UNWELCOME "GUESTS", UNWILLING "HOSTS": RETHINKING HOSPITALITY THROUGH THE CULTURE, LITERATURE, AND THOUGHT OF CONTEMPORARY US WOMEN OF COLOR

when you hit the holy bank you do not care in your pyramid
of insulations you do not care about those who fight for you
write for you live for you act for you study for you dance for you
parade for you paint and construct for you carry you build you
inform you feed you nanny you clean you vacuum for you swipe
the grease off your clothes chef for you serve you teach you carry
carry you rock you to sleep and console you the rape the assault
the segregation the jailing the deportations upon deportations
the starving the ones curled up on the freezing detention corners
because they wanted to touch you to meet you against all odds
and you —you
just don't talk about it

—JUAN FELIPE HERRERA, *Every Day We Get More Illegal* (2020)

Immediately after they were airborne and instructions had come for them to loosen
their belts and feel free to smoke, a neatly coiffured hostess of the airline walked to
her. She said, "You want to join your two friends at the back, yes?"
"My two friends?" wondered Sissie.
She raised her eyes and, following the direction of the hostess's finger, saw
two faces. She was about to say she had not met them before . . .
Something told her to cool it. She went to join them.
Of course, it was a beautiful coincidence that they were two extremely handsome
Nigerian men who were going on the same programme she was on.
But to have refused to join them would have created an awkward situation,
wouldn't it? Considering too that apart from the air hostess's obviously civilised
upbringing, she had been trained to see to the comfort of all her passengers.
Naturally, she was only giving Sissie a piece of disinterested advice to make her feel at
ease enough to enjoy her flight.

—AMA ATA AIDOO, *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977)

The episode by Ama Ata Aidoo from *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) stages the power relations at work within the so-called "hospitality business" of a commercial flight. Sissie, a Ghanaian female passenger, compliantly follows the "advice" of the white hostess welcoming her on behalf of the airline company. The hostess's high-standing "care work" embodies the "civilised" terms of the airline's welcome, whereby "the comfort" of all the passengers rests on the racial and ethnic marking of those euphemistically labelled as "friends". As in any patriarchal, male-dominated realm, "feminine hospitality is almost an oxymoron, since women are rarely hostesses in their own right" (McNulty, 2007: xxvii). In different degrees, both women are subordinate to the "host" of liberal capitalist patriarchy represented by the airline: While the white woman, a "dependent thing" or chattel of the hospitality business embodies the racializing authority of Western capitalist patriarchy (xviii), Sissie, the passenger, knows she will only feel welcome if she follows her suggestion. Therefore, to avoid an "awkward situation", she "cool[s]" her initial discomfort and persuades herself that the hostess is giving her "disinterested advice to make her feel at ease enough to enjoy her flight".

Reflecting on this very episode, Sarah Ahmed states that "maintaining public comfort requires that some bodies 'go along with it'" and behave adequately in an environment that has already decided for them their adequate place for the "happiness" of the public and the "common good" (2010: 68-69). The foreign other is an "adequate" guest provided she docilely accepts her assigned place. Sissie's refusal to sit next to the other black passengers would have probably been perceived as an "awkward" menace to the integrity of the airline passengers under the hostess's care (McNulty, 2007: 70). Stretching the figuration of the plane incident to allegory, we might see Sissie's compliance and evasion of an "awkward" situation as the subsidiary behavior expected of women-of-color activists and academics in the United States and elsewhere. Intellectual feminists of color hoping to overcome the history of racism are often perceived as a "sign of its overcoming", a "happy sign of diversity" who should be grateful to "receive the hospitality by sharing in the happiness they have been given" in liberal society (Ahmed, 2010: 264). By this token, they should renounce any criticism of racial discrimination. Had a hypothetical angry Sissie voiced her nonconformity and had a hypothetical receptive hostess seen her passenger's anger as akin —however different in nature— to her own angers and frustrations, an uncomfortable but potentially transforming conflict might have ensued. The women might have "scrutinize[d] the often-painful face of each other's anger", the "grief of distortions between peers", and their shared dependence on the power and identity of a patriarchal, capitalist host, under whom they have "different needs and living contexts" and different angers (Lorde, 1982: 129).

