****

**Cartographies of Hospitality**

**Oxford Report 2019**

**Yasmin Gunaratnam (Goldsmiths)**

Summary and Overview

“you're doing a lot by hosting and yes [and] it's painful to not be able to help more than you can, or should...”.

“…he was very clear that what made a difference to him was that he needed a home, not just a roof over his head”

Relationships

Lodger

Guest

Like-family

Making a Difference

Emotional labour

Sharing space

Acting & doing

“We’re like little bits of sticking plaster, but it makes a difference if you’re bleeding”

“We’re showing that this country wants refugees, the asylum system treats them so badly, hosts counteract that”

Social Change

Key Themes

Overview

This report is based on 13 qualitative interviews with 15 volunteers at Sanctuary Hosting (Oxford), conducted during September 2017 and January 2018. The majority of those interviewed were women (n=12) and of varying white British and European ethnicities (n=14). Those hosted included asylum seekers, refugees and individuals who had entered the country legally but had become irregularised due to lapsed or revoked immigration visas.

The research is part of the *Cartographies of Hospitality* study, led by Dr Fataneh Farahani (Stockholm University), with research also being carried out in Sweden and Turkey.

Context

The interviews were conducted during a period of significant political and social change and uncertainty in the UK. Hostility towards migrants and displaced people has intensified following the June 2016 UK referendum vote to leave the European Union (“Brexit”). Two hosts talked about the impact of Brexit on their hosting, one in relation to thoughts about leaving the UK and the other with regard to a racist note that was put through her letterbox in the run-up to the referendum vote.

Publicity surrounding the more recent “Windrush” immigration cases in early 2018 has made visible the extensive effects of British immigration politics and policies on long-term residents. In these cases, individuals have found themselves at the meeting point between various immigration laws and rules: rights to regularise citizenship and rights of abode circumscribed by the 1971 Immigration Act and 1981 Nationality Act and more widespread checks on immigration status initiated by the 2014 and 2016 Immigration Acts. The Windrush events have also served to illuminate misconceptions about different categories of migrants. “The Home Office has a default assumption that if your papers aren’t in order, it’s because you’re dodgy,” Polly Mackenzie, director of the think tank Demos has said (Serhan 2018). “They thought undocumented migrants and illegal migrants were in fact the same thing, and it’s very clear that because of the legacy of Commonwealth migration, those two things are not the same”.

While I use the term “migrant” in this report, it is important to recognise that migrant identities and experiences are characterized by a “super-diversity”, constituted by an inter-relation between several factors such as country of origin, migration channel, legal status, gender and access to employment (Vertovek, 2007).

Becoming Involved

Motivations to volunteer and host were most commonly talked about in the interviews in relation to an individual’s past activism, faith-based principles and personal family histories of displacement and exile, blurring boundaries between the humanitarian (based on notions of human rights and their defense) and the political. The extent to which volunteers share a sense of a collective identity based on shared values and perspectives and/or see themselves as part of broader social movements, such as “Refugees Welcome” or the “Strangers into Citizens” campaign has been more difficult to identify. However, the City of Sanctuary network was mentioned in several interviews when volunteers recounted the early development of Sanctuary Hosting. Some volunteers also mentioned being involved in the Close Campsfield campaign and Asylum Welcome.

Being motivated to host following the media coverage of Aylan Kurdi’s death and those of others crossing the Mediterranean Sea in 2015-16 was a recurring topic. As Sirreyeh observes, Kurdi’s death prompted “an unprecedented outpouring of sentiments of compassion among the media, the public and politicians” (2018, p.55). Although some individuals mentioned that they had become volunteers in order to offer support to Syrian asylum seekers, as a result of their subsequent relationships with Sanctuary Hosting they became aware of the wider support that was needed for migrants who “had fallen through the cracks” of welfare support and had become destitute. At the time of writing, people seeking asylum are given £5.39 a day to live on.

