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Beyond the Threshold: *Of Hospitality and Unaccompanied Children*¹

*“If he no longer responds, it is because he is responding in us,
from the bottom of our hearts, in us but before us.” (Jacques Derrida, Adieu 13)*

--for Yaguine Koita and Fodé Tounkara, who are impossibly forgotten

On the evening of 28 July 1999, two Guinean boys, 15-year-old Yaguine Koita and 14-year-old Fodé Tounkara, scaled the brick wall surrounding Guinea’s national airport, clambered up into the wheel well of an airbus bound for Brussels, in the hopes of reuniting with family living in Europe. Eight days later, their badly decomposing bodies were discovered inside the undercarriage of the plane—though not before it had made another three round trips to Africa.

Their deaths might have gone entirely undocumented were it not for a two-page letter, handwritten in haltingly awkward French prose, discovered by the Belgian pathologist called to the plane to examine the bodies. As if they had anticipated their demise, the boys had addressed the envelope containing their letter “to Messrs the members and officials of Europe,” “[i]n case we die.” The letter begged the members of the EU to increase aid to Africa—one imagines so that boys such as these would not be drawn to risking such treacherous journeys in search of a better life—and closed with a poignant appeal from the boys to “to excuse us very, very much for daring to write this letter to the great personages to whom we owe much respect.”

With the hope, perhaps, of exposing to worldwide attention the lengths that migrants and refugees will go to ameliorate their conditions, a persistent Brussels deputy prosecutor, (with the blessing of the investigating judge), saw that the letter was widely published in the media. The spectres of the boys were adopted by churches and charities campaigning for Africa; the letter was read out at assemblies of the United Nations and the WTO, (along with crocodilian promises to increase aid to African children). And yet, today, the story of these boys—and so many other unaccompanied refugee and migrant children, both

¹ I agree with Roxanne Doty’s assertion, here, that “The illegal immigrant, the UDA, the *undocumentado*, the *sans-papiers*, as a figure of modern politics is similar in many respects to the refugee and we should not make too much of the distinction between the categories” (18).

before and since—is all but forgotten. As Derrida has suggested elsewhere, it seems that “once the revolutionary task [was—however imperfectly] completed, amnesia necessarily set in” (SM 139). The letter is buried in an archive of Belgian judiciary dossiers; a continent away, back in Guinea, two graves mark where the boys are also laid to rest.²

News headlines like these are regrettably plentiful. I share this story with you here because I am still—and always—haunted by the story of these two boys, and feel compelled to offer hospitality to the spectres they leave behind (or bring forth). When the report was released in the media, I was scant days away from the birth of my son, Dante. A time of delicately high emotions, under the best of circumstances, to be sure—even banking commercials would leave me teary-eyed. And yet, the story of these two boys has never left me. Until recently, I have not felt capable—and now, only marginally so—of unearthing stories like these, to contribute my nascent political voice to an urgent analysis of the violences waged against refugees and other displaced persons.

What drives two young boys such as these to—so very literally—take their lives in their hands? To risk everything in order to cross borders?³ Despite the abhorrently frequent occurrence of similarly tragic outcomes, academic literature has more or less elided the question of child migration, assuming, more often than not, that children are crossing borders solely as either the dependents or victims of adult migrants (see Watters 2008; Uehling 841). While some analysts (Wouk et al. 2006) suggest that the percentage of children who travel *genuinely unaccompanied*,⁴ without the benefit of a parent or a “qualified guardian”⁵ is much smaller than

² See <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/the-boys-who-froze-to-death-at-40000-feet-1114657.html> and/or <http://archive.southcoasttoday.com/daily/03-00/03-19-00/a02wn016.htm>

³ Of course, not all refugeeism or economic migration is South-North; South-South (i.e., neighbouring countries) is quite—and probably, in fact, more—common.

⁴ The UNHCR defines an unaccompanied child as someone under the age of 18 ‘who is separated from both parents and [is] not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible to do so’.

the UNHCR estimates of two to five per cent of the international refugee population, I argue that the numbers of unaccompanied minors forced into such precarious lives remains significant nonetheless, and begs critical analysis.⁶

To propose a more hospitable consideration of others seems reasonable, to say the very least, particularly as we find, ever-increasingly, people are displaced by the convergences of war, corporate greed, and environmental havoc. And are children, particularly, not deserving of a hospitable welcome? Why or why not? I am anxious to tackle these questions, but before undertaking a consideration of the hospitality extended to the other's children (the other's other?), I must first try to understand what hospitality means. What does it *actually* mean to be truly hospitable? What possible criteria does one use, in order to choose to be hospitable to one over another, as de Vries insists we must? (330) What might it mean to offer an unrestricted hospitality to the other, or the child of the other? Is such a utopian vision of hospitality impossible? If such is indeed the case, is this impossibility an ultimately and utterly unimaginative space, or in its very inconceivable *impossibility*, can we offer up more contemplative philosophical fodder at its border with the possible? Rather than simply dismissing it as a hopeless privation?

My primary 'real world' focus in this essay shall be the reception and hospitality afforded to refugee and otherwise unaccompanied children. With de Vries' caution about "translating the motif of hospitality...into contemporary illustrations" in mind, I insist on trying to "invent the relevant mediations" between hospitality and these migrants (368). I shall negotiate, therefore, a

⁵ Many children travel under the 'care' of snakeheads, traffickers, etc., but this is neither suitable care, nor do they have the best interests of the child at heart. As far as the 'guardians of convenience' are concerned, these are financial transactions. It is for this reason that I would not characterize these purveyors of children as 'qualified.'

⁶ Martin and Curran argue that "claims from unaccompanied children represented just 0.9 per cent to 1.4 per cent of all refugee claims leading to decisions" (448). To my mind, this still amounts to a significant number of minors. In 2002, for example, their research shows that 1,830 children were seeking asylum in Canada—that remains pretty significant to me.

consideration of the hospitality afforded to them (vis-à-vis this aforementioned barrage of questions) through the lens of Derrida's complex oeuvre(s) on and of hospitality. I argue, here, following Derrida, that in order to be truly hospitable to any other (including spectre, animal, man, woman, child), one must transgress the laws of hospitality itself, to transform the impossibility of perfect hospitality something more vigorous than simply a placeholder of privation. To imagine it, rather, an active space of negotiation and conceiving of how things might be otherwise. To riff on Derrida's analysis of *Hamlet*, to be or not to be –*hospitable* – is this really the question? There is no question.

My first undertaking here shall be to attempt a provisional framework of Derrida's conception of hospitality. Next, I shall work through the criteria that seem to loosely constitute childhood, from a specifically Western perception, and how such discourse is distorted where the other's child is concerned. Negotiating an imagined interstitial space between these two concepts, I will ask how we greet children who wish to be welcomed across the threshold of our (national) doorstep, and perhaps more importantly, how might we imagine our reception otherwise. Finally, I will look at the possibility for potentially effective transnational activism. Looking at the activist work of several international organizations, the potential for linkages of 'deep democracy' which seeks to secure greater hospitality on behalf of, and by, unaccompanied migrant children will also be considered. This paper makes no claim to having any or all definitive answers to these complex questions. Rather, I image it is an inceptive contribution to deeper, more fruitful research and inquiry in this under-served area of refugee studies. I turn now, to my provisional understanding of Derrida's work on hospitality.

Derrida both joins together and distinguishes between the law of hospitality (the law of ethic) and the laws (as mandated by the nation-state) that govern hospitality, two seemingly

discordant imperatives which form the basis of his conception of hospitality. For the law of hospitality to be pure, Derrida insists it must be offered absolutely unconditionally, with no expectation of return of any sort from its recipient (the *law* of hospitality). Yet, in order for hospitality to be of any effect whatsoever, it *requires* the imposition of limitations and conditions (the state *laws* of hospitality). At a time when it is fashionable to express nothing but contempt for the potency and enforceability of the nation-state and its regulations, it must be insisted that despite its vexingly imperfect nature, the state remains, in effect, the contemporarily most capable supplier of rights and obligations of the individual.⁷ Without (state) *laws* to govern the *law*, hospitality itself “would risk being abstract, utopian, illusory, and so turning over into its opposite” (OH 79). Derrida continues: “the law and the laws, are thus both contradictory, antinomic, *and* inseparable. They both imply and exclude each other, simultaneously. They incorporate one another at the moment of excluding one another” (OH 81). A seemingly impossible negotiation, to say the least.

Derrida asks, in *Adieu* (20), if this “this impossibility signal[s] a failing?” Certainly not. While we may be eager to concede defeat to an impossibly irreconcilable contradiction, Derrida will not let us away so easily. He insists, rather, that the very impossibility of resolving these antinomic manifestations of law/s is, rather, exactly *the* active, constructive space between the possible and the impossible (the *in/possible* space, to borrow another Derridean neologism)⁸ required to effect either (and both) ethical and political change. In other words, the impossibility itself is not meaningless; rather, it offers us the potential to insist upon the transformation of the

⁷ See Derrida (AL 101); see also Cheah, *Inhuman Conditions*, pp. 40ff for a discussion about the effectiveness of nation-states vs. NGOs.

⁸ I regret that I cannot find the page reference/source for the concept of the ‘in/possible’ among the books I’ve read this month – is it in *Of Hospitality*?

unjust or ultimately unethical application of the laws of hospitality, vis-à-vis the spirit of the law of hospitality.

To drive this point home, Derrida plays with the slipperiness/fluidity of the French language as it seeks to define this seemingly impossible negotiation in *Of Hospitality*. The homonymical first word in Derrida's turn of phrase "pas d'hospitalité" (OH 75) has two very distinct meanings: 'Pas,' in French, can mean either "no/none," but curiously enough, it also "step/s". So embedded firmly in the very impossibility of hospitality in language, Derrida insists are the steps to hospitality itself.

If we are stepping toward hospitality, then, where does this lead? What lies beyond (and through) hospitality? Derrida insists in *Adieu* that hospitality "is not simply some region of ethics, [but rather,] is ethicity itself, the whole and the principle of ethics" (AL 50). I think that I understand the meta-ethical imperative of Derrida's train of thought here, that hospitality *is* ethics, insofar as that it requires an "interruption of the self" (and of the self by the self as other) (AL 51). Yet for expository purposes, I draw greater insight from de Vries' explaining Derrida's conception of hospitality as "the condition and the preamble, the *antechamber*, the threshold, the *parvis* of the ethical" (328). Understood through this illustration, I come to understand that hospitality is part (and parcel) of ethicity: without the desire or need to be ethical one would not find oneself on its doorstep (hospitality to the other); conversely, to even consider turning away from the potential offered beyond the threshold speaks of a brutish hostility and unsociability. In a very real sense, to remain before—but never entering—the threshold of hospitality implicates those who stand there as merely tolerant (at best) or non-welcoming to the other, and, in truth, to the self. Turning away, as it were, from the potential for messianic salvation of both the self and the other.

De Vries is quite right to suggest that hospitality “opens in two directions,” signalling “both a welcome . . . and an abandonment” (340) which “instantiates a ‘phenomenological inversion of the gaze’” (305). To imagine this bilateral opening and welcome of the messianic potential of the hospitable act, one might invert, accordingly, the image of the threshold (hospitality) and its beyond (ethnicity). Consider, then, the knock upon your (literal or figurative) door as the invitation to *be* hospitable to the other who awaits your welcome. To welcome either s/he who waits not only by invitation, but more importantly, by visitation: the unexpected *arrivant* who may or may not ever arrive. Derrida calls this welcoming of the “unexpected visitor” the messianic (without messianism) (see SM 33, 82; AR 362; HJR 66). To speak merely of the arrival, of hospitality, without speaking of the *arrivant* would seem an absurd exercise. Who, then, is the *arrivant*?

Engaging, once again, the slipperiness of (French) language as a *mochlos* to impel our understanding of his philosophical insight, Derrida remarks in *Acts of Religion* that the word *hôte* in French describes s/he who “is both the one who gives, *donne*, and the one who receives, *reçoit*, hospitality” (AR 356).⁹ So as de Vries insists, the question of hospitality does, in fact, “leave in suspense the question of what comes first” (305): which *hôte* is the subject of hospitality? It would seem that as with our earlier study of ethics and hospitality, the *hôte(s)* is (are) inseparable, one from the other, comprising, again, part and parcel of the same messianic salvation. That is, the *hôte* must, from one side, welcome the unwelcomed visitation as well as they receive the invited guest, and (unanticipated) *hôte* coming to the door must be receptive to the welcome they receive—yet somehow, without feeling as though governed by duty to do so.

⁹ Sherene Razack (2008) has noted that she has some difficulty with the “pernicious” host/guest metaphor, insisting that “hosts and guests are racialized categories that depend on specific silences,” “depend[ing] upon a profound disavowal of the interconnectedness of the past with the present, of the spaces of wealth with poverty” (122-3). I acknowledge Razack’s concern, but feel it inadvisable to simply inhospitably throw away Derrida’s use of the metaphor altogether.

Again, the question (and the question of the question) returns to language. Despite the logic of the law of *absolute* hospitality not requiring anything of the visitor, the nation-state's governance of the *laws* hospitality require the visitor, the *foreigner*, to ask for hospitality "in a language which by definition is not his own, one imposed on him by the master of the house, the host, the king, the lord, the authorities, the nation," which Derrida decodes as the "first act of violence" against the guest (OH 15). Derrida asks, quite pointedly, "Does hospitality consist in interrogating the new arrival?" It certainly seems inhospitable to do so, but how might we imagine receiving the other otherwise? Derrida would insist on an "unquestioning welcome"; on "hospitality rendered...to the other before they are identified" (OH 29). This is such a powerful move, is it not? "Let us say *yes to who or what turns up*, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any *identification*, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female" (OH 77). Without this identification as 'other,' as 'foreign,' the unexpected, messianic visitor becomes a/the third, does it not? A third "who not only deepens my responsibility but also *gives me a break* and thus makes responsibility, if not bearable or masterable, then at least less violent" (de Vries 323)? Relieving the *hôte* of the impossibility of offering hospitable welcome? I think we are a long way from being capable of offering such unrequited hospitality to the other, but this need not be a negative space. In the impossibility of the gesture lies the possibility for improving existing reception to the other.¹⁰

Up to this last point on language, I have deliberately attempted to avoid using the word 'foreigner,' for "who," as Derrida asks, "is foreign? Who is the foreign man, who is the foreign woman?" (OH 43) And indeed, who is the foreign child? An interesting aporia develops within

¹⁰ It might be useful, here, to include a discussion of hostipitality and spectrality here?

the development of the state's 'contract' laws of hospitality, which Derrida says "links to the foreigner and...*reciprocally* links the foreigner" to the host/welcoming state (OH 21). If we are *linked* philosophically, or legally bound, somehow (for a shared physiology seems all-too-often ignored), are we really able to determine who is/is not welcome? Beyond welcoming the foreigner as a brother, compatriot, friend, Derrida insists that this same contract of hospitality extends beyond the individual, "commit[ting] a household, a line of descent, a family, a familial or ethnic group," for "a proper name is never purely individual" (OH 23). What might this mean for children of 'foreigners,' particularly those children travelling alone? How, or why, are they to be received differently than 'our own' children?

Historically, children have been negatively ontologized—defined by what they are not—and regarded as only incomplete, "provisional citizens" who are incrementally granted a "graduated package of social entitlements,...*acced[ing]* to political membership only at adulthood" (Brysk 156). In *Centuries of Childhood* (1962), Phillipe Ariès would insist that the recognition of childhood as a category other than adulthood only "emerged in Europe between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, together with bourgeois notions of family, home, privacy, and individuality" (Ariès 125). Indeed, the "concept of childhood as a distinct stage in the human life cycle [only] crystallized in nineteenth-century Western thought" (Stephens 7).

According to Peter Nyers, laws preventing animal cruelty predate child protection legislation in most jurisdictions. "Indeed," he says "the children employed in English mines in the mid-nineteenth century often worked longer hours than the pit mules that were protected by animal cruelty laws" (Nyers 2006, 86). So at one point, children were deemed less valuable than livestock. In the past half-century, however, (with increased personal wealth), particularly in the west, we have seen greater emphasis on the rhetoric of the 'rights of the child,' who appears to

need specialized, indulgent care because of their physical and emotional immaturity. Yet, as far as the child of the other is concerned, there is a definite shift in how we are made to think about children¹¹: neither simply ‘adults in miniature’ nor mollycoddled to a fault (though some might argue otherwise), today’s other children¹² are imagined both *at risk* and, crucial here to our discussion of hospitality, constituting the risk in their own right (children *as risk*). Jacqueline Bhabha is indeed right to ask “‘what constitutes ‘childhood,’ that the category ‘child’ is viewed as inapplicable to this class’?” (294) Derrida’s neologism *hostipitalité*—the recognition of the hostile within contemporary notions of hospitality—takes on an entirely new dimension in this context. How can we be hostile to unaccompanied children, when we spoil our own to a fault? What is their crime?

Despite what Liz Fekete calls the “‘pieties of international law’”—the laws of hospitality—that promise (though rarely deliver) protection in the ‘best interests’ of migrant, foreign children, they are frequently demonized¹³—in both politics and popular culture—alongside their migrant or asylum-seeking adult counterparts as liabilities (94). Although their particular physical and emotional vulnerabilities (as ‘imperfect’ i.e., non-adult beings) are commonly acknowledged (if only tacitly), migrant children travelling alone are viewed as “‘people out of place,’ more [,] rather than less [,] suspect for being displaced and detached from firm anchoring in familiar social settings” (Bhabha 294).

¹¹ For extensive and thoughtful deliberations on children at/as risk, see Henry Giroux’s vast body of work.

¹² And certainly, an interlocking ‘hierarchy of vulnerabilities’ — being victimized by race thinking, gender discrimination — plays an important role here as well. And crucially, ‘other’ children are not simply found abroad, but in ‘our’ cities as well. See, again, Giroux’s exemplary work on youth at/as risk.

¹³ A distinction needs to be made, of course, between the invited-guest-child (e.g., potential adoptee) and the uninvited-visitor-child (e.g., stowaway refugee). While Derrida speaks about the welcoming of the substitute child (i.e., adopted child) as the “‘gift of hospitality *par excellence*” (AR 410), my primary focus, here, is on the latter category, in a sense, the messianic visitor.

Immigration officials in Western states¹⁴ inhospitably—or perhaps in an *hostipitably*—“focus on the child’s alien and irregular status” (Bhabha 293), that is to say, the focus falls only on the fact that unaccompanied migrant children are travelling alone. Seldom, if ever, is any thought given to the situations leading up to, or resulting in the migration. Situations like these, where children ‘take the lead’ in migration challenge the widely held view of them solely as dependents requiring that specialized, indulgent care we bestow upon our own children. The power of the nation-state, here, is somewhat threatened by children engaging in autonomous—and decidedly adult-like—acts of ‘bio-agency,’ demonstrating that they do not need the state’s approval (either the home state or the state they migrate to) to cross the border. By so doing, the receiving state seems to argue (based on the inhospitality afforded such migrants) that such children have relinquished their right to any sort of special protections under the laws of hospitality.

Derrida suggests that to “welcome the other out of mere duty, unwillingly, against my natural inclination, and therefore without smiling, [is] not welcoming him either: One must [*il faut*] therefore welcome without ‘one must’ [*sans ‘il faut’*]” (AR 361). Put simply, in these terms, there is no hospitality here. Autonomously migrating children are, for the most part, treated by the state with as much hostility as their adult counterparts. In the US context, for example, immigration authorities routinely *detain* (to say nothing of a hospitable reception) children upon arrival, “making subsequent determinations as to whether children should be placed in less restrictive care” (Maloney 110). Children as young as *10 years old* “are placed behind multiple layers of locked doors, surrounded by barbed wire; they are strip-searched,

¹⁴ There are plenty of documented anti-child immigration official in the US, the EU, esp. in border countries, like Greece; Canada, too, has a recent history of less-than-hospitality to unaccompanied minors being detained at a hotel converted to a detention centre near Pearson International airport.

placed in solitary confinement for punishment, forced to wear prison uniforms and handcuffed and shackled when they are transported to court or from one facility to another” (Bhabha 303).¹⁵

And this is a problem that is not ‘going away,’ for, according to Sarah Maloney, “long-term detention for unaccompanied/separated children in the US has increased fourfold since 1996” (110). Indeed, many migrant children are incarcerated alongside ‘real’ criminals,¹⁶ when they have committed no crime but crossing a border. Bearing in mind the indivisibility of *hôtes* (host and visitor), hospitality (or not) to the other also constitutes hospitality (or not) to oneself. It bears keeping in mind, does it not, that crimes against others—and others’ others—are, in effect, “crimes against hospitality”? (AL 71) How might we imagine the reception and welcome of unaccompanied migrant children otherwise?

I note, again, de Vries’ caution that “the primacy or prevalence of hospitality... (cannot and should not be) motivated by the current worldwide tendencies toward globalization, marked by migration, forced displacements, the decline of the nation state, and ‘crimes against hospitality’” (329); he seems to suggest that hospitality is ethereal, somehow, that it is “a category beyond all categories, which not only resists definition [but]... must in principle subtract itself from any conceptual determination as well” (329). Yet Derrida himself seems to call for a more active definition and conceptual determination of hospitality. He insists, does he not, quite rigorously (and quite rightly) that

Our task here is simply—between Kant and Levinas—to sharpen a difference that matters today more than ever with regard to this right of refuge and all the most urgent matters of our time, everywhere that... millions of ‘undocumented migrants’, of ‘homeless, call out for another international law, another border politics, another humanitarian politics, indeed a humanitarian commitment that *effectively* operates beyond the interests of Nation-States” (AL 101)

¹⁵ If all of this isn’t surreal enough, consider the image of children’s toys or playground equipment behind razor wire. See <http://tdonhutto.blogspot.com/> How do such images complicate our notions of ‘illegality’?

¹⁶ A debateable construct in its own right—see Angela Davis’ work on the prison-industrial complex and the over-representation of minorities.

While Derrida is not suggesting, here, that he has any or all definitive answers to and of hospitality, to be carried in some sort of simplistic Ikea furniture-building instructional booklet, he invites us “to reflect upon our own relationships to those strangers, refugees, or immigrants who ask to be welcomed into our homes, communities, and states” (Brault 139).

Such an undertaking must necessarily involve, as Adele Jones contends, an acknowledgement “that the experiences of young asylum seekers and refugees do not exist in a vacuum. Broader international issues, for instance the expansion of global capitalism and the social conflict, instability and inequality spawned in its wake” all contribute to rising immigration and refugee claims (Jones 255). Indeed, how many wars have been fought in the Third World, causing displacement and suffering? And yet, in anti-migrant discourse which propagates so prolifically in Western nation-states, the root causes of dislocation are seldom, if ever addressed. But as with the inseparability of the vestibule of hospitality leading us through the door to ethnicity, there is a beyond the threshold to simply acknowledging these conditions.

Acknowledging that such conditions exist is indeed an obligatory prefatory step, but what next? What lies beyond the hospitable confession of our own complicity (by action or omission) in the creation of abhorrent living conditions, leading people to seek to build lives elsewhere? Pheng Cheah suggests that part of the solution may lie in embracing an understanding of the spirit of cosmopolitanism. Cheah argues that “contrary to conventional understandings, the cosmopolitan spirit is not one of rootlessness. What is imagined is a universal circle of belonging that embraces the whole of humanity, as a result of the transcendence of the particularistic and blindly given ties of kinship and country. Hence, the cosmopolitan embodies the universality of philosophical reason itself” (21). As Derrida recalls in *Adieu*, (citing Kant), the very topology of the planet compels us to share it. We might do well to consider who benefits or profits from

holding our worlds apart. This would require—without (or perhaps at risk of, in my unqualified hands) reducing the discourse to fanciful, simplistic fantasy—that one imagines that they are not so far removed from problems plaguing people on the other side of the world; the problems of the refugee to come. Cheah insists that “[a]s a form of collective consciousness [,] ... cosmopolitanism can help to release human rights from their historical bondage to the instrumentality of sovereign national states” (5). So a hospitably-embraced cosmopolitan ideal could perhaps infuse the polity of the nation-state with a much needed injection of a consideration of humanity—through a humanitarian lens—without doing away with it altogether. While neither cosmopolitanism nor nationalism as either separate or combined ideologies are perfect or definitive solutions to a consideration of greater hospitality, there is greater risk in imagining one having ultimate authority over the other. How do we compel one ideology to engage with the other? Is such an approach even possible?

Despite the “inspiring examples of politically oriented cosmopolitanisms” such as Amnesty International and Médecins sans Frontières (41), Cheah remains, for lack of a better turn of phrase, sceptically optimistic: “One is never entirely certain whether the new forms of cosmopolitan consciousness from below celebrated by the academic critic are hopeful ideals of the imagination, since the exact relation between the critic’s theoretical imagination and the political imagination or imagined community of transnational movements is never clearly investigated” (40). Perhaps I’m looking at this too simplistically, but I think there is hope for hospitality. Following Arjun Appadurai—who is, perhaps, among these academics that Cheah critiques—I think there is good reason to feeling rather more optimistic than Cheah about the potential opportunities for deeper democracy. While in many respects, globalization and its effects pose a tremendous threat to the safety of children, Appadurai argues that it is

simultaneously a remarkable opportunity to form international rights building linkages. Indeed, “grassroots movements are finding new ways to combine local activism with horizontal, global networking” (Appadurai 25). Part of the solution lies in creating greater public awareness to inhospitality—especially towards children, who by the very fact that they *are* children complicate our perceptions of il/legality. In order to see any positive change, particularly with such an insidiously conservative government,¹⁷ we need increased positive publicity to press hospitality as an election-time political platform.

As Appadurai argues in “Deep Democracy,” transnational advocacy networks “provide new horizontal modes for articulating the deep democratic politics of the locality, creating hitherto unpredicted groupings” (26). While sometimes criticized for being a medium that requires little reflection on the part of the consumer, the speed and technology of, for example, Internet communication has created remarkably accessible avenues for advocacy that could not have been imagined a scant ten years ago. While not readily available to everyone globally at this point in time, cyberspace may indeed constitute a reasonably democratic forum through which youth can engage in “guerrilla exercises in capturing civic space” (Appadurai 36). Briefly—and as silly or frivolous as it may sound—examples for building social justice include the mobilization of like-minded individuals on social networking sites like MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter.¹⁸ YouTube is another excellent forum used to air political viewpoints or broadcast short films, such as the (remarkably compelling!) Youth Film Festival on Social Justice.

Sponsored by the Los Angeles-based Bresee Foundation, its “mission is to inspire high school

¹⁷ And certainly, the political atmosphere in Canada is increasingly unfavourable, when Immigration minister Jason Kenney frames refugees as perpetrating “wide-scale and almost systematic abuse” of the system (24 March 2009).

¹⁸ See Getrich, “Negotiating Boundaries of Social Belonging: Second Generation Mexican Youth and the Immigrant Rights Protests of 2006.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 52:4 [2008], 533-556; also try typing #iranelection, or #refugees (or, indeed, #Derrida!) into Twitter’s search engine: <http://search.twitter.com/>

students to create short media on issues that impact their community”¹⁹: making that which seems an inaccessibly large, global issue tangible and local. Its inaugural film festival features a series of videos created by teens about undocumented migrants. YouTube further serves as a vehicle for the broad dissemination of sousveillance, that is, monitoring authorities ‘from below’ at activist or political rallies—we’re seeing superb (though disturbing) examples of this in the current post-election crisis in Iran. I am certain there are far more sophisticated examples of ‘cyberocracy’ at work; clearly, further investigation would be required to exhaust this ever-burgeoning forum.

Another useful way of building public awareness might be through creative works, such as art and/or films. Peter Nyers has noted the positive effect of the Arts in Detention group, which was displayed at Toronto’s Mayworks Art Festival. He suggests that “since the artwork has been shown in galleries and reproduced in magazines and books, they [women and children in detention] are also becoming interlocutors in the debate about their condition” (Nyers 2008, 176). Similarly, artwork (which is, incidentally, both compelling and heartbreaking) created by children detained in the T. Don Hutto Family Detention Facility in Texas has been broadly disseminated across the Internet through various websites, blogs, and the recently-released documentary film “The Least of These,” which is also available to stream from the Internet (if you live in the US).²⁰ While another film about border crossing, *La Misma Luna (Under the Same Moon)*, was not produced by undocumented youth, it presents the story about a nine-year-old Mexican boy who crosses the US-Mexico border to rejoin his mother, who is working as an undocumented domestic in Los Angeles. It is perhaps not the most ‘academic’ film on the subject, but despite somewhat saccharine moments, it touches on the experience (and near-

¹⁹ See www.bresee.org and <http://www.youtube.com/user/youthfilmfestival> for details.

²⁰ See, for example, <http://flowtv.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/05/amaya-hutto-heart.jpg> or <http://www.hispanicnashville.com/helpus.jpg>

misses) of an undocumented minor crossing the border alone. In doing so, the viewer is forced to ask herself why a young mother ought to be separated from her child (for four years, no less!) because of some arbitrarily drawn line in the sand. This film, in its wide distribution and positive reception at the Sundance Film Festival, has provided a very public forum for the case of undocumented migrants/minors. Such public attention, in providing *virtual* face-to-face encounters, can only help to re-humanize the hollow debates and social statistics that surround studies of refugees.

Finally, I wish to return, again, to Derrida's powerful, metaphoric use of language as *mochlos*. Consider, for a moment, Saussure's assertion that "Language...is at every moment everybody's concern...everyone participates at all times, and that is why it is constantly influenced by all. This capital fact suffices to show the impossibility of revolution" (Saussure, quoted in Cheah 9). 'Revolution' itself is rendered impossible because we are all constantly exerting and influencing subtle changes on language—which in the end, amount to such considerable changes that Shakespeare himself wld no lngr rcgnz nglsh (that's a text speak version of 'would no longer recognize English'). Cheah's analysis of Saussure suggests, as Derrida would, that there is hope in revolution's very impossibility: "language...by virtue of its very arbitrariness, ... is radically mutable for *no reason* at all" (9) A similarly active engagement with and on behalf of unaccompanied minors—and refugees or economic migrants, more broadly—requires, perhaps, similarly subtle transmutations whose end result would be an impossibly unrevolutionary reconsideration of hospitality altogether.

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