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Expanding the boundaries of hospitality: the relationship between Ukrainian refugees and their hosts

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ABSTRACT

Family members and friends play a crucial role in refugees' arrival and settlement, including accommodating them in their homes for varying periods. While the migration literature has demonstrated the positive impact of such support for refugees' well-being, the relationship between the host and guest and the potential challenges of reunion and cohabitation are seldom explored. This study adopts the concept of 'hospitality' – a notion originally based on welcoming the 'stranger' – to study the welcoming practices of citizens with their previously acquainted 'guests.' Using qualitative methods, the relationships between Ukrainian refugees and their hosting relatives and friends in Israel were explored. Three main relationship dynamics are presented and discussed: (a) hospitality across borders, (b) hosts as service providers and (c) the burdens of hospitality. Altogether, these dynamics were found to challenge the common notion of hospitality, as they uncovered the pivotal role of hosts as advocates beyond the domestic sphere and across borders, as well as the emotional burdens of hospitality in close quarters over time. Finally, the role of the state is discussed regarding the regulations of the host-hosted relations by privatizing its responsibilities and designating hosts as responsible parties.

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Introduction

Informal support systems, and especially family members and friends, are a primary source of practical and emotional support during refugees' journeys, arrival and settlement, which has been well-documented in the literature (e.g. Ager and Strang 2008; Goodson and Phillimore 2008; Taccolini Pannagio and Gonzalez Benson 2019; Zetter, Griffiths, and Sigona 2006). Following their arrival, such support often includes accommodating the newly arrived refugees in their relatives' or acquaintances' homes for varying periods, particularly in the first weeks or months. Yet, research on the nature of the co-habitation relationship between the host¹ and the hosted, as well as the different roles adopted by the host beyond the practice of hosting, is scarce (e.g. Rousseau

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et al. 2004; Tingvold et al. 2012). When such relationships are explored, the focus is often on inter-familial relations in the context of family reunification, which is a lengthy bureaucratic and emotional process (Löbel and Jacobsen 2021). Insufficient attention has been given to the host's roles and the host–guest relationship in co-habitation scenarios, particularly after receiving government ‘welcoming’ responses to emergency situations such as war, which allows ‘accelerated’ reunions. In an attempt to fill this gap, this study explored the perspectives of Ukrainian refugees regarding their relations with their hosting family/friends in Israel, in the context of the Israeli entry and reception policies towards Ukrainian refugees.

Global policy responses towards Ukrainian refugees could be seen as unprecedented in terms of their relatively welcoming and comprehensive nature. For example, in 2022, the European Union (EU) activated the Temporary Protection Directive (Council Directive 2001/55/EC), which renounced the asylum procedure and issued temporary residence permits as well as access to integration opportunities to all Ukrainian refugees (EU 2023). In Germany, unlike Middle Eastern and African refugees, Ukrainians were not required to stay in refugee reception centers, and many lived with relatives and acquaintances already in the country (Brücker et al. 2023). This policy led to a larger number of cohabitation relationships than that seen among previous refugees.

The Israeli response to Ukrainian refugees was also somewhat unprecedented, differing from the country's policies towards African or Palestinian refugees. Unlike other refugees' entries, which have mostly occurred through illegalized physical border-crossings, Ukrainians entered through Israel's airport border control. Before the war, Ukrainians could enter Israel with a tourist visa due to agreements between the countries. However, the outbreak of the war resulted in restricted changes. Now, Ukrainians' entry was based on an invitation letter, accompanied by the commitment of the inviting person – a family member or friend – to house and take responsibility for their ‘guests.’ After arriving, Ukrainian refugees' access to integration services and rights was slightly better than that of other refugees, yet still extremely limited (Refugee Organizations Forum 2023).

The concept of hospitality has been widely used within migration literature and is ascribed to different meanings. Most commonly, hospitality refers to the concrete domestic practice of local citizens who, either privately or through NGOs, solidarity groups or government-led initiatives, host migrants and refugees in their homes (e.g. Bassoli and Luccioni 2023; Burrell 2024; Ran and Join-Lambert 2020). As a point of departure, the hospitality literature offers a relatively developed analysis of host–guest relations, as well as a link between domestic practices and migration policies. Bassoli and Luccioni (2023) offered three main levels of analysis in relation to hospitality: (a) the micro level, including the host–guest relationship within the domestic sphere; (b) the meso level, including the roles of nonprofit organizations and public institutions; and (c) the macro level, including the societal and policy dimensions.

