
Promised Land? Immigration, Religiosity, and Space in Southern California

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Abstract

This article looks at how immigrants and their supporters appropriate and use religious space and other public spaces for religious and socio-political purposes in Southern California. While the everyday living conditions of many immigrants, particularly the unauthorized Latino immigrants, force onto them an embodied disciplinarity that maintains spatialities of restricted citizenship, the public appropriations of space for and through religious practices allow for them—even if only momentarily—to express an embodied transgression. This practice in public space helps realize spaces of freedom and hope, however ephemerally. Potentially, these rehearsing exercises can help revert internalized disempowering subjectivities and create social empowerment. Negative stereotypes about immigrants held by the larger public can also be challenged through these spatial practices, as the public demonstrations make visible the invisible. We focus on “Posadas Without Borders” and “the New Sanctuary Movement,” considering both the role of progressive civic and religious institutions in supporting immigrants and the agency of the immigrants themselves. The theoretical analysis builds on concepts drawn from a conversation between geography and religious and theological studies. We use a triangulated methodological approach that includes observation and participant observation, content-analysis of multimedia, interviews, and intellectual advocacy for the immigrant movement. The cases discussed here show that progressive religious groups and coalitions can be important allies to progressive planners, geographers, and policy makers in advancing social and environmental justice for the disenfranchised. They also show that the theological underpinnings of such groups share a lot in common with planning epistemologies for the just city.

Keywords

immigration, religion, space, Southern California, Posadas without borders, new sanctuary movement

Introduction

Although the role of religion in the lives of immigrants has recently been a subject of much interest to scholars (Hondagneu-Sotelo, Hondagneu-Sotelo, Gaudinez, & Lara, 2007;

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Hondagneu-Sotelo, Gaudinez, Lara, & Ortiz, 2004; Miller, Miller, & Dyrness, 2001, 2002; Vázquez & Friedmann Marquardt, 2003), there has not been much of a focus on the importance of the interaction between space and religiosity (for exemptions, see Gómez-Barris & Irazábal, 2010; Irazábal & Gómez-Barris, 2007; Kniss, 2004). In addition, urban scholars have not given due attention to the vibrancy and importance of religion in contemporary cities, and particularly in global cities of growing ethnic and religious migrants (Davey, 2001). In this article, we explore how immigrants and their supporters appropriate and use formally sanctioned religious spaces and secular public and semipublic spaces in Southern California for religious and sociopolitical purposes as a way to understand the importance these practices and spaces have for immigrants and their allies and the advance of social justice. Religion provides a means for immigrants and allies to transform these spaces into meaningful spiritual, cultural, and sometimes political places that facilitate immigrants' societal integration while maintaining and nurturing their distinct cultural identities.

In the midst of a polarized national climate on immigration policy, some faith-based organizations and groups of immigrants have adopted policies and actions that spatially support immigrants in both authorized and unauthorized, "invented," and "invited" spaces of citizenship (Miraftab, 2004; Miraftab & Wills, 2005) that have "made visible the invisible" (Sandercock, 1998). In addition to formally sanctioned religious spaces, as Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007) suggests, "[i]t is necessary to look beyond churches and temples to comprehend the multiple ways that religion is involved in seeking social justice for immigrants" (p. 7). Immigrants have also been transforming the way congregations express their faith in public and semipublic spaces, particularly through street processions (Kotin, Dyrness, & Irazábal, 2009). We particularly focus on the examples of "Posadas Without Borders" and "the New Sanctuary Movement" to analyze the interaction of religious and spatial practices in aiding immigrant integration in Southern California. We examine how these practices and spaces advance struggles for sociospatial justice for immigrants considering both the role of progressive civic and religious institutions in supporting immigrants and the agency of the immigrants themselves.

