The Violence of Hospitality and Exophonic Practices

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Abstract: This paper discusses the notion of linguistic hospitality and its often-overlooked relationship with violence. While hospitality and violence are commonly perceived as opposing phenomena, this contribution reveals their intricate entanglement. The first part of the article examines key theoretical perspectives on hospitality, drawing on the works of Benveniste, Ricoeur, and Derrida. Particular emphasis is placed on Paul Ricoeur's notion of linguistic hospitality and its implications. The connection between violence and hospitality within the realm of language is further elucidated through an analysis of Walter Benjamin's reflections on translation and communication. In the final section, the paper investigates alternative practices of translational experience, defined as exophony, which challenges and goes beyond the model of hospitality.

Keywords: Hospitality, Violence, Communication, Language, Exophony.

1. Hospitality as a model (Benveniste, Ricoeur, and Derrida)

What appears to be the absolute antipode of any form of violence or violent act is the phenomenon of hospitality. Thus, it should not be surprising that hospitality has often served as a theoretical model for explaining translational practice, which is commonly regarded as a generous and peaceful act of accepting the foreign into *our* language. According to this common view,

translation is essentially hospitable, enabling the foreign to communicate with us and share the same discursive space. Hosting a stranger—a genuine welcoming of a foreign figure—is, from a commonsensical perspective, seen as a nonviolent, benevolent, and altruistic way of engaging with otherness. Translation, by this logic, does the same. But what if translation is not as generous and open as it seems? What if the model of hospitality merely obscures the presuppositions of violence inherent in translation?

In his *Vocabulary of Indo-European Institutions,* the French linguist Émile Benveniste, discussing the term "hospitality", presents a classical historical analysis of the terms *hostis* and *hosti-pet*, which has proven to be an invaluable material for philosophical accounts of hospitality. Benveniste's analysis reveals the common origin of the two terms *hostis* and *hospes*, which only later came to be opposed. Before acquiring its standard meaning of "enemy", *hostis* originally denoted a guest—specifically, a good, acceptable, and welcome stranger. The term *hosti-pet* (in which the lexical element "pet" or "pot" indicates "master" or "chief of some unit, whether a house, a clan, or a tribe") was introduced in Latin as a new word for "guest" at the point when the archaic *hostis* began to signify "enemy". *Hospes*, from which the word "hospitality" derives, thus inherits *hosti-pet* and, as a compound, means "guest-master". In this term, one can already discern a tension between mastery and power on the one hand, and foreignness on the other.

Hostis, which corresponds to "gast" in Gothic or "gost" in Slavic languages, obtained the meaning of "enemy" only in Latin. As Benveniste argues, the initial division in ancient vocabulary was not between "stranger" and "enemy", but between *peregrinus* and *hostis*—two types of being a foreigner:

> A *hostis* is not a stranger in general. In contrast to the *peregrinus*, who lived outside the boundaries of the territory, *hostis* is "the stranger insofar as he is recognized as enjoying equal rights to those of the Roman citizens." This recognition of rights implies a certain relation of reciprocity and supposes an agreement or compact. Not all non-Romans are called *hostis*. A bond of equality and reciprocity is established between this particular stranger and the citizens of Rome, a fact which may lead to a precise notion of hospitality. From this point of view *hostis* will signify "he who stands in a compensatory relationship" and this is precisely the foundation of the institution of hospitality[1].

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[1] É. Benveniste, *Dictionary of Indo-European Concepts and Society*, transl. by Elisabeth Palmer, Chicago, Hau Books, 2016, p. 67.

Hostis originally referred to a stranger who was considered equal to us — someone who could be accepted and hosted on the basis of similarity and reciprocity. Benveniste highlights a compensatory relationship underlying hospitality: Akin to the logic of gift and counter-gift, this relationship is defined as the bond of reciprocity. In this context, another parallel semantic mechanism comes to light. It concerns the root *mei, which signifies exchange, and has given rise to numerous Latin words, such as *munis*, *immunis*, and *communis*, and, in the long run, the word "communication". Both *hostis* and *munis*, along with their associated ideas of hospitality and communication, are grounded in the "bond of reciprocity". In the rest of his analysis, Benveniste constructs an entire semantic framework in which the meaning of "guest-host" aligns closely with the notions of exchange (reciprocity) and contract.

Benveniste attributes the shift in the meaning of *hostis* to social and historical transformations that marked the transition from archaic societies to the type of collective organization that embodies the political order of modernity.

> When an ancient society becomes a nation, the relations between man and man, clan and clan, are abolished. All that persists is the distinction between what is inside and outside the *civitas*. By a development of which we do not know the exact conditions, the word *hostis* assumed a "hostile" flavor and henceforward it is only applied to the "enemy".[2]

With the aforementioned political and institutional changes in the character of a political community (i.e., the establishment of the boundary between "inside" and "outside"), *hostis* came to signify an "enemy" or a "hostile stranger". Better put, when this boundary became the dividing line that separates two nations, two states, and two communities, *hostis* exclusively assumed one form of being a foreigner—that is, a hostile foreigner. *Hostis*, in other words, ceased to signify "stranger" or "foreigner" when it is bifurcated into two distinct figures: *hospes*, the acceptable and invited stranger (i.e., guest), and *hostis*, the hostile stranger (i.e., enemy). This internal split or division, however, remains in the term *hospes* itself; it can refer both to someone who provides hospitality (a host) and to someone who receives it (a guest)—a duality still evident in some languages today (*ospite* in Italian, which encompasses both meanings). In short, there is an immanent duality in the figures of *hostis*/*hospes*.