The role of family and friends in refugees' migration and integration

Within the extensive literature on refugees' migration and integration, the role of informal support systems, and more specifically that of family members and friends, has been considered pivotal (Ager and Strang 2008; Goodson and Phillimore 2008; Zetter,

Griffiths, and Sigona 2006). Migrant's social relationships in their own communities have been commonly termed 'social bonds,' referring to their relations with their family and/or co-ethnic and co-national groups (Ager and Strang 2008; Zetter, Griffiths, and Sigona 2006), which differ from other social relations. The roles of social bonds could be differentiated into two main phases: the first is migration and arrival, and the second is post-migration and integration.

Before refugees leave their country of origin, their networks of family and friends may play an eminent role in their migration decision-making, including choosing a destination country. For example, in a large representative survey conducted among Ukrainian refugees in Germany, about 60% mentioned that they chose to arrive in the country because their family members, friends and acquaintances already lived there. This reason was cited alongside other reasons that included specific characteristics attributed to Germany, such as respect for human rights and the German welfare and education systems (Brücker et al. 2023). In addition, it is possible that because most Ukrainian refugees arriving in Germany were single women – and as such, facing adverse conditions – family and network-related factors played a prominent role in choosing the destination country (Milewski et al. 2023).

At this phase specifically, the family unit stands at the heart of some governmental policies and directives. Although refugee family reunification is highly restricted in many Global North countries (Löbel and Jacobsen 2021), this policy, as well as private refugee sponsorships, are legal pathways for refugees to enter based on social bonds, particularly family relations. For example, Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSRP) allows refugees to reunite with friends and family by permitting a group of private Canadian citizens or permanent residents to collectively sponsor refugees, as long as they can support them financially and materially during their first year in the country (Morris, Lenard, and Haugen 2021). Another option is family reunification, however here, the definition of a family member is rather narrow and only includes the refugee's spouse or common-law partner, their dependent child, or the dependent children of a refugee's dependent child, excluding, for example, children over the age of 22, parents and grandparents (Morris, Lenard, and Haugen 2020). In the US, a similar and even narrower definition includes only the spouse and unmarried children under the age of 21 (Morris, Lenard, and Haugen 2021).

In the post-arrival phase, the presence of family members and friends is considered vital in promoting the refugee's ability to adjust to their new environment. Although the concept of integration is highly debated (see, for example, Phillimore 2021; Shaw and Wachter 2021), it is generally agreed that social connections, including within the family and ethnic group, are a major facilitator of successful 'integration outcomes' such as employment, housing, education, and health (Ager and Strang 2008; Goodson and Phillimore 2008). Relatives and friends can provide support and promote refugees' well-being (Summerfield 2001), as well as opportunities to engage in cultural practices, connect to social activities and information, and contribute overall to their adjustment in the receiving country (Ager and Strang 2008; Taccolini Pannagio and Gonzalez Benson 2019).

Such support for refugees has been reported as especially necessary in the case of women, who often experience additional integration barriers, including language acquisition and entering the job market (Goodson and Phillimore 2008). Moreover, they often tend to form social connections in the private rather than the public sphere. As such, the

support of other family members around administrative decisions and service utilization is extremely valuable (Löbel and Jacobsen 2021). Conversely, it has been well documented that family separation harms refugees' emotional, mental, and physical health, as well as their overall ability to settle and integrate in a new country (e.g. Löbel 2020; Morris, Lenard, and Haugen 2021). It has been found that family reunification has a positive impact on refugees' mental health (Löbel and Jacobsen 2021). Specifically, the role of the family post-arrival has mostly been studied among refugees who migrated together with their family members or among refugees whose family members stayed behind, revealing the meaning and roles that such ties play in their overall integration and acculturation processes (e.g. Tingvold et al. 2012).

Hospitality and hospitality relationships

The support of family members and friends in the post-arrival phase often comes in the form of hosting the refugees in their homes. Such practice is often referred to as private hospitality, a common practice among migrant communities. Notably, private hospitality differs from homestay, which is the temporary hosting of refugees in local residents' homes and is often regulated and/or encouraged by the state (Bassoli and Campomori 2022; Burrell 2024).

Importantly, while hospitality is commonly used to refer to the concrete domestic practice of local citizens who host migrants and refugees in their homes (Bassoli and Luccioni 2023; Ran and Join-Lambert 2020; Rottmann and Nimer 2021; Ticktin 2011), it holds other meanings. In a broader sense, hospitality is also considered a valuable and ethical position of welcoming 'strangers' (Bassoli and Luccioni 2023; Kyriakidou 2021; Rottmann and Nimer 2021), which, as stated in the highly influential work of Derrida (2000), means welcoming the stranger without asking who they are. Finally, hospitality is also a discourse and guiding principle for governmental policy responses to migration (Bassoli and Luccioni 2023; Kyriakidou 2021).

