

# **‘It’s like having one more family member’: Private hospitality, affective responsibility and intimate boundaries within refugee hosting networks**

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In a context of increasingly exclusionary immigration and asylum policies in Europe, the idea of hospitality has seen a revival in contemporary debates on the inclusion of refugees in society. This article aims to analyse how individuals create and practise hospitality within the ‘Refugees Welcome’ movement, which emerged as a response to the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ in 2015 (Agier, 2018; Sirriyeh, 2018).<sup>1</sup> We focus on a form of engagement which has been prominent across Europe since 2015: citizens’ initiatives to host refugees in their homes. Through a set of 47 interviews of volunteers who host refugees in Britain, France and Italy (three countries in which the ‘refugee crisis’ has unfolded in distinct ways), we want to explore the accounts, lived experience and temporality of ‘private’ domestic hospitality (the fact of opening one’s home to a ‘stranger’ – Agier, 2018), its articulation within ‘public’ hospitality (how governments respond to refugees’ demands for a better life in their territory), and the new forms of responsibility that it produces.

As shown by Derrida (1999: 113), an act of private hospitality is an ethical ‘responsibility’ to construct a ‘place of encounter’, a ‘compromise’ between a host and a guest (each with their own language, culture and habits). It is also a critique and an alternative action to the lack of public hospitality, and to the boundaries that governments draw between ‘desirable’ and ‘undesirable’ migrants – what Derrida (2000) defines as the conditionality of hospitality. From this perspective, we want to investigate the ambivalent relation between private and public hospitality by looking at volunteers’ personal accounts of their motivations for, and experience of, hosting refugees. Through a focus on the temporality of individual hospitality – a dimension which remains under-explored in the literature – we want to analyse how the affective experience of hosting shapes volunteers’ narratives about their sense of responsibility towards refugees.

More generally, our article aims to contribute to studies that have analysed how states’ bordering processes are endorsed, enacted, resisted or subverted in everyday life (Back et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2017; Yuval-Davis et al., 2017). In particular, looking at the ‘refugee crisis’ as a moment of critical juncture (Della Porta, 2020), we aim to analyse how volunteers make sense of the inclusive/exclusive logic of citizenship (Tyler and Marciniak, 2013) throughout their experience of private hospitality. In so doing, and in line with the other contributions in this special issue, we analyse the practice of private hospitality as a form of intimate citizenship: the imbrication between the daily (mundane) relations to the others and states’ politics of inclusion, exclusion and belonging (Humphris, 2019; Plummer, 2003). Thus we aim to contribute to a number of key questions raised in this special issue, in particular ‘how hospitality discourses and practices have the potential to encompass a range of *multiple and different* relational possibilities rather than simply being “good” or “bad”’ (Introduction to this special issue: Farahani, 2021).

Our general argument is that the practice of private hospitality is an ambivalent response to public hospitality. Although it emerges as a critique of – and an alternative action to – inhospitable immigration and asylum policies put in place by European governments, the everyday practice of hospitality in the specific hosting networks that we analyse leads participants to reframe their engagement within an affective connection between the hosts and the guests. We maintain that this shift risks reproducing broader processes of boundary-drawing. In particular, following Derrida’s (1999) reflection on the notion of responsibility, and Ahmed’s (2004) work on emotions, we argue that the construction of hospitality as an intimate space based around feelings of love and affection creates and reifies boundaries between different types of guests (i.e. those who can show that they share these feelings and those who are perceived as more distant). In so doing, we highlight the emotional dimension of bordering processes and the lines of inclusion and exclusion that they create (Monforte, Bassel et al., 2019; Yuval-Davis et

al., 2017). We show that the expectations of reciprocity on the part of the hosts play an essential role in these processes.

The first section of the article reviews the literature on private and public hospitality, and reflects on the notions of conditionality and responsibility through the focus on the intimate, affective space of home. We then present the methods of our research, before analysing how volunteers' narratives about their experience of hosting show the prevalence of an 'affective responsibility' constructed around feelings of love. Finally, we explore the expectations and the bordering processes that result from this affective responsibility.

