

Disability and Migration: The dea(r)th of hospitality

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Hospitality?

‘Pure and unconditional hospitality, hospitality itself, opens, or is in advance open to someone who is neither expected nor invited, to whoever arrives as an absolute foreign visitor, as a new arrival, non-identifiable and unforeseeable, in short wholly other’ (Derrida 2000: 128-9)

**‘Hospitality is not our custom here; we have no use for visitors’
(Kafka1914/1992: 164)**

‘What doubtless remained longer than leprosy ... were the values and images attached to the figure ... that insistent and fearful figure which was not driven off without first being inscribed within a sacred circle’ (Foucault1967: 6)

Strangers

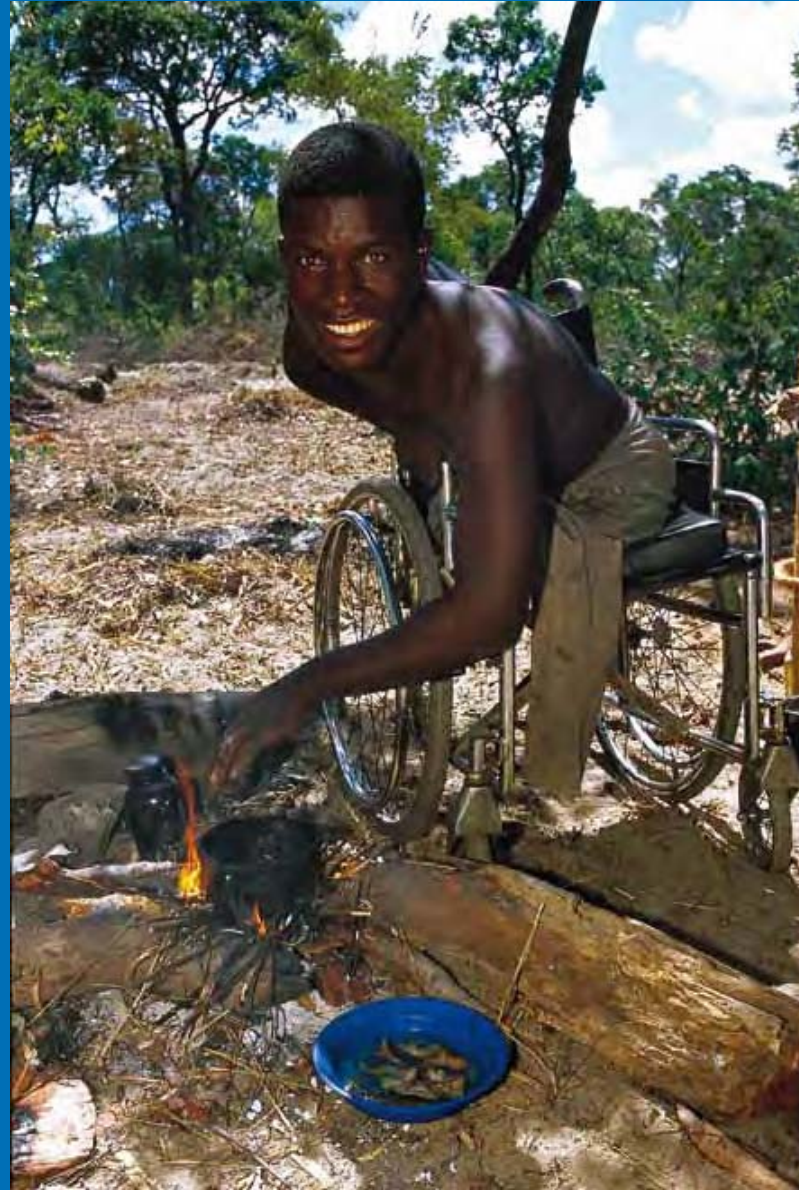
In this paper, I use the anthropological idea of the stranger as a 'wrap-around' analytical tool to outline the ways in which disabled people and migrants are negatively constructed and provide a social litmus test of the tolerance and hospitality of the community.

Disability is constituted as a figure that represents the existential stranger; the uninvited guest, signifying the proximity of constitutional vulnerability; and the immigrant, arriving uninvited from afar brings 'new ways' of doing and being that threaten the near, the dear and the clear.

An Uninvited Visitor?

A Stranger?

A Threat?



Repertoires of invalidation

The disabled person and the migrant are (near) interchangeable in the repertoires of invalidation deployed in a neoliberal context.

I demonstrate this claim by outlining the pejorative depictions shared by disabled people and migrants and point to their origins in the eugenic sentiments of classical liberalism.

Repertoires of invalidation are constituted by defamatory, stigmatising signifiers; Disabled people and migrants are represented as contaminating, threatening and burdensome.

Disability like the uninvited new arrival is a visitor, a stranger, a shadow of fear.

