

## Hotel Geopolitics: A Research Agenda

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## **HOTEL GEOPOLITICS: A RESEARCH AGENDA**

### **Abstract**

This article sets a new agenda for research into the geopolitics of hotels. Moving beyond the study of hotels as neutral sites of leisure and tourism, hospitality mediated by financial exchange, we argue that hotels need to be researched as geopolitical sites. Hotel spaces – from conference rooms to reception halls, from hotel bars to corridors and private rooms – are connected to broader architectures of security and insecurity, war- and peace-making. We present six themes for this research agenda: hotels as projections of soft power, soft targets for political violence, strategic infrastructures in conflict, hosts for war reporters, providers of emergency hospitality and care, and infrastructures of peace-building. We conclude that the geopolitical potential of hotels emerges from two spatial dimensions of the relation of hospitality: hotels' selective openness and closure to their surroundings, and their flexible material infrastructures that can facilitate and mediate geopolitical processes. Research on geopolitics, and its engagements with the everyday materialities that shape war and peace, must take seriously the hotel as a geopolitical space.

### **Introduction**

*'The top secret program carries the codename "Royal Concierge," and has a logo showing a penguin wearing a crown, a purple cape and holding a wand. The penguin is apparently meant to symbolize the black and white uniform worn by staff at luxury hotels.'*<sup>1</sup>

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Among the intelligence data leaked by former National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden in June 2013, were revelations – published by German newspaper Der Spiegel – that the UK Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) used a system of surveillance codenamed

'Royal Concierge' to monitor foreign diplomatic delegations at more than 350 hotels worldwide, These allegations, neither confirmed nor denied by GCHQ, place hotels at the centre of geopolitical intrigue and the British state's practices of international security, diplomacy and espionage.

This article sets a new agenda for research into the geopolitics of hotels. Hotels are much more than neutral sites of (corporate) hospitality where visitors reside, relax and consume. In the following pages, we consider how hotels become geopolitical sites, connected to and embedded in broader geopolitical architectures, geographies of security and insecurity, and moments of war- and peace-making. Moving beyond a dominant commercial and management-orientated approach, we argue that hotels deserve to be studied as spaces in which geopolitics is manifested and shaped, where agreements and disagreements, interactions, encounters and exchanges, can be made. In hotel conference rooms, reception halls, corridors and private rooms, we can find the geopolitics of statecraft and international relations taking place. Their hospitality, materiality, relationality and strategic locations draw hotels into, and embed them within, broader geopolitical relations of conflict and peace-making.

The fundamental function of a hotel is to provide hospitality to paying guests. This hospitality can take different forms, all of them potentially profitable: overnight accommodation, food and drink, conference facilities and business services in larger hotels. The hotel is an infrastructure of monetised hospitality – a relationship of conditional welcoming mediated through financial exchange. To offer hospitality requires degrees of openness and closure. For Jacques Derrida, all hospitality is in some way conditional.<sup>2</sup> The very act of welcoming must always have limits. For the host to be a host requires their position of power in the space of hospitality to be maintained, along with the alterity of the guest who must respect and abide by the host's rules and norms of behaviour.<sup>3</sup>

This conditional relation of hospitality is manifested in relational spatialities within and without the hotel, and represents *the* defining characteristic of hotel space, true from grand luxury hotels to family pensions to oriental caravanserais. In the hotel, guests are screened, controlled, charged and welcomed into certain spaces: public areas like the entrance hall, reception, corridors, elevators, restaurants, and private areas like guest rooms and function rooms. At the same time, guests are restricted from accessing other spaces, such as service areas, behind the desk, kitchens, and the private rooms of other guests. Relinquishing control entirely to the guest would mean the end of hospitality and the beginning of another kind of relationship. The hotel must therefore maintain a controlled openness to the outside – to the potential customer – while being able to screen, monitor and subtly control those who enter. The open door allows the outside inside, and so hotels' relations with their surroundings, particularly the city and the state, are a crucial dimension of hotel space. This openness is essential to the functioning and profitability of the hotel. All forms of hospitality must begin with an open door, even if that openness is carefully controlled and limited. Inside the door, the human and non-human elements that materially constitute hotels' flexible built environments complete the constitution of hotel space. This paper will consider and draw together these spatial qualities, at times complementary and at others contradictory, in order to articulate hotel geopolitics.<sup>4</sup>

In conceptualising geopolitics, we reject the distinction between the geopolitical and the everyday as separate spheres fixed in a hierarchical relationship.<sup>5</sup> Rather, the two are equally important and intimately linked through numerous fragile connections.<sup>6</sup> The hotel is one space in which these connections are made and shaped and, we argue, it can be an important and productive focus for research into geopolitics. How might the relations of hospitality forged in hotels shape and be shaped by geopolitics? How are relations of conflict and peace-making manifested in, transformed and influenced by hotels? How do the locations and material infrastructures of hotels make them strategic sites in moments of conflict, facilitating or mitigating war? How might the spaces and

physical fabric of hotels facilitate the forging of new relations between friends or adversaries, and mediate their encounters?