## **Private hospitality, affective responsibility and the construction of intimate boundaries**

Citizens' responses to the 2015 'refugee crisis' show the prevalence of moral emotions and principles such as compassion (Maestri and Monforte, 2020; Sirriyeh, 2018) and hospitality (Agier, 2018). In particular, the emergence and visibility of private hosting initiatives organised by networks such as 'Utopia 56' in France, 'Refugees at Home' in Britain, or 'Refugees Welcome' in Italy shows how hospitality has been a key principle of mobilisation for participants in the Refugees Welcome movement, revealing the ambivalences and paradoxes of citizens' reaction to the 'refugee crisis'. Indeed, hospitality has by nature a double dimension: it is both a moral and ethical principle and a political call that needs to be translated into laws by governments (Genard, 2018). As Derrida (2000) argues, both dimensions are closely interrelated: moral principles and ideals of hospitality cannot be put into practice without laws and policies that guarantee and codify them. This reveals the 'troubled and troubling origin' of hospitality (Derrida, 2000: 3). It is a principle of inclusion and exclusion, generosity and violence, solidarity and conflict (Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2018; Pitt-Rivers, 2012). From this perspective, unconditional hospitality – as a gift that is offered without expectation of anything in return to a guest – is impossible: it is an ethical ideal of individual and collective responsibility that inevitably becomes conditional (and therefore linked with hostility) when it is codified through laws and policies that aim to guarantee the right to hospitality (Baker, 2013). Laws and policies formalise hospitality by basing it on principles of sovereignty and on the inclusive/exclusive logic of citizenship (Tyler and Marciniak, 2013), which establishes distinctions between those who are welcomed and those who are not (the 'deserving' migrants and the 'Others'). Moreover, hospitality, as a conditional act, is based on an unequal power-relation: the power of the host prevails over that of the guest (Rosello, 2001; Rozakou, 2012). More generally, as shown by Malkki (2015), the definition of the migrant as a guest reifies the idea of the sovereign state as the 'national order of things' (Rozakou, 2012: 567).

These perspectives lead to making a distinction between private hospitality (as a value, a responsibility and an individual practice) and public hospitality (as the institutional codification of hospitality in law) (Agier, 2018; Gotman, 2001). In other words, there is a difference between how individuals and communities make sense of – and practise – hospitality, and how governments establish and implement its norms. In fact, although private and public hospitality are closely interrelated, they also respond critically to each other. As recent studies have shown (Della Porta, 2018; Fleischmann and Steinhilper, 2017; Karakayali, 2017), private initiatives of hospitality towards refugees are a critique of – and an alternative to – public hospitality (or lack thereof), and in particular what Fassin and colleagues (1997) define as the 'laws of inhospitality', which have prevailed in Europe since the 1970s. The practice of private hospitality is critical of exclusionary politics as it is based on the need to 'invent the place of encounter as a unique event' (Derrida, 1999: 114) between volunteers (the hosts) and refugees (the guests). This opening to the unknown is a learning process that can lead volunteers to discover the injustice that migrants and refugees face in their everyday life, including state and border violence, which in turn can spark off increasingly critical actions against governments' public (in)hospitality (Agier, 2018; Fleischmann and Steinhilper, 2017; Vandevordt and Verschraegen, 2019). Arguably, however, engagements that aim to create spaces of private hospitality are also ambivalent as they do not necessarily disrupt the conditional character of hospitality. For example, as we have shown elsewhere (Maestri and Monforte, 2020), volunteers risk reproducing some of the disciplinary role of charities and governments as they engage in processes of distinction between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' refugees. Similarly, as shown by Armbruster (2019), initiatives that welcome specific groups of refugees, such as those framed as vulnerable, can reinforce boundaries between the vast majority of the people who are excluded by states' border policies and the 'exceptional' refugees, whose profile meets strict criteria established by governments.

Building on these perspectives, we want to explore the ambivalences of acts of hospitality, through the focus on how refugee support volunteers give meaning to their responsibility towards their guests in the shared intimate, affective space of home. As shown by Derrida (1999), hospitality is inextricably linked to the idea of responsibility, in the sense of an orientation towards others. However, the notion of responsibility has a double meaning. Based on the word 'response' (*réponse*), it is both a 'response to a call' and a (potentially violent) injunction to 'answer (*répondre*) for oneself' (Derrida, 1999: 111). Therefore, the principle of responsibility indicates not only 'exchange, recognition and respect for the other' but also a call to 'answer for your identity'