While the literature on private hospitality is scarce and lacks an in-depth exploration of the relationship between hosts and their hosted family members/friends, the literature on homestay has attended to the complexities of the relationship between the host and guest, thus providing a valuable point of departure for this study's analysis. Homestay, also interchangeably termed home-sharing, hosting or family hosting, has become a policy direction increasingly seen in various European countries. For example, in France, a government program to support citizens who accommodate refugees in their homes is funding NGOs that offer guidance, supervision, and evaluation (Ran and Join-Lambert 2020). In the UK, a government-led scheme called 'Homes for Ukraine' urged the public to host refugees in their homes, and financially supported local authorities, hosts and refugees (Burrell 2024). Homestay differs from private hospitality as it mostly involves native-born citizens who have no previous acquaintance with their guests (Bassoli and Luccioni 2023). Moreso, as Bassoli and Luccioni (2023) have argued, private hospitality relies on personal relationships, while 'homestay moves private hospitality to the public sphere' since it is operated by people who 'are part of humanitarian and solidarity movements, which seek visibility in the public space' (5).

The existing literature has mostly described issues related to unequal power relations based on the positionality of the hosts and their guests (Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh

2018; Luccioni 2023; Monforte, Maestri, and d'Halluin 2021). For example, in their study among volunteers who hosted refugees in Britain, France, and Italy, Monforte, Maestri, and d'Halluin (2021) demonstrated the expectations of the hosts to provide a family-like relationship, including a close and affectionate connection between themselves and their guests, which may lead to tensions when the guests are unwilling or unable to 'perform' such intimate relations. Furthermore, at times, the relationship may entail a host's over-protective aspirations that may disempower and harm the refugee's privacy and independence, which is also linked to the unbalanced power relation between the two sides (Burrell 2024; Ran and Join-Lambert 2020). Previous studies have often included the hosts' perceptions, with little attention given to the guests' perspectives (for an exception, see Burrell 2024). Additionally, there is often an assumption of a dichotomous notion of the host and the guest coming from different national, social, and cultural backgrounds. However, attention regarding the host's active role as an advocate who promotes refugees' access to social benefits and services (Tarshish 2024) is missing.

Against this backdrop, the current study adopted the concept of hospitality, commonly used to describe un-familial and un-acquainted hosting relations, to explore the hospitality relations created as a result of previous acquaintance. It leans on the common notion of hospitality as a domestic practice, focusing on the micro level. The study aimed to explore the unique dynamics that evolved between the family members and friends who were Israeli citizens, who acted both as the inviting persons and initial hosts, and their invited 'guests' who were Ukrainian refugees, based on the perspectives of the 'hosted' refugees.

The Israeli case study

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, more than six million Ukrainian nationals have been recorded as refugees worldwide (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2023). In Israel, during the first year of the war, 61,500 Ukrainian citizens entered as asylum seekers, the majority being women. This group can be divided into two main categories: 14,000 Olim, those of Jewish descent who are eligible for Israeli citizenship based on the Law of Return, and 46,000 non-Jewish Ukrainian refugees who entered the country on tourist visas (Population and Immigration Authority 2023). As of December 2023, the number of those holding a tourist visa had decreased and was estimated to be 11,000 (Rozovsky 2024).

The second group was at the center of a controversy. Before the war, Ukrainians were allowed into Israel with a tourist visa. At the beginning of the war, initially, Israel's Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked announced the requirement of the hosts of Ukrainian refugees without Jewish decedents to deposit 10,000 shekels with the Ministry of Interior upon their arrival in Israel. Later, and due to heavy criticism, Shaked announced that instead of a deposit, they would accept a commitment letter from an Israeli host: 'Israelis will no longer be forced to deposit a guarantee [for the arriving refugee] at the airport, and will only sign a commitment that the guest will leave Israel as soon as the state of emergency ends, in the hope that this will happen in the near future' (Mako 2022). Subsequently, Shaked announced a new refugee quota of 5,000 people, excluding those Ukrainians who are eligible for citizenship under the Law of Return, and those who have an invitation letter from a family/friend in Israel: 'This means that anyone who

has a relative who arrives in Israel, and that Israeli citizen signs that the relative is really staying with him for a month or two to get a break, will be excluded from the quota' (Gilad & Morag 2022). This policy was later canceled due to a petition to the Supreme Court. Nevertheless, based on these policies, the underlying assumptions of Israel's hospitality directive at the time were: (a) the Israeli host is responsible for the Ukrainian guest's accommodation and the guest's prospect of leaving the country, and (b) the guest will arrive for a short period, 'to get a break.' In the Minister's quotes, other integration-related needs they may have besides accommodation are not mentioned.

