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 challenge and go beyond the model of hospitality.

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

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

What appears to be the absolute antipode of any form of violence and violent act is the phenomenon of hospitality. It should not, therefore, 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

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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 non-violent, benevolent, and altruistic way of engaging with otherness. Translation, by this logic, does the same. But what if translation is not so generous and open as it seems? And what if the model of hospitality merely obscures the presuppositions of violence inherent in translation?

In his *Vocabulary of Indo-European Institutions,* discussing the term "hospitality", the French linguist Émile Benveniste presents a classical historical analysis of the terms *hostis* and *hosti-pes*, which has proven to be an invaluable material for philosophical accounts of hospitality. Benveniste's analysis reveals the common origin of these two terms, which only later came to be opposed: *hostis* and *hospes*. Before acquiring its standard meaning of "enemy", *hostis* originally denotated a guest – specifically, a good, acceptable, and welcome stranger. The term *hosti-pet* (in which the lexical form "pot" indicates "master", "chief of some unit, whether house, clan, or 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, developed its meaning of "enemy" only in Latin. As Benveniste argues, the initial division in ancient vocabulary was not between "stranger" and "enemy", but rather between *peregrinus* and *hostis* - two types of being 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].

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

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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*, *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 community that will embody 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 these political and institutional changes in the character of political community, i.e. the establishment of the boundary between "inside" and "outside", *hostis* came to signify an "enemy", or a "hostile stranger". Or better to say, when this boundary became the dividing line that separates two nations, two states, two communities, *hostis* exclusively assumed one form of being 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 and 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). Shortly, there is an immanent duality in the figures of hostis/hospes.

Benveniste's linguistic analysis shows an intrinsic ambiguity in the terms associated with hospitality. What does this ambiguity entail? It lies in the

[2] Ivi, p. 68.

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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, conditioned. But who then sets the rules and conditions of hospitality? It can be only the host. 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 get back to the already mentioned, primitive meaning of *hosti-pet*, i.e., master, "master of a guest". Those who open the door of their home to a stranger do not commit only an act of generosity but also the act of power. This power lies in the host's capacity to draw and control the boundaries that constitute their relationship with a guest.

But how this analysis of hospitality works 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 (the idea that every act of interpretative comprehension is itself a form of translation). This distinction roughly aligns with Roman Jakobson's division between interlinguistic and intralinguistic translation (or external and internal translation, as Ricouer terms them). However, already this point should be put under a critical scrutiny. What are the philosophical but also political assumptions underlying Ricoeurian separation between internal and external translation, and his subordination of the practice of translation to either communication or interpretation? In this framework, translation appears insufficiently autonomous, as it is conceptualized primarily in service to other (albeit related) activities: communication on an international inter-linguistic level, or interpretation within the same linguistic community. This is not to suggest that translation operates in isolation from both communication and

[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 Ricoeur finds is to substitute this dichotomy with another one: fidelity/betrayal. Translational strategy in Ricoeur is therefore possible only as "balancing" between two poles: being faithful to one's own language and betraying its identity through innovations, choosing in this way the middle way between two risks, the risk of sacralization of the mother tongue (identitarian temptation) and the risk of abandonment of the own language. On such 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.

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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, the fact of linguistic diversity, in Ricoeur's view, 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 facts. Diversity of languages is therefore envisaged as something that precedes and grounds translation.

By virtue of this 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 well-defined, distinct and mutually bordered space. In this view, translation can only appear as either communication or interpretation. For the same reason, envisaging translation as a secondary activity of mediation between pre-constituted linguistic spaces-identities produces a model of hospitality supposed to balance between identity and difference, home and foreigner.

> Linguistic hospitality, then, where the pleasure of dwelling in the other's language is balanced by the pleasure of receiving the foreign word at home, in one's own welcoming house.[6]

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

[5] P. Ricoeur, "Translation as challenge and source of happiness", in Id., *On Translation*, cit., p. 10.
[6] P. Ricoeur, "A 'passage': translating the untranslatable", in Id., *On Translation*, cit., p. 33.

