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Kenotic hospitality, disruption, and loving an other: Engaging hospitality theologies for migration dynamics

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When confronting popular notions that treat migration as a crisis, there is an impulse to offer a theologically proper response. The discussion in this chapter centers on the question: which new questions may arise upon a critical engagement with hospitality theologies when applied for migration dynamics from the perspective of faithful connections? Four theologians each contribute to the discussion from their own area of experience and expertise. Amy Casteel, brings in the perspective of pastoral work among refugee communities in the United States along with her research focuses on lived religion among adolescents who have migrated to Europe. Néstor Medina offered a view from his research in ethics and liberation and post/decolonial theological debates, and experience as an immigrant himself in the North American context. From a missiological perspective, Dorottya Nagy brought her insights out of her research and experience on migration in/to Europe. Starting from decolonial theology, thinking about migration from the standpoint of heterotopic spaces, Kaia Rønsdal offered a view on migration from borderlands, particularly of Northern Europe. Throughout this chapter, quotations from the transcript of that panel are identified with the name of the speaker in the text and noted as (panel 2021).

Introduction

When confronting popular notions that treat migration as a crisis, there is an impulse to offer a theologically proper response. That response is often hospitality, a concept involves meeting with others, it would fit when new people meet each other. While it makes sense that hospitality is part of the way that connections can be made and even reinforced between people, it needs the balance brought through faithful connections. However, crisis cannot be the only frame through which practical theology engages with migration. Faithful connections offer the support and acceptance needed for human flourishing. When we stop treating migration as a crisis and instead consider migration as the movement of people in search of faithful connections, then a better conversation about hospitality becomes possible.

The conversation partners

This chapter engages four different theological disciplines to offer nuance and depth to the interrelat-

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edness of hospitality and the search for faithful connections from the perspective of migration. Amy Casteel brings in the perspective of pastoral work among refugee communities in the United States along with her research on lived religion among adolescents who have migrated to Europe. Starting from decolonial theology, Néstor Medina offers a view from his research in ethics and liberation and post/decolonial theological debates, and his experience as an immigrant in the North American context. From a missiological perspective, Dorottya Nagy brings insights out of her research and experience on migration in/to Europe. Looking at migration from the standpoint of heterotopic spaces, Kaia Rønsdal offers a view on migration from borderlands, particularly of Northern Europe. Each of the authors have worked with people who have migrated, witnessing and interrogating hospitality as theory and as it is enacted.

Migration

Migration is a broad term that encompasses all forms of moving away from one's usual place of residence. Most people who migrate navigate through the same process (leaving, moving, arriving) but not all encounter the same challenges and hazards along the way. In this chapter, we address international migration which often brings the challenges of unfamiliar languages, unfamiliar customs, unfamiliar landscapes, and unfamiliar habits of living (Medina 2016, 216–219). The application of the concept of hospitality and the search for faithful connections can be understood broadly. Still, the discussion focuses on vulnerable persons who have migrated.

Hospitalit<u>ies</u> in the context of migration

The concept, hospitality relates to "both biological life, as well as the socio-ethical responsibility of living with respect for other lives" (Rønsdal 2020, 29). In other words, all living things fall into the scope of hospitality. While the discussion in this chapter is focused on what hospitality means in view of the experience of migration, the idea is broader. It begins with life, yes, human life, as well as all living things. This will come back into the discussion a bit later. By beginning with biological life, we move quite quickly into the socio-ethical dimension. There is a responsibility for humans, as living beings, to care for and protect life. People who are already locally placed have a responsibility to make space to interact with people who are arriving, particularly those who are vulnerable. "This should mean that when refugees come to our doors, they are the life held in our hand to care for, to show hospitality" (Rønsdal 2020, 29). There is an ethical dimension to showing care for others. And yet, this responsibility is shared between human beings.

Migration dynamics show that the reverse is also true. It is consistently reported by those receiving people who arrive, that locally placed people who were described as giving hospitality felt they were the ones receiving it. In the words of one such person interviewed by Kaia Rønsdal, "we have never received such hospitality as when the refugees came" (Rønsdal 2020, 32). In Finland, people who were bringing coats and supplies—aid—to others, explained that they received hospitality. Their definition of hospitality was shaped and re-created through interactions among themselves as former strangers. Hospitality came to mean an attitude of openness, sharing space, and an offer of friendship (Rønsdal 2020). This reciprocal relationship is no longer confined to the limited roles of guest and host typically found in theologies of hospitality (Casteel 2021). It is better characterized by the concept of loving one another.

Loving one another is not a vague undefinable ideal, but an embodied action in context. It is inherently contextual and personal. It is a kind of loving that is "measured against the experience of a person or group of people about whom another person or group says that they love them" (Nagy 2016, 370). This shifts emphasis in hospitality from an event of welcome to an event where relationships are built. Building relationships in the context of migration is based not on the similarity of culture or upbringing, but on openness to a relationship that challenges the everyday spaces in which we live. However, theologies that do not address migration and immigration leave an underdeveloped kind of hospitality that does not aim at building equality within relationships (Medina 2015).

A theologically based openness to equality in relationships is made possible by a return to the starting point—that hospitality is rooted in biological life as created by God. Human loving, then, is understood as "characterized by the relationality, the connectedness expressed in the theology of creation. The depth and height of its intensity varies from situation to situation" (Nagy 2016, 371). Such variation in relationality is not a weakness, but a reflection of the variation in creation.

While hospitality can sometimes be used to refer to the individual relationship, human relationships are situated in cultures and communities. A diversity of cultures and ethno-social communities promises a variety of "unique ways in which people perceive the reality of the divine, interpret divine disclosure, and express their experiences of faith…" (Medina 2014, 442). This enriches the worshipping community. And while there is a necessary asymmetry where "God remains God and human beings remain human beings". In the search for faithful connections, "loving between people, then, is about reciprocity but also about the asymmetry of being human" (Nagy 2016, 371). In other words, humans share the experience of an asymmetrical relationship with God. That asymmetry informs the reciprocal way that people can interact with each other. The presence of people who have migrated in any local community calls for a reconsideration of the way we define and enact hospitality theologies.

Challenging hospitality-as-welcome

In the context of migration, the idea of hospitality among Western churches can take on particular nuances. In some cases, the generosity of meeting needs for food and shelter are meaningful and enriching when there is no expectation for ongoing relationships. In other cases, hospitality is urged out of an ethical duty. In still other cases, hospitality toward those who migrate is urged as a tactic. Some missiologists have argued that hospitality is an appropriate theological key to intercultural interaction. Without the proper framing, this explanation risks changing the act of welcome into a tool. Instead of extending hospitality in a way that enables the development of relationships, it becomes programmatic. But such a view does not take into account that the concept of hospitality varies by context and is laden with cultural meanings and expectations.

A theological hospitality that takes into account migration dynamics is based in the concept of reciprocal relationships where loving *an* other is a reflection of a shared creatureliness and not a program or tactic. Loving *an* other as a way of being in the world includes hospitality and the search for faithful connections as a matter of course.

When a person migrates, they go through a process of movements: leaving, moving, arriving. Awareness of this reality, that migration begins with leaving a place called home, has implications for the understanding of hospitality. Those who leave carry much of this place with them, along with their culturally-informed expectations of welcome and hospitality. To presume that hospitality has universal expectations runs the risk of denying or erasing difference. But a theology of hospitality makes room to celebrate cultural difference because "… to remove ethnic and cultural identity from the theological equation is to engage in a kind of docetism that denies the impact of the human ethnocultural dimension and its contribution to our understanding of the reality of the divine and to our expressions and experiences of faith" (Medina 2014, 441–442). Differences between understandings and embodiments of hospitality can be celebrated in theologies of hospitality. It may be that the complexity itself offers a place to experience 'the reality of the divine'.

Complexity is the realm of migration. People who move across borders expect to encounter differences at the same time that they bring different expectations and practices with them. This is enacted in the space of everyday lives where the people arriving and the people already located, share a "moment of encounter" that is real, present, and material (Rønsdal 2018, 84). These encounters happen in physical spaces which may have previously been designated for another purpose, thus re-defining these spaces.

Shared moments happen in the context of communities and in the context of churches—where there is an openness to them. What is more, when people arrive many continue to nurture relationships from the previous place they lived, creating transnational networks (Medina 2015, 215). The interaction, then, between the mover and the located represents multiple networks and spheres of influence. This adds to the complexity of the interaction between individual persons. These encounters certainly include both physical and social spaces of everyday life; they also include the possibility of a "reality we work to create" (Rønsdal 2018, 82–83).

The practice of theologies of hospitality, then, includes encounters where loving an *other* occurs as a way of being in the world in such a way that it re-defines social and physical spaces. This manner of loving upholds differences as valuable expressions and experiences that inform our understanding of the divine. Hospitalities are actions and embodiments in the present in real spaces that re-shape and re-order those spaces. Hospitality links experiences of welcome with opportunities for faithful connections.

The issue of power

In a very practical way, hospitality is linked to space. It is not something that can be defined in words only—it must be embodied in space to be understood. In the interaction of migrants and locals in border spaces humans encounter each other in a kind of embodied spatial calling (Rønsdal 2018). The concept of hospitality is made visible in the attitudes and habits formed around routine interactions. This requires an openness and willingness to let an other, in effect, disrupt my routines which means they are unexpectedly "setting my life into motion" (Rønsdal 2018, 33). This kind of hospitality is disruptive to spaces and routines in such a way that "the binary of guests and hosts is, in this framework, interchangeable and dynamic. None of us are static, our roles are negotiated and interchange continuously" (Rønsdal 2018, 22). The shifting of power through the shifting of roles is an integral part of a correct concept of hospitality.

But in current practice, power tends to be maintained by the located/placed persons, communities, and societies. Thus, there is a tension connecting an individual's performance of hospitality—in which roles may shift—with the actions of a community of worship or the practice of hospitality at a societal level—in which roles are fixed. Even when a consistent thread can be traced through the belief structures from individual to the greater community, power is often reinforced through actions called hospitality. The current structures of many societies are currently at odds with an understanding of hospitality that seeks to dismantle power dynamics through openness and reciprocity. This is particularly evident in political and economic efforts to control the movement of people. Rather than offering an opportunity for disruption that invites dialogue, hospitality becomes a mechanism for holding onto power.

Enforcement and hospitality

The power dynamic performed in today's politics and in current Christian practices of hospitality both reflect a longstanding presumption that Western identity, Christianity, and cultural superiority are intertwined (Medina 2018, see 98–150). Certainly these appear in individual interactions, but more importantly, the presumption that Western Christianity is normative is a cultural assumption that underpins many of the policies towards people who migrate. These policies not only regulate borders, they have influenced economic and political actions for centuries. The conditions that drive people to choose to leave—financial, environmental, or political—are often created by Western actors (Medina 2022). When people living in the West, who benefit from those financial, environmental, or political conditions, extend hospitality, they may presume it to be a moral good. But what kind of hospitality is it that merely offers the leftovers from what was gained by exploitation of the very people who move because of the exploitation?

Borders are regulated not only by economics but also through political and spatial means. Political measures are justified as though they are moral or ethical. They are articulated as necessary for the protection of the local, placed citizen. Protection can be economic—protecting jobs or preventing access to welfare schemes. It can also be cultural—protecting the dilution of tradition or religious heritage. In the Netherlands, for instance, a government agency worked together with Christian organizations to help define the idea of conversion for the purposes of migration (Nagy and Speelman 2018). This was done to protect Christianity from being diluted by false conversions and the nation from false claims to asylum. Who determines the credibility of a religious experience, on what basis, and for what purpose? What period of time must pass before one can determine whether a conversion is credible? Who or what is protected by the formalization of credibility of conversion?

Once a person begins the process of migrating, they "find themselves in a liminal space, where migrants' human rights seem to be suspended" (Medina panel 2021). Perhaps this is linked to an erroneous view of the human not as *imago dei*—one connected to all life by bearing the image of the Divine—but as the *homo sacer*—one disconnected from citizens and the rule of law (Agamben 1998). The unwillingness to apply generally accepted human rights and international law to the current state of those who choose to migrate is problematic. This moves humans who migrate into the "state of exception" where sovereign nations allow judges to suspend normal order "for the purpose of safeguarding the existence of the norm" (Agamben 2005, 31). This is presumably because the act of humans moving into economically prosperous Western nations threatens that prosperity so the only recourse the nation-state has is to promote "an essential fracture

between the position of the norm and its application" (Agamben 2005, 31). The idea of national sovereignty brings with it a presumption of power, a power that is not shared and, in the case of migration, cannot be yielded. We must remember that ideas of sovereignty are also intimately woven with our history of colonization (Medina 2019b).

Before moving further, a few demographic realities need to be addressed. The first reality is that the vast majority of persons who move do so within the majority world and not into western countries. Second, most human migration into Western nations takes place through so-called regular pathways with the expected documentation, applications, and fees provided by those who migrate. People who move this way typically have a family, employer, or educational sponsor and the financial means to relocate. Third, the rules that govern these pathways are constantly shifting as politics and conditions shift. That is to say that a person who begins the process of migration following all the rules, may find that the so-called regular pathway moves away from them. Along with people who choose to migrate using these regular pathways, there are those who choose to leave a place but are unaware of the regular pathway requirements or who are aware and move anyway or who are forced to leave by violence or disaster. Nevertheless, while all those who migrate find themselves in a liminal space, those who find themselves outside the designated pathways are more likely to find themselves in a state of exception. What is tragic about this situation is that there is no real legal protection for those who choose to risk their lives to leave a place of threat in order to seek refuge.

Without another country that offers the seeker legal protection, nations view those who migrate in this way as "disposable" (Medina panel 2021). This is evident in the enforcement actions taken by nations against those trying to enter. Violent actions by those charged with enforcing the border have become visible and commonplace and government policies that justify such actions are defended and justified as necessary. But the justifications are contradicted by individual cases:

> Claudia Patricia Gómez Gonzalez, a 20-year-old indigenous Mayan woman from Guatemala crossed the border into Texas and approached a U.S. Customs and Border Patrol officer who drew his weapon and shot her in the head (Lakhani 2019).

> Jakelin Caal Maquin, a 7-year-old Mayan girl from Guatemala, died in custody of U.S. Customs and Border Patrol after her father repeatedly sought care for his daughter during the 2 hour bus ride to the detention facility (Romero 2018).

> Filomena Jacinto-Carrillo, a five-year-old girl from Guatemala separated from her father by U.S. CBP and not returned to her family for more than a year due to the Zero Tolerance: the family-separation policy that lasted from 2017 to 2018 (Dickerson 2022).

While cases in the news from the U.S.A. make headlines around the globe, this is not the only place that such things happen. Other borders are patrolled with similar brutality. Officials found 92 adult men forced to strip before crossing the border between Turkey and Greece on 14 October 2022 (Fraser 2022). A family of Rohingya asylum seekers were killed in traffic while they were fleeing a riot in a migration detention center in Malaysia, April 2022 (Wee 2022). To give another example, Vali, one of many Iranian refugees in an Australian migration detention facility who was already approved for resettlement, continues waiting in detention after 8 years for permission for travel to begin that approved resettlement (Vasefi 2021). Even when direct violence is less extreme, changing policies impact the lives and survival of many who are moving. Because of the strain on local agencies and governments in 2016, the political machine mobilized legislation to "control and eventually stop the flow of migrants using the Arctic route into Norway" (Rønsdal 2020, 23). Yet a few people continued to act in congruence with what they believed was the ethical response—and they were arrested for their efforts (Rønsdal 2020, 28). In each of these cases, richer countries treat human beings who attempt to migrate in these ways as though they do not have basic human rights (Medina 2019b, 10).

Reaching beyond border spaces, rich countries also extend the state of exception to spaces within the political boundaries of poorer nations. Richer nations use "the mechanisms of economics and international political manipulation" in ways that undermine the sovereignty of other poorer nations to protect their resources for their people (Medina panel 2021). Although much of their work is understood as development, mechanisms such as the international monetary fund and the world bank have been used to suspend, violate, or deny the rights of entire populations (Medina panel 2021). In what ways can practical hospitality theologies critically respond to policies and laws that deny human rights to people who migrate? Can hospitality theologies claim relevance for migration dynamics without ad-

dressing the underlying economic policies that benefit the people providing the welcome?

Kenotic Hospitality

There will continue to be power dynamics at play in loving an other. To address the power dynamics, Néstor Medina advocates for a hospitality that includes both transcendence and kenosis (Medina 2022). Here transcendence is understood in the Levinasian sense that as a being, I have a responsibility to an other. That responsibility requires that I transcend my self to consider an other (Levinas 2000, 100). Kenosis is the principle of emptying or self-limitation. Jesus told his followers to love God and to love others based on the love of God. The power in this formulation is divine power. When it comes to power, we are reminded by the life of Jesus that God's ways are different from those of humans. Christians are challenged in Philippians 2:1-11 to treat each other in the same way that Jesus treated others by limiting themselves for the benefit of an other. This principle can be found at play in the everyday interactions that make and re-make spaces where people encounter each other (Rønsdal 2018). Self-limiting for the purpose of making space for another is a way of loving an other (Nagy 2016). Through the exercise of self-limitation there is the possibility of transcendence or responsibility to an other.

Engaging in kenotic hospitality is less about what a Christian has to offer and it is focused beyond the immediate moment. Bringing together the responsibility to an other with the idea of limiting oneself to make room for an other "challenges the privilege of the one who can offer hospitality, and interrogates the historical circumstances that create the power and resources differential within the two and turns that into an ethical-moral imperative" (Medina panel 2021). In this way, hospitality is enacted by making space for an other to engage in the (now) shared space. Kenotic hospitality prioritizes the "acceptance of the existence of another to whom we are morally or ethically indebted" (Medina panel 2021). This responsibility for another is then rooted not only in the shared identity as creatures but also in the act of acceptance. An *other* has a right to existence—here in this space. This requires a second act—relinquishing privilege.

While this short explanation is framed in individualistic terms, kenotic hospitality is not only about addressing the individual. It is about seeing the individual despite the systems and frameworks that seek to de-humanize people who migrate. It is about critically engaging with the causes of displacement. A kenotic hospitality that seeks to make space for an other who has migrated will necessarily identify spaces of injustice. This, then, becomes a call to act on the causes of displacement and call out the injustice in systems.

Two tasks towards a better hospitality

Theological reflection over these matters is, we think, a second step. The first step is taking action to accept the disruption of arrival by an other and extend love in a kenotic hospitality—a hospitality that empties itself of rights and power to meet an other where they are. Such actions are accompanied by a call to carefully investigate our own participation in creating refugees, in how we maintain colonial structures, and in ways we participate in silencing others.

Task one: taking responsibility for an other now

When related to the migration of people, these structures of power visibly play out at borders. Borders are not fixed, discrete spaces. They change over time—through environmental and political processes. They can also be porous and flexible, moving according to geopolitical negotiations of power. This changeability is because spaces are not only physical, but also incorporate the relationships of people. Such an analysis of space offers a different glimpse into moments of encounter and non-encounter, into ways of relating in everyday ways (Rønsdal 2020). One way of opening spaces in civil society may include "surrendering" space to the body or the voice of another. There are often strong connections to places and newcomers may challenge the importance given to sites and spaces. But exercising responsibility to an other by the self-limiting of privilege makes possible an openness to the creative potential present in the re-shaping of space. This challenges the perception of borderlands as places of tragedy, instead exploring the ways that lived interactions challenge binaries and make room for loving an other (Rønsdal 2020, 22).

Focusing on hospitality might distract theology towards abstract concepts and away from addressing "the experience of the actual people who migrate, or to the larger and economic structures of

exploitation, late free market capitalism, or the dominance of the world by a few wealthy nations controlling the affairs of the world" (Medina panel 2021). Spending so much energy only on a response to migration is to ignore the systems and the human experience that both require "the ethical perspective of practical theological views" (Medina panel 2021).

A disconnection exists between the lived experiences of people, the systems that create the conditions, and theological notions. The term 'hospitality' can be used "to blur and actually ensconce or hide those more complicated issues of the reasons for which migration is taking place" (Medina panel 2021). Rather than responding to individual people fleeing difficulties, appropriate theological action would challenge the financial, environmental, and political conditions that force people to flee. This offers a ground from which to begin a reflection over the voices, the bodies, and the spaces that are permitted and welcomed as well as those that are not permitted and unwelcome.

Task two: Theological reflection over (un)welcome others

And so begins the second task: theological reflections over what causes people to move and how societies respond to that movement. Are the terms used in theology to discuss migration dynamics theological or political ones? In what ways are the notions and concepts of hospitality or loving an other theological? In what ways are these same notions and concepts subverted or employed as political mechanisms to manage the movement of human persons?

What if, in the explanation of creation, there is an emphasis that supports the command to love God and love others? Nagy's explanation of hospitality begins with *creatio ex amore* instead of *creatio ex nihilo* (Nagy 2016, 369). (The latter is still dominantly present in text books on systematic theology). Looking at God´s creation as *creatio ex amore* underlines the relationality involved in the acts and processes of creation. If humankind is, indeed, as Nagy argues, *creatio ex amore* then it is necessary that relationship of love be reflected in social processes—personal and political. Such an anthropological stance that centers itself on *creatio ex amore* understands a necessity in the divine to create out of love that is then reflected in humans. For humans, to be created out of love means having a necessity to love and to enter into creative relationships of love which fits well with the idea of kenotic hospitality as conceptualized in this text.

Applying this means moving beyond theologies that simply "legitimize the way Christian communities were dealing with migration and migrants" by supplanting the one who migrates with images of God, Jesus, or the Church (Nagy 2016, 373). Doing this simply continues to ignore the person who migrates and treats them again as an exception, strengthening existing structures that manage human movement. These current restrictive structures and negative attitudes about the movement of people have grown out of a history of Western expansion (see Medina 2018). It is only recently that "criticism of the migration management of nation states and their combined powers" is discussed openly in theology (Nagy 2016, 376). In a similar way, hospitality theologies must critically engage social and political structures that serve as unjust barriers to those who are on the move.

Theologians, particularly practical theologians, who work with "marginalized and precarious" people can use the concept of hospitality as "a reminder of what's at stake when we work with migration issues" (Rønsdal panel 2021). The notions of *creatio ex amore* and loving an other offer practical ways that hospitality might offer a framework for challenging these structures. But only if the hospitality as it is enacted by Christian communities relies on "a bond between the collective and the individual; citizen and non-citizen, and vice versa" (Nagy panel 2021). What happens when the collective actively works against the individual? When through the "mechanism of economics and international political manipulation, richer nations undermine the sovereignty of other, poorer nations" (Medina panel 2021)? What is then the Christian responsibility for an other?

Where to go next?

The answer begins with (re)creating spaces. Spaces to encounter each other in faithful connections. Connections that are motivated by a responsibility to an other that compels us to make room for an other. We make room through an act of acceptance that is expressed by limiting our privileges to make space. There are examples of people who do this at borders (Rønsdal 2020), who do this in communities of worship (Nagy 2017), who do this in the pro-

cess of arriving (Medina 2015). This space is extended beyond the personal interaction to larger spaces.

Rønsdal answers this question by using an example of two people who continued to act in ethical-moral response to people unprepared for winter at the border of Russia and Norway and were arrested for their efforts (Rønsdal 2020). Nagy challenges the all-too-easy adoption of terms and structures of migration management (Nagy 2016). Medina calls for greater focus on the underlying exploitative economic structures that force people to move (Medina 2018).

There is a need to address the underlying structures and contributors of migration. To do so will cost more than a self-emptying of the right to control the offer of hospitality. It is a call to actively support claims by majority-world people of the very rights cherished in Western politics. There is a need for disruptions, rooted in a theological anthropology that equates loving God with loving an other, that expose and disarm exploitative economic policies and structures.

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