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Toward a Theory of Feminist Hospitality

Maurice Hamington

Immigration, international conflicts, and world debt have contributed to rising unease over the power relations created by burgeoning globalization. Absent from much of the political rhetoric surrounding global issues is a role for the social value of hospitality. Political theorists and philosophers such as the late Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas have reinvigorated interest in hospitality. This article suggests that the work of feminist theorists such as Seyla Benhabib, Margaret Urban Walker, and Iris Marion Young on issues of identity, inclusiveness, reciprocity, forgiveness, and embodiment can contribute to an alternative theory of hospitality. Consistent with feminist care ethics, the theory of feminist hospitality proposed here integrates a moral disposition toward the Other with an open epistemological stance, funded by a metaphysical conceptualization of connected identity. Granting the historical gender division of labor associated with hospitality work, the hospitality offered integrates a healthy notion of self-care and is critical of oppressive power dynamics. Ultimately, this article proposes a feminist hospitality that reflects a performative extension of care ethics by pursuing stronger social bonds, as well as fostering inclusive and nonhierarchical host/guest relations.

Keywords: care ethics / embodiment / forgiveness / hospitality / identity / immigration / inclusion / performativity / reciprocity

The right to universal hospitality is sacrificed on the altar of state interest. We need to decriminalize the worldwide movement of peoples, and treat each person, whatever his or her political citizenship status, in accordance with the dignity of moral personhood.

—Seyla Benhabib (2004, 177)

*Hospitality is indeed in crisis, not simply because our contemporary
(Western?) world may not have enough of it, but because it is in
the process of being redefined.*

—Mireille Rosello (2001, 8)

A dictionary definition of *hospitality* describes it in a positive and benign way, hardly the stuff of theoretical importance and seemingly bereft of gender significance: “1. The friendly reception and treatment of guests or strangers. 2. The quality or disposition of receiving and treating guests and strangers in a warm, friendly, generous way” (*Webster’s* 1989, s.v. *hospitality*). What this definition does not address is the social and political implications of hospitality, nor does it distinguish between the socially prescribed roles of those who administer hospitality and those who receive it—metaphorically, the host and guest. Too often women have been unwilling hosts and unwelcome guests. Unlike traditional mind/body dualisms, gender oppression does not easily map onto the host/guest metaphor. Both men and women have played the role of host but, in the case of women, “host” is not always a freely chosen role nor does it always entail power or decision-making ability. Similarly, for women, “guest” does not necessarily translate into the subject of authentic hospitality, as the host often has ulterior motives reflecting power differentials and social-role constraints. Feminist theorists have a right to be ambivalent about hospitality, given these asymmetrical and inconsistent gender responsibilities. Furthermore, in North America, hospitality has been rendered somewhat innocuous through its commercialization and because of a general decline in civil speech. Despite the ambiguities, hospitality is a glaring moral imperative because of the escalation of world violence, global disparities in quality-of-life issues, international alliances, globalization, and widespread migration.

Given the oppressive gender legacy, why pursue *feminist* hospitality?¹ I contend that the depth and maturity of feminist analysis has led to unique and compelling ethical insights that can invigorate and expand the notion of hospitality. Because feminism is a social-justice movement concerned with intersections of oppression, attaching the qualifier “feminist” to hospitality is intended to bring a mature body of justice analysis and sensibilities to the notion of hospitality. The construction of feminist hospitality is not in opposition to some of the important analytic work found in the philosophical tradition. For example, Emmanuel Levinas (1969) and Jacques Derrida (2001) have offered rich explorations of hospitality, the significance of which has not been exhausted by contemporary commentators. Derrida describes the centrality of hospitality:

Hospitality is culture itself and not simply one ethic amongst others. In so far as it has to do with the *ethos*, that is, the residence, one’s home, the familiar place of dwelling, inasmuch as it is a manner of being there, the manner in

which we relate to ourselves and to others, to others as our own or as foreigners, ethics is hospitality; ethics is so thoroughly coextensive with the experience of hospitality. (2001, 16–17)

Although Derrida and Levinas have revitalized philosophical interest in hospitality, feminist ethicists have advanced alternatives to traditional moral theory that I suggest can coalesce and contribute to a robust understanding of hospitality—that is, identity, inclusiveness, reciprocity, forgiveness, and embodiment.

At a minimum, feminist hospitality drives at a nonhierarchical understanding of hospitality that mitigates the expression of power differential, while seeking greater connection and understanding for the mutual benefit of both host and guest. Accordingly, feminist hospitality does not assume autonomously acting moral agents; the feminist hospitality that I propose creates and strengthens relationships, but not without the risk that comes from the vulnerability of human sharing.

Without creating a false dichotomy, I pose feminist hospitality in contrast to what Derrida (2001) refers to as “conditional” hospitality: A hospitality that serves to maintain or advance existing power hierarchies. In the United States, hospitality has been rendered a vacuous instrument of industry that offers the appearance of welcoming and goodwill to customers from paid employees without challenging underlying economic structures. For example, minimum-wage workers with little or no benefits are often asked to put on cordial displays of affection for a public who has voted to cut social services and safety nets that would have benefited them. In such an instance, expressions of hospitality give the appearance that all is well in the relations between guest and host, thus masking the underlying inequalities and possibly hiding submerged class antipathy. Appropriating morally praiseworthy notions of welcoming and care, the hospitality industry has advanced a thin version of hospitality to create temporal and superficial feelings of goodwill because the market is ill suited to offer deep or robust understandings of hospitality. Although not without value, this is a conditional hospitality predicated on exchange.

Although conditional hospitality is prevalent in contemporary manifestations, the character of hospitality is governed by era and culture. For example, in his study of ancient hospitality, Ladislaus Bolchazy (1995) concludes that hospitality played a number of important, socially formative roles in antiquity. He claims that ancient societies were often xenophobic, and the Greeks were no exception. Acknowledging the mistrust of unknown Others, the ancient Greeks self-consciously developed strong codes of hospitality, and even gauged other civilizations by the depth of their hospitality (Bolchazy 1995). According to Bolchazy, Greek conditional terms of hospitality subsequently influenced Roman notions of hospitality that, in turn, shaped Christian notions of hospitality:

[Hospitality] is a humane solution to one's suspicions regarding the ill disposition of a stranger. It represents a deterrent to war and a desire for peaceful coexistence. It encourages frequent social intercourse between strangers. It is based upon the realization that a social contract—not to harm so as not to be harmed—is preferable to the law of the jungle. (1995, 32)

Although this form of conditional hospitality may have had important social utility, it is limited, defensive, and rooted in mistrust of strangers. The hospitality that I describe as feminist is embedded in a positive human ontology that pursues evocative exchanges to foster better understanding. In this manner, feminist hospitality explores the antimony between disruption and connection: The guest and host disrupt each other's lives sufficiently to allow for meaningful exchanges that foster interpersonal connections of understanding. To this end, I propose that feminist hospitality reflects a performative extension of care ethics that seeks to knit together and strengthen social bonds through psychic and material sharing. The feminist hospitality addressed here is not limited to personal exchanges and is conceived as having social and geopolitical implications. What follows is an exploration of hospitality through the extrapolation of provocative feminist theoretical work on identity, inclusiveness, reciprocity, forgiveness, and embodiment.

Identity

Hospitality is a performative act of identity: To give comfort or make welcome the stranger, the host must act; to resettle displaced people, a host nation must act. In the process of this action, the performance of hospitality, the host—whether it is an individual or a nation-state—is instantiating identity. There must be an “I” who gives, welcomes, and comforts, and that “I” is only known through action. As Levinas (1969) describes it, subjectivity is created through “welcoming the Other, as hospitality” (27). Acts of hospitality actualize identity. Connecting the personal and the political, Tracy McNulty (2007) suggests that hospitality has a twofold implication for identity formation: Acts of hospitality constitute the identity of the host, as well as the identity of the group, culture, or nation for which the host acts. Nevertheless, McNulty observes that the actualization of this identity has rendered women invisible: An identity that negates the self. For example, she finds that in the early religious traditions and archaic practices “the host is almost invariably male,” and concludes that in these contexts, “feminine hospitality is almost an oxymoron” (xxvii). Women are denied opportunities to hold a valued position of host and are thus denied opportunities to participate in these acts of self-assertion. Women have been historically associated with hospitality, but as a marginalized self in society. Obviously, feminist hospitality must consciously resist forms of disempowering caregiving.

Judith Butler's (1988) notion of the performative self is useful here. She describes gender as "an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (519; emphasis in original). This is a performative, constructed, and fluid identity. The acts of gender formation are not entirely freely chosen; rather, they are done to the body within prescribed social frameworks: "My suggestion is that the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time" (523). Despite social discipline placed on behavior, Butler (1999) leaves open the possibility of subversive performativity: Rather than repeat acts that maintain gender identity, one can choose to "displace the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself" (148). Significantly, Butler (1999) is primarily concerned with subverting compulsory heterosexuality, but her analysis can be applied to the identity of the "master of the house" created by hospitality. Subversively, the feminist host can remain cognizant of not recreating acts that constitute identity through positions of power over others, but instead attempt to foster the atmosphere for lateral exchanges.² The implication is that acts of feminist hospitality can contribute to an alternative identity, one that is less restrictive and more empowering than is offered through traditional understandings of hospitality. Women who help other women, not in the spirit of charity or to alleviate class guilt but with a generous disposition and for mutual benefit, exemplify acts of feminist hospitality.

Property plays a role in how hospitality constitutes identity. The host is usually conceived of as having some resource to offer or share with the guest. This also has a gendered dimension: Males, as the historic holders of property—a category that often included women and children—were able to perform acts of hospitality as an extension and instantiation of their identity. McNulty (2007) finds the connection between property and personhood inescapable: "[I]n the paradoxical logic of the hospitality relation itself, . . . the host's mastery is defined by his ability to offer up or dispose of his personal property in furtherance of his hospitality" (xxiii–xxiv). Ultimately, McNulty asks: "Can one speak of hospitality in the absence of personal property?" (xxiv). The need for a feminist hospitality to subvert historically masculine manifestations of hospitality becomes more significant in the face of materialism's role in identity formation. Traditional Western hospitality has often implied that the mastery over property included family, as well as power over the guest (xi). I suggest that feminist hospitality should subvert hospitality-infused hierarchies and minimize the inferred power relations grounded in property to facilitate connections among people. In this manner, sharing is less instilled with hidden agendas and more directed toward the well-being of the guest. Such an approach entails a radical rethinking of the host's relationship to property—not necessarily a negation of property rights, but perhaps a mitigated sense of ownership.

Part of the shift in feminist identity formation through acts of hospitality is from a self-valorizing, or "what one can do to or for others," to an identity formation that values the Other in one's self. Rather than constructing a

“fortress” of rigid ritual that is ready to provide for others while simultaneously keeping them at a “safe” distance, feminist hospitality is open to empathizing with others, such that identity is located in the interaction.³ Drawing upon Derrida, Meyda Yegenoglu (2003) distinguishes between the conditional hospitality of invitation and the unconditional hospitality of visitation to address the defensive nature of some forms of hospitality. In such arrangements, “the master remains the master, the host remains the host at home, and the guest remains an invited guest” (n.p.). When one is invited and thus selected to meet under specific conditions, the guest is less likely to disrupt the identity of the host or the property that constitutes the host’s identity. Openness to an uninvited stranger provides the greatest opportunity for mutual discovery; feminist hospitality frames a shared or connected identity.⁴ In this manner, hospitality can be truly disruptive because the “I” is no longer the same after confronting the guest; both the host and guest have changed as a result of their meeting. This change has individual and collective implications: Exchanges with the guest can engage a personal identity transformation, but there can also be social or cultural self-understandings altered by the experience. A country can develop policy “habits” of aiding other peoples that seep into the fabric of that nation’s collective ideals. Hospitality is a dynamic act of identity formation that finds growth through compassion and caring.

Inclusion

Feminism has been at the forefront of negotiating issues of inclusion and exclusion. Women have been historically excluded from many spheres of social life, and women’s experience and theorizing have been excluded from intellectual endeavors. Here, I address two aspects of inclusion regarding hospitality. The first is a question of hospitality’s inclusion among widely held values. Hospitality is currently a low-ranking value when compared to the list of values usually espoused in North America, such as freedom and equality. The second aspect of inclusion addressed is a question of participation: *Who should be invited to receive hospitality?* These two aspects of inclusion—value and participation—are related, as excluding the experience and ideas of the oppressed can be a means of mitigating their involvement in a downward spiral of suppression. For example, domestic work is not highly valued in our society, particularly in terms of compensation, thus not surprisingly the experiences and reflections of domestic workers are not often sought or thematized in the media or research.

Hospitality is not included among the highest values of a market economy. The labor of hospitality has been repeatedly undervalued in modern free-market economies and, not surprisingly, disproportionately relegated to women and people of color. It takes work to make guests feel welcome and comfortable: There is the material labor of food and accommodation preparations, as well as the psychic labor of not only making one’s self present to the Other, but

also being responsive and attentive to the Other. In a market-driven economy, one has the “freedom” to opt out of paid labor, but this is not a realistic choice for most. The ascendancy of the service economy has created more jobs that require some degree of care labor, thus placing many workers in the position of being compelled to care in order to participate in the economy. Marx described alienation as coerced separation of an individual from his or her human nature as exemplified in boring and repetitive factory work that does not reflect the interest of the laborer (qtd. in Cox 1998). He could not have anticipated the alienation created when one has to feign care in a service economy. The significance in perceived hospitality has not been lost on commercial enterprise, but it is accorded what Marx would refer to as “use” value, and given very little “market” value. In her landmark work *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Arlie Russell Hochschild (2003) defines emotional labor as requiring that one:

induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others—in this case, the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place. This kind of labor calls for the coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on sources of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality. (7)

Hochschild concludes that twice as many women as men are in jobs that require substantial amounts of emotional labor, and, not surprisingly, these jobs are not as highly compensated as other skilled positions (248). The technical knowledge of a doctor is a prized commodity; the ability of a nurse to negotiate complex feelings to produce a sense of comfort and well-being is not as highly valued in the marketplace. Feminist hospitality has the potential to reframe emotional labor to a position of social value. If the world is to be made hospitable, the work of care will have to be included among highly regarded activities, and caregivers will have to be given more agency in the decision to care. The work of hospitality is not alienating when freely chosen—for example, as when motivated by the “engrossment” of a caring relationship. In her approach to care ethics, Nel Noddings (1984) describes engrossment as the presence, regard for, and actions made on behalf of the one cared-for (19). In such cases, the desire to be hospitable is authentic and reveals the will and disposition of the moral agent. When one is cared for in this manner, it is a powerful human affectation associated with love, friendship, and potentially moral heroism.

The above discussion of inclusion and exclusion focuses on the value of hospitality work in society, but another aspect of inclusion is who constitutes “guest.” Because feminist theory has been driven by the experience of those marginalized in society, feminist hospitality should be particularly attentive to inclusive definitions of guest. Hospitality can be an occasion to enact feminist commitment to diversity. Shannon Sullivan (2001), for example, constructs a feminist pragmatist metaphor for transactions between diverse peoples as a

“stew.” According to the metaphor, diverse individuals, like the ingredients of a stew, maintain their individuality and yet are changed while contributing to the whole in the pot. An open hospitality has the potential for constituent transformations that Sullivan addresses; however, to reach full potential, diverse guests must be introduced. If I only welcome guests who share much of my identity and values, how will I, or they, grow and learn? One place where proximity creates the possibility of unchosen human exchanges is the city. Iris Marion Young (1990) describes the city as where it is possible to have a “vision of social relations affirming group difference” (227). Her notion of inclusion, like Sullivan’s, does not entail homogenization, but rather implies opportunities for hospitality to maintain individuality while fostering a serviceable community. Seyla Benhabib (2004) pushes the notion of inclusiveness to the political arena. She acknowledges the tension of membership: “The right of hospitality is situated at the boundaries of the polity: It delimits civic space by regulating relations among members and strangers” (27). Benhabib’s primary concern is immigration in an age of shifting political landscapes. Whether it is a home, the city, or the nation-state, hospitality operates at the border of membership, but it is precisely at the border where learning takes place—learning about self and Others through confronting difference. Expanding the notion of guest inclusion unlocks the epistemic power of hospitality.

Feminist hospitality should be expansive, promoting hospitality as an important value to be included among other values in society, but simultaneously reframing hospitality to be more inclusive and generous as to who is the object of that hospitality.

Reciprocity

Hospitality has historically been understood as having a directional and hierarchical character: The host gives and the guest receives. This directionality has significant implications for the conduct and expectations of hospitality. For example, in much of the discourse over immigration, there is an assumed host/guest relationship that implies that the host nation must give in terms of resources, while guests (immigrants) receive the benefits of the hospitality. In this manner, hospitality is viewed as a gift from the haves to the have-nots. The feminist hospitality that I envision resists this directionality, instead valuing the exchanges between host and guest as reciprocal: Both parties gain something from the encounter. Reciprocity implies a flattening of the relationship out of mutual respect and humility; the distinction between guest and host is blurred as both learn and grow together.

Judith Green (2004) draws the notion of “mutual hospitality” out of the writings and activism of settlement leader and public philosopher Jane Addams (1860–1935). This mutual hospitality posits the guest and host in a horizontal relationship, where both sides know they can benefit from the other and treat

each other with dignity (213). What Green describes is not a contractual relationship, but one born out of the caring disposition that Addams described as “sympathetic knowledge”:

What Addams and the other women of Hull House learned is that hospitality that can fulfill its aim of meeting the needs of its intended recipients [while] at the same time positively transform[ing] the would-be benefactor in important ways through a growth of knowledge-based respect for the other that sheds light on her own assumptions and habits, as these interactively influence a now shared situation. (213)

Addams and her cohort at Hull House may have begun their social settlement in Chicago with paternalistic ideas about their multinational immigrant neighborhood, but they quickly resolved to learn and communicate all they could about their community in an authentic spirit of mutual regard. Furthermore, as Green observes, Addams (1902/2002) contends that mutual hospitality is the foundation of a thriving democracy. For Addams, democracy is more than its political structure: It is funded by the relationships and attitudes of its constituents who bring democracy to life. In *Democracy and Social Ethics*, Addams refers to John Stuart Mill’s concept of a living society: “[A] man of high moral culture . . . thinks of himself, not as an isolated individual, but as a part in a social organism” (qtd. in *ibid.* 117). This idea of the social organism remained a guiding metaphor for Addams’s notion of social democracy. Settlement workers, living and working among the poor and oppressed as good neighbors, modeled a form of reciprocal hospitality that Addams and others hoped would be integrated into the fabric of democracy. Part of this reciprocity is a commitment to pluralism and valuing diverse voices in the public square. In this respect, Addams advocates a form of hospitality that supports a cosmopolitan worldview.

Benhabib (2006) describes cosmopolitanism as “a normative philosophy for carrying the universalistic norms beyond the confines of the nation-state” (18). She argues that in 1948, when the UN Declaration of Human Rights was written, the world entered a new age whereby norms of justice became governed by cosmopolitan values rather than international negotiations. The UN declaration marks a new era, because it endowed individuals rather than states with rights. Benhabib further contends that hospitality is the vehicle by which nation-states negotiate their relationship with strangers, but the nation-state is in flux: Globalization and the rise of powerful multinational organizations are pulling apart popular sovereignty into fractionated privatization. Her solution is to rebind society through the reciprocity of hospitality: “The interlocking of democratic iteration struggles within a global civil society and the creation of solidarities beyond borders, including a universal right of hospitality that recognizes the other as a potential cocitizen, anticipate another cosmopolitanism—a cosmopolitanism to come” (177). Reciprocity on an international scale becomes a hope for a more peaceful world and reflects the social justice embedded in a feminist hospitality.

Forgiveness

If feminist hospitality is to offer an alternative approach to personal, social, and political relationships, the power to forgive is an important tool in maintaining reciprocity and dialogue. Without forgiveness, friction among individuals and groups is a constant threat to human connection. Hospitable relations contain an entanglement of contradictions. Although a metaphor of host and guest evokes images of cordial and positive engagements, very close to the surface of hospitality lurks hostility: The guest is an unknown, a wild card. On a social level, without the mitigating effect of direct proximal relations, the guest may even be a pariah and the brunt of stereotypical characterization as exemplified by the treatment of Mexican immigrants in the United States. Having allowed the guest into proximity, the host, whether an individual or a society, has been made vulnerable by taking a risk. Rosello (2001) describes this risk as “one of the keys to all hospitable encounters” (172); negative experiences are a real possibility. The guest may resent the host, who can in turn hold the guest in contempt; for example, the artificial hospitality in commerce that entails a public face of cordial cheerfulness on the part of paid laborers to customers may harbor an underlying contempt for such exchanges, given that the worker is often engaged in work for remuneration rather than as a chosen vocation. Derrida (2004) describes how closely the shadow of hostility follows hospitality in his neologism, “hostipitality” (356). When hospitality is constructed as the host having power over the guest, that structure is always threatened by the possibility that the guest will usurp that power.

In the face of potential hostility, forgiveness is a crucial tool for maintaining and expanding hospitable relations. Margaret Urban Walker (2006) describes forgiveness as a form of moral repair, given her understanding that morality is rooted in relationship. For Walker, “morality as a phenomenon of human life in real time and space consists in trust-based relations anchored on our expectations of one another that require us to take responsibility for what we do or fail to do, and that allow us to call others to account for what they do or fail to do” (23). Hospitality can be an entrée into, or the sustenance for, moral relations. Of course, relationships can fall apart and become antagonistic. Nevertheless, Walker ascribes particular importance to the potential of forgiveness, as it constitutes hope. She describes (as above) a trajectory whereby moral relations are grounded in trust, and that trust requires hope to maintain it. Accordingly, the moral repair of relationships is often aimed at restoring hope. Walker thus raises the stakes for forgiveness by arguing for its role in providing hope for a moral future, one grounded in right relationships. Without forgiveness, relationships can stagnate and hope is lost. As Hannah Arendt (1958) describes it:

Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed

from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever, not unlike the sorcerer's apprentice who lacked the magic formula to break the spell. (237)

Regarding hospitality, I am infusing a broadly construed sense of forgiveness. Besides the more commonly understood sense of forgiveness that entails an explicit exoneration for a harm done, as Walker describes above, I am including a more subtle form of forgiveness that operates as an implicit subtext in human interactions. A generous spirit of humility and openness to the Other characterizes this implicit forgiveness.

Some forms of traditional hospitality eschew a forgiving spirit and can be formulaic and formal in character. Formal hospitality uses hospitality as a conditionally offered gift that can be withheld from those deemed undeserving; for example, Cynthia Kierner (1996) describes how hospitality in the colonial South was very much a demonstration of the power differential between host and guest, which mimicked the difference in power between husbands and wives. Kierner suggests that sociability rituals illuminate underlying networks of obligation and dependence—a variation on Derrida's (2001) notion of hospitality's ever-present shadow of hostility. Although society was governed by rules of hospitality, women and men played much different roles, particularly among the genteel elite: "Husbands and wives who offered hospitality jointly—and guests who perceived their offerings as mutual—personified prevailing notions about the division of labor with marriage" (Kierner 1996, 454). Male hospitable activities were public displays of ownership and physicality, while women's hospitality was domestic, religious, and ornamental. Because mutuality and reciprocity were not a goal of this formal hospitality, a forgiving spirit played a limited role. For feminist hospitality to incorporate the healing power of forgiveness, humility and vulnerability are essential elements to the host/guest relation.

If feminist hospitality seeks a radical openness to the Other that is both disruptive and connective, its antithesis is revenge. Trudy Govier (2002) defines revenge as the seeking of "satisfaction by attempting to harm the other (or associated persons) as a retaliatory measure" (2). It is a simple definition with tremendous consequences in the history of personal, social, and geopolitical conflict. The violence and death that have resulted from unchecked cycles of revenge cannot be overestimated. In the face of such cycles, forgiveness stands as a challenging disruption. To accomplish disruption, Govier describes a concretization of the Other: "Forgiving someone who has done a serious wrong requires the capacity to empathize enough, and re-frame enough, to *distinguish the wrongdoer from the wrongdoing*" (58; emphasis in original). Hospitable relations become possible again when host and guest can relocate the fundamental humanity they share. Govier also points out that forgiveness is not forgetting: These memories are instructive and can motivate change and should not be lost in the process of forgiveness. This is a crucial notion for feminist hospitality,

given the history of atrocities perpetrated against women. Feminist hospitality can entail a forgiving spirit without forgetting past and present oppression that drives analysis and activism for change.

A robust notion of hospitality characterized as feminist moves away from conceptualizing hospitality as an event or occasion, and toward viewing it as central to an ongoing relational morality. Hospitality is an ethical disposition toward the Other that is capable of transcending individual transgressions through forgiveness to maintain a relationship of care.⁵ Lucy Allais (2008) describes the significance of forgiveness as allowing “a renewal of relationships, in which the way we feel about each other is not fixed by our wrongdoing” (8). An unforgiving hospitality is a contradiction that invites revenge and resentment.

Embodiment

Feminist theorists have long challenged the notion of disembodied subjects in moral philosophy (Hekman 1992). A theory of feminist hospitality should be no exception. Both the guest and host live a corporeal existence; acts of hospitality are intimately linked to attending to the body and usually involve physical proximity; hospitality often engages tending to the needs of the body in forms of food, drink, rest, and so on.

The embodied dimension of hospitality is significant because it facilitates a concretizing of the Other. Hospitality is not an abstract concept, but a performed activity directed at particular individuals. This concretization is significant for fostering caring relations even in the face of social and political distance; for example, theorizing about immigration can keep the immigrant at arm’s-length as a construct of discursive claims, such as an immigrant being a user of resources or a competitor for domestic labor. When we think of immigrants as real, embodied people, it invokes feelings of care and compassion—hallmarks of feminist hospitality.

One outcome of feminist attention to embodiment has been the blurring of mind/body distinctions, which has implications for the moral status of habits. If the body is viewed as capable of containing ethical knowledge, then habits can be described as a performance of that knowledge (Hamington 2004). In this manner, habits of hospitality can be developed in the same way that athletes acquire physical skills through iterations of actions. Habits of hospitality are not rote repetitions of muscle movements, but imaginative and open-ended responses to strangers and environments on a trajectory of hospitality (Sullivan 2001). What I am describing here is a theory of the development of a moral imagination that is both reflective and corporeal (Johnson 1993); for example, if one exercises and practices hospitable acts, there is a reflective and imaginative dimension to human corporeal existence that makes it easier to respond accordingly to new and unexpected guests.

Furthermore, the body has the potential to catch and learn such behavior, allowing the guest to acquire the habits of hospitality from the host, thus fostering not only mutuality in the host/guest relation, but potentially extending hospitality to Others—in colloquial terms, “passing it [hospitality] forward.” Because of the moral imagination, personal embodied acts of hospitality can inform theoretical discussions of hospitality on a grander scale; for example, when one is hospitable to strangers, the experience might influence how they view national policies on hospitality—an epistemic twist on the feminist notion of the personal being political.

Conclusion: Feminist Hospitality as Acts of Socializing Care

One of the trends in feminist care ethics has been to explore the social policies and practices that can sustain and promote care in an effort to bridge the personal and political. Joan Tronto (1993) was among the first to write about care as a social imperative. For her, care ethics and its assumptions of a connected moral existence are, in part, a corrective to a moral tradition that was satisfied with stratifying the personal and political realms: “[T]he separation of public and private life that might have served as an ideological description of life in the nineteenth century can no longer be sustained” (151). Although contextually different, the various spheres of social life still require a moral consistency, or at least a resonance, or else we place ourselves in danger of moral-role conflicts, ethical hypocrisy, or gamesmanship. Accordingly, feminist hospitality includes a set of practices that we learn at the personal level from direct experience. Although a community or nation is not identical to an individual host who welcomes a stranger, it does not preclude moral themes from crossing over to the social or political arenas. Tronto develops her understanding of care in this manner. Describing care as both “a practice and a disposition,” she locates the practice as “aimed at maintaining, continuing, or repairing the world” (104). Tronto views such a definition as mapping onto political values: “[T]he practice of care describes the qualities necessary for democratic citizens to live together well in a pluralistic society, and that only in a just, pluralistic, democratic society can care flourish” (162). Hospitality is one of these caring practices.

The kind of continuity between the personal and political that Tronto suggests demonstrates what a feminist hospitality has to offer, as compared to certain traditional notions of hospitality. In *Perpetual Peace*, for example, Immanuel Kant (1795/1983) also views hospitality as playing an important socially progressive role; part of his vision of a world without war is one where national partisanship is minimized through the freedom of international travel. He explains:

[H]ospitality (hospitableness) means the right of an alien not to be treated as an enemy upon his arrival in another’s country. If it can be done without

destroying him, he can be turned away; but as long as he behaves peaceably he cannot be treated as an enemy . . . the *right to visit*, to associate, belongs to all men by virtue of their common ownership of the earth's surface. (118; emphasis in original)

For the purposes of considering his theory of hospitality, I will ignore (but not forget) that Kant's culturally supported sexism does not allow him to extend to women the right to visit other countries. For Kant, world traveling and hospitable relations can create a grassroots foundation for international understanding. In his words, "[D]istant parts of the world can establish with one another peaceful relations that will eventually become matters of public law, and the human race can gradually be brought closer and closer to a cosmopolitan constitution" (118). Kant optimistically viewed a peaceful world as within the grasp of humanity, but it has severe limitations. Pauline Kleingeld (1999) argues that Kant's "hospitality right" is merely a right to visit, and does not entail the right to be treated as a guest (514). Furthermore, McNulty (2007) notes that in Kant's zealous attempt to develop a universalizable principle of hospitality devoid of religious or ethnic underpinnings, he coined the term *unsocial sociability* to describe how relationships in society should be less connected and affective, while being more rational and isolated (qtd. in *ibid.*, 55). In this manner, Kant's principled hospitality is actually emptied of caring relations—in stark contrast to the project of feminist hospitality, which seeks to foster deeper connections among people.

I not only suggest that feminist hospitality can be viewed as a branch of care ethics, but that it can play a useful role in expanding the depth of care ethics. As noted at the beginning of this article, hospitality is most often associated with practices directed toward strangers. Early works of care ethics tended to focus on close circles of relationships, particularly family, friends, and, most often, the mother/child dyad. Recent works have aimed at "socializing" care, and feminist hospitality can serve to facilitate that trajectory (Hamington and Miller 2006; Held 2006; Noddings 2002). A feminist theory of hospitality can influence the evolving definition of this ancient practice, but more importantly, it can inform policies and practices that have for too long devalued the work of caring. In a world where people and nations desperately need to improve relations to foster peace, perhaps feminist hospitality can positively contribute and is worthy of further exploration.

I will conclude with a note about naiveté. Given the trivialization of hospitality in contemporary U.S. culture and the entrenchment of a political realism that insists on self-interested power analysis as the only response to contemporary issues, a proposal for feminist hospitality can appear hopelessly naïve. However, naiveté is highly perspectival. Was it naïve to believe in 1800 that slavery could be abolished? Was it naïve to believe that diseases such as smallpox could be eradicated? Recently, philosopher Nancy Tuana (2004, 2006) has

advanced a provocative analytic approach called “epistemologies of ignorance” (2004, 195; 2006, 2). Rather than addressing epistemological aspects, such as justification, for what we know, this seemingly oxymoronic analysis investigates what has contributed to certain lacunae in public knowledge. Tuana suggests that this feminist project engages in examining withheld knowledge, reclaiming suppressed knowledge, and creating new knowledge. Politics, psychology, and ideology are among the culprits that lead to significant gaps in knowledge. Investigating epistemologies of ignorance can be applied to hospitality. Why is the label of naiveté so often given to arguments applied to peace, care, and hospitality in human relations? Are they really naïve ideas, or do they represent a voyage into the unknown and unfamiliar that may challenge some of our culturally sedimented ideas? My hope is that the above discussion can foster further conversation around alternative ways of being with one another and thus foster new, imaginative possibilities for hospitality—including a feminist one.

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Notes

1. As Virginia Held (1998) points out, feminists do not agree on distinctive feminist values or virtues so as not to recreate the universalizing claims of traditional ethical approaches. The attempt here to develop a theory of feminist hospitality is not to contend that there is a distinctive feminist hospitality, but that feminist ethical analysis has provided unique theoretical insights that can be applied to hospitality.

2. In an era when women still do not have the social power of men, it seems disingenuous to construct a feminist hospitality that does not invoke women's power. Nevertheless, applying a radical feminist analysis, the effort here is to change the metaphors for power from that of something akin to a weapon, to that of something like energy that can be shared.

3. In Tracy McNulty's (2007) critique of Emmanuel Levinas (1969), she regards his treatment of the feminine Other as displaying sexist biases. Despite attributing hospitality to the feminine, Levinas (1969) finds women lacking in identity formation because they lack the "virile" qualities. McNulty reads women as having an alternative approach to hospitality that finds the Other in themselves.

4. Given the history of violence against women, feminist hospitality should not be construed as imprudent or self-destructive behavior.

5. The history of women's oppression makes forgiveness a particularly challenging aspect of hospitality. Many feminist theorists have challenged the notion of absolute ethical principles, and forgiveness is not an absolute as, for example, in the case of one who is raped forgiving the rapist. Such an extreme violation entails a complex process of healing that may or may not include forgiveness. On an individual level, authentic hospitality extends from a host who is psychologically whole and ready to give it. The distinction between forgiveness and mercy offered by Lucy Allais (2008) may be helpful here: Whereas mercy suggests a change in action toward the wrongdoer, forgiveness involves a change in feeling that is compatible with punishment. A nuanced or conditional form of forgiveness may be a more palatable approach for feminist hospitality

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