Sarah Ahmed and Audre Lorde's respective reflections on happiness and anger enable an affective point of entry into the conditional character of Western hospitality and its contradictions as experienced by women of color in the United States and elsewhere. The exploration of these incongruities is especially in order given the very inhospitable social environment created by the current rollback of civil rights in the United States, "the promotion of bullying, nasty, cruel, and mean speech in political discourse" of Trumpist MAGA (Make America Great Again) politics in the country since the mid-2010s (Alarcón, 2023: 1), and the overall anger of women, peoples of color, and minoritized collectives at their increasing disenfranchisement. Within capitalist relations there has been a displacement of hospitality from its religious and philosophical dimension to "the so-called hospitality industry (tourism) and a social and political discourse of parasitism, in which the stranger is construed as a hostile invader of the host nation or group" (McNulty, 2007: vi). The main hindering element to hospitality in the secular, capitalist world is the conditional regulation of its uncertainty, an uncertainty Jacques Derrida defines as the "not-yet" or the "not-knowing" inherent to welcoming a stranger: "We do not yet know who or what will come, nor what is called hospitality and what is called in hospitality" (2000: 11). Western hospitality can no longer posit an "unconditional" welcome, as it always involves the host's "invitation" and "acceptance" (6). By distinguishing between "conditional" and "unconditional" (or absolute) hospitality Derrida underscores the contradictory nature or aporia in acts of hospitality where there is an owner/host who has both the power to receive and the power to control the rights and duties of the guest by law (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000: 77). At the same time, relations of hospitality involve the dispossession of the host's subjectivity, identity, and home at the very moment in which these entities open to the unfamiliar:

> The hospitality relation concerns the crisis of what is properly "mine", the limits of the "at home-ness" of identity. To call for an understanding of the subject as hospitality is thus to oppose to the notion of identity —with all that it implies of the self-identical, the total, and the integral— an understanding of subjectivity as foreign to itself, as nonidentical. The act of introducing a foreigner into the home thus recalls the dispossession of identity that is uncannily internal to identity itself, to the *chez soi* of having and possessing. (McNulty, 2007: xix)

This dispossession of the home and the self is, in fact, the condition of possibility of the act of hospitality. In modern history, however, the unpredictable otherness or "unhomeliness" of the encounter between guest and host is displaced as the property of the invading stranger, who is "the figure of the unknowable" (McNulty, 2007: xiv-xxiii), the "outsider inside" (Ahmed, 2000: 2, 22). The

domestication and homogenization of women, ethnic minorities, and any non-identical beings as the "outside" regulates and depersonalizes uncertainty, thus impeding the sacred unconditional realization of hospitality, the infinite ethical obligation towards the stranger in some of the doctrinal and theological religious interpretations of Genesis exposed by Tracy McNulty. Since these so-called "guests" do not merit the absolute respect of the so-called "host", the impersonal formalities that regulate the relationship with them as "strangers" shift the focus away from ethics and immanence to identity, and to "the irrational side of our relation to the stranger —fear, anxiety, and hatred" (McNulty, 2007: vii).

The hosting subject in acts of hospitality is the "master of the house", "of the subordinates who make up the household (servants, slaves, and dependent women)", and "of the livestock or chattel that form his personal property" (McNulty 2007: ix). Indubitably masculine and white, the host is identical to himself, his property, and the identity and moral principles of the group, the collective, or the nation in whose name he acts (79). Feminist approaches to hospitality replace the association between the host, his property, and his identity with an emphasis on the unfamiliar and the uncanny to overturn the investment of hospitality with "mastery" and "power" (Hammington, 2010: 25). McNulty's feminist reinterpretation of hospitality hinges on the potentially destabilizing import of the hostess as an external representation of the male host's mastery and as an appendage to his "internal" identity. The symbolic, accessory status of the hostess poses a challenge to the host's "oneness"; it exposes his insufficiency and lack of integrity as a subject (2007: xxxviii). In McNulty's view, the "feminine" represented by the hostess is neither an ontological characteristic of female subjectivity nor a cultural function linked to gender roles, but a disruption of identity from within, the manifestation of the Other within the self: The feminine is "not only the Other inside who welcomes the Other outside, but the internal marking of alterity, the index of the Other's implication in the self" (2006: xvii). In consequence, the "feminine" in relations of hospitality does not stand for law and identity but for ethics and immanence:

