

Already Lamenting: Deconstruction, Immigration, Colonialism

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In essays, conversations, and lectures such as “Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort!” (1997a), *De l'hospitalité* (1997b), “Fidélité à plus d'un” (1998a), *Monolinguisism of the Other* (1998b), and in his contributions to *Manifeste pour l'hospitalité* (1999a),¹ Jacques Derrida has addressed the relationship between hospitality and coloniality. Three of these publications resulted from roundtables or published conversations that addressed political asylum, the deprivation of citizenship, refugee status, immigration, xenophobia, and national identity. In such contexts, Derrida has asked if hospitality is possible.

Elsewhere in his work he has discussed hospitality widely in relation to canonical philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, Emmanuel Levinas, and Hannah Arendt in whose work hospitality already is (or can be shown to be) a theme. For the following reason Derrida acknowledges that his focus on hospitality seems strange amid discussions of immigration policy:

Any politician or Minister for Internal Affairs, adopting a generous and leftist stance on these questions, might well explain to us that immigration and hospitality cannot be considered as homogenous or identical phenomena. Hospitality refers us back to major canonical texts. Immigration refers us to the potential adaptation of (potential) citizens to a given state of French society. Hospitality, in an ethical register, might consist in welcoming the other within the private sphere, or offering shelter in the traditional Greek sense. Meanwhile foreign citizens or those without legal residency status (*sans papiers*) who arrive here *en masse*, and who must fit into our society, would be related to an entirely different kind of problem: an economic and social problem. (1999a, 99)

What might Derrida have to say to a minister of immigration? To pursue this question, one must first consider the distinctions he

1. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are by the author.

draws between the ideas of conditional and unconditional hospitality and between formal and ethical hospitality.

To begin with the first term—conditional hospitality—there is hardly a shortage of instances within the canonical tradition. In an ancient Greek context, a formal right to hospitality was extended to someone from another city, namely the stranger or *xenos*, who was accustomed to a different set of laws. Yet the stranger was considered to some extent as the “like.” For example, the right to hospitality was extended only to those with a family name. The rights and duties associated with the stranger’s right to hospitality were also extended to the lineage of descendants bearing that family name. The logic of hospitality therefore assumed that the stranger belonged to a family structure not unlike that of the Athenian family structure, and it also assumed that the stranger was rational and responsible, and therefore recognizing laws, rights, and duties similarly to the Athenian (Derrida 2000, 21–23). That this hospitality was conditional can be seen in the fact that it was not offered to “an anonymous new arrival and someone who has neither name, nor patronym, nor family, nor social status, and who is therefore treated not as the foreigner, but as another barbarian” (2000, 25).

Other traditions of conditional hospitality which Derrida investigates include an ancient Islamic tradition of nomadic communities who offered unlimited hospitality to lost travelers, but only for three days, after which departure from the community was obligatory (1999a, 105). Kant’s “Conditions of Perpetual Peace” (1983) introduces the concept of a universal hospitality. Every state should offer hospitality to every visitor, but again, this universal hospitality was conditional: visitors should conduct themselves peacefully and appropriately, and will remain visitors to, rather than residents of the state (Derrida 1999a, 105). Finally, in *Adieu* (1999b), Derrida considers hospitality as a term which appears intermittently throughout Levinas’s *Totality and Infinity*, which he interprets in the context Levinas’s later writings which deal with justice, the state, and the nation (1999b, 73).

In *Adieu*, Derrida defines political crimes of deportation and incarceration as crimes against hospitality (71). The precedent is given by the controversial “Debré” laws upheld during a recent period in French politics, in which it was deemed a “*délit d’hospitalité illégale*” to protect illegal residents from expulsion, for example by conceal-

ing or sheltering them in one's home. The fact that "in the spirit of the decrees and ordinances of 1938 and 1945" such protection is deemed by French authorities a "délit d'hospitalité," leads Derrida to call that law a more general kind of crime "against hospitality endured by the guests [*hôtes*] and hostages of our time, day after day incarcerated or deported, from concentration camp to detention camp, from border to border, nearby or far away" (1999b, 71).