Several volunteers pointed to the impossibility of everyday survival under the conditions imposed by immigration rules. Discussing the experience of one of her guests, a host asked, “how does the government expect them to be able to survive if they don't let them work? She's not allowed to study too as she's not got recourse to any public funds, and if she can't work how is she supposed to fund any study?...She’s completely stuck at the moment.” In such circumstances the host felt that networks like Sanctuary Hosting made a significant difference:

“like for instance, if someone is lucky enough to get asylum and

they become a bona fide refugee, they get 28 days notice to leave

their hostel accommodation which the government has provided.

So in 28 days they have to save up enough money to get a deposit

on a room somewhere, they've got to get a job, and they've got to

get their national insurance card, all in 28 days. That's why agencies

like us have to help them. It's just not possible.”

The themes of social responsibility and care were recurring themes in the interviews, as well as the practicalities of hosting being enabled by biographical changes, such as retirement, decreased work commitments and “the empty nest syndrome”, where children had left home and more space was available within a household. “I have two spare rooms in my house” one host said, “I often have guests to visit, why not help other people when you can?” The practical and relative privilege of being in a position to host, could also be marked by ambivalent feelings, “Part of it for me was about, well here I am sitting in this house on my own, so I may as well try and make use (of it) because it's a fairly big house for one person. Maybe there was some sort of guilt, I hadn't quite explored that”.

The individualising of hospitality was framed by one interview participant as holding an inherent tension: she recognised how “refugees are internal within society”, adding, “On the other hand, we’re absolving society from how they do politics”. She felt that, “Hospitality has to do with a sense of powerlessness”. Another host described the hosting role as “We’re like little bits of sticking plaster, but it makes a difference if you’re bleeding”, adding “I don’t do the work I do for the Government to claim they are doing what they should be doing”.

Volunteering in some interviews was described as marking a transition from an ethics of conviction to an ethics of action (Fassin, 2007), most often expressed as the difference between giving money to charitable causes and participating actively in providing hospitality to those in need, “There is something very tangible about giving someone food and warmth…it’s a way of staving off despair”. The impetus to volunteer was also talked about by several hosts in relation to government policies, “We’re showing that this country wants refugees, the asylum system treats them so badly, hosts counteract that”. As another host put it:

“I felt I had the time and the availability of accommodation to do something more practical for people, so I was specifically looking

to do something practical…our government were saying we were

full and I thought that was nonsense...I felt somewhat ashamed of

the government’s response, in particular to the Syrian crisis, and I

just felt, you know "Not in my name".”

Several volunteers observed that in Sanctuary Hosting there were more individuals wanting to host than the number of people in need of accommodation. One host saw this as an opportunity for Sanctuary Hosting to play a more active lobbying role:

“You live in a world where you can only change things at your

own level...I think that they (Sanctuary Hosting) should act on

the demand side and also be a lobbying place for getting more

refugees in...you offer hospitality but there is a gatekeeper there,

called the government...Sanctuary...they should coordinate with

all the other NGOs around the country...and then make a list,

or a website and put all these numbers together and show that

the government is lying...”

A spectrum of hosting: ‘lodger’, ‘guest’ and ‘like-family’

For those hosts interviewed, hospitality ranged from the most practical (a room for a night or a week or two) to the more expansive and unforeseen, such as a guest living with a family for months, or becoming part of an extended family network. There are similarities here with Sirriyeh’s (2013) identification of three broad relationships of hospitality to those providing foster care to unaccompanied minors, which ranged from ‘lodger’, ‘guest’ to ‘like-family’. In the ‘like-family’ relationships described in the interviews discussed here, relationships with guests continued once a placement had ended. Some hosts also maintained contact with guests via social media or text messaging. Sometimes guests who had moved on to other localities would return to see hosts and/or ask for assistance with matters such as compiling documents and making job applications. This continuation of relationships is relatively unpredictable and contingent, owing in part to the variety of the relationships that have developed and to the mobility of guests (some did not always remain in the Oxford area).