> As an ethics, the aim of hospitality is not to maintain the ipseity of the host, but rather to open it to the unforeseen stranger: a stranger who is not simply the counterpart, inversion, or negation of the host, but an alterity whose admission into the intimacy of the master's home alters it irreparably. Ethics implies not only identity, but relation: the possibility of a relationship between a "me" and a "you" who are not just pluralities of the "I", a host and a guest who are not merely reciprocal —and therefore potentially hostile— positions. (McNulty, 2007: xiv)

Feminist hospitality, then, rests on the hostess's receiving outsiders through her own will and in her own right assuming this Other within without being subject to the conditional laws of power, property, and identity of the "master" of the house (McNulty, 2007: xiv).

From colonial times to the present, "hospitality" in the United States has been conditional on a "white" "nation by design" that has nearly eradicated indigenous peoples, imported slaves, and accommodated "desirable" immigrants discretionally, some of whom have been "returned" to their places of origin through the so-called "revolving-door" policies (Zolberg, 2006). The virtual death and extermination of indigenous peoples at the hands of European invaders was justified through theological, ecclesiastical, political, and philosophical arguments that relied on the ontological construction of the *indian* as beastly, idolatrous, and not human. As such, they were "not sufficiently developed as creatures of reason to assume ownership or claim property as the expression of their individual talents and capacities" and as the manifestation of a "moral society" (McNulty, 2007: 62). In the case of slaves, since the personhood and mastery of the host have archaically been linked to the possession of property, they are "annulled in the act of being made property of another" (xxxi). Reminiscent of colonial justifications, the supremacist politics and discourse prevailing in the United States today are, Norma Alarcón argues, gradually replacing and destroying secularity (2023). Sovereignty, property, and religion-inflected nativist superiority lay the grounds of the crude, deceitful logic of self-appointed "rightful" citizens by birthright and origin, a logic that fabricates desirable and non-desirable citizens "in the guise of (pseudo) 'ontological' notions of irreducible and essentially incommensurable 'difference'" (De Genova, 2016: 227). The increasing hostility toward migrants and refugees is not an end in and of itself but serves the "productive" purpose of a "deeply racialized (and commonly, avowedly racist) politics of citizenship" (228). The supremacy of "hosts" of the country is founded on a "disciplinary conservatism —devoted above all else to the *conservation* of the concept of 'culture'", which is in keeping with the Eurocentric tenets of the anthropological representation of "natives", who are "simple repositories and receptacles of their essential and irreducible cultural (now 'ontological') differences" (De Genova, 2016: 229). Supremacist nativism is therefore a "geographically determinate 'cultural' difference in some presumably isomorphic correspondence of people, culture, and place" (230). Given this essentialization of cultural difference, it is no wonder that in Trump and post-Trump eras, the "wall" should have replaced the quintessential American myth of the open (and expansionist) "frontier" (Grandin, 2019). While the ideology of military and economic expansion heavily relied on the pretense of spreading democratic freedom at the expense of the uncomfortable but necessarily "regenerating" violence of war, colonization and exploitation, the redoubling of security at the US-Mexico border defended by white nativism and supremacism unscrupulously constructs the

nation through the aversion to and fear of the "non-normative" sexual orientation, gender, race, looks, poverty, origin, and alleged criminal disposition of the unde-sirable.

