

**Hostipitality and the Immigrant:
A Postcolonial Critique of U.S. Christian Positions on Immigration**

Zac Poppen

Abstract:

U.S. Christian positions on immigration utilize the concept of hospitality as it is articulated in both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. In this paper, my aim is to use the concept of hostipitality, as articulated by Jacques Derrida, and Jean Baudrillard's concept of cannibalistic hospitality to disrupt and identify nationalistic defenses embedded within Christian positions that engage with immigration. I will also look at specific examples of the word *ger* ("stranger") in the Hebrew Bible in order to investigate the theological interpretations of selected Christian authors and scholars. This theoretical framework will allow me to critique Christian positions on immigration.

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INTRODUCTION

As animals, human activity includes migratory people groups. This type of movement has a plurality of manifestation: cyclical, annual, singular, erratic, etc. Regardless of how the movement is analyzed, human life has utilized (and continues to utilize) immigration. But this immigration is not without risk. In our present time, in the context of the border between the United States and Mexico, certain nationalistic, Christian discourses have voiced their opposition to allow more “illegals”¹ into the United States from Mexico. Fused with nationalism and Christianity,² certain political discourses form a constellation of responses, ranging from perspectives that argue against any sort of hospitality that might be extended to people entering the U.S. to those who advocate for the immigrant’s humanity while remaining beholden to “the law of the land.” Using Christian positions within the Mexico-U.S. immigration discourse as an illustrative context, I argue that these positions fail, both politically and theologically, to welcome the immigrant-stranger. I also argue that these positions defend a form of nationalistic identity and embody a spiritualized, conditional hospitality that demonstrates the conflict within the term “hospitality” itself (Derrida’s “hostipitality”).

To study these positions, I will employ a threefold approach: postmodern and postcolonial discourse,³ a close reading of the *ger* (“stranger, sojourner”) legislative context in the Hebrew Bible, and recent publications by Christian authors and scholars in

¹ I include the inflammatory term “illegals” here for effect. This paper, however, will use more respectful and accurate terms to refer to immigrants from Mexico: “undocumented people and/or workers” and “immigrant-stranger.” The latter is my own creation from the fusion between Mireille Rosello’s “Immigrant as Guest” and how any unfamiliar person within a community is often dubbed a “stranger” or “foreigner.” The Hebrew word *ger*, which is often translated as “stranger,” also contributes to my formulation of the term “immigrant-stranger” as an appropriate designation for a person moving between borders and communities. This intentional change of language appropriately counteracts an essentializing identity designation (“illegals”) and moves toward a shared humanity.

² “Christianism” is a term coined by Namsoon Kang that replaces the term “Christianity” for the sake of alterity. Upon noticing that many world religions are assigned an “-ism” suffix, she offered the term “Christianism” in order to promote equity. Of the twelve major world religions, only “Christianity” has a unique suffix (with “Islam” being a close second [though still maintaining the -m]). I find the usage of “Christianism” to be a self-humbling (since I identify with a mainline Protestant tradition) and necessary position for a postcolonial and theological critique. Elizabeth Pritchard notes Kang introduced this term at the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* conference, “Teaching for Change,” Cambridge, Massachusetts, June 12, 2005 (Elizabeth Pritchard, “Don’t Be Afraid of the F-Word: Feminism, Fun, and Future,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 21 no. 2 [Fall 2005]: 119).

³ For the postmodern discourse, I will discuss Jacques Derrida’s work on hostipitality. For the postcolonial discourse, I will discuss Mireille Rosello’s concept of the immigrant as “guest.”

terms of the immigration discourse from a glocalized perspective. This threefold approach will conclude with a final analysis of the material surveyed. I will also include a section in which I recommend future avenues for scholarship and opportunities for the reader to reflect on the importance of the current Mexico-U.S. immigration discourse. I will now provide an overview of Christianity's constellation of perspective on immigration.

Christian Positions on Immigration in the United States

Christian communities in the United States are complex and variegated; this suggests that any response to a complex discourse – such as immigration⁴ – is appropriately complex. A brief introduction of the two prevalent U.S. Christian positions will set the landscape of this discourse for those unfamiliar with this area of study (I will examine several positions in a later section). The first prevalent Christian position orbits around a type of amnesty⁵ and advocacy for critical immigration reform. This position is best represented by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). The second prevalent location in the constellation, somewhat surprisingly, is not a hyper-conservative or conservative Christian position.⁶ Instead, the other prevalent position is a moderate Christian position that attempts to balance national sovereignty with Christian theology, interpretation, and ethics. Though many positions typify the moderate Christian position, I have selected Russell Moore, the President of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) of the Southern Baptist Convention, as an adequate example of such a moderate perspective. I will first discuss the progressive position of the USCCB. I will then discuss the moderate position of Russell Moore.

The USCCB advocates for what is known as “Critical Immigration Reform” (henceforth as CIR). It should be noted that there is not one singular CIR policy among

⁴ For the sake of clarity and readability, all mentions of “immigration” will refer to the contemporary Mexico-U.S. context of immigration unless specifically indicated otherwise.

⁵ This is a buzzword in the immigration discourse and is avoided by those in favor of critical immigration reform (CIR) in the United States. However, the policies of those who advocate for CIR tend to minimize the legal repercussions of “illegal presence” or any other legal infraction that a person may have committed in an attempt to arrive (or, perhaps, find employment) in the United States.

⁶ I recognize that such a statement suggests that hyper-conservative Christian positions do not exist. This is not true: they do exist, but this perspective has popular representation without many scholars willing to promote the often extreme ideas (e.g., massive deportation) found in hyper-conservative and conservative approaches. In 2007, the Southern Poverty Law Center reported that a poll among Family Research Council members favored (at 90% of the vote) “forced deportation as the appropriate fate for America’s estimated 11-12 million undocumented immigrants” (<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2007/family-research-council-poll-shows-many-conservative-christians-hardlined-against-illegal>, accessed December 3, 2015). In 2014, The Pew Research studied two subsets of Christians (Protestants: White Evangelical, White Mainline, and Black Protestant demographics; for Catholics: White, non-Hispanic and Hispanic demographics) and their responses to questions on immigration. In response to the question: “Should undocumented immigrants be allowed to stay legally if they meet certain requirements?” Protestants voted affirmatively at 69% and Catholics at 77% (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/04/01/catholics-other-christians-support-immigration-reform-but-say-faith-plays-small-role/>, accessed December 4, 2015).

all parties that advocate for reform. For this group of U.S. Catholic bishops, their position is based on six elements: earned legalization, future worker program, family-based immigration reform, restoration of due process rights, addressing root causes, and enforcement.⁷ From this list, two items pertain to my study: earned legalization and enforcement. The first term, earned legalization, is the “amnesty” portion of the policy since it advocates for the opportunity “that would allow foreign nationals of good moral character who are living in the United States to apply to adjust their status to obtain lawful permanent residence.”⁸ The second term – enforcement – is problematic for a group that appears to express positive intentions for aiding immigrants already in this country: “The U.S. Catholic Bishops accept the legitimate role of the U.S. government in intercepting unauthorized migrants who attempt to travel to the United States.”⁹ This statement of deference to the authority of law in the U.S. also appears in The Catholic Catechism: “...good government has two duties...the first duty is to welcome the foreigner out of charity and respect for the human person...the second duty is to secure one’s border and enforce the law for the sake of the common good. Sovereign nations have the right to enforce their laws...”¹⁰ I will revisit these statements in a later section and provide a threefold critique – postmodern, postcolonial, and theological – within the larger conversation of U.S. Christianity’s response to the immigrant.

Representing a more moderate Christian position, Russell Moore, the President of the ERLC, emphasizes the centrality of the “gospel” within the conversation on immigration. He connects the idea of immigrant (and “illegal immigrant”) to the figure of Jesus Christ. This biblical immigranthood extends beyond Jesus into the past, to “the ancestors of the faith, who were also immigrants and sojourners in Egypt.”¹¹ He sidesteps the political discourse in his attempt to link the import of immigration to the idea of salvation: “Jesus tells us that our response to the most vulnerable among us is a response to Jesus himself...God will judge those who exploit workers and mistreat the poor.”¹² While he complicates Christian observance of national law, he has no immediate solution for the conflict of interest between biblical directives and the (il)legality of immigration. Moore concedes that Romans 13 – “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist

⁷ “Catholic Church’s Position on Immigration Reform,” <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/churchteachingonimmigrationreform.cfm>, accessed December 5, 2015. This site also provides insight into the intersection of the group’s political stance and their religious beliefs.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ “Catholic Church’s Position...,” <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/churchteachingonimmigrationreform.cfm>, accessed December 5, 2015.

¹⁰ Ibid., taken from the Catholic Catechism, 2241.

¹¹ “Immigration and the Gospel,” Russell Moore, <https://www.russellmoore.com/2011/06/17/immigration-and-the-gospel/>, accessed December 1, 2015.

¹² Ibid.

have been instituted by God”¹³ – is a problematic passage. His argument concludes with an overly-spiritualized perspective: “We might be natural-born Americans, but we’re all immigrants to the kingdom of God.”¹⁴ Now that I have briefly discussed two prevalent positions in the Christian positions on immigration, I will now proceed to discuss the postmodern and postcolonial concepts of hospitality.

HOSTIPITALITY AND HOSPITALITY

Postmodern and postcolonial discourses are invaluable sources of conversation for scholars working in the biblical¹⁵ and theological fields. Each discourse provides a necessary critique of modernity, the era which gave rise to a colonial biblical scholarship, dominated by European and United States scholars (the vast majority being white men). The concept of hospitality within postmodern and postcolonial discourses offers a critical lens into Christian positions on immigration due to its disruptive functionality and decentralization of assumed power. Hospitality’s critical lens, then, is an appropriate point of entry to the discussion of the immigrant in the Mexico-United States context. To begin, I will discuss the Derridean concept of hostipitality. I will conclude this section with Mireille Rosello’s concept of the immigrant as guest.

Derrida’s Hostipitality: Some Hostility In All Hospitality

Jacques Derrida was (and posthumously continues to be) one of the titans of postmodern philosophy. His linguistic re-definitions and wordplay mirrors the complexity of scientific journals and studies. Derrida’s impact on the worlds of philosophical, biblical, and theological studies have been immeasurable. Many lifetimes would be required to sift through all of what Jacques Derrida has offered to humanity. That said, I focus here specifically on Derrida’s concept of hostipitality as an initial point of entry into the dialogue of immigration. It provides a necessary framework for the remainder of this study.

In Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida, John Caputo’s annotated curation of Derrida’s comments on hospitality presents itself as the

¹³ Romans 13:1, NRSV. The following verses are even more problematic: “Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God’s servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer” (Rom 13:2-4).

¹⁴ “Immigration and Gospel,” Moore, <https://www.russellmoore.com/2011/06/17/immigration-and-the-gospel/>, accessed December 1, 2015.

¹⁵ “Biblical” here refers to linguistic, literary, and methodological studies of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament texts. There is overlap, obviously, between the biblical and theological fields. However, I chose to distinguish the two since they are often concerned with different agendas.

best introduction to the formation of the curious hybrid word: hostipitality. I begin here with a question: what is hospitality? Derrida claims that “‘hospitality’ means to invite and welcome the ‘stranger’ (*l'étranger*), on both the personal level...and on the level of state...”¹⁶ Derrida, then, was interested in the etymology of the word.¹⁷ In his investigation, he uncovered a surprising discovery: hospitality “derives from the Latin *hospes*, which is formed from *hostis*, which originally meant a ‘stranger’ and came to take on the meaning of the enemy or ‘hostile’ stranger (*hostilis*), + *pets* (*potis*, *potes*, *potentia*), to have power.”¹⁸ Hospitality, then, is the “welcome extended to the guest” that is simultaneously juxtaposed against the “power of the host to remain master of the premises.”¹⁹ This inner-conflict between the desire to extend a welcome while maintaining an inherently hostile power is represented by inner tension of the construction of the word “hospitality” itself. I defer here to John Caputo’s reading of Derrida’s wordplay:

The *hospes* is someone who has the power to host someone, so that neither the alterity (*hostis*) of the stranger nor the power (*potentia*) of the host is annulled by the hospitality. There is an essential “self-limitation” built right into the idea of hospitality, which preserves the distance between one’s own and the stranger, between owning one’s own property and inviting the other into one’s home. So, there is always a little hostility in all hosting and hospitality, constituting a certain “hostil/pitality.”

With this understanding of what constitutes hos(ti)pitality, what can be concluded about its impact on the discourse of immigration? In order to struggle with this question, I will now consider how deconstruction is intricately linked with the concept(s) of hos(ti)pitality.

Hospitality is locked in an aporia – a “paralysis.”²⁰ The act of welcome always already presents the possibility of the erasure of sovereignty, of ownership. For Derrida, “the possibility of hospitality is sustained by its impossibility; hospitality really starts to get under way only when we ‘experience’ (which means travel or go through) this

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida and John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 110.

¹⁷ Caputo notes that Derrida “is following the etymology of Emil Benveniste, in *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes I* (Paris: Minuit, 1969), chap. 7, “*L'hospitalité*.” (Derrida and Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 110).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 111. The concept and definitions of aporia are vast. The term derives directly from the Greek *aporia*; in Latin, it can mean “an impasse, difficulty of passing, lack of resources, puzzlement”), but the word also has many definitions throughout literature. “Charlton T. Lewis, Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary*,”

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0059:entry=aporia&highlight=aporia>, accessed December 3, 2015.

paralysis (the inability to move).”²¹ Caputo claims that, for Derrida, hospitality is actually impossible (in what Derrida calls “*the impossible*”).²² This impossibility, however, “is not the same as a simple logical contradiction.” This initial moment of hospitality begins when this limit is pushed against. When we push against “this limit, this threshold, this paralysis, inviting hospitality to cross its own threshold and limit, its own self-limitation, to become a gift *beyond hospitality*.”²³ Hospitality must go beyond itself – beyond hospitality – in order to happen: “Hospitality, ‘if there is such a thing’: that means it never ‘exists,’ is not ‘present,’ is always *to come*.”²⁴ But what about the language in which hospitality is spoken or heard? Up until this point, I have attempted to present a succinct overview of the formation of Derridean hos(ti)pitality. In the following section, I will discuss another aspect of Derrida’s work on hospitality that concerns the linguistic space of hospitality and who can/not speak in that space.

Let me begin this section with a series of questions: what is the language of hospitality? Can hospitality be requested? Does the aporia of the possibility-impossibility prevent any hospitality discourse? To answer these questions, Derrida offers some help: “The foreigner is first of all foreign to the legal language in which the duty of hospitality is formulated, the right to asylum, its limits, norms, policing, etc. He [sic] has to ask for hospitality in a language which by definition is not his [sic] own...”²⁵ This is the beginning of epistemic violence, says Derrida, as the State (or authority or host or master or others) “imposes on him translation into their own language...”²⁶ Gayatri Spivak is a critical conversation partner at this juncture. Her question (and publication), “Can the Subaltern Speak?” directly applies to what Derrida means when he contends that the foreigner is both unable to ask and unable to speak since the foreigner is always already translated into the language of the State. The foreigner can speak, but not in a language that the State recognizes as valid. The foreigner is simultaneously heard and silent, because the language is unintelligible. Judith Butler is another necessary interlocutor in this discussion:

To find that you are fundamentally *unintelligible* (indeed, that the laws of culture and of language find you to be an impossibility) is to find that you have not yet achieved access to the human, to find yourself speaking only and always *as if you were* human, but with the sense that you are not, to find that your language is hollow, that no recognition is forthcoming because the norms by which recognition takes place are not in your favor.”²⁷

²¹ Derrida and Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 111.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 111-112.

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. by Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 15.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 30.

Butler's articulation of gender as mostly-social construction based on a shared vulnerability (which indicates a shared humanity) also significantly figures into a discourse on hospitality and immigration.²⁸ I have spent a significant amount of space discussing the postmodern contributions to the concept (and avenues/obstacles to the practice) of hospitality. I now turn to the postcolonial contribution of Mireille Rosello's concept of the immigrant as guest.

Hospitality as Cannibalism

As a French postcolonial scholar, Mireille Rosello is deeply enmeshed European history, discourses, and geography. However, I appreciate Rosello's work in *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest* for the sheer scope and depth of the project. Though I am unable to include most of her work in this paper, I will focus on her first chapter, "Hospitality, Ethics, and the State" and her reading of Jean Baudrillard's *La transparence du mal* (*The Transparency of Evil*). I am specifically interested in Rosello's interpretation of Baudrillard's work with Japanese hospitality as cannibalistic and the complications that might have for the immigration discourse at the Mexico-U.S. border. I will first recount some of Baudrillard's work through Rosello's critical analysis of the implications for what "cannibalistic hospitality" contributes to postcolonial discourse. I will then propose how a cannibalistic hospitality will strengthen my critique of the Christian positions on immigration issues in the United States.

In her book, *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest*, Mireille Rosello notes that Jean Baudrillard's articulation of Japanese hospitality is a hospitality that, rather than being "grounded in a universalistic discourse about the same and other" à la the "myth of French 'integration'," absorbs the other/immigrant/foreigner into the "body" of the host.²⁹ She is skeptical about the "monolithicity" of Baudrillard's anthropological claims that this type of hospitality only occurs in Japanese and "Afro-Brazilian" host-cultures.³⁰ She asks: "After all, isn't it commonly accepted that France 'absorbed' and 'devoured' its colonial others to a degree unparalleled by other imperial powers?"³¹ Most useful from Baudrillard's somewhat problematic analysis, she notes, is that "he goes so far as to suggest that hospitality can be bad, cruel, selfish and egotistical."³² She concludes her analysis (in this section of Baudrillard's work) by emphasizing that the idea of a cannibalistic hospitality is a "welcome understanding" (is the pun intentional?)

²⁸ For a full treatment of this idea of mutual/shared vulnerability as a means of gender's social construction, see Butler, *Undoing Gender*, chap. 1, "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy." In a future revision of this paper, I hope to include more of her argument since her work illumines much of what Derrida writes about in his treatment of hos(ti)pitality.

²⁹ Mireille Rosello, *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 30.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

³² Rosello, *Postcolonial Hospitality*, 31.

of the “element of power involved in guest-host relationship...as a critique of ‘our’ own colonial and postcolonial assimilationist policies, which have transformed a supposedly welcoming gesture into a demand for dissolution. If the host strips the guest of his or her identity, then it can be said that cannibalism has occurred...”³³ This provocative conceptualization – hospitality as cannibalism – has deep implications for the Christian positions to the Mexico-U.S. immigration discourse.

Cannibalistic hospitality is of great importance to my critique of Christian positions on immigration for two reasons. First, the graphic nature of the metaphor interfaces appropriately well with my lived experience with conversation topics with host-culture persons, exemplified by the colloquial statement: “This is America – we speak English here.” Over the course of my life, I cannot recall the number of times I have heard that sentiment expressed, particularly in reference to immigrants who have traveled from Mexico. The sounds of the Spanish language, resonant with the rich number of dialects present in Mexico, were often met with this colonial, nationalistic defense – “This is America – we speak English here.” It should be noted, too, that this nationalism and linguistic imperialism was often uttered by people who identified as “Christian.”

The second reason that cannibalistic hospitality will aid my critique is its synchronicity with the Derridean hostipitality. To recall Rosello’s statement from above, the inherent critique of a hospitality that devours the other is rather similar to Derrida’s idea that a conditional hospitality always already has an element of hostility. These twin conceptual models (and mutations) of hospitality are full of potentiality to critique Christian positions that are part cannibal, part hostile. So far I have discussed how postmodern and postcolonial discourses might contribute to a critique of Christian positions on immigration and have attempted to demonstrate how necessary these concepts are to address the failures of those positions. But prior to the final analysis of these long-awaited positions, I turn now to consider the details of these U.S. Christian positions on immigration. how the *ger*, the immigrant-stranger, forms the basis of a theological understanding in Christian immigration discourse.

³³ Ibid. Rosello notes that this form of cannibalism (identity-stripping) is the “form of cannibalism that Aimé Césaire denounced in his *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1950; trans. as *Discourse on Colonialism* [1972]).”

THE GER: LAW, ETHICS, AND LOVE

At the beginning of this paper, I stated that human activity has always involved movement, and the Hebrew Bible bears witness to this phenomenon. The Hebrew word *ger* – “stranger, sojourner, alien”³⁴ – occurs frequently in Hebrew Bible texts (92 times). Though some authors reject the relevance of the *ger*’s legal status in a community as incongruous with modern immigration discourse (particularly when an illegal “stranger” transgresses a sovereign border), I am not interested in that conversation. Instead, I focus on the *type* of action and understanding of the *ger* (even though a legal/political understanding is necessary for any discussion on immigration). Commensurate with its prevalence, many scholars have attempted to understand the word’s usage, its social location, and what the usage suggests about the identity of one who might be a *ger*. Christina van Houten maintains that the general assumption that the *ger* is a “non-Israelite living in Israel.”³⁵ Reinhard Achenbach proposed a definition of the *ger* within the probable agrarian, lineage-based societal context of ancient Israel: “a person, who, in order to protect his life and family, looks for a new home. *Gerim* [strangers, sojourners] may have their origin among related or non-related ethnic groups.”³⁶ José E. Ramírez Kidd, a cited authority on the topic of the *ger*, contends that the *ger* “refers...not to a ‘person’ but to the ‘legal status’ of a man within the community where he presently lives.”³⁷ Putting aside this brief history of scholarship, a question emerges: how does this non-person-legal-status function within the Israelite community? This leads to a further question, one that is critical to my own study: is it appropriate to apply the *ger* legal context of the Hebrew Bible to the Christian positionalities with regard to the Mexico-U.S. immigration discourse? To (approach an) answer to these important questions, I want to conduct a brief survey of the *ger* in the Hebrew Bible.

As I stated above, the Hebrew Bible contains 92 instances of the term *ger*.³⁸ To narrow the discussion for this study, I will focus on three aspects that constitute a framework for a theological perspective within contemporary immigration discourse: exploitation in law, humane treatment, and love. Each aspect is a critically necessary piece to facilitate an understanding of both the potentiality and the failure of Christian positions on immigration.

³⁴ “ger,” *NIDOTTE*, vol 1, 822.

³⁵ Christina van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 107.

³⁶ Reinhard Achenbach, “Ger-Nokhri-Toshav-Zar: Legal and Sacral Distinctions Regarding Foreigners in the Pentateuch,” in *The Foreigner and the Law: Perspectives from the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, Reinhard Achenbach, Rainer Albertz, & Jakob Wöhrle (eds) (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), 29.

³⁷ José E. Ramírez Kidd, *Alterity and Identity in Israel: The ger in the Old Testament (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft)* (Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 16.

³⁸ For a comprehensive treatment and analysis of *ger*, see Kidd, *Alterity and Identity*, 15-33.

In Exodus 23:1-9, there is an escalatory series of prohibitions against injustice that climaxes with the treatment extended to the *ger*. Exodus 23:9 states: “You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”³⁹ Fleur Houston notes that the preceding prohibitions against injustice were capable of executing innocent victims (based on false testimony (Ex 23:7) or corruption that makes it “impossible for the innocent to get a fair hearing” (Ex 23:8).⁴⁰ The following section (Ex 23:10-12) contains “humanitarian provisions” for the treatment of vulnerable people: the poor, the slave, the *ger*. Houston contends that the *ger*’s membership among vulnerable groups of people (the poor, the slave) suggests that “the *ger* was not being treated fairly either in the courts or in the community.”⁴¹ In the context of Mexico-U.S. immigrants, does the rule of law defend the rights of the stranger? I recognize that the laws governing Israel were theocratic. I also understand that the legal contexts of the United States and Israel are separated by a chasm of space and time. However, even with the difference in context, the Israelite law to not oppress the stranger and to treat this stranger with the same compassion afforded to the poor and the slave has particular resonance with my contemporary context. I will return to these observations when I critique the U.S. Christian positions on immigration.

Hebrew Bible legal texts, like many Mesopotamian legal codes, are concerned with ethical, humane treatment of oppressed and vulnerable people groups. In Deuteronomy, there is a triad of marginalized peoples: the *ger*, the orphan, and the widow. Some scholars, such as Houston, suggests that this formulaic triad “may be taken to refer to the helpless, marginalized group of people who were emerging in the late monarchy...the widow and the fatherless child with no man to support them and the landless *ger*...”⁴² Deut 16:11-12 connects the “religious and social realities”⁴³ of Israelite life, calling on citizens to “Rejoice before the LORD your God – you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, the Levites resident in your towns, as well as *the strangers, the orphans, and the widows* who are among you...”⁴⁴ The disenfranchised were included in the communal celebration. Do Christian positions on immigration consider how to communally involve immigrants? Again, I will revisit these observations and questions in my critique.

The final, and perhaps most important, aspect of treatment extended to the *ger* is love. Israel is frequently commanded to imitate the actions of YHWH. In Deut 10:17-19,

³⁹ My translation.

⁴⁰ Fleur Houston, *You Shall Love the Stranger as Yourself: The Bible, Refugees and Asylum* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2015), 72. It is worth noting that the prohibition against perverting justice through deceit (Ex 23:7) by “making an indictment on the basis of false testimony or insufficient evidence” could “condemn an innocent person to death.” Houston rightly concludes that such actions constitute “judicial murder” and the judge would have been held responsible to YHWH.

⁴¹ Houston, *You Shall Love*, 73.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Deut 16:11, NRSV.

this imitation is explicitly demanded: “For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the *strangers*, providing them with food and clothing. You shall also love the *stranger*, for you were *strangers* in the land of Egypt”⁴⁵ (emphasis mine). Houston rightly understands that the theological ethic is grounded “in a motive clause” of the past experience of the Israelites: “for you were *gerim* in the land of Egypt.”⁴⁶ As if Houston were writing about the Mexico-U.S. immigration conversation, it is imperative that Israelites understand the vulnerability of the stranger because “they know what it feels like; they can identify with the *ger* because they have themselves been *gerim* [in Egypt, in the Babylonian exile].”⁴⁷ Immigration, according to these ancient Hebrew texts, orbits the principle of reciprocity: “...you know what it is like to be oppressed, so see to it that you do not in your turn oppress the *ger*; love him!”⁴⁸ As with the previous two aspects, I will revisit these theological observations in the next section. Having discussed the postmodern and postcolonial theoretical discourses and briefly surveyed a biblical investigation of the term *ger*, I eagerly turn to my analytical critique of Christian positionality on immigration.

CHRISTIANS, IMMIGRANTS, AND NATIONALISM – OH MY!

At the time of this paper, the United States is the throes of a presidential election season (2016). In less than a year, this country will elect a new president. One of the hotly debated issues during this season (and for the previous decades) has been immigration and how to regulate the influx of peoples. While some Christians claim to be “apolitical,” many other Christian scholars and authors have voiced their opinions and convictions about which people should be allowed to arrive in this country legally and what should be done once a person arrives here. These opinions and perspectives predictably fall into two typical areas: progressive and moderate.⁴⁹ But these terms are inaccurate for a discussion of Christian positionality on this issue. Since the selected positions seek to defend nationalism (with varying degrees of positivity), I have re-categorized them to reflect a predominantly shared trait: humane nationalism and spiritualized nationalism. I will treat each of these positions in their listed sequence, beginning with humane nationalism and concluding with hostile nationalism. After each position has been discussed, I will

⁴⁵ NRSV.

⁴⁶ Houston, *You Shall Love*, 75.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Similar to the introductory material in this paper, my research revealed far more examples of moderate positions than of conservative or hyper-conservative responses. Though hyper/conservative positions exist, these should be treated in a study of their own.

present my analytical critique, utilizing the previous theories and biblical material to offer a postcolonial-theological reading.

Humane Nationalism: The Theological Tension Between the Human and the State

In my search for the most progressive Christian position on immigration, all signs indicated that I should investigate the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB). In the introduction of this paper, I briefly outlined their position with some minor comments. I return now to those two points that I examined: earned legalization (advocacy for the opportunity “that would allow foreign nationals of good moral character who are living in the United States to apply to adjust their status to obtain lawful permanent residence”)⁵⁰ and enforcement (“The U.S. Catholic Bishops accept the legitimate role of the U.S. government in intercepting unauthorized migrants who attempt to travel to the United States”).⁵¹ Recall also that the USCCB’s position on enforcement is augmented by the Catholic Catechism: “...good government has two duties...the first duty is to welcome the foreigner out of charity and respect for the human person...the second duty is to secure one’s border and enforce the law for the sake of the common good. Sovereign nations have the right to enforce their laws...”⁵²

The positionality of the USCCB is humane, but limitedly so. The policy is mired in nationality, and a hos(ti)pitable, cannibalistic theology. It is humane in that earned legalization (in addition to the other elements in the USCCB policy: future worker program, family-based immigration reform, restoration of due process rights, addressing root causes) desires to treat the immigrant as a human being (e.g., recognizing that families should not be split apart and that underlying causes should be addressed). However, these theologically admirable articulations cannot overcome the power of a nationalism. Reading the “enforcement” element carefully, the USCCB legitimates the sovereign power of the State (the United States) to intercept “unauthorized” migrants. The policy endorses a nationalistic power over the human (“good government”) and ultimately defers to the State (“Sovereign nations have the *right* to enforce their laws...”).

Drawing upon the catechistic statement, it is relatively easy to locate both signs of a conditional hospitality and a cannibalistic theology. Good government’s first duty is to “welcome the stranger out of charity and respect for the human person...” If the State’s power supersedes the value of a human being, how can a welcome be anything but hostile? If the foreigner is always already translated into the language of the State, how can the stranger hear our welcome? Does the stranger hear our words? Or can this

⁵⁰ “Catholic Church’s Position on Immigration Reform,” <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/churchteachingonimmigrationreform.cfm>, accessed December 5, 2015

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

stranger only see our borders, guns, and detention centers with strange letters scrawled on the walls? To welcome a stranger in this way is to be hostipitable.

This manner of welcome is also somewhat cannibalistic. If an immigrant were to arrive and somehow achieve earned legalization, this person may have been “welcomed” but to what end? The immigrant must struggle constantly against our culture to not be completely absorbed (“This is America – we speak English here”). If I reverse the hypothetical situation, the immigrant is still “absorbed” even if only temporarily: the person is devoured by the U.S. legal system (83% of deportees were not allowed a hearing by an immigration judge),⁵³ forced to sit in the “belly” of our justice system (detention center), and then “vomited” back out into Mexico through deportation. Even though there are some humane elements to the USCCB’s policy on immigration, its nationalism is hostile in its hospitality and its theology cannibalizes the immigrant’s experience regardless of whether the arrival is “successful” (earned legalization) or a “failure” (devoured, partially digested, and then vomited out).

Spiritualized Nationalism: Theological Disorientation

Since I have already mentioned Russell Moore’s position on immigration in the introductory overview on Christianity in the United States, I will include another author – Jen Smyers, Associate Director for Immigration and Refugee Policy at Church World Service – in this position. Spiritualized nationalism shares many characteristics with humane nationalism but differs in a critical mode: the policy’s theology is not embodied. Humane nationalism attempts to reify the immigrant into a human (or at least appears to believe in the possibility of reification) whereas spiritualized nationalism is disoriented, complicit in its bond to the State’s power yet convicted by biblical directives such as Deut 10:19 to love the *ger* and/or “fair” legal treatment in Ex 23:9-12.

Smyers is ultimately concerned with the concept of security and how that security promotes human dignity. The *duty* of the Christian, then, is to help “restore public understanding of security as a means to protect human dignity.”⁵⁴ Throughout the article, she rightly observes that current immigration policies fail to uphold human dignity in their attempts to establish security. Under current policies, “...enforcement mechanisms cause more human suffering and unnecessary deaths.”⁵⁵ But like the USCCB, she cites the Center for Public Justice’s statement on nationalistic sovereignty: “...every government has a responsibility to ‘legislate, enforce, and adjudicate public law for the safety, welfare, and public order of everyone within its jurisdiction...’”⁵⁶ In a

⁵³ “Immigrations Officers Ordering Illegal Deportations Without Hearings, Finds ACLU,” <https://www.aclu.org/news/immigration-officers-ordering-illegal-deportations-without-hearings-finds-aclu>, accessed December 6, 2015.

⁵⁴ Jen Smyers, “Immigration and Security: Public Policy and Christian Ethics,” in *Review of Faith & International Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 1 (January 2011): 41.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁶ Smyers, “Immigration and Security,” 43

disconcerting statement, Smyers claims that specific types of border policies (“disbanding vigilante groups; increasing and improving the effectiveness and use of legal ports of entry; and consulting border communities on border patrol policies and personnel training”) would protect human dignity: “By restoring law, order, and community engagement to the border, these reforms would prevent human rights abuses and unintended consequences counterproductive to the intent of protecting human dignity.”⁵⁷ She concludes her argument with a “Christian call” to love the stranger, advocate for justice and reform, and position that supports a system of “humane enforcement” and “legal structures that are responsive to our economy and to the integrity of the family unit.”⁵⁸

I begin my critique of Smyers with a question: what does it mean to love the stranger? How is a welcome-hospitable-love possible when Christians are split between spiritual convictions (to love and not oppress the *ger*) and national responsibilities and duties? This tension is adequately represented by Derrida’s complexification of hospitality. Theological hospitality invites the stranger in and desires to work toward a path that preserves human dignity; hostility, though, lurks in the discourse of loyalty to the State. Human dignity, for Smyers, is the ultimate concern for the immigration discourse. Another question: can human dignity be preserved by rule of law? Hospitality suggests that dignity is founded upon the reception of the person as a human being. This would mean that law, a construct of power by dominant people groups and dominant discourses, is not the tool through which dignity can be preserved. In fact, law might be the channel in which dignity is destroyed. This theologically disoriented policy, the welcome of a stranger through humane enforcement of laws that promotes the stability of the host-State economy, is a near perfect representation of hostipitality in the immigration discourse.

In terms of cannibalism, Smyers advocates for an immigration policy that is about justice⁵⁹ but also about promoting security and humane enforcement in accordance with “the values which the United States was founded [upon]: fairness, opportunity, and compassion.”⁶⁰ The cannibalization process for this policy is performed in secret, out of the public eye. On the surface, Smyers recognizes the biblical examples of stranger-love and acts of justice, but this is supported by a framework that perpetuates colonial interests: fairness, opportunity, and compassion. The stranger is cannibalized – eaten whole – by these three concepts. This spiritualized disorientation prompts more questions: fair *for whom?* Opportunities *for whom?* Compassion *for whom?* Who – or what – is granted the authority to answer these questions? The problem is that these policies, both humane and spiritualized, are not capable of actually loving the stranger

⁵⁷ Smyers, “Immigration and Security,” 44.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

when they remain captive to nationalistic and colonial power structures. And until the power shifts, these questions will remain unanswered.

CONCLUSION

I embarked on this study because I was moved by a question: what are some U.S. Christian positions on immigration in the Mexico-U.S. context? To answer this question, I employed a threefold approach: postmodern (Derrida's hostipitality/hospitality) and postcolonial (Rosello's postcolonial cannibalistic hospitality) discourses, the themes of law, humane treatment, and love in reference to the *ger* ("stranger") in the Hebrew Bible, and the expressed positions of Christian authors and scholars on the issue of immigration. By using the concept of hostipitality, I was able to disrupt narratives that have uncritically proffered the idea of hospitality as neutral and compatible with nationalistic sovereignty. In using a postcolonial hospitality of cannibalism, my eyes were opened to the theological mechanisms that absorb individuals rather than struggle with the meeting of the Selves. Finally, I was reminded yet again that much of U.S. Christian discourse (especially those who benefit from the status quo) is still inextricably enmeshed in a nationalistic (and often subconsciously performed) defense of law, order, sovereignty, and security.

Scholarship should always move forward toward increased precision and deeper conclusions. Because of this, I offer some potential avenues for future scholarship. One potential avenue would be to continue pressing this combined postcolonial and theological discourse on immigration. Christian positions on immigration have been mined, but this area of the field is ripe for postcolonial scholars to apply different discourses to the neocolonial structures embedded in these positions. Another avenue of scholarship might be an investigation of the economic dimensions involved with immigration policy. The old saying from *All the President's Men* (1976 TV Drama) is appropriate here: "follow the money." Systems do not run on ideology alone. Because I am not trained in economic theories and discourses, I am a poor candidate to investigate this particular avenue. The combination of economic and postcolonial discourses, however, shows much promise as a tool to disrupt power structures in this country.

As I conclude this paper, two thoughts remain: provisionality and love. I am left with provisionality because I have only offered partial answers and partial questions. More work needs to be done on this topic. The second thought, love, remains in my mind because of the impact of Deut 10:19, that I am called to love the stranger. This intersects with Gayatri Spivak's "call for a mind-changing love" discourse for this planet.⁶¹ Can the immigration discourse change in this country? I believe it is possible if Christian

⁶¹ Namsoon Kang, *Cosmopolitan Theology: Reconstituting Planetary Love, Neighbor-Love, and Solidarity in an Uneven World* (Atlanta: Chalice Press, 2013), 17.

communities practice self-critical reflection and recognize the embedded hostility within their idea of hospitality.

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