The analysis presented here builds on concepts drawn from Judeo-Christian theology on immigration and a conversation between geography and religious and theological studies. We use a triangulated methodological approach. First, we engaged in observation and participant observation of rallies, meetings, and different types of sociopolitical events that had religious dimensions to them, particularly those related to Posadas Without Borders and the New Sanctuary Movement. Second, we performed academic literature review and content-analyzed multiple media (flyers, TV and newspaper reports, websites) covering the events and the ethical and religious values of churches and faith-based groups involved. In addition, we photographed and video-recorded key material from interviews, site visits, and events for multimedia content analysis. Third, we used interview data drawn from primary research on key agents of these phenomena, including people involved in organizing spatial events related to struggles for immigration reform or rights, people that participated in them, clergy and leaders within the faith-based and policy institutions that have been organizing or monitoring marches and other pro-immigrant actions, reporters, local legislators, and academics. Finally, we learned by acting as public-intellectual advocates for the immigrant movement, as we have been called to explain it in several radio, newspaper, and TV media outlets.

The first section of the article presents our theoretical construct, which advocates for a new synergy between (immigration and spatial) theology and (spiritual) geography that can help us make more productive sense of religiosity in the city. The second section discusses the spatial dimension of religious activism for/ by Latino immigrants in Southern California, including the cases of Posadas Without Borders and the New Sanctuary Movement. The final section concludes with some observations and lessons derived from our explorations of the interplay of immigration, religion, and space in Southern California.

God and the City: A Synergy Between Theology and Geography

This section puts in creative conversation the insights of theologians and scholars of religion and those of geographers regarding what we call a “theology of place” or “spatial theology,” on the one hand; and “the emplacement of spirituality/religiosity” or “spiritual geography,” on the other.

The need to contextualize theological discourse to specific spatial settings has long been recognized by liberation and political theologians, but not fully realized. What is newer is a call, likewise not fully realized, to embrace a “more fluid sense of contextuality” in light of a globalized world, whereby theologians need “[t]o follow the spirit of resistance” in the “hybrid worlds of peoples on the move across lands and seas” (Lewis Taylor, 2007, p. 390). Some theologians have also claimed a need to account for theology’s “embeddedness in the existential spatiality of life” (Bergmann, 2007, p. 353). In sum, we are witnessing a significant “spatial turn” in theology, pushing it to “discover a wide open land of pain and hope” (p. 376).

Parallel to the spatial turn, we are also witnessing a “spiritual turn” (Ferber, 2006, p. 176) in the humanities and social sciences, as the rise of spirituality in the world has prompted some to think about a “spiritual revolution” (Heelas & Woodhead, 2004). However, the renewal and transformations of religiosity in the United States (and in Europe and the Global South; see Jenkins, 2006, 2007a, 2007b) is understudied, particularly as associated with large-scale immigration and space. Our contribution to tackle this analytical void is to construct a theoretical framework that considers novel concepts from selective topical areas of theology and geography—what we term immigration and spatial theology and spiritual geography, respectively—that is useful to analyze the experience and aims of immigrant religiosity in space in general, and those of Posadas Without Borders and the New Sanctuary Movement in Southern California in particular.

Immigration Theology

Following theologian Burke’s (2005) notion, theology “not only ‘thinks’ about God, but commits to God’s ways and acts on God’s word. It integrates conceptualization, commitment, and praxis” (p. 42). For our purpose, we particularly focus on Border Theology or Borderland Theology (in the United States), most generally known as Immigration Theology (decentered from the U.S. borderland region). It embraces the basic principles of social justice in Christian teaching—the preference to side with the oppressed and the mandate of service, and put them in the context of immigrants. Gill (2003) summarizes the religious call through the lens of Immigration Theology: “God came among us an ‘undocumented alien,’ taking up the causes of those who are oppressed. Can we do any less?” (p. 6). Immigration theologians oppose the laws that brutalize the lives of immigrants and the militarization of the U.S.–Mexico border, and recognize the phenomenon of migration as a *locus theologicus* in today’s world (Campese, 2007, p. 175). These theological developments have been largely motivated by the Latino experience of immigration in the United States (Campese & Rigoni, 2003; Castillo, 2004; Espín, 2000). Informed by Latin American Liberation Theology, Immigrant Theology also takes on a larger critique of structural inequalities brought about by neoliberal global economic policies. It advocates for the creation of fair-trade conditions that allow people to remain in their countries of origin, but acknowledges the migrant’s right to migrate in search for better life conditions. In Ufford-Chase’s (2004) words, “[i]t is not morally defensible to create a global economy without accepting the responsibility of building a global community” (p. xx).