This paper offers a starting point for answering these questions, and for developing a wider body of critical scholarship that takes hotels as important geopolitical sites, spaces where the everyday, relational and material aspects of geopolitics are manifested and encountered. We argue that the particular spatialities of hotels – in their relations with the city and their surroundings, and their flexible infrastructures of hospitality – make them significant geopolitical spaces. We offer six themes for this agenda, a typology of hotels and their geopolitical dimensions, interactions and interventions, drawing on existing work by geographers and others, and pointing towards future avenues of research. In the next section, we consider existing literature on hotels from geography, international relations and critical tourism studies, and argue for a novel agenda of critical research on hotel geopolitics that bridges the gap between these areas of scholarship.

## **Bridging the gap: Hotels and political geography**

The geopolitics of hotels, and tourism more broadly, have received little sustained attention from scholars. This is partly because, as Cynthia Enloe notes, '[t]ourism doesn't fit neatly into public preoccupations with military conflict and high finance'.<sup>7</sup> The scarcity of scholarly political work on hotels is not confined to geography, but is part of a wider knowledge gap – across geography, politics, international relations and tourism studies – about the relationships between politics, space and tourism. This gap has been identified by a number of scholars before. Ruth Craggs has called for research into the political geographies of hotels, echoing Debbie Lisle's call for work on the broader 'role of tourism within a global security landscape'.<sup>8</sup> In a similar vein, Walid Hazboun argues that the political aspects of tourism have been 'overlooked by [international political economy] scholars and the vast literature on globalisation'.<sup>9</sup> In turn, Kevin Hannam denounces 'a paucity of research into

the role of geopolitics in current critical tourism research', despite the fact that geopolitics shapes the fate of national tourism industries as well as of global place branding strategies.<sup>10</sup>

Unlike critical accounts of hospitality in the social sciences, studies of hospitality related to tourism have traditionally been grounded in business and economic approaches. Here, hospitality is seen narrowly as a purely commercial relationship, a managerial exercise in the provision of accommodation, food and drink.<sup>11</sup> However, a critical literature has developed in tourism studies, with a number of scholars employing new theoretical approaches and embracing more interdisciplinary agendas to advance what Britton proposes as 'a critical geography of tourism'.<sup>12</sup> This developing literature has addressed the political economy of the tourism industry,<sup>13</sup> issues surrounding workers, labour relations and labour markets,<sup>14</sup> as well as security and tourism,<sup>15</sup> affect and biopolitics.<sup>16</sup>

Developing this debate, Pritchard et al. have suggested a renewed agenda for theory and applied research in tourism that embraces academic reflexivity and participatory methods, and engages with feminism, embodiment and affect, in order to politicise tourism knowledge.<sup>17</sup> What they call 'hopeful tourism' promotes counter-hegemonic knowledges and practices that highlight the absences, contradictions and power structures that tourism relies on. Relatedly, Causevic and Lynch have analysed the role of post-conflict tourism beyond the accepted category of 'dark tourism' for pure economic enhancement, and within a wider discourse of post-conflict social renewal and normalisation of community relations.<sup>18</sup> Here, what they define as 'phoenix tourism' functions as socio-emotional catharsis rather than purely as a tool for economic development. Finally, Lynch et al. present a renewed interdisciplinary agenda for hospitality studies that problematises the ethics and politics of hospitality, and the way hospitality industries and discourses also produce hostility and inhospitable spaces – from infrastructures of immigration control to exclusion produced in and around resorts.

These critical tourism debates represent a very promising development, but even then the hotel is not positioned as a specific and central focus of research. Hotels have barely figured in Anglophone political geography either. The two main sub-disciplinary journals, *Political Geography* and *Geopolitics*, have only ever published two articles with the word 'hotel' or 'hotels' in the title, abstract or keywords. In one, Ruth Craggs calls for 'considering hotels as key sites in the making of political geographies' and concludes that 'hotels and the hospitable practises [sic] within them are crucial elements in the construction of local, national and international politics'.<sup>19</sup> The other emerges from recent work led by Claudio Minca at Wageningen University that has considered the role of hotels in the projection of commercial power and biopolitical discipline, looking particularly at hotels constructed for migrants by European shipping companies in the eighteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Beyond these studies, there *have* been a number of valuable contributions on the cultural and identity dynamics mediated by hotels, by scholars across disciplines such as cultural geography and cultural studies.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, in economic geography, McDowell et al. have highlighted the micropolitics of class relations among global migrant hotel workers in London.<sup>22</sup> These studies represent a useful starting point, but as McNeill notes, 'the spatiality of the hotel requires further elaboration'.<sup>23</sup>

We argue that three recent and emerging debates in political geography and critical geopolitics can contribute to bridging the conceptual gap between hotels as sites of tourism and leisure and hotels as sites of geopolitical importance. The first concerns human geography's 'materialist return' and its resonance in political geography and critical geopolitics, where the focus on representation and discursive deconstruction is giving way to reflections about the complex interplays between discourse, materiality and affect.<sup>24</sup> Political geographers are developing a substantial debate around materiality considering objects not only as containers of power, but as its mediators,<sup>25</sup> within a geographical imagination where physical things matter.<sup>26</sup> Objects, three-dimensional volumes, built environments and infrastructures, offer a lens for doing a political geography of the everyday which is very relevant to hotels as mediators of space-power relations. Far from being spaces of detached

depoliticized leisure and hospitality, or the neutral backdrops to formal political events, hotels can be seen instead as actively entangled in relations of power and politics, supporting the circulation of the materialities and relationalities of states and statecraft. It is also the very *matter* of hotels that is important: their physical presence, geographical location and material design shape dynamics of political encounter, inclusion and exclusion, and possibly violence.