I would like to consider his comments on political policies concerning immigration. In the above passage from *Manifeste pour l'hospitalité*, Derrida acknowledges the charge of irrelevance that a minister of immigration might direct towards philosophical reflections on concepts of hospitality. Concerning the meaning of hospitality, he notes that "the use of this word immediately raises the question of whether it can be translated by other words, such as immigration or the integration of foreigners. Are these homogenous concepts? Is it a matter of the same thing?" (Derrida 1999a, 99). He recognizes that one might have reservations about translating "an ethics of hospitality into the political or economic order" (1999a, 98–99). But he has frequently evoked the possibility of the inseparability of these orders in discussing the contemporary political situation and attitudes towards immigration in France. His interest has been directed, for example, toward the close connection of apparent institutional generosity and its extreme opposite: "when those hosts who are apparently, and present themselves as being, the most generous, constitute themselves as the most limiting (for instance, Michel Rocard stating that France can't offer a home to everybody in the world who suffers [*la France ne pouvait accueillir toute la misère du monde*])" (1999a, 116).

Within the field of conditional hospitality, there are, on the one hand, gestures identifiable as literal hospitality such as an invitation to someone considered as a guest by someone considered a host. On the other hand, there are state and political party based policies on national immigration. Many would consider that these are vastly different domains, not appropriately considered in the same terms. It might be considered that hospitality is a private and domestic matter, far from the concern of public or national immigration policy. Whatever duties, rights, or politics are involved in the latter, it would be peculiar to formulate them in

what is typically the private language of hospitality. However, Derrida has proposed that we think of these domains in connection with each other, and in connection with the problematic of a pure and impossible hospitality.

When Derrida deems incarceration or deportation a crime against hospitality, he does so in terms of an ethic of hospitality we might imagine as an ideal. This is very simply defined in terms of the "better." For example, responsibility is defined in terms of ensuring that hospitality, while conditional, be "the best possible. Hence responsibility consists in attributing to that hospitality which we want to be as large as possible, the best conditionality, the best possible law" (1999a, 101).

Derrida appeals to an ethics that exceeds existing legal entitlements in relation to the right to citizenship, residency, or free movement. While the French government may have the legal right to expel illegal immigrants, one may nonetheless deem the policy a crime against hospitality, if it is thought of as an ideal for the best possible practice. This ethics must be distinguished from political rhetoric in which one speaks in the name of hospitality so as to lay claim to national or property boundaries. When the conservative Australian government temporarily admitted Kosovar refugees in 1999, the gesture was presented within discourse of hospitality. In the words of Prime Minister John Howard "they were invited here and Australia responded far more generously than most other countries" (Howard 2000). He made clear that the refugees had no right to residency in Australia. The concessional language in which Australia's hospitality was extended emphasized this point, as did the fact that refugees were confined to a remote, former army barracks, and subject to expulsion at the caprice of the Australian government.

The extension of hospitality by Australia in this form is the context for what Derrida might define as a crime against hospitality. While Derrida's invocation of an ethics of hospitality is not reducible to his reading of Levinas, it is useful to consider the distinction discussed in that reading. The hospitality evoked by Levinas, Derrida points out, precedes property (1999b, 45). By contrast, the hospitality offered by the Australian government (and most commonly offered, both personally and politically) occurs in the name of property. Extending hospitality to Kosovars was one of the many means by which the Australian government

asserts property rights over the territory to which they provisionally offered them residency, and it would make no sense in the absence of that assertion of property rights. If we define this as formal hospitality it can be terminologically distinguished from “ethical” hospitality. One means of distinguishing these might be that the former presupposes the assertion of property whereas the latter precedes such assertions.