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– a strictly defined space of belonging that seems incompatible with the fluid and dynamic nature of languages? And 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 guest and host is subverted *as* binary relation by the inherently foreignizing character of language itself? The division between host and guest, dwelling and welcoming, mirrors actually the division between internal and external that, 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[7]: 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 so, the French philosopher reaffirms Benveniste's conclusions: linguistic hospitality is fundamentally tied to the figure of a master, to the sovereignty of homeland. In other words, the model of hospitality functions only if there is a border that divides the "inside" from the "outside" of political community. The problem with this division lies not so much in the very existence of border (and 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 a foreigner but also an outsider. From the host's perspective, the space of exteriority becomes a space of non-belonging. And the reciprocity between host and guest emerges from the shared potential to be a foreigner: both figures can be alien, but they cannot be foreigners equally at the same place. The foreigner, the guest has its homeplace, but elsewhere, in a space where they themselves hold mastery and control. Put differently, the home where we host others is foreign only to some external figure, but not to ourselves. The relationship of an abstract reciprocity reveals a deeper, non-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"[8], 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

[7] P. Ricoeur, "Translation as challenge and source of happiness" in Id., *On Translation*, cit., p. 4.
[8] Ivi, p. 9.

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other words, languages are not foreign *in* and *through* themselves, but only when confronted with something that comes from the outside, as the foreign among other foreigners. The tongues are perceived or thought of as foreign, but still they are not constituted as foreign because they are governed by the idea of a unique and indivisible "home". This kind of extrinsic 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 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*.[9]

Linguistic hospitality is here 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 at 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 continuous space into bordered, sovereign territory. In other words, it depends on a certain violence. This violence seems ignored in the framework of hermeneutics of hospitality, and is rather sublimated as a submission to necessary linguistic constraints. The translator, while serving both masters, does not question the underlying structure of masterhood. Translator is just invited to act ethically through dialogue and balancing. This raises an important question: can translation be understood beyond the ethics of hospitality?[10]

In sum, the Ricoeurian model of hospitality presupposes the foreign as something or someone originary dwelling outside the home, which is conceived as a space of exclusive self-identity. While linguistic hospitality avoids linguistic

[9] Ivi, p.10.

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

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ethnocentrism by fostering relational and dialogical ethics toward other languages and cultures, it fails to challenge the construction of boundaries between internal and external, "own" and "foreign.". However, the space of homeland is never truly challenged and remains configured as one and indivisible space. 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 abolition of differences between internal and external, or between "own" and "alien", but rather for the problematization of these differences. Such borders are not absolute but historical and 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 a balancing and finding a "middle way" between two "masters". The figure of master is "pacified" by the contraposition with another master. In some sense all alternatives in Ricouer remain paralyzing since they are based upon the static separation of "inside" and "outside". This binaristic perspective on translation is not unique to Ricoeur but reflects a classical stance in translation theory. Friedrich Schleiermacher's normative principle[11], which dictates that translation either moves the author toward the reader or 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 practise what I like to call *linguistic hospitality*.[12]

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

[11] 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.
[12] P. Ricoeur, "The paradigm of translation", in Id., *On Translation*, cit., p. 23.

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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 only possible if a fixed 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 the hospitality as an ethical act underscores over and over the boundary that the guest must cross in order to be a guest. Second, the 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. And 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 other[13]? 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". 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 argues that the question of hospitality is a question 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 fulfill specific expectations and demonstrate their willingness to the host. It is the obligation to translate oneself into the figure of guest and Derrida calls it "the first act of violence"[14]. This insight raises a critical point: the very condition of being a guest. Before translating the foreign guest in the host's language, they as guests are already translated. Or better to say, they are made translatable in a certain context. The guest's unprivileged position is a result of translation. But the request to be

[13] 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.
[14] J. Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, transl. by R. Bowlby, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 15.

hosted, or an invitation to become a guest, is not sufficient. The guest must align themselves with the host's rules (culture, language, 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 at the same time limits and makes possible hospitality, leading Derrida to conclude that the very mastery makes hospitality possible as impossible, and the act of hospitality always does the opposite of what it pretends to do[15].