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[2] Ivi, p. 68.

Benveniste's linguistic analysis showed an intrinsic ambiguity in the terms associated with hospitality. What does this ambiguity entail? It lies in the fundamental fact that the figure of the guest is potentially identified with its opposite: the enemy. If the guest we receive has the potential to become our enemy, it implies that hospitality must be controlled and conditioned. But who sets the rules and conditions of hospitality? It can only be the host. Thus, far from being a reciprocal relationship, hospitality is based upon a unilateral determination of its condition by the host. What was supposed to be a bond of reciprocity turns out to be a power relation in which one side has greater rights than the other. In this way, we return to the already-mentioned primitive meaning of *hosti-pet*: a master or a master of a guest. Those who open the door of their home to a stranger commit not only an act of generosity but also an act of power. This power lies in the host's capacity to draw and control the boundaries that constitute their relationship with the guest.

But how does this analysis of hospitality work in the field of language and translation? The French philosopher Paul Ricouer, in several texts (e.g. *Défi et bonheur de la traduction*, *Le paradigme de la traduction*)[3], discusses the concept of linguistic hospitality and elevates it to the paradigm of translation. In Ricoeur's considerations, the problem of translation is framed through dichotomies or alternatives[4]. For instance, he suggests that translation can be understood either as communication (the transmission of a message) or as interpretation (every act of interpretative comprehension is itself a form of translation). This distinction roughly aligns with Roman Jakobson's distinction between interlinguistic and intralinguistic translation (or external and internal translation, as Ricouer terms them). However, this point should be put under a critical scrutiny. What philosophical and political assumptions underlie the Ricoeurian separation of internal translation from external translation as well as subordination of the practice of translation to either communication or interpretation? In this framework, translation appears insufficiently autonomous because it is conceptualized primarily in service to other (albeit related) activities: communication on an international interlinguistic level or

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[3] P. Ricoeur, *On Translation*, transl. by E. Brennan, London-New York, Routledge, 2006.

[4] The principal problem that Ricouer aims to tackle is the dichotomy between translatability and untranslatability. But the solution that he finds is to substitute this dichotomy with another, more practical one: fidelity versus betrayal. Thus, a possible translational strategy in Ricoeur functions as "balancing" between two poles, between being faithful to one's own language and betraying its identity through innovations, choosing the middle way between two risks: the risk of sacralization of the mother tongue (identitarian temptation) and the risk of abandonment of one's own language. On such a balancing strategy, see: R. Kerney, *Translating Hospitality. A Narrative Task*, in Chad Engelland (ed.), *Language and Phenomenology*, London-New York, Routledge, 2021, pp. 264-292.

interpretation within the same linguistic community. This is not to suggest that translation operates in isolation from both communication and interpretation, but rather that the essence of translation—as Walter Benjamin explained—cannot be fully grasped if it is reduced to a peculiar form of either communication or interpretation.

One of the fundamental assumptions underlying Ricouer's dichotomies can be found in his assertion of the givenness of languages. When addressing the question of why there is a plurality of languages, Ricouer answers: This is the way things are[5]. Consequently, translation exists because there is a plurality or diversity of languages. However, in Ricoeur's view, the factum of linguistic diversity is not premised upon any deeper logic or process. This view corresponds to the commonsensical representation for which languages are to be "found" as given facts, each with its differences and incompatibilities existing within the plural symbolic world of human relations so that translation appears nothing but a peculiar form of communicative relation—a mediation between the pre-established linguistic entities[6]. Diversity of languages is therefore envisaged as something that precedes and grounds translation.

By virtue of the aforementioned assumption, it is not possible to conceive of translation in its autonomy—that is, in its intrinsic relationship to language as such, and not subordinated to any particular mode of linguistic activity. Ricouer's claim that linguistic plurality is given, therefore, projects a certain idea of translation as a secondary mediation between already-formed and constituted languages, each occupying a well-defined, distinct, and mutually bordered space. In this view, translation can appear only as either communication or interpretation (where the latter actually falls under the dominion of the former). This envisaging of translation as a secondary activity of mediation between pre-constituted linguistic spaces-identities results in a certain model of hospitality: the ethical and dialogical model of hospitality, which is supposed to balance between identity and difference, home and foreigner—"Linguistic hospitality, then, where the pleasure of dwelling in the

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[5] P. Ricoeur, "A 'passage': translating the untranslatable", in Id., *On Translation*, cit., p. 33. He restates the same claim also in his other texts (e.g. "Translation as challenge and source of happiness).
[6] Naoki Sakai calls this "regime of translation" "heterolingual address": "Strictly speaking, it is not because two different language unities are given that we have to translate (or interpret) one text into another; it is because translation *articulates* languages so that we may postulate the two unities of the translating and the translated languages as if they were autonomous and closed entities through a *certain representation of translation*" (N. Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity. On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism*, Minneapolis-London, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 2).

other's language is balanced by the pleasure of receiving the foreign word at home, in one's own welcoming house".[7]

What Ricouer terms "linguistic hospitality" is characterized by a double movement of receiving-dwelling: We dwell in the language of the other, so the foreign language hosts us, while, at the same time, we accept the foreign words into our own linguistic place. But what operation transforms language into a "home"? Does the very idea of home not presuppose a fundamental exclusion—a strictly defined space of belonging that seems incompatible with the fluid and dynamic nature of languages? Furthermore, even if we accept the applicability of the notion of home to language, how can hospitality serve as a suitable paradigm if the "home" of a certain language is already a space imbued with foreignness? In other words, what if the relationship between the guest and the host is subverted *as* a binary relation by the inherently foreignizing character of language itself? The division between the host and the guest, dwelling and welcoming, actually mirrors the division between the internal and the external, which, as we have already seen in Benveniste, underpins the notion of *hostis*.

