# Plastic hospitality: The empty signifier at the EU's Mediterranean border

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## Abstract

Hospitality and hospitality-laden language feature highly among people working in or around structures of first reception in Italy and Malta, two countries at the European Union's (EU) external border. This is peculiar because hospitality rarely features at first reception, which forms part of the state's border system. Characteristically, security issues are prioritized, and the first reception system is managed by the member state's security agents, in collaboration with EU and international security agents. In practice, first reception refers to the processes of identification, registration, and classification that irregular migrants go through after having crossed the border without authorization and, often, without identification. Drawing on long-term and multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in Italy and Malta, this article examines some of the uses of hospitality language by a spectrum of territorial borderworkers operating with state, non-state, security, humanitarian, and activist entities in the two countries that are the object of this study. Discourse analysis yields interesting insights into how the use of the hospitality paradigm and hospitality terminology in first reception is less about hospitality practices and more about power. It proposes that the hospitality paradigm be conceptualized as a Laclauian empty signifier, and therefore, as a locus of power.

Keywords: first reception, hospitality, Mediterranean, EU reception policy, territorial borderworkers

## 1. Introduction

But what kind of hospitality is this? Where I come from, guests are treated well, they are given the best seats at table. But look at us – I have to beg for closed shoes because I feel cold with these flip flops. Our 'hosts' are many police outside and some people in here [the centre]. Even them, [pointing towards the cultural mediators], they are very good to us, but they are paid to do their work and they are only two. And Italy is

a civilised country you know, they save us, it's true and *alhamdulillah* . . . we are here today because of them. But look where they host us, in the desert. Not because this is a desert, but it is like a desert, because there is no people nowhere. My friend, he escape and he told me that it took him more than four hours to arrive to the first city [Agrigento]. He escape because here you know we are in prison when we do not give the fingerprint, but I give my fingerprint and still I am in prison because I get too little money to travel to the city and I cannot work or do something. I am not a guest, I am like a prisoner. Hospitality, guest . . . these are all plastic words, like human rights, gender equality, . . . (Ahmed, Sudanese migrant, early 30s, Agrigento/ Siculiana, April 2016).

At first reception, migrants are quiet, observant, and do not voice criticism, unless it is about major issues such as their refusal to be fingerprinted (which was common among Eritrean migrants). Although Ahmed's approach is not typical of a migrant going through the first reception system, I have chosen to start this article with this quotation because it mirrors my impressions of the first reception system and raises critical questions about the use of a discourse of hospitality to describe such a system. First reception at the external border consists of a series of impersonal, bureaucratic, and securitized procedures often framed in a crisis and/or emergency culture. The system includes singular acts of solidarity, encounter, and hospitality by individuals operating within it, carried out either spontaneously or out of rebellion. However, the system itself is not constructed to be hospitable or to allow acts of hospitality by others (DeBono 2018; Rozakou 2012). By hospitality, I mean a peaceful relationship between a host and a guest, which involves reciprocity, exchange, ritual, reception, and at times, entertainment of a guest (for a conceptual presentation and discussion, including ethnographic studies, see Candea and Da Col 2012; Derrida 2000; Herzfeld 1987; Pitt-Rivers 1968; Shyrock 2008). The approach to the concept of hospitality is therefore not in the normative direction of Kant's cosmopolitan right to universal hospitality (Kant 1970/1795) but rather open and exploratory in line with Candea and Da Col's description:

> hospitality, like gift-giving, involves reciprocity, a tension between spontaneity and calculation, generosity and parasitism, friendship and enmity, improvisation and rule; like the gift, hospitality encompasses distant agents; it embeds social transactions in materiality and raises complex questions relating to economy and time . . . hospitality also goes beyond the classic ground of gift exchange, touching on a number of other central anthropological problematics: identity, alterity, and belonging; sovereignty, politics, and inequality; the relation between the individual and the collective; commensality, consubstantiality, and kinship (Candea and Da Col 2012: 1–2).

The stated aim of the first reception system in European Union (EU) documents is to identify, register, and classify migrants (see European Commission 2015), which shows clearly that first reception at the external borders is an intrinsic part of border control. This notwithstanding hospitality terminology is the dominant discourse in asylum and immigration in Europe not only in official statements and law but also in social analysis (see Rosello 2001: 23–48, Rozakou 2012: 566). The paradigmatic discourse of hospitality is connected to what Walters (2011) described as the 'novel development in the history of border and bordermaking' (138) of the European border into a site of humanitarian

government. The notion of humanitarian border refers to the presence of humanitarianism within European border governance and the increasing presence of non-state actors in the humanitarian border assemblage (see Pallister-Wilkins 2015; Stierl 2018). Indeed, the European Agenda on Migration, which defines first reception on the EU's external borders, also includes regulation and plans regarding humanitarian activity at the territorial border, which assume the necessity of policing (in the form of Frontex).

The tensions and contradictions of the military–humanitarian border of the EU have been analyzed by various scholars (among whom Cuttitta 2015; Garelli and Tazzioli 2017; Moreno-Lax 2018; Pallister-Wilkins 2015; Stierl 2018). The use of the hospitality paradigm takes place within the setting of this humanitarian border, and rather than challenging it, it supports its construction and compounds its effects (Rozakou 2012). But hospitality is often overlooked in literature on humanitarianism or conceptualized as identical to it (such as humanitarianism as 'gift' in Calhoun 2010: 37 and in Pallister-Wilkins 2015: 59 and hospitality also conceptualized as 'gift' by, for example, Candea and Da Col 2012: 1 and Shyrock 2008: 413–414). Rather, this article, in line with Rozakou's analysis of humanitarians, shows how hospitality is 'transcribed and re-enacted' (Rozakou 2012: 563) in the descriptions and practices of territorial borderworkers who, akin to Lipsky's (1980) street-level bureaucrats, are involved in 'making policy' (xiii), in the construction of military–humanitarian border policies. The article dwells on the outcome of these transcriptions and analyzes the network of cultural sources within which this discourse is embedded and which give the paradigm the impetus and visceral quality that exacerbate its effectiveness.

In Italy, first reception runs from the disembarkation of migrants from a vessel to the migrant detention centre (which is generally located close to a port). First reception processes can also extend to a 'Regional hub' or to a Centre of Extraordinary Reception (*Centro di Accoglienza Straordinaria*, popularly known by its acronym CAS). In Malta, first reception processes take place in the Initial Reception Centre and may extend to migrants' open centres. Unlike Italy, Malta did not trigger the hotspot approach, and the country is not formally included in the European Agenda on Migration.

