

Cristina Martín Hernández

Of Borders and Bridges: Re-Imagining Hospitable Encounters Through a Feminist Border Perspective in Julia Álvarez's *Afterlife*

DOI: 10.7311/PJAS.17/2024.03

Abstract: While hospitality constitutes a threshold similar to a geopolitical border, the negotiation that its participants partake in commonly results in the establishment of a new borderline. Therefore, in a world where borders and movement are constantly being patrolled and (trans)formed—thus generating power asymmetries and perpetuating systemic violence—hospitality needs to be read as a possibility for ethical encounters and empathetic proximity to the Other. Drawing from Derrida's foundational theory of hospitality, border epistemology (Anzaldúa 1987; Brady 2000, 2002, 2022; Manzanos and Benito 2017) and feminist theories of subjectivity, mobility and hospitality (Braidotti 2011; Hamington 2010; Still 2010), this essay aims at exploring the migrant experience as expressed in Julia Álvarez's novel *Afterlife* (2020) by analyzing the interplay of hospitable and hostile spaces, and the negotiation of hosts and guests' subject positions. In so doing, this essay unfolds the instability of binominal relations within bordering and hospitality practices to ultimately disclose new forms of relationality and feminist social transgression.

Keywords: hospitality, borders, immigration, feminism, Julia Álvarez

Introduction

Practices of hospitality have become paramount in the democratic attempt of dismantling prejudices and forestalling discourses of exclusion and social containment. Paradoxically, many of these practices have failed to acknowledge the key role border dynamics play when social encounters occur, thus assuming and perpetuating hierarchical and asymmetrical power relations. In a world where migration constitutes, in many cases, a national crisis and a natural catastrophe akin to political discourses of sovereignty and prejudice, revising the intricacies of our encounters with the Other is rendered necessary in order to dismantle the language of violence and polarization. This revision, as this paper aims to disclose, is intrinsic to contemporary literary representations that deal with the nuances that construe mainstream political, ideological and historical representations of (im)migrants, and the consequences thereof.

Whilst the assumption of hospitality as a mark of Western civilization functions as an imperative to encourage welcoming practices (Lind et al. 1195), national policies and media coverage regarding migration and international humanitarian crises work towards an increasingly profound unawareness of what hospitality "truly" is, its ethical potential, and how has morphed throughout human

history. Thus, contemporary hospitality acts often fall flat in the face of massive and/or consistent human mobilizations, such as the refugees “crises” in Europe or the US-Mexico border crossings in North America. Uncertainties regarding how to encounter the Other—notice that positionality is often a proxy for the subject-host stance—are traversed by a pending and long-coming query: who are “we” and where do “we” belong within the hospitality scheme. Bereft of stable rubrics, the hospitable act is performed in a myriad of ways depending on the contextualization and identification of the participants (Still 5). Indeed, far from the homogenization of migrant experiences (Hron 287; Hoffman et al. 42), the major tenets of discussion revolve around “how” and “who” becomes eligible for entering the nation. While this eligibility might be understood in terms of capital and reciprocity, meaning citizens’ contribution to the host nation, mobility and hospitality ultimately relocate the performative and policing nature of the border to a wider and exchangeable social encounter where safety, legality and belonging are constantly at stake.

Thus far, this essay aims to analyze the need and potential of literary representations of hospitality and migration. This constant negotiation at the basis of spatiality and identity formation is beset by the political dimension of hospitality, which in turn elaborates the language of welcoming (Still 7).¹ In light of this political magnitude that structures hospitality as the relationship between states and individuals, the self—or what Levinas understood as the subject-host—is commonly constructed as “in opposition to,” thus unfolding an aporetic border perception that permeates the language of relatedness and socialization. Thus, the critique to Levinas’ subjectification of *hôte*, equally meaning host or guest, becomes essential to understand why the hospitality encounter has significantly been approached from the subject/host perspective. However, a shift in the paradigm is possible when resorting to feminist lenses and the original location of hospitality. If the hospitable act occurs when “crossing thresholds” (Still 4, 7), then the liminal space cannot be mastered by any of the participants, thus deactivating the principle of belonging—ultimately read by Levinas as usurpation (Manzanas Calvo and Benito Sánchez 40) and built upon the premise of social hierarchies. The texture of hospitality takes on what Jean-Luc Nancy advances as the convergence of two singularities, whose proximity is paradoxically an emphasis on distance as “the law of touching is separation” (Nancy 5). In this vein, no assimilation nor sameness are then at the core of hospitality, and a feminist form of understanding hospitality as horizontal and empathetic is rendered necessary.

In a similar vein, when crisscrossing territories, what may dissolve the idea of border or barrier may as well preserve it. This is the case of borders, which have been contemporarily read as a transforming, productive site that transfigures social and economic status (Brady, *The Fungible* 174). This performative vein of the border proves timely when discussing the corporeal practices of displacement, containment and surveillance (Sánchez-Palencia 15), and stresses the urge of “every society [that] needs to solidify and consolidate itself” (Martins 156). Other than construing spaces

1 I adhere here to Judith Still’s analysis of the three dimensions that construe hospitality: the social or ethical (between individuals), the psychological (with oneself or the Unconscious), and the political (between States or between the individual and the State) (7).

where power asymmetries perpetuate labor docility, cultural oppression and other forms of contemporary brutality, hospitality needs to be read as a potential resource that defuses its organizing and hierarchical nature by bringing to the fore what Rosi Braidotti denotes “the nonfixity of boundaries” as the basis of contemporary subjectivity (*Nomadic* 66). It is then not an imperative to execute hospitality within the realm of political subjectification, but the urgency to return to the ethics and sociality of hospitality encounters that matters (Still 8).

While hospitality constitutes a threshold similar to the border, the negotiation that its participants, host and guest, partake in commonly results in the establishment of a new borderline. In this sense, this paper seeks to demonstrate that albeit physical, borders have also been imagined as movable and invisible to later emerge in the way one encounters with the Other. Not only do we need to establish a parallelism between the politics of hospitality and border dynamics, but it is rendered urgent to envision a non-hierarchical structure of hospitality through the feminist theorization of proximity, horizontality and care ethics. In the case of migrants, this approach is considered primordial since borders are carried within themselves by navigating practices of hospitality and hostility within the alien land, as it is the case of Julia Álvarez’s exploration of hospitable relations in her novel *Afterlife* (2020). Following the story of Antonia, the novel explores the nuances of a double role: a (former) migrant who hosts a (newcomer) migrant, and the liminal states of hospitality. In analyzing these multiple encounters with the Other, Álvarez aptly pinpoints the fault lines of current hospitality schemes. Drawing from the foundational theorizations of hospitality, border epistemology and feminist theories of subjectivity, mobility and hospitality, this essay aims at exploring the migrant experience as expressed in Álvarez’s novel by analyzing the interplay of hospitable and hostile spaces and the negotiation of such binomial relations, thus mirroring borders’ kinetics. Ultimately, readers and characters will be able to navigate in/hospitable encounters and read them anew through new forms of relationality and feminist, social transgression.

