

# 12 Geographical Imagination, Politics of Hospitality and the Media in the European Refugee Crisis

Kaarina Nikunen

In 2015, more than 1.3 million refugees and migrants entered Europe in what has been called 'the worst refugee crisis' since the Second World War. While the refugee crisis has more severely affected countries outside Europe, such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, the European imagination has regarded the arrival of refugees as an unexpected and exceptional emergency (UNHCR, 2016). The arrival of large amounts of people has created enormous challenges for European nations to manage the integration processes and overall situation. However, it has also revealed various underlining pressures, values and emotions that shape the European imaginations and sense of responsibility in the face of global events.

The ongoing conflict in Syria, the aftermath of the Arab Spring and continuous unrest in various parts of the African continent have resulted in increasing waves of people moving towards Europe seeking safety and a better future within the borders of the European Union (EU). Over the decades, people have sought refuge and better livelihoods in countries and regions that seem able to offer them. In the imaginations of many, Europe has long held a position as an avenue to new possibilities.

Entering Europe became more complex after the establishment of the Schengen Agreement in 1997. It opened the inner borders of the EU while strengthening the outer borders of Europe, resulting in what has been termed Fortress Europe. While the refugee crisis has made the general public aware of the dangers of crossing borders, these dangers have a long history. Reports of refugee deaths on the borders of Europe were already systematically collected in the 1990s by United for Intercultural Action, an umbrella organization for various nongovernmental organizations. It reported more than 2,000 deaths on the borders of Europe from 1993 to 2000 (Nikunen, 1999; United Against Racism, 2016). It is clear that migrants and refugees hoping to enter Europe often do so in extreme and life-threatening conditions. The camps set up in Melilla and Ceuta in the early 2000s, the Spanish Canary Islands in 2006, Lampedusa, Italy, after the Arab Spring in 2011, Lesbos Island in Greece and the bordering areas of Syria and Turkey in 2015 evidence the hard conditions refugees have faced for years in the border areas of Europe.

The local villages and cities on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea have dealt with migration and the so-called refugee crisis in different ways. In the 1990s, border control was still elementary on the Calabrian coast of Italy. Italy had been a transit country for Europe, so its political leadership had not considered migration to be a burning problem and had not made controlling the border a priority (Menz, 2008). By the late 1990s, other EU nations, especially Germany, started to pressure Italy to tighten its border control to decrease cross-border migration to other countries. In the 2000s, the EU started to financially support new operations to control its external borders.

Local people have witnessed the increase of national and European border controls and the launch of surveillance and rescue initiatives, such as the Nostra Mare and Frontex-led operations (De Genova, 2002; Cuttitta, 2009; Friese, 2012; Horsti, 2012; Musaro, 2017). At the same time, in contrast to the militarization of the border, a politics of hospitality emerged among the locals who witnessed the arrival of refugees and migrants in the region (Friese, 2012; Smith, 2016). The locals' hospitality has drawn attention and wonder in public discussion as something unexpected. This chapter explores the politics of hospitality that emerged in the small southern Italian village of Badolato in Calabria in the 1990s and years later during the refugee crisis 2015. In the 1990s, Badolato suffered from widespread problems throughout Calabria and Southern Italy: high unemployment rates, an ageing population, organized crime and a bleak vision of the future. The local government saw the arrival of more than

800 Kurdish refugees in December 1997 as an opportunity to reinvigorate Badolato by inviting the refugees to stay. This exceptional story soon brought media from all around Italy and Europe to report on these unusual events.

Drawing on the theories of space and place, this research operationalizes the concept of geographical imagination proposed by Harvey (1973/2009); it also looks at the idea of the politics of hospitality to examine how media imaginations shape a region economically, politically and culturally. What happens when hospitality becomes a political tool for survival circulated by the local and global media? In what conditions might such a politics of hospitality emerge, and most importantly, what kind of agency does it offer to refugees and migrants?

This chapter first introduces the key concepts of geographical imagination and the politics of hospitality, followed by a case study of Badolato in southern Italy based on ethnographic research. Finally, it discusses the European refugee crisis of 2015 and the ways in which the politics of hospitality has been appropriated in the crisis. These questions are connected with larger issues of refugee policies in the European imagination: are refugees and migrants threats to Europe's future, values and identity, or is Europe open to change? How do European towns and villages see themselves in the midst of changes? This critical consideration of the concept of geographical imagination shows the possibilities and limitations of imaginations in times of uncertainty and increased mobility.

## Geographical Imagination and the Politics of Hospitality

The concept of geographical imagination was first formulated by Harvey (1973/2009: 24) in response to Mills' (1959) concept of sociological imagination, which refers to the ability to grasp history and biography and their relations in society. Harvey (1973/2009: 24) believed that the concept lacked spatial consciousness and introduced the concept of geographical imagination to emphasize the process through which the individual can 'recognize the role of space and place in his own biography' and understand the relations between social structures and space. Geographical imagination highlights the connections among social processes, spatial forms and social justice. The ways in which geographies are imagined have been multiplied and complicated by globalization, global media and digitalization. Local–global ties are actively manufactured; they shape our understanding of ourselves and others and the way we act in the world (Castree, 2004: 139). In the process of change, whose imaginations are at play becomes relevant. To be able to imagine connections between places and people across borders and to perceive opportunities that can be seized despite enormous challenges are crucial for asylum seekers and migrants who are seeking new futures in distant places. The imagination of Europe as a place of opportunity and prosperity provides crucial incentives for migration. Often, these imaginations are formed through media images and narratives, as well as messages and information from relatives, friends and acquaintances already living in Europe (Gillespie et al., 2016). At the same time, the capacity to imagine opportunity and responsibility for change is relevant to the construction of transnational, hospitable places. Here, the connections of media, geographical imagination and politics of hospitality become pertinent.