Ricoeur cites Rosenzweig, who asserts that translation is the mode of servitude to two masters[8]: the master of the foreign author, a foreign text, and the master of the reader who shares the same language with the translator. By doing this, the French philosopher reaffirms Benveniste's conclusions: Linguistic hospitality is fundamentally tied to the figure of a master, to the sovereignty of the homeland. In other words, the model of hospitality functions only if there is a border that divides the "inside" from the "outside" of the political community. The problem with this division lies not so much in the very existence of borders (and the categories of inside and outside) but in the underlying treatment of the foreigner, the stranger, deemed "homeless" the moment they leave their home. Outside their home, they are not only foreigners but also outsiders. From the host's perspective, the space of exteriority becomes a space of non-belonging. Thus, the reciprocity between the host and the guest comes from the shared potential to be a foreigner in some other place, which is not their own. The foreigner, the guest, has their own intimate homeplace, but elsewhere, in a territory where they themselves hold mastery and control. It seems that the belonging excludes the foreignness. Put differently, the home where we host others is truly alien only to some external figure, but not to ourselves. The relationship of an abstract reciprocity reveals a deeper, non-

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[7] P. Ricoeur, "Translation as challenge and source of happiness", in Id., *On Translation*, cit., p. 10.
[8] Ivi, p. 4.

reflected asymmetry at the place of home: Foreignness is not a self-relation occurring within the space of identity; it relies on external otherness and separation from it.

It is symptomatic that even when Ricouer considers the possibility and the chance of being foreign to oneself, as "the ambition of de-provincialising the mother tongue, which is invited to think of itself as one language amongst others, ultimately to see itself as foreign"[9], it is measured comparatively, against something external: the "real" foreign that arrives at the threshold, awaiting the decision of the master (whether it be a generous welcoming or a refusal). In other words, tongues are foreign not *in* and *through* themselves but only when confronted with something that comes from the outside, as the foreign among other foreigners. Tongues are perceived or thought of as foreign, but they are still not constituted as foreign because they are governed by the idea of a *politically* and *historically* unique and indivisible "home"[10]. This kind of extrinsic and bordered foreignness structures the model of hospitality.

Nonetheless, the arrival of an outsider at the threshold may cause tension and antagonism. Yet, as Ricouer argues, such conflictuality is resolved within the horizon of the dialogicality of hospitality:

> When the translator acknowledges and assumes the irreducibility of the pair, the peculiar and the foreign, he finds his reward in the recognition of the impassable status of the dialogicality of the act of translating as the reasonable horizon of the desire to translate. In spite of the agonistics that make a drama of the translator's task, he can find his happiness in what I would like to call *linguistic hospitality*.[11]

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[9] Ivi, p. 9.

[10] Ricoeur admits that internal translation (i.e., translation within the same linguistic community) is not transparent and smooth because "we rediscover, within our linguistic community, the same enigma of the same, of meaning itself, the identical meaning which cannot be found" (P. Ricoeur, "The paradigm of translation", in Id., *On Translation*, cit., p. 25). Moreover, he suggests that this internal dealing with the enigma of the same, basically with the foreign within the same language, is a sort of metalinguistic operation, "language's work on itself" that holds the key for the translation *ad extra*. However, interlocutors who speak the same language are not true foreigners but just others, so here, Ricoeur operates with a different notion of the foreign, which problematizes the sameness of the meaning but not the sameness of the "same language". In other words, the home language for Ricoeur is not self-identical but a place of enigma, of the secret, or of the distance. However, it seems that this dimension of "non-communicability" or "unexpressed" is rather aesthetical (the mysteries of poetic language), affiliated with the language as general human expressivity (*linguaggio*), and it does not question the natural status of language as *lingua*. For the same reason, the enigmas of language cannot appear in the guise of violence.

[11] P. Ricoeur, "Translation as challenge and source of happiness", cit., p.10.

Here, linguistic hospitality is provided "in spite of the agonistics" inherent in the task of the translator, while the happiness is achieved if the ideal of perfect message transmittance is given up. The translator's happiness is, actually, a consequence of the successful maintenance of the master's sovereign position in their homeplace, which is nonetheless exposed to the risk of otherness. The sovereignty is preserved through the dialogical act of hosting the foreign. But dialogue exhibits the power of the master who owns the very space of the dialogue. The "impassable status of dialogicality of the act of translating" is premised upon the division of a continuous space into bordered, sovereign territories. In other words, it depends on certain types of violence. This violence seems ignored in the framework of hermeneutics of hospitality and is sublimated as a submissiveness to necessary linguistic constraints. The translator, while serving both masters, does not question the underlying structure of masterhood. The translator is just invited to act ethically through dialogue and balancing. This raises an important question: Can translation be understood beyond such ethics of hospitality?[12]

In sum, the model of hospitality presupposes the foreign as something or someone originary dwelling outside the home, which can be conceived either as a space of exclusive self-identity or as a space where certain challenges might occur[13]. While linguistic hospitality avoids linguistic ethnocentrism by fostering relational and dialogical ethics toward other languages and cultures, it fails to challenge the construction of boundaries between the internal and the external, the "own" and the "foreign". However, the space of the homeland is never truly challenged and remains configured as the main axis of reference (even though it is not fixed). As long as these boundaries remain unquestioned, there can be no politics of translation that transcends the framework of hospitality. The violence inherent in bordering—both in language and translation—must be acknowledged if translation is to move from an ethics of relation to a genuine politics of translation. This critique, however, does not advocate for the

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[12] How translation cannot be only hospitable, because there is also an inhospitality of translation, has been discussed in C. Canullo, *Il chiasmo della traduzione*, Milano-Udine, Mimesis, pp. 165-170.