Redefining Hospitable Encounters Through Feminist Border Lenses

Current conceptualizations of hospitality are irrevocably intertwined with ideas of migration, mobility and identity. So much so that a vast majority of contemporary examples of human movement are appraised through their convergence with plurality and directionality, thus placing the idea of “encounter” at the heart of these processes (Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 1). Whether hospitality implies a political, economic or ethical dimension is at stake within the multiple strands that aim to delimit the subject matter. Whilst some authors stress the traversing nature of borders, others reject the trite association between migration and hospitality since it enhances a paradigmatic and systematic narrative of power asymmetries (Molz and Gibson 6). The same is true of hospitality within a global context, where mobility is understood as a pivotal element of contemporary societies. Even though movement

does not equate migration, it does dialogue with the liberal notion of freedom which “is materialized through mobility, and [thus] power is materialized through the ways in which it can regulate and constrain movement” (Brady, *Scales* 12). It is no surprise, then, that hospitality is radically prized as an “industry” (Manzanas Calvo and Benito Sánchez 2, 5), or even a “business” (Still 1), thus mirroring already set-up ideas of migration industry and tourism (Cranston et al. 543). What is true is that welcoming practices of mobile subjects are strongly informed by a capitalized systematization of legal—and/or illegal—mobility that is sustained by an exchange of capital, services and privilege.

Already in the eighteenth century, hospitality was—and now continues to be—extended on the basis of law enforcement and reciprocity, quite unlike the Ancient Greek prescription, which foreshadowed a moral subordination to the divine unknown and the *xenos*. While the latter was conducted by means of absolute dedication and the promise of a divine reward through humility and generosity, contemporary forms of hospitality are subdued to a social and/or economic contract (Hamington 24; Still 11-12). Thus, the discourse of hospitality has morphed from a moralizing practice of civilization into a political encounter with the Other (Manzanas Calvo and Benito Sánchez 19). In the face of such limited rubrics, there unfolds a complex uncertainty: Is there a form of encounter that resembles unlimited hospitality or is it reciprocity a foundation of contemporary hospitality?

Mobility occurs at many levels and within many transpositional processes, to use Braidotti’s term. As Gloria Anzaldúa, and later Mary Pat Brady advance, the borderlands are of multiple kinds and are never—or not only—asccribed to statism. Trespassing social, cultural, political or economic borderlines is far beyond the geopolitical static borders these incursions are commonly associated with (Manzanas Calvo, n.p.), and so the resulting relocation of the subject becomes fluid and transitional. Far from a positive reading of hospitable encounters, border epistemology does not abide by the original moralizing nature of welcoming a visitor, but it rather codifies an encounter based on performative acts of bringing in/rejecting, opening and closing doors, etc., thus eliciting the visitor’s difference as a mark of displacement and illegitimacy (Manzanas Calvo and Benito Sánchez 20; Miller 114).

More than a reminder of binomial structures, border epistemology is of aid when apprehending the underlying neo-liberal rubrics of contemporary hospitality and functions as a platform for epistemological disobedience (Hamington 26; Smith et. al 259). This paradoxical double nature of borders as sites of containment and renegotiation opens the possibility of transcending aporetic perceptions of space and identity by laying bare the mechanisms of polarization. In this vein, feminist authors within the fields of transnationalism and new materialism imply that contemporary subjectivities are intrinsically grounded on modernity and Western Enlightenment, an assumption that resonates with the hospitality metaphor insofar as “[t]he oscillation and tension between mobility and the security of fixed locations

is one of modernity's most enduring and complex oppositional binaries" (Kaplan 212). The neo-liberal discourse ultimately juxtaposes the mobility of first-world citizens and the rendition of precarious experiences of migrants, thus elaborating a complex plot dominated by power and surveillance.

Border dynamics partake of hospitality in that the ethical and political aspects of encounters pivot transnational mobility and expand the work of bordering. Its performative vein regarding geopolitical displacement rather construes a productiveness that emerges from cultural transference and transversal mobilities (Brady, *The Fungibility* 175). Put differently, border work is still conceptualized as the foundation of state security inasmuch as identity negotiations at the borderline aptly restore a history of colonization, meaning that historical continuity re-produces a colonization and territorialization of bodies (Ahmed et al. 7). In the last decade, authors specialized in border theory have interrogated the coherence of border work once the border is "decentered," thus eliciting the permeability and porosity of borders as "not just lines on the ground, but rather ... an important part of our political imaginary that is predicated on an idea that territory exists, that states inhabit it, and that people are bound by it" (Johnson and Jones 4, 6). Indeed, borders emerge in the different spheres where hospitality occurs. Thus, the border is incorporated as a site of social (trans)formation and political encounter to the hospitality metaphor.

The history of colonization, as well as the historical continuity of colonial power asymmetries (Saldívar xi, coloniality of power), impinges on the radical relocation of hospitality as an ethical approach to the Other, as understood by Levinas, to a site of national belonging and citizenship. Under this light, Manzanas Calvo and Benito Sánchez aptly signal a transition between ethical hospitality and what they term "national hospitality" (37). In other words, a relocation of priorities within the hospitable encounter is what grants a new form of hospitality that displaces the guest's needs and brings to the foreground the safe emplacement of the host:

The birth of this form of conditional hospitality—contingent upon the presentation of legal documents, and the analysis of the returns of the hospitable act—is tied to the existence and recognition of sovereign territorial demarcations, boosted by the emergence of the nation-state. (Manzanas Calvo and Benito Sánchez 40)

What before was covert divinity or an opportunity for ethical encounters is now a presumed threat to national citizenship and belonging. Hospitality, then, consists of both a form of political surveillance (e.g. migration) and a form of enhancing neoliberal reciprocity (e.g. tourism). The stratification embedded in mobility and subjectification reveals how "the migration industry provokes different experiences of mobility, as well as immobility, across lines of class, legal status, age and gender" (Cranston et al. 549). Thus, binomial identifications such as

mobility-guest-precarity and immobility-host-sovereignty need to be further and critically analyzed from a feminist viewpoint, as this paper aims to do from now onwards.

Ahmed et al., in their questioning of home and migration, go on to identify the collision and superposition of different practices of mobility that generate a circuit of social transpositions ultimately bereft of generic assumptions of the self since “[i]t is precisely these collisions of the corporeal, the familial and the (post)national that create the densely conjoined (and often traumatic) struggles over identity, belonging and longing within uprootings and regroundings” (4). Thus, if hospitality partakes in the futile imagination of these binomial categories that contribute to the systematic establishment of precarity and sovereignty, then strategies of deflation are rendered necessary in order to broaden the potentiality of hospitable encounters. Likewise, the migration experience, whose meaning is produced and controlled by neoliberal conceptualizations of mobility, cannot be reduced to a one-way movement or to the mere transposition of economic subjects. Hospitality stands for not only crossing thresholds but, rather, inhabiting permanently these politicized spaces (Molz and Gibson 9).

Feminist theories do acknowledge the politicized and gendered practices of mobility that are inherently intertwined with circumstances of precarity and vulnerability. It is worth noting that the metaphorical vein ascribed to the conceptual analysis of migration and hospitality is not exclusionary but finds its logics in the material experience of those who traverse geopolitical boundaries in more than spatial terms, ultimately “this question of hospitality does entail paying serious attention to the question of political frontiers where admittance or refusal may even be a matter of life and death” (Still 4). Thus, precarity and vulnerability are enacted as material consequences of neoliberal discourses and practices of mobility. Albeit prone to be fetishized, literary and/or media representations of precarity do not only denounce an oppressive mastery over space and political sovereignty but also reflect upon the border gnosis underlying those social encounters that are dissociated from “state/security/mobility” (Cooper et al. 15) and that are performed by individuals in their daily lives. Thus far, other than dis/placement, the conceptualization that these feminist theories propose is based on relatedness as an analytical tools (Conlon 354), care ethics (Hamington 24), and horizontality in power relations (Brady, “Hemispheric” 167, *Scales* 34).

