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1 author:

Ana Manzans
Universidad de Salamanca
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Junot Díaz's "Otravida, Otravez" and *Hospitalia*: the Workings of Hostile Hospitality

Ana María Manzanas Calvo
Universidad de Salamanca, Spain

The language of hospitality and its intimate opposite, hostility, reverberates insistently in the current political climate, as countries worry about fortifying their borders against waves of migration. This framework has paved the way for the language of hospitality to return as an apt lens for anatomizing current encounters with the Other. This article argues that the hospitality at the heart of Junot Díaz's story "Otravida, Otravez" (2012) is one that has turned against itself in a manner reminiscent of Derrida's concept of "hostipitality." I analyze the two locations of this hostile hospitality in the story, the hospital and the house, arguing that the hospital is its true locus and represents the guarded health of the American Dream.

Keywords: Junot Díaz / hospitality / hospital / migration

> The metaphor of hospitality structures contemporary debates on nationalism, migration, multiculturalism, and asylum. Who feels at home within the nation? Who is excluded or fails to feel at home in the nation? Is a host necessarily a citizen of the host nation-state? Why are immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers imagined as guests of the host nation-state?
>
> —Jennie Germann Molz & Sarah Gibson, *Mobilizing Hospitality: The Ethics of Social Relations in a Mobile World*

Only a real stranger, someone who doesn't belong to the same biological family, can bring me nourishment and teach me something about

> myself and about other people. Hence the essential, the vital need to relate to somebody else.
>
> —Tahar Ben Jelloun, *French Hospitality*

Our globalized and mobile world has brought about myriads of encounters with the Other. It is this unprecedented context of interactions and contact zones that has revitalized the notion of hospitality as a critical lens to assess the conditions, duration, and contested roles of hosts and guests. "An ancient and rather musty philosophical and theological thematic," as described by Mustafa Dikeç, Nigel Clark, and Clive Barnett, hospitality has returned as a framework for anatomizing "current debates about immigration, multiculturalism, and post-national citizenship" (2). For Tahar Ben Jelloun, hospitality is "the act of taking somebody into one's home without any thought of recompense." Three aspects are involved in the ritual: an action (a welcome); an attitude (the opening of oneself to the face of another); and a principle (disinterestedness) (1–2). This opening out towards the guest is not totally disinterested, however. As Ben Jelloun explains, "entertaining a guest is something that both honors and humanizes the host. . . . It makes the guest recognize me, the host, as someone capable of sharing" (2). The guest, he continues, "makes me confront myself. He upsets my space and my habits and teaches me what I am. It's a kind of test" (3).

As opposed to a sealed abode, an open house, on Ben Jelloun's reading, "is an invitation to emerge from solitude, from solitude seen as lack, a flaw in the architecture of existence" (4). As a paradigm, hospitality reveals an implicit correlation between the house as home and the house as nation-state, between the sphere of the domestic, the abode or dwelling, and the public and geo-political. Countries, like homes, have doors that open and close (Crosthwaite 9), and reserve their right of admission. In the words of a border patroller:

> The United States is like our house. If someone wants to come in, then they can knock on the door and if we want to let them in, then they can come in. But they can't just break in. That's what illegal immigration is. It's breaking and entering. (Bigelow 10)

The quote refashions the image of the welcoming house into an abode that is intermittently and conditionally open. It also codifies the metaphor of immigrant as guest, a contested image that distorts the presence of immigrants in the host country.

The fungible language of hospitality and its related concepts—hospital, hostel, hotel, hospice—resonates in the popular images and political discourse of immigration, and in the newly-minted promotional media of the hospitality industry. It also reverberates in the places of welcome and care suggested by its Latin root, *hospitium*: the hospitals and hospices. In "Otravida, Otravez," a story in Junot Díaz's short fiction collection, *This is How You Lose Her* (2012), it is fitting that Yasmin, the narrator, works as a laundress at a hospital. She is

dating a married man about to buy his first house in the United States while cheating on his wife, who is back home in the Dominican Republic. The hospital becomes the symbolic location where Yasmin hopes to enact a translation of the American Dream: another life, another time, as the title suggests. Indeed, given the etymological domain of the story, it is my contention that in "Otravida, Otravez"[1] Dominican American migrants are portrayed as the recipients of a particular kind of hospitality that entails close observation akin to convalescent hospitality. Just as the untranslated Spanish title is uncomfortably suspended within and surrounded by the English text, so too are the immigrants of the story confined by an ambiguous hospitality that blurs the lines between caretaking and surveillance.