The second debate relevant to the study of hotels is that of urban geopolitics, a multidisciplinary corpus of theoretical frameworks and methodologies dealing with the mutual relationships between specific urban sites and wider processes of geopower.<sup>27</sup> This diverse scholarship shares the principle that urban space is not just a backdrop to wars and violence, but also a target and a vehicle for them. Cities are 'strategic sites' of contemporary global politics and can signal, normalize or even worsen conflict and violence.<sup>28</sup> Whether used as targets, military positions, or locations for peace conferences, hotels are often strategic urban sites occupying prominent positions within cities, where wider geopolitical processes are played out and where complex connections between geopolitics and everyday life become tangible.

The third debate is around conceptualizations of peace in geopolitics. Megoran argues that political geographers have a better track record of studying war than studying peace, and that peace and peace-making deserve to be conceptualized with as much richness, nuance and care as war itself.<sup>29</sup> Hotels are not only sites where we can observe the everyday workings of conflict, but also potentially are intimately connected to networks and practices of peacemaking. Hotels as hosts to and facilitators of peacemaking initiatives, moments of reconciliation, and renewing and repairing community relations, deserve further research by political geographers. Debates around hospitality, so central to the functioning and business of hotels, speak to this challenge of constructing relationships of amity in place of enmity.



Drawing on these current geographical debates, we argue for the hotel to be taken seriously as a key space for geopolitical enquiry. Hotels' materialities and infrastructures, their locations and relations in cities, and their facilitation of certain types of encounter, relation-building and peace-making all shape this geopolitical potential. We set out this geopolitics of hotels in the next section.

## **Geopolitical hotels: a typology**

In this main section of the paper, we develop a typology of hotel geopolitics, outlining six ways in which hotels are drawn into geopolitical relations. This is offered as a baseline for geopolitical research into hotels, and a framework to be developed by other scholars. These six themes – sketched out here with examples and short vignettes – are neither a conclusive list nor the final word, but represent priority areas for this new research agenda. The following six sections start by highlighting the seemingly mundane role of hotels and tourism in the projection of state power. We then consider how hotels and their hospitable infrastructures are targeted, appropriated and transformed by conflict and those actors involved in it. Finally, we consider the role of hotels in hosting and nurturing relations of peace.

### **1. Soft power and state projection**

Hotels interact with states in different ways, in different places and at different times. This first theme concerns how hotels (and tourism more broadly) are drawn into practices of state power projection. The social theorist Paul Hirst, drawing on Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*, argues for 'consider[ing] constructed objects as components of a discursive formation ... and how in consequence buildings or planned environments become *statements*'.<sup>30</sup> Building further on Foucault and Merleau-Ponty's view of experience as a constant bodily interaction between subjects and objects,<sup>31</sup> Dovey argues that the built environment frames power relations in the sense that it constantly mediates human action.<sup>32</sup> Buildings, therefore, may be part of the state's apparatus of power, as much as legal and bureaucratic practices and discourses. In many instances, hotels have

been evident mediators of state power, and the work of several historians has highlighted these connections.

Architectural historian Annabel Wharton's work on hotel construction during the Cold War analyses the role of the Hilton chain hotels as crucial nodes of US soft power projection, and the cultural and geopolitical construction of a 'free West' versus a socialist Other.<sup>33</sup> Through their powerful visual and material presence, exemplars of architectural modernity, foreign investment and technological prowess, Conrad Hilton's hotel chain embodies a political experience designed to reproduce American values at the furthestmost boundaries of the Western sphere of influence such as Cairo, Athens and Istanbul. Dennis Merrill has analysed the everyday practices of US soft power in twentieth century Central America, arguing that the everyday, complex and transnational encounters between US tourists and Central American residents and tourism business elites – alongside military and bureaucratic power – shaped international relations. Here, hotel lobbies figured among the networks of public spaces which 'together, helped construct the transnational cultural context in which political economy and diplomacy took place'.<sup>34</sup>

Chris Endy has also used the lens of tourism to look at international relations, specifically US/France relations during the Cold War. Endy opens his book *Cold War Holidays* with the image of the Hotel George V in Paris as a privileged site 'to observe the rise and fall of great powers in the twentieth century'. He notes how the hotel's newsletter 'encouraged the waiters, chambermaids, porters and other workers to see themselves as part of the drama of international relations' and serve as France's showcase for its post-war rebirth as a world power.<sup>35</sup> Sasha Pack's work shifts away from a state-centred perspective on international relations and focuses on the soft power of consumerism, leisure and tourism. Pack employs the notion of 'consumer diplomacy' to interpret the everyday practices of tourism – including hotel management from presentation, to service, to correct lighting

– as crucial to the image of Spain under Franco’s dictatorship as a modern and efficient tourist destination.<sup>36</sup>