How different modes of hospitality are negotiated is affected by pre-migration/exile experiences, experiences of border regimes upon arrival in the UK, and the changing needs/wishes of both the host and guest. “She doesn’t want to be part of the family” one host said of her guest. For another host, their guest “was very clear that what made a difference to him was that he needed a home, not just a roof over his head...It's all about family. Not just having a room, so we would include him in things...”. For others, hosting was seen and defined as a temporary, transitional space, with relationships spanning the “lodger” and “guest” relationships identified by Sirriyeh, “It is important for a guest not to think it’s (the hosting) permanent…It’s always a moving-on place.” Another host described how she limited on-going contact with her guest because she found the relationship emotionally demanding at a time of personal difficulty:

“…what I decided at the time was I needed a clean break, because I

wasn't sure then that I could continue to provide her with support, as

I found it quite emotionally difficult at that time, so I decided not to,

I mean if I see her I'll say hello and have a chat, but there was a part

of me thinking I don't want this relationship to become too dependent,

and that was my reason.”

In offering to host, whether it is through the provision of temporary accommodation, sharing meals, driving their guest to an immigration reporting centre, taking guests shopping or providing support and advice to guests and other hosts, volunteers can find themselves in contact with the day-to-day precariousness and degradations of border and immigration regimes. For some volunteers, their support of guests also brought them into contact with racism and cultures of workplace bullying. An implication of these different experiences is the demand on hosts for various forms of “immaterial” (Hardt, 1999) and “emotional” labour (Hochschild, 1983). Immaterial labour has been described as the bodily labour that results in intangible and non-durable goods such as services, information and affects (unconscious feelings), which have the potential to orchestrate and regulate social relationships. Nicky James (1989) has used the concept of emotional labour to denote types of conscious “labour involved in dealing with other peoples' feelings, a core component of which is the regulation of emotion” (p.16).

The affective and emotional labour of volunteering and hosting was talked about through two main themes: the difficult emotions that were triggered by being exposed to the traumatic experiences and events in the lives of guests; and emotional self-management, that is, the work that volunteers do in managing their own feelings and renegotiating their lived experience, consciousness, values and knowledge, especially that of relative privilege. Such experiences need not be negative. Moral dilemmas and uncertainty about how to respond to the various challenges of volunteering for instance, can offer individuals the opportunity to reappraise relationships of power and adjust their own views and values.

Time and the Other

Hosting as a transitional space is also an effect of immigration policies and rules, where guests can wait for months, in some cases years, for decisions about their immigration applications. Volunteers observed how guests were made passive “only waiting for something to happen” and described how “life was put on hold”. For Khosravi (2018), being in such states of “deportability” robs “an individual of the viabilities of life. It wipes out the vision of a better future” (p.39). Undocumented migrants and asylum seekers can find themselves in what Susan Coutin (2002) describes as “a space of non-existence”, which can produce, maintain and prolong unequal access to welfare, economic, legal and educational resources and to family and friendship networks.

Depriving certain migrants of opportunities to education is a global trend, Khosravi argues, whereby individuals:

“are destined to remain ‘unskilled workers’ wherever they go. Deportability at the global level generates a removable underclass of workers in both the country that one escapes from and the country in which one seeks refuge. Deportation has been added to neoliberal policies of social abandonment, which expose vulnerable groups to multiple expulsions from communities, the labour market, the housing market, the spheres of security, the health care system, the education system and state protection.” (p.39)

In the UK, waiting for an immigration decision can also involve deskilling. One host talked about how she witnessed her guest becoming deskilled in the process of waiting, unable to undertake the additional training needed to convert and maintain her professional skills, “During that time a person becomes quite de-skilled as well…Work is a big part of our lives, because you're interacting, communicating, and learning new information, but there's none of that, apart from if you're with a host or whoever, and you lose that current knowledge if you're working in a particular field”. She added:

“I think it's the fact that everything is such a lengthy process, I

think that has quite a negative impact on the individuals concerned.

In the interim period it's about survival, people just trying to get themselves from one day to the next. Life is put on hold basically, awaiting a decision about their future…you can't really make future

plans, because you don't know where you're gonna end up being”.

