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Hospitality versus Hostility in the United States: An Exchange Student's Reflections

Abstract: In this essay, the idea of hospitality and/or hostility is set against, and compared to, the author's own memories as a high school exchange student during the 1976–1977 academic year and works such as Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976), Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976). Definitions of hospitality in ancient Greece and Derrida's definition of hospitality and "hostipitality"—the inherent hostility within hospitality—will also be used to explain the unique position of African Americans, Native Americans, and Chinese Americans within the United States. Specifically, this essay will focus on how the aforementioned works portray a negligent, careless, and unfriendly society that is hostile toward ethnic groups: slave traders capture Africans, separate family members, and sell them for their labor; settler colonials do not respect Native American land and treat indigenous populations as unwanted others; and Chinese immigrants experience communication difficulties because of language barriers. The friendly welcome of the American host family towards the exchange student is juxtaposed with the idea of inhospitality as conveyed by select mainstream works published during the same period, thereby presenting the multifaceted nature of host-guest binary in the United States.

Keywords: Hospitality, hostility, Jacques Derrida, *Roots*, *Ceremony*, *The Woman Warrior*

Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi (1207–1273), the revered Sufi mystic and poet who chose Anatolia as his home, is the supposed writer of a well-known emotional verse that could be called one of the ultimate expressions of welcoming strangers, regardless of their social standing:

Come, come, whoever you are,
Wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving.
It doesn't matter.
Ours is not a caravan of despair.

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Come, even if you have broken your vows
a thousand times
Come, yet again, come, come.

Yine gel, yine gel! Kim olursan ol, yine gel!
Kâfir, mecusi, putperest olsun da yine gel!
Bu bizim dergâhımız ümitsizlik dergâhı değildir.
Yüz kere tövbeni bozmuş olsun da yine gel!” (Şafak 75)²

In these lines the invitation to become part of the Sufi community is enthusiastically encouraged for those who are willing to embrace a new perspective and lifestyle that could eventually lead them to the path of becoming believers in a community.

Centuries later Emma Lazarus (1849–1887) wrote a poem titled *The New Colossus* (1883) to raise funds for the construction of the pedestal for the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor. In a similar vein to Rumi, the narrative voice is directed towards those the poem addresses, guiding the immigrants to new possibilities denied to them in their earlier lives:

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!” (Lazarus 202–203)

2 Authentically ascribed to Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi, this verse appears at the seventh volume of *Mathnawi* or *Masnawi*, the collection of spiritual poems derived from Quran and everyday life. The seventh volume was not written by Rumi but compiled later by his followers. Thus, it is quite likely that this particular verse was included by scribes, and ascribed to him, although the meaning of the verses is in line with Sufi tradition. In fact, the verses have also been ascribed several other Sufi poets, including Ebû Saîd Ebu’l-Hayr who had lived two centuries before Rumi (Şafak 75).

Although centuries and geographies apart, in both expressions the invitation entails or hints to a change to one's previous life and the call to be a part of a new community, whether one decides to enter Rumi's covenant by repenting and starting over, or whether one decides to leave the ancient world to embrace a life in the new world. The affinity between the two calls may be more than a casual coincidence. At the time Lazarus wrote her poem, Transcendentalism was influential in New England. Lazarus was not directly affiliated with the Transcendentalists: she was Jewish and interested in helping immigrants in need; yet, she also admired Ralph Waldo Emerson, the leading figure of Transcendentalism, was affected by his ideas, met him on multiple occasions, and dedicated the main poem of one of her poetry collections to him with the inscription, "To My Friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson" (Lazarus, *Admetus and Other Poems*). Several critics have documented the Eastern sources and particularly Sufism—not specifically Rumi—among Emerson's inspirations in structuring his ideas. The Sufi concept of inclusivity and congregating, or assisting, people without discrimination appeals to Transcendentalists. For example, the Transcendentalists were ardent abolitionists and several members of the Club helped runaway slaves along the Underground Railroad. Thus, Lazarus could have easily been inspired by her colleagues' viewpoints when composing her thoughts. Her poem was eventually carved on a bronze plaque and placed on the pedestal of the statue in 1903, although she did not live to see it. The exact replica is now located in the Statue of Liberty Museum (Statue of Liberty).