Of course the use of hotels and tourism for state power projection can backfire. Across the ‘iron curtain’, the Soviet state-controlled tourist agency Intourist held a monopoly over foreign tourists visiting the Soviet Union before 1989.<sup>37</sup> While Soviet citizens were encouraged or coerced to holiday within the borders of the Soviet Union,<sup>38</sup> foreign visitors represented an important source of hard currency for the state, as well an audience for Soviet ‘cultural diplomacy’<sup>39</sup> – even if they did not always leave with the best impression.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, the incomplete Ryugyong hotel, 330 metres and 105 storeys high, has dominated the skyline of Pyongyang for decades.<sup>41</sup> Construction began in 1987 as a national showcase for the World Festival of Youth and Students,<sup>42</sup> but was suspended in 1992 after the collapse of the state’s international sponsor the Soviet Union. Construction resumed in 2008 with the intention to open in 2012, but this has not yet happened. Rather than a triumph of the North Korean state and its leadership, and a useful earner of hard currency from tourism, the Ryugyong stands as a monument to the weakness and extravagance of the state’s centralised planning.<sup>43</sup>

## **2. Soft targets**

An open door is crucial to the functioning of hotels, but this openness also entails risks. Hotels have long been seen as ‘soft targets’ for acts of political violence, including insurgency and terrorism.<sup>44</sup> The 1946 bombing by Irgun of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, the headquarters of the British Mandate authorities in Palestine, and the later bombing of the Semiramis Hotel by Haganah in 1948, are two very famous early examples. A more recent example is the 2003 bombing by Al-Qaeda in Iraq of the Canal Hotel in Baghdad, headquarters of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq. Such events are not confined to the Middle East, of course. The Irish Republican Army repeatedly targeted hotels during the ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland, including the 1984 bombing of the Grand

Hotel in Brighton, location of the UK Conservative Party conference, and the repeated targeting of the Europa Hotel in Belfast, which earned the title of Europe's (or even the world's) most bombed hotel.<sup>45</sup>

There has been a marked increase in attacks on hotels in the eight years following 9/11: 62 attacks in 20 countries, compared with 30 attacks in 15 countries in the previous eight years.<sup>46</sup> Various factors have made hotels more frequent targets post-9/11, including the heavier securitisation of high-profile critical infrastructure such as embassies, and the ongoing devolution of terrorist groups towards regional 'franchises' which lack the training and equipment to attack heavily securitised compounds. Attacks like those in Mumbai in 2008 and Jakarta in 2003 and 2009 have resulted.<sup>47</sup>

Debbie Lisle has analysed how seemingly antithetical notions like terrorism and tourism are implicated in the same post-9/11 geopolitical discourses of international security, and in the reorganisation of mechanisms of American/Western soft power.<sup>48</sup> Looking specifically at the bombing of hotels, Lisle argues that American tourists have a renewed diplomatic role based on claims of solidarity with victims of terrorism in places like Bali.

Hotels have seen their infrastructures and functioning reorganised in light of the War on Terror. But securing hotels requires a difficult balance between openness and closure. It is difficult to implement airport-style checks in a hotel, complete with full body and luggage scans and armed security personnel, without compromising its welcoming atmosphere. Even so, some of these practices *have* become normalised in hotels in response to the increased targeting of hotels by militants and terrorists. Hotels deploy technologies such as 'large concrete blocks, manned security checkposts, automatic bollards and electronic barriers that increase the standoff distance' between the hotel interior and the world outside.<sup>49</sup> In this liminal zone, the hotel's conditions of hospitality can be imposed, and potentially unwelcome guests screened out, for security or other reasons. Pre-arrival data surveillance and screening, then, once inside, a 'security matrix' of CCTV, card-activated doors

and elevators and security guards, further attempt to control guests and the potential risks they bring.<sup>50</sup>

### **3. Strategic infrastructure of conflict**

The targeting of hotels during conflict can take another form. Their locations and infrastructures can become strategically valuable assets during war, hence there are numerous examples of hotels being used or taken over by states, regular armies and irregular militias. Within this, we can see hotels commandeered as logistical bases for the coordination of political and/or military activities, and others redeployed so that acts of violence can be conducted from them.

In the former case, numerous examples include the Princess Hotel (now Fairmont Hamilton Princess) in Bermuda, which served as an Allied military hub and intelligence and censorship centre during the Second World War.<sup>51</sup> The southern wing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, mentioned in the last section, hosted British Mandate administrative and military headquarters until it was bombed in 1946. The Ledra Palace in Nicosia, discussed in theme 6, became the headquarters of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus when the city was divided in the 1974 civil war. Since 2014, Al-Masira hotel in Tobruk has hosted one of Libya's two rival governments, which holds parliamentary sessions in the hotel's conference hall, 600 miles from the capital Tripoli.<sup>52</sup>

In the latter case of weaponising the hotel, there are again numerous examples. During the Bosnian war in the 1990s, the Sarajevo Holiday Inn continued to function as a hotel, hosting the newly declared Bosnian government, alongside international actors such as war reporters (see theme 4). The upper floors were used by snipers in the initial days of the conflict, and soon declared off limits to hotel staff and visitors.<sup>53</sup> In February 2011 in Egypt, the Mubarak regime reportedly deployed snipers on the rooftop of Cairo's Ramses Hilton Hotel, to target protesters camped in the nearby Tahrir Square.<sup>54</sup> More recently, Islamist rebels entrenched themselves in the Safir hotel, perched on

a hill overlooking the Syrian town of Maaloula, while fighting Syrian government forces.<sup>55</sup> These latter examples rest on the dual value of hotels' physical height. Their verticality represents a militarily strategic asset during conflict.