HOSPITALITY: THE CONTESTED SITE OF *HOSTI-PETS*

> Every voyage can be said to involve a re-siting of boundaries. The traveling self is here both the self that moves physically from one place to another, following "public routes and beaten tracks" within a mapped movement, and the self that embarks on an undetermined journeying practice, having constantly to negotiate between home and abroad, native culture and adopted culture, or more creatively speaking, between a here, a there, *and* an elsewhere.
>
> —Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Other than Myself/ My Other Self"

The practice of hospitality (*xenia*, *hospitium*) was one of the most cherished virtues in ancient Greece and Rome. *Hospitium* initially signified the simple but sacred duty of every man to welcome and protect any stranger. It later became a formal agreement of mutual aid between two persons and their families. Eventually it included agreements between an individual and a community and between states and nations (Nybakken 248). Hence the distinction between *hospitium privatum* (private hospitality) established between individuals, and *hospitum publicum* (public hospitality) established between two states.[2] The split renders this "interstitial virtue," as René Schérer calls it, unstable at its core. It might be considered not only a disposition belonging to the individual, but also an institutional prescription applicable to all (Schérer 15). Hospitality thus comprises a series of binaries, for it is private and public; it is a virtue belonging to ethics, but also a regulation pertaining to the law of the land (Schérer 15, 43). Since ancient Greece and Rome, and in its multiple manifestations, hospitality "slips into each pore of the everyday where it plays out its allegorizing power in the fashion of the mysterious guest of parables and stories" (Schérer 49; my translation).[3] Plato placed hospitality among the first and foremost obligations of the citizen. It was a *devoir sacré* that one could not escape without incurring the gods' wrath. The gods were always sensitive

about the protection of foreigners, and they frequently appeared in disguise to ensure that the duty of hospitality was adequately provided. The workings of hospitality and the welcoming of a guest were of special interest to the supreme god, Zeus *hospitalier*, and the gods punished more severely the crimes committed against strangers than the crimes committed against citizens (Schérer 16).

In our contemporary world, when the concept of hospitality is constantly evoked in the context of massive border crossings and continual human movement, the term itself has become a slippery signifier. The vocabulary of hospitality is routinely co-opted by certain political discourses that practice the opposite to hospitality at the same time that they use its language (Schérer 21–22). A repeated theme in political advertising, especially in border regions or countries, hospitality is no longer seen as a "barometer of civilization" (Bolchazy 1), but is often portrayed as a mark of weakness against the alien and parasitic guest.[4] This is a frequent reduction and denigration of the concept of hospitality, which frequently lives side by side with its own negation. This is, in fact, the double movement inherent to hospitality itself.

As Benveniste demonstrates, the Latin *hospes* is made up of the elements *hosti-pet-s*, where two different roots converge—*hostis*, meaning "guests" or "host," and *pet* (which alternates with *pot*), meaning "master." Derrida elaborates on the importance of this etymology by explaining that *pet* or master unites the semantics of power, mastery, and despotic sovereignty. He therefore appends to "hospitality" the phrase *chez lui*, thus implying the importance of location for the exercise of power and sovereignty over the space and goods he offers or opens to the Other as stranger (Derrida, "Hostipitality" 14). As a site of enunciation, the *chez lui* designates not just a dwelling place, but also "the fact of residing within an identity" (McNulty x). *Hostis*, the other primary root of the compound hosti-pet-s, signifies reciprocity and compensation, and applies both to host and guest alike, hence the French *hôte*, which means both host and guest. Albert Camus's story "L'hôte," in fact, illustrates the convergence of both roles. Daru, a schoolteacher in a remote region of Algiers, initially appears as the host of a hostile guest he is supposed to escort to prison in the nearby Tinguit. The colonial frame of the story, however, reverses Daru's act of hospitality. In the scarcely populated part of Algiers where the story is set, Daru is part of the state apparatus (Kim 250).[5] As such, he is the real guest who has forcibly displaced the indigenous populations or hosts to the margins (cf. Still 177). Significantly, the story closes with the irruption of indigenous lines in between the colorful but displaced rivers of France that Daru had carefully drawn on the blackboard: "'You turned in our brother. You will pay'" (Camus, *Exile* 55).[6] The blackboard inscription unwittingly illustrates the lines within the lines in a kind of textual hospitality in reverse: the colonial inscription finds itself surrounded by the threatening lines of the colonized.

Hospitality emerges at the constant shifting crossroads of these two contradictory and fluid notions: one defined by reciprocity and exchange, the other by despotic power, mastery, and personal identity. The former, Tracy McNulty explains, "can result in a feeling of recognition and respect between host and

guest, a reciprocal relationship of power and mutual confirmation of one another's mastery that is guaranteed by relations of debt and obligation" (xi). The latter can turn into "a source of anxiety, rivalry, or hostility, in which the host's power over the guest is conceived in a threatening manner, or in which the guest threatens to overtake the host's place as master by usurping his home, personal property, or social position" (xi). Not in vain *hostis* evolves from a reciprocal and compensating guest to a threatening enemy who must be excluded or simply immobilized in particular spaces.[7] In fact, migrants are often portrayed as *hostis* in the host country—associated with crime and parasitical practices, and corroders of the country's moral standards. At the same time, the transformation of *hostis* refashions the position of the master, the *pet*, into a figure constantly threatened with dispossession who must constantly defend his or her rightful proprietorship (cf. McNulty xiii). "Otravida, Otravez" illustrates both transformations, for it portrays the immigrant as a threatening enemy that must be allocated to a specific space for guests. As the story ends, Ramón, a former guest, has morphed into a jealous host who needs to police the perimeter of his home against the outside.

The tensions within the concept of hospitality emerge in the act of opening the home to the Other, the stranger. Being a host, McNulty argues, implies more than mastery over the home:

> [I]t means not only residing within the familiarity of the *chez soi*, but opening the *chez soi* of identity to what is unfamiliar to it. As in ethics, the aim of hospitality is not to maintain the ipseity of the host, but rather to open it to the unforeseen stranger: A stranger who is not simply the counterpart, inversion, or negation of the host, but an alterity whose admission into the intimacy of the master's home *alters it irreparably*. Ethics implies not only identity, but relation: The possibility of a relationship between a "me" and a "you" who are not just pluralities of the "I," a host and a guest who are not merely reciprocal—and therefore potentially hostile—positions. (xiv)

This vision of hospitality as ethics, reminiscent of the sacred duty of welcoming the stranger, clearly contrasts with the situation of contemporary migrants in the host country. The opening of the *chez soi,* as the border patroller implied, is always partial and conditional. The terms of this conditional and limited hospitality are clear for the "guests" in Díaz's story. "We are not here for fun" (59), Ana Iris, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic reminds Yasmin when they meet. Yasmin similarly tells the new arrivals at the hospital, "This . . . is not an easy country. A lot of girls don't make it through their first year" (60). This harsh orientation lays down the parameters of the immigrant's engagement, and transforms the terms of the stay: immigrants are not guests, but workers. Derrida notes that the law of the household, the law of a place "de-limits the *very* place of protected hospitality and maintains authority over it, maintains the truth of authority" ("Hostipitality" 4). This limitation circumscribes the applicability of hospitality, as Derrida explains, "hospitality is owed to the other as stranger: But if one determines the other as stranger, one is already introducing the circles of conditionality that are family,

nation, state, and citizenship" ("Hostipitality" 8). These circles of conditionality punctuate Díaz's story.

Mireille Rosello points out that if a nation invites immigrants because "they are valuable assets, because it needs them for an economic or demographic purpose, that country is not being hospitable. At least not unconditionally, infinitely hospitable" (Rosello 12). Since immigrants are not being invited into the bosom of the nation, the image of the nation-state as a house is not a valid one either. Given these caveats, Rosello rightly argues that it might be more reasonable to conclude that "the so-called hospitality of nations may more closely resemble commercial hospitality"; similarly, the nation-state, as a place of limited hospitality, might be better conceptualized as a hotel, and the status of the immigrant as that of the paying guest (34–35). The notion of "paying" guest cuts through the concept of hospitality and reveals the aporetic nature described by Derrida: "Hospitality is a self-contradictory concept and experience which can only self-destruct—put otherwise, produce itself as impossible, only be possible on the condition of its impossibility— or protect itself from itself, auto-immunize itself—precisely in being put into practice" ("Hostipitality" 5).

The impossibility of hospitality, as well as the immigrant's precarious claim to the domestic spaces of the host country, appear in Yasmin's first photographs in the United States. None of them portray her home in the host country. One is taken in front of the McDonald's, "because I knew my mother would appreciate how American it was"; one in a bookstore, where she is pretending to read "though the book is in English" (62). The best picture, she claims, was taken in front of a building at the university. "There are no students but hundreds of metal folding chairs have been arranged in front of the building for an event" (63). The first two commercial backdrops are revealing. The McDonald's picture portrays one of the United States' symbols of globalization that apparently welcomes all kinds of paying customers; the second offers the interior of a bookstore from which Yasmin is already barred, since she does not speak the language.

Her "pretending to read" a book whose language she cannot decipher seems to suggest the trope of the talking book in slave narratives, an episode that signaled the abyss between written culture and the illiteracy of the slave. As James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw first put it in his autobiography, the book refused "to talk" to the slave.[8] "Literacy," argues Henry Louis Gates, Jr., has been "Western culture's trope of dominance over the peoples of color it had 'discovered,' colonized, and enslaved since the fifteenth century" (165). Dominance over the Other, I would add, establishes the rings of conditionality that govern communication. The silence of the book is a reminder that the English language automatically folds the foreigner "into the internal law of the host," as Derrida puts it ("Hostipitality" 7). The host dictates "the law of its language and its own acceptation of the sense of words, which is to say, its own concepts as well" (Derrida, "Hostipitality" 7). It also reminds Yasmin that Spanish itself is considered a linguistic guest in the United States.

The chairs set out for an unknown occasion (a graduation or a convocation, possibly) is the most powerful image of the three photographs, for it visually bespeaks a welcome, an offer. A chair is an invitation to sit and rest, yet the immigrant has not been asked to tarry, for conditional hospitality always gives and takes. Hospitality may offer, hold out and greet, but it will always retain its mastery over space and time. The fact that the picture is taken at the university foregrounds the exclusion of the immigrant from the temples of knowledge, for he or she is conditionally welcome only to work in the country. The inviting chairs do not seem to be set out for Yasmin. In fact, for the immigrant places of hospitality are not meant to consolidate into providers or markers of identity. Immigrant places slip into non-places, into locations that, as Mark Augé argues, do not provide any sense of a relational and historical identity (112). "Otravida, Otravez," is set in just such a non-place: a hospital offering an ailing form of hospitality for its guests/workers.

THE REALM OF HOSPITAL-ITY

Given the aporetic nature of hospitality and its designated locations, it is not surprising that in "Otravida, Otravez," hospitality includes through exclusion. There is an intrinsic spatial separation between the domestic spaces of the country and the spaces for immigrants. Yasmin spells it out at the beginning of the story, when she talks about Ramón's efforts to buy a house: "He's been talking about the house he wants to buy, how hard it is to find one when you're Latino" (51). Latinos live in the assigned space of the *barrio*; outside this "dislocating localization" (Agamben 175), Latinos are not welcome. They are the *hostis*, the threatening enemy that must be excluded or contained in pockets of the city. Their welcome outside these restricted areas is always conditional,[9] binding them to a spatial threshold of belonging and not belonging. They are always subject to the disciplinary side of hospitality as the "law of the household," "the law of a place." This rule applies to house, hotel, hospital, hospice, family, city, nation, and language, and it signifies "limiting the gift proffered and making of this limitation, namely, the *being-oneself in one's own home*, the condition of the gift and of hospitality" (Derrida, "Hostipitality" 4). The truth of this authority materializes with the allocation of sanctioned spaces to the empowered and marginalized spaces to the outsider-immigrant.

Given this allocation, it is not surprising that Yasmin did not send home a picture of her first apartment. It was situated over a bar, and she shared the place with nine other women; the noise from below was so loud that no one could sleep. Together with the apartment she shares in the story, both are examples of the spatial parameters of immigrant occupation of space, of an aporetic hospitality akin to Derrida's hostipitality. If, following McNulty, we understand hospitality as opening the possibility of a relationship between a "me" and a "you" who are not pluralities of the "I," then Yasmin's position indicates the unlikelihood of such an encounter: "Most of the people I know in the States have no friends here; they're crowded together in apartments. . . . I've seen the lines at the phone places, the

men who sell stolen card numbers, the cuarto they carry in their pockets" (60). Distrust presides over the contacts and exchanges not only between immigrants and natives, but also among immigrants themselves. The home does not shelter the individual or her possessions; indeed, the immigrants carry in their pockets their *cuarto*—a word that translates as both coins and bedroom. We might borrow Jennifer Gonźalez's concept of the "autotopography" here—the "spatial representation of identity" created from a fragmented array of "personal objects" (133)—to suggest that Díaz's image reinforces the dynamics of immigrant mobility within immobility. Symbolically, hostipitality in the story radiates from St. Peter's hospital, where Yasmin works. As I have suggested, the word "hospital" conflates several different meanings: Middle Latin *hospitale* "guest-house, inn"; Old French *hospital*, *ospital*; "hostel" from mid-thirteenth century, meaning "shelter for the needy." The online Etymology Dictionary traces the development of the word, which in the early fifteenth century evolved into "charitable institution" and "house to maintain the needy." The sense of "institution for sick people" is first recorded in 1540s.

"Otravida, Otravez" actualizes the different meanings of the word in such a way that the lodgings or apartments for guests resemble the shelter for the sick. The story suggests that the hospital is a core space for what might be thought of as a sick or debilitated hospitality. These slippages at the lexical level are also manifest if we consider the hospital as a heterotopic space. Foucault describes heterotopias as counter sites that have the property of suspecting, neutralizing, or inverting the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror or reflect (24). For Foucault, the hospital actualizes two forms of heterotopias, for it can be considered as a crisis heterotopia, a place "reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis" (24), but also as a heterotopia of deviation where those "individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed" (25). Crisis and deviation interact and overlay St. Peter's, where Yasmin and her co-workers labor for nine hours a day, for the hospital harbors not only the sick—those who are removed from society in a state of crisis—but also the immigrants, a different wave of occupiers (or guests) whose behavior is culturally alien from the norm. The two sets of "guests" together constitute a microcosmic contact zone between old and new migrants, between the sick and the healthy, the old and the young.

Yasmin is at the center of these conceptual slides and overlaps: she is seen as the rock, the experienced *veterana* to whom the young women turn for advice or money. Her domain is the laundry room, where she sorts through piles of sheets with gloved hands:

> I never see the sick: they visit me through the stains and marks they leave on the sheets, the alphabet of the sick and dying. A lot of the time the stains are too deep and I have to throw those linens in the special hamper. . . . Sometimes the stains are rusty and old and sometimes the blood smells sharp as rain. You'd think, given the

> blood we see, that there's a great war going on out in the world. Just the one inside of bodies, the new girl says. (55)

There is a correlation between the marks of pain dotting the white sheet, and the stories she hears from her workers at the hospital. Yasmin is not only visited by the sick and dying, but also by the young immigrant women working at the laundry torn between the non-home they now dwell in and the emotional pull of the home country, where young children, wives or mothers await money, letters, or photographs. Yasmin witnesses their negotiations between home and non-home, places and non-places, native culture and adopted culture—a here, a there, and an elsewhere, as Minh-ha suggests. Yasmin has also anatomized these younger versions of herself going through different stages of adaptation to the new country, their rituals of survival, their comings and goings, their absences, their moving on, their giving up, or returning home. The bloodstains that she has formalized into "the alphabet of the sick and dying" become the visual correlatives not only of the lives of hospital guests, but also of guests of the nation-state. Bloody sheets provide the ultimate biography of the sick and the deviant. Significantly, Yasmin could not make sense of the English book in her photograph, but is is literate in a language written in blood. For her, the sheets become the pages of a talking book. Like the laundry she sorts through, the traumas of migration might sometimes be washed off, while at other times they are deeply staining and cannot be removed from her consciousness. "I hold up the blue hospital sheets in front of me and close my eyes, but the bloodstains float in the darkness in front of me" (67), she claims. This visual image provides the traces of a palimpsest that does not leave her vision. So does the hospital as a location, as a hotel or refuge, for it offers the symbolic location that allows us to assess the terms of a "sick" or convalescent hospitality that radiates to the outside.

BETWEEN HOST AND GUEST: THE HOUSE

> The fundamental deprivation of human rights is manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective.
>
> —Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

> We already have laws restricting entry and residence; why shouldn't we have other laws based on the idea that to welcome strangers into one's country is a fundamental mark of civilization? We're not talking about someone who turns up out of the blue, but about someone set by History on the path that leads to my house (my country), to a place where he will be received as a guest. . . . The whole significance of

> immigration lies in the fact that the immigrant is expected. The Other is on his way. Maybe he wasn't formally asked to come, but somehow or other the invitation was issued.
>
> —Tahar Ben Jelloun, *French Hospitality*

Like the rest of the immigrant workers, Yasmin enters the mechanism of a hospitality that grants and deprives of a place, with the ensuing loss of her "place in the world," as Arendt describes. Yasmin becomes another occupier of the new versions of apartments for guests or guest chambers. Within these places, the guests are constantly reminded that they will never be welcome or admitted to what Homi Bhabha calls "the *Heim* of the national culture and its unisonant discourse" (164). These guests, in turn, will always be "the marks of a shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of the modern nation" (Bhabha 164). These migrants/guests are contained within the national body as "its interiorized outside" (Butler 16); always at the threshold, always in a liminal position. Guests may be welcome, accepted, invited, received, and granted a right of asylum by being authorized to cross a threshold or line that will accompany the immigrant everywhere. Migrants will always bear this externality, for "encounters between self and other tend to be conceived of in spatial tropes of openness and closure, inclusion and exclusion, border patrolling and boundary crossing, while the 'stranger' who might be welcomed or turned away is most often characterized as one who has been spatially mobilized or displaced" (Dikeç, Clark, Barnett 4).

These sets of binaries between identity/difference, self/Other, here/there, inclusion/exclusion, and in-place/out-of-place (Dikeç, Clark, Barnett 7–8) become more obvious when Ramón starts looking for a house to buy. This has been, "his dream since he first set foot in the States," Yasmin tells us (Díaz 57). The dream is closer now, with all the jobs he has had and the money he has saved. "How many get to this point?" asks Yasmin, "only the ones who never swerve, who never make mistakes, who are never unlucky" (57); only those, one might add, that are literally *patient* enough. Still the closeness of the dream simultaneously cancels its goal, for it foregrounds the precarious position of the immigrant within the spatial practices in society. These social articulations of space tend to be static and invariable.

Looking for houses is described as a rite of initiation, as if by becoming a homeowner the immigrant could claim a deeper sense of belonging to the new country despite the emotional pull of his home country. "To own a house in this country is to begin to live" (69), Ramón concludes, as if purchasing property equated admission to an inner sanctum.[10] Accordingly, the purchase is carefully calculated. Ramón and Yasmin drive around the quieter sections of Paterson, New Jersey, where the trees "have spread over the roofs and garages" (57), and a middle class roots its claim to place. Ramón's musings evoke the image of domesticity and middle class Americanness: a garden and a garage are part of the dream vision of what the United States means for immigrants.

Not surprisingly, Ramón makes an event of house-hunting, "like he's interviewing for a visa" (57). Yasmin's metaphor is not far-fetched, for purchasing a house equates being admitted into a *chez soi* that is limited and conditional. Like a checkpoint at a geo-political boundary, both visa interviews and the process of purchasing a home enact an encounter between self and Other, and reverberate with images of openness and closure, inside and outside, policing and trespassing. In both scenarios, someone belonging to the out-there is seeking entrance to the in-here. The stranger or *arrivant*, as Derrida puts it, "affects the very experience of the threshold whose possibility he brings to light" (*Aporias* 33). As a consequence, the limits of the master's abode become concrete and tangible; they congeal in the face of this stranger or guest who pushes against or passes over them (Dikeç, Clark, Barnett 12). Any attempt to redraw the racial and spatial boundary replays the rituals of border crossing and the gatekeeper's power over the one seeking entrance. The invisible boundary between different sections of the city is fully customized according to the identity of the crosser/buyer.

Ramón's preparations for the house search, however, do not fit the actual homes they visit, as Yasmin comments:

> Three nights a week we look at houses. The houses are in terrible condition; they are homes for ghosts and for cockroaches and for us, los hispanos. Even so, few people will sell to us. They treat us well enough in person but in the end we never hear from them, and the next time Ramón drives by other people are living there, usually blanquitos, tending the lawn that should have been ours, scaring crows out of our mulberry trees. (63)

Migrants are welcome to look at substandard houses only, as if the contact between the homeowner and the potential buyer opened up a particular spatial dislocation within the in-here. It is an internal displacement that actualizes the exteriority traditionally attributed to the immigrant Other. The immigrant brings the outside within. Ghosts, cockroaches, and Hispanic Americans are lumped together as natural dwellers of the spatial stereotype. As Derrida argues, the law of identity, the *ipseity* of the host, always de-limits the space of conditional hospitality and maintains its authority over it. The dream, like the idea of hospitality itself, is sabotaged from within, as Yasmin intuits, from its inner hostility. That is why Yasmin is reluctant to find a house, for she knows how the rights of *ipseity* will determine the idea of home.

Eventually, however, there is a hopeful development in Ramón's house search. An elderly homeowner who served in the Dominican Republic's Civil War likes Ramón and Yasmin and is willing to sell to them. Yasmin chronicles Ramón's excited but scared reaction. These mixed emotions, Yasmin adds, are "something I know, a place I've been" (69). The sentence is significant; it situates Yasmin and Ramón at another threshold within the nation-state. Cautious about their right of entrance, they seem to pause, as if aware of the affirmation of mastery that governs their going in. Their lingering at the limen is revealing, pointing to the workings of hospitality. Hospitality "governs the threshold—and hence it forbids in some

way even what it seems to allow to cross the threshold" (Derrida, "Hostipitality" 14). Hospitality, Derrida continues, "becomes the threshold" and "remains forever on the threshold of itself" ("Hostipitality" 14), at the crux of a bifurcation between opening/closing, mastery/ipseity and the Other/guest, between *hostis* as host or as enemy, between hospitality and its own parasitic other, hostility.

In Díaz's story, this paralysis is complicated by the crossing of another threshold in time and space. As in *Drown*, Díaz brings up the American invasion of the Dominican Republic in April 1965 to prevent the Constitutionalists, allegedly infiltrated by communists, from securing control of the country in the midst of a civil war.[11] During the American invasion, the Dominicans became the coerced hosts of a colonizing guest. This forced visitation reminds us that, as Ben Jelloun points out, migrants do not turn up in another country out of the blue (6). The homeowner who sells to Yasmin and Ramón does so in part because he participated in in the invasion of their home island. That is, the immigrant is somewhat expected. "The Other," Ben Jelloun explains, "is on its way. Maybe he wasn't formally asked to come, but somehow or other the invitation was issued" (6). These encounters shift the usual roles of host and guest, for the host is also a guest, and vice versa. The United States opens its borders to paying guests, while the Dominican Republic saw its borders violated through the 1965 American invasion.

CONCLUSION: WELCOME TO THE OUTSIDE

> One of the outstanding characteristics of traditional societies is the opposition that they assume between their inhabited territory and the unknown and indeterminate space that surrounds it. The former is the world (more precisely, our world), the cosmos; everything outside it is no longer a cosmos but a sort of 'other world,' a foreign, chaotic space, peopled by ghosts, demons, 'foreigners'. . . .At first sight this cleavage in space appears to be due to the opposition between an inhabited and organized—hence cosmicized—territory and the unknown space that extends beyond its frontiers; on one side there is a cosmos, on the other a chaos.
>
> —Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*

Buying the house takes longer than either Yasmin or Ramón imagined, and Ramón almost walks away from the deal. While Yasmin expected the sale to fall through, however, a miracle happens and Ramón is able to wade through the paperwork. The purchase opens a new bracket in time, *otra vida, otra vez*, another life, another time, as the title suggests. Now, Ramón says, "We can begin" (71). Home ownership does not initially translate as progress, however: paying his way into America opens another time loop into the past.

> [The house is] a half-ruin and only two rooms are habitable. It resembles the first place I lived when I arrived in this country. We don't have heat for the entire winter, and for a month we have to bathe from a bucket. Casa de Campo, I call the place in jest, but he doesn't take to any criticism of his "niño." (72)

The home seems to have its own inner partitions and divisions between the habitable and inhabitable, as if mirroring the space outside. Revealingly, Yasmin compares the new house to her first American apartment, as if this step into the future has simply repeated the past. Gaston Bachelard notes that, "the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories, and dreams of mankind. Past, present and future give the house different dynamism" (6). Without it, "man would be a dispersed being" (7): "the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace" (6). A house protects dwellers from the outside, and signifies the individual's right to place, yet this house is not separate from the outside, but seems to bring the outside within, as indicated by Yasmin's ironic use of the term *casa de campo*, "a country house" situated outside a settlement, usually meant for farming or recreation.[12] *Casa de campo* implies closure within as opposed to the openness of the countryside. It is a house in progress, and Yasmin chronicles Ramón's "raiding the abandoned properties on the block for materials. Every floorboard he reclaims, he boasts, is money saved" (72). Furthermore, in spite of the tree-lined streets that Ramón interpreted as the signs of a bucolic middle class space, Yasmin cautions that "the neighborhood is not easy and we have to make sure to keep everything locked all the time" (72).

However precarious their claim on space appears, Yasmin and Ramón's house marks another line of division between inside and outside, this time as a boundary that separates the new couple from the others who still belong in the category of "dispersed beings." The couple settles into the new home, and yet,

> For a few weeks people knock on the door, asking if the house is still for sale. Some of them are couples as hopeful as we must have looked. Ramón slams the door on them, as if afraid they might haul him back to where they are. But when it's me I let them down softly. It's not, I say. Good luck with your search. (72)

Significantly, it is now Ramón who assumes the position of the master, the *pet*, who feels he must constantly defend his rightful proprietorship. Ramón now unites the semantics of power, mastery, and despotic sovereignty; he is the master *chez lui*. Between reciprocity and exchange on the one hand, and despotic power, mastery, and personal identity on the other, Ramón clearly chooses the latter. The potential guest is already *a priori* a *hostis* that threatens the host with dispossession. Ramón will not open the house to curious buyers or strangers; his relation to them exists in circumscribing and demarcating the contours of his own identity. Thus the story circles back to its point of departure, and the scripted roles of host and guest. As it does so, "Otravida, Otravez" throws light on the role of the host and his emphasis of the law of the land and the *chez lui*. Díaz shows that what

motivates Ramón's slamming his door on the Other is a fear of sliding back into a menacing outside — a foreign, chaotic space, peopled by ghosts, demons, and foreigners. Thus the writer anatomizes a hospitality that includes through exclusion, and that renews itself as it shifts the roles of host and guest.

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Notes

1. Significantly, the title in Spanish inserts itself into the English text and becomes a guest in a host language. Furthermore, the title wedges itself into Spanish as well, for it creates two words out of four, *otra vida, otra vez*. "Otravida, Otravez" thus becomes the impossible linguistic guest in both languages.

2. In ancient Greece, the stranger was initially looked upon as an enemy, but this initial perception changed as strangers were gradually viewed without suspicion but as ordinary human beings. From magico religious xenophobia and the avoidance of the stranger, the Greeks moved to different forms of private hospitality. These different manifestations have been systematized by Ladislaus Bolchazy as follows: the apotropaic category of hospitality, consisting of a series of rituals to disarm the stranger of his or her alleged harmful magical powers; the Medea category of hospitality, in which strangers are welcome in order to disarm them of their bad will; the Theoxenic category of hospitality, which welcomes the stranger because he may be the embodiment of some god; the *ius Hispitiie, Ius Dei* category, based on the belief that it was some god's will that strangers be received and treated hospitably; the contractual category of Hospitality, which put the practice of hospitality to practical use. The chief motive, Bolchazy writes, was enlightened self-interest. Side by side with this variation of hospitality we see a type of altruistic hospitality that is offered to a total stranger (Bolchazy 11); the altruistic category of hospitality was based on the tenet that hospitable treatment of strangers is one of the distinguishing criteria of civilization (Bolchazy13). Public hospitality saw two variants in ancient Greece: citizens living in their own state who were appointed by another state act as its representatives, and citizens who were appointed by their own state to show hospitality to foreigners in its name (*Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*).

3. "*Elle se glisse dans chaque pore du quotidian où elle fait jouer sa force allégorisante à la manière de l'hôte mystérieux des paraboles et des contes*" (49).

4. An extreme case of negative advertising is David Vitter's (R-La) characterization of democrat Charlie Melancon's immigration policies. The ad portrays a band of alleged migrants being welcome to the United States. A neon sign marks the point of entry to the country. A welcome reception salutes the newcomers with a Charlie Melancon sign as the border patrol witnesses the fanfare. The group of "illegals" is finally invited to step onto a limo. The voice-over conveys Melancon's immigration record: "Melancon voted to make it easier for illegals to get taxpayer funded benefits, and actual welfare checks. Melancon even voted against allowing police to arrest illegals. Thanks to Charlie Melancon, it's no wonder illegals keep coming, and coming . . ." (Kleefeld).

5. Although repulsed by the guest's crime, Daru practices the rituals of hospitality and provides him with a meal and suitable sleeping arrangements. Extending hospitality to the guest changes Daru's position as host. Jungah Kim explains that Daru is "forced to re-enter his home thorugh the guest,

the Arab prisoner, who comes from the outside" (252). Daru, the host, becomes the guest, while the Arab prisoner becomes the host (253).

6. "*Tu as livré notre frère. Tu paieras*" (Camus, *L'Exil* 101).

7. This transformation also explains how *hostis* became the linguistic root of "hostility."

8. See Gates 136–169.

9. Such is the immobilization of barrio boys that Alejandro Morales portrays in *The Rag Doll Plagues,* and that Piri Thomas fleshes out in *Down These Mean Streets*. Thomas describes the movement of the family from Harlem to Babylon, Long Island, where the family expects to have better opportunities. "it is a better life in the country. No like Puerto Rico, but it have trees and grass and nice schools" (82), the mother explains to a young Piri. In the next chapter, revealingly entitled "But Not for Me," the protagonist pictures Long Island as a foreign country. "It looked so pretty and clean but it spoke a language you couldn't dig" (88). It also speaks the language of racism, as Piri finds.

10. In some European countries, buying a house or apartment is, in fact, the fastest path to citizenship (Grabar).

11. The invasion has been qualified as an unprecedented abuse of national might (Vance in Roorda 842). The United States intervened in the civil conflict between the rebel insurgents and the military heirs of the repressive Trujillo regime. The former fought for the Dominican Constitution and wanted the return of the legitimate president, Bosch, whose democratic rule was overthrown in September 1963. After the insurgents' initial victory over the military regime, the United States sent a contingent of troops on 28 April 1965 to occupy the capital, Santo Domingo. The marines pushed the constitutional rebels to an enclave in the inner city. The reasons for this harsh decision have remained in the dark due to the long and gradual declassification process of paper documents and phone conversations. For Alan McPherson, President Johnson was more responsible than previously thought for the intelligence failures that led to the invasion. According to the intelligence the President gathered, "communists trained outside the Dominican Republic had taken over a leftist revolt against the right-wing Dominican military and planned to conduct a Castro-like revolution once in power" (129). The aim of the landing of the marines on the island was to form an interim government agreeable to the contending forces and dedicated to an election in the near future.

12. According to the Diccionario of the RAE, *casa de campo* means "*La que está fuera de poblado y sirve para cuidar del cultivo, para recrearse o para ambos objetos a la vez*."

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