Double trouble

The disabled immigrant - the 'unfit', constitutionally corrupted *arrivant* - is in the position of making a claim to citizenship from a position of 'double(d) marginalization'; consigned to the edge of social acceptability on two accounts:

A)The incomer or migrant is alien, foreign, an outsider, an uninvited difference, does not belong ... a source of fear and anxiety.

B)The disabled person is an *existential alien*. The stranger in 'our' midst; a reminder of the precariousness of life, the vulnerabilities of existence, the universal human tendency to break down and die (Hughes 2002)

Heavenly Migrations

There will be – St. Augustine insists – no ‘monsters’ or ‘idiots’ at the resurrection (Metzler 2006).

On the day of Judgement, in this crowning eschatological moment of absolute truth, the somatic anomalies and mental ‘deficiencies’ of ordinary mortal life will be eliminated.

Only ‘clean and proper’ bodies will stand before the almighty. Disability cannot cross the celestial border.

There is no welcome, no hospitality for disability in heaven. The guards at the Pearly Gates have been briefed to turn back the ungodly tide of unsightliness.

Keeping contaminants out: Victorian USA

The State of New York, concerned in the late Victorian period about the calibre and stock of people passing through Ellis Island, raised a statute to 'prevent the landing of mendicants, cripples, criminals, idiots &c ' (Schweik 2009: 165).

This is a classically *anthropoemic* strategy (as opposed to an anthropophagic strategy) ; the process by which strangers are rooted out and cleared away.

In this case, the disabled *arrivant* was associated, not only with diminished labour power but also with the potential degradation of the moral economy. In this context, the inhospitable border is policed by the eugenic imagination.

Creating contaminating 'crookedness'

Co-locating criminality, disability and migrant status was most efficacious (for power) in the period of mass migration from rural to urban spaces during the period of industrialisation.

The clustering of attributes associated with moral degeneracy consigned a mix of identities to a murky melting-pot; a thick, peasant stew of shoulder rubbing, disreputable and culturally strange ne'er-do-wells that included not just criminals, migrants and disabled people but also people of colour. These identities produced the 'crooked classes'; made them amenable to a discourse of criminality

Eugenics created the myth of an intersectional threat to the health and purity of the population: 'non-white races were routinely connected to people with disabilities ... both were depicted as evolutionary laggards or throwbacks' (Baynton 2001: 36)

Cleaning up the streets

The 'Ugly laws' – implemented in the US in the latter half of the 19th century punished disabled people for being unsightly (Schweik 2009) for the disgust they elicited from 'decent' citizens who experienced the discomfort of having to share the urban environment with such wretched creatures.

Migrants from the countryside and abroad added to the ranks of the despoiling bodies that brought dishevelment to the glittering spaces of capitalist prosperity.

These persons were unfit to contribute to the American dream. Disabled people were unwelcome; migrants who could not prove their worth, turned away at the ports or forced into the dark corners of the great cities by the barren well of bourgeois hospitality

Strangers as threats to security

Contemporary repertoires of invalidation place the accent on disabled people and immigrants as threats to security (and welfare ...more on welfare later)

In becoming negative figures in the neo-liberal social imaginary the immigrant and the disabled person fall less on the sword of eugenics; more on degrading popular representations that focus on the existential and social threat to 'our' security that 'uninvited guests' are supposed to embody.

The duties embedded in the politics of care and hospitality - the duty to look after and protect others - is displaced by the accent on the threat to security and the protection of the national interest and national identity – embodies a coalition between ableism and ethnocentrism

“We” will be engulfed!

The post millennial migrant, in the UK, is constructed as a potential threat to the security of the state an intruder who carries a high risk of terrorist affiliation.

Checks on the global mobility of labour are designed to keep the citizens of the white nations safe from the unstable firebrands of militant Islam.

Ethnocentric and racist cards are played regularly, in the moral positioning of the new arrival. The other as potentially violent and bellicose extends the invitation to consider the outsider in terms of risk, danger and harm.

Immigration is characterised as a ‘tide’ or a ‘flood’ that needs to be stemmed. It spells (putative) engulfment and drowning

Rule Britannia

Islamophobia and racism are particularly important signifiers in the construction of the immigrant threat because they are easily linked to the 'global war on terror' and the post-imperialist fantasy of a Manichean world of good and evil in which the white west is (always) on the right side; battling in far off countries to ameliorate the threat of 'crackpot Islamists'.

In the UK, war – foreign war - is central in the making of the 'imagined community' of nation.

The foreign wars and the closed borders are part of the same package of 'liquid fear' and 'negative globalisation' (Bauman 2007) in which the other – in whatever dark shape or form – is a perennial threat.

A war of restriction

The thrust of UK Asylum policy, since the mid 1990's, has been massively over-determined by the 'threat to security'.

Effectively, the *UKBA* was constituted as a line of 'defence' in the war against the rising tide of arrivals. In practice, policy has sought to exclude asylum seekers from access to support and services and to undermine 'their' entitlement to rights (Mulvey 2010) and asylum seekers have been criminalized or, pitched into disrepute by representations in which they are constituted as 'illegal' and as a threat to national security.

The right to work was removed from asylum seekers by the UK Government in 2002

Disability fear and loathing

Disability is conceived, in the ableist imaginary, as a threat to 'ontological security'; a threat to the stability and integrity of the 'clean and proper body'.

Disabled people are 'the wounded', 'the monstrous and 'the abject' (Hughes 2009); that which is projected onto the other; that which belongs to the vulnerable self; all that spells out the frailty of human constitution.

In the non-disabled imaginary, mortality is a heavily policed ontological border – a high wall – over which able-bodied participants, distracted by the magical moments of consumption, fear to peer.

Out of Control

If disability signifies loss of bodily control, more precisely the fear of it, as Susan Wendell (1996) has argued; then the immigrant is constructed as a threat to the social body and to social identity (Innes 2010).

Both 'invade' beloved territories: the first the territory of the flesh; the second the territory of place or 'home'.

(Might the German word *heimat* cover both corporeal and geographical home?)

It is on these existential grounds that discrimination against strangers prosper and it is on these grounds that the border guards of 'indigenous' and 'normate' communities seek to strike down the reputations of the 'invaders'.

Beggars, beggars everywhere!

Enter the welfare scrounger – home grown and foreign

Strangers demand ‘our’ assistance and in so doing ‘we’, the descent, striving, hard-working, moral, majority of ‘up-standing’ citizens, are robbed of the fruits of ‘our’ labour. Migrants and disabled people, alike, have fallen – in Neoliberal times - into this category, framed as little better than ‘beggars’; an underclass of scroungers (Philo et al 20113; Strathclyde Centre for Disability Studies 2012).

Both parties are accused of adopting a ‘mendicant’ role in relation to public forms of social assistance and welfare.

This is the politics of resentment – not hospitality

Discriminating Calculations

Michael Keith (2013: 27), calls the contemporary campaign against asylum seeker and refugees a manifestation of the 'bigot's' calculus at the cost of arrivals'.

It sits well alongside the 'miser's calculus', the cost 'we' – the so called 'good citizens' – must pay for 'bogus incapacity'; for people 'pretending to be disabled', 'swinging-the-lead', or playing-up their impairments in order to dupe the custodians of the public purse into doling out the 'generous' disability benefits that the community pays to people with impairments who cannot work.

The bigot and the miser are the figures that create and are created by the neoliberal politics of resentment

Farewell to welfare

The portrayal of the British Welfare State as a nirvana of ease for the comfort of global waifs and strays validates the massive cuts that, in recent years, have masqueraded under the 'progressive' euphemism of 'welfare reform'.

The shutters of hospitality have come down hard on the fingers of asylum seekers and refugees; access to welfare benefits and services has been closed off at every opportunity.

The local's however, are not doing too well either. Internal systems of hospitality and care have been crushed by neoliberal demolition teams. Disabled people in the UK have been hammered by 'welfare reform'. During the period 2010-2012, 'disabled people and their carer's saw their income cut by £500 million' (Butler 2012).

Neo-liberal hospitality

Neo-liberal ‘hospitality’ is entirely conditional.

Without proof of the means to look after oneself, there is no welcome at the door; no room at the inn.

Those seeking hospitality and knocking at the door – be they internal or external to the increasingly bounded, ‘imagined community’ – meet not only with refusal but with disparagement, transformed into ‘folk devils’, constituted as the stuff of moral panics

Neoliberal hospitality descends into moral populism and resentment

The last word

The promise of new beginnings that the stranger typifies do not invoke the warming sense of hospitality embedded in Derrida's description of the, ideal-typical, unconditional welcome.

We seem comfortable with Kafka: 'Hospitality is not our custom here; we have no use for visitors'. We are in thrall to the figure of the Leper; a fearful living legend from which we must keep our distance; an abject existential, difference which we avoid.

The stranger who craves our protection we vilify; the abject within, we have disowned and disavowed. Both have been transformed into a horrific reminder of what we do not wish to become. Neither – it seems - deserves our hospitality.

We are left with a neoliberal politics of resentment (*ressentiment*)

Afterword

When we co-habit and commune with others whose vulnerability we recognise as our own and if we look closely enough and see through the opaque calculus of prejudice and bigotry, we will, without doubt, see ourselves looking back, perhaps taken aback. How to make our vision in the likeness of this mirror of hospitable self-recognition is the most pressing concern of the age.

The first task is to overcome the neoliberal politics of resentment