[13] To give a more nuanced view of Ricoeur's position, it must be acknowledged that the notion of self-identity (idem) is at odds with Ricoeur's general hermeneutical position and, consequently, with his considerations on language and the semantical structure of symbol. Since his early works on interpretation and psychoanalysis, Ricoeur has actually aimed to stress a certain functioning of language other than mere communication. Traces of this position can also be seen in his texts on translation, when referring to the "desire to translate". However, our aim is to show the limits of the model of hospitality, which, in Ricoeurian formulation, also shows an inability to transcend the separation between the internal and the external. A detailed analysis of the internal coherence of Ricoeur's thought and whether his hospitality of translation falls below his own hermeneutics of language would require additional space.

abolition of differences between the internal and the external, or between the "own" and the "alien", but rather for the problematization of these differences. Borders are not absolute but historical and are thus subject to transformation and variation.

Ricoeur's model of linguistic hospitality follows the logic of dichotomization and polarization, where the tension between two poles is to be resolved through balancing and by finding a "middle way" between two "masters". The figure of the master is "pacified" by its contraposition with another master. In some sense, all alternatives in Ricouer remain paralyzing because they are based upon the static separation of the "inside" and the "outside". This binaristic perspective on translation is not unique to Ricoeur but reflects a classical stance in translation theory. Friedrich Schleiermacher's normative principle[14], which dictates that translation either moves the author toward the reader or moves the reader toward the author, embodies the same logic of balancing between opposing forces. Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, in many ways, foreshadows the paradigm of hospitality—a link explicitly acknowledged by Ricoeur:

> Indeed, it seems to me that translation sets us not only intellectual work, theoretical or practical, but also an ethical problem. Bringing the reader to the author, bringing the author to the reader, at the risk of serving and of betraying two masters: this is to practice what I like to call *linguistic hospitality*.[15]

As argued in the existing scholarship, Schleiermacher's emphasis on openness to the foreign serves a distinctly political function: to enrich the native language and create the borders of a modern German linguistic identity through acts of openness and foreignization. In this framework, the privileged model of translator is one who translates from a foreign language into their mother tongue. The mother tongue, as the language of home, remains the privileged horizon of translation, its ultimate destination and normative end.

Two political conditions of hospitality have emerged so far: boundary and sovereignty. First, hospitality is possible only if a boundary exists—an unmovable threshold that separates the intimate space of home from the unfamiliar external world. A stranger becomes a guest—our guest—only by crossing this boundary, and hospitality as an ethical act underscores over and

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[14] F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens*, in H. J. Störig (ed.). *Das Problem des Übersetzens*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963, pp. 39-70.
[15] P. Ricoeur, "The paradigm of translation", cit., p. 23.

over the boundary that the guest must cross to be a guest. Second, a boundary exists, and consequently, hospitality as well, if there is a sovereign host, the master of the home, who defines the terms and conditions of hosting/bordering. Within this paradigm, the guest is never truly equal to the host but remains an accepted and welcomed alien figure subject to the host's rules. In addition, the dialectics of the master-guest is not the dialectics of the master-slave, where an asymmetric relationship has the emancipatory potential.

But what if translation, as Benjamin claims, reveals that languages are not alien to one another[16]? Contrary to Ricouer's assertion ("This is the way things are"), a (Benjaminian) answer to the question "Why do we have a plurality of languages?" might be "There are so many languages, because languages are translated and constantly in translation". This translation is more than an intralinguistic interpretation, and keeping with Benjamin, what if translation reveals an immanent violence of language, which, for the models of hospitality, remains invisible?

Before engaging with Benjamin's inputs, it is essential to consider how Derrida, following Benveniste, exposed the inherent ambiguity of the concept of hospitality. Derrida argued that the question of hospitality is a question not only of law (i.e. of rights) but also of violence (i.e. power). While a guest has the right to be hosted, they do not have the right to define the terms or conditions of hospitality. Only the host, as the sovereign in their native domain, determines the rules. To be hosted, the guest must meet certain expectations and demonstrate their willingness to do so in front the host. This is the obligation to translate oneself into the figure of a guest, and Derrida calls it "the first act of violence"[17]. This insight raises a critical point: the very condition of being a guest. Before translating the foreign guest into the host's language, they (as a guest) are already translated— or, better put, they are made translatable in a certain context. The guest's unprivileged position is the result of translation. But the request to be hosted, or an invitation to become a guest is not sufficient. The guest must align themself with the host's rules (relating to culture, language, and ethical life). Derrida calls this the "self-contradiction in the law of hospitality": While hospitality apparently rejects "inequality", it paradoxically reaffirms the host's sovereignty over the space of hospitality. This

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[16] W. Benjamin, *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*, in Id., *Gesammelte Schriften. Bd. IV*, Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 1972, pp. 9–21; W. Benjamin, *The Translator's Task*, trans. by S. Rendall, in L. Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, London-New York, Routledge, 2012, pp. 75–83.