The chapter pays particular attention to the role of media in the process of geographic imagination, first on the level of representation. To follow Harvey (1989: 287–288), media images and investments in image building have assumed growing importance in cultural and economic practices, as well as in political and social life. In geographical imagination, media publicity holds significant power to define and shape how places are imagined. The media construct notions of places by focussing on particular issues, events and angles (Hanna, 1996; Ellapen, 2007). Through the machinery of news production and particular forms of framing, the media have the power to redefine places as violent, dynamic, dangerous, hopeless or attractive (Gold, 1994). These framings produce the social meanings of a place that can have significant political and material consequences. Especially in moments of change, the identity of a place becomes visible, accentuated and the object of struggle.

The role of media in terms of geographic imagination is not limited to representation of places. In the context of migration, mobile media particularly have increasingly important roles in providing information that can be life saving in dangerous crossings. Examples of mobile maps and technological alarm systems for refugees and migrants (Walsh, 2013; Gillespie et al., 2016). This illustrates the importance of media technologies on migrant routes. These technologies are also used by officials and the media in tracing refugees and migrants on their

routes, and thus they are connected with different forms of power (Latourette, 2016). Media is also known to be important for enhancing long-distance social relationships with friends and family, and these possibilities have increased significantly with social media (Gillespie, 2000; Madianou, 2005; Bailey et al., 2007; Leurs, 2015). While media provides possibilities for imagining, connecting and finding information, they also provide voices for people to take part in public debates. Thus, geographic imaginations are made in these debates and discussions concerning everyday life and politics. These aspects are present also in the idea of mediapolis, the global civic space through which we can imagine and realize cosmopolitanism (see also Georgiou, 2013; Smets, 2016).

Another concept relevant here is hospitality. It is widely used in different theoretical contexts, often drawing on Kant's perpetual peace (1795/2003), but for the purposes of this chapter, the work by philosopher Levinas (1981), further developed by Derrida (2000) and Silverstone (2007), offers reference points relevant to geographic imagination. To imagine a place as transnational and open to change is a prerequisite for hospitality in the sense discussed by Levinas (1981) and Derrida (2000). In short, hospitality refers to the obligation to share space with the Other and operates on two levels: ethical and political. The ethical level refers to the individual's moral obligation, whereas the political level refers to the state's obligation to offer shelter to strangers and humanity. Derrida (2000) discusses hospitality in the context of the cosmopolitan rights of asylum seekers in western societies, focussing on the relation between conditional and unconditional hospitality. For Derrida (2000), this tension between unconditional hospitality (an unachievable ideal) and conditional hospitality (limited by various laws and regulations) can disrupt, challenge and open existing practices. Becoming open to others leads to new experiences and insight and consequently to the possibility of threshold for hope (Derrida, 2000, 2001). The politics of hospitality then can be seen as an attempt to create a place that provides such openness towards others – a place that is inclusive and cosmopolitan in its basic premises. Such a place comes close to Massey's (1994: 146–156) idea of a progressive, open place. A mediated version of a progressive, cosmopolitan place is formulated in Silverstone's (2007) idea of a mediapolis. Silverstone (2007: 22), following Hanna Arendt, defines mediapolis as a space of appearance, connection and compassion in the late modern world. It is a space of multiplicity with media narratives, images and interaction where people may come together as publics. Mediapolis, as cosmopolitan technologized space, entails several levels of mediated encounters and imaginations that may promote solidarity or enhance the sense of togetherness. For Silverstone (2007), hospitality is connected to mediapolis and, in this context, it means recognizing the Other's right to be heard and to listen to the Other. Silverstone promotes particularly the idea of unconditional hospitality as the responsibility of the media.

Borden (2015) and Couldry (2012) have criticized Silverstone's concept as too abstract and absolute. It hangs on the idea of universal cosmopolitanism without acknowledging localized and culturally specific practices as part of hospitality (Borden, 2015). Both critics present Aristotelian care ethics as a model for a more practice-based hospitality. In this view, hospitality is understood contextually as part of cultural practices and traditions, not as a separate, individualistic cosmopolitanism. As argued by Borden (2015), the contextualized understanding of hospitality might offer a better analytical tool for understanding the relevance of the politics of hospitality in the context of migration than do calls for unconditional hospitality in the name of universal cosmopolitanism. However, we should not forget that the defence of humanity, especially in times of crisis, is essential, although this understanding might not provide practical means to improve the conditions of vulnerable humans in the best way. The complex implications of the culture of hospitality become clear in empirical research on migration, border areas and reception centres. Anthropologist Friese (2011), who has explored life on the island of Lampedusa, describes how cultures of hospitality become professionalized and institutionalized. These developments, after years of managing the arrival of refugees, have rendered refugees invisible: they have become hidden in the extraterritorial space of transition, in a form of exclusive inclusion (Friese, 2012). Thus, managing refugees, as it becomes institutionalized, creates separate spaces of limited welcome instead of recognition.