The literal offering of formal hospitality often—and perhaps structurally—presupposes that the host who offers it has a proper domain or dwelling. It supposes, consolidates, or institutes the host’s proper place (house, home, nation, land, domain, camp, resting place) and also presupposes the host’s rights over that proper place, either in terms of ownership, custodianship, or at least authority over that place. A gesture of literal or formal hospitality assumes someone’s right to say to another that s/he may or may not occupy one’s own nation, land, or place of dwelling. It assumes a certain relationship to authority, laws, and permission, in the occupation of the role of the gatekeeper who says, “you may pass.”

This is one reason why one might say that literal or formal hospitality is inherently inhospitable. As Derrida has elsewhere written of the gift, once a gesture is recognized as hospitality, it assumes that the person who grants it might have refused it. If that’s not so, it is not literal hospitality. If it is recognized as hospitable, it assumes that we (guest and host) have followed preexisting formulae recognizable as those of hospitality. But true hospitality, suggests Derrida, would not be robotic, the mere following of formulae. It would involve the very reinvention of hospitality, which (in its most radical expression) would be unrecognizable as such. It would require the invention not only of its own forms, rules, or conditions, but also of its own language. Concerning the invention of its own language, pure hospitality would be poetic. The moment it is recognizable as such (according to preexisting forms and discourse), it is no longer what Derrida suggests as a radical hospitality (1999a, 134).

Less radically, the position assumed by the apparently hospitable person (adjudication, granting passage, assertion of the authority to grant or deny access) is inherently inhospitable. The gesture of literal or formal hospitality always says, in essence: I let you in, but in doing so I assume the right to determine your movements, I say that I might not have let you in, and I might later insist on your departure.

In addition to property, ownership, authority, gatekeeping, control, order, and regulation, the conditions of what I am distinguishing as literal or formal hospitality from ethical hospitality have often been a body of patriarchal customs. For example, the right to Athenian hospitality is extended to the stranger and his family, while women are subsumed under the latter. As Derrida asks of this context: “Qui serait une étrangère?” (1997b, 67) (“What would a foreign woman be?” Derrida 2000, 73). As he notes, it has usually been the father and the husband who lays down the laws of hospitality (2000, 149). He discusses the Judeo-Christian tradition of hospitality seen in various biblical stories that highlight the frequently sacrificial role of women in the economy of hospitality offered to the stranger. Loth’s daughters are, for example, sacrificed in Loth’s fidelity to the law of hospitality. After Loth takes in strangers, the men of Sodom arrive, demanding access to the men he is sheltering. Protecting his guests, Loth volunteers in their stead his two virgin daughters with whom, he offers, the Sodomites can do as they please (2000, 151–55). In this story, women pay the price for and enable the means of Loth’s hospitality towards his fellow man, and this is also more banally true insofar as it is often the women who tend to the stranger to whom the patriarch has offered shelter.

There is an often-concealed backdrop, then, to the economy of generosity, and welcome of the foreign which takes place between men. The stranger must be identified to some extent as “like” the host, not as the radically unknowable stranger. Think of Derrida’s reminder that the stranger-guest, the *xenos*, entitled to Athenian hospitality was not “the other, the completely other (*le tout autre*) who is relegated to an absolute outside, savage, barbaric, precultural, and prejudicial, outside and prior to the family, the community, the city, the nation, or the State” (2000, 73). It is not typically offered to, or by a woman, except insofar as the woman belongs to the family of the stranger or host, although women are often the routes by which it is possible to offer hospitality. And it occurs through an admission of the heterogeneous or strange, which could be said to simultaneously undermine that admission by setting conditions to it. In other words, in extending hospitality to the unknown stranger who is of another kind but not too strange, I shall admit strangeness, but in the mode of doing so I shall admit the like.