Since white Christian supremacy coexists with neoliberal capitalism, nativist politics and hate speech only intensify the servitude and disenfranchisement of women and people of color, upon whose labor rests the secular guest-host binary of the hospitality industry. Women of color work double days for the sustenance of families they are often separated from while pretending they like playing the role of "hostesses" in their jobs as they have been trained to do. While the label "guest worker" may have been used to refer to men and women from Latin American countries within binational temporary-work agreements, it is very unlikely that peoples of color will ever think of themselves as "guests". In a nation that in effect excludes them from the sphere of labor rights, welfare, healthcare, higher education, and retirement pensions, the precarization of their labor and their lives is "part and parcel of the resulting heterogeneity of living labor commanded and exploited by capital" (Medrazza and Neilson, 2013: 85). Therefore, the experience of women of color cannot be circumscribed within the "guest/host" binary and may be better described as an "inclusion through exclusion" or "differential inclu-sion" through the hierarchies, divisions, segmentation, and discrimination estab-lished jointly by neoliberal capital and a nativist politics of citizenship (Medrazza and Neilson, 2013: 159; De Genova, 2016: 233). Forced sterilization, kidnapping, rape, deportation, family separations, low wages, and the exacerbated health haz-ards in Republican states after the repeal of the Roe v. Wade court ruling are only some instances of the abuse, control, and disposability of documented and undoc-umented women of color's bodies within a politics of immigration and citizenship that gives prerogatives to "the [Western] native" (De Genova, 2016: 133). Men and women with high-paying jobs may naturally ignore the contradictions inherent in the prevailing notions of Western hospitality thanks to a leisurely life that, as sug-gested by Juan Felipe Herrera's excerpt from "you don't talk about it", allows them to look elsewhere and "not care".

The "politics of rage, hate and grievance" described by Norma Alarcón are clearly visible in political and intellectual discourses where the term "woke" is dis-engaged from its original vernacular African American meaning —staying awake in the face of racism and discrimination—, and stigmatized as grooming, indoc-trinating "Anti-American" anger under the derogatory label of "wokeism". In tune with these politics, "woke" and "wokeism" defame the intellectual and activist crit-ical anger expressed by the Black Lives Matter movement, the Freedom to Learn Network, critical race theory, and other intellectual currents and social initiatives carried out by African Americans, Latinx peoples, Native Americans, Asian Amer-icans, LGTBQ+ people, and feminists (Andrews, 2023). The logic of this discourse

—summarized by Alarcón as "you are either with us or against us"— constructs and places foreignness outside the American ethos through conspiracy theories, chaos, and "hysteria, if not psychosis" as part of "the structure of feeling that guides their behavior" (Alarcón, 2023).

The feminist acceptance of the "unhomely" inherent to ethical hospitality (McNulty, 2007: vii), the "not yet" and the "not knowing" referred to by Derrida, necessarily involves dealing with the role of rage, anger, and fear in any encounter between strangers, a task developed by the affective turn in feminist theory in the last two decades. This seemingly innovative approach was *already* essential in the 1980s in the coalitional spirit of women of color and minoritized collectives. Audre Lorde hinted at the affective repercussion of nativism and racism in the above-quoted speech, "The Uses of Anger", where she addressed the racist hatred of the privileged, the reactive anger of the underprivileged, and the fear of this anger by the former. While the objective of racist hatred is "death and destruction" (Lorde, 1982: 129), anger and fear may have practical, creative uses if confronted and acknowledged by both the oppressed and the privileged:

> My fear of anger taught me nothing. Your fear of that anger will teach you nothing, also.

> Women responding to racism means women responding to anger: Anger of exclusion, of unquestioned privilege, of racial distortions, of silence, ill-use, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal, and co-optation.

> My anger is a response to racist attitudes and to the actions and presumptions that arise out of those attitudes. If your dealings with other women reflect those attitudes, then my anger and your attendant fears are spotlights that can be used for growth in the same way I have used learning to express anger for my growth. (Lorde, 1982: 124)

It is only timely that in this emotionally charged political climate, black feminist Jennifer Nash sees identitarian strategies as fostering fragmentation and division and calls for the reinstatement of "women-of-color feminism" as a methodologically "regenerative space" (2019: 84). Also very relevant is this theorist's rejection of the social and academic "intersectionality wars" that have coopted the term beyond its intellectual, disciplinary origins, emptied it of meaning, and identified it with an "ideology" that "colonize[s] the hearts and minds of vulnerable college students" (2). Nash focuses on the work of Audre Lorde and other forerunners of coalitional feminism such as June Jordan, Leslie Marmon Silko, Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange, the Combahee River Collective, Cherríe Moraga, and Gloria