In this chapter, these theoretical concepts of geographic imagination and hospitality are explored in two case studies; one situated on the Mediterranean coast in Badolato, Italy, and the other on the Northern fringes of Europe, in Kauhava Finland. This research applies an ethnographic approach to explore the mediated process of geographic imagination in the context of refugee politics in Europe. The aim of ethnographic research is to

achieve a holistic understanding of a phenomenon or process. Thus, one must spend months or even years with the research. I follow Marcus' (1986) guidelines on multisited ethnography to identify the relevant sites of the phenomenon studied by following the processes, items, objects and information relevant to the study. Thus, this research utilizes a wide range of sources and methods, from the analysis of media texts and documents to interviews and participatory observation. This is also close to the idea of multilocal fieldwork (Hannerz, 2002) that combines different sources of knowledge to gain an understanding of the processes that shape the phenomenon studied. In this case, the temporal dimension (1997–2016) forms the frame for observing the process and long-term significance of imaginations.<sup>1</sup>

## The Hospitality of Badolato

The story of this chapter begins in December 1997 on the old ship Ararat carrying 836 passengers from Turkey to Italy. Most passengers were from the Kurdish regions of Turkey and sought asylum in Europe. Many had supported the Kurdish separatist army PKK or were otherwise politically active. However, many were simply on a journey to start new lives in better conditions. Among the passengers were 27-year-old Karzan, 22-year-old Sherim and Nazin, a 23-year-old mother who had left Turkey with her brother and 3-year-old son. Nazin was heading to Germany, where her husband already lived. Communicating across distances was very different in 1997 than in the 21st century. Very few people had their own mobile phones, and Internet access was rarely available free of charge. While travelling, migrants and refugees contacted relatives and friends by making calls through landline pay phones and writing letters to *poste restante*. Through networks of friends and relatives, many had some kind of image of what life in Europe might entail, how they could prepare for it and what kind of jobs might be available, for instance, in Germany.

On Christmas night, 25 December 1997, the Ararat deviated from its route and shipwrecked on the coast of Calabria. The passengers all survived and soon received help from the Coast Guard and the local people. Local volunteers collected dry clothes, blankets and food for the survivors. Soon after the relief operations, Gerardo Mannello, the mayor of Badolato, decided to invite the passengers of the Ararat to stay permanently in the village. He wanted to help the refugees and migrants and, at the same time, use the opportunity to revitalize Badolato, a small municipality in Calabria. Badolato had suffered from emigration for years. Many of its medieval stone houses on the hillside looking down at the Mediterranean were deteriorating. The more lively and modern centre, Sea-Badolato, was 10 kilometres away on the coast. The region suffered from high unemployment and poverty and had weak prospects for future growth. In addition, Calabria had a reputation as the stomping grounds for organized crime.

In 1954, the population of the village was 7,000, but by 1998, it had fallen to only 600. Most of the remaining inhabitants were elderly people. The largest wave of emigration took place in 1960s as people moved away, especially to Switzerland. In the 1970s, more than 500,000 Italians lived in Switzerland working in the construction, textiles and machine industries. There, Italians suffered from ethnic discrimination, poor housing conditions and restrictions on residence permits and family unification (Efionayi, Niederberger, & Wanner, 2005). Consequently, many in Badolato had experiences of migration and marginalization in their own family histories. This experience appeared to be relevant to how the locals related to the arriving migrants and refugees.

In 1997, the centre square of Badolato had three cafes, two restaurants and a small grocery store, which flourished mostly in the summertime as tourists and relatives from northern Italy visited. As the village of 600 was suddenly populated with 300 new inhabitants, it was evident that the change would affect the everyday life of the village in many ways. A local cultural association, Pro Badolato, was established to organize cultural events where locals and newcomers could interact and get to know each other in order to avoid conflicts. For example, migrants and locals celebrated the Kurdish New Year, Newroz, in March 1998. The mayor, who represented the Communist party, created a plan to renovate 20 old, deteriorating houses for the arriving asylum seekers. The plan included establishing a new restaurant and a convenience store and creating jobs for social workers and interpreters. Eventually, Badolato was granted 686,000 Euros in federal funding to realize this plan. Renovations provided work for local businesses, which were also granted subsidies for employing asylum seekers. In February

1998, a Kurdish restaurant named after the shipwrecked boat Ararat was opened. Karzan and Nazin found work at the restaurant, while Sherim started to work in a tourist shop, selling local goods and souvenirs, close to the town square. All these developments happened within several months of the shipwreck.

The story of Badolato was unusual enough to attract publicity, and reporters from throughout Italy and Europe came to the village to cover the story. The publicity was predominantly positive, which also affected the overall attitude towards the project in the town. The people of Calabria were accustomed to reading headlines associating the region with poverty, crime and social problems, but this time, the region was presented as an exemplar of hospitality and global responsibility. Positive media coverage was so unusual that it became news itself in the local press (*Gazzetta del Sud*, 29 March 1998). In 1998–2001, Badolato received unprecedented attention in the media, and the media coverage became a powerful site of geographic imagination. The news stories from 1998 to 1999 gave a detailed description of Mannello's plans to offer housing to the refugees and to invite them to stay in the village. The Badolato method received attention in a wide range of media, including local, national and international press, from high-prestige national newspapers to women's magazines and the popular press to local political left-wing newspapers. Within this variety of publications, the general tone of the coverage was surprisingly harmonious, indicating a shared sense of enthusiasm for the project. The news stories framed Badolato as a place that could 'set an example' (*Neues Deutschland* 24/25 1998) and offered 'a different model of integration' (*Le Courrier*). These stories carried a sense of hope and optimism, singling out Badolato as an exceptional town with an innovative vision for the future and a true ethic of hospitality. The Badolato method became a successful political concept and was referred to in several stories. Mayor Mannello became the central figure in the press coverage, and the 'miracle of Badolato' was attributed to him as his personal idea. The media attention made Mannello a public name, and he received several awards and honours.