The feminist attempt to approach hospitality by means of resorting to an ethical origin relies on the assumption of vulnerability not as a prescription to precarity and submissiveness but rather understood as “a deliberate exposure to power, [which] is part of the very meaning of political resistance as an embodied enactment” (Butler 22). This vulnerability, embodied and relational, works towards the disempowerment of structural law enforcement or the conditions upon which hospitality is nationally and politically extended. In so doing, notions that sustained national hospitality will be deflated in order to create new forms of approaching the Other. If neoliberal work—such as “scaling,” in Brady’s terms—is what permeates

the systematic precarity within mobility and hospitality, and becomes “an effective imperial and colonial tool with profoundly homogenizing effects,” the subsequent reversal of roles within these encounters will lay bare the mechanisms of the coloniality of power that underlies national security and surveillance (Brady, “Hemispheric” 158). Conversely, an ethical and feminist approach that considers the border as a movable borderline that operates at psychological, ethical, and political levels, may give way to horizontal, empathetic and interdependent webs of solidarity and connection. According to Brady, regulating mobility through the neoliberal scale or scaffold imaginary undermines the ethics of hospitality by weakening kinship among migrants or “keep[ing] social relations precarious,” which in turn problematizes social integration or at least recognition as part of a society, resulting in what Brady denotes a “new docile labor force” (Brady, *Scales* 2). Thus far, the decentralization of labor and/or capital docility holds a central position in the renegotiation of identities and the reconfiguration of—at least—less hostile political and cultural imaginary. In like manner, it is fundamental to disentangle both hospitality and border work from the imperative of security/nation-state, thus leading to actual reparation and solace through an active enhancement of “emphatic proximity” (Braidotti, “Writing” 182) or “[d]ensity, not scale” (Brady, *Scales* 115). The feminist priorities are to leave behind the passive listening from a state of privilege and citizenship, and to dismantle the static emplacement of the self. This disjunction at multiple scales aims ultimately at decentralizing the host-subject position in the hospitality metaphor and codify the encounter by means of an ethical disposition.

Julia Álvarez’s *Afterlife* as a Case Study

Álvarez’s novel commences with the interweaving of absence and presence that results in the convulsion of time and space. Antonia, the protagonist, has lost her husband to an abrupt death. Thus, the subsequent scene is that of a woman waiting for her husband to return, and, in her waiting, she wanders about space as a deserted woman. Readers do not know yet, but Antonia’s process of mourning hints at a further alienating situation other than grief. Had the process of hospitality ever began or ended, she would have had the reassurance that her sense of belonging and grounding has tragically shifted. It is worthy to note that Antonia’s Dominican background plays an important role in the construction of this initial sense of uprooting since she had partaken of the migratory phenomena as a social process whereby she became an English professor, married Sam, her now deceased partner, and became part of Vermont’s societal structure. Her love for Sam was built not only on the basis of genuine affection and partnership but also drawing from the stability of relying on Sam’s mediating and protective figure.² The extensive dimension of hospitality impinges on Antonia’s grief for an impossible encounter, thus offering a relevant insight to what Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous claimed as an “outside

2 This idea can be misread since dependency on host figures is often used to imbue migration with a parasitical nature. Nonetheless, dependency is rather construed as a collateral result of vulnerability and law enforcement.

in the inside” that seems unbearable and never-ending (qtd. in Manzanas Calvo and Benito Sánchez 48).

Precarity and vulnerability are pivotal elements in hospitality and are associated with the guest’s state of affairs regarding spatiality, temporality, and identity. For Antonia, the absence of her husband, her mediator-host within the national and domestic space, elicits a new type of uprooting or displacement through familiar yet unfamiliar spaces, such as home. In *Uprootings/Regroundings*, Ahmed et al. advance the affective relations between space and identity, and how homes, far from being an epitome of stasis and safety, recreate the axes of change and adaptative metamorphosis. In this vein, home and homing are in a constant state of flux and consist of “the reclaiming and reprocessing of habits, objects, names and histories that have been uprooted – in migration, displacement or colonization” (Ahmed et al. 9). Under this new light, Antonia’s home is divested of familiarity; *habitus* implies an impressive and unsettling effort, and now even lying in bed becomes a journey to “terra incognita” (*Afterlife* 6). She resorts, unconsciously, to a state of vulnerability akin to the migratory experience of dependency and criminalization. Her home becomes a sort of prison, but also the space where power relations are going to be negotiated according to the law of hospitality and property.

Fragmentation is present in the structure of the very first chapter through a prose populated by slashes, a poem that is broken into verses but also amended and integrated within an interdependent structure. English turns into a faulty language, inhospitable and distant, since the referential figure she used to cling to has vanished from her life, if it was ever there. In the host’s house, the host’s language is predominant, but what if there is no host to talk to? This estrangement towards not only a space but also a language suggests a “historical tendency for the language and practice of hospitality to ‘turn’ against the guest” (Still 13), and through this enmity or linguistic disavowal hospitality mirrors its embedded, hostile counterpart. Irrespective of the participant’s intentions, if hospitality is understood as a “gift” relation, to use Still’s conceptualization, providing the Other with generous gestures and gifts might entail both a sense of indebtedness and dependency. Giving becomes a prescription to obedience, surveillance and, in sum, “a means of political control over the visitor” (Manzanas Calvo and Benito Sánchez 38). The host’s property—space and language—resembles highly regulatory spaces such as hospitals and caretaking facilities, where there is a similar expropriation of the body of the patient by being incorporated to a sanitized and stratified institution that works both towards safety and massive control. Under this light, Antonia’s new status is constantly questioned by her relationship with space, language and other actors within hospitality, and in such questioning, she will be able to restore a sense of homeness after death and separation. Battling along with her self-image as “tie-braker” (*Afterlife* 77) and as an eternal guest of her (non)country will lead her to (trans)form the ethics of hospitality towards oneself and the Other.

Master's Tools

Albeit successful, Antonia's scaling process seems far from the utopian closure of what Levinas terms the ethical responsibility towards the Other.³ In his thesis, Levinas proposes a disentanglement from political and cognitive approaches and peruses instead proximity and alterity (Levinas, *Other* 48), the latter being not just constructed beyond the metaphorical endeavors of ontological entities but prominently enacted through the corporeal and material implications of vulnerability and exposure. However, even when the migrant masters the way to "melting" and "becoming," for instance, American, this commodified assimilation proves limited as if the migrant's "original identity would be colonized, taken over" due to a lack of awareness and recognition (Hoffman et al. 46). Pending a broader recognition whether from an outer or inner source, the afterlife prizes Antonia's dwelling in the threshold as a site that can be read twofold: a spatial and temporal suspension of national signifiers, such as language, in order to fully embrace the Other's demands; or a residual space where cultural differences are prone to generate fragility and exclusion. To summon up the portrayal of Antonia as a deserted woman, both in the sense of ignominious abandonment and of the desert as a "socially" constructed and imagined place (Price 20), Antonia's dwelling aptly reflects on the political implications of desertification and cultural infertility. Unlike the border or borderlands, the desert diverges from common assumptions of "contact" or "separation" zones (Pratt 34) and plays in turn a key role in processes of oblivion, silencing and boundless violence (Martín Hernández 59). Notwithstanding this rather contemporary interpretation of deserts, such a space was conversely read in biblical renditions of hospitality as a space of encounter and openness towards what is unknown or cannot be known, placed away from the state of law and property but protected by what Levinas claims as "the ethical approach to the Other," meaning "an entrance into the area of the unknowable, of potentiality, the realm of the 'perhaps'" (Manzanas Calvo and Benito Sánchez 27). Thus, the open space awaiting and haunting Antonia, both metaphorically and materially, now that she is alone and only master of the house, will play a decisive role in staging different forms of hospitality but also in laying bare the social and political strata of national enclosure.