Finally, literal hospitality presupposes property or at least the assertion of rights over land or a domain under the jurisdiction of masters authorized to permit the offering of shelter to the stranger. What then is the condition of the domain governed by the patriarch? Often that he has colonized another people. For example, hospitality is often offered on the land once appropriated from some invaded or enslaved people deemed barbaric.

To offer literal hospitality, you must be (or deem yourself to be) authorized to act as the gatekeeper of a domain. But what if colonization grounds the assertion of such authorization? Let's think then of an Australian prime minister, or a minister of immigration, a John Howard or Philip Ruddock, and the condition of their ability, to offer, on behalf of the nation, temporary hospitality to Kosovars. These conditions depend on the previous colonization by Europeans of Aboriginal peoples and land, to generate the possibility of that white, Australian benevolence. What if those values specifically associated with hospitality (generosity towards the other, fraternity with the other, duty towards the other) must have already brutally failed to generate the possibility of benevolent national hospitality? What if colonialism is the condition of hospitality? And how might this possibility be related to Derrida's suggestions in "Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort!" that hospitality is culture itself, ethics itself (1997a, 42) and in *Monolingualism of the Other* and in "Fidélité à plus d'un" that all culture is originally colonial (1996, 39; 1998a, 259)? The two comments suggest that we need to think culture in terms of the intersection of hospitality and coloniality.

I have so far mentioned contexts discussed by Derrida of conditional hospitality, such as its being offered to an other identified as the stranger, while excluding an other identified as the savage or barbaric. I mentioned that Derrida's question is whether hospitality is possible, and referred to the formulation according to which a conditional hospitality would be inherently inhospitable. This suggests that only an unconditional or pure hospitality would be truly hospitable. But the question Derrida will also ask is whether an unconditional hospitality itself could ever be possible, and this is the question also posed by him in the context of roundtable discussions of immigration.

Preoccupied, as we know, by problems of impossibility, one of Derrida's arguments has been that the stranger is impossible, or at least,

impossible for us: "To speak of the stranger (*l'étranger*) is to speak of the possibility of this is the very im-possible" (1998a, 246). This point can be generalized to discussions of alterity and the other that constitute the problem of anticipation. At the point at which I identify the other as other (as in "this is the other," or "this is my other"), I subordinate the other to my domains of anticipation, understanding, and recognition. The moment I do that, the other is no longer other, and could never have been the other. My very ability to say to or about the other that *this* is the other undercuts the possibility that this is the other. At the point one encounters, or identifies the other, s/he could not have been the other. In this sense, the other could be described as impossible. The advent of the other would have to break or thwart my horizon of expectation and anticipation in every sense (1998a, 246). Any subordination of the other to the domain of preexisting sense (allowing the intelligible identification *this* is the other) would already have annulled the impossibility, the foreignness, or the alterity I might have hoped to greet.

Derrida extends this point to the problem of hospitality. In *Manifeste pour l'hospitalité* he asks if an unconditional hospitality is possible:

In an unconditional hospitality, the host should, in principle, receive even before knowing anything about the guest. . . [the host] should avoid every question about the other's identity, desire, rules, capacity for work, integration, adaptation. . . . From the moment [*dès lors*] that I pose all these questions and . . . conditions . . . the ideal situation of non-knowledge is broken. (Derrida 1999a, 98)

Let's say that an unconditional hospitality would have to be offered to an unlimited number of unknown others, to an unlimited extent, and to whom no questions were posed. It fails as such if it is offered only under duress, or to fulfill a debt, or out of legal or moral obligation. Again consider for contrast that very limited hospitality offered by Australia to Kosovars, conditional as it was on a concept of national duty and professed reluctance to undertake that duty, on the identification of a victim deemed innocent, and patently conditional also on a requirement of the guest's sufficient gratitude. To return to John Howard's commentary:

I would imagine that the great bulk of the refugees are immensely grateful for the safe haven that Australia's provided. . . . What they do have is an entitlement to stay at our expense in accommodation that

we have nominated. . . . And they have a right to move around, but they don't have the right to say to us: well look we don't like that accommodation which the government is providing. (Howard 1999)

It seemed that some of the Australian tabloid media felt the requirement of appropriate gratitude had not been fulfilled when, as was recounted to readers with considerable outrage, a group of Kosovar men criticized the quality and conditions of Australian hospitality. From the perspective of the hosts, the condition of Australian hospitality to Kosovars seemed to be precisely that the guests undertake no assessment as to its quality or adequacy.