[17] J. Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, transl. by R. Bowlby, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 15.

at the same time limits and makes hospitality possible, leading Derrida to conclude that the very mastery makes hospitality possible as impossible, and that the act of hospitality always does the opposite of what it pretends to do[18].

The aforementioned phenomenon is what Derrida calls "conditional hospitality". Here, we offer hospitality on the condition that the others follow our rules, our way of life, language, culture, or our political system. In other words, hospitality ceases to be truly hospitable. It is a contradictory phenomenon, or, as Derrida puts it, hospitality can be possible only on the condition of its impossibility:

> Hospitality is a self-contradictory concept and experience which can only self-destruct <put otherwise, produce itself as impossible, only be possible on the condition of its impossibility> or protect itself from itself, auto-immunize itself in some way, which is to say, deconstruct.[19]

However, Derrida's conceptual move is not to abandon the concept of hospitality due to its impossibility but to keep it exactly in the form of unconditional hospitality, which is constitutively needed for the very concept. In an almost Kantian way, unconditional or pure hospitality serves as a regulative ideal with a transcendental function: it is due to unconditional hospitality that we have the idea of an alterity. This true hospitality, according to Derrida, is the condition of the political and juridical, and it cannot be just an ethical idea. He pushes the limits of an ethical model of hospitality to its extremes, where the ethical necessarily becomes political-juridical. Yet, pure and unconditional hospitality is not just an idea; it is an experience that is impossible to practice. Better put, it is the experience of what is practically impossible. "An unconditional hospitality is, to be sure, practically impossible to live; one cannot in any case, and by definition, organize it. Whatever happens, happens, whoever comes, comes (*ce qui arrive arrive*), and that, in the end, is the only event worthy of this name".[20]

The aforementioned absolutely open hospitality conditions the political, but ultimately, it is not practicable as politics. Its function, therefore, remains transcendentally constitutive: The impossibility of hospitality is necessary to justify its possibility and to expose its contradictory character. Derrida grasps

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[18] J. Derrida, *Hostipitality*, «Angelaki», n. 5:3, 2000, pp. 3 – 18, p. 14.
[19] Ivi, p. 5.
[20] G. Borradori, *A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida*, in G. Borradori (ed.), *Philosophy in a Time of Terror. Dialogues with J. Habermas and J. Derrida*, Chicago-London, The University of Chicago Press, 2003, p. 129.

the fact that this contradiction arises from the fundamentally binary and asymmetrical relationship that underpins every hospitable act. Pure hospitality actually tries to subvert this binarism and the dichotomy between the host and the guest by stressing a state of risky openness and indeterminacy: A guest is genuinely a guest only if the possibility of their being an invader remains unresolved as a threat. However, it is this pure hospitality that then generates binarism:

> Pure and unconditional hospitality, hospitality itself, opens or is in advance open to someone who is neither expected nor invited, to whomever arrives as an absolutely foreign visitor, as a new arrival, nonidentifiable and unforeseeable, in short, wholly other. I would call this a hospitality of visitation rather than invitation. The visit might actually be very dangerous, and we must not ignore this fact, but would a hospitality without risk, a hospitality backed by certain assurances, a hospitality protected by an immune system against the wholly other, be true hospitality?[21]

However, in exposing the paradoxicality of hospitality[22], Derrida acknowledges its constitutive binarism and the inherent risk that the unconditional, undecided, and indeterminate might dissolve into nothing (pure hospitality that is no hospitality). Yet, he identifies something fundamental for the political and juridical order in this non-relation, in the unresolved tension between conditional and unconditional hospitality. The question now is the following: Is it possible to conceive of translation beyond the binary framework? To do this would mean leaving behind the structuration of languages through the fixed separation of the internal from the external. Even unconditional hospitality relies on the external figure of the foreigner—an unidentified presence who arrives and requires a certain negotiation. As such, unconditional hospitality reflects the idea of translation as impossible but necessary[23]. If the limits of an ethical model of hospitality reveal its inescapable binary relationships, is it not necessary to either abandon this model or restrict it to the ethical domain, acknowledging its limitations? Should we instead propose an alternative political paradigm with translation at its core?

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[21] Ivi, pp. 128-129.

[22] For more information on this problem, see S. Nergaard, *Translation and Transmigration*, London-New York, Routledge, 2021, pp. 66-92.

[23] J. Derrida. *Des Tours de Babel*, in *Difference in Translation*, transl. by J. F. Graham, Ithaca-London, Cornell University Press, 1985, pp. 165-205.

2. Violence and communication in Benjamin

In the previous section, we explored how the concept of hospitality, when applied to translation, conceals its constitutive violence. In this section, we examine how different and more developed forms of translational practice resist being reduced to acts of hospitality and their ethical framing. It must be acknowledged that hospitality itself ignores its violent dimension; it justifies the seemingly peaceful and dialogical communication between languages. But what if both hospitality and communication share a similar self-representation —appearing nonviolent while actually relying upon a certain violence? What if hospitality is an ethical concept that depoliticizes its condition of possibility and its effects? It is through Benjamin's reflections on translation that we are allowed to construct a relationship between violence and language that moves us beyond the notion of hospitality—a notion Benjamin does not adopt and whose logic is fundamentally at odds with the central points of his stance.

