



HOSPITALITY AS A RESPONSE TO THE DIFFERENT MODES OF EXPRESSION OF HOSTILITY TO MIGRATION

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PUBLISHED BY



INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I will discuss two terms, which seem to be linked together when it comes to the issue of the mass displacement of people around the world: migration and hostility. I dare to associate migration with hostility, not because every attempt to migrate to another region or country is always veiled with hostility (neither is hostility intrinsic to migration), but in a bid to demonstrate that the migratory environment on the US-Mexican border is hostile. Therefore, by bringing migration and hostility together, my intention is to discuss a problematic situation that already exists and present hospitality as a hypothesis of solution from an ethical point of view. To avoid giving the impression that this work is necessarily about global migration, I will limit my framework to a specific geographical context: The U.S.-Mexican border. However, there is no denying that the findings of this paper could be applicable to similar situations in other parts of the world.

Many essays that address this issue brim with concepts that depict the hostile character of the experience of migrants on the said border. For purposes of reference, it is worthwhile to mention some of these concepts, which describe the hostile environment of migration: uprooting, family separation, long walks, thirst, hunger, death, refusal, expulsion, exclusion, exploitation, rape and death, just to name a few.

While there are many terms used to describe the fate of migrants at the border – as illustrated above – I will limit myself to only three, as these three are seemingly genuine in describing the daily reality of migrants:

exploitation, deportation, and death. In fact, all three words depict hostility. Hostility could be seen as exploitative, as expulsive, and also as an act that leads to death. It is around those three words that I will formulate the subject of my work.

This essay, in turn, presents hospitality as a response to the three major ways of expressing hostility to poor migrants. This work will be divided into three main sections. Firstly, I will discuss in a general way the migratory phenomenon in relation to what actually takes place on the U.S.-Mexican border, in a hostile environment, as a sign of the times. I will discuss hostility in its various forms of expression such as deportation/exclusion, exploitation and death. Secondly, I will present ways in which the virtue of hospitality can respond to these patterns. Finally, the promise of meeting patterns of hostility by hospitality in a pastoral perspective- in a concrete way will constitute the last part of my work.

THE MIGRATORY PHENOMENON IN RELATION TO WHAT IS LIVED ON THE U.S. - MEXICAN BORDER

In a bid to retain a classic definition of the term, I would define migration as any movement of people from one place to another, especially from one country (emigration) to another (immigration), which is the fact of either an entire population or individuals integrating into a larger social phenomenon. Migration could be caused by

multiple reasons such as: economic conditions, famine, drought, armed conflicts/war, forced displacement, political problems (persecution, deprivation of liberty, etc.), environmental problems (pollution, global warming, etc.), social problems (for instance family reunification), job seeking, search for improved living standards, or for personal and professional reasons.

“There were around 272 million international migrants in the world in 2019, which equates to 3.5 percent of the global population”

United Nations



photo: RJM-Haiti

It is for this reason that I assert that migration has become a normal paradigm, a fact of life for many and a defining feature of 21st-century globalization, "which can be described as a modern type of nomadic existence." Faced with this mass movement of people, some governments feel compelled to secure their borders, in order to avoid an "invasion". It is in this logic of border security that the particular situation of the U.S.-Mexican border draws our attention.

Alejandro Olayo-Méndez points to the fact that "Mexico has long been known as an emigration country. It has more recently become an important transit country." In the same spirit, several observers note that every year, tens of thousands of people try to enter the United States by crossing Mexico in the hope of a better life, far from the great misery they leave behind. Most of these migrants are from Central America and the Caribbean. This is not a recent phenomenon, but the number has been increasing considerably over time.

Miguel Ángel Sánchez Carlos underlines that "the migration of people from the countries of Central American and Mexico to these United States of America has been a constant phenomenon since the last century. However, in the last two years, there have been very noticeable changes in this phenomenon." It is true the increasing number favors the displacement of migrants in the group but it does not secure them from being attacked during their journey. This displacement is "for many [people] a dangerous and often deadly journey." The picture of violence, strict migration policies, and daily obstacles pervades the journey of those migrants in the border context.

For a long time, the U.S. has been seen as the "land of milk and honey" for migrants of all walks of life. The literature has shown that the first migrants who arrived on the soil of the New World were able to enjoy the privileges, but not without pain, that the second wave of migrants were unable to enjoy.

In reference to this second wave of migration, Jenny González Muñoz speaks in these terms:

“Recent migrants from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, the victims of war and torture, memories of their pain and suffering are agonizingly fresh: blood-oozing wounds and mutilations branded on their bodies, rape and piracy on the high seas, hunger, and thirst in the jungle and the desert, despair, and anguish carved into the deep folds of their psyche, haunting them on sleepless nights or jerking them awake with screams of terror”

Jenny González Muñoz

The factors that explain these differences are multiple, but they will not be addressed within the context of this framework, because my objective is quite different. I would like instead to point out that with each new wave of migrant arrivals, the conditions under which one may become accepted or to carve out a place for oneself have become more and more complicated. Why have they become more and more complex? Who is responsible? Can one put a name on the faces of the people who make

them more and more difficult? These are all questions that deserve to be answered but for which I do not have an answer yet. What can be said is that fear, racism, and xenophobia are, in most cases, the primary causes of the non-acceptance of the second wave of migrants. History has shown that for a long time the measures aimed at discouraging unskilled migrants from entering the United States were each time stricter. However, the tragedy of September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, was seen as the initial straw that broke the camel's back and fostered drastic measures and procedures to curb emigration on U.S. soil.

After 9/11, border measures and airport controls became stricter than ever. The U.S. sought by all means to secure its territory. Fearing that the perpetrators of the 9/11 terrorist attacks would use neighboring territories to reach them, coupled with nationalistic sentiments, the U.S. seized the opportunity of 9/11 to implement border security measures with Mexico. Thus, people who dreamed of entering to the U.S. through Mexico found themselves stranded at the borders and in a hostile environment, generating a great sense of despair.

I must emphasize that the journey undertaken by these migrants (children, men, and women) is one of the most dangerous in the world. Groups of criminals are stationed on the main illegal routes used by migrants. In the vast majority of cases, they are victims of kidnapping, extortion, ill-treatment, and sexual violence. Some of them disappear without leaving any trace.

They are simply abducted and killed like "animals." So, I can say that their journey is fraught with danger, both from the precarious nature of transport and from the violence of criminal gangs. According to Kristin Heyer, "historically, stricter immigration policies have driven people to take more dangerous routes."

Migrants who cross Mexico and arrive at the border face a dire human rights situation for many reasons, particularly according to "nativism", they are a "'illegal alien' threat to national and societal security." It is in this context that the war against migrants intensified. To stop them, the border is necessary and it can only mean a physical barrier.

In the spring of 2018, President Donald Trump declared "zero tolerance" against immigration: one of the slogans that brought him to power. Relying on his favorite mantras: A nation without borders is not a nation. Thus, justifying once again the idea that "something had to be done to stop 'illegal' immigration right at the border." Here, there is one important aspect here that I think is important to point out. In the U.S. system, the body responsible for formulating and supervising migration policy is the Department of Justice, to which the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) belongs. It is this institution that is responsible for implementing the policy of "zero tolerance" against immigration in a context where fear of immigration seems to have reached its peak with the presence of Trump at the head of the country.

INS²¹ bureaucrats took the opportunity to expand their federal prestige and increase their resources by coming up with a border strategy whose rationale is "prevention through deterrence." This strategy was activated by pouring thousands of Border Patrol agents and sophisticated surveillance devices into the rural areas and building metal and concrete fences in the urban areas of the border region, which had become the normal corridors through which undocumented immigrants crossed the U.S.-Mexico boundary. Once these critical border sites were sealed, the "illegal flows" would be forcibly channeled toward the most inhospitable and indeed dangerous terrain in the border region, like mountains, desert, rivers, and water channels. Faced by these rugged terrains, and by extreme meteorological conditions the immigrants would be discouraged from entering the U.S.

If the expected result by putting “illegals migrants” in harm’s way in view to discourage them from crossing the border assuming that they would not dare to brave the climate dangers, in fact, the reality shows the opposite. The data shows that while fewer people are crossing illegally, more are taking riskier routes through more treacherous terrain.

The irony of fate, “the border build-up, rather than deterring undocumented immigrants from entering the U. S., discourages them from returning home; and, most tragically, the number of immigrants dying at the border has simply skyrocketed.” Desiring to arrive in the United States even at the cost of their lives, migrants take itineraries that lead them to certain death. Geoffrey Alan Boyce states that:

counted more than 1,200 missing person’s cases, involving families who contacted the organization seeking help to locate a loved one. Figures like these have led human rights groups to talk about a “crisis of disappearance” along the US–Mexico border

Geoffrey Alan Boyce

Even if people who “flee insecurity in search of safer places to rebuild their lives and those of their families only [to] be treated as sources of insecurity”, on one hand, one can remark that border measures do not prevent ‘illegal migrants’ from daring, by any means, to enter the U.S., on the other hand, one can conclude that these measures are pushing migrants inciting them to take dangerous routes that cause human tragedies: some have disappeared and, others are victims of inhuman and degrading treatment.

In this context, it is very important to remind that every country has the right to implement measures to protect their territory, but it is very interesting to underline that there is almost no entity that dares to urge host countries to ensure that migrants, so-called illegal, are not subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment or simply to the loss of their lives.

Not being able to rely on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which stipulates free movement by proclaiming the right of everyone to leave any country,

“The cause of death is primarily (although by no means exclusively) exposure to the harsh desert climate and mountainous terrain where the vast majority of unauthorized crossings occur (Martínez et al. 2013). Meanwhile, the number of recovered human remains is certainly an undercount of the total number of fatalities. In 2015 alone, southern Arizona’s Coalicion de Derechos Humanos

including their own, and to return to it, migrants, known as "illegal", find themselves turned away by charities such as NGOs, Caritative Associations, Parishes, Churches, etc., which see them not as enemies to fight but as humans who need to be welcomed. They understand that "refugees as resident guests whose needs must first be attended to before they are asked why they fled."

For these ONG and Associations, illegal migrants are not only welcome labor but also humans in search of a dignified life. In this framework of welcome, the paradigm shift from hostility to hospitality invites us to create the meaning of the latter, hoping that it could be a hypothesis of response to the suffering of illegal migrants.

Can one imagine a society in which it would be forbidden to welcome those who come to us - or to one's home, to open up one's "interior" to them in order to receive them as they should, as guests? Can one imagine a social life stripped of these multiple features of mutual welcome and recognition, a society in which one would never ask, give, receive or give back these forms of help, consideration and attention? No! Without these acts and gestures by which one opens oneself to others, how would it be possible to enter into social circles and human friendships?

Receiving one another, granting each other hospitality, is the mark of friendship. Rwezaura underlines that

“Hospitality demands that a guest be treated with dignity due the person”

Deogratias M. Rwezaura, SJ

THE VIRTUE OF HOSPITALITY TO METTE THE PATTERNS OF HOSTILITY

How does one respond to a crisis where the human person seems to be a mere object rather than a subject? How do we talk about human dignity in a context where some people are treated as objects or as means by others? In the following lines, I will try to present the virtue of hospitality as a hypothesis of response to the burden of suffering of thousands of men and women who, in search of a better life, find themselves in the most complete uncertainty where their life is threatened.

Through Hospitality, one gives, receives and visits. But when it comes to receiving strangers, fear is trying to take over. Receiving illegal migrants, as I demonstrated in the first part of this paper, is even more difficult. It is something else to receive one, some, and many for a time or forever. Is the migrant as the stranger or "the unknown other" be welcomed unconditionally just because they are Human- subjects? If so, in the name of what? Without being able to answer exhaustively, it seems that those who welcome unconditionally, foreigners, are animated by the virtue of hospitality. What is the Virtue of Hospitality?

First and foremost, one has to acknowledge that Hospitality is a gift. Quoting Adolfo Nicolas, Rwezaura notes that Hospitality refers to "a deeply human and Christian value that recognizes the claim that someone has, not because he or she is a member of my family or my community or my

race or my faith, but simply because he or she is a human being who deserves welcome and respect." In the context of today's "migration crisis," should Christians be hospitable? One can ask oneself about what, in Hospitality, is a gift; how it is genuinely a relationship, which gives, receives, and surrenders? And why is important to practice it in this context of a "migratory crisis?"

The gift of hospitality means "to receive and to give" in the double sense of the term. He or she who gives receives and he or she who receives gives. In other words, successful hospitality is where the one who receives... receives! Quoting Hauerwas in his dissertation, Materne says

“For Christians, there are no 'barbarians', only strangers whom we hope to make our friends. We offer foreigners the hospitality of the Kingdom of God by inviting them to share our history. Of course, we know that the stranger does not come to us as a clean slate; he also has a story to tell”

Stanley Hauerwas

In this sense, one can say that the gift of Hospitality is an expense which reciprocity can be hoped for but not guaranteed and even less demanded. Thus, there is a permanent and subtle interplay with the norm of reciprocity. In this sense Still remembers that "Hospitality between individuals (governed by the code) is often theorized (and experienced), on the one hand, as a structure of reciprocity and, on the other, as an exchange between peers, although

non-reciprocity and inequality are at least as important." As such, insofar as it is one's "interior" that is offered, it may well be the most radical form of the gift. Perhaps in the context where the "illegal migrants" are searching a better life, it is the opening of the heart that should be the first response as Christian. As one can read in the document of the USCCB "The need to provide hospitality and create a sense of belonging pertains to the Church on every level, as Pope John Paul II said in his annual message on World Migration Day 1993: 'The families of migrants should be able to find a homeland everywhere in the Church.'"

Through Hospitality, one can underscore new ways of inhabiting the earth as our common home. Hospitality must drive Christian to be continually transformed by the interrelationship that involves risk and often requires conversion. As Pope Francis said: "As Christians, we must work together to show migrants God's love revealed by Jesus Christ. We can and we must bear witness that there are not just hostility and indifference but that every person is precious to God and loved by him. "

There is no question that migrants stocked in the U.S- Mexican border are leaving for a better life. The welcome they receive does not show that one allows oneself to be touched by their suffering. Is it not time to understand that when one welcomes them, one gives oneself the chance to become someone else and even the guest of God? How one can be the guest of God through the migrants? Which relation exists between migrants and God? To answer those questions, let take "migrants" as Imago Dei.

In almost all societies, situations of injustice are frequently associated with situations of poverty. The "calamity" of being a threat as a mere object reveals an existential wound that shackled and damaged the life of undocumented migrants. Because these migrants are victims of hostility, I consider them as the starting point for my theological

reflection in this paper. People who live in situations of great precariousness are most often subject to great injustice, which can leave wounds that only God's love can heal. In Genesis one can read:

God said: Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild animals and all the creatures that creep along the ground.' God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.

(Gen 1: 26-27)

In this well-known Creation text, there is something very valuable for every human being without distinction. This narrative clearly asserts that every human being is a creature of God: "God created man... male and female He created them." Here, the verb "create" appears twice in verse 27. Literally, it means "made from nothing," which means, "came out from nothing." The creation of the human race, not the human race, occurs as a sudden appearance, a true creation. This is, of course, in complete opposition to the hegemonic culture that places one race above another. "This common creation gives every person a shared dignity and worth that reaches across all boundaries that are humanly constructed, such as the borders between nation-states."

Through this creative act, I understand that the fundamental origin of each human being is the Creator. God who made humanity in His image is in Himself, the genesis, the beginning, the origin, the source of the human being. This reminds me that men and women, created in the image of God, cannot find their full flourish apart from the Creator. This creative link bonds the human being to the One who made him, as children are linked to their parents. And this link also implies the need to live one's human life in relationship with this Creator God, to experience with Him a fluid communion that is a powerful source of stability and fulfillment.

This narrative reveals the depths of God's heart. By creating humans as one race, God chooses to create them in his image, in his likeness. God says: "'Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves... God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him.'" There is in those words of God a very specific will, which consists in imprinting in human nature something that resembles Him. Since in every human, God is present. We are called to receive every human as if we were receiving God himself.

Seeing in undocumented migrants an image of God implies recognizing their suffering and aspirations and this can lead to looking beyond appearances to discover a brother, a human being who awaits our respect, and there, perhaps, one can meet God Himself. That is what Hollenbach wants to make know by saying:

“Even in the harsh stories of migration, God is present, revealing himself. Abraham stepped out in faith to respond to God's call (Gen 12:1). He and Sarah extended bounteous hospitality to three strangers who were actually a manifestation of the Lord, and this became a

paradigm for the response to strangers of Abraham's descendants. The grace of God even broke through situations of sin in the forced migration of the children of Jacob: Joseph, sold into slavery, eventually became the savior of his family (Gen 37:45)—a type of Jesus, who, betrayed by a friend for thirty pieces of silver, saves the human family.



Hollenbach

As one can notice, it is, therefore, a mark of Christian identity to be able to give a place to others. The encounter with the stranger can be difficult, but the provocation it provokes is an invitation to return to the story of Jesus. Hospitality is a sign of holiness in the measure that the saint is someone who welcomes the stranger as the image of God or simply as “the very presence of God”. Having justly overcome the fear of others, the Christian is invited to go towards the other without trying to control him or her but to set structure to live the Hospitality in a concrete way. This is What I will demonstrate in the next section of this paper.

THE PROMISE OF MEETING PATTERNS OF HOSTILITY BY HOSPITALITY IN A PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

In the first two sections, I have unveiled how hostility hinders the life of illegal migrants on the U.S- Mexican border and then I proposed the virtue of Hospitality as a hypothesis capable to meet the patterns of this hostility. In the following section, based on my experience and observations, I would propose some ways

to put the virtue of hospitality in practice. I believe that Hospitality as a practice can shape the behavior, virtues, knowledge and comprehension of those who want to live it. “To be termed ‘Christian’, a practice must pursue a good beyond itself, welcoming and incorporating the self-giving dynamics of God’s own creating, saving and supporting grace.”

What light can the Christian faith shed on the practice of the virtue of Hospitality? What actions can the Church and any other individual of good will take in order to

translate hospitality into concrete action? How can hospitality be practiced in the context of the U.S.-Mexican border? These questions, in a way, imply my conviction that the practice of hospitality can bring life, even in the midst of chaos, as is the case in the hostile environment of the border.

The hallmark of Christian hospitality is not only kindness and generosity - which are certainly fundamental - but the fact of receiving every person as if he or she were Christ because every human person was created in the image and likeness of God. Christian hospitality is more about receiving as Christ received. Christ did not receive at home because he did not have a home, but the Gospels show how he welcomes the requests of those who cross his path: he listens to them and allows himself to be touched. In this sense, I believe that listening is the very first action in putting into practice the virtue of hospitality.

Being touched by the suffering of the undocumented migrant - victim of any kind of inhuman treatment - allows one to remember that the migrant himself always has something to say before one does or says something in his place. Hence, it is only by listening that a real bond of trust (or even friendship) can be born. In this way, a reciprocal, step-by-step, process of sharing and discovery full of the unexpected and wealth could be established. Then, one can understand that in the matter of hospitality it is not first a question to do FOR rather to do WITH.

Therefore, the virtue of hospitality requires one to receive — for example in the case of illegal migrants at the U.S.-Mexican border — not in a condescending manner as if the duty of the host was only to “give” the one who asked. The virtue of hospitality requires one to receive with humility knowing that the host can also ask something from the one who is received. It is in this sense that true hospitality can create a horizontal relationship on the grounds of equality, at least on equal dignity. Beyond this, one can understand that hospitality is a spatialized relationship which

needs a place to be practiced.

And this implies that the host does not spare himself in the reception. It is on this condition that hospitality is a bond-forming activity and that reception is not simply a matter of filling in a task so as to be able to get rid of it as quickly as possible.

This makes it possible to understand that hospitality is not a simple gesture of benevolence towards a guest. The way in which it manifests itself depends on the values and principles of the host. When hospitality is practiced by a Christian, it is expected that it will not be confined to private life but will take on a collective dimension, with the risk to stand up in favor of the guest by ensuring his or her protection and well-being. Such is the case of NGOs and associations that are dedicated to helping migrants.

CONCLUSION

Migration has always been a fact within human history. There are many factors that pushed and still push people to migrate from one region to another or from one country to another. From one period of time to another, migration has become more and more complicated, but this does not prevent people from migrating.

The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century have seen an unprecedented wave of large mass movements. In order to migrate, people, either have to go through huge bureaucratic gymnastics to get a visa or are simply denied access to the land of their dreams for no good reason. So, the question about who can hold back a determined soul from migrating must be considered. As I have shown, more often than not, people migrate, because their lives are threatened. Those who flee the misery of their region or their country and wish to find a better life elsewhere set off with a destination in mind, but without any certainty that they will reach it. In this quest for a better life, they find themselves struck by hostility.

In the first section of my work, I tried to highlight the complexity of the migration situation on the U.S.-Mexican border. The environment is hostile! The means of travel and security checks, far from leading to a safe port, place migrants in extremely dangerous conditions. As a result, they are exploited, and worse, some of them have disappeared without any trace. Paradoxically, they lose their lives while looking for a better life. Life is lost in the search of it!

As an answer to hostility, I have proposed the virtue of hospitality as a hypothesis capable of creating conditions where the migrant can be considered as a subject, a child of God. I have presented the virtue of hospitality, in a theoretical framework, as a gift that can help to find a ground of equality where the welcomed and the hospitable can enrich each other. And through this, the suffering of the migrant can be a challenge and an invitation to action. Translating hospitality into practice. I have shown that the practice of hospitality requires listening in order to be able to create bonds of trust. True hospitality is never neutral, it is an invitation to stand up for others, which can be a hard task.

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