But, argues Derrida, in an unconditional hospitality, the other whom we welcome "might violate, might be an assassin, might disrupt my home . . . might come to make revolution," and I would have to welcome that possibility (1999a, 100). Our welcome would not be contingent on prior interrogations about the other's identity, let alone their return of gratitude, leading Derrida to ask, in *Of Hospitality*:

Does one give hospitality to a subject? to an identifiable subject? to a subject identifiable by name? to a legal subject? Or is hospitality *rendered*, is it *given* to the other before they are identified, even before they are (posited as or supposed to be) a subject, legal subject and subject nameable by their family name, etc? (2000, 29)

The moment we assume that the other is an other, another subject like me, or another subject not like me, even human as opposed to nonhuman, there are prerequisite questions we have already asked and answered. The prerequisite assumption we have made when we greet the other is that we do already know him or her: he or she is fundamentally like us and so there is some kind of fraternity between us. In so far as that must be so, Derrida argues there could never be an unconditional hospitality. We have always already subjected the other to a question we have already answered, at least to some extent.

Among the reasons for this, think again of his comment, "From the moment [*dès lors*] that I pose all these questions and . . . conditions . . . the ideal situation of non-knowledge is broken" (1999a, 98). This ideal situation must always already be broken, if it is not possible to turn to or think of the other without already having posed some kind of question: who, what? In that sense, a more general hospitality would always "annul" itself. There's a sense in which, as Derrida writes, "When I see the other appear, I am already lamenting the other's absence, *adieu, adieu, tu m'abandonnes*" (Derrida 1998a, 227).

Why evoke the impossible? Above all, why do so in the context of a reflection on acts of national reception, expulsion, and immigration? For whom or what might the thinking of this permanent impossibility of any unconditional hospitality be useful in such contexts? One moment we can be ironic about the very conditional hospitality offered by white Australian landowners to those of other nations in the guise of generosity or benevolence. The next moment we seem to have Derrida reminding us that however lamentable practices of conditional hospitality might often be, unconditional national hospitality would be as impossible as is, for many, leaving permanently open one's front door.

Is his intention to reassure us about, or make an apology for, conditional hospitality? "You might as well be as conditional as you like, making no efforts, for you could never have acted unconditionally, and anyway, hospitality is impossible." Clearly not, given the emphasis Derrida gives to a politics of improving immigration laws and hospitality more generally, despite (or in the context of) the impossibility of pure hospitality.

So, who is being asked to reflect on a poetics of pure hospitality? In answer to this question, let's return to the minister of immigration, evoked by Derrida as someone who may well be expected to protest that immigration and a philosophical or poetic reflection on hospitality are entirely different spheres.

Could it be that the minister of immigration is already engaged in a reflection on the possibility of pure hospitality? Consider how those wanting to limit immigration programs often speak precisely in the name of unconditional hospitality, evoked as a threat: a flood of immigrants might be admitted, those temporarily admitted might never go home, they might be assassins, or contribute to violence, terrorism or unrest, or the nation's identity might simply be lost in the numbers. So often we are told that we must draw a limit. Why? While it is constituted as a threat, rather than an affirmative and general "come," the meanest acts of limited hospitality live with what they seem precisely to designate as the possibility of unlimited hospitality. Is this not echoed in Michel Rocard's comment that France cannot open its doors to all those in the world who suffer? Apparently, it is Rocard who contemplates an unconditional hospitality so as to deem it a threat that must be firmly denied.