The inter-relation between living in the transitional space of being hosted and “waiting for something to happen” can reconfigure the experience of time, its pacing, rhythms, intensity, tempo and duration for both guests and volunteers. Time can be “lost” in dashed hopes and plans as a result of unfavourable immigration decisions so that “you have to start again” as one volunteer observed. Time can also be lost or “stolen” Khosravi (2018) in discordant cycles of inertia and depression. Volunteers spoke of examples in which they observed guests becoming emotionally withdrawn and disconnected from the temporal rhythms of sociality in a local community, household and/or their transnational networks.

Witnessing and being brought into such cycles of waiting, hopefulness, despondency and “starting again” are a part of the emotional demands of volunteering with regard to immaterial and emotional labour (described above). In this respect, the support worker system and the training days that are offered by Sanctuary Hosting were valued in providing opportunities to share experiences and ask questions. One of the training days that I participated in provided a forum for volunteers to learn from an expert about the effects and manifestations of trauma, depression and negotiating psycho-social boundaries.

Cultural Difference

All of those interviewed talked about cultural, faith and language differences as inflecting and/or having an impact on their volunteer role and relationships. Some felt they did not always have the cultural and linguistic knowledge and skills to fully understand the needs of their guests. At the same time several hosts recognised the importance of building trust over time, which they felt could lessen the effects of differences. Differences of gender and sexuality were also brought up as topics that were seen as having a potential impact on volunteers’ relationships with guests.

As guests negotiate differential inclusions and exclusions in pursuing their citizenships and residency claims, they were also described as embracing new cultural and social opportunities, such as language and cultural orientation classes, becoming involved in community activities and networks, as well as using local counselling and emotional support services. Although volunteers recognised the importance of cultural integration—most often talked about in relation to English language skills—some expressed ambivalence about integration initiatives, which could imply a one-sided process of cultural adaptation and did not always recognise how different social experiences such as government surveillance in countries of origin could affect communication and therefore integration. A host described how government surveillance of one particular ethnic group of asylum seekers, “make them all very cagey about who they can trust…and that explains a lot of the cultural misunderstandings we had...so this can have the effect of making integration very hard sometimes”.

Despite the variety of forms that hospitality can take, hosts and volunteers can often become cultural intermediaries, playing an important role in explaining and representing how British cultural conventions and values are put into practice. These small circuits of culture and also idiosyncratic values and tastes are further mediated and shaped by Sanctuary Hosting’s policies and networks of support. However, because volunteering entails different forms of material and immaterial labour, the boundaries between the private and public facets of volunteering are porous and diffuse and are therefore more difficult to manage within formal policy frameworks.

The emotional demands of volunteering

The emotional demands of hosting were raised by several volunteers and related to both the practicalities of co-living with strangers and more significantly, the impact of supporting individuals in situations of precarity and emotional distress. Here, there was often a balance to be struck of “Boosting people by making them feel they have value, without going beyond your expertise”. As this host elaborated, the process of valuing guests entailed a careful balancing between empathy and recognition in “gauging” needs, while not moving beyond personal expertise. In the context of the broader dehumanising of particular migrants and exiles in the UK and in Europe, such valuing can also be an act of re-humanising:

“You try and boost people by making them feel that, which is

true, that you value them - they have a value. I think that's a role

that is important when you're hosting, to gauge the needs of your

guest, both practical and emotional, and without trying to go beyond

your expertise. Being very cautious about it but trying to help them

in whatever way you can.”

Common experiences for guests that volunteers identified included: poor living conditions and physical vulnerability (one young guest had been homeless and was living on the streets), loneliness, depression and chronic illness. The inter-relatedness of these experiences, in addition to cultural and language differences between host and guest, can be demanding for volunteers, particularly in how they respond to mental health problems and feelings of hopelessness. One support worker talked about how perceptions and judgments of the value of hosting and of “making a difference” could sometimes be eroded or become more ambivalent. In such situations, she tried to both reassure and recognise difficult emotions by telling hosts, “you're doing a lot by hosting and yes [and] it's painful to not be able to help more than you can, or should...”.  Another volunteer commented, “Sanctuary Hosting gives good back-up when you ask for help”.