No hotel conveys this better than Beirut's Holiday Inn-Saint Charles which, for almost its entire existence, has stood as a ruin overlooking west and central Beirut. After opening as a hotel in 1974, in the heart of Beirut's cosmopolitan hotel district, from October 1975 the Holiday Inn became a strategic base for armed militias to target the city below. Fighting between rival militias spread across Beirut, and a bloody frontline (the 'Green Line'), dividing the city in two, was sealed amidst the high-rise hotels at the waterfront. The Holiday Inn was the last stronghold in a six-month battle, after which the hotel district became a no-man's land for the rest of the war. The hotels became strategic assets within the urban geopolitics of the civil war.<sup>56</sup>

There was not a mere background presence to a conflict taking place all around; Beirut's hotels, and especially the Holiday Inn, mediated the dynamics of conflict in four ways.<sup>57</sup> Firstly, by determining the course and final closure of Beirut's dividing line. Secondly, the hotel district was open, designed to facilitate a smooth and profitable flow of customers and goods. This openness and the transience of guests allowed the hotels to be quickly emptied and occupied by the militias. Thirdly, their infrastructure became a privileged platform to surveil and target the city below – especially the Holiday Inn, with its 24 floors and circular rooftop bar. The high floors of hotels offer panoramic views of the city as a commodity to be consumed by paying guests; when the militias took over, they did so for those same panoramic views of the city, so as better to target, possess and dominate it. Lastly, militia propaganda celebrated the fall of the Holiday Inn as the conquest of a symbol of a rival ideology of foreign capital and wealth that did not relate to Lebanon's and Beirut's social inequalities. The hotel's iconic image was re-appropriated for militia propaganda and

commemoration, its interiors and equipment looted, and its architecture reconfigured to serve as means of warfare.

That the building ceased to function as a hotel (in contrast to the Sarajevo Holiday Inn) is somewhat beside the point – what was constructed as a hotel became *in its very form* a strategic military asset. This infrastructure of hospitality became one of hostility in the time it took armed militias to take over from paying guests, the click of a tourist's camera replaced by the crack of a sniper's gun.

#### **4. Hotels and war reporters**

When war descends and tourists flee, international journalists arrive to cover events. Pinkerton argues that while the texts, videos and photographs produced by journalists have been the subject of critical geopolitical analysis,<sup>58</sup> the role of journalists themselves in the 'production, interpretation and circulation' of these materials has been somewhat neglected.<sup>59</sup> One exception is Maggie O'Kane, whose highly personalised reports from the Bosnian war in 1992 have been posited as an 'anti-geopolitical eye', an embodied 'view from somewhere' that challenged dominant geopolitical scripts of the conflict.<sup>60</sup> The *where* of this view from somewhere is crucial: extending Pinkerton's point, the spaces from which journalists operate are crucial for our understandings of war. We argue that the hotel is a crucial locus for such processes. Hotels that open their doors to journalists can become essential platforms for seeing and reporting war.<sup>61</sup>

These relative safe havens, enclosed, sanitised and securitised, are 'often one of a limited number of physical places that members of the international community will visit',<sup>62</sup> and can become gathering places for the international media and for local and international political actors. In her persuasive investigation of Sarajevo's Holiday Inn, the late Lisa Smirl explained how the hotel became 'a key interface between external actors and local contexts', a crucial site for the production, circulation and consolidation of specific understandings of the Bosnian war, the siege of Sarajevo, and its

resolution. For those fighting, the journalists holed up in the hotel represented 'an audience to be performed for ... seeing what the elites wanted them to see'. The hotel therefore became 'constitutive of the conflict geography', shaping a dominant but flawed narrative of a war based on pre-existing and clearly defined ethnic divisions, one consumed both by international audiences and those under siege in the city.<sup>63</sup>

The Commodore Hotel in West Beirut served a similar function for international journalists covering the Lebanese civil war during the 1970s and 80s. 'Every war has its hotel, and the Lebanese wars had the Commodore ... an island of insanity in a sea of madness'.<sup>64</sup> International journalists congregated in the Commodore, in part, because it was one of very few places that had functioning international telephone and telex lines, on which journalists relied to file their reports. This made the Commodore 'a meeting-place, a press club, a conference centre' but also 'a trap' in Robert Fisk's view: 'a safe haven from the war ... [that] served to isolate the press from the world outside its doors'. This 'unreal world' allowed 'a breed of journalistic lounge lizard' to report on the war without leaving the hotel, picking up information from informants and gossip in the hotel lobby.<sup>65</sup> This isolation and skewed sense of reality and priorities was illustrated, for Fisk, by the \$500 reward offered by one British journalist for the safe return of the hotel's parrot, when the hotel was finally taken over and looted by militiamen in 1987. The parrot, Coco, was celebrated for imitating the sounds of incoming shells, and had featured in numerous journalists' accounts of the war (accounts Fisk condemns as simplistic and clichéd).<sup>66</sup>

## **5. Emergency care and hospitality**

Hotels' security measures, management decisions, provisions of food and water, communication services and accommodation can also turn them into relative safe havens within spaces of conflict and strife. This has been discussed above in the case of international journalists. Journalists, like tourists, are paying guests, but in certain cases hotels are capable of extending forms of welcome



and hospitality to those who are in need of urgent shelter but may not have the means to pay. In such emergency situations, the infrastructures of hotels can be reconfigured to grant refuge, care and relief to those fleeing violence or danger. This is clearly not the norm, but several important examples point to this functional flexibility of hotels, some of which have experienced repeated functional transformations.