In the New York Harbor, Liberty Island neighbors Ellis Island, the location that processed the immigrants arriving mostly from Europe. From 1892 until 1954, about 12 million immigrants passed through the island and although only two percent were denied entry, the anticipation and the possibility of refusal caused the island to be nicknamed the "Island of Tears." The nickname also refers to an eye test for trachoma, since the inspectors used a buttonhook to examine under eyelids, a short but painful procedure. The hospital on the south side of the island treated infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and diphtheria, prolonging the process of entry for some immigrants (Bayor 47, 59, 66). The Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island became real and symbolic thresholds for newcomers. Yet, issues of receiving migrants and refugees have changed over time, depending on the social and political rhetoric of the certain eras. The historical record documents that American immigration hospitality has not been the same for particular ethnic, racial, and religious groups, contrary to what is expressed in Lazarus's poem.

Crossing symbolic and/or physical thresholds is a necessary act when entering another home or country. Immigrants and travellers still have to cross thresholds when entering other nations: customs and passport control at airports, train stations, or seaports. They need to gather pre-approved documentation or visas, fill out declaration forms, and wait in immigration lines for their passports to be processed before receiving their luggage and entering a new country, which is not an easy endeavor. One has to be motivated with a sense of mission to undergo this trouble, whether the travel is a temporary or permanent journey. Once the bureaucracy related to entering another country is completed, the traveller faces attitudes in the host country that may or may not be positive. These (un)favorable encounters are the result of particular political,

cultural, social, and economic conditions and are forged with discursive practices related to the guests' specific positionality.

In ancient Greece, the word *Xenos* refers to a stranger, foreigner, or traveler. *Xenos* are guest-friends, different from *philos*, who are local friends or relatives. And this relationship is bound by the rules of *xenia* (guest-friendship). *Xenia*, the Greek concept of hospitality, entails a moral obligation that involves generosity, gift exchange, and reciprocity. The rules of *xenia* are clear: the host provides the meals and shelter and the guest is required to respect the host and not be a threat or burden. In ancient times, Gods would act as travellers-in-disguise; therefore, a stranger could be a deity-in-disguise. Zeus was called Zeus *Xenios*, the protector of strangers, since he tested mortals by dressing up in ordinary clothes to see if he would be given shelter for the night. He would oversee the practice of *xenia* and inflict misfortunes upon those who fail to provide him with hospitality (Ogden 239). Generosity and courtesy toward strangers are expected behaviors. Plato describes four types of strangers (*xenoi*) that should be treated with respect in his *Laws*: summer travelers (tourists), inspectors who wish to observe temples, those who have a public business, and visitors who are sent by other states on official business (Plato 435–470). In *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, Homer discusses several examples of *xenia*: the Trojan War occurred because Paris violated *xenia* by abducting Helen, the wife of the host. During Odysseus's journey, the Phaeacians welcome him after the shipwreck and help with his return trip. Thus, hospitality in ancient Greece is an act tied to obligation, virtue, and honor.

My personal account of crossing the threshold to the new world to experience *philoxenia* (friend to the stranger) was probably not unique but certainly noteworthy when compared to other not-so-fortunate individuals and groups. When I first travelled to the United States, I was sixteen years old, a high school student from Gaziantep, a city near Türkiye's Syrian border. I was chosen as an AFS (American Field Service) student after a rigorous selection process to determine whether the young candidates had the ability to adapt to situations other than their own. That particular year sixty-seven AFS students from Türkiye attended high school in the United States for a year. In August 1976, we all arrived in New York and participated in a three-day orientation program at Long Island University's CW Post campus with other AFS students from different countries. After the program, the students were sent to meet their host families. The bus to northern Maryland carried three of my Turkish friends whose destinations came before mine. When my last Turkish friend got off the bus in Delaware, I could not contain my emotions and started crying. The idea of being a stranger in an unknown land suddenly struck me and the awareness of loneliness was too much to bear at that young age. As the bus drove to its final destination, the Danish student, Leah, with whom I became good friends later on, took out her guitar and started to play and sing to cheer me up (bless her heart wherever she is): "We Shall Overcome / We Shall Overcome / We Shall Overcome Someday / Deep in my heart / I do believe / We Shall Overcome Someday." Given the circumstances, as ironic as it may sound, the song did the trick. I stopped crying and joined in—reluctantly at first, but enthusiastically eventually. Our little group of five students from different countries sang joyfully until we arrived at our

destination to meet our host families. I took a deep breath, got off the bus, and hugged my American mom, dad, sister, and brother for the first time. Since then, that family, who greeted me with open arms, became my American family and I became their Turkish daughter.