The group of Ukrainian refugees who entered on a tourist visa did not receive a protective status, but rather had their tourist visas renewed every few months. They also did not receive work permits, however, the government announced that this regulation would not be enforced (Refugee Organization Forum 2023). In addition, they were not eligible for regular assistance schemes. Instead, a special aid program was established through a governmental administrative agency called the Emergency Decree. Through this program, assistance came in the form of health and education solutions, concrete assistance, namely clothing and rechargeable cards for groceries, temporary psychological assistance, and housing solutions for a small number of refugees who had no host family member/friend. Importantly, this scheme was criticized as highly limited and inhospitable, as some of the programs, such as grocery cards and mental health support, were limited to the first few weeks up to three months following the refugees' arrival. Other programs, such as health insurance, were limited to only small groups of refugees. Furthermore, the refugees faced multiple systemic barriers in realizing their limited rights (Refugee Organizations Forum 2023).

While the Israeli policy of hospitality shares some common features with the above-mentioned programs of family reunification and sponsorship, it is unique in several ways. First, unlike the above programs, it leans on a broad definition of the family unit as well as un-familial social ties to grant entry. Second, while family reunification and sponsorship are both long processes filled with uncertainty and waiting, the Israeli directive was ad-hoc and immediate, approving a refugee entry within approximately 24 hours. It also differs from the two policies regarding the limited rights granted to those who arrive and the (lack) of long-term planning for the refugees' future stay and so-called integration. Finally, in comparing the Israeli case to other directives of private and public hospitality, it is fair to say that it is situated at the intersection of both. On the one hand, it is embedded in an ad-hoc directive that assumes a contract between the state and its citizens, who are committed to the guests' stay (and potential departure). On the other hand, in this case, practically, hospitality is operated solely by the hosts and is not part of a comprehensive public refugee reception policy (Bassoli and Campomori 2022), which, in some countries, includes government-funded guidance and supervision.

Methods

Research aims

This paper is part of a larger research project, including in-depth interviews with Ukrainian refugees regarding their experiences of bureaucratic encounters and accessing social benefits following their arrival in Israel. Here, the focus is on the dynamics that evolved

between the Ukrainian refugees and their hosts, who were family members or friends, as perceived by the refugees. These dynamics were explored from the time the refugees entered Israel and over the first few months following their arrival.

Participants

This explorative study included a sample of 17 participants recruited using a convenience sample, followed by a phase of snowball sampling. The average age of the participants was 41.35 (range of 25–83). Due to travel restrictions imposed by the Ukrainian government banning military-aged men from leaving the country, the sample consisted entirely of women. These women lived in various cities in the north ($n = 9$, 52%), south ($n = 4$, 24%) and center ($n = 4$, 24%) of Israel. Seven participants had children (41%). The participants were recruited through online posts in Hebrew, English and Russian in Facebook groups, personal contact with refugee organizations and volunteers, and recommendations from previous participants. The inclusion criterion was their arrival to Israel on a tourist visa, with the intention to seek refuge after the war in Ukraine began.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews, ranging from 40–120 minutes, were conducted with participants in 2022–2023 via Zoom. An interview guide was developed by the second and third authors and culturally adapted by a research assistant who was Israeli with Ukrainian origins and spoke Hebrew, English and Russian. Pilot interviews were conducted with three participants. Two of the pilot interviews were conducted in Hebrew by the second and third authors and simultaneously interpreted by the research assistant. The remaining interviews were conducted solely by the research assistant. Upon contacting the interviewees, the research assistant mentioned that the interviews could be conducted in Russian rather than Ukrainian, to which all of the interviewees agreed. Thus, the interviews were conducted in Russian, transcribed, and translated verbatim by the research assistant into Hebrew. The interview guide covered topics related to the experience of accessing rights in bureaucratic encounters as refugees, including general experiences in Israel, and relationships with third parties (e.g. volunteers), service providers, and government agents.

Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Haifa University. All participants signed informed consent forms in their native language prior to participation. To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms were used throughout the article.

Data analysis

The thematic analysis of the data was informed by the concept of hospitality and, specifically, by the relationship between hosts and guests in the context of hospitality policies and directives (Braun and Clarke 2006). The first stage included reading the transcripts as a whole to gain a better understanding of the stories and gain familiarity with the data.

Then, the transcripts were coded into meaningful units of text, and emerging ideas were debated amongst the researchers to create an initial list of themes and sub-themes. In the following stage, the themes were refined, and the transcripts were checked to add context and finalize the themes. The process included regular researcher meetings to discuss the stages of analysis. This process resulted in the identification of four main dynamics. Ongoing peer debriefing was also conducted to increase self-awareness, and careful record-keeping was implemented to provide an audit trail documenting the process (Nowell et al. 2017; Shenton 2004).