The support structures for volunteers offered by Sanctuary Hosting were appreciated in lessening the potentially socially isolating experience of hosting and volunteering. This support was felt to be important even for those volunteers who were more experienced, but may still find their role emotionally challenging. The training days were valued and helped to make volunteers feel more connected to each other and to the broader purpose of their role. Research with volunteers to the “Jungle” camp in Calais (Doige and Sandri, 2019) has also highlighted the importance of recognising how emotions are central to the work of volunteering with refugees, playing a vital part role in how volunteers make sense of the meeting points between individual biographies and social institutions and structures.

Sharing Space



“How to sensibly share a washing machine:

I explain to guests I'm happy to put their washing in with ours (given a bit of notice if urgent) and will put it out to dry, as we don't have a tumble drier. But I don't do the ironing!”

Conversations about sharing domestic space highlighted some of the ethical and practical tensions in hosting, which can be unlimited/unconditional in its initial motivations, but which in practice is necessarily constrained. This is not to suggest that “conditionality” is opposed to “unconditionality”, but rather that the two facets of hospitality are mutually entangled. For example, household “rules”, conventions and what several hosts called “checklists” are always present in homes, these range from expectations of privacy to sharing a fridge, cooking or washing machine. A host described how she “tried to set up rules from the beginning like when she (the guest) could use the kitchen and so on, because it was important for me to set up limits from the beginning. On the whole she respected it, but I felt it was quite hard on someone. We became friends in a way that I could tell her when I had had enough and she wouldn't mind, so I wasn't letting myself get too invaded either”. Hosts also described how guests helped with household chores from cooking and washing-up to mowing the lawn but were aware that this work could be part of a sense of obligation and of wanting to “give something back”.

In addition, two hosts discussed specific instances of what was felt to have been significant breaches of trust by guests. Examples from other hosts were given of how guests sometimes tested relationships by asking for money and a host described what she felt was “intrusive” behavior and demands on her time. In the latter case, her concerns were addressed through discussions between support workers.

Imagined Communities

Overall, conversations about hospitality in the interviews with volunteers cohered with regard to an envisioning narrative of how the world and human relationships *should be* and/or *could be*. Such narratives did not always entail an articulated political concern with past histories of injustice, a questioning of the nature and justice of national borders, laws and citizenships rights but more often included an interest in the biographical histories and the futures of guests. A predominant concern was with how policies and environments in the present might be transformed to enable greater openness and generosity towards migrants and exiles. Hosting was talked about as a “small’ way of enacting and moving closer to such futures.

References

Coutin, S. B. (2000) *Legalizing Moves: Salvadoran Immigrants’ Struggle for U.S. Residency*. University of Michigan Press.

Doidge, M and Sandri, E. (2019). ‘Friends that last a lifetime’: The Importance of Emotions amongst Volunteers Working with Refugees in Calais, *British Journal of Sociology*, 70 (2): 463-480.

Fassin, D. *(*2007)Humanitarianism as a Politics of Life. Public Culture 19(3): 499-520.

Hardt, M. (1999). Affective labour*. Boundary* 2. 26(2). 89-100.

Hochschild, A. (1983) *The Managed Heart: Commercialisation of Human Feeling*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

James, N. (1989) Emotional Labour: Skill and Work in the Social Regulation of Feelings. *Sociological Review* 37(1):15-42.

Koshravi, S. (2018) Stolen Time, *Radical Philosophy* 2(3): 38-41.

Serhan, Y. (2018) When Even Legal Residents Face Deportation, *The Atlantic*, 19 April 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/04/windrush-generation-uk-facing-deportation/558317/>.

Sirriyeh, A. (2018) *The politics of compassion: Immigration and asylum policy*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.

Sirriyeh, A. (2013) Hosting strangers: hospitality and family practices in fostering unaccompanied refugee young people, *Child and Family Social Work*, 18 (1): 5-14.

Vertovec, S. (2007) Super*-*diversity and its implications, Ethnic and Racial Studies, 30 (6):1024-1054.