The arrival of refugees and migrants shaped Badolato in many ways. First, the new inhabitants and their languages and traditions brought multiculturalism into the village. Its once-silent streets became lively, filled with children and families. In the cafes surrounding the square, new customers, mostly men who had arrived in the Ararat, smoked and talked politics. The offices of Pro Badolato, which handled refugee issues, were constantly crowded with people requesting documents and exchanging news with Daniela, a staff member with the refugee organization CIR (The Italian Refugee Council). The new interest in the town was evident in the streets, as well as the media, as reporters and politicians visited the village. These visitors included then-Interior Minister Giorgio Napolitano, later the president of Italy, who gave his support to the project. His visit was carefully documented by the local press. The visits by politicians and reporters expanded the boundaries of the locality, connecting Badolato to the larger issues of refugee politics in Europe. The new people in the village and the interest in them created a sense of a place open to the world and open to change. This sense of a place was born out of the synergy between the symbolic level of media publicity and the material level of everyday life. Mayor Mannello acknowledged that the media publicity was extremely valuable for him in realizing politics of hospitality (interview 28.07.2011). The support of positive media coverage enabled him to follow through with initiatives that would have otherwise been difficult to achieve. The news media emphasized Mannello's vision and the actions of the village rather than the conditions and struggles of the refugees and migrants in the deteriorating situation in the Mediterranean area.

What did this politics of hospitality mean to the refugees and migrants themselves? Evidently, none of the passengers of the Ararat expected the reception they received in Badolato. They were not prepared to be part of 'the miracle' Badolato. Initially, the general atmosphere was full of excitement and optimism. The everyday life of people working in restaurants and shops was devoid of idleness and the frustration of waiting. Sherim and Karzan interacted with locals and tourists and learned the Italian language through these interactions. At the same time, migrants' networks and contacts to Germany and elsewhere in Europe remained important and gave rhythm to their lives. Through phone calls, letters and news, they learned about others' situations and possibilities elsewhere. Nazin, who worked in the Ararat restaurant, talked with her husband on the phone every day. Politically active members of Kurdish associations were in touch with others in different parts of Europe, particularly Belgium and Germany. They took part in television debates about refugees and the Kurdish situation in Italy.

However, the migrants who did not have jobs remained caught in 'the time of suspension and wait' (Capparelli, Lagozzo, & Vitale, 2006: 105). In the living quarters at the local schools, satellite television with Med TV provided leisure entertainment with Kurdish programming. The men who lived at the school premises spent most of their days watching television, playing cards and talking with others in the same situation. Badolato did not offer a particular solution to their situation. Instead, waiting for their asylum decision and documents that would enable them to continue their journey to other European countries seemed to provide the solution. In practice, almost all of the passengers of the Ararat were granted asylum in Italy, although the procedure took several months. The bureaucracy and slow process of the documents became the daily topic of conversation in cafes and streets (see also Capparelli et al., 2006). More importantly, the inability of Mannello's plan to provide employment to all refugees became the inherent problem and defect in the politics of hospitality. It did not change the incapacity of the narrow regional economic structure to provide long-lasting employment for its new population. Even if the refugees and migrants were welcome in the village, their future prospects there seemed unrealistic. Even most of those who secured jobs in Badolato left the village to find new possibilities in northern Europe. Their existing networks with friends and family members seemed more significant than the possibility of staying and working in tiny Badolato. By the end of 2000, most migrants who had arrived on the Ararat had moved on to northern Italy or northern Europe as the young people of Badolato had done for years before them.

## Value of Hospitality

To understand the relevance of the politics of hospitality, it is useful to look at it as part of a longer development. As I returned once again to Badolato in 2011, the refugee situation in Europe had become more difficult since the Arab spring of 2011, with uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya forcing new waves of refugees and migrants from North Africa to Europe. These developments had little impact in Badolato, which seemed to be declining rather than flourishing. One of the three cafes and the tourist shop had closed. The Kurdish restaurant had changed ownership, and it had been turned into a local Calabrian restaurant. Nazin had moved to Germany with her husband, while Karzan and Sherim had moved to northern Italy. The mayor of Badolato had also changed. The new mayor, Nicola Parretta, lived in Rome and visited the village on weekends. The village still had refugees, organized by a central administration in Rome. Groups of 15 people who had been granted refugee status were sent to Badolato for three-month integration periods. During that time, they were supposed to learn Italian and find work.

The Afghan refugees then living in Badolato did not perceive the village as especially hospitable. Indeed, they felt that the locals were not interested in communicating with refugees or even offering them lifts from the village to the coast (interviews 2–3 August 2011). The local cafe owner recognized the same change in climate. He longed for the interaction and events of late 1990s and described how the village was slowly withering (interview 6 August 2011). This was clear in the evenings as locals and refugees gathered in separate groups in the square.

However, the politics of hospitality was still relevant in the brand of the town. The image of Badolato as an exceptionally hospitable village has found its way into the village's tourist brochures, website and advertising. Real estate agents used the story of the hospitable town to sell and rent houses to foreign tourists. The municipality also promoted several initiatives that utilized its reputation for hospitality. In 1998, a group of local politicians suggested that Badolato receive the Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>2</sup> In 2006, Badolato and the refugee organization CIR applied for the World Habitat prize for a project aimed at improving social housing with innovative solutions. Badolato unsuccessfully applied to be included in UNESCO's World Heritage list. Through such initiatives, Badolato strove to redefine its identity and move away from the reputation as hopeless and marginalized to the image of a unique, globally valuable place (Valaskivi, 2016). The event that drew the most attention nationally was the making of a film based on the story of Badolato by German director Wim Wenders. The short film *Il Volo*, released in 2010, was partly funded by the municipality of Badolato.

In the imagination of the politicians of Badolato, hospitality became a resource, through which the locals strove to redefine their value and assume a position as agents of change, not victims of it. Various materials produced for tourists emphasized hospitality. A local real estate agent explained that a news story in the Swedish newspaper

Dagens industri helped him close a deal with a Swedish family in the summer of 2011 (interview 29 May 2011). German, Swiss and Danish tourists have also bought houses in the village, and an entire Danish holiday village has been built close to Badolato. The holiday village illustrates the unequal power geometry of globalization (Massey, 1994: 149; Sheller, 2004) that placed people in different social and economic positions. Even if the Danish tourists remain separate from locals, the holiday village itself has benefitted some refugees. A man who arrived in Badolato as an asylum seeker from Ethiopia has found a permanent job as a gardener in the holiday village. When we met in August 2011, he lived with his brother in Badolato and was waiting for his wife to arrive in Italy (interview 5 August 2011).