In California, Immigrant Theology and its resulting rituals and actions have also been influenced by the legacy of the United Farm Workers movement and the Chicano movement. The rituals, in particular, are heavily invested with Latin American popular religiosity, both in content and format. As Anglo-American Protestants and Catholics embrace these symbolisms and practices, a

religious hybridity is created. This practice encompasses the syncretistic mix of indigenous spiritual practices from Latin America and Western-based religious practices. Hondagneu-Sotelo et al. (2007) argue that, significantly, this hybridity counters the predictions of assimilation and secularization theories prevalent in the sociological thinking of the past century.

In some instances, linking conceptualization, commitment, and praxis, the church has moved beyond denunciation of practices that it considers unjust and recommendations of policy reforms vis-à-vis immigrants. Theologian Cavanaugh (2007) provides the rationale for this move: "The role of the church is not merely to make policy recommendations to the state, but to embody a different sort of politics, so that the world may be able to see a truthful politics and be transformed" (p. 404). The church in this view is called to serve the world "by reminding the world of what the world still is not." Evidently, there is great variation among the church communities that opt for this theology in praxis, as they muddle through the spiritual, material, and political obstacles at different paces and levels of conviction. The majority of these communities, including the ones led by liberation or immigration theologians, operate within "the modern *mythos* of politics as statecraft" (Bell, 2007, p. 436)—the notion that the church should critically participate in the transformation of the state to perfect some sort of liberal democracy or democratic socialism. Bell (2007), however, identifies an "emergent tradition" of contemporary postliberal political theology that rejects politics as statecraft and instead propose "the church as the site of a distinctly theological politics" (p. 434), that is, politics "as the renewal of the friendship/communion of humanity in God" (p. 435). A politics, ultimately, "that modern statecraft, embedded as it is in the (dis)order of dominion and the endless conflict of self-interested individuals, cannot even dream of, but only mock" (p. 437). These are churches committed, in principle, to the construction of radical utopias of justice and love even in contestation to the state—churches as countercultural (Budde & Brimlow, 2000). Posadas sin Fronteras (Posadas Without Borders) and the New Sanctuary Movement, discussed below, are prominent instances of that proposal of "the church as the site of a distinctly theological politics" that challenges the laws of the current U.S. statecraft regarding immigration and foreign policy.

Spatial Theology

The emphasis of a nascent spatial theology is to locate God (or the notion and values of the sacred and transcendent) in the city, to investigate how God takes place in the city and to what effects (Northcott, 1998). Within a "Christian theology of place," theologian John Inge (2003) proposes place as "the seat of relations or the place of meeting between God and the world" (p. x), thus pronouncing the potential sacramentality of all places. This refers not only to institutionalized places such as churches and shrines but also to socially constructed places—including public spaces—emerging from spiritual practices. Thus, spiritual practices create space; but space also affects spiritual practices. In the current religious practices of some individuals and religious groups in support of immigrants in Southern California, such as in the cases of Posadas Without Borders and the New Sanctuary Movement, we perceive the presence and opening up of "spaces of hope" (Harvey, 2000) in the interlaced dimensions of the relation of religiosity and place. In these places that welcome and integrate the "stranger," diluting his or her "otherness" in spaces of reconciliation, Sheldrake (2001) sees "a this-worldly utopian anticipation of the Kingdom" (p. 114)—radical utopias of justice and love.