Part and parcel of (im)migrating and settling is the consolidation of the liberal notion of movement, that is to say that mobility is not a neutral conceptualization of freedom but a constructed imposition upon those who traverse national lines and spaces (Brady, *Scales* 12). Antonia, on her part, finds herself genuinely immersed in the process of eligibility and positive assimilation of the rules of the hosting nation—an omnipotent subject-host—by learning and mastering the Other's—now, host's—language: "[s]he mended her broken pieces and ended up teaching

3 See the ethical relocation of subjectivity, language and self when approaching the Other and *otherwise* in Levinas (1961, 1981).

Americans their own language, four decades total, three at the nearby college. What now, now that she has retired?" (*Afterlife* 11). Labor gives Antonia access to reliability and reciprocity, and in such exchange, her status in the nation is preserved. With her retirement, her sense of self within Vermont subsides into caution and fear. Even though she has fulfilled common requirements of social integration, there remains a constant sense of displacement that adheres to emotional distress while being also cultural and socially framed. As a(n) (im)migrant, Antonia relies on these mending practices between two worlds—two national identities—by adjusting herself to English, "doing," as Hoffman would put it, the "melting pot" herself (Hoffman et al. 45). The fact that she becomes a professor of the host language evokes the porous and ambiguous nature of hospitality roles, what in turn refrains from eliciting new formulations of belonging and fosters narratives that "are comforting and reassuring," at least for those who hold privilege and sovereignty (Manzanas Calvo n.p.).

Derrida, among other modern and contemporary authors, explores this reversal of roles by advancing the revision of concepts such as liberation and emancipation, thus claiming that the host has always been a guest to a house that ultimately does not belong to him or her, "the master of the house is at home, but nonetheless he comes to enter his home through the guest—who comes from outside. The master thus enters from the inside *as if* he came from the outside" (Derrida 125, italics in the original). This estrangement towards one's 'hostness' also implies an active role on the migrant's part, undermining his or her portrayal as an alien to the house/nation. Derrida's expropriation of the own house opposes the premise of sovereignty within national hospitality and gives way to an apparent non-hierarchical structure of reciprocity. This reciprocity, presumably, abandons the conditions of the Kantian cosmopolitanism and international relations and turns into a (trans)formative sense of responsibility that, following Emmanuel Levinas, rejects the sovereign movement of the consciousness and stages a solidarity that does not neglect but consolidates subjectivity (Levinas, *Huella* 63). Thus far, it is through her later encounters with a migrant that Antonia, now the hostess of the house, dis-covers the multilayered nature of hospitality and reconfigures the encounter with the Other. Feminist appraisals of reciprocity might be of aid at this point in so that the practice of hospitality cannot be understood as a mere gift relationship; due care needs to be paid to the factors this reciprocity entails, such as a "directional and hierarchical character: The host gives and the guest receives" (Hamington 29). Far from perpetuating a fixity of affiliations, a reversal of roles fosters the possibility of destabilizing monolithic poses of host and guest, taker and receiver, inside and outside and it elicits new modes and spaces for hospitality and communication.

For Antonia, linguistic dissonance in the host language has become stronger and rather significant now that her companion is gone. The silence at home has made her regain a sense of alienation and foreignness through the series of losses and departures she has experienced—her retirement, Sam's death, her sister's upcoming disappearance. In a similar vein, what Antonia endures resorts to what Homi Bhabha

denotes “unhomely,” meaning not homeless but dislocated within the common boundaries of the world-home dichotomy:

In that displacement the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is divided as it is disorienting The home does not remain the domain of domestic life, nor does the world simply become its social or historical counterpart. The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world. (Bhabha 141)

Her unhomeliness, so to speak, is that of a woman who navigates the hostile structure of national and political existence within the domestic. She is haunted by not only the (g)host—a present absence—of her husband, but also the multiple factors that flesh out her psychic dwelling, a sense of “doubleness” (Bhabha 148) that mirrors Levinas’s “externality of the inward” (qtd. in Bhabha 150) and the already-mentioned “outside in the inside” advanced by Derrida and Cixous. This dwelling that is at the heart of Antonia’s experience reinforces the connection between hospitality and borders inasmuch as “it is exactly the constructed nature of modern state borders that can extend them so far in real space that human beings can be stuck on them almost permanently” (Szokolczai 22). The materiality of the limit emerges in the psychological outcome of Antonia’s sense of displacement when locating herself “at the outer edge where, in the old maps, the world drops off, and beyond is terra incognita, sea serpents, the Leviathan—HERE THERE BE DRAGONS” (*Afterlife* 6).

On their part, Jennie Germann Molz and Sarah Gibson denounce the futile endeavor of applying the metaphor of hospitality to migration narratives since it perpetuates the structure of national hospitality and the history of colonization.⁴ Assuming the (im)migrant as guest propels the idea that “the ‘host nation’ maintains its historical position of power and privilege in determining who is or is not welcome to enter the country, but also under what conditions of entry” (Molz and Gibson 9), thus neglecting Levinas’s ethical approach. That being said, the common juxtaposition of liminality and hospitality leaks an opportunity to imagine the afterlife of border crossing, the coexistence of cultural differences and the reconfiguration of ethics that are not grounded in political and national tenets. For Antonia, this threshold is not merely abstract but experiential, embedded in her psyche and in her body, and materially experienced through embodied practices of hospitality and territorialization (Smith et al. 259). Not being able to fully incorporate herself into a status of belonging to the country, Antonia struggles to find the way back to the proper word in Spanish and resents the global colonization of the Anglo-American language and imaginary:

[To her sister’s question about her well-being] I’m okay. Antonia’s mantra of the last year. Somewhere she read that *okay* and *Coca-Cola* are the two must

4 It is important to recall that the status of host has not always equated the status of native. In this vein, the case of America’s colonization stands as an illustrative process of guests taking hostage of hosts.

universally understood words. It depresses her to think that the ties that bind are so flimsy. Even silence would be better. (*Afterlife* 10).