In the run up to the Second World War, for example, Amsterdam's Lloyd Hotel was used to house Jewish refugees, then hosted prisoners during the war itself. After the war, the building served as a juvenile detention centre from the 1960s, then hosted artists from the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, before reopening as a boutique hotel in 2004. This varied history is packaged and commercialised as part of the experience for guests today.<sup>67</sup> In another example, around 200 000 Muslim and Croat refugees from Bosnia fled Serbian attacks and headed to the towns of Croatia's Dalmatian coast in 1992. Established tourist towns like Split became strained yet remained hospitable, with their many restaurants donating food to the refugees and their hotels and resorts, then devoid of tourists, turned into accommodation for refugees.<sup>68</sup> A further famous case is that of the Hotel des Milles Collines in Kigali, depicted in the film *Hotel Rwanda*. At the height of the Rwandan genocide, 700 ethnic Tutsis were given shelter at the Milles Collines. The hotel manager, a Hutu, used contacts in the military, and bribed officers with alcohol from the hotel's stores, to keep the hotel off limits to militiamen targeting Tutsis with genocidal violence.<sup>69</sup>

Tbilisi's 'refugee hotel' represents a further compelling case. More than 200,000 ethnic Georgians were displaced during the 1992-3 separatist conflict in the region of Abkhazia.<sup>70</sup> Many of these internally displaced people (IDPs) were housed in hotels and empty buildings in the capital, Tbilisi. The Iveria Hotel, a 22-storey landmark building in the centre of the city, became home to 800 IDPs, and was thus transformed into a 'hotel/refugee camp' until the IDPs were finally moved out in 2004.<sup>71</sup> Over 12 years, the hotel's inhabitants adapted the material structure of the hotel, many

enclosing balconies with improvised building materials. Once a site of privilege and elite mobilities in the Soviet era, the hotel was transformed into 'a post-modern ruin, a hybrid of original modernist architectural intention and the bricolage of architectural adornments and modifications made by the IDPs'.<sup>72</sup> Prominent and visible for miles around, the Iveria refugee hotel brought the political realities of the Abkhazia conflict into the heart of Tbilisi, the newly independent post-Soviet capital.<sup>73</sup>

A very different kind of emergency refuge was offered by the Divan Istanbul hotel in June 2013. The Divan lies on the northern edge of Gezi Park, on Taksim Square in central Istanbul, which became the focal point of large-scale urban protests against the park's demolition and wider opposition to the 'authoritarian urban neoliberalism' of Turkey's prime minister Recep Erdoğan and the ruling party, AKP.<sup>74</sup> On the evening of 15 June 2013, police used bulldozers to clear the protest camp, fired water cannon and tear gas at protesters, and there were sustained clashes between police and demonstrators in the side streets around Taksim Square. Divan's location made it an obvious place for those fleeing the police to seek refuge. The hotel could, of course, have turned away protesters, but Divan's management, supported by the proprietor Koç Holding, allowed protesters in and gave access to first aiders to help the injured. In this emergency situation, the infrastructure of the hotel was reconfigured to give refuge and care to those fleeing and injured by the police action. In response, the police stormed the hotel, beating protesters and launching tear gas canisters inside the lobby.

Of course Divan's decision to open its doors to protesters did not represent unconditional hospitality in the manner proposed by Derrida, but clearly it went beyond the monetised hospitality offered by a hotel in normal times, and certainly a refusal to grant refuge would have seen protesters exposed to further police violence.<sup>75</sup> This action led the international hospitality consultant PKF Hotelexperts to give Divan their 'Hospitality Innovation Award' in October 2013, declaring that Divan 'showed solidarity and courage during Gezi Park protests and proved how important hospitality is during

crisis situations'.<sup>76</sup> These events had broader repercussions for Divan and Koç Holding, who found themselves positioned against the government and its economic and (geo)political vision for Turkey, and even accused by Erdoğan of cooperating with terrorists.<sup>77</sup>

## **6. Infrastructure of peace-building**

We have discussed above some ways that hotels are drawn into relations of conflict, but a further dimension of hotel geopolitics is represented in the ways hotels host and facilitate practices of diplomacy and initiatives of peace-making. This function has a long lineage: the 1783 Treaty of Paris, ending the American Revolutionary War, was signed at the Hotel d'York, for example. Here, we discuss three examples, one hotel within a zone of conflict that has hosted peace-building meetings, and two in neutral places that have hosted formal diplomatic negotiations.