Spatial theologians are also reflecting on urban planning. Seppo Kjellberg (2000) constructs what he terms an *urban ecotheology*—an environmental ethics that aims to further the space of the city as "emancipatory koinonia" where just planning betters the life of urban populations. Tim Gorringer's book, *A Theology of the Built Environment* (2002), denounces some processes of planning the built environment—including ownership of land, issues of housing, community, art, and environmental crisis—as unjust and disempowering, and advocates the need for

redemption. A complementary approach to the study of space is offered by Sigurd Bergmann (2005a, 2005b) through the notion of “aesth/ethics”—a synthesis of aesthetics and ethics, “a concept of bodily perception of the self in the surrounding where ethical demand appears” (Bergmann, 2007, p. 364). He claims that “[t]he quest for the religious dimension of architecture—a dimension that has been treated as self-evident in premodern worldviews—can also be meaningful with regard to secular buildings” (p. 364) and, we’d add, secular spaces. A conception of God inhabiting and acting in place, gives way to a “theology *in* built environments” and an “ecothology of liberation” (p. 365), which interprets the urban spatiality of the divine and its role in redeeming people and creation. Bergmann (2005a) also proposes the concept of “aesthetic justice” to signify that the *perception* of others’ suffering is at the core of a normative ecothology. Building on ecofeminism, Anne Primavesi (2000, p. 20) contributes an analytical framework of “scapes” (à la Appadurai, 1990, 1991) to understand God’s dwelling in space—SelfScape, SocialScape, EarthScape, and PoieticScape. Following Primavesi’s (2000, 2004) notions, expressions of immigrant religiosity in space can be understood as constructing PoieticScapes—spaces expressed in creative use of metaphor; in material and imaginative word-and-image couplings of drama, art, music and religious ritual). These PoieticScapes in turn produce and transform SelfScapes, inasmuch as subjectivities of participants are altered; SocialScapes, inasmuch as social consciousness are problematized and/or expanded; and last, EarthScapes, as they produce new global ecologies.

Building on the well-known concepts of “life world” (Habermas, 1987) and “lived space” (Lefebvre, 1974/1991), theologians Wolf-Eckart Failing and Hans-Günter Heimbrock propose the notion of “lived religion,” by which practices and experiences with rituals, movements and other sensorial phenomena can be opened to new spatial and bodily understandings. Holloway, a geographer of religion, also presses to enhance the analyses of religious spaces by focusing on the sensuous, vitalistic, embodied, and affectual practices through which they are performed. To ignore those practices, he argues, “is to sideline both a key aspect of these spaces themselves, and a key element in the circulation of religious-spiritual discourses and the identities that produce and are produced through them” (Holloway, 2006, p. 182). Thus, identities, discourses, and institutions are shaped and informed by spiritual affective relations and forms of embodiment that produce space. This is particularly expressive in Latino immigrant religiosity, whose spiritual practices “have the potential to bind people together in ways that other institutions are not equipped to do” (Miller et al., 2002, p. 120).

Spiritual Geography

Religion and spirituality are playing a significant role in shaping the sociocultural, political, and physical landscapes in the United States and other parts of the world. Yet scholars of spatial disciplines have done little to appreciate these phenomena (Proctor, 2006). Nonetheless, geographers are leading the way by sustaining a fruitful dialogue with some theologians and scholars of religion who, as we discussed above, are also awakening to the significance of the spatial dimension in the lived religion and spirituality of individuals and societies. Geographers have also acknowledged that global postmodern processes “destabilize the boundary between the sacred and the profane” (Ivakhiv, 2006, p. 169). Kong (2001) and others recognize the fluidity of significances of the sacred and the profane in and across places, and the need to trace those spatial reorchestrations. Accordingly, the geography of religion is

the geography of specific kinds of practices that happen to have become associated with the historically malleable signs of the religious and the sacred. Its object is thus the practices, the signs, and the contestations that emerge around them, in specific places and spaces. (Ivakhiv, 2006, p. 169)

Bridging into theology and the scholarship of religion, spatial scientists are also rapidly acknowledging that people appropriate, give meaning, and use space in manners that are deeply “embedded in and affected by as well as affecting worldviews, values, and belief systems” (Bergmann, 2007, p. 370).