At the time, I did not know the context, or the cultural or historical importance of that song we sang together on the bus. I had not heard of Pete Seeger, who had popularized this old hymn. I was ignorant of the fact that African Americans embraced it during the marches and gatherings of the Civil Rights Movement. Nor did I know that the symbolical gesture of crossing your arms in front of your body, holding the hands of the person next to you, and swaying while singing, was as an act of solidarity, inspiration, uprising, and lifting of the spirits. Yet, only a little more than a decade before, Martin Luther King, Jr. had delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (1963) where “We Shall Overcome” was repeatedly sung in Washington DC, which I would visit several times during my stay in the area. Silly, young, bewildered me . . . lost in my own emotional reaction, how was I to know that I was being introduced to something profound, something meaningful then. How was I to know that places were sites of contradictory experiences, or “heterotopias,” as Michel Foucault had aptly observed a decade before I arrived in the United States.

The 1976–1977 school year was going to present me with possibilities to learn about African American experience. Observing how African American students kept sitting in the back row in the student cafeteria—not because of segregation but because of the comfort of “group insularity,” in Cornel West’s words—my curiosity was piqued (West 215). I wanted to learn more about their mannerisms and vernacular expressions. That year my American family encouraged my host sister, brother, and me to watch Alex Haley’s *Roots*, the television miniseries adapted from the eponymous historical novel. The story of Kunta Kinte, a young man kidnapped from Gambia and brought to the United States on a slave ship, sold at auction in Annapolis, Maryland, and the experiences of seven generations of his descendants were etched on my mind as images of the history of slavery. For Kunta Kinte and all other enslaved Africans, the living and working conditions were clearly not hospitable, but hostile. Thousands of African slaves brought to the United States were deprived of the rights extended to white immigrant arrivals. They were considered property that could be sold or transported. Depending upon their master’s compulsions, they could be whipped, coerced into labor, and forcefully separated from their families or children. Women could be sexually assaulted and other slaves were unable to protect them (Halabi 34). The history of the United States is full of the hostile treatment of workers, whether they were brutally abducted to provide free labor on southern plantations or whether they arrived willfully, commissioning their future labor as indentured servants.

African American slavery is an example of how early *de facto* racist acts turned into practices framed by the laws of the state (*de jure*) to exploit and objectify laborers. “Strangers” that are acquired as goods cannot have the status of honored guests and thus, the rules of hospitality would not be applied to them. Disregarding certain others is actually a conflicting attitude with respect to “traditional southern hospitality,” a phrase associated with the charm, kindness,

friendly, and welcoming manners, that has been used to describe Southern states. Writing during the heyday of the Civil Rights Movement, historian and activist Howard Zinn calls this discrepancy a paradox—"A Southern Mystique"—because newcomers are categorized depending upon their skin color. African Americans are not on the same level as white guests or strangers. Years of Jim Crow practices in southern states clearly testifies to the prejudices toward those whose skin color differs (Zinn 50). When a group of people are labeled and viewed as "inferior" and marginalized, the members of that group are pushed to the periphery. As Jacques Derrida has described it, the politics of hospitality maintains the difference between a "foreigner" and the "absolute other." Foreigners may or may not receive warmth and kindness from the host, but the "absolute other" can never receive hospitality (Derrida, *Hospitality* 82).

While problematizing the concept of hospitality, Derrida asks several questions: When does the hospitality start, with the invitation or with the visitation? Who is the "host" and who is the "guest"? Who is assisting whom?—That is, who presents and who receives? And does the "host" or the "guest" pose a potential threat to the other? (Shepherd 55). Derrida starts with the concept of hospitality, which opposes hostility, as necessary and good. He describes it as "a right, a duty, an obligation, a law," of welcoming the stranger, on the condition that the welcoming agent, the host remains "proprietor, the master of the house, on condition that he guard the authority of the self-at-home" (Derrida, *Hospitality* 5). Therefore, "the law of hospitality" is limited by the "law of house," which is Derrida's first conclusion in his etymological analysis. Drawing from Emmanuel Levinas's writing, Derrida argues that the offering of hospitality is not an act of independent freedom, but is rather a response to the Other, who is already within us. He also coins another neologism, "hostipitality," to express his understanding that a potential for violence is inherent within hospitality (Derrida, "Hostipitality" 3–4).