The refugee issue remains significant currency in local politics. The new mayor Parretta strove to make impacts on the Mediterranean situation by cooperating with other mayors in the region (Riace and Lampedusa). In a joint declaration, the mayors of Badolato, Riace and Lampedusa called for Northern Europe to display solidarity in solving the refugee situation in the Mediterranean region (interview 5 August 2011). The relevance of politics of hospitality becomes clear when comparing Badolato to the other municipalities in the area. For example, in Sant'Anna, a village 100 kilometres from Badolato, asylum seekers are hosted in old warehouses, and the relationships between locals and asylum seekers are tense (Donadio, 2010). The reception centre has been investigated for financial unclarity concerning the daily allowances for asylum seekers. According to investigations by humanitarian organizations, the centre has failed to pay allowances of more than 2 million euros (Consentino & Mezzaroma, 2014; UNHCR, 2016). Compared to this, the appropriated politics of hospitality in Badolato, even if failed, illustrates the incentive to create humane processes of integration. This direction in politics profoundly affected the self-understanding and identity of the town. The locals viewed themselves as heroes and humanitarians in the process – not as victims of the undesired change. This position is relevant to how refugee issues are solved at a local level and shows the power of geographic imagination to shape things on a concrete level.

What was the relevance of politics of hospitality in the lives of Sherim and Karzan? Both moved to northern Italy, close to Milan in the early 2000s. Their decision to stay in Italy was influenced by the fact that they had already learned Italian in Badolato and could find work and interact with locals. Neither had strong relations or networks in other parts of Europe. They are now self-employed, working in their own restaurant. Although they have left Badolato, they still keep in touch with the mayor and Daniela, who worked for the refugee organization CIR. However, the media environment has changed drastically during these years and impacted their possibilities to communicate and maintain social relationships. When they first arrived in Badolato in the late 1990s, communication took place primarily through landline phones and letters. During the 2000s, media technology provided new means of communication through the Internet and mobile phones illustrating the virtual transnationalism of people living in diaspora (Sheller, 2004; Bailey et al., 2007; Eide & Nikunen, 2011). The former mayor Mannello and Daniela with CIR keep in touch with dozens of refugees through Facebook. Sherim and Karzan also use Facebook to keep in touch with the transnational network they developed during their years of refuge. Their friends include those with whom they travelled to Badolato who have now gone separate ways, relatives from home and new friends they made since settling down in Italy. Facebook offers ways to recreate personal identity by sharing everyday life with others and by showing how life goes on. It also offers possibilities to create past narratives and momentarily gather together around shared memories. Every 25 December, Daniela posts a picture from Ararat on her Facebook page, remembering the event that shaped the lives of both the passengers of Ararat and the people of Badolato. Both people living in Badolato and the refugees who arrived in Badolato come together to the page and write comments under the picture. Most comments testify to the unique, life-changing nature of the event and express gratitude to the municipality of Badolato, as Sherim did in 2014: 'thank you for taking us in your hearts'.

## The 2015 Refugee Crisis

How should we understand the relevance of the case of Badolato to the European refugee crisis in 2015? Although the scale of the refugees arriving in Europe was very different in 2015 than in the 1990s, movements of hospitality as in Badolato can be seen in different parts of Europe. The response to the newly arrived refugees and

migrants in many European cities and towns was initially welcoming. Examples of campaigns to provide water, blankets and food to refugees in parks and railway stations in European cities expressed a sense of solidarity for the plight of refugees arriving from Syria and the Middle East. The local residents on the island of Lesbos and in Lampedusa have received awards for their exceptional humanitarian assistance rescuing and accommodating refugees and migrants arriving by sea (IFRC, 2015; United Nations, 2016). In Greece, the lack of proper management of asylum seekers and migrants has given rise to new forms of anarchist movements to help people in need (Strickland, 2016). From these sentiments of charity and hospitality, several new Europeanwide movements, which also operate on social media, such as Refugees Welcome and Refugees Hospitality Club, have been born.

However, after the initial wave of hospitality, sentiments of fear and chaos started to emerge. In the public sphere, refugees were connected with terrorism, especially after the Paris attacks in October 2015, and with sexual violence after the allegedly organized sexual harassment of women in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015. These events and their media publicity, along with the growing anti-immigrant movement in European politics, have influenced public opinion and fuelled growing opposition towards refugees (Bachman, 2016). Media coverage has provided cartographic imaginations of refugee crisis in forms of maps, charts and numbers, depicting the inhumanized figures that undermined European borders. The space for the politics of hospitality has become increasingly narrow. The so-called refugee crisis has become a central issue in the EU and seems to threaten core EU values and principles, including the Schengen Agreement, Dublin Treaty and free movement of people. Instead of generating new alternatives to refugee politics, the main focus was managing the masses through increased surveillance and closed borders. On the macro level of European politics, the geographic imagination appears to have reinforced closed nationalism through intensified border control.

Although much of the public focus has been on hostilities and conflict, on the local level, several examples of politics of hospitality can be found. As new reception centres were rapidly established across Europe, many small towns hosted refugees for the first time. In Finland, for instance, the annual number of asylum seekers multiplied from around 6,000 to 32,000 (Migri, 2016). In Kauhava, a small town of 16,000 inhabitants, a reception centre for 300 asylum seekers was established in September 2015 on the premises of a former air force base. The centre at first faced fierce resistance among the locals. The arriving asylum seekers were considered threats to the security of the locals, especially the local girls, who were seen as potential targets of sexual violence. However, after initial resistance, the centre slowly became accepted as part of everyday life in Kauhava.