Anzaldúa, to "engender generative feminist connections that consider questions of both place and race as fundamentally made through each other, and that center multiple and crosscutting projects of domination, including race, gender, sexuality, class, accent, and ability" (Nash, 2019: 109). Nash establishes links between their thought and the affective politics of Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, José Esteban Muñoz, and Ann Cvetkovich to examine "how structures of domination feel, and to suggest that simply naming structures fails to do justice to how they move against (and inside of) our bodies" (30). This revalorization of the affective politics of women of color during second-wave feminism puts forward witnessing and mutual regard for the other beyond the personal as political (114-5). Keener on the "political is personal" than on "the personal is political", anthologies such as *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) and *Making Face, Making Soul* (1990) were permeated, as Nash's recent revisiting of these works, by "a commitment to mutual vulnerability [that] constitutes a commitment to be intimately bound to the other (or to others), to refuse boundaries between self and other" (2019: 115). We have only to recall Emma Goldman's words in Cherríe Moraga's epigraph to her chapter "La Güera" in *This Bridge* to detect McNulty's "feminine" or the "index of the Other in the self": "It requires something *more than personal experience* to gain a philosophy or point of view from any specific event. It is the quality of our response to the event and *our capacity to enter into the lives of others* that help us to make their lives and experiences our own" (1981: 27; my emphasis).

In their reconsiderations of hospitality through the thought and artistic practice of women of color, the contributions in this special issue rely heavily on historical memory, testimony, storytelling, affective politics, and decolonial phenomenology and epistemology. Given the mismatch between a humanistic, almost old-fashioned discourse of hospitality and the secular use of the word in the service business, the essays demonstrate a renewed interest in hospitality as a figuration of ethics and a critique of its practical and discursive contradictions: between a legally confirmed identity and the encounter with the unknown, between the unlimited responsibility toward a guest and gendered and racialized economic relations, between justice and fairness and essentialist views of the other (McNulty, 2007: viii). From distinct fields of expertise in US literary and cultural studies, the featured authors explore the transformative and contradictory dimension of hospitality in works by Native American, African American, Latinx, and Iranian American women of color. Silvia Martínez Falquina, María Platas, Núria Molines and Aarón Rodríguez, and Inmaculada Lara-Bonilla draw attention to encounters that challenge spatialities and temporalities and introduce indeterminacy, exploring the affective dimension of written and visual manifestations about migration, racial oppression, and colonization. They make visible alternative genres, forms, and thought —those produced in non-Western and hybrid Western contexts, such as the Caribbean, the Latina/o/x, the Black, and the Native American United

States— that challenge the boundaries between past and present, reason and emotion, academic and personal writing, activism and poetics. They propose a politics and poetics of proximity, conversation, and decolonial relationality with "the unknown that is knocking at the door" (Martínez-Falquina). An "affect-inflected philosophical thought" (Lara-Bonilla) runs through the works explored in the essays, where emotions are featured as part of any "unhomely" encounter and as catalysts of the challenge to the regulatory categories of Western conditional hospitality: identity, nation, community, sovereignty, and language. If (in)hospitable meetings, arrivals, and visitations are permeated by fear, anger, and violence, the voices, aesthetics, and thought explored "take [the host] on" (Anzaldúa in Lara-Bonilla) making a productive "use" of these emotions, tapping into them critically, and making them a source of renewal and insight for individual and collective purposes (Lorde, 1982: 128-130). Other essays address the critique of patriarchal notions of "conditional" hospitality as they affect women of color. Méliné Kasparian problematizes the role of Chicanas as "hostesses" and the assimilation of their racialized, ethnicized labor into the hosting society, examining, as well, their incorporation or "hosting" of the silenced stories of the vulnerable. Parisa Delshad's analysis of Masih Alinejad's autobiographical work underscores the journalist's conflation of "women", "life", and "freedom" in a captivity narrative where Iranian women's bondage and freedom is patterned around the individual merit of resilience. Such narratives of hospitality are conditioned by the host's expectations about the foreigner as either fearful and oppressive, or docile and accommodating. Overall, the essays in this issue contest the identitarian constitution of the female racialized other and of the hosting community and self, exposing the association of hospitality with mastery, property, and cultural uniformity and its violent, disempowering consequences. An offset to the current political discourse of supremacist greatness, rage, hatred, and grievance they also probe the creative, strengthening potential of multiple forms of otherness within culture, nation, and self to envision a more hospitable society.

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