Findings

The findings indicated three main dynamics characterizing the relationship between the Ukrainian refugees and their hosting family and friends: (a) hospitality across borders; (b) hosts as service providers; and (c) the emotional burdens of hospitality.

Hospitality across borders

In contrast to the ‘classical’ literature on hospitality, in which the starting point for investigating the hosting relations is domestic, including the refugees’ arrival at the host country and, particularly, at the host’s home (e.g. Bassoli and Luccioni 2023; Ran and Join-Lambert 2020), the Israeli hosts’ hospitality began even before the refugees left Ukraine. The hosts were transnationally involved in the arrival of the Ukrainian refugees to Israel. Such involvement included two phases of support regarding the arrival of the refugees to Israel, and later to their homes. The first phase was related to decision-making. The hosts actively assisted refugees in their decision to leave Ukraine by pressuring them to leave and even buying their plane tickets. Some of the refugees described the concerned phone calls they received from their friends and family members in Israel that ‘rushed’ them to leave Ukraine. For example, Iryna, whose daughters both lived in Israel, said: ‘When a rocket hit my workplace in Ukraine ... my girls called and said: ‘Mom, you need to leave!’ Such dynamics were, at times, spontaneous and rushed, including decisions that were made on the spot without preparations. For example, Lyudmyla described waking up from the bombing on the first day of the Russian invasions, and one of the first phone calls she received was from friends in Israel:

I woke up from the bombing ... and early that morning, friends of mine from Israel called ... [they are] Israelis with Ukrainian origins, and they said that they are waiting for us, that there is a war going on, and [said]: ‘What on earth are you doing? You should already be here in Israel close to us.’

The emergency of the war called for immediate actions, which, in this case, were made possible, in part, due to the ad-hoc nature of the Israeli policy directive, which allowed the invited refugees to avoid long bureaucratic processes. Such rapid decisions also meant that there was not much time for both sides to prepare, which will be elaborated on below.

The second phase of support revolved around the refugees’ entry. The hosts’ involvement in the decision-making process later materialized in the form of an invitation letter that allowed the refugees to enter the country. For example, Halyna said: ‘Arriving here is

really hard, and [possible] only thanks to someone writing this invitation letter and taking responsibility for your stay. Beyond this, it's almost impossible.' As reflected in her account, the hosts took responsibility for the refugees' stay in the country before their physical arrival at the border control.

At times, the practice of hospitality included the hosts physically accompanying their family members/friends through border control. Olena described how her sister physically escorted her during the final stage of her journey:

I met my sister in Warsaw because she was really worried that I would not be let in [Israel], even with this letter of approval ... Of course, I didn't want to agree because it's, like, her private time, but since she is my big sister ... I said yes [...]. Being with her made me feel much more relaxed [...]. Once I arrived with all my documents to the border officers, they probably intended to ask me many questions, but my sister approached them and said: 'That's my sister,' in Hebrew. And that's it, they ran out of questions and said, 'ok, move forward.'

Here, the host's actions could be seen as practices of hospitality both formally (signing an invitation letter) and informally (being present at the border control, indicating that the guest is 'one of us' and, thus, is protected and welcomed).

Hosts as service providers

A main dynamic identified in the post-arrival phase was the hosts serving as service providers who took care of the refugees' most basic needs, including two main practices: direct support and advocacy. Providing direct support meant that the hosts took care of many of the refugees' basic needs, including accommodation, clothing, food, money to buy medications and other necessities, thus complementing and often replacing the relatively limited governmental support that was available to the guests. For example, as mentioned earlier, food vouchers were provided to Ukrainian refugees only in the first three months following their arrival, and their amount was described as insufficient. To a certain extent, this form of direct support resonates with an un-familial and un-acquainted hosting. First and foremost, the hosts provide refugees with appropriate accommodation (Ran and Join-Lambert 2020), which may include the expensive and physically demanding task of organizing their homes (Burrell 2024). Also, hosts may offer food and monetary support, especially in the first period of hosting (Burrell 2024).

Other forms of direct support seemed unique to familial hosting and included the hosts babysitting the children of their guests to allow them to rest or look for a job or allowing the refugees to use their bank account. This decreased the refugees' experiences of administrative burden such as when trying to open a bank account, which was highly frustrating and often nearly impossible. For example, one refugee shared that after she found a job, her salary was sent to her mother's account, who holds Israeli citizenship. In another case, the refugee's friends rented an apartment under their names since the owner was unwilling to rent directly to refugees. The friends paid the landlord, and the refugee woman then reimbursed her friends. Such actions of direct support, made possible due to existing trusting relations, would not have necessarily been possible in the case of unfamiliar hospitality. They allowed some of the refugees to bypass everyday bureaucratic and systemic barriers post-arrival.