The year Benjamin began working on *The Translator's Task*, as a prologue to his translations of Baudelaire, he also published his essay on violence (*Zur Kritik der Gewalt*[24]), in which he sets forth the idea of divine violence—a pure immediate violence (*reine unmittelbare Gewalt*) opposed to mythical violence, which is *rechtsetzend* (law-positing), instituting laws and the juridical order. The annihilation of the legal order is precisely the task (*Aufgabe*) of pure divine violence. If mythical violence is identified with the violence of law, divine violence functions as a form of counterviolence: it performs violence upon legal violence, opening a space for alternative social relations beyond the current norms. Divine violence is not only annihilating and destructive (*rechtsvernichtend*), but also revealing and exhibiting (*darstellend*): it exposes the violent origins of all laws and legal systems. In this sense, divine violence in Benjamin reveals but also anticipates a new epoch; it is the seed or latent condition for a different future, harboring the possibility of its opening and realization. Is it allowed, from this brief introduction, to envisage some connections between divine violence and pure language, a key concept in Benjamin's *The Translator's Task* and *On Language as Such*?

The perspective of divine violence is that of *Entsetzung des Rechts*, the deposing of the law and its elimination, while the perspective of pure language represents the reconciliation and integration of many languages into one single language of truth, which is not simply a historical language but rather the

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[24] W. Benjamin, *Toward the Critique of Violence. A Critical Edition* (ed. P. Fenves, J. Ng), Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2021.

essence or truth of every language. While divine violence establishes a new historical epoch (*ein neues geschichtliches Zeitalter*), pure language expresses the supra-historical kinship of languages[25], their historical conclusion and end. In both cases, they announce a future that is already present in a germinal and implicit way. However, if divine violence counteracts the violence of law by dismantling the legal order and opening up the possibility of historical transformation, can we say something similar for pure language? Can we consider translational practice, which elicits pure language, a violent act because it transgresses the normatively imposed borders of national languages and indicates the possibility of a different history of languages?

Benjamin affirms that the establishment of boundaries (*Grenzsetzung*) is the fundamental phenomenon of law-positing violence as such[26]. The delimitation or establishment of boundaries, as a manifestation of mythical violence is intended to guarantee the exercise of power. Thus, divine violence serves the task of not only deposing the law but also of elimination of the boundaries (im)posed by the law (i.e., by mythical violence). Given what has already been said about hospitality and boundaries as its presupposition, we can conclude that law-positing violence is also the act that poses the conditions for hospitality as an ethical relation within the established juridical order. In other words, the Benjaminian *Akt der Grenzsetzung,* as an operation of mythical violence, introduces the regime of hospitality. In a certain sense, it is divine violence that reveals the underlying violence of hospitality and counteracts the violent establishment of boundaries that hospitality presupposes[27].

The relationship between violence and translation emerges in some passages of Benjamin's *The Translator's Task*, with reference to the violent ability to detach or unbind (*entbinden*) language from meaning. It is in this detachment that pure language presents itself[28]. Benjamin also refered to the movement of languages [*Sprachbewegung*] as one of the most violent and fruitful historical processes [*ein der gewaltigsten und fruchtbarsten historischen Prozesse*][29]. Even the figure of fragmentation, evoked in the famous metaphor of the broken vessel, implies a certain violence. The image of the broken vessel as the fractured unity of languages depicts a situation in which a translator is invited to find the modes of intention of languages. But this situation is itself a product of a violent event

[25] W. Benjamin, *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*, cit., p. 13.
[26] W. Benjamin, *Toward the Critique of Violence*, cit., p. 56.
[27] J. Derrida, *On Hospitality*, cit., p. 47.
[28] W. Benjamin, *The Translator's Task*, cit., p. 82.
[29] W. Benjamin, *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*, cit., p. 13.

—the fragmentation of languages—which corresponds to an equally violent impossibility of recomposing languages' originary unity. However, the only response of the translator to this kind of violence is to attempt to reveal the affinity or kinship of languages that counteracts the enclosure of fragments-languages as new unitarian and identitarian entities. Put differently, the plurality of fragmented languages must not be understood as a pure givenness. Rather, translation shows that fragmented languages are the result of a violent rupture, not an originary state of unity. But is this translation's task itself free of violence?

Translation remains violent in relation to its content, Benjamin writes[30]. In other words, translation's violence comes to the fore only when it assumes a particular attitude toward the content to be translated—that is, when it gives up communicating the content, the sense. But what does it mean that translation "remains" violent? It means that translation resists; it stands its ground by refusing to be grounded, to be fully determined by the local dynamics of the language of translation. This might also be an immanent resistance of language as such, which manifests itself in its "purest" form in translation. Thus, violence is intrinsic to language[31], and communication is not essentially a true form of language. Benjamin claims that what is essential in language cannot be presented in communication, and the task of the translator is to reconfigure translation as something beyond mere communication.

Language *appears* and *functions* as a realm of communication when it is dominated by a normative (juridical) order, covering the fact that the essence of language lies not in communicability but rather in translatability. The legal institution of language, which establishes the space of communication, is precisely what is suspended in the violent act of pure language as realized through translation. The divine violence of pure language exhibited in translation reveals not only the violence of the legally instituted language but also the incommunicable kernel of communication itself. The communicative order of language, with its demand for transparency and fluency, depends on a normative framework of imposed rules that, while concealing its own violence, labels as violent anything that endangers its foundation. From the perspective

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[30] W. Benjamin, *The Translator's Task*, cit., p. 79.
[31] However, what about Benjamin's paragraph from *Toward the Critique of Violence* (W. Benjamin, cit., p. 50) where language as the proper sphere of understanding is stated as radically excluding any violence and totally inaccessible to violence? It is clear from the rest of the text, which we cannot analyze here, that Benjamin discusses language in terms of law and intersubjective communication, differently from *The Translator's Task*, where he claims that language cannot be reduced to the communicative function.

of communication, the incomprehensibility of the foreign or alien appears to be nothing but violent. Translation is therefore demanded to neutralize the transformative power of the foreign, and to host it according to the current norms. Translation with *this* particular function of preserving the communicative normative order can be called law-preserving translation. Conversely, the translation that Benjamin focuses on—that which opens up pure language—functions as a counterviolence that dismantles the communicative functioning of language, setting it "powerfully" into motion and transforming it by means of another language. In other words, far from attempting to reestablish nonviolent communication[32], such translation actually reveals communication itself as intrinsically violent, a form of legal violence in the sphere of language that presents itself as "natural" normative coercion[33].

Language as the proper sphere of agreement, understanding, and nonviolent communication, as seemingly indicated in Benjamin's essay on the critique of violence, is already a product of imposition and violence. Just as there is law-instituting violence in Benjamin, we can say—by adopting his terminology—that there is also *language-instituting violence*. This is the violence that creates the conditions for communication and agreement by bordering linguistic communities through a normative organization and institutionalization of language usages. Language-instituting violence, in other words, sanctions a certain grammar that gives uniformity to language use and, like the legal order, guarantees the uninterrupted flow of social communication. Benjamin's insight lies precisely in recognizing the establishment of the legal order as an act of violence. Following this reasoning in the context of language, communication can be understood as a "justificatory framework" that filters linguistic and social interactions, legitimizing some while excluding others as "violent". The role of translation in Benjamin is therefore twofold: to bring to the surface the violent conditions of communicative order and to exhibit the noncommunicable kernel of language.

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[32] Therefore, translation does not represent a technique of conflict resolution, an "extra-juridical domain of non-violence" (as in J. Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence. An Ethico-Political Bind*: *The Ethical in the Political*. London-New York: Verso, 2020, p 127), but rather a practice that reveals a violent face of what was represented as nonviolent and nonconflictual.

[33] The legal violence in and through language can be exemplified by the cases of refugees and asylum seekers ("guests") who are forced to translate themselves into the alien language of the law and the sovereign state ("host") to gain some rights, if any, or even to be recognized as refugees. See: M. Mokre, *The language of the hegemon: migration and the violence of translation*, in F. Italiano (ed.), *The Dark Side of Translation*, New York, Routledge, 2020, pp. 38-56.

Here, we observe a structural analogy between hospitality and communication, not limited to the fact that hospitality establishes communication in the context of a certain tension and potential conflictuality—such as between a host-master and a guest. Hospitality, like communication, presents itself as dialogical and nonviolent, while its conditions are rooted in a violent positing of a juridico-ethical order in the realm of language. In Benjaminian terminology, hospitality and communication are concepts aligned with mythical violence. Or, if we adopt Naoki Sakai terminology, hospitality can be defined as a homolingual[34] concept and, as such, it cannot overcome the separation between inside and outside, because it is based on the static concept of boundary. Hospitality produces a relation on the spot of belonging, while translation produces a relation on the spot of heterogeneity and foreignness. To emancipate translation from hospitality is to reconceptualize it as a complex practice that counteracts the bordered separation of the hosting and hosted languages, creates a new usage and fosters the emergence of novel linguistic communities.

3. Conclusion: Exophonic Experiences

At this point, we must examine alternative modes of translation and translational experience that fall outside the framework of linguistic hospitality. In other words, we need to take a look at those experiences in which it is not possible to draw or presuppose a clear boundary between the hosting and the hosted language, and in which no single language in the translational process can be taken as a sovereign "home". These translational practices expose the inherent violence and historically determined imposition of a boundary between the host and the guest, as evidenced by Benveniste's and Derrida's analyses. The concept of "exophony"[35], which refers to the practice of writing or speaking in a language other than one's mother tongue, illustrates the estranging nature of language itself, revealing the division between a domestic linguistic space and an external foreign area as misleading in the understanding

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[34] For Sakai, homolinguality or homolingual address in translation corresponds to a certain political configuration of the modern international world—named by Sakai scheme of configuration—where ethnolinguistic entities co-exist on the world map separated by nationally defined borders. Every language entity is constituted as a bordered identity, clearly distinguished from other languages. Cfr. N. Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity. On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism*, cit.

[35] Y. Tawada, *Exophonie*, Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, 2003; S. Arndt, D. Naguschewski, R. Stockhammer, (eds.), *Exophonie: Anders-Sprachigkeit (in) der Literatur*, Berlin, Kadmos, 2007; C. Wright, *Exophony and literary translation: What it means for the translator when a writer adopts a new language*, «Target: International Journal of Translation Studies», n. 22 (1), 2010, pp. 22–39.

of translation. In exophonic practices, communicating in one language coincides with translating between languages. In other words, communication becomes a form of self-translation, rendering translation not a secondary communicative function but a fundamental dynamic that precedes communication. Exophony is the phenomenon that testifies to what Rada Iveković describes as "a different economy of otherness and foreignness"[36].

Exophony destabilizes the fixed and stable boundary between communication and translation, strongly challenging the notion that communication takes place within the secure confines of a home-community, while translation should occur only at its external borders, neighboring another territory, a space of non-belonging. Exophonic writing or speaking is not merely an artistic or experimental way of expressing oneself; it is also an almost-everyday language practice in such plurilingual communities, where multiple languages are used simultaneously as an intrinsic part of communication.

Anton Shammas is a US-based Palestinian writer who moves between Arabic, Hebrew, and English, but above all, he chose Hebrew as the language for his novels, with all the political implications that this decision entails. In one of his essays, Shammas reflects on his peculiar exophonic experience, which, in his case, stands for a specific exile.

> But I'm not sure the site of "border crossing" actually exists. I for one believe that borders, as such, are no longer there, let alone their alleged "crossing", metaphorically or otherwise. Borders are no longer there because they cannot be seen and deciphered from within that twilight zone that we refer to as bilingualism, or trilingualism for that matter, where the edges of any given language are filed down, blurred, cannibalized, metabolized, and then assimilated into that intersection where two languages overlap.[37]

It is Shammas's trilingual experience that prompts him to question the very existence of borders. When writing becomes a continuous act of translation, the borders between languages lose their significance, and along with them, the model of hospitality is superseded. There is an experience of crossing and moving between linguistic realities, but this movement seems

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[36] R. Iveković, *Politike prevođenja*, Zagreb, Fraktura, 2022, p. 302.
[37] A. Shammas, *The Drowned Library (Reflections on Found, Lost and Translated Books and Languages*), in I. De Courtivron (ed.), *Lives in Translation. Bilingual Writers on Identity and Creativity*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, pp. 111-128, p. 124.

more like a crossing without borders. It is a crossing that prevents the clear identification of who is the host and who is the guest. This exophonic translational experience makes an "intersection where two languages overlap" visible, and in this sense, shows that the foreign is not an external otherness but rather an element in the process of self-foreignization, an ever-present internal otherness.

> If asked, I'd describe myself as translator and linguistic refugee, a fugitive from three languages: Arabic, Hebrew and English. And as such, I've been trying, since I came to this country some fifteen years ago, to maintain my relationship with these respective languages through translation.[38]

Shammas's self-translating practice dismantles the notion of being hosted because it refers to a constant process of self-foreignization, where foreignness is encountered in the relationship with one's own language—with all "own" languages (Arabic, Hebrew, English). Can a Palestinian writer who translates himself into Hebrew truly be hosted by that language, as he might be by any other language? Similarly, if a bilingual Palestinian chooses a third language—English—does this resolve the tension between Arabic and Hebrew, making English a truly hosting language? And finally, is not the imposition of the host-guest schema to such an exophonic experience a violence?

There can be other examples of writers-translators whose plurilingual experience shapes the form and content of their literary expression, albeit in less conflictual and politically charged contexts. In these examples, communicating in another language is also inseparable from self-translating within that language. For example, Antonio D'Alfonso's poem *Babel* offers a case of translingual writing that requires a certain translational effort from the reader:

> Nativo di Montréal / élevé comme Québécois / forced to learn the tongue of power / viví en Mexico como alternativa / figlio del sole e della campagna / par les franc-parleurs aimé / finding thousands like me suffering / me casé y devorcé en tierra fria / nipote di Guglionesi / parlant politique malgré moi / steeled in the school of Old Aquinas / queriendo luchar con mis amigos latinos / Dio

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[38] A. Shammas, *The Drowned Library*, cit. p. 123

where shall I be demain / (trop vif) qué puedo saber yo / spero che la terra be mine.[39]

This mixture of languages that challenges the borders between them is not merely an artistic and poetic experiment of a single writer. Here, D'Alfonso stages a plurality of voices that is characteristic of certain cultural environments, such as Canada. He is a Canadian writer of Italian origin who writes in English, French, and Italian. The plurality of voices in different languages reflects a cultural and historical situation in which every language is foreign and none of them is entirely alien. Translation, then, is no longer a hospitable act but the very life of each language through another language. Moreover, the plurality of voices in a language becomes a feature of certain social groups, such as second-generation immigrants who are bilingual or trilingual. In other words, the heteroglossia poetically expressed in D'Alfonso literature represents the living experience of languages and the collective construction of a common language. In this type of translingualism, it is impossible to establish who is hosting and who is hosted. The foreign is one voice within others and within one's own voice, and sometimes, this other, foreign voice can be described as a "locked-up ghost inside the closet"[40], as Shammas illustrates the presence of Palestinian Arabic in Israel. Liberating these internal foreign voices is one of the tasks of exophonic practice. Finally, the term "exophony" should not confuse here: the externality of the voice—language—is, rather, a self-externalized voice that cannot be hosted because it is already embedded within what is regarded as one's "own" voice. The dimension of exteriority is not dissolved by this discourse on exophony, but rather is situated within the universal process of foreignization so that it becomes impossible to separate "inside" and "outside" voices with a fixed boundary.[41]

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[39] A. D'Alfonso, "Babel", in Joseph Pivato (ed.), *The Anthology of Italian-Canaian Writing*, Toronto, Guernica, 1998, p. 195.
[40] A. Shammas, *The Drowned Library*, cit., p. 126.

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