This imposition of the host's language hinders the incorporation of the outsider, while simultaneously forestalling the conditions of autonomy within the national territory. Unsurprisingly, the mastery of language—or lack of it—also works as a way of availing or pervading the foreigner's right for hospitality (Derrida 15), thus arresting processes of cultural and linguistic independence within the national ground. After losing Sam, and at an already old age, Antonia finds herself reassuring her perpetual state as a foreigner/guest, “[e]ven now, long after immigrating as a child, she still thinks of it as ‘their’ country. Not for her to meddle in their affairs” (*Afterlife* 17). Unlike the temporality prescribed to national hospitality and Kant's cosmopolitan idea of international hospitality (Manzanas Calvo and Benito Sánchez 40, 44), the temporal span for performing the guest role is conveniently dilated to the point of producing paradoxical social and psychological effects: the perpetuation and enhancement of fragility upon which violence is legitimized. However, this temporality is not new to the interweaving of hospitality and colonization, for part of the neoliberal systematization of violence and order is the work of scaling and captivity that divest individuals of agency in national soil. This is the case of the illegalization of mobility through immigration policies that infantilize and/or criminalize individuals in order to systematize and control movement, “[l]ife without papers in the twenty-first century must also be understood as a form of captivity, as a flexible enclosure that constrains and delimits socialities just as forced removal and mass deportation have broadened the geometry of captivity seemingly everywhere” (Brady, *Scales* 2-3). The disempowerment of the illegal migrant allows the emplaced subject, the national entity, to order and perform power upon their bodies, minds and social realities. Brady reads this captivity through the metaphor of the child, who “came to symbolize all those ineligible to claim the right to steer their own social relations or to hold the status of citizen” (*Scales* 6). The infantilization, feminization and criminalization of the mobile subject/guest correspond to some of the many strategies that pervade and limit hospitality practices. For Antonia, her sisters, and the migrants she is going to encounter, this temporality or suspension generates a web of captivity and precarity that does nothing but undermine their agency by empowering the nation-state.

Sisterhood and Care Ethics

As part of her suspended state of affairs as a former migrant, Antonia shelters in her relationship with her neighborhood as a way to prove her involvement within Vermont community. Likewise, her experience as a teacher and a translator provides Antonia with a mediating standpoint that helps incorporate her to the hosting process while negotiating the entrance of others. Even at home, she performs mediating techniques, a “neighborly” behavior by means of “letting him [her neighbor] have the

last word—it worked most times with Sam” (*Afterlife* 11). Thus far, being a mediator in her private and public spheres reveals not only a hyper surveillance but also a consequential reconfiguration of affiliations. Antonia is prone, then, to assume her role as a potential caretaker within her family, her sisterhood—conformed by four sisters, including Antonia, the second oldest; Izzy, the oldest one and the one who embodies unlimited hospitality; Mona, the youngest, and Tilly—that emerges as a system of filial relationships fostering communication, mutual support and care relations. It is through her conflictive relation with her family—she constantly dwells between the urge of care labor and individuality as a tie-braker—that Antonia foreshadows the feminist problematization of hospitality relations by navigating the tensions of self-preservation and the ethics of care and responsibility (Hamington 24, 28). These tensions are illustrated when Izzy, the oldest sister, disappears without notice, which means that Antonia is expected to take charge of the situation since she is the second oldest sister. While their sisterhood comprises a communal experience of (im)migration (*Afterlife* 73), their multiple positionalities reveal a myriad of hospitality practices.

Even though every sister is “emplaced” in the coherence of the dyad of nation-state/security, their kinship is rendered indispensable when trying to understand Izzy’s standpoint and intentions. As far as readers know, Izzy has gone into a reckless mission: finding a place to house migrants far from the labor farms, where their creativity and agency define their lives rather than (their) labor (*Afterlife* 49-51). For this mission, Izzy renounces her home-state and finds practical ways of housing others. The prescription of homelessness in order to enact hospitality resorts to an ethical—and biblical—form of approaching the Other (Manzanas Calvo and Benito Sánchez 24, 25), thus expanding Derrida’s definition of unlimited hospitality not to a tolerance of difference but also to a divestment of what originally produces hostility: property and mastery.⁵ At first, Antonia seems reluctant and agrees with her sisters on the fact that Izzy’s choices in life are both a waste of resources and time as well as a mortifying process for her family. The political unconscious of hospitality practice emerges here in the reticence of risking one’s safe position within the national territory. Although it is deeply rooted in a history of colonization as well as in the experience of “foreignness,” the experience of Antonia and her sisters ushers readers and each other in a process of not only getting closer to the uncanniness of the migrant experience through reversing roles—caretakers and care receivers, guests and hosts—but it also unfolds the many nuances adhered to the assimilation of a new culture.

While Izzy turns uncanny within her own family structure, Antonia and her sisters’ attitude unravels the constant state of fear and hyper surveillance that the scaffold imaginary and the political tenets of hospitality enhance. This constant state of vulnerability and precarity, that Brady identifies as a form of captivity, surpasses the limitations of hospitality itself and gets installed in the unconscious

5 In words of Derrida, unlimited hospitality means “to give the new arrival all of one’s home and oneself, to give him or her one’s own, our own, without asking a name or compensation, or the fulfilment of even the smallest condition” (77).

of the ‘eternal guest,’ meaning that the prescription of temporality works not against law enforcement but versus the guest herself: “[t]he sisters all have an aversion to authority, an immigrant thing” (*Afterlife* 73). Such aversion—covert vulnerability—reveals in turn an interiorized hostility towards the Other and towards themselves at once, they perform and reproduce border work by generating an inside-outside dichotomy (Johnson and Jones 6-7). Álvarez’s overt depiction of the core tenets of scale work and power asymmetries help readers interrogate the multiple encounters that occurred in the novel. This constant state of vulnerability and uneasiness is, in the pursuance of destabilization, constituted by the interweaving relations of hospitality and hostility the sisters partake in and the encounter with unexpected guests and other familiar haunting presences. Most of all, it is the disarticulation of the guest’s limited representation that enables readers and characters fathom a feminist hospitality that “unlocks the epistemic power of hospitality” by incorporating the guest as a subject rather than an object (Hamington 28).

Something that the sisterhood filiation proves in this novel is the complex directionality of hospitality practices and the importance of centralizing care ethics over, for instance, space and language mastery. Since Francisco de Vitoria and Immanuel Kant, any work on hospitality implies that direction and reciprocity are key to understand the current limitations of hospitality as well as its potential (Green 214). While her sister’s background construes a multivocal source of akin experiences of vulnerability and hospitality/hostility, Antonia, far from embodying a hospitable subject, finds herself refraining from her mediating role in her domestic and professional life, while negotiating her own status within the home-state. Under this light, and in an ironic turn of events, Antonia encounters Mario, a helpless man knocking at her door. He has crossed the border from Mexico to the United States by a cross-border bus. How he has ended up at the porch of Antonia’s recently empty house is easy to elucidate, “though everyone assumed it was she who was the political one by virtue of her ethnicity, as if being Latina automatically conferred a certain radical stance” (*Afterlife* 18). The border is, through hospitality work, transposed to everyday life and domestic spaces that become policed and politicized (Johnson and Jones 3).

Prior to Mario’s knocking, Antonia is informed by her neighbor Roger, a host for migrant workers in his farm, that she is needed to mediate with Mario. Indeed, Antonia’s reception is incited on behalf of her “Spanish,” or rather Hispanic, heritage, although she is, in her own words, “not really *Spanish Spanish*,” but Dominican (*Afterlife* 13). Antonia’s mediation as a ‘hostess’ is rather significant insofar as she is requested to mediate for a host that is defined by whiteness, capital and masculinity. If “[a]cts of hospitality constitute the identity of the host, as well as the identity of the group, culture, or nation for which the host acts” (Hamington 24), women have rather been obliterated from and/or disempowered by the execution of hospitality. Even though authors such as Tess Varner associate the historicity of hospitality labor with women’s work while acknowledging the mastering or “credit” to the male host (42), there still exists a lack of attention to the gender implication of hospitality

practices. Still is one of the few authors who digs deeper in this scarcity of interest and evaluates the linguistic and philosophical implications of being a *hôtesse*. For Still, the *hôtesse* bears unavoidable gender and professional connotations, usually associated with sexual difference. The reliance of the hostess is fostered by a generic dependency on the “true” master of the space, and so her role consists of merely mediating, “[h]er authority is thus only a delegated one, and she is an intermediary, her body (and mental and emotional faculties) a means for two or more men to communicate and bond” (Still 21). Thus, Antonia’s reluctance to bring the Other in is not only sustained by her connection with her immigrant background but also with the expropriation of agency within hospitality practices. Ultimately, what Antonia, Izzy and the sisterhood construct is rather a feminist, ethical statement on responsibility, emotional labor and care relations by re-signifying the domestic space while navigating the political implications of their actions.