First reception is articulated within the discourse of hospitality in two distinct but inter-related ways. First, it refers to the very practical aspects of hosting the newcomers, including logistical arrangements that cater for basic needs. Secondly, it recalls the overarching image of a state hosting newcomers. This has contributed to the situation which is being explored in this article, namely that of territorial borderworkers seeing themselves as hosts engaged in a larger project of hospitality practices, with migrants as guests.

The term 'territorial borderworkers'[1] here refers to state and non-state actors who are at the implementing end of humanitarian border policies. They constitute a heterogenous group of people who are active or work on the territorial border, which includes the securitized spaces of first reception and the border towns and whose activity involves regular contact with incoming migrants. Territorial borderworkers include state officials, migrant centre workers, health workers, international, national, and local non-state organizations workers, volunteers and activists, intergovernmental organization officials, and EU agency workers. Lipsky argued that 'street-level bureaucrats' by implementing the policy are also 'making policy', and similarly, territorial borderworkers should be seen as policy makers of the humanitarian border. While Rumford argues that citizens enact borders in their daily life, and similarly, territorial borderworkers who live and spend time in border

towns are involved in borderwork in a place characterized by its location on the territorial border. As a constitutive element of the humanitarian border, territorial borderworkers thus play an important role in its construction. The reality of the first reception system is sharply in contrast with the manner in which territorial borderworkers working for different entities in the first reception processes portrayed their job and peppered their descriptions with hospitality terminology. When people were explaining the system to me, those working at the hotspots referred to migrants as *ospiti* (guests), and a cultural mediator described *prima accoglienza* (first reception) very eloquently as 'the period when the *ragazzi* (boys; referring to the migrants) are introduced to the Italian state and when hospitality is enacted in practice' (fieldnotes, Trapani, 29 March 2017). By and large, the police and security services tended to be more flippant in their use of language, but even they used the terminology: 'we have a few guests here who need some care' (fieldnotes, Agrigento, 9 April 2016), one of the police officers told the manager of the centre as they were getting off the coach from disembarkation. Territorial borderworkers employed with inter-governmental organizations also used the terminology regularly. Their work was concentrated in the centres, and their interactions were mostly with other territorial borderworkers in the hotspot centres. Non-governmental organizations and humanitarian organizations used the terminology regularly. Overall, the use of hospitality terminology appeared to be an effort made to refer to migrants respectfully.

Apart from being influenced by policy makers' representation of first reception, this phenomenon reflects a similar process taking place in the secondary reception system, where the use of hospitality language is also noticeable. Indeed, there are several points of contact between the two processes and some crossover of employees, which partly explains this linguistic influence. Secondary reception is different to first reception. The secondary reception process is much longer (first reception lasts from a few hours to three months,[2] while secondary reception lasts from a year up to even four years). In addition, the main aims of secondary reception include accommodation in migrant centres and contact with the host community. Finally, secondary reception is where integration processes should start. The analysis made in this article focusses on first reception, but it is indicative of similar processes at play in secondary reception too.

A clear impression formed during my fieldwork was that territorial borderworkers genuinely believed they were engaging in hospitality practices to some degree or other. This is the strength of this discursive praxis. Few stopped to question whether this was the case. Conversations with me provided an opportunity for them to tease out and discuss some of the contradictions and tensions in the use of hospitality terminology within the border and refugee management field. Their reflections interfaced constantly with more traditional, emic, cultural understandings of hospitality.

This article is based on a long-term, multi-sited ethnographic study exploring first reception 'in situ' in Western Sicily (primarily in the provinces of Agrigento, Palermo, and Trapani, in particular the main cities and ports where migrants were disembarked and towns where hotspots or first reception centres were located, that is, Porto Empedocle, Siculiana, Milo, and in the island of Lampedusa) and in Malta (no specific location) between 2015 and 2018. Both Sicily and Malta are part of the EU's external border. The researcher, building on prior experience in this field spanning 15 years, spent over 2 years in the field for this project, alternating between the different localities. Time was spent with

people working with different stakeholder groups, such as immigration police departments, health authorities, NGOs offering special services, and activists. Observations and participant observation in different spheres of activity of first reception were carried out, including disembarkation points, first reception centres, health centres, and at NGO meetings. Fieldnotes were taken and complemented with over 80 in-depth interviews ranging from one hour to six hours. Most in-depth interviews were recorded and selectively transcribed, whereas with interviews that could not be recorded, notes were taken as soon after as possible, and where possible, near-verbatim quotes were noted. Although not the focus of this article, it is important to note that I spent time with new migrants at various ports, even although access was often limited due to the securitized nature of the areas of operation of first reception and, as was often the case, the vulnerable condition of the migrants. New migrants were considered vulnerable, and the least harm principle in my interactions with them was applied throughout, while in-depth interviews were conducted with migrants who had arrived earlier.

By drawing on this long-term fieldwork, this article uses elements of discourse analysis to examine the different uses of hospitality by territorial borderworkers in Italy and Malta. It challenges the simplistic explanation given often by policy makers, NGO officials, territorial borderworkers, and observers of the system that hospitality is used because it appears as a more humane, politically correct framework. Rather this article delves into the socio-cultural and political processes taking place in the larger society that serve to explain how and why hospitality has become entrenched within the EU migration lexicon. The article puts forward the argument that a particular convergence of factors takes place that conditions the language use and allows the hospitality paradigm to thrive. Hospitality language, irrespective of the intention behind its use, appears to uphold a system that prioritizes state interests over those of migrants, a system that is driven by exclusion and control, rather than cosmopolitan ideas, tolerance, or acceptance.

## 2. Signs, signifiers, and plastic words

'Plastic words' is the title of an insightful book by Uwe Poerksen. A linguist by profession, Poerksen describes how some words that have international currency appear repeatedly in political speeches, government reports, and academic conferences and give the perception of a new utopian reality. These plastic words might begin or have been present as scientific words with specialized meanings but are (re-)imported to the vernacular stripped of their specialized meanings. Hugely reminiscent of George Orwell's epic Nineteen Eight-Four, he shows that when plastic words infiltrate reality, they reorder it in their own image; but instead of helping to construct a utopian reality, through ambiguous meanings, common language is disabled, and the world is actually impoverished (Poerksen 2004). Plasticity itself is an interesting concept that is widely used in philosophy of language. One of the most influential theorists who launched plasticity was Charles Sanders Peirce who refers to plasticity as the ability of language to express meaning. He proposed a model of the self as a constantly emerging dialogic self: 'When one reasons, it is that critical self that one is trying to persuade and all thought is whatever is a sign, and is mostly in the nature of language' (Peirce 1905: 170). In Peirce's model, the individual can maintain a sense of subjectivity,

whether this is considered illusory or real, and change and evolve constantly. Plasticity, for him, is an outcome of the individual's 'blundering rational mind' (Peirce 1932: 3.421), and cultures reflect the plasticity of signs, and these signs in turn reflect the plasticity of human selves (Denzin 2008: 17).