Beyond the abovementioned practical needs, the hosts also offered physical and emotional safety. Knowing that their most basic needs would be taken care of relieved some of the psychological costs of uncertainty. This was exemplified by Natalia, who lived in her husband's daughter's house immediately after her arrival:

While we were on our way to Israel, the volunteers, who brought us here, asked if we had a place to stay. I mean, it's a question that I didn't even ask myself, because our family members accepted us [into their home].

In her account, she emphasized how the issue of accommodation was not even a question that needed to be raised. Being able to live with family members/friends allowed a sense of stability during a period of adjustment, which required the refugees' adaptation on multiple levels. Many participants compared their situation to that of other refugees who arrived in Israel but had no friends/family in the country, stating that they were 'the lucky ones.' Olha said: 'If there are people who arrived here and have no one [they know], really ... they deserve to have a monument with their names on it while they are still alive [laughing].'

The second practice was that of advocacy. This type of support included active advocacy and mediation between refugees and service providers, including governmental and municipal services such as banks, welfare services, health and mental health services, and schools, as well as informal services, such as volunteers, NGOs and informal community organizations. For example, one refugee shared that her friends, with whom she had resided for almost a year at the time of the interview, had contacted the local school and helped her register her son there. Furthermore, the hosts often physically accompanied the refugees to different services, advocating and serving as linguistic and cultural mediators. Due to the refugees' unfamiliarity with the local language, the hosts' advocacy often made the difference between the ability to have their needs met or not. For example, Natalia, who was hosted, along with her husband, at the husband's daughter's house, said:

Everywhere [we went], she went with us, she knows Hebrew and has lived here for six years already. [...] We were lucky to have a place to stay, a person who helped us. In the first phase, when we did not know the language, it was really tough and scary. Now it's a bit better.

In her narrations, again, it was clear that having a family member who can serve as a mediator not only allowed better access to services but also a sense of psychological safety. While a similar role of hosts as advocates can be seen in homestay arrangements, such as hosts assisting in bureaucratic tasks and finding jobs or local educational opportunities (e.g. Burrell 2024; Ran and Join-Lambert 2020), it is possible that in the current case, the previous acquaintance supported a somewhat more devoted engagement by hosts, and was linked to the psychological feeling of safety reported by the participants.

The emotional burdens of hospitality

Family tensions

Alongside the supportive dynamics, the practice of hospitality raised some complexities and challenges. Some hosts and refugees lived together for many months, sometimes in

crowded conditions, with two or three families living in a tiny apartment, often with children of different ages. At times, and especially in the case of hosts who were family members, this brought a mixture of old and new family dynamics to the surface. Different family members had different needs, and finding privacy became challenging.

Similar tensions may arise in unfamiliar hospitality arrangements, such as guests feeling a lack of privacy (Ran and Join-Lambert 2020) or hosts experiencing the burdens of the emotional labor of caring for the guest (Burrell 2024). However, unlike the hospitality of a stranger, the relationship between the refugees and hosting family members often included some historical emotional burdens that had been minimized when the family members were living far apart. Some refugees felt guilty for the practical burdens they placed on their hosts by staying with them; others felt that they should be thankful and, thus, did not question what they received, and some felt more comfortable criticizing their hosts precisely because of their close relations. Occasionally, the tensions escalated. For example, Solomia described a fight she experienced with her aunt, with whom she resided for about six months:

We didn't get along ... One day, all my money was just gone, and I told her about it, and she started yelling at me [...] Eventually she kicked me out of the house ... it really hurt me [...]. I realized that half a year is a lot of time and could be burdening ... I helped as much as I could ... [at the end] it was very painful because I never believed that such a thing could happen to me.

As evident from her account, the expectations from relatives sometimes brought disappointment and even pain when disagreements arose. Also, quite naturally, there was an exhaustion of support over time, both financially and emotionally, despite the host's good intentions. Such complexities were exemplified by Yulia, who lived with her aunt:

[Having] family members is a good thing, but with time, all sorts of challenges are created, because ... each one had their own space and suddenly we penetrated this space. We thought it would all end [soon], that we would be here [in Israel] for a little while and then go back. And after three months nothing ended ... We felt uncomfortable taking over someone else's territory, and also, you need time to adjust [...] even couples who move in together have a period of adjustment, fighting, etc., well, with relatives I think it's the same.