(Derrida, 1999: 111). Arguably, although Derrida did not emphasise this dimension in his reflection, emotions play a crucial role in the construction of responsibility. As a matter of fact, our analysis of participants' narratives reveals that the way they construct their responsibility towards their guests is shaped by emotions: the act of hosting refugees is very often lived as an intimate experience based on an individual, affective, connection between the host and the guest. This way of making sense of their own experience – which is often actively encouraged by the specific organisations that we analysed – leads volunteers to present their act of hospitality as a 'retreat' into the domestic realm of family life, constructed around feelings of love and affection. But far from romanticising the idea of the family (Bittman and Pixley, 2000), we want to problematise it and explore its effects, including the exclusionary ones. As shown by Ahmed (2004), in her reflection on the performativity of feelings, emotions such as love or affection generate specific social relations: they 'generate their objects' (Ahmed, 2004: 32) by defining groups and individuals in certain ways (i.e. those who feel love and those who are loved). In so doing, the expression of emotions leads to the construction of specific subjectivities (and boundaries) that people have to respond to. To refer to Derrida's work on responsibility, emotions create identities that people have to 'answer for'. Drawing on these reflections, we show that participants' narratives about their experience of hosting refugees are based on an affective responsibility, which produces an intimate injunction to reciprocate feelings of love and affection: as they – in their role of hosts – demonstrate that they *Choose Love*,<sup>2</sup> refugees – as guests – are expected in return to *show* love. More generally, we argue that participants' narratives are ambivalent as they are based on a criticism of governments' response to the 'refugee crisis', but also on the production of emotional (intimate) bordering processes. The critique of the (lack of) public hospitality is present in participants' narratives, and their practice of private hospitality is constructed as an alternative to exclusionary politics. However, their (private) hospitality also reflects broader processes of boundary-drawing as it leads them to distinguish between 'desirable' guests (those who demonstrate that they can reciprocate feelings of love and affection) and the 'others' (who don't respond to this injunction).

## Researching hospitality: sample and methods

The article is based on 47 interviews with hosts in Italy (22), France (16) and Britain (9). The interviews were conducted between May 2017 and May 2019 in the cities of Brescia, Milan, Modena and Rome (Italy), Nantes and Paris (France), and London and Birmingham (UK). While these national and local contexts vary considerably in relation to migration flows, asylum policies and charity sectors,<sup>3</sup> in this article we do not adopt a comparative approach. As we develop elsewhere (Monforte, d'Halluin et al., 2019), differences can be observed between the narratives of participants in the three countries. In particular, we note that the affective framework of family life that we analyse in this article is more prominent among participants in Britain and Italy than in France, where the organisations we engaged with encourage shorter-term hosting. However, although we acknowledge these differences, this article aims to highlight some commonalities across the three cases and draw attention to the aspects that characterise the hosting experience through the construction of an affective responsibility.

Our interviews were conducted either with individuals or with the families involved in the hosting initiatives. In some cases, we also had the opportunity to interview guests. While we believe that reporting the experience of refugees can help in better understanding the experience of hospitality, in this article, we focus exclusively on the hosts in order to unveil the ambivalent meaning that they give to their act of hospitality.<sup>4</sup> Participants were approached through gatekeepers (often charity representatives) or directly (in the case of informal networks) and through a snowball strategy. Our sample comprises hosts of different ages, genders and socio-economic backgrounds. However, it should be noted that a large proportion of our participants self-identified as women and retired people. Also, most respondents presented themselves as white and middle-class. During the fieldwork, charity representatives confirmed that these groups are over-represented among volunteers engaged in the refugee support sector. As we will develop below, the profile of our participants had an effect on the relation that they construct with their guests.

The volunteers we interviewed were involved in a variety of local, national and transnational organisations that are part of the refugee solidarity movement. These charities had different degrees of formalisation and professionalisation, and their relation to local institutions could vary: some organisations were independent, others were linked to religious institutions, and others were working more closely with local councils. Also, it is worth noting that, while most organisations emerged as a reaction to the 'refugee crisis' in 2015, some were already active before 2015. For the purpose of this study, although we observed a range of different organisations, we conducted our fieldwork in charities and networks that described themselves as guided by principles of compassion and humanitarianism, and therefore distinct from organisations that had more politicised orientations and that privileged claims-making activities. As a result, the findings we present below should be read as a reflection of dynamics taking place in this specific part of the refugee support sector.