If slavery exemplifies the potential of a violent act from the host—or rather the master—as in the case of Alex Haley's *Roots*, the vampire myth acts in opposition by presenting an example of violence as indicted by the guest. Ann Rice's *Interview With the Vampire*, also published in 1976, builds upon the experiences of a vampire who goes through an existential crisis. The story—and the later film adaptation in 1994—incorporates southern gothic elements while assuming the basic characteristics of a vampire originally outlined in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Despite all their power and cunning ability, a vampire must be invited to enter a home, although the concealed hostility would eventually breach the safety and trust of the dwellers. The idea behind an invitation has to do with respecting personal boundaries and asking for the consent of the host to accept the stranger into the sanctity of the home. The vampire, after entering the household, does not respect those boundaries and violates the rules of hospitality by quenching their insatiable appetite for blood. Yet, these fantastic fictional characters could easily be adapted to real life vampire-like characters in American literature. Published a decade earlier, one such example can be seen in Joyce Carol Oates's short story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" (1966). Fifteen-year-old Connie is stalked by Arnold Friend, a man more than twice her age, in her home, when she is alone. Arnold Friend, the predator character, never

enters the house but stands outside the kitchen door behind the fence, while trying to persuade Connie to come outside. Connie declines and attempts to call the police to which Arnold replies: "Promise was not to come in unless you touch that phone, and I'll keep that promise . . . I ain't made plans for coming in that house where I don't belong but just for you to come out to me, the way you should" (27). After a lengthy exchange charged with the possibility of a violent act, Connie decides to cross the threshold from her comfort zone to the unknown, despite the possibility of encountering violence and the loss of her innocence.

The idea of violating the trust of the host and bringing devastation can also explain the European settlers' viewpoint. European settlers arriving to the United States felt superior to those who inhabited the land before them and did not treat the indigenous population with respect. Native Americans experienced a unique position as the host and the Other at the same time, and they became objects of a type of colonization and hostage within the host-guest binary. Although Native Americans were not "guests" but rather the legitimate "hosts," first the incoming settlers, then the nation-state, ruled over them. Indigenous communities were caught between the behavior of the host in acknowledging and welcoming the guest, and the behavior of the guest in graciously accepting the welcome of the host. In this case, the ancient Greek tradition of *xenia*, or hospitality, was infringed by the host. In the context of settler colonialism, the host-guest relationship is transformed into one of guest-hostage, in which the host community is threatened because its existence contests the efforts of the settler colonists to seize territory. Thus, the treatment of Native Americans represents a distinctive relationship between a host and a guest community, which becomes a relationship of conquest and colonization, rather than assimilation or integration (Halabi 27).

Before 1976, a few important Native American literary works, such as N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968), often credited as a watershed in Native American Literature, reference the concept of hospitality. The novel follows the character Abel's experiences both inside and outside the reservation, exploring the ideas of home, belonging, and hospitality. Adapted from Thomas Berger's novel of the same name, Arthur Penn's movie *Little Big Man* (1970) is another example that subverts the traditional western myth of cowboys vs. Native Americans. The 121-year-old Jack Crabb reminisces about being raised by the Cheyenne nation and recounts his attempts to integrate unsuccessfully into white society. He feels like an outsider in both communities, although the Native American tribe is portrayed in a much more sympathetic manner. Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), one of the preeminent novels of Native American literature, was published the same year I was in the United States. The plot line follows Tayo, a World War II veteran returning to Laguna Pueblo Reservation, who deals with posttraumatic stress disorder as a result of being imprisoned by the Japanese army. He is partially rejected by his own community because he is of mixed blood, half Laguna and half white, and because his mother has left him to be raised by his aunt. Since he is of mixed blood, he is treated differently than his cousin in the household and among his friends. His fellow Indians, particularly Emo, taunt him by calling him a half-breed. However, as the story evolves, Emo is revealed to be the real

half-breed, poisoned by his internalized racist behaviors, while Tayo finds solace in native tradition. Upon the suggestion of his maternal grandmother, he decides to undergo a healing ceremony conducted by one of the tribe elders, which will be the first ceremony in his healing journey. *Ceremony* is not only a novel that shares Native American ceremonies of healing, but also a ceremony in itself with its unconventional hybrid narrative of poetry, storytelling, and prose.