Poerksen's work also follows in the tradition developed in semantics where signifiers without referents are called 'floating signifiers'. Initially coined by Lévi-Strauss (1950/1987: 63), it was further elaborated by Barthes, Hall, and Laclau, among others. A 'floating signifier' is a symbol or concept loose enough to mean many things to many people. The signifier is therefore 'equivocal', where as a result of the arbitrariness of the sign, the same signifier can be attached to different signifieds in different contexts (Laclau 1996: 36). It could also be 'ambiguous' to the extent that 'either an overdetermination or an under-determination of signifieds prevents it from being fully fixed' (Laclau 1996: 36). In brief, therefore, the floating signifier refers either to a signified that is not fixed or has multiple referents, and as a result different political groups compete to assign their desired signified. A floating signifier is distinct to an empty signifier (sometimes referred to in the literature as a master or central signifier). Laclau defines it as such:

> An empty signifier is, strictly speaking, a signifier without a signified. This definition is also, however, the enunciation of a problem. For how would it be possible that a signifier is not attached to any signified and remains, nevertheless, an integral part of a system of signification? An empty signifier would be a sequence of sounds and if the latter are deprived of any signifying function the term 'signifier' itself would become excessive. The only possibility for a stream of sounds beign detached from any particular signified whilst still remaining a signifier is if, through the subversion of the sign which the possibility of an empty signifier involves, something is achieved which is internal to significations as such. What is the possibility? (Laclau 1996: 36)

An empty signifier is the hegemonic representative of a collection of various demands, constituting a chain of equivalence whose members are distinguished through a differential logic (as in elements exist only in their differences to one another) but combine through an equivalential one. This chain of unsatisfied demands creates an unfulfilled totality, inside of which one signifier subordinates the rest and assumes representation of the rest via a hegemonic process (Laclau 1996).

The use of the hospitality paradigm, terminology, and metaphor with its vague, malleable meanings provides an opportunity for groups seeking power, dominance, and hegemony over societies. In Gramscian terms, the impoverishment of language through the insertion of plastic words results in the disempowerment of groups whose worldview is an imposition by a dominant group to meet their own interests. Therefore, the fact that hospitality has become the accepted cultural norm through which first reception is portrayed and represented in the EU should lead us to question whose privilege is being protected and who is being disempowered. On a practical level, territorial borderworkers, the people socially constituting the first reception process at the border, hold a perception of first reception (and a worldview), which does not meet the reality that they themselves construct through their daily activities. And therefore, the uncritical use of hospitality terminology by territorial borderworkers is indicative of a complex power play that reflects the daily reality enacted by territorial borderworkers and migrants at first reception, which

is the focus of this article. This should not hide the fact that it also reflects a much larger, more complex, power play that is going on at a macro state and regional-EU level.

In this article, I build on three strands of investigation and empirical data. First, and this is really our starting point, is the real, lived experience of a lack of hospitality as captured by Ahmed in the quote above. Second are my observations and documentation of the myriad use of hospitality language by actors with different interests some of which I will present in this article. Drawing on the conceptual tools of discourse analysis helps us to construct a picture of the political processes at play through cultural forms. It also allows us to link the processes by which hospitality gets used and extinguished in first reception and secondary reception systems in Italy, Malta, and EUrope[3] and how this is related to other areas of life in modern societies. A discourse analysis allows us to address the question: what does the use of hospitality and hospitality language among territorial borderworkers tell us? This article concludes with a discussion raising several points that arise from this analysis. Overall, these cautiously indicate that hospitality language and discourse play the role of retaining existing hegemonic structures of dominance.

# 3. On the ground: the reality of an inhospitable first reception in the EU/Italy and Malta

Migrants who undertake the Central Mediterranean Route often arrive exhausted and in a dire psychological and/or physical state. Libya has always been a dangerous country, but the situation became dire after the fall of Gaddafi and the war in 2011. The very high risks of extreme violence and abuse that migrants face in Libya are well documented and include detention, rape, torture, and kidnapping (UNSML and OHCHR 2016). Apart from Libya, migrants also undertake the sea crossing—currently the most deadly in the world (UNHCR 2018). This is important to bear in mind when discussing first reception in Italy as it hugely impinges on the physical and psychological state of the migrants. Let us take Ahmed. Ahmed is from Sudan. He spent almost a year in Libya before taking the decision to leave. He got on a boat that left from Zuwara, but their boat quickly ran into trouble. They called someone who alerted the Italian Coast Guard. After a good few hours drifting, panic had started to set in because they were out of water, and some people on the boat were feeling faint. They were relieved when they saw a ship approaching: it was a merchant vessel. They were told that rescue was on the way and given bottles of water. The ship remained close to their boat until the Coast Guard arrived and took them on board to two vessels. Although the police told me disembarkation took two to three hours, he described it as a very long process. This is not uncommon, given that migrants tend to be extremely tired at this stage. I met Ahmed two and a half weeks later. Ahmed had been through all the first reception processes (medical triage, identification, registration, fingerprinting, and other forms of interrogation for intelligence collection purposes). He was still in the centre because his transfer had not yet been authorized for administrative reasons. He was told that he would be given the opportunity to formally submit an application for asylum upon his transfer to another centre.