In November 2013, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the P5+1 countries<sup>78</sup> signed the Geneva Interim Agreement on the Iranian nuclear program, a major breakthrough in relations between Iran and the West. The negotiations were scheduled originally in the UN's grand and symbolic Palais des Nations, which hosts thousands of intergovernmental meetings and delegations each year. But delegates preferred the flexibility and practicality of a modern hotel, with rooms to rest and take showers between work sessions,<sup>79</sup> and so negotiations took place instead in the Geneva InterContinental hotel, about half a kilometre from the imposing Palais. After several failed attempts at reaching a conclusion, the Guardian's Julian Borger recounts, work continued in different private rooms where, respectively, the P5+1 foreign ministers and the Iranian foreign minister negotiated the final aspects of an agreement, passing drafts by hand between two rooms on different floors. The flexible space of the hotel, designed to facilitate quick communication (through lifts, in-room phones, concierge services, and so on) yet equally allowing privacy, reserve and informality, contributed to the conditions necessary for a deal. However, as negotiations reached a standstill on the Friday night, the hotel was double-booked with a charity party. The lobby, Borger describes, became a mix of

party guests and state officials, while in the meeting rooms ‘the focus of the diplomats poring over heavy-water reactor designs was constantly assaulted by the strains of Loch Lomond and Ring of Fire’.<sup>80</sup> This farcical scene could have been avoided at the Palais des Nations, but the more formal atmosphere of the Palais might not have been as conducive to a deal as the Intercontinental.

The use of hotels for formal diplomatic initiatives and negotiations is not new, of course. The Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh was a regular host to Israeli-Palestinian peace talks in the 1990s, and peace-making has become part of the city’s identity, and the image it presents to visitors. On the Salam (Peace) Road from the international airport, images commemorating the March 1996 Peacemakers Conference are displayed proudly to tourists and diplomats alike. Speaking at the Mövenpick Hotel (now the Jolie Ville Resort and Casino) in March 1996, at the Summit of the Peacemakers which brought together 27 governments for Middle East peace talks, US President Bill Clinton declared: ‘from around the world, we have come to the Sinai to deliver one simple, unified message: Peace will prevail.’<sup>81</sup> While several hotels were involved in hosting peace talks or delegations, the Jolie Ville is one of the most prolific, listing on its websites some of the talks it has hosted, including further Middle East peace talks in September 2000 and June 2003, an Iraqi peace conference in May 2007, a ‘Women for Peace’ conference in September 2002, as well as the 1998 G15 meeting and the 2003 Arab League Summit.

Nicosia’s Ledra Palace is located at the heart of the protracted conflict between Greek and Turkish Cyprus. Once the premier hotel in Cyprus, Ledra Palace had not only welcomed tourists, but was an important space for Cypriot nation building and dispute resolution, hosting ‘trendy parties, beauty contests, high profile social gatherings, international conferences, meetings for the constitution of the Republic of Cyprus and talks for a solution to ‘the Cyprus problem’’.<sup>82</sup> But since 1974, a 180km buffer zone has divided the Greek Republic of Cyprus (ROC) to the south from the Turkish-controlled and proclaimed Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) to the north.<sup>83</sup> Nicosia, divided between the two

republics, serves as capital city to both. Ledra Palace is located within the buffer zone, and so is completely entangled in the geopolitics of the conflict. From 1974, it served as headquarters of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus. Soon after the division, Ledra Palace resumed its role of hosting cross-community political meetings on the island. By the early 1980s, Ledra Palace was serving as a hub for 'city diplomacy',<sup>84</sup> hosting weekly meetings between the Greek and Turkish mayors of Nicosia, and in 2003 became the first of several crossing points to be opened between north and south Nicosia.<sup>85</sup> Transformed by the urban geopolitics of Nicosia, Ledra Palace remains a space of hospitality and encounter between communities, a point of contact in a zone of semi-abandonment, and a hub for a network of organisations working towards reconciliation.<sup>86</sup> Peace-making is not only a series of high-profile official events and negotiations, but equally importantly it happens as a process in which people come together, encounter one another and build relations of mutual respect, rapport and potentially affinity.<sup>87</sup> Far from being an inert backdrop against which peace-making events simply happen, the former hotel, its location, infrastructure and legacy facilitate and *make possible* such moments.

## **Conclusions: hotel geopolitics**

The geopolitics of hotels have been under-researched in geography and beyond. In this article, we argue that hotels are not incidental to geopolitics, backdrops against which the political events of international relations, war and peacemaking unfold. Rather, hotels are crucial spaces in and through which geopolitics is manifested, negotiated and shaped – by ordinary people as well as political elites. From being part of the landscape of war to offering refuge to victims of state repression and offering spaces of encounter and reconciliation, hotels are crucial materialities and infrastructures that underpin some of the everyday mechanisms of geopolitics. The examples and vignettes discussed in this article point to different ways that the presences, spatialities and hospitality of hotels are drawn into and intimately linked to geopolitical processes. We therefore,

propose *hotel geopolitics* as a research agenda that considers the complex ways in which hotels influence politics, power practices, international relations and dynamics of war and peace-making.