Ceremony's plot incorporates sections that compare white and native attitudes towards nature and animals. As ranchers, for example, the white men raise a breed of cattle that is ill-adapted to the desert terrain and available food supplies, then fence them in so that they cannot run free. The white ranchers do not know that "cattle are like any living thing. If you separate them from the land for too long, keep them in barns and corrals, they lose something" (74). As hunters, the white men are also more destructive. In addition to unnecessary tree cutting, the white loggers hunt more than their need and shoot "the bears and mountain lions for sport" (186). The attitude that game animals are merely objects to destroy resonates in white society's outlook toward smaller animals and insects. The science teacher in the white school brought in dead frogs, "bloated with formaldehyde" for dissection, and laughed when a female student expressed that killing frogs would bring terrible floods (194). Another teacher taught Tayo to kill flies because "they are bad and carry sickness" (101).

Healing the community starts with healing relationships between individuals and the Earth. To do this, Tayo has to realize his own agency and take the control of his narrative. He must realize that the white man's definition and the boarding school do not define him. Tayo must counteract the story of the destroyers by choosing to live like his own people and must redefine himself as a Laguna man. He takes care of his family's livestock and goes to the mountain as part of his quest, but also returns to the traditional ways of hunting after coming into contact with the Mountain Lion, the prototypical hunter. Tayo, eventually, becomes a traditional warrior fighting for his own land and for the people who belong to it (Wieser 52).

Among all the diverse groups that are part of the United States, the African American and Native American experiences stand apart: Native Americans were already there when the settlers came, and African Americans were brought by force starting in the sixteenth century. When white settlers usurped Native American land, their situation changed dramatically. The Native American experience paradoxically evokes what Gayatri Spivak has called the "Resident Alien," or outsiders expecting "hospitality" from those whom they have colonized (302). Although Spivak talks about the Asian Indian colonial experience with reference to Derrida's *Of Hospitality*, under colonial conditions, the concept of hospitality is somewhat subverted in both examples. Curiously, the colonized become the somewhat despised guests of the colonizers, whereas in reality, the natives of any land are the hosts. Thus, the guest/host binary is reversed in both situations. The legitimate host is rendered incapable of being the host by the guest, and the guest usurps the position of the host, transforming the original host into "an absolute other." In the United States, this resulted in hostility towards Native American communities and those brought forcefully to fulfill the need for labor. The white colonizers also required the respect

given to the host as the “master of the house,” expecting loyalty and support “from below” (Spivak 308). Spivak problematizes similar kinds of colonial hospitality and gives examples from postcolonial literary texts to support her point.

Immigrants’ experience of American hospitality or “hostipitality” has also been documented in several texts. Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* (1976), a fictionalized memoir recounting the childhood experiences of a young girl who is caught between her ancestral Chinese/Cantonese culture and the American culture of her upbringing in Stockton, California, is yet another ethnic text that exemplifies the contradictions of hospitality. The text is divided into five stories, and each episode tracks the development of the young girl as she transitions into the inspirational figure of the woman warrior. The sections tell the story of a particular woman who becomes a role model in the narrator’s life. These maternal figures are real and mythical, ghostly and palpable presences in her life.

The story starts with a warning from Kingston’s mother: “You must not tell anyone,” she says, before disclosing the story of Kingston’s aunt’s illegitimate pregnancy and eventual suicide by jumping into the drinking-water well with her newborn (3). This “no name aunt” becomes an absent presence throughout Kingston’s story, symbolically referring to Chinese patriarchal oppression over women in the text. The story is told to the young narrator as a cautionary tale: a warning not to humiliate her parents by behaving against the rules of the community and not to speak of familial shame. This opening section of disclosing, or not disclosing, through speech becomes the major preoccupation of the last section, in which the language barriers between host and guest cultures are described vividly.