'First reception' refers to the very first part of the reception system, which overlaps with the border system. In brief, the aim is threefold: a) implementing the procedures related to identification, registration, and classification for security purposes, as well as to ascertain the status of the migrant; b) accommodation; and c) urgent humanitarian needs. First reception in Italian law, for example, refers briefly to the accommodation needed to carry out the necessary operations to define the legal position of the foreigner: '*Per le esigenze di prima accoglienza e per l'espletamento delle operazioni necessarie alla definizione della posizione giuridica, lo straniero è accolto nei centri governativi di prima accoglienza...*' (For the purposes of first reception and for enabling the operations necessary for the definition of their juridical status, the foreigner is received in government centres of first reception (Article 9(1), Article 9(4) and Article 9(5) of the Italian law LD 142/2015). First reception is further regulated by EU policy, in particular the 'hotspot approach' enacted by the European Commission following the 2015 so-called refugee crisis to help Member States deal with situations of crisis. The hotspot approach is a management approach, which serves as a platform for cooperation among EASO, Frontex, Europol, and Eurojust, and is established to swiftly process asylum applications, enforce return decisions, and prosecute migrant smuggling (European Commission 2015). These EU agencies together with national officials identify, fingerprint, screen, and register asylum applicants, organize relocation to other member states of those who qualify, and organize the return of those who either did not apply for international protection or whose right to remain on the territory has ceased (European Council 2015). The period of first reception is envisaged to be short, with migrants being processed quickly and redirected to their respective centers (for example, centers for people who are waiting for an asylum decision, centers for expulsion, centers for unaccompanied minors, centers for relocation participants). This model is also being implemented in other countries with variations. For example, Malta's Initial Reception Centre is designed on this model, and it has only been used to process migrants arriving through the relocation scheme.[4]

During the first reception process, migrants may register a wish to apply for asylum, but technically, they do not formally submit their application. Although, in Italy there is currently a slight overlap—in fact submitting an asylum application can take place in what is still called 'first reception', that is, the *Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria* (Centres of Extraordinary Reception)—but if we were to take the hotspot approach as indicative of the EU model for first reception, it is in the next stage. The management of first reception is the responsibility of the prefecture. Most processes are conducted by different organs of the police, except health, which is the responsibility of the public health authorities, and accommodation and services within the centre, which are farmed out to '*cooperattive*' (cooperatives) through a public procurement process. Waiting for the migrants at the wharf are various local, national, European, and at times, international or intergovernmental security actors. They are debriefed by Frontex and/or by local Police whose aim is to collect intelligence on the journeys and identify as quickly as possible potential smugglers or traffickers. Humanitarian actors are also present, generally on the basis of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Interior with the agreement to offer a service.

Administrative detention, if not authorized by a judge, should not take more than 48 hours according to the Italian Constitution.[5] In practice, in Italy, it can take from a

few hours to a few months (AIDA 2017). This depends on the efficiency of the prefecture, and the ancillary organs, entrusted with the processing, the number of arrivals, as well as the availability of beds in the next centre. Mostly during periods of high arrivals (but not only), 'bottleneck' situations have been recorded, which slow down the process (ECA 2017: paras 76–83). After submitting the application for asylum, there are mixed modalities as to how long a person remains in a CAS or is moved on to 'secondary reception', a *Centro di Accoglienza* (Reception Centre) or a SPRAR (Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees).

Ahmed spoke English quite well and told me that he knew people working with the United Nations in Sudan. I don't know what his background was, but he was clearly familiar with international governance terminology. Ahmed's anger and cynicism tran-spires from the quote above. And although, as I showed earlier, this was exacerbated by other factors, such as lingering tiredness from the journey, stress from incidents that he witnessed in Libya, and the tumultuous sea crossing in itself, he was clearly disappointed. He had expected 'good treatment, a welcome and sympathy in Europe'. It is revealing that he had the outburst right after he overheard a cultural mediator describe first reception activities to me as hospitality.

First reception consists of a series of processes, which prioritizes public and state security, rather than individual well-being. This is not to say that migrants are ill-treated during these processes, even though as I have argued elsewhere, the risks of grave human rights violations are present at an elevated level during first reception (DeBono 2018). Hospitality indicates treatment that puts emphasis on the interests of the guest and on the relationship with the guest as a fellow human being. This is difficult, if not impossible, to enact in a system that is led by contrasting aims.

# 4. The pervasive nature of the hospitality metaphor in first reception

Italians, and in particular Sicilians (which is the site of my fieldwork and make up the majority of my Italian informants and interviewees), like the Maltese, often portray first reception (*prima accoglienza*) and reception (*accoglienza*) within a hospitality framework. Different actors explain, re-explain, and discuss first reception to me not simply as some legal or institutional structure but by using hospitality terminology. In Italian, the use of words such as *ospite* (guest), *ospitare* (host), and *accogliere* (to receive/welcome/accept[6]) is very common across the board: not only territorial borderworkers working with different state and non-state entities but also policy-makers, politicians, and the media. In Malta, the terminology used is either in the Maltese language or in English: *nilqagħhom* (we receive them), *nieħdu ħsibhom* (we take care of them), and in English 'welcome', 'reception', 'guests' (or residents). Although not the only factor, an influential reason might be the strong Catholic ethos still very strongly interspersed with local culture, which presents hospitality practices towards foreigners as morally good. The picture emanating from the use of this language is of a large institutional system all geared up to welcome, receive, accommodate, host, and take care of irregular-arriving immigrants, with employees eagerly

awaiting what they portray as an opportunity to exercise hospitality practices. Hospitality features prominently at some points of contention between different stakeholders within the larger reception and immigration system: typically, non-state actors will blame the authorities for not being humane and hospitable, and the authorities label non-state actors as utopian do-gooders who are not practical and give misleading pictures of migrants as poor victims in need of care and asylum.

The reality was indeed very different. In the broader/secondary reception system, services are notoriously inconsistent and in general riddled with a lack of resources, lack of formation for staff often employed precariously, at times gross mishandling of money, fraud by cooperatives running different centres (Il Fatto Quotidiano 2016; Iacono, 2017), and in some cases in Sicily, the mafia was involved as uncovered, among others, by the investigation 'Mafia Capitale' initiated in 2014 (La Sicilia 2017; Marceca 2018). This, apart from some scattered good practice examples around Italy, provides few opportunities to engage in hospitality practices. In the first reception system, which as I explained earlier involves border processes, this opportunity is in practice non-existent. In this section, I will go through some of the uses of hospitality terminology. Drawing on a writing style used predominantly in case study methodology, I will present incidents (paraphrased or direct excerpts from my fieldnotes) and quotations from interviews to show the meaning attributed to the concept through other linkages.

CASE 1: Enrico: hospitality as welcome, as tradition/cultural and as a patronizing relationship

> This morning at the Police Station, Enrico introduced me to their superior, an officer who held a high rank as could be gleaned from the ritualistic introduction. Enrico told him that I was conducting research on first reception and that I was interested in the practice processes. Enrico's superior nodded, raised his eyebrows in a typical ceremonious manner: "*Prima accoglienza* for us is about giving a dignified reception to these people. Italy is known in European circles for being the foremost country doing this. We have chosen to save people from the sea and to bring them to our shores. Reception means treating these people like guests, feeding them and giving them a bed. First reception, for us who are at the Italian and European border, is a test of our hosting skills, because, and rightly so, it involves a series of delicate processes. What you will see is how we register people, take their details and so on. But these guests of ours are also being scrutinised on other levels to ensure that no smuggler, trafficker or terrorist passes through our net." (My fieldnotes, Agrigento, April 2016)

This type of comment, coming from a high standing official used to representing his department, needs to be viewed as a reflection of national narratives of Italy's 'openness' to foreigners and within the context of migration humanitarianism. Indeed, Italy has clearly positioned itself within the EU as a state with humanitarian interests. The decision by Italy during 2013 and 2014 to embark alone on Mare Nostrum, a military and humanitarian operation aimed at tackling the humanitarian emergency in the Strait of Sicily due to the increase in migration flows costing the Italian state 9.5 million euro over 12 months, only served to further consolidate this image.

Let us, for the sake of the argument, take what Enrico says at face value—before entering into a more critical discussion. For Enrico's superior, *prima accoglienza* is about hospitality, about hosting in a dignified manner another person. Reception, understood as hospitality, is a demonstration by the state that it is generous, welcoming, and possibly, cosmopolitan. Indeed, hospitality speaks not only of the welcome and 'acceptance' of a foreigner but equally of who is a foreigner, who is acceptable, and therefore, who the non-foreigners (natives) are that have a claim to the territory.

This brings us to the discussion of the Italian state and its complicated history of unification and nation-building. Cinema, one of the primary cultural forms of Italian state and society, is imbued with the figure of the foreigner. But as Wood (2005) notes, some representations of Italy's migrants in contemporary Italian cinema imitate the kind of stereotypes used to represent internal migrants from the south (that took place decades before). Duncan writing about Italian post-war cinema points out, for example, that the representation of the non-Italian in the cinema of the post-war period serves as 'a pretext for the affirmation of an exclusive Italian identity rather than an opening out to more inclusive articulations of belonging and citizenship' (Duncan 2008: 196).

> On my way out, Enrico was little more apologetic, making reference to the fact I was Maltese commented: 'You will understand me when I say that for us southerners, hospitality and *accoglienza* is something that we take seriously. Unfortunately due to the political and the economic situation we have been unable to be as hospitable towards these people as we would have liked to be. But don't be fooled by what you see, these poor people (*poveracci*) are seen as unwelcome guests (*ospiti-non-graditi*) by Sicilians because politicians have left us in this culture of crisis and emergency, we Sicilians are not like that.' (My fieldnotes, Agrigento, April 2016)

Enrico qualifies the Director's approach and prepares me for what I will see in the operations of first reception. He does so by reproducing another well-known cultural form. Sicilians have embraced hospitality as part of their identity. This can be seen in the many Sicilian local councils (comune) that have officially adopted 'accoglienza' or 'ospitalita' in their official description. Trapani, for example, has recently added 'accoglienza' to its welcome slogan to the city: '*La Citta della Vela, del Sale e dell'Accoglienza*' (The City of Sailing, Salt and Reception/Welcome) (Fulco 2016); Lampedusa is known, now worldwide, as a symbol of rescue and hospitality and is the location for the monument by Mimmo Palladini 'The door to Europe' (Comune di Lampedusa e Linosa 2008); Palermo is also projecting itself as '*la citta modello di accoglienza e convivenza*' (The good practice model of reception/welcome and conviviality) (Rai News 2016). This nod towards hospitality and welcome has deeper roots. The idea of cultural differences between Northern and Southern Italians is well entrenched, stemming from a long tradition of racist explanations of the different socio-economic and political development of the south (for an excellent article on this see Cimino and Foschi 2014). Banfield (1958) in his ethnography of a small southern Italian village writes about hospitality practices as part of the moral and behavioural values of the southerners; Schneider and Schneider (1976) in their ethnography of Western Sicily mention hospitality several times as a characteristic trait, in inter-personal and inter-group relations, reproducing itself through traditions such as feasting and wine consumption; Fiume (2006) starts her article by 'Sicilian reactions

combine curiosity, availability, and an impulse towards welcome' (37) and Hilowitz (1977) notes that 'Syracusans have a great respect for people from different areas and for the needs of others, and the hospitality they offer would be excessive for Northern Italy' (72). Hilowitz adds that this tradition of hospitality lies, sometimes at odds, with the Syracusan family's jealous reserve and affective life, where interests are measured in relation to the family (Hilowitz 1977). Most researchers of Sicily note warmly the hospitality towards themselves too.

Enrico presents *accoglienza*, an intrinsic part of hospitality, as a customary practice. Whether such practices of feeding, protecting, and providing shelter to strangers are still customary nowadays goes unquestioned. In a typical manner, he draws on representations of the warmth of the *meridione* (the south) and the 'Mediterranean', as opposed to the cold north (northern Italy and northern Europe). And yet the sympathy with the south is not extended farther than Malta.

> At the entrance to the Police Station, there was a long, thick cordon of migrants: looking far from happy. They were Tunisian and Moroccan migrants who had been released from the hotspot a few days before with an expulsion order requiring them to leave the country voluntarily within seven days. They were at the Police Station to submit an appeal. Enrico insisted on offering me a coffee from the machine and smoking a cigarette. They hassled him with questions but he waved them off to take his position a few metres away. "They, he explained, are the problem. Because they don't behave, because they don't obey. In Sicily we say "'A casa capi quantu voli 'u patruni[7]" (lit. translation: Hospitality depends on the willingness of the head of the house), and we don't want them. They spell trouble. You can't force *hospitality*. By definition, the *guest* can never be the one dictating." (My fieldnotes, Agrigento, April 2016)

Enrico here shifts. Clearly it cannot be forgotten that traditional hospitality and honour among Sicilian communities mixed with Catholic ideas of charity and benevolence is embedded in a largely hierarchical and patriarchal organization of society. Hospitality is therefore defined as a relationship embodying a strong power imbalance. It is a patronizing relationship of dominance and control of the host over the guest.

Enrico here is making a difference between what Faleschini Lerner (2010) calls 'a hospitality of invitation' (7) and 'a hospitality of visitation' (7). Whereas in the former the host remains in control of his threshold, determining who should or should not be invited in and under what conditions, in the latter, where the visitor is unexpected, a pure host would open their house without asking questions (Faleschini Lerner 2010: 7). Evocatively Faleschini Lerner is discussing the Giordana's 2005 film *Quando sei nato non puoi più nasconderti* (When you are born you cannot hide anymore) and describes how conditional hospitality is the operational principle of both the *centro d'accoglienza* and also the protagonist's family.

CASE 2: Rosario & Nunzio: Hospitality as humanitarian treatment, welcoming of guests

> For some reason, clothes and shoes are often scarce in the centre. What is worse is that when they have ailments which cannot be treated by the visiting doctors of the centre they bring them to our health centre. And they are often brought without shoes and with tattered clothes, often just a t-shirt. This is something that I cannot

accept. What kind of *accoglienza* are we speaking about then? Is this how we welcome and host people? Just last week two Senegalese guys were brought in like this. I told the officials: what kind of clothes are these, and why are they not wearing shoes? They responded, typically, with: we gave them from what we had, but don't worry they are used to being barefoot in their own countries. I got mad, and told them: what kind of treatment is this?! And maybe, yes, they are used to being barefoot, but in their own homes and possibly in warmer temperatures than these! Look around you – and I showed them the locals in the waiting room all wearing scarves and jackets. At which point, I just took the two guys into a room we have at the back of the health centre where I keep some warm clothes and shoes and told them to take some clothes. (Rosario, offers medical services to migrants in Lampedusa hotspot, interview, September 2016)

Later that day I spoke to a person working in the centre and brought this issue up. He defended the *modus operandi* of the centre saying that the migrants were treated well. He explained that migrants often arrived barefoot and that although they generally had gave them a pair of sandals, sometimes they ran out or the migrants tore them. However, he explained, 'we do the best we can, we give them food and shelter, but they cannot expect five-star hotel treatment'. But nevertheless I can tell you, with hand on heart, that I give them five-star care and attention. From the minute they step off at the wharf I show them that I care, I smile to them and look them directly in the eyes. I go out of my way to demonstrate kindness. In the centre, I take care of them as I would with a guest in my house. Not because I'm a do-gooder, but because that is how I have been brought up to treat people in my family. A guest is looking for human kindness and not some shiny service. (fieldnotes from conversation with Nunzio, hotspot worker, Lampedusa, September 2016)

In these two snippets of conversation, the limits of conditional hospitality are discussed. Whilst Rosario feels that addressing the material needs, like basic clothing, is important, Nunzio contests it. Nunzio makes an interesting distinction between hospitality expressed through material gifts and hospitality as the relationship with the foreigner. Nunzio, like many Lampedusans, has also worked in the tourist industry. One can see the influence in his way of thinking. Among businesspeople in this field, it is normal to speak about financial aspects of hospitality, which is how clothing in first reception is seen by him. Care, smiles, gracious treatment do not cost anything and therefore are not a privileged possessions.

CASE 3: Anna: Hospitality influenced by social movements

Anna is an activist and an artist who has been in touch with primarily first reception in Western Sicily, but during some periods, she has also followed activities in secondary reception in northern Italy. She is in her 40s, works in the private industry, and equates *accoglienza* to an ideological definition of a humane hospitality against a background of social justice and human rights. This excerpt is particularly telling:

*Accoglienza* is a meeting between equals. That is how we can speak of real *accoglienza*. No one treats migrants as they would treat a guest. This is a reality that saddens me, especially now that there is so much information on the root causes of migration, on global inequality and on the unimaginable difficulties that these people face during their journeys. If we are not even able to offer them a dignified welcome, how do we then expect them to integrate and become part of our society? (Anna, Sicilia, activist, October 2017)

Anna's use of hospitality is akin to that found in Homer's *The Odyssey*, which for ancient Greeks was a source of ethics, theology, and history. Hospitality is identified with civilization, with a humane treatment of guests. Odysseus on his departure from the island of the goddess Calypso is wrecked on the Phaecian coast, where he says (Book VI):

> 'Alas,' said he to himself, 'what kind of people have I come amongst? Are they cruel, savage, and uncivilized, or hospitable and humane? I seem to hear the voices of young women, and they sound like those of the nymphs that haunt mountain tops, or springs of rivers and meadows of green grass. At any rate I am among a race of men and women. Let me try if I cannot manage to get a look at them'. (The Odyssey Book VI)

This is to be contrasted with the description of the cruel Cyclops as 'lawless and inhuman', a conclusion derived primarily from their ill-treatment of guests. The consequences of a lack of hospitality for Anna are long-term and might influence the integration process. Again this is an allusion to a Cyclopian uncivilized society.

CASE 4: Adrian: Refuting hospitality

My conversations with Adrian were quite confusing not only because of his overzealous use of hospitality terminology but also because he seamlessly moved, to and fro, between using hospitality to refer to encounters and using hospitality as subjugation. He has been a territorial borderworker in Malta for over 10 years. Adrian started as an NGO worker, but eventually moving to a government agency. With both entities, Adrian had direct contact with migrants at first reception and secondary reception. He spoke at times ideologically, like Anna above, of 'meeting migrants as equals', of ensuring that the initial encounters of migrants with the authorities at first reception was designed as a 'welcome'. He showed me 'welcome packs' and lamented generally the lack of cultural mediators in Malta, who could 'facilitate initial encounters, enable trust in us and the system, but also understand that as our guests they had to respect our rules'. Adrian seemed to be a prototype of the plastic use of the hospitality paradigm in first reception. Towards the end of the second interview, Adrian stops and in a reflective comment says:

> Let us be clear. As I explained we treat everyone like a guest and we try hard to be good hosts. But they (migrants) have to understand that we are under no obligation to treat them in this way. And you have to remember that officers working here are not in the hospitality industry, and that these migrants are not paying guests, who by the way also have to follow rules, these are paid guests. And what that means is that since the buck starts and stops with us, it is up to us to lay down the rules. Malta does it because the country has human rights obligations, and because it is benevolent and this is of course a good thing. But how much can you expect if you have come illegally and you don't even pay? (Adrian, August 2016, IRC worker, Malta)

Hospitality for Adrian is a charitable activity and not a rights-based process that migrants can lay claim on. It is clear that he feels that the state does not owe irregular migrants hospitality—in his words, 'they are not paying and they have crossed the border illegally'.

Adrian's comment reflects the dominant approach in law. The law, including EU laws, does not put an obligation of hospitality but outlines as explained procedurally a complex series of operations that take place when a person enters the territory irregularly. Basic

humanitarian needs are to be met, but there are no obligations on the state or on anyone else to 'host' them or to make them comfortable. They are not 'guests' but residents in a migrants' centre until the state decides what status it is going to assign to them.

Underlying this comment is also an intimation of hostility. The language is not only firm and authoritative but dismissive of claims that migrants might make. This strongly evokes Derrida's 'hostipitality', which refers to an inherent tension within the concept of hospitality. Derrida challenges the idea of hospitality as a form of unconditional charity but shows that hospitality ultimately chains even the host to the relationship. As a result, hostility remains a subtext of any enactment of hospitality, and the potential of hospitality to morph into hostility is always present (Derrida 2000).

## 5. Hospitality as an empty signifier and a key node of power struggles

Hospitality remains a complex concept, as Derrida's attempts to bring out the logic that governs the concept demonstrate. He claims that within Western traditions, hospitality takes the form of a tension, an antinomy, or a double imperative: between traditional hospitality and power (Derrida 2000). If hospitality already as an abstract concept is complex and multi-faceted, what is strange about the differential use by different actors in the field? The answer is straightforward and brings me back to the initial quote by Ahmed: first reception cannot be considered 'hospitality' by any stretch of the imagination. It is rather a series of bureaucratic procedures imposed on vulnerable persons on account of their action of crossing the border without state authorization. And although it is interesting to see the different uses, the aim of the previous section's presentation was not simply to analyze the quotations or to show that hospitality is used by different actors in myriad ways but to present the rampant, pervasive use of this metaphor. *What* does this pervasive use of hospitality tell us? Corollary questions that then fall outside the scope of this article but which need to be further investigated are: *Why* is this metaphor used? What are the *consequences*? Does the use of this metaphor indicate more humane treatment or a wish to enact practices that are more humane?

Navigating and sifting through discursive fields is not an easy task. Hospitality is broadly used with a clear idea of what hospitality entails. Different elements of hospitality terminology could be conceptualized as 'floating signifiers', without a fixed meaning, without a referent point, possibly ambiguous and imbued with different meanings in different contexts. But hospitality itself, as a paradigm, is different. The problem is therefore not a lack of a definite meaning but rather an apparent divide between the paradigm and the actual practices and activities at hand. Hospitality in this first reception setting is to a large degree devoid of meaning because it lacks a referent. And yet, in spite of this, it is clearly a locus of significant power. In this regard, it is useful to consider hospitality as a Laclauian 'empty signifier'.

The empty signifier conditions the discursive field and is where power is located. The hospitality metaphor functions as an empty signifier and therefore serves as the site of efforts to construct content. Beneath the metaphor's cosmopolitan, humane, seemingly

harmless surface lies the site of power struggles. Whoever manages to invest content into the empty signifier will influence change within the discursive field and through hegemonic processes bring about structural change and social transformation. Therefore, in part challenging Derrida's indications of conclusions, I propose that hospitality is not conflicted conceptually on account of its lack of clarity and the shift in boundaries over the years but precisely because it constitutes the site of power struggles tied to the idea of the nation-state. State borders, nationalism, and ethnic centrism are some of the ideas that the discursive power of hospitality language can change. What is portrayed in the idiosyncratic use of the hospitality metaphor by territorial borderworkers at first reception is merely the tip of the iceberg of the power struggles that are assailing the modern nation-state.

The discursive power of hospitality in the field of first reception allows us to better understand state hegemonic processes. This is done, first, by projecting an image of cosmopolitanism, of generosity, and of encounter, through which the state asserts its territorial sovereignty and ideas around ethnic centrism, thus maintaining social control. This Foucaultian perspective is nicely captured by Darling:

> It is the exclusivity of hospitality that Derrida critiques most forcefully in challenging the claim by European governments that irregular migrants "abuse" the hospitality of the nation-state. The problematic nature of hospitality lies not in its expression in communal forms of welcome to migrants at an everyday level, but rather in how a language of hospitality may become a political tool to suggest values of cosmopolitanism while simultaneously enforcing the right to exclude those seen as unworthy of welcome. (Darling 2014: 163)

Secondly, the hospitality metaphor as expressed in the words of Candea and Da Col quoted in the introduction to this article is about encounter and exchange. These are linked to the values of cosmopolitanism, tolerance, and acceptance that in many first and second reception systems go beyond the practical reality. The divide between hospitality as a concept and in practice can be felt in a stronger way in first reception as Ahmed eloquently described: 'I have to beg for closed shoes because I feel cold...Our 'hosts' are many police outside and some people in here' and 'I am not a guest, I am a prisoner'.

Thirdly, Poerksen, whose work is entrenched in a different disciplinary tradition and therefore does not provide the sophisticated semantic analysis of Laclau, Mouffe, and other semioticians, reminds us nonetheless that plastic words are a means for authoritarianism to ensure its power and hegemony. Poerksen argues that plastic words (akin to floating signifiers) produce an impoverishment of language. He reminds us that for elite power bosses to engage in their own power struggles, plastic words must remain uncritically challenged by its mass users. What would happen to the power struggle dynamics meaning is critically challenged by mass users, who then attempt to construct new meanings? In practice, what happens is that mass users employ these terms uncritically, indulge in the false security they attribute to them, and fight useless battles against signifiers. There is little awareness that in so doing, they render themselves powerless, unable to think or reach beyond the discursive field. Identifying and addressing the cultural formation of the empty signifier as a node of power struggles is essential for bringing about political and social change.

Territorial borderworkers, and by extension mass users of the hospitality metaphor, are chained to a discursive field that is being slowly but surely formed by power struggles

between the elite for whom the state remains the ultimate tool of power. First reception is particular because of the predominance of state actors and intergovernmental organizations (such as UNHCR, IOM, and EU entities) on the ground: the presence of non-governmental actors is limited and exceptional. The situation has developed in this way because first reception is part of the border system where state security aspects such as health, registration, and identification are prioritized.

Their limited presence has not stopped NGOs from actively competing to re-appropriate the language of hospitality in a bid to influence the field. Indeed, as Laclau and Mouffe (1985) remind us, competing discourses may be marginalized, but they can never be eliminated by the hegemonic dominance of a discourse. Rosario's comment exemplifies this: 'What kind of *accoglienza* are we speaking about then? Is this how we welcome and host people?' The same is seen in Anna's comment '*Accoglienza* is a meeting between equals. That is how we can speak of real *accoglienza*. No one treats migrants as they would treat a guest'. NGOs, however, have tended to target floating and other signifiers. A typical example is the 'Yes, we host – *un rifugiato a casa mia* (a refugee in my house)', a project run by the Diocesan Caritas diocesana of Agrigento and the Fondazione Mondoaltro (Caritas Diocesana Agrigento 2015), through which migrants were offered accommodation and integration into a family, instead of the typical 'hosting' in an impersonal migrant centre. This project provides great opportunities for migrants and their Sicilian host families. Its stated objective is: 'Moving from a model of hospitality, that of the great centers for refugees and asylum seekers, to one that offers a micro-diffused, directly in Italian families' (Caritas Diocesana Agrigento 2015).

However promising, projects like the one I have just described are unlikely to influence political change at at municipal or national levels because they tend to operate on a small-scale and in a manner that runs counter to municipal or state policies. Indeed, at best, they are humanitarian projects offering opportunities to individuals. Had organizations aspired to broader political change, they would have targeted the 'empty signifier', that is, the hospitality discourse. It is only by aiming at the discursive nodal point that the dominant political power, and therefore the current modalities of immigration policy, can be challenged. This is reminiscent of Rozakou's example of the attempts by street volunteers in Athens to invert state hospitality discourse and practice, by putting themselves in the position of guests hosted by refugees and asylum seekers. She shows that despite contrary practices, there are similarities in the dynamics of their relationships with refugees: 'hierarchies and power still linger over encounters in the street, and entrenched understandings of sovereignty, belonging and Otherness as well as space are inevitably brought to the fore. The refugee as a host is disputed, and his or her ability to perform proper hospitality is questioned' (Rozakou 2012: 574).

NGOs often and unwittingly reinforce the hegemonic discourse by retaining it, instead of engaging in a process of deconstruction: they thus participate actively in its (re)production. The Refugees Welcome campaign, which rose to prominence in 2015 during the so-called refugee crisis in response to the suspension of Schengen and the closing of borders between different Member States, is another example. It showed an incredible effort of NGOs and civil society to convey new meaning to 'reception' and 'welcome'. Refugees Welcome, however, did not challenge the hospitality paradigm but rather played into it. It was an attempt to change the referent, the meaning. In practice, although the campaign proved extremely successful in providing an opportunity to many to contribute and engage in

humanitarian activities, it did not change anything at a political level. Post the 2015–2016 refugee crisis, the EU's migration and external border policies have in no way become more hospitable. At the height of the Refugees Welcome campaign in March 2016, the EU passed the controversial EU–Turkey agreement, which effectively closed a refugee route into the EU. In September 2017, the EU instituted an agreement with Libya to target the Central Mediterranean route. This move was even more controversial due to the gross human rights violations and mistreatment of migrants, as well as the shaky post-conflict situation of the country. This and other examples show that official EU policy is anything but 'refugees welcome', even though the predominant paradigm remains that of hospitality even at first reception. The Refugees Welcome campaign fed into the hospitality narrative, but it was ultimately unsuccessful in its attempts to dent the hegemonic dominance of exclusionary and discriminatory politics of border control.

## 6. Recognizing the plasticity of hospitality

As Rosello (2001) had indicated with reference to the broader immigration field, the conditioning of knowledge production and conceptualization of the first reception system by the hospitality discourse ought to be more widely discussed. Theoretically, this is a necessary and important complement to the analyses of the military-humanitarian border, since the construction of this border takes place through the daily activities and interactions of territorial borderworkers who use the language of hospitality. The ethnographic approach adopted throughout this study made possible these explorations of the use of the hospitality paradigm in concrete ethnographic settings. Moreover, the long-term and multi-sited nature of the fieldwork allowed the analysis to move beyond the emic, very local to the national and regional.

This article has shown the extremely plastic nature of hospitality within the border and refugee management field. As a result, the contradictions created within the narratives produce a situation where discussions on the ground remain at an impoverished level due to the vagueness and fluidity of the concepts. On the other hand, the strength and coherence of this discursive field is evident, especially, as this article has shown, when seeing the level of internalization by territorial borderworkers who experience the tensions and contradictions first hand. This hospitality paradigm is unhelpful to territorial borderworkers in their attempts to locate and describe the underlying principles of their work. In the same way, this paradigm is obstructive to those wishing to challenge current immigration policies. Therefore, the hospitality paradigm, I have argued, leads not only to an impoverishment of the production of knowledge in this field but to a retention of the dominant discourse and existent structures that serve the interests of the state, at times to the exclusion of the interests of the person.

## Notes

1. Although the designation 'borderworkers' has occasionally been used by Chris Rumford, he generally prefers employing the phrase 'citizens conducting borderwork'. Rumford uses this phrase to refer generally to people engaged in borderwork, bordering, and debordering practices: its use is not limited to a territorial space.
   In this article, the notion of borderworkers is prefixed by 'territorial' to denote

specifically the complexities of borderwork as citizens on the external state border deeply influenced by the imposed exigencies of the military–humanitarian border and their simultaneous role as 'street-level bureaucrats' implementing the humanitarian border policy.

2. For example, the following refers to unaccompanied minors: 'Ai sensi del D.lgs. 142/2015, art. 19, i minori non accompagnati sono accolti in strutture governative di prima accoglienza il tempo strettamente necessario, comunque non superiore a 60 giorni'. 'According to D.lgs 142/2005, art. 19, unaccompanied minors are received in government structures of first reception for the time strictly necessary, however not exceeding 60 days'.

3. Following Stierl (2016), Europe is intentionally used to refer to EU members and EU policy in recognition of other 'European' state groups such as the Council of Europe, the European OECD group, and so on.

4. There have been very few irregular boat arrivals to Malta in the last years; however, the Initial Reception Centre is also used for other irregular entries and/or people seeking asylum.

5. Given the possible contention in this phrase, I will offer a short presentation here. The 'National Unified Text on migration regulating migrants' detention' does not permit administrative detention for the purposes of identification, while ordinary criminal custody aimed at identification must comply with solid guarantees (a judge should be immediately informed and the maximum length of detention is 24 hours). The Italian Constitution in article 13 on the inviolability of personal liberty expressly states: 'No form of detention, inspection or personal search nor any other restriction on personal freedom is admitted, except by a reasoned warrant issued by a judicial authority, and only in the cases and the manner provided for by law. In exceptional cases of necessity and urgency, strictly defined by the law, law-enforcement authorities may adopt temporary measures that must be communicated to the judicial authorities within forty-eight hours. Should such measures not be confirmed by the judicial authorities within the next forty-eight hours, they are revoked and become null and void. All acts of physical or moral violence against individuals subject in any way to limitations of freedom shall be punished. The law establishes the maximum period of preventive detention'.

6. The verb *accogliere* in Italian translated literally into English could equally mean 'to receive', 'to accept', and 'to welcome'. The noun *accoglienza* could then refer to 'reception', 'acceptance', and 'welcome'. However, in the context of immigration, 'accoglienza' has a meaning of its own and refers to the 'institutional reception system'. My reference here is to the use of the term *accogliere* in the context of receiving, accepting, and welcoming a person on the basis of a respectful relationship.

7. In Italian, this would be: *la casa è capiente quanto vuole il padrone: l'ospitalità dipende dalla volontà del padrone di casa*

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