Two sets of spatial features can be generalised to outline this hotel geopolitics, manifestations of the relations of hospitality that point to hotels as mediators of power, war and peace. The first concerns hotels' relations with their surroundings, particularly the city and the state. Hospitality begins with an open door, and thus hotels are open to their surroundings and events occurring around them, whether peaceful or violent. This openness is carefully controlled and conditional; hotels need to be secured, but they also need to make profit by maintaining a constant flow of people and goods. This openness makes hotels 'soft targets' for terrorism (theme 2), where weapons and explosives can be smuggled in, or even where suicide bombers can infiltrate. Their openness is also an exclusive one: different people have different kinds of access to a hotel, and experience its hospitality differently. Hotels thus reflect and reinforce accepted social hierarchies, but – as in the case of Divan (theme 5) – can sometimes intervene in and disrupt them. Hotels are often seen as the embodiment of particular lifestyles and soft power (theme 1), which can trigger socio-political resentment and opposition, as well as excitement and aspiration. Hotels are usually private enterprises, but they might interact with city and state authorities in different ways, acting as interfaces between private capital and public actors and events, even hosting governments and military forces (theme 3), or clashing with state authorities (theme 5).

The second set of spatialities relates to the flexible built environment of hotels, and the human and non-human elements that materially constitute the relations of hospitality. This shapes how hotels might serve as dual technologies that can facilitate practices of war and peace. Hotels mix public and private areas that can be used by guests for different purposes. The negotiations at the Geneva Intercontinental (theme 6) illustrate how the different spaces of the hotel were used by negotiators, who were able to hold face-to-face negotiations in conference rooms, private discussions in private

rooms, and of course could rest in between sessions. The communal areas of the Beirut Commodore (theme 4) were used by war reporters, informants, political actors and militia leaders to meet, share and exchange information, while the aspect of one's guestroom (shelling side or not) was a matter of some importance to journalists staying there. While journalists gathered in the lobby of the Sarajevo Holiday Inn, its upper floors were transformed by snipers into something else entirely – something more like the Beirut Holiday Inn whose verticality was redeployed by militias as a machine for hostility rather than hospitality (theme 3). In moments of conflict and crisis, hotels can also be reconfigured and redeployed temporarily to offer emergency care and hospitality (theme 5): for protesters in Istanbul, for refugees and evacuees from conflict zones in Tbilisi, and for victims of ethnic conflict in Kigali. In divided Nicosia, the Ledra Palace was also transformed to host United Nations peacekeepers and peace-building meetings between political and community leaders (theme 6). Hotels are transient spaces, for temporary dwelling not permanent habitation, and they can therefore easily be emptied and reconfigured in times of conflict and crisis.

Hotels are sites of multi-scalar flows of people, capital and information; they are sites of encounter, inclusion and exclusion; their carefully managed openness, transience and potential anonymity underpin their geopolitical potential; their materialities and symbolisms shape relations with their surroundings and the potential for conflict or cooperation. An often taken for granted part of our urban built environment, hotels become entangled in processes of war and peace, and the fine boundary that can exist between them. Hotels are far more than simply detached spaces of depoliticised leisure and tourism, of corporate hospitality mediated by financial exchange. They are also *geopolitical* spaces, embedded within broader relations of conflict and peace-making. Empirical research on geopolitics, and its engagements with the everyday materialities that shape war and peace, must take seriously the hotel as a space with geopolitical potential.

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78. The five permanent members of the UN Security Council, plus Germany.

79. J. Borger, 'How Iran Nuclear Deal Was Clinched to Johnny Cash's Ring Of Fire', *The Guardian*, 2013, sec. World News, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/24/iran-nuclear-deal-hotel-charity-concert>.

80. Borger, 'How Iran Nuclear Deal Was Clinched to Johnny Cash's Ring Of Fire'.

81. S. H. Storer, 'Terror Summit: Many Words, No Action', *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, 1996), [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1996-03-14/news/9603140128\\_1\\_tel-aviv-summit-site-arab-israeli](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1996-03-14/news/9603140128_1_tel-aviv-summit-site-arab-israeli).

82. M. Epaminondas, *Home for Cooperation*. (Nicosia: AHDR, 2011).

83. Divided first under British colonial rule, Cyprus's two main ethnic communities, Greek and Turkish, have had troubled relations for decades. In the 1960s, the two communities became increasingly polarised and segregated and the British army, in order to quell strife between the two communities, drew a line cutting the city in two. In 1974, the Turkish army invaded the north of Cyprus in response to the removal by the Greek military Junta of the Republic of Cyprus Archbishop Makarios, under whom the island had reached a fragile political equilibrium. As a result, the city of Nicosia was also divided, along the Green Line drawn by the British in 1963.

84. L. Demetriades, 'City Diplomacy to Build Measures of Confidence in Nicosia' (presented at the Forum for Cities in Transition - Brussels open days: City diplomacy: A tool for building measures of confidence, Nicosia, 2009), <http://citiesintransition.net/2009/10/06/brussels-open-days-2009/>.

85. See also E. R. Charlesworth, *Architects without Frontiers : War, Reconstruction and Design Responsibility* (Amsterdam; London: Architectural, 2006); M. Howe, '2 Mayors Ease Rift in Divided Cyprus', *The New York Times*, 1982, sec. World. See also E. R. Charlesworth, *Architects without frontiers : war, reconstruction and design responsibility* (Amsterdam; London: Architectural, 2006); M. Howe, '2 Mayors Ease Rift in Divided Cyprus', *The New York Times*, 1982, sec. World.

86. Including the Fullbright Center, the Home for Cooperation (H4C), the Peace Research Institute (PRIO) and the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR)

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87. McConnell, Megoran, and Williams, *Geographies of Peace*.