So we need to ask, not whether the politician or others should think about a poetics of pure hospitality, but how one is probably already—and according to Derrida inevitably—engaged, if implicitly, in such a reflection. Such a lurking poetics can be seen when individual acts of conditional hospitality occur in the context of the belief that one must set limits, or when acts of improvement (or deterioration) of immigration laws occur with regrets about the impossibility of an unlimited opening of national boundaries. This is one response which could be made by Derrida to the minister of immigration who considers problems of hospitality to be far removed from those of political and state policy: to ask how the former is already implicated in the latter.

The possibility of unconditional hospitality is apparently believed in, and in conjunction with this, it is feared. Perhaps it is the posing of unconditional hospitality as a national threat that has already failed to recognize that unconditional hospitality is impossible? Yet an emphasis on the impossibility of pure hospitality is unlikely to soothe the politician or the xenophobe who fears it. The politician, or the xenophobe, is worried about the horde of people who might come. Pure hospitality is impossible in the sense that I never could radically take up the position: come.

In *De l'hospitalité* Derrida associates xenophobia with the fear that one's home will no longer be one's own domain, one's inviolable private space. Furthermore, "one can become virtually xenophobic in order to protect or claim to protect one's own hospitality, the own home that makes possible one's own hospitality" (2000, 53). Offering residency to somebody else relies on establishing the land as one's own. But this point is elsewhere made as a means of converting the understanding of the visitor as threat into an understanding of the visitor as one's fortune. What if the land is only my own because I can offer it to somebody else? What if the act of offering it performatively insists on the fact that it is mine? But to argue in this context that hospitality is more good fortune than risk can also be considered a deconstruction of one's status as host. Rather than the guest being dependent on my benevolence, I am dependent on the guest to give me the opportunity of taking the position of host (1999a, 118). Certainly one might pursue a critique of national hospitality in relation to immigration formulated in terms which only consolidate the assertion of one's

rights over the land, particularly when those rights are grounded in literal colonial or appropriative violence. Along these lines one might note the connection between hospitality and xenophobia. One might explore the possibility of notions of generosity, hospitality, and responsibility that might be less grounded in demarcations of what is properly mine.

At the outset of this discussion, it seemed that the conditions of hospitality would be that I choose to offer something I possess (my territory) to an other who does not already in some way occupy it. If these are the conditions, hospitality is also, in a more general sense, impossible. The discrete identity of the welcoming self is in question, mediated as it is by its identifications with, fear of, or distancing from the other. "An identity is never (definitively) given, received nor attained; only the interminable and indefinitely phantasmatic process of identification endures," writes Derrida in *Monolinguisism of the Other* (1998b, 28). Xenophobia is sometimes interconnected with the failure to come to terms with this: "xenophobic and inhospitable behavior can be analyzed as the behavior of those who have difficulties with the foreigner within oneself, with their own phantoms, while those who have the taste, the talent or the genius for hospitality are those who accept multiplicity *within themselves*, who know how to deal with the stranger within, in its multiple forms" (1999a, 139). In *Manifesto*, he also reminds that "Language is also, in a certain way, the foreigner within oneself because it's a matter of heritage, composed of things, forces, motivations that I have not chosen and which constitutes the other, others (1999a, 139). In *The Other Heading* he emphasizes that "what is proper to a culture is to not be identical to itself" (Derrida 1992, 9). A nation-state is never itself, never a homogeneous, self-identical united voice or people. Its territory is never its own, and we can think this in many ways: in cases of the literal colonial history of a country such as Australia, and in a kind of generalized colonialism which Derrida has argued, in *Monolinguisism of the Other* and in "Fidélité à plus d'un" pertains to all cultures:

A culture forms, stabilizes or forms roots . . . through force conflicts, the phenomena of imposition and hegemony, repelling and repressing. . . . A culture is always the hegemonic and coercive imposition of a group, a force, a drive, a fantasm over another. Coloniality is always at work. (Derrida 1998a, 259)

Derrida speaks to a rethinking of the concepts that literal hospitality seems to presuppose, such as one's own residence, one's proper identity, and one's proper cultural identity. In offering hospitality to Kosovars, the Australian state presumes and asserts the integrity of its identity and property. But how might the rights and duties of hospitality be rethought once this integrity is more properly in question? Derrida does not offer an argument for the end to all efforts at hospitality, but an argument for the reconception of its terms. For example, he speaks for an ethics of "responding for and to what will never be . . . mine" (1998a, 260), as opposed to a hospitality grounded in the assertion of what is mine.

The argument is particularly risky. Derrida emphasizes that in no way does he wish to minimize the importance of legal citizenship and other formal rights (1998a, 257). Nevertheless, his argument that no one properly has his or her own identity, property, language and heritage could seem to say to those dispossessed of language, heritage, land, property, citizenship, and voting entitlements: why not sacrifice these as values to which one aspires. A well-worn critical response to Derrida has been emphasizing the difference between the deconstruction of these aspirations when espoused by the entitled subject associated with them, and the deconstruction of these aspirations in relation to those deprived of them. Nevertheless, many who have supported indigenous land rights would be the first to argue that a rethinking of the European relationship to hospitality, property, heritage, and responsibility is critical to an adequate formulation of those rights. One of the most well-recognized dilemmas associated with indigenous land rights claims is the reconsolidation of British traditional legal concepts of property, ownership, and compensation which has occurred as indigenous land rights claims have been by necessity formulated in these terms in order to be legible to Australian courts. Derrida's argument for a general rethinking of the philosophical bases of citizenship, nationality, and hospitality makes sense from this perspective. This would mean not just that indigenous land rights claims need make themselves legible to British legal traditions, but that European-based understandings of property, citizenship, responsibility, identity, culture, hospitality, and coloniality must also be open to reconceptualization.

To approach this suggestion, I'd like to imagine Derrida's declaration that "all culture is essentially colonial" (1998b, 39) directed at

a privileged white Australian perspective, whose supposition is that, whoever has been colonized, it is certainly not this self, not this Australian. This Australian has language, land, and above all, rights, so much so that it is one's right to impose upon somebody else, as when arguments are put that those who "choose to live in Australia" must be competent in English. How treacherous an argument that all culture is colonial could be, to be sure. Someone tries to recount the specificity of Australian indigenous experience, only to be greeted with the response: "yes, yes, we know, for we have all been colonized, we are all colonial." Certainly Derrida avows that he wishes not to suppress differences between the experiences of the literally colonized, and those who have undergone "the coloniality of every culture":

I would not like to make too easy use of the word "colonialism." . . . The question here is not to efface the arrogant brutality of what is called modern colonial war in the strictest definition. . . . On the contrary. Certain people, myself included, have experienced colonial cruelty . . . but . . . it reveals the colonial structure of any culture in an exemplary way. (1998b, 39)

Certainly, he acknowledges that he will be seen as suppressing those differences: "I will be accused of confusing it all." And given that this danger is so apparent, and the position he has taken up so precarious, why does he do it?

Think of the readiness of the person who aggressively believes that their home is their own, to admit that it may not be. The white landowner who believes that one could lose one's home to indigenous Australians through some decision of the Australian courts thereby admits that one does not have a proper, unbreakable tie to one's home. The lament "our homes are not our own"—for example, when said even in the legal naiveté of those whose homes are the product of colonial invasion—describes and avows a situation it wants to fend off. These homes are not one's own. Property ownership is founded in laws open to change and by a politics that can alter it. A government body can appropriate a home under certain circumstances. National status which assures home ownership is subject to alteration under the conditions of annexing, invasion, coup d'état, or revolution.