In her account, the ad hoc and speedy process of her arrival to Israel was reflected in the dynamics that were created among the family members. It seemed that all parties needed time to adjust, both physically and mentally, to the idea and practice of shared living. While she thought that being hosted would be a short experience, and perhaps so did the hosts, the reality was different.

The crowded living conditions sometimes limited the refugees' ability to receive other services. For example, the official government assistance included Ukrainian refugees' right to receive three psychological appointments for free over the phone. As one participant recalled, living in a crowded flat did not allow her to find a quiet and private space to conduct such sensitive phone calls.

Beyond the challenges of crowdedness, for some refugees, staying at a house that was not theirs created a sort of alienation and enhanced the longing for what was once their own home. Olena described living at the house of her sister and sister's husband:

They love me and treat me well, but it is still a foreign home. It's all very comfortable, but it feels as if I am living a life that is not mine. My life was very different [...] my life was full, fast and busy. And here, without work, you know, it feels like I'm retired [laughing].

She described a tension between the support, comfort, and familiarity of her family's hospitality and the alienation that she felt regarding the house, both physically, as a house that was unfamiliar, and emotionally, as a house that represented a home but at the same time, it was not hers. This sense of alienation was also more widely connected to who she was and what her life used to be like before the war.

Reverse hospitality

The last dynamic, which was mostly prevalent in the case of family hosting, entailed blurring the 'classical' roles between the host and the guest, as well as family roles. Reverse hospitality occurred, for example, when the hosts were not necessarily in a position to offer support but rather in need of it. For example, a young refugee, Tetiana, was hosted by her elderly grandparents, who migrated to Israel late in their lives, were not well integrated, and had not acquired the local language. She said:

My grandmother and grandfather are old, and they made Aliya [Hebrew word for the migration of Jews to Israel] at a relatively old age, did not manage to acquire the language properly, and many times they can't find doctors, for example, who speak Russian. When I arrived, I had many questions, you need to go get a bank card, but they speak only Hebrew there, and I had no one to help with translation.

Here, unlike some of the refugees' previously mentioned situations, the hosts could not function as service providers. Rather, their age and the barriers they faced in utilizing local services may have placed certain responsibilities on the hosted granddaughter, who also needed to navigate her way in a new country. In other cases, reverse hospitality included simultaneous roles played by each host and guest. For example, in one family, the classical family roles were blurred when Iryna arrived as a refugee and lived with her daughters, who were in their 20s. While mothers are often considered supportive and caring figures, Iryna was supported by her daughters, who accommodated her. However, this also gave her the opportunity to be close to her daughters and give them support.

Discussion

This study aimed to uncover dynamics that characterize the host-guest relationship among Ukrainian refugees who were hosted by their relatives and friends in Israel. The findings indicated three main dynamics that characterized these hospitality relationships: hospitality across borders, whereby the hosts were actively engaged in the refugees' departure and journey by encouraging the decision to flee Ukraine and providing support during the refugees' entry to Israel; hosts serving as service providers by supporting refugees with either direct assistance to meet their basic needs post-arrival or advocacy aimed at easing their access to services and provisions; and the emotional burdens of hospitality between family members over time, as well as reverse hospitality, whereby traditional family roles were challenged, such as when the hosted refugees provided support to their hosts.

The current research contributes several new insights. First, the findings revealed that families and friends functioned as key providers of direct support and advocacy for the hosted Ukrainian refugees at the meso and macro levels, often filling the void of support from state-level institutions. While offering direct support, first and foremost through accommodation, was an integral part of un-familial hospitality, when the hosts and guests were tied by social bonds, these dynamics might have been expected and exaggerated (Tarshish 2024). Moreover, the hosts' comprehensive support aligned with the Israeli immigration policies designating private hosts as responsible for the refugees' well-being. The hosts were not only declared responsible, but the State's policies of only providing the refugees with tourist visas and limited access to services reinforced their responsibility. As Luccioni (2023) mentioned, the state tends to 'instrumentalize private hospitality [...] while securing its power on the regulation of migration' (11).

More importantly, this study uncovered new dynamics that stretch the boundaries of hospitality. It highlighted how hospitality is not bounded by space and is also an emotional, ethical, and practical position that can predate refugees' border crossing. In the study, acts of hospitality could be seen as transnational as they often occurred beyond the host countries' national borders, beginning with the hosts pressuring their invitees to leave Ukraine, issuing invitation letters and even buying their plane tickets to Israel. The hosts played an essential role in facilitating the refugees' journeys by providing two key forms of support. First, they offered assurance that there would be a secure and welcoming physical home for the refugees upon their arrival to Israel, thus allowing them to avoid the uncertainty that many refugees face during their journey and first phase of arrival in destination countries (Ager and Strang 2008). Second, knowing there was a safe place ready to accept them once they undertook the perilous journey was a key element of emotional support, lessening at least some of the emotional weight that accompanied their journeys. These findings raise important questions regarding the borders of hospitality: What actions are considered to initiate the practice of hospitality, and when, if at all, does hospitality end? Can, and in what forms, hospitality occur transnationally? Can hosts' practical and emotional labor that occurs before the guest has arrived be conceptualized as part of the hospitality?