The Red Cross reception centre was led by a former air force officer, Ilkka Peura, who lived permanently in the area. His vision reflected that of Mannello in Badolato: Peura sought to integrate the asylum seekers into the local community and create jobs through local businesses. His aim was to provide activities and means to improve the living conditions as much as possible for the asylum seekers who had to wait up to eight months for their application decisions. These ideas were exceptional and distinct among reception centres and offered an alternative imagination of how integration processes could be realized. Soon, the Kauhava reception centre had its own laundry, a small weaving factory and a tailor shop. To manage salaries, the centre founded a cooperative to organize employment. The reception centre also had its own ten-member parliament elected through free elections. In June 2016, dozens of asylum seekers were working either in the centre or outside in local businesses and small industries. In many ways, the initiatives to offer jobs to asylum seekers while profiting local businesses in Kauhava were similar to the initiatives in Badolato. The aims were to increase the integration of asylum seekers and to revitalize local business. Instead of treating the asylum seekers as passive victims or masses of travellers passing through, Kauhava provided several activities and employment in local businesses for asylum seekers.

Like Badolato, Kauhava was strongly defined by media publicity. Initially, Kauhava inspired headlines representing local fears and racist commentaries, but a few months after establishing the reception centre, the town was presented as an example of a place that treats asylum seekers well and offers possibilities for the future. Here, the mainstream media constructed the image of a place open to change and capable of responding to the challenges of a global crisis. However, the tone was different on social media. Notably, in the case of Badolato in 1997, publicity was created primarily through mainstream media and local print media, whereas the 2015 refugee crisis was discussed and debated largely on social media. Although social media provides access to multiple perspectives and voices from the margins, it is also characterized by affective, conflictual and propagandist tones.



In the case of Kauhava, several online sites, including blogs, tabloids and discussion forums, circulated false rumours of terrorists or bombs on the premises of the reception centre and sexual relations between locals and asylum seekers (Metropoli 18 November 2015; MV 15.5. 2016; Suomi24<sup>3</sup>). Such rumours and false information drew on existing prejudices and previous stories to circulate the sentiment of fear. This kind of emotional energy fuels social media and its affective economy (Ahmed, 2004). However, actual encounters with asylum seekers at the local grocery stores and workplaces created necessary counternarratives to the imaginations and circulating narratives of threat. The geographical imagination of Kauhava was formed at the intersection of contradictory images from mainstream media, social media and the material practices of the everyday. It also became part of the larger narrative of the European refugee crisis as local experiences were interpreted and reflected through European developments.

The crucial question in politics of hospitality is how it positions migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Are they granted agency and political subjectivity? Through the politics of hospitality, do they become invisible and separate from the rest of the community, or are they understood as part of the community, interacting with others? In the case of Badolato, the ideal of hospitality was connected to a shared sense of humanity. However, in practice, it was disconnected from the everyday structures of local economic life; so it could not provide sustainable solutions for the newcomers. It momentarily opened the door of community to the refugees, but in time the divide and sense of difference between the locals and the refugees grew. However, the refugees and migrants who entered Europe through Badolato achieved a fair start in Europe, unlike so many of the asylum seekers who have entered Europe after them. As the case study shows, such experience is relevant to the sense of belonging and citizenship in the long run. The hospitality in Badolato was constructed as the result of locals' exceptional humanitarianism, so they became heroes of the story. The refugees and migrants were cast into the role of grateful, apolitical victims, which is a persistent problem in humanitarian discourse and universal, unconditional hospitality (Ticktin, 2010). In the case of Kauhava, the politics of hospitality was formed in the continuous cross-draft of contradictory ideas and images of what Kauhava should be and how asylum seekers might or might not be part of that future. In this context, the reception centre created space for alternative imaginations of the politics of hospitality by challenging the idea of asylum seekers as passive victims and locals as victims of change. Hospitality was contextual and pragmatic, making use of local businesses. It was formed through the local cultural tapestry without the accent of the cosmopolitan idea of shared humanity. New practices emerged from this politics of hospitality, but it faced continuous resistance and criticism within local social media. Although the asylum seekers were assumed to be active agents, their agency was constantly challenged, suspected and rendered potentially dangerous in social media debates.

## Mediated Geographic Imagination

Geographic imagination refers to the capacity to understand the role of a place in social processes, as well as how this role is constructed. The concept refers to the forms and quality of knowledge produced by these imaginations and the ways in which we can form an understanding of the world, power relations, social structures and their material consequences. In the context of the 2015 European refugee crisis, we can make a distinction between macro- and micro-level imaginations. On the macro level of political decision making and media imaginations, Europe appeared to be under attack by an influx of migrants and refugees. The solution imagined was a move away from an open, cosmopolitan Europe towards re-establishment of borders and rise of nationalism. On the micro level of local everyday life, however, there were several examples where ordinary people furthered the imagination of an open, hospitable Europe, welcoming and helping migrants and refugees and creating new forms of help and hospitality while faced with increasing imaginations of fear and hatred.

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate that the media constitute a significant dimension of geographic imagination and the politics of hospitality. The cases point out how media operate on different levels, defining, connecting and providing space for debates in which these imaginations are again circulated and redefined. The ways in which media shape our understanding of the world have consequences for practices and places. The media might enhance a sense of cosmopolitanism, but they can also make the world seem dangerous through representations of fear and chaos. The role of media has changed throughout the years, and clearly it has become

more immersive, embodied and mobile. Media travel now along with refugees and migrants all the time and provide new means to communicate across distances as well as gain information. However, the latest media technology does not always guarantee that the imaginations of better future are realistic and realizable. Mediated imaginations of cosmopolitan place do not necessarily help such imaginations to be realized.

Possibilities to imagine alternatives, rooted in the local cultures, are an essential part of the concept of geographic imagination. Such imagination is also necessary for refugees and migrants to assume agency. As the case studies of this chapter have shown, assuming agency through the politics of hospitality is far from easy. Even if the politics of hospitality consists of benevolent efforts to help, it might undermine the capacity of refugees and migrants to define their own positions and imagine alternative futures from their own perspectives. This reminds us how important spaces of voice, participation and connection are.

Geographic imaginations that are built on universal and technocratic sources of knowledge lack a contextualized understanding of the conditions and situations at stake. As such, they fail to create long-lasting alternatives, sustainable solutions and social change. Therefore, it is necessary that the imagination created through and with media not paint unrealistic utopias or dystopias but focus on the concrete, manifold perspectives rooted in everyday life, building on interaction and solidarity based not on obligation but on a shared understanding of the world in which we live.

## References

- Ahmed, S. (2004). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Bachman, B. (2016). *Diminishing Solidarity. The migration Policy*. [Online]. Accessed 12.9. 2016. Available from: [www.migrationpolicy.org/article/diminishing-solidarity-polish-attitudes-toward-european-migration-and-refugee-crisis](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/diminishing-solidarity-polish-attitudes-toward-european-migration-and-refugee-crisis).
- Bailey, O., Georgiou, M., & Harindranath, R. (Eds.). (2007). *Transnational Lives and the Media: Re-imagining Diaspora*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Borden, S. (2015). A virtue ethics critique of Silverstone's media hospitality. *Journal of Media Ethics*, 30(3): 168–185.
- Capparelli, A., Lagozzo, M. C., & Vitale, S. (2006). I Kurdi in Calabria: A Badolato comune catanzarese. In *Studi e Ricerche di Geografia XXIX Unica 2006*. Università della Calabria. Reggio di Calabria.
- Castree, N. (2004). Differential geographies: place, indigenous rights and 'local' resources. *Political Geography*, 23(2004): 133–167.
- Couldry, N. (2012). *Media, Society, World. Social Theory and Digital Media Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Consentino, R. & Mezzaroma, A. (2014) Milioni sulle pelle dei rifugiati. *Il Repubblica* 6.5. 2014
- Cuttitta, P. (2014). *The Mediterranean Grenzsäum: Migration Controls and Borders in the Strait of Sicily*. [Online]. [Accessed 20 August 2016]. Available from: [www.altrodiritto.unifi.it/frontier/storia/grenzsäum.htm](http://www.altrodiritto.unifi.it/frontier/storia/grenzsäum.htm).
- De Genova, N. (2002). Migrant illegality and deportability in everyday life. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 31: 419–437.

- Derrida, J. (2000). *Of Hospitality*. Anne Dofourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to respond. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Derrida, J. (2001). *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Donadio, R. (2010). Race riots grip an Italian town, and Mafia is suspected. *New York Times*. [Online]. 10 January. [Accessed 28 March 2012]. Available from: [www.nytimes.com/2010/01/11/world/europe/11italy.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/11/world/europe/11italy.html?_r=0).
- Efionayi, J., Niederberger, M., & Wanner, P. (2005) *Switzerland Faces Common European Challenges*. Migration Policy Institute. [Accessed 18.09. 2015]. Available online: [www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?ID=284](http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?ID=284).
- Eide, E., & Nikunen, K. (Eds.) (2011). *Media in Motion: Cultural Complexity and Migration in the Nordic Region*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Ellapen, J. A. (2007). The cinematic township: cinematic representations of the 'township space' and who can claim the rights to representation in post-apartheid South African cinema. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 19(1): 113–137.
- Friese, H. (2011). Limits of hospitality: Undocumented migration and the local arena. The case of Lampedusa. In M. Bauman & K. Rosenow (Eds.), *Crossings and Controlling Borders. Immigration Policies and Their Impact on Migrants Journeys* (pp. 249–272). Opladen: Budrich Unipress.
- Friese, H. (2012). Border economies: Lampedusa and the nascent migration industry. *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures*, 6(2): 66–84.
- Georgiou, M. (2013) *Media and the City: Cosmopolitanism and Difference*. Polity Global Media and Communication Series. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gillespie, M. (2000). Transnational communications and diaspora communities. In S. Cottle, (Ed.), *Ethnic minorities and the media: Changing cultural boundaries* (pp. 164-178). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Gillespie, M., Ampofo, L., Cheesman, M., Faith, B., Iliadou, E., Issa, A., ... Sklrparis, D. (2016). *Mapping Refugee Media Journeys: Smartphones and Social Media Networks*. [Online]. Accessed 13.10. 2016.
- Gold, S. (1994). Locating the message: Place promotion as image communication. In S. Gold & J. Ward (Eds.), *Place Promotion: The Use of Publicity and Marketing to Sell Towns and Regions* (pp. 19–37). Chichester: Wiley.
- Hanna, S. (1996). Is it Roslyn or is it Cicely? Representation and the ambiguity of place. *Urban Geography*, 17: 633–649.
- Hannerz, U. (2002). Among the foreign correspondents: Reflections on anthropological styles and audiences. *Ethnos*, 67(1): 57–74.
- Harcup, T., & O'Neill, D. (2001). What is news? Galtung and Ruge revisited. *Journalism Studies*, 2(2): 261–280.