Derrida's reading is directed at the subject he names, using an old-fashioned language—the master and the question of what that

master rightfully owns—whether that be one's proper country, or one's proper language:

For contrary to what one is most tempted often to believe, the master is nothing. And he does not have exclusive possession of anything. Because the master does not possess exclusively and *naturally* what he calls his language, because, whatever he wants or does, he cannot maintain any relations of property or identity that are natural, national, congenital or ontological with it, because he can only give substance to and articulate this appropriation in the course of an unnatural process of politico-phantasmatic constructions, because language is not his natural possession, he can, thanks to that very fact, pretend historically, through the rape of a cultural usurpation, which means always essentially colonial, to appropriate it in order to impose it as "his own." That is his belief, he wants to make others share it through the use of force or cunning. (1998b, 23)

Doesn't the language of colonialism consolidate the impression that the dispossessed are dispossessed of something the master does have? In fact, doesn't it reinforce the myth in which the master is highly invested: that he or she has definitively, with authority and confidence: language, culture, identity and/or property?

In other words, consider Derrida's argument as directed at a white, colonizing perspective which by designating the other as disappropriated, understands itself as noncolonized, in possession of a proper language, culture, identity and nation, over which it has fundamental rights.

In Australia we're so very familiar with John Howard's hostile rejection of what he designated the black armband approach to history. According to this (in his imagination) he and today's white Australians would be wrongfully attributed with the shame, guilt, or responsibility that belongs appropriately only to the original colonizers of Australia, and earlier governments. Rejecting a black armband sentiment, Howard strenuously disavows that his own identity is that of the colonizer. This identity—and accompanying shame and responsibility—rightfully belongs only to his ancestors: such is Howard's declaration.

Perhaps Derrida's recent material on immigration and colonialism acts as a different kind of reminder. John Howard's disavowal dovetails perfectly well with his concurrent investment in the identity as colonizer. For the Howard-as-colonizer is not the Howard who

has been colonized. Howard engages in a simultaneously disavowing and desirous understanding of indigenous Australians as dispossessed of language, cultural heritage, identity, and land. They do not have these things. I, Howard have nothing to do with this. I am not the colonizer. Yet I, Howard, am the colonizer for a colonized subject who has lost language, identity, land. By contrast I know that my language is my own, as is my culture and my land. Unlike them, I have my heritage, I have my identity.

So long as it is the other who may be seen as dispossessed of language, cultural heritage, identity, and land, the subject may all the better retain the myth that he or she is in full and confident possession of these things. What kind of intervention is made into this myth by Derrida's emphasis of a generalized coloniality? Such an emphasis leads to the affirmation that no one properly owns his or her land, domain, dwelling, language, and culture. A nation-state is never properly itself. It is never a homogenous, self-identical united voice or people, whose others remain at the exterior until offered admission. Language is never our own: it comes to us from the other. Identity is not our own, nor is culture our own.

When directed at those who have suffered a brutal history of colonization, the argument, "but don't you see, we are all colonized, culture is colonial" can serve the flattening of differences about which Derrida himself rightly expresses concern. But when directed at the colonizer's identity as sustained by the belief that it is those others who lack identity, culture, language, and land, not this colonizing subject, Derrida's interpretation has the greater potential. Hence the pertinence of a rethinking of hospitality, the suggestion for "an unheard of concept of hospitality" (1997a, 15). For example, suggests Derrida in "Fidélité" one should first be "hospitable to the other within *oneself*" (1999a, 139). A failure to question the integrity of one's own identity is seen in those self-righteous protestations that anyone living in Australia should be prepared to learn English, adopt certain standards, and in immigration policy which determines who shall, and shall not be allowed admittance. However, it is also seen in benevolent extensions of one's rights or land to those not legally entitled to them as in the granting of asylum to the other—where what is wrong is not the asylum, but its consolidation of the apparently rightful property of those offering it.

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