Our analysis is based on the narratives of hosts about their own engagement. The interviews included open-ended questions about their personal trajectories, their relationship with their guests, their general experience of

volunteering (including the dilemmas that they face), and the values that motivate their engagement. We define our data as narratives because we designed our interviews to allow participants to narrate their own experience of volunteering, in particular by inviting them to tell their own story about their engagement. This enabled us to analyse the meanings that they produce to make sense of their experience and practice (Polletta, 2006). The data collected were coded and analysed through NVivo: we identified how respondents relate to public hospitality, the values and emotions shaping their practice of hospitality, as well as the way they define their responsibility towards the people they are hosting.

## **The intimate and affective dimensions of private hospitality**

In our interviews, participants reported having changed their views over time, in particular in terms of how they define their engagement and make sense of the relation between their action and that of governments (public hospitality). Our analysis shows that hosts tend to present their engagement as something that is increasingly disconnected from broader debates about public hospitality; something that moves towards the realm of the domestic sphere and family life. This shift can be observed in the contrast between how respondents present their initial motivations for getting involved in the refugee support sector and how they discuss their actual experience of hosting refugees in their homes. In this section, through the focus on the emotional bordering processes that result from the construction of an affective responsibility, we analyse this shift and its effects on how volunteers make sense of their relationship towards refugees.

### *The retreat to the domestic realm of family life*

The literature on Refugees Welcome shows that citizens have engaged with this movement for different, sometimes seemingly contradictory, reasons. Although the idea of providing immediate help to vulnerable victims was central (especially after the publication of Alan Kurdi's picture in September 2015), participants were also motivated by more long-term objectives of social change based on a criticism of governments' response to the 'refugee crisis' (Agustín and Jørgensen, 2019). Our analysis of volunteers who host refugees confirms the diversity of their motivations. Most respondents reported that they were motivated first and foremost by the desire to help vulnerable refugees in times of crisis, thus reproducing a humanitarian framework of engagement (Malkki, 2015). Also, they explained that they wanted to do something useful for themselves, especially during life transitions such as retirement, or as a result of changes in family arrangements due to children moving out. For some others, hospitality was something that they always did outside of the refugee crisis (e.g. fostering children) and that was linked to their religious values or their family history. More generally, participants often reported that they aimed to resist the hostility dominating public debates around migration and to counter it with (private) hospitality. In particular, for many, hosting a refugee was motivated by the willingness to 'fill in the gaps' of governments' actions. This is, for example, explained by a host based in Paris, when asked what made her decide to engage in the refugee support sector:

It was the fact that I was seeing people sleeping in the metro, the camp in the middle of Paris, it was unbelievable. And above all the lack of reactions. . . . For me, this was just unacceptable, and also the fact that some people are very, very, vulnerable. . . . So I said to myself 'This is not possible, we cannot not do something about this.' (Claire, 35, Paris)

Similarly, a host based in Rome presented her engagement as a (private) reaction to a degraded political climate: 'Lately, though, because of this degrading environment that is emerging, we really need this culture of encounter' (Maria, in her 60s, Rome). From this perspective, many participants evoked visible local initiatives that represented a critique of – and even resistance to – the exclusionary politics enacted by European governments. For example, many Italian hosts linked their engagement to the story of the mayor of Riace, Mimmo Lucano, whose local politics of hospitality had been openly discredited by the Italian government. The criticism of the government's inhumane approach and inaction was also presented as an emotional reaction by several hosts who reported to be 'upset' (Kaity, 52, London), 'horrified' (Jane, 78, London) or 'frustrated' (Federico, Rome, 46). Finally, some participants evoked the significance of values – sometimes religious ones (Francis, 72, Nantes) – and worldviews, either by saying that hospitality initiatives reflected their political principles or by pointing out that they did not feel represented by their government approach to refugees (Grace, 32, Birmingham).

Overall, the way respondents present their motivations to host refugees shows that private hospitality can be linked to objectives of social change and based on values of social justice and human rights (see also Della Porta, 2018). The way they define their responsibility towards refugees echoes Agier's (2018) reflection on the relation between private and public hospitality: 'responsibility' is constructed both at the individual level (as a response embodied through the volunteers' engagement) and at the collective level (as a response that governments ought to provide).