Antonia’s hosting is thus built upon gender prescription and language as a means to enact hospitality. On his part, Mario is conversely unable to claim hospitality to his former master—Roger—since he does not know the host’s language, English, which aptly demonstrates “the extent to which the foreigner is forced to ask for hospitality [only] in a language he does not know” (Lind et al. 1196). Other than pursuing proximity, the interaction between guest and host is coded following the rubrics of the nation-state, which becomes “the ultimate hospitable space for the *national occupant*” (Manzanas Calvo and Benito Sánchez 54, italics mine). Roger, the master of the farm Mario is working at, does not know Spanish nor aims at enhancing a linguistic proximity to his migrant employee. So much so that he delegates the mediating position and emotional labor to Antonia, who at first feels uncomfortable trying to linguistically accommodate Mario, even though Spanish is her mother tongue. Hospitality, in this case, proves not to call for proximity but for a borderline between participants, with language being a pivotal and “critical” element of the relation, since “forcing the other to speak my language even as they ask for asylum is hardly hospitable” (Still 19). Consequently, Antonia is compelled to provide hospitality and, in doing so, to prove that mediation works no longer as a hospitality practice, but complete commitment does. If, as stated before, hospitality works towards performative acts of identity (Hamington 24, 26), Antonia would find herself at the insurrection of being host and guest and thus, she will problematize her status in order to embark on a rather horizontal hospitality.

To talk about horizontal hospitality is to reflect on the directionality of hospitality practice and the implications of enhancing proximity. While, as previously discussed, feminist hospitality focuses on the importance of care ethics, proximity, and alternatives to power asymmetries, these ethical practices clash against the language and rubrics of national hospitality. In other words, borders’ movable nature and performative role within hospitality relations often arrest the potential aspect of care ethics. Far from being solely what BMette Louise Berg and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh identify as a “fundamental human capacity” and a “basic human need” (4), care might also be enacted as a political and performative act that ultimately construes

identity. Even though the often-fetishized association between migration and hospitality falls far short of a transformative renewal of the self-Other relationship, re-imagining relationality within long-term (im)migration is rendered necessary to understand the tensions of welcoming on a gift-relation basis. As an (“former”) immigrant, Antonia stands for a vulnerable subject that reproduces the anxiety of border crossing, not in its eventual and metaphorical aspect, but in the subsequent displacement that living permanently in a state of difference and estrangement engenders (Molz and Gibson 9). There is no easy welcoming for Antonia when “[t]he people’s fear of displacement from *their* nation emerges as a form of political unconscious, hidden in the national mind but still prevalent in the nation’s dealing with the Other showing up at the border” (Manzanas Calvo and Benito Sánchez 40, italics mine). The way Antonia receives Mario does not differ from what the national subject perpetuates, which implies a subjectification to what Derrida termed laws of hospitality, meaning those which set up the conditions of the welcoming. Thus far, being unable to imagine Antonia as a host, the binary opposition immigrant/mobility/guest and citizen/immobility/host, is rather problematized and dismantled. First, by placing Antonia in a detachment state regarding the home-state, both in public and private terms, and second, by provoking the impossible hosting of a migrant who she intimately identifies with.

The border, as a paradigmatic set of eruptions within social relations, emerges alongside the hospitable encounter. A relevant aspect of the border dynamics is displayed when Antonia, being aware or not of her vulnerable position and her hosting reluctance, arrays a myriad of patrolling and policing strategies that perform the act of hostage. Enacting these containment tactics towards the Other, namely portraying him as a guest, uncovers the political unconscious of hosting as self-preservation over ‘the’ law of hospitality or unlimited hospitality. Thus, Antonia’s incapability to sincerely commit to the law of hospitality ushers readers in the core tenets of conditional and conditioned welcoming. Most of Antonia’s hosting experience is marked by a sense of fear of displacement, self-preservation and reticence that prevents her from disclosing a larger, unlimited hospitality towards Mario, who also stands as a vulnerable subject under the national siege. In her domestic relationships, Antonia is constantly struggling with prioritizing self-care over caring for others, and the ethics of responsibility, empathy and proximity, that summon hosts to dissolve power asymmetries comprises a risk of belonging for Antonia. Therefore, in preserving her hosting status, Antonia must distance herself from the guest since it apparently is “the best perspective on and route toward knowledge of self and others” (Kaplan 212). What is true of this distancing process is that it performs the limitations of hospitality and construes the conditional and conditioned welcoming. Opposed to ethical rubrics, national hospitality aims at relocating the supremacy of the host to the space of the nation-state. This relocation is what grants a new form of hospitality, by which the guest’s demands become secondary to the primal and essential protection and safe emplacement of the host (Manzanas Calvo and Benito Sánchez 40). Thus far, Antonia will perform the limits

of national hospitality as she faces the incapability to enact proximity when her status within the nation-state is threatened by abjection.

Unlike Derrida's unlimited hospitality, Antonia knows her visitor's name and partial story, which simultaneously humanizes Mario and subjects him to his host. Even though Mario does speak a fair amount of English and often talks with Antonia in Spanglish, this linguistic bridge is rather eclipsed by a negotiation of the intimate-public relationship with Antonia. It is their exchange in such an aporetic space that fathoms a new approach to hospitality through recognition, connection and collaboration. Their affiliation is infused with humanization through a cultural and social bond between the two originally counterparts of hospitality practices. While the scaffold imaginary of Western neoliberal discourse advances the scale that "operates through process of comparison and containment, requiring abstraction and homogenization to enact a limiting, hierarchical perception of spatial and social relations" (Brady, *Scales* 4), Antonia and Mario's interaction will unravel the metaphorical construction of hospitality as moving from a reciprocal political contract towards an ethical approach to the Other. Antonia relies, then, on a covert kinship by relating to language and cultural similarities as, for instance, Mario gives his condolences in Spanish and Antonia realizes "somehow it gets to her more" in that way, as "roots go deeper" (*Afterlife* 14). However, this kinship will not only be built upon moments of identification and sameness, but it will also accomplish an ethical proximity by acts of witnessing and answering social demands. In this vein, Antonia is asked "a favor," that is, to bring in Mario's girlfriend, Estela—she is trapped on the way to Vermont by the coyotes, who are asking Mario for money in order to release her. In view of these demands, Antonia faces an ethical dilemma regarding hospitality and its fundamental imbrication with politics and the nation-state. While she relies on her political status as American as she is "becoming" a host to the Other, she also faces the possibility of an empathetic response, which is portrayed by the interweaving and at times ironic set of resemblance-distinction that occurs when physically and metaphorically encountering Mario as the Other: "[r]are also for Antonia to feel tall in this country. For a moment she understands the self-assurance of those who can look down at another's face" which in turn aligns with the awareness of privilege and safe emplacement as "what comes with health care and good nutrition" (*Afterlife* 12). All in all, Antonia undoes the political conceptualization of hosting by undergoing a process whereby she is able to identify the Other within, the unhomeliness of national belonging and ultimately the potential of ethical proximity.

Border Patrolling and Parasites

Likewise, Antonia embodies the paradoxical aspect of consciously hosting when she decides to perform the policing role upon Mario. As a host, she prioritizes a commitment to oneself, which in turn unfolds a commitment to law's authority and safe emplacement as part of a modern understanding of hospitality (Manzanas

Calvo and Benito Sánchez 22). In so doing, it is the omnipotent host, the nation-state and law enforcement, that penetrates the private space and “violates” the home so as to clean it from any parasitical entity (Derrida 51).⁶ Characters such as Mario or Estela are eventually depicted as parasites, meaning “a guest who is wrong and illegitimate, clandestine, liable to expulsion or arrest” (Derrida 61). The nation-state, in this regard, operates as a host in order to pervade the imaginary of welcoming and mobility, with (im)migration as a usual prescription for public illegalization and criminalization (Molz and Gibson 9, 10). As it happens with borders, the material and psychological implications of strategies of containment are affecting both host and guest, and this is made explicit in Álvarez’s novel through the constant state of fear and sense of persecution that makes Mario hide in Antonia’s house as soon as someone approaches. The undocumented and illegal state of the migrant transforms him both into a captive (Brady, *Scales* 3) and a parasite that “only fails to fulfil his duties” while perpetuating vulnerability and dependency towards the nation-state (Still 13; Molz and Gibson 10). This is especially true of the United States’ large history of immigration policies and how difference is constructed within a national context (Still 19; Miller 115). Small wonder, then, that the host to a migrant commences to practice power relations upon the guest, as it is the case of Antonia when she shouts “La Migra!” to demonstrate control over her visitor (*Afterlife* 18). However, once Mario hides, and aware of these containment strategies, Antonia decides to play a more hospitable role by ensuring safety, which in turn permeates her complete sovereignty within the domestic, unhomey space: “Tranquilo, tranquilo, she calms him. Estamos en Vermont. Here there be no torture of prisoners,” a mirroring statement of the forementioned “here there be dragons,” to which Mario, as readers, react by being skeptical and distrustful of authority and the nation-state, just as Antonia and her sisters are, “[h]e stares back, unconvinced. The world is crazy. Who knows what angry people will do” (*Afterlife* 22). Bereft of agency and constantly being pushed and pulled among hosts, Mario equates the age minority that scale imposes on illegal migrants and other unwanted visitors. This episode aptly mimics border dynamics in so that it juxtaposes safety and control, outside and inside, thus generating a state of precarity and dependency that fosters control over the visitor through law enforcement and policing practices.

Ultimately, another instance of reticence and hostility that paradoxically leads Antonia to absolute hospitality and problematizes current conceptualizations of hospitality is her incapability to accept Estela’s gratitude, as though she were reluctant to engage in hospitality discourse: “[g]racias, gracias, the girl keeps saying. Her gratitude is hard to bear. De nada, Antonia, replies, a more accurate rejoinder than *you’re welcome*: she has done nothing to be thanked for” (*Afterlife* 26). Whether she rejects to be publicly recognized as a host or understands the futility of acknowledging what otherwise would have been, again, a natural mark of civilization is not as relevant as her critical view on dependency and control over

6 I am using the term “violate” since it is the word that Derrida uses in his analysis (51), although authors such as Still and Smith et al. have already denounced the use of the metaphor of the body (and usually the female body) as part of hospitality traditional rubrics (Still 26; Smith et al. 259).

the ethics of care and responsibility. Hence, the question she is ultimately intrigued by is whether this/that is hospitality, and, if so, if it is likely to be part of the ethical approach to the Other. In any case, Antonia both figuratively and literally resist to “welcome” Mario and Estela since she ultimately feels unhomey and not entitled to do so. At the end, her sense of unbelonging, of dwelling in no man’s land, both liberates her from the imposition of the host as well as reconfigures hospitality relations. Far from regaining on the right of hospitality, Antonia’s resistance to greet the migrant as guest by rejecting gratitude unfolds the compliance of a faulty integration into the hospitality structure: “[t]hanks for what? Antonia hasn’t agreed to anything. But how can she refuse just talking to the girl? What is the minimum one owes another?” (*Afterlife* 26). To answer this question, which is the purpose of any encounter, requires resorting to Still’s conceptualization of hospitality as “*recognized* as a structure with no fixed context – ... [which] is intuitively understood by practitioners. Thus, offering someone a glass of water, or a bed for the night, is *or is not* hospitality depending entirely on the relation between the one offering and the other accepting or refusing” (11). Thus far, the structure of hospitality is malleable as long as the practitioners redefine the practice. Even though some encounters might be systematically read as part of hospitality practices, the affective associations an encounter or contact implies may equally resort to a hospitable framework (Still 12). Conclusively, as structures are socially enacted and constructed while materially experienced, both hospitality and borders share the paradoxical nature of binomial opposites and enhance their (trans)formation. In other words, a wall is built in order to simultaneously impede and generate contact in the same way that stating difference and imposing sameness through material and metaphorical endeavors work as a reminder that these sites are rather prone to be equally dissolved and transformed.

Conclusions

In Álvarez’s novel, a kinship with the other is laid out by means of a series of recognitions of the Other within, the outside in the inside, and the self in the Other. In particular, the haunting presences that blight the dragon country give way to a revision of relatedness between hosts and guests by which, in this case, they relate to each other as being “all residents of a dragon country, no man’s land beyond the gated communities of belonging” (*Afterlife* 31). This impossibility of locating oneself through unbelonging opens the possibility of transforming hospitality relations by deflating the host subject-position. While this dragon country state is also a blank space in the eyes of hospitality language, it is worth noting that such gated communities do not always operate as exclusionary unities within hospitality but as a territorialization of difference through bodies and relatedness (Smith et al. 259). Unlike Sam’s safe emplacement, or Roger’s hostile sheltering based on labor and economic reciprocity, Antonia discloses new forms of hospitality that align with her and her sisters’ communal experience of (im)migration. In this vein, Izzy, far

from committing to national belonging and property, ends up inspiring Antonia a sense of recklessness and complete, horizontal and empathetic proximity. In so doing, Antonia aligns with feminist strands of relationality that could permeate hospitable relations and encounters by focusing on the possibilities beyond structural responses of the nation-state. Likewise, Álvarez centralizes the ethics of care that construe a community of interconnectedness and interdependence rather than mere dependence and control. She recognizes herself in the Other, not by imposing sameness nor her host subject-position but by enacting reparative relations with those who are vulnerable to power asymmetries.

In sum, a reversal of roles and hospitality practices is enhanced by means of a transformation from a sense of self-preservation and a hostile attitude that reminds her that “[w]e live in America ... where you put your oxygen mask on first,” into the possibility of answering the demands of the otherwise alien, foreigner or guest, since “either way, the plane is going to crash. So why [not] a little kindness before she, too, is a body in a ditch on the side of the road” (*Afterlife* 48). Ultimately, Antonia does not obscure her political relationship with the Other as she is the one deciding on Mario and Estela’s behalf (*Afterlife* 128); however, her sense of unhomeliness reflects the hostility (im)migrants politically read as guests have to face in the United States. By contrast, a more positive reading of the original prescription of the host becoming ‘hostage,’ as it were the case of the history of colonization, Antonia finds a way out of the rigid rubrics of national hospitality through caretaking and un/housing practices. She is divested of her home-state while performatively embodying the hand of law that comes from outside and penetrates the inside as a way of self-preservation, security and social reorganization (Derrida 51, “violation of the inviolable”). Indeed, Antonia’s relationship with power hierarchies becomes entangled with the dynamics of dwelling and liminality that often infuse migration with vulnerability and precarity. Nonetheless, the reconfiguration of these dynamics as aptly deconstructing the hospitality metaphor is of aid to disarticulate national core tenets: mastery of space and language.

All in all, Antonia embraces a sort of “afterlife” by which she feels freed from former visions of social and hospitality practice. Through the many (re)cognitions that underly the performative rendition of hospitality within national identity, Antonia unfolds the instability of this rigid and binomial structure regarding hospitality/hostility, host/guest and the subsequent mobility/guest and immobility/host. In this vein, both readers and characters are able to navigate the multiple and nuanced spaces of the inside and the outside and their superposition, and thus traverse the threshold of the private and the public, the Self and the Other. Such duality, however, proves not to be an unbreakable dyad but a constantly negotiated open space, or encounter, that gives room to new modes and sites of and for hospitality and relatedness.

Works Cited

Ahmed, Sara, et al. “Introduction: Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and

- Migration." In Ahmed, Sara, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier and Mimi Sheller (eds.), *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, pp. 1-19. Berg, 2003.
- Álvarez, Julia. *Afterlife*. Algonquin Books, 2020.
- Berg, Mette Louise, and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh. "Introduction to the Issue: Encountering Hospitality and Hostility." *Migration and Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2018, pp. 1-6.
- Bhabha, Homi K. "The World and the Home." *Social Text*, no. 31/32, 1992, pp. 141-53.
- Brady, Mary Pat. "The Fungibility of Borders." *Nepantla: Views from South*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2000, pp. 171-90.
- . "Hemispheric Routes." In Miller, Joshua L. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Twenty-first Century American Fiction*, pp. 157-74. Cambridge UP, 2021.
- . *Scales of Captivity: Racial Capitalism and the Latinx Child*. Duke UP, 2022.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. Columbia UP, 2011.
- . "Writing as a Nomadic Subject." *Comparative Critical Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2-3, 2014, pp. 163-84.
- Butler, Judith. "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance." In Butler, Judith, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay (eds.), *Vulnerability in Resistance*, pp. 12-27. Duke UP, 2016.
- Conlon, Deirdre. "Waiting: Feminist Perspectives on the Spacings/Timings of Migrant (Im)mobility." *Gender, Place & Culture*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2011, pp. 353-360.
- Cooper, Anthony, et al. "The Vernacularization of Borders." In Jones, Reece and Corey Johnson (eds.), *Placing the Border in Everyday Life*, pp. 15-32. 2014. Ashgate, 2016.
- Cranston, Sophie, et al. "New directions in exploring the migration industries: introduction special issue." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 2018, vol 44, no. 4, pp. 543-557.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Hospitality*. Stanford UP, 2000.
- Green, Judith M. "Building a Cosmopolitan World through Mutual Hospitality." In Lawson, Bill E. and Donald F. Koch (eds) *Pragmatism and the Problem of Race*, pp. 203-24. Indiana UP, 2004.
- Hamington, Maurice. "Toward a Theory of Feminist Hospitality." *Feminist Formations*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2010, pp. 21-38.
- Hoffman, Eva, et al. "Stories of migration and belonging." In Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Elena (ed), *Refuge in a Moving World: Tracing refugee and migrant journeys across disciplines*, pp. 41-51. UCL Press, 2020.
- Hron, Madelaine. "The Trauma of Displacement." In Kurtz, J. Roger (ed.), *Trauma and Literature*, pp. 284-298. Cambridge UP, 2018.
- Johnson, Corey, and Reece Jones. "Where is the Border?" In Jones, Reece and Corey Johnson (eds.), *Placing the Border in Everyday Life*, pp. 1-11. 2014. Ashgate, 2016.
- Kaplan, Caren. "Transporting the Subject: Technologies of Mobility and Location in an

- Era of Globalization.” In Ahmed, Sara, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier and Mimi Sheller (eds.), *Introduction: Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, pp. 207-224. Berg, 2003.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Total Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. 1961. Martinus Nijhoff Publishers and Duquesne UP, 1979.
- . *La huella del otro*. 1967. Alfaguara, 1998.
- . *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. 1981. Duquesne UP, 2011.
- Lind, Andreas Gonçalves, et al. “Hospitality and Identitarian Tensions.” *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, vol. 78, no. 4, 2022, pp. 1195-1202.
- Manzanas Calvo, Ana M^a. “‘Here There Be Dragons’ and the Borderlands Within.” In Alexander, Neal, and David Cooper (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Geographies*, n.p. Routledge, pending publication.
- Manzanas Calvo, Ana M^a, and Jesús Benito Sánchez. *Hospitality in American Literature and Culture: Spaces, Bodies, Borders*. Routledge, 2017.
- Martins, Rui Cunha. *El método de la frontera. Radiografía histórica de un dispositivo contemporáneo (matices ibéricas y americanas)*. Translated by Manuel Pino. Universidad de Salamanca, 2007.
- Martín Hernández, Cristina. “Reclaiming Wounds: Personal Narratives and Collective Memory in Norma Elía Cantú’s Autobiographical Writing.” *JAm It! It’s Alright, Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)*, no. 7, 2022, pp. 37-71.
- Miller, Paul Allen. “On Borders, Race, and Infinite Hospitality: Foucault, Derrida, and Camus.” *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2021, pp. 112-129.
- Molz, Jennie Germann, and Sarah Gibson. “Introduction: Mobilizing and Mooring Hospitality.” In Molz, Jennie Germann and Sarah Gibson (eds.), *Mobilizing Hospitality: The Ethics of Social Relations in a Mobile World*, pp. 1-27. Ashgate, 2007.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Being Singular Plural*. Stanford UP, 2000.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. “Arts of the Contact Zone.” *Profession*, 1991, pp. 33-40.
- Price, Patricia L. “Place.” In Johnson, Nuala C., et al (eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Cultural Geography*, pp. 118-29. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2013.
- Saldívar, José David. *Trans-Americanities: Subaltern Modernities. Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico*. Duke UP, 2012.
- Sánchez-Palencia, Carolina. “Antígona en la frontera: Vulnerabilidad y resistencia en la narrativa de Ana Castillo y Yuri Herrera.” In Duraccio, Caterina (ed.), *Bordes: Escritoras y Fronteras Geosimbólicas*, pp. 11-20. Dykinson, 2021.
- Smith, Sara, et al. “Territory, bodies, and borders.” *Area*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2016, pp. 258-261.
- Still, Judith. *Derrida and Hospitality: Theory and Practice*. Edinburgh UP, 2010.
- Szakolczai, Arpad. “Liminality and Experience: Structuring Transitory Situations and Transformative Events.” In Hovarth, Agnes, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra (eds.) *Breaking Boundaries: Varieties of Liminality*, pp. 11-38. Berghahn, 2015.
- Varner, Tess. “Transformative Hospitality: A Pragmatist-Feminist Perspective of Radical Welcome as Resistance.” *The Pluralist*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2021, pp. 41-48.