The findings further highlighted the burdens of hospitality, an aspect that, thus far, has received only little scholarly attention (Burrell 2024; Ran and Join-Lambert 2020). These burdens included two main dynamics that challenge the common definition of hospitality and extend its breadth. The first addresses familial tensions rising from hospitality, where hosting relatives resurrected dormant family tensions, exacerbating current adjustment challenges to the point of 'disrupting the fragile balance' that had been established during the separation period (Rousseau et al. 2004, 1096). The second dynamic was reverse hospitality, whereby the archetypal host-guest hierarchy was inverted, as the refugee acted as both the hosted and caretaker for the host. Both of these dynamics challenge the idealized notion of private hospitality as an act of anticipated family union and the role of the host as a well-adjusted person who supports the 'dependent' newcomer. As such, it allows a more nuanced perspective that recognizes the complexities and hybridity of hospitality, which can be borrowed to critically examine the host-guest relations in other settings of unfamiliar hosting.

Indeed, the notion of reverse hospitality can offer insights that could be integrated into the literature on homestay, as it reveals shifting power relations between the host and

guest. Seeing the guest as not (only) dependent on the host could offer a perspective for future studies to explore regarding the relationships that emerge in non-private hospitality, including the potential reversals and blurred boundaries they may entail. Indeed, recognizing these hospitality burdens and continuing their theorization is a task that should be adopted in further research. Thus, it is important to uncover the implications these dynamics may have on the host–guest relationship and the refugee’s integration into society. Finally, examining questions around the sustainability of the hosting relationship, evolving reciprocity, and the ethical complexities at play may prove fruitful avenues for conceptual development.

As previously noted, the Israeli directive of hospitality can be seen as situated at the intersection of private and public hospitality. This hybrid nature was reflected in the evolving dynamics between the hosts and the refugees as an ad hoc decision that lacked a long-term perspective. It enabled the hosts to act quickly and offer immediate support to their friends and relatives in need of protection while avoiding long bureaucratic processes, including in cases of un-familial ties. Yet, this short-term perspective was also reflected in the hosts’ active roles as service providers, at times replacing the extremely limited official solutions, as the state transferred or even privatized some of its responsibilities to the host. The ad hoc nature was further reflected in the sudden nature of the encounters, for which both sides were often not emotionally and practically prepared.

This research was a case-specific study and, as such, bears some limitations. First, only women were interviewed. The overwhelming majority of Ukrainian refugees in Israel are women and children due to restrictions imposed on the departure of men from the borders of Ukraine. As such, from a gendered perspective, the active roles taken by some of the hosts in the current study could be related to the fact that the hosted were all women who experienced increased integration-related barriers (Goodson and Phillimore 2008). Furthermore, the translation of the interviews from Russian to Hebrew by the research assistant could have introduced meaning changes or miscommunications, which might have impacted the interpretation of the findings. Future studies in diverse national settings and refugee groups could expand on these preliminary findings and further support the widening of the concept of hospitality and attending to the complexities of the relationship it includes.

Finally, the study offers a few implications. First, front-line practitioners in both governmental and non-governmental organizations that support refugees and/or their hosts should pay attention to and recognize the potential hospitality burdens experienced by both sides. Second, in the light of what Burrell (2024) referred to as the state’s ‘responsibilising private citizens,’ policies that place the overwhelming responsibility on refugees’ hosts should, at the very least, support such roles with sufficient and accessible guidance and services for both the hosts and the refugees themselves. If governments fail to do so, it is crucial that civil society organizations and frontline practitioners critically call into question such governmental responses. The naturally evolving supportive roles taken by the hosts should not be discouraged, as they demonstrate the strengths of the irreplaceable informal support systems. Yet, if policymakers are to adopt and encourage private hospitality practices, then facilitating support for both the hosts and the hosted should not be neglected.

Note

1. Different terminologies have been used to refer to hospitality relations, holding different meanings and implying varied power imbalances. As such, throughout the paper, we will interchangeably refer to the person already living in the receiving country as host or inviting person, and to the recently arrived refugee as hosted, guest or invited person.

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