However, further analysis shows that participants' narratives about their actual experience and practice of hosting refugees is different from the way they talk about their initial motivations. Indeed, in the interviews, volunteers present the practice of hosting through a private and intimate vocabulary, which is characterised by the language of the family and the idea of an affective connection with their guests. This is especially the case in Britain and

Italy, where – in contrast with France – this discourse is actively encouraged by the charities that we analysed. This ‘retreat’ from a critique of the (lack of) public hospitality to the intimacy of the domestic sphere and daily family life is articulated in three main ways: by highlighting the beneficial effect that hosting has on the host’s family ties; by evoking emotions of love or affection; by mobilising family terminology to describe the relationship with the guest(s).

When asked about the most rewarding aspects of hosting refugees, including the unexpected positive effects of living together with a ‘stranger’ (Agier, 2018), many hosts (who are also parents) explained how children play a crucial role in bonding with the guest(s). For example, a London-based host explained that the presence of her daughter made their guest feel more at ease and helped them create an intimate, emotional, connection:

Also, the fact that we’ve got a daughter is quite powerful because refugees all got family and they’re separated now, or their family might be dead. They have had a family and they lost that and having a child around is really positive for them. Just playing and that kind of things. And once my daughter gets to know them well, she would give them a hug. And makes you think ‘Wow, I wonder when the last time someone gave them a hug was.’ (Helen, 58, London)

This interviewee highlights that the affective connection established with the guest(s) is seen as an essential part of the hosting practice as it is linked with the traumatic experience of refugees, and the fact that they are perceived as lonely and isolated. In many cases, as this example suggests, this leads the hosts to actively look for an affective connection with their guests, as they feel personally responsible for their emotional wellbeing and often describe the support they offer as a form of healing process. Moreover, many hosts stress the benefits that this experience had, either for their children or for other members of the inner family circle, explaining how hosting can constitute a learning experience, something enriching from the cultural and moral point of view.<sup>5</sup> For instance, this is mentioned by a host based in Milan, who argues that ‘it opened a window on a new world for our kids’ (Stefano, 50, Milan). Likewise, a French host in Nantes underlined that the experience ‘has made everyone, including our daughters, realise how lucky they are’ (Alain, 48, Nantes). Beyond the children’s experience, hosting is also described as beneficial as it helps to strengthen bonds with other family members. For example, many participants referred to the act of cooking and sharing meals as a way to connect emotionally with the family.

More generally, the perceived mutual benefits of connecting with their guests lead many respondents to highlight the emotions of love or affection that characterise their relationship with the refugees that they host. From this perspective, hospitality is described as an intimate space that enables the natural growth of mutual affection between the hosts and the guests. This is well illustrated by a London-based host who remembers a moving moment with her guest:

I spent nearly four weeks with my sister and came back through the US and took a train across from San Francisco to New York. I arrive back home and I had a text from [guest] saying please call me immediately as you get home, and I did thinking he was probably somewhere. And he was in his room and he turned up and he just cuddled me. He couldn’t let go. I’m really fond of him. (Jane, 78, London)

In the same interview, this respondent explained that what she found most rewarding about her hosting experience was: ‘the kind of attachment, the love developed between me and the refugee. It’s humbling and warming. And rather lovely’ (Jane, 78, London), showing thus how the vocabulary used to describe the daily experience of hosting pertains to an intimate emotional sphere. Similarly, a host based in Rome argues that hosting is about the affective connections that hosts and guests construct:

From this house-sharing, we moved quickly to an affection sharing, the creation of a relationship of mutual affection was immediate, not only with us but also very strongly with our kids. (Federico, 46, Rome)

As these interviews show, ‘affection sharing’ is perceived as an essential feature of the hosting experience; it is seen as something that emerges naturally from the fact of sharing a house and around which the relation between hosts and guests is constructed. Further analysis shows how this repertoire of love, affection and intimate connection is often combined with the use of a family vocabulary, and in particular the presentation of guests as (new) family members. In the hosts’ narratives, guests are often described as ‘children’ or ‘siblings’. Likewise, many hosts tend to present themselves as ‘mothers’ or ‘fathers’. For instance, this was very clear in the case of a host based in Brescia, who referred to the image of the ‘umbilical cord’ (Filippo, in his 60s, Brescia) when talking about his relationship with his guest. A similar idea was pointed out by a host based in Milan who defined herself as ‘differently mother’:

It is not like being a natural mother, but it is about motherhood or fatherhood – because the same happened to fathers, immediately, it’s like imprinting. Maybe because in our project they are all young. I mean, they are all young men who’ve been alone for so many years, they’re alone, even if they have a family they maybe left five-six years ago so they feel uprooted, they have this immediate longing for home, for family. (Manuela, 48, Milan)

Like in the interview with Helen above, this last example shows how the intimate and affective connection that emerges between hosts and guests is linked with the perceived needs of the isolated and vulnerable young refugees

with whom our respondents share their home. From this perspective, volunteers demonstrate an affective responsibility that defines the identity of their guests in a specific way: the love or affection that they display defines their guests as subjects in need of these particular feelings (Ahmed, 2004). While this process often occurs when guests are minors, it can also apply to older ones. For example, this is the case of a host based in Rome, who describes her guest as an ‘adult son’ (Elena, 53, Rome).

As these narratives illustrate, volunteers who host refugees tend to change the way they give meaning to their own engagement over time. Throughout the concrete daily experience of hosting refugees, the initial critical reaction towards public (in)hospitality gives way to the repertoire of the private domestic sphere, largely disconnected from broader debates about public policies. This shift is explained by the nature of their engagement: hosting, as an act of private hospitality, is based on daily exchanges between the host(s) and the guest(s), which revolves around the mundane experience of family life (Rosello, 2001). When they describe their experience and practice of hosting, our respondents focus on the intimate connections that they create through the daily acts of cooking, sharing a meal or learning to communicate with their guests. Although some respondents explain that they have learnt more about the injustices of immigration and asylum policies as they have shared their home with someone who is directly impacted by these policies, the idea of constructing an alternative to governments seems generally distant and abstract when compared to the concrete experience of being a host. This shift is also explained by the way charities frame and coordinate the activities of the hosts.<sup>6</sup> The organisations we observed present the act of hosting a refugee as a cultural and emotional learning experience. It is presented as a way to learn about a new culture, to connect with new people and to learn from each other through the mundane activities of family life. The websites and internal communications of these organisations are filled with positive stories and images of meals cooked together by the hosts and the guests, the relationships of trust and affection that they construct, and the intercultural exchanges that emerge from the fact of living together. Finally, this shift can be also explained by the positionality of the hosts and the unequal power-relations with their guests (Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2018). Our analysis shows that the narratives of volunteers tend to reproduce and reify the racial and social inequalities that are observed in studies on humanitarian action (Malkki, 2015). In particular, the construction of the guests as isolated and lonely young people often reflects the trope of the vulnerable victim who depends on the help of more powerful (middle-class and white) actors (Ticktin, 2017). As we will now develop, we maintain that this ‘retreat’ to the private sphere has significant implications in terms of hosts’ and guests’ subject formation, in particular because it leads to the emergence of an affective responsibility towards refugees.

### *Affective responsibility and intimate bordering: the construction of the guest as a subject of love*

Conceived as a call to ‘answer for your identity’ (Derrida, 1999: 111), the responsibility that hosts demonstrate towards their guests is not only a mark of respect and recognition, but also an injunction to act in accordance with the specific identity attributed to them. More generally, the way hosts feel towards their guests generates boundaries, in particular because the demonstration of these feelings leads to the construction of specific subjectivities and expectations (Ahmed, 2004). It is therefore important to ask what the feelings of love and affection expressed by the hosts do to the individuals involved in the intimate relationship of private hospitality: what are the subjectivities and expectations that are produced in the specific encounter of family affection that hosts describe? On the one hand, private hosts perform their hospitable subjectivity through an individual ‘response’ to the call for inclusion of (racialised) others in the very intimacy of their family, thus symbolically challenging the hostility embedded in exclusionary border politics. Many hosts explain, for example, that their act of hospitality provides an alternative to the rhetoric of fear and scaremongering that targets ‘undesirable’ groups. On the other hand, however, the affective responsibility that hosts demonstrate through their engagement risks reproducing boundaries between the ‘desirable, ‘responsible’<sup>7</sup> guests and the others, in particular because they create an expectation that the guests should reciprocate by showing affection towards them in return.<sup>8</sup> In other words, it is expected from the refugees who are hosted that they ‘answer for their identity’ as (new) members of the family.

As we explored elsewhere (Maestri and Monforte, 2020), respondents explained their feelings of frustration when their guests displayed behaviours that they did not expect to see. For example, not helping with household chores or being disorderly were brought up as elements of tensions with the guests. But these situations were quickly dismissed as something irrelevant – sometimes presented as the result of childish behaviours or cultural differences – if mutual affection was present. For example, this was the case for an Italian host, who compared her guest to her two teenage children listening to loud music in their bedrooms, and who quickly explained that this was not important to her (Francesca, 50, Milan). However, beyond these minor disappointments, participants’ narratives show that more significant tensions emerge when the guests do not appear willing or are unable to spend their time with their hosts and to share intimate ‘familylike’ moments. Sometimes, also, tensions emerge when the guests avoid talking openly about themselves and sharing their stories with their hosts. For example, a

volunteer based in London explained that, although she feels close to her guest, she would expect more exchanges with him:

Some people have people who would cook. I would love that but [guest] hasn't done that. I'd be happy if he took more time, but he hasn't. But I heard that some people just want some space to be by themselves, to feel at home and they haven't impinged that much on the life of the host. Next time I might have someone who might want to do a bit more, that would be fine by me. (Jane, 78, London)

As this interview illustrates, the fact that some guests 'just want some space to be by themselves' can be disappointing. As a result, guests who are perceived as difficult to communicate with – and to connect with emotionally – might be excluded from private hospitality in some cases. For instance, during an interview, a volunteer who coordinates a hosting network in Nantes argued that private hospitality cannot work without communication. Therefore, she explained, her network only includes refugees who can speak French (although with some exceptions):

Generally speaking, the asylum seekers don't talk a lot. This is a big difficulty for the hosts, they need something to work with. For some, this is difficult. But apart from that, there are no major difficulties. Obviously, we only take asylum seekers who have already taken some French language courses and who can communicate, otherwise hospitality is impossible. This is not the way we see things. (Jeanne, 42, Nantes)

The expectation that hosts should be able to communicate and connect with their guests is directly linked to the construction of hospitality as an act based on emotional bonds. Therefore, as this volunteer argues, this expectation can become a condition of hospitality. In particular, the interviews show that the expectation to communicate is linked to the definition of the guest as a person in need of love and affection (due to their trauma and to their isolated living conditions). Directly inquiring into the private lives of guests is discouraged by hosting organisations, in particular as a way to safeguard refugees from potentially stirring up traumatising experiences (Agier, 2018; Armbruster, 2019). Nevertheless, in line with the idea of an affective responsibility, many respondents – especially in Britain and Italy – feel that knowing more about the life of their guest(s) would help in supporting them emotionally. This expectation leads them to experience disappointments when refugees are reluctant to open up and share their stories. This was the case of a family from Brescia, who explicitly voiced their disappointment when talking about a taciturn guest:

*Mother:* The first [guest] was educated, he spoke French with her [pointing at her daughter]. I don't speak French.

*Daughter:* I know some French but he didn't want to talk anyway.

*Mother:* So the problem wasn't to understand each other. But he didn't want to talk, at all. He didn't speak about himself but, in general, he didn't want to talk about anything either. (Lidia, in her 60s, and Marta, 20, Brescia province)

In the same interview, the family recalled that they experienced similar difficulties with their second guest. They highlighted how they wanted an 'exchange' with them, and that they did not want their house to be treated like a 'hotel'. However, they felt that their second guests did not open up because they did not 'trust' them, which left them disheartened:

They gave out so little of themselves: the first didn't give a damn, that's true, but we generally felt that they didn't trust you. And we were always baffled by it because, we said, sorry, but if I go to someone's house, and this person gives me everything, they host me, you can stay there and we let them understand that almost there wasn't a limit to how long they could stay . . . (Lidia, in her 60s, Brescia province)

Eventually, the family highlighted the centrality of the expectation to connect emotionally by concluding that it was the lack of sincerity and frankness that hurt them the most, more than the fact that their guests did not help them in the house or did not express gratitude. More generally, the affective responsibility that emerges from the experience of hosting also leads participants to present their act of hospitality as being limited in time and not easily transferable to different guests, especially because it is highly dependent on the affective bonds that they create with single individuals (those who have 'successfully' become new family members). This is illustrated by a couple from Modena, who told us that their guest became like a family member and that the choice to host a new person would have to be made with him:

Thinking I'm going to get another one would sound strange, like a replacement. But I would do it again, absolutely. And let me tell you, this would be a choice that this time we could make also with him [their guest]. (Giulia, 34, and Luca, 33, Modena)

In this case, the bond with the guest is described as being so strong and positive that it could potentially preclude the replicability of the experience with another refugee, and hence undermine the sustainment of their engagement in the future. As these examples illustrate, participants' narratives reveal the intimate boundaries that derive from the feelings of love and affection in their experience of hosting refugees. As hosts expect their guests to reciprocate these feelings, they create distinctions and boundaries between those who can follow this injunction and the others. These boundaries do not necessarily lead to the exclusion of guests who do not connect emotionally (although the case of the French association above shows that the ability to communicate can be a criteria of inclusion).

However, the analysis reveals that these boundaries are deeply entrenched in the relation between the hosts and the guests because they take place at the most intimate level. To use the words of one of our respondents, they relate to expectations that the guests 'give out of themselves' (Lidia, in her 60s, Brescia province).

## Conclusion

In this article, we have explored private hospitality as one of the repertoires of the refugee solidarity movement emerging in the context of the 2015 'refugee crisis'. The analysis of participants' narratives about their experience of hosting refugees shows the ambivalence of acts of private hospitality, in particular when hosts describe their responsibility towards their guests. Our respondents challenge negative representations of refugees, and they present their decision to engage in the Refugees Welcome movement as a way to oppose governments' exclusionary border politics. However, by perceiving and presenting their guests as family members in need of love and affection, they also produce new boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. In their narratives, hosts feel responsible towards their guests because, as 'new family members', they are recipients of their affection and love. This affective responsibility is the basis of the 'place of encounter' (Derrida, 1999) that they construct with their guests, but it also works as a potentially exclusionary injunction to reciprocate these feelings. Refugees who do not perform the expected willingness to share their time, thoughts and stories with them (either because of communication barriers or because of an emotional distance) risk being framed as ungrateful, and sometimes risk being excluded from the host's circle of affection.

Overall, the expectation of a reciprocal affection risks creating and reproducing bordering processes in the intimate sphere. In this case, exclusion is not based on legal requirements or the proof of persecution and vulnerability (criteria that are essential in governments' examination of asylum claims). Private hospitality puts refugees in the position of having to prove that they are emotional and loving beings who can return the affection that is offered to them. These processes highlight the ambivalent and conditional nature of hospitality: as hosts create distinctions between the 'desirable', 'responsible' guests (those who demonstrate that they have become family members) and the 'others', they remind us that hospitality is based on contradictory principles of inclusion and exclusion, generosity and violence, solidarity and conflict (Derrida, 2000).

## Notes

1. The idea of a 'refugee crisis' was widely circulated in media and political discourses to describe the arrival of refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict in 2015 (Alcalde, 2016). In this article, we use the term 'refugee crisis' to reflect the content of public debates on this issue. However, we argue that the notion of 'crisis' should be understood critically as it risks shifting the terms of the debate away from European governments' failure to respect the rights and dignity of refugees (Lendaro et al., 2019).
2. 'Choose Love' is a prominent refugee support charity that emerged in Britain in the context of the 2015 'refugee crisis'.
3. For example, in contrast with the French and British cases, Italy is often considered as a country of first arrival in Europe, and a relatively low proportion of refugees apply for asylum in the country. Also, in contrast with the French and Italian cases, Britain did not take part in the European Union relocation programmes in the aftermath of the 2015 refugee crisis, which limits the possibilities for asylum seekers to enter the UK legally.
4. The ethical implications of the interviews were reflected upon throughout the research process and we observed a high level of sensitivity in the collection and handling of data in order to avoid harming the participants, in particular through a close collaboration with the gatekeepers.
5. However, some participants also mention that their relationship with some members of their family deteriorated as a result of their engagement, as we explore elsewhere (Monforte and Maestri, forthcoming).
6. As we develop elsewhere (Monforte, d'Halluin et al., 2019), this is especially the case of Britain and Italy. In contrast, in France charities tend to organise shorter hosting period and actively discourage hosts from becoming 'too attached' to their guests (Marie, 62, Nantes).
7. 'Responsible' in the sense that they follow the injunction to 'answer for oneself' (Derrida, 1999: 111).
8. Although it should be noted that some respondents explain that they want to avoid getting attached to their guest(s).

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