This phenomenon is what Derrida calls "conditional hospitality". We offer hospitality on condition that the others follow our rules, our way of life, language, culture, our political system. In other words, hospitality ceases to be truly hospitable. It is a contradictory phenomenon, or, as Derrida puts it, hospitality can only be possible 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.[16]

However, Derrida's conceptual move is not to abandon the concept of hospitality by the reason of its impossibility, but to keep it exactly under 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 the unconditional hospitality that we have the idea of an alterity. This true hospitality is, Derrida says, 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 toward 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. Or better to say, 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".[17]

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[15] J. Derrida, *Hostipitality*, «Angelaki», n. 5:3, 2000, pp. 3 – 18, p. 14.
[16] Ivi, p. 5.
[17] 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.

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This 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 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 host and guest by stressing a state of risky openness and indeterminacy: a guest is genuinely a guest only if the possibility of their being invader and threat remains unresolved. 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?[18]

However, in exposing the paradoxicality of hospitality[19], 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 so would mean leave behind the structuration of languages through the fixed separation between the internal and the external. Even an 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[20]. If the limits of an ethical model of hospitality reveal its inescapable binary relationships, isn't it necessary to either abandon this model or restrict it

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[18] Ivi, pp. 128-129.

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

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

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to the ethical domain, acknowledging its limitations? Should we, instead, propose alternative a political paradigm with translation at their core?

2. Violence and communication in Benjamin

In the previous pages, we explored how the concept of hospitality, when applied to translation, conceals its constitutive violence. Now, it remains to 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 non-violent while actually relying upon a certain violence? What if hospitality is an ethical concept that de-politicizes its condition of possibility as well as 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 position.

The year Benjamin began working on *The Translator's Task*, as prologue to his translations of Baudelaire, he also published his essay on violence (*Zur Kritik der Gewalt*[21]), 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 counter-violence: 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 origin of all laws and legal system. In this sense, divine violence in Benjamin reveals but also anticipates a new epoch; it is the seed or latent condition for the different future, harbouring 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*?

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

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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 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[22], 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[23]. The delimitation or establishment of boundaries, as a manifestation of mythical violence, is intended to guarantee the exercise of power. Thus, one of the tasks of divine violence is not only to depose the law but also to cancel 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 then the underlying violence of hospitality and counteracts the violent establishment of boundaries that hospitality presupposes[24].

The relationship between violence and translation emerges in some passages of Benjamin's *The Translator's Task* with reference to the violent ability of detaching or unbinding (*entbinden*) language from meaning. It is in this detachment that pure language presents itself[25]. Benjamin also refers to the movement of languages [*Sprachbewegung*] as one of the most violent and fruitful historical processes [*ein der gewaltigsten und fruchtbarsten historischen Prozesse*][26]. Even the figure of fragmentation, evoked in the famous metaphor of the broken

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

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vessel, implies a certain violence. The image of the broken vessel as the fractured unity of languages depicts the 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 – the fragmentation of languages – which corresponds to an equally violent impossibility of recomposing their originary unity. However, the only response of translator to this kind of violence is their 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 language is 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 states[27]. 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? Translation resists, it stands its ground by refusing to be grounded, that is fully determined by the local dynamics of the language of translation. This might be also an immanent resistance of language as such, which manifests itself in its "purest" form in translation. Thus, violence is intrinsic to language[28], and communication is not essentially a true form of language. What is essential in language – Benjamin claims - cannot be presented in communication, and the task of 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 the violent, incommunicable kernel of communication itself, its presuppositions. The communicative order of language, with its demand for transparency and fluency, depends on a normative framework of imposed rules

[27] W. Benjamin, *The Translator's Task*, cit., p. 79.
[28] 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 radically excludes any violence and is 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 language cannot be reduced to the communicative function.

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which, while concealing its own violence, labels as violent anything that endangers its foundation. From the perspective of communication, the incomprehensibility of the foreign or alien appears as nothing but violent. Translation is therefore demanded to neutralize the transformative power of the foreign, and to host it according to the current norms. This particular function of *this* translation – to preserve the communicative normative order – can be called law-preserving translation. Conversely, the translation that Benjamin focusses on – translation that opens up pure language – functions as a counter-violence which 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 a non-violent communication[29], such translation actually reveals communication itself as intrinsically violent, a form of legal violence in the sphere of language that present itself as "natural" normative coercion[30].

Language as the proper sphere of agreement, understanding and non-violent communication, as it seems indicated in Benjamin's essay on 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 use. Language-instituting violence in other words sanctions a certain grammar that gives uniformity to the 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 rather twofold: to bring to the surface the violent conditions of communicative order and to exhibit the non-communicable kernel of language.

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[29] Translation does not therefore represent a technique of conflict resolution, an "extra-juridical domain of non-violence" (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 to what was represented as non-violent and non-conflictual.

[30] 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") in order to gain some rights, if any, or even to be recognized as a refugee. 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.

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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 host-master and guest. Hospitality, like communication, presents itself as dialogical and non-violent, 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 according to the terminology of Naoki Sakai, hospitality is a homolingual[31] concept and as such it is not able to 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 on those experiences where it is not possible to draw or presuppose a clear boundary between the hosting and the hosted language, and where 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 the boundary between host and guest, as evidenced by Benveniste's and Derrida's analyses. The concept of "exophony"[32], 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 domestic linguistic space and external foreign area as misleading in the understanding of translation. In

[31] 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 ethno-linguistical 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 language. Cfr. N. Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity. On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism*, Minneapolis-London, University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

[32] 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.

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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 what Rada Iveković describes "a different economy of otherness and foreignness"[33].

Exophony destabilizes the fixed and stable boundary between communication and translation, challenging strongly 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 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 practices in those 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 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.[34]

It is Shammas' 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 more like a

[33] R. Iveković, *Politike prevođenja*, Zagreb, Fraktura, 2022, p. 302.
[34] 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.

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crossing without borders. It is a crossing that prevents the clear identification of who is host and who is guest. This exophonic translational experience makes visible an "intersection where two languages overlap" 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.[35]

Shammas' self-translating practice dismantles the notion of being hosted, as 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. 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?

We can have another example of writers-translators whose plurilingual experience shape the form and content of their literary expression even though in less conflictual and politically charged contexts. And in these examples as well communicating in another language is 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 where shall I be demain / (trop vif) qué puedo saber yo / spero che la terra be mine.[36]

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[35] A. Shammas, *The Drowned Library*, cit. p. 123
[36] A. D'Alfonso, "Babel", in Joseph Pivato (ed.), *The Anthology of Italian-Canaian Writing*, Toronto, Guernica, 1998, p. 195.

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This mixture of languages that challenges the borders between them is not merely an artistic and poetic experiment of a single writer. D'Alfonso here stages a plurality of voices that is characteristic of certain cultural environments such as Canada. D'Alfonso 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 the 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 the own. And sometimes, this other, foreign voice can be described as a "locked-up ghost inside the closet"[37], as Shammas illustrates the presence of Palestinian Arabic in Israel. To liberate these internal 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 the "own" voice. The dimension of exteriority is not dissolved by this discourse on exophony, but rather situated within the universal process of foreignization so that it becomes impossible to separate "inside" and "outside" voices by a fixed boundary.[38]

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[37] A. Shammas, *The Drowned Library,* cit., p. 126.

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