Through this lens, the religiosity that immigrants and their supporters have infused in their appropriations of public space has transformed these spaces into heterotopic and contested places at the intersection of a local and global cultural and political economy (Ivakhiv, 2001). In addition, the hypermobility and spatial instability of immigrants within the global economy in general, and within the current political climate in the United States in particular prompts theology and the spatial disciplines to consider how spiritual and religious imaginations and practices are embedded in flows and movements (Bergmann, Hoff, & Sager, 2008). In the case of unauthorized immigrants and their religious allies in the United States, they are constructing alternative modes of believing and walking (Bergmann, 2007, p. 374), reconstituting as “pilgrimages” both their migrant journeys across the border and their urban marches for the reenactments of traditions and claims for justice. This has always been the case, but has become particularly poignant in the parallel associations between the migrants’ journeys across borders and their reenactments of Posadas and Via Crucis in U.S. territory. These pilgrimages imbricate the spiritual and secular. Furthermore, if sacred space is a situational or relational category, as Hecht (1994, p. 222) suggests, then sacred places are “those spaces *rendered* sacred through practices of sacralization (involving selection, demarcation, design, orientation, ritualization, etc.)” (Ivakhiv, 2006, p. 171). In the case of the New Sanctuary Movement, participants desire to expand the sacralization of space, so that it encompasses the entire nation as a safe haven for immigrants. For Chidester and Linenthal (1995), the sacralization of space involves a “surplus of signification: . . . conflict in the production of sacred space is not only over scarce resources [as any spatial contestation is] but also over symbolic surpluses that are abundantly available for appropriation” (p. 18). As articulated by Posadas Without Borders and the New Sanctuary Movement—among other religious expressions of immigrant religiosity, with its traditionally sensual and iconographic exuberance—the extent and significance of symbolic surpluses are particularly salient and hence, potentially productive in the struggle for the expansion of immigrant rights.

The Spatial Dimension of Religious Activism for/by Latino Immigrants

Space is both materially and metaphorically present in the expressions of religiosity and social justice for immigrants. To start, a migrant is a person that traverses space and that fluctuates in between three categories of places, emotionally and/or physically inhabiting—often simultaneously—the place(s) of origin, the place(s) of destination, and the path(s) of migration in different times and at different levels of intensity during his or her life. These different psychospatial dimensions of the immigrant experience compound the multifaceted marginalizations that (unauthorized) immigrants in the United States face in the current era, derived not only by *who* they are (i.e., their ethnicity and country of origin), but also in very salient ways by *what* they are (i.e., their legal status in the United States), and *where* they are (i.e., in foreign land). In this context, religion is a mechanism for both *coping* with current conditions and *hoping* for a better future. Religious practices perform as a connecting tissue between time and space: “Rituals are symbolic embodiments, at salient times and places, of the beliefs of a group . . . affirmations of basic beliefs seem to connect participants with deep truths about the world, and hence with the past and the future” (Jasper, 1997, p. x).

The ontological approximation to religion for many Latin Americans and Latino immigrants intertwines contemplation (worship) and action (praxis). In Liberation and Immigrant theologies, inspired by the experiences of these people, contemplation and action are also viewed as two sides of the same coin. This has radical implications for liturgy, rituals, and all expressive

practices of religion: “the option for the poor necessarily implies an option for the *lived faith* of the poor, and option for the *spirituality* of the poor. To opt for the poor is necessarily to pray as the poor pray, and to pray to the God to whom the poor pray” (Goizueta, 2007, p. 294). Furthermore, the linkage of worship and praxis also transforms every act of prayer into a sociopolitical act. Thus, to pray as the Latin American immigrants pray usually means embracing expressive spatial practices in both private and public spaces, and permeating with religiosity all aspects of life, from the personal and the familial, to the social and the political.

At some points, such as with the massive immigrant marches and caravans of 2006 and 2007 in support of just immigration reform in the United States, religion has often provided a lynchpin that empowers immigrants to challenge a culture that oppresses them. In Los Angeles, faith-based groups joined efforts with other institutions to mobilize more than half a million people who took to the streets of downtown for the immigration marches in the Spring of 2006, thereby forming the largest street demonstrations in the history of the country. Many individuals and faith-based groups participated in these marches carrying crosses or images of the Virgin, displaying banners and boