

## Civilization and the *xenoi*

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In *Of Hospitality*, Derrida proposes that hospitality is something extended to those who are not *that* dissimilar from oneself. To make this point, he follows Beneviste's analysis of the trial of Socrates, noting that it is the *χενος*, not the *βαρβαρος* who is entitled to hospitality. As Derrida writes, "[...] the *xenos*, is not simply the absolute other, the barbarian, the savage absolutely excluded and heterogeneous." Quoting Beneviste he continues, "*xenos* indicates relations of the same type between men linked by a pact which implies precise obligations [...]"<sup>1</sup> What linked *χενοι* in the city-states of Ancient Greece, and distinguished them from barbarians, was that they were *πολητισμενος*, or civilized. While the substantive form, "civilization," did not exist in Socrates's day, its usage increased exponentially during the period with which these two papers deal. I would like to suggest that to a greater or lesser extent both papers point to how changing notions of civilization and evolving political contexts conditioned states and individuals' approaches to hospitality.

In *Persona Non Grata*, Gürsel explores the author, translator, and diplomat, Mouradgea d'Ohsson's life trajectory. Gürsel claims that d'Ohsson's status as a *persona non grata* points to "[...] an alterity reversed [...]" d'Ohsson was not *too foreign*; [but] by all imperial accounts he was not *foreign enough*.<sup>2</sup> There is something of the uncanny in this formulation. D'Ohsson, like the *χενος* was not the same, but he was also not entirely different, which at least initially granted him the right to hospitality. However, when this privilege was revoked, Gürsel argues "[...] d'Ohsson is perhaps not so much a singular *persona non grata* as the first of the many *personae non gratae* – [...] the Christian and Jewish constituency who at the beginning of the nineteenth century were entering the modern process of becoming a minority in the Ottoman Empire [...]"<sup>3</sup> D'Ohsson's ambiguous status and the revocation of his right to hospitality is embedded in a particular moment in the history of Europe and the Ottoman Empire. D'Ohsson's work, steeped in the language of the Enlightenment, laid claim to a past that included the legacies of "[...] the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds—including Ancient Greek heritage, which he is quick to point out was once reappropriated by Europe from the Muslim lands."<sup>4</sup> Yet, the world represented here, one of a multi-religious, multi-ethnic Empire, was falling apart. Historians of Southeastern Europe generally describe this era as the High Balkan Enlightenment, characterized by a confrontation between Ottoman/Post-Byzantine traditions and Western thought. By mediating the clash between European and Ottoman culture and creating a unified historical-cultural narrative, d'Ohsson appears as a relic: a reminder of a multi-religious, multi-ethnic imperial ideal that seems to be slipping away—an ideal where the difference between *χενος* and *βαρβαρος* had perhaps been significant, but stable. Could it be then, that d'Ohsson's uncertain status stemmed primarily from this shift?

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Dufourmantelle and Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 19-20.

<sup>2</sup> Burcu Gürsel, "Persona Non Grata: Mouradgea d'Ohsson Between Empire Republic, Kingdom," 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

Morrison's paper evokes a similar question as it repeatedly references changes in hospitality practices before and after the Revolutionary War. Not only does she follow Rhys Isaac in arguing that "Virginian's doors were often times closed to strangers in the 1780s," but she also contends that the war affected the infrastructure of hospitality.<sup>5</sup> Morrison implies that there is more to the story than the material damage caused by the war. I would ask if part of the relationship between the war and the hospitality the Viennese naturalists encountered can not be traced to the Revolution's political and cultural implications? While not English, these scientists hailed from the Old World from which the colonies had recently liberated themselves. Again, could it be that the war had fundamentally shifted a pact between the one-time colonists and Europeans revoking their right to hospitality?

While who is and is not a *χενος*, and therefore, alike enough to be entitled to hospitality may be an unstable category in any culture, could it be that the interplay between the domestic and foreign political context serves to draw that line? And that in both cases changing notions of civilization and cultural allegiances placed the subjects of these studies on the edge of hospitality's reach?

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<sup>5</sup> Heather Morrison, "Seed Collectors Hunting for Beds: Hospitality's Limits in the Eighteenth Century Atlantic," 101.