

**Agier, Michel. 2021. *The Stranger as My Guest: A Critical Anthropology of Hospitality*. Cambridge: Polity Press. 160 pp. Hb.: 50.90 €. ISBN: 9781509539888.**

Rather than being ‘unbound’ as previously theorised, nation-states are being territorially ‘rebound’ with the cement of xenophobic instincts and atavistic desires. As a result, the last two decades have seen borders become increasingly restrictive for human mobility. Current migration regimes and their proponents see hostile borders as the only solution. Their ultimate solution encompasses physical borders, those unwelcoming spaces of hostility that divide and keep the unwanted stranger out, to everyday borders, those symbolic actions of hostility that mark certain human bodies as outsiders. Under such circumstances, Michel Agier’s *The Stranger as my Guest* paves a conceptual pathway towards a much-needed welcoming door. A door of hospitality that can counter the effects of hostile migration regimes normalised under the guise of national interests – economic, security, social, cultural, etcetera.

In this compelling read, Agier challenges this very normalisation of hostility as a sensible approach towards managing mobility on our planet, the only one we have to share. Instead, he advocates a better understanding of hospitality to develop more sustainable, prosocial and empathic approaches to global mobility. In doing so, he delves into the pathology of the so-called ‘migration crisis’. He reminds us that the torchbearers of borders forget that, more than a panacea, borders are the source of our (mobility) maladies.

As suggested by the subtitle, this *Critical Anthropology of Hospitality* draws on anthropological, philosophical and political approaches to unpack the phenomenon of hospitality in a mobile and connected world. At the most fundamental level, hospitality (like hostility), Agier argues, is a means to deal with the ambiguities surrounding an encounter with someone from the outside – the stranger,

the foreigner, the alien. Thus, in a sense, Agier digs out an old anthropological lens: that of hospitality/reciprocity. With this lens, he reimagines the trilateral relationship between the state, citizen and migrant for contemporary times.

The core thesis of this stimulating read is that institutional and public forms of hospitality offered by churches and states in Europe are on the decline, and private forms of hospitality provided by citizens, though laudable, are not enough to deal with mobility in the 21st century. The situation leads him to consider a few possible (secular) prosocial principles and prefigurative forms of hospitality required for our times. Hospitality for this century, one could say.

In the first two chapters of the book, Agier sheds light on hospitality from various angles. He discusses numerous issues from different manifestations and relationalities of hospitality in various societal and cultural contexts to distinct forms of hospitality (and hostility) that the 'national stranger' or foreigner encounters in Europe and beyond. The latter, i.e. forms of hospitality, lead him to expand on two main kinds of hospitality in the wake of the 'migration crisis'. First, unconditional private hospitality – that is, the kind of hospitality epitomised in the German term 'Willkommenskultur' and seen across Europe since 2015. Second, conditional or limited hospitality offered by the state – that is, refuge or asylum if one *meets* some conditions and *follows* some others.

Throughout the book, state and private (citizens') attitudes towards the stranger are juxtaposed. Agier sets the foundation of such comparison early on by framing 'private hospitality' towards strangers as a form of 'civil disobedience'. Indeed, many European citizens chose to act in solidarity with migrant newcomers, no matter their reasons for coming or legal status in the host country. In this way, they challenged their respective governments and the criminalisation of specific acts of hospitality and reciprocity.

In Chapters 3 and 4, Agier tries to imagine the political possibilities that the concept of hospitality offers and discusses the condition of migrant-hood. He does this by expanding on an argument about social movements made in the preceding pages. According to him, social movements and actions to help and accommodate the stranger hint at the need for a 'principle of hospitality'. Therefore, in imagining a form of principle-based 'universal hospitality', he brings into question methodological and epistemological nationalism as human blinkers limiting our understanding and thus imagination of dealing with mobility. Piggybacking on Ulrich Beck's valuable insights into the epistemological conflict between 'methodological cosmopolitanism' and 'methodological nationalism', Agier argues that it is not only an epistemological conflict but also a political one. Then drawing on the likes of Emmanuel Kant, Jacques Derrida and Hannah Arendt, he claims that even the most avid supporters of 'universal hospitality' are 'politically cosmopolitan' but 'epistemologically nationalist'.

Agier urges us to question this epistemological nationalism but more urgently demands scrutiny of the 'siege mentality' that seems to grip many governments

of the world. Concluding the book on a hopeful note, he envisions what he calls 'a nomadic citizenship for all'.

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