The narrator’s approach to her mother tongue is ambivalent and almost hostile. Chinese is the language associated with her mother’s pestering, while English represents her individuality. She feels embarrassed by her parents’ lack of proficiency in English when her teacher calls them to discuss her education (165). She becomes angry when her mother insists that she should act as a translator. As she notes: “You can’t entrust your voice to the Chinese, either; they want to capture your voice for their own use. They want to fix up your tongue to speak for them. ‘How much less can you sell it for?’ we have to say” (169). The pressures she experiences cause her to become silent and temporarily lose her expressive nature. In time, she understands and embraces her family’s hybrid language—the mixture of Chinese and English—as a communicative tool that is empowering rather than limiting. Understanding between the host and the guest depends upon linguistic interaction for both parties. Travelers/immigrants arriving in cultures with language differences experience different spellings of their names or have trouble pronouncing the names of their hosts. This linguistic difficulty may be linked to a crisis of selfhood. The young narrator in *The Woman Warrior* says: “I could not understand ‘I’. The Chinese ‘I’ has seven strokes, intricacies. How could the American ‘I’, assuredly wearing a hat like the Chinese, have only three strokes, the middle so straight?” (166). Her initial quietness is thus bound to her struggle with trying to reconcile her conflicting linguistic inheritances.

The above-mentioned texts—*Roots* by Alex Haley, *Interview with the Vampire* by Ann Rice, *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko, and *The Woman Warrior* by Maxine Hong Kingston—were published during my exchange student program in 1976–1977. They carry statements of American hospitality or “hostipitality.” In the host-guest binary, there is also the idea of temporality. Being a guest is defined by an acceptable time frame that is agreed upon by both parties. After all, an individual cannot remain a guest forever and the status can change with time. My first personal experience of American hospitality ended that year with mom giving me a large brown bag of homemade chocolate chip cookies to munch on during my long flight back home. An elderly lady accompanied by her husband sitting next to me on the plane curiously asked about my impressions upon learning that I was returning home after a year. Before I could answer, the gentleman said: “Honey, can’t you see she had a fabulous year!” pointing to my flowing tears of sadness caused by the parting of ways with my American family, while I clutched on that brown bag of cookies. Feeding others is one the major acts of hospitality mentioned in *xenia*, especially offering desserts and sweet snacks. I remember watching mom bake apple and lemon meringue pies and chocolate chip cookies from scratch while talking to me. Store-bought crust and cookies were unacceptable, and our dinners always ended with a piece of homemade dessert and a cup of brewed tea.

That high school year would not be last year I savored the home cooked meals with my American family. Six years later, I returned to the same home, used the same door key, and continued to be the live-in Turkish daughter again while earning an MA in English from the University of Maryland at College Park. They were the first to meet my fiancé, and after I had my own family, our transnational/overseas excursions to each other’s homes resumed, adding memorable moments to our lives. In 2017, Mom’s obituary listed me as her Turkish daughter. Two summers ago, my American Dad purchased a roundtrip ticket for me because he wanted to connect in person again. My American brother picked me up from the airport and drove for six hours so I could visit Dad in his retirement community. I stayed at my American sister’s home, sharing memories and savoring the homecooked meals and family tradition of drinks before dinner. The hospitality, kindness, and generosity initially extended to a stranger (me) turned out to be a special bond beyond friendship and duty, as they became my chosen family.

My personal experience with American hospitality is clearly different than the experiences described in the aforementioned literary texts. I was not a slave brought forcefully for labor, not a Native American whose tribal lands were claimed, and not an immigrant seeking to become a permanent resident. Thus, my temporary presence posed no possible hostility to the binary of host-guest relations. Each experience has its own nuances and distinctions; yet, when a threshold is crossed intentionally or because of circumstances, the hosts and the guests yield to the possibility of an exchange. One may learn to voice his/her experiences as Kunta Kinte did in *Roots*, rely on native traditions as Tayo did in *Ceremony*, find a suitable language as in the case of the narrator in *Woman Warrior* or, in my particular case, one may learn to bake apple pies and chocolate chip cookies from her host Mom or repeatedly be moved by her host Dad’s generosity, only hoping, one day, to be as hospitable to others as they were to me.

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