- Harvey, D. (1989). *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Harvey, D. (2009) [1973]. *Social Justice and the City*, rev. edn. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Horsti, K. (2012). Humanitarian discourse legitimating migration control: FRONTEX public communication. In M. Messier, R. Wodak, & R. Schroeder, (Eds.), *Migrations: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (pp. 297–308). Vienna: Springer Science & Business Media.
- IFRC (2015). Lampedusa Honoured for Its Role in Maintaining the Dignity of Migrants Fleeing Violence. [Online]. [Accessed 12.9. 2016]. Available from: [www.ifrc.org/en/news-and-media/news-stories/europe-central-asia/italy/Lampedusa-honoured-for-role-in-migrant-safety-68025/](http://www.ifrc.org/en/news-and-media/news-stories/europe-central-asia/italy/Lampedusa-honoured-for-role-in-migrant-safety-68025/).
- Kant, I. (1795/2003). *Perpetual Peace. A Philosophical Sketch*. Indianapolis: Hackett publishing.
- Latonero, M. (2016). For Refugees, A Digital Path to Europe. *Responsible Dataforum* 8.2. 2016. [Accessed 28.12. 2016]. Available at: <https://responsibledata.io/for-refugees-a-digital-passage-to-europe/>.
- Leurs, K. (2015) *Digital Passages. Migrant Youth 2.0. Diaspora, Gender & Youth Cultural Intersections*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press
- Levinas, E. (1981). *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence*. The Hague: Nijhoff.
- Madianou, M. (2005). Contested communicative spaces: Rethinking identities, boundaries and the role of the media among Turkish speakers in Greece. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31(3): 521–541.
- Marcus, G. (1986). Contemporary problems of ethnography in the modern world system. In J. Clifford & G. Marcus (Eds.), *Writing Culture* (pp. 165–193). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Massey, D. (1994). *Space, Place and Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Menz, G. (2008). *The Political Economy of Managed Migration: Nonstate Actors, Europeanization, and the Politics of Designing Migration Policies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Migri (2016). [Online]. [Accessed 20 June 2016]. Available from: [www.migri.fi/tietoa\\_virastosta/tilastot/turvapaikka-ja\\_pakolaistilastot](http://www.migri.fi/tietoa_virastosta/tilastot/turvapaikka-ja_pakolaistilastot).
- Mills, C. W. (1959). *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Musaro, P. (2017) *Mare Nostrum: the visual politics of a military-humanitarian operation in the Mediterranean Sea*. *Media, Culture & Society* 39(1):11-28.
- Nikunen, K. (1999). Euroopan rajoille menehtyy satoja pakolaisia vuosittain. *Helsingin Sanomat* 19.1. 1999.
- Nikunen, K. (2015). Hopes of hospitality. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 19(2): 161–176.
- Sheller, M. (2004). Demobilizing and remobilizing the Caribbean. In M. Sheller & J. Urry(Eds.), *Tourism Mobilities: Places to Play, Places in Play* (pp. 13–21). London & New York: Routledge.

- Silverstone, R. (2007). *Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Smets, K. (2016). Ethnic media, and the nation state: Kurdish Broadcasting in Turkey and Europe and mediated nationhood. *Media, Culture & Society*, 38(5): 738–754.
- Smith, H. (2016). Refugee crisis: How Greeks opened their hearts to strangers. *The Guardian*. [Online]. 13 March 2016 [Accessed 12.9.2016]. Available from: [www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/12/refugee-crisis-greeks-strangers-migrants](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/12/refugee-crisis-greeks-strangers-migrants).
- Strickland, P. (2016). Greek anarchists organise for refugees as 'state fails'. *Al-Jazeera*. [Online]. 16 January 2016. [Accessed 14.6.2016]. Available from: [www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/01/greek-anarchists-organise-refugees-state-fails-160117032251199.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/01/greek-anarchists-organise-refugees-state-fails-160117032251199.html).
- Ticktin, M. (2010). From redundancy to recognition: Transnational humanitarianism and the production of non-moderns. In E. Bornstein & P. Redfield (Eds.), *Forces of Compassion: Humanitarianism between Ethics and Politics* (pp. 175–219). Santa Fe: SAR Press.
- UNHCR (2016). [Online]. Available from: [www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html](http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html).
- United Against Racism. (2016). [Online]. Available from: [www.unitedagainstracism.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Listofdeaths22394June15.pdf](http://www.unitedagainstracism.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Listofdeaths22394June15.pdf).
- United Nations (2016). Greek Volunteers Awarded Top UN Humanitarian Honour. [Online]. Available from: <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/greek-volunteers-awarded-top-un-humanitarian-honour-efforts-migrants-and-refugees>.
- Valaskivi, K. (2016). *Cool Nations: Media and the Social Imaginary of the Branded Country*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Walsh, (2013). Re-mapping the border: geospatial technologies and border activism. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 31: 969–987.

---

<sup>1</sup> I visited Badolato four times between 1998 and 2011. I made the first visits as a journalist covering the story of Badolato and the last visit as a researcher. During my visits, I collected materials through interviews, observation and various statistical, historical and archive materials. These research materials include journalistic interviews that are treated as background information. As well, Mayor Gerardo Mannello provided archive materials, including 106 news stories, 23 images, 67 letters and cards and 37 invitations and honors to the mayor from 1997 to 2003 (see also Nikunen, 2015). Since my last visit, I have kept in contact with the interviewed locals and refugees through email. The names of the interviewed refugees and asylum seekers have been changed to protect their anonymity, but the real names of politicians and officials are used. In addition to the materials from Badolato, the research materials include materials from Kauhava, Finland: interviews, observation, media coverage and statistical and historical documents gathered from June to August 2016.

<sup>2</sup> The Mediterranean region sought the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015, when the people of the Island of Lesbos who welcomed more than 30,000 refugees were nominated.

<sup>3</sup> <http://keskustelu.suomi24.fi/paikkakunnat/etela-pohjanmaa/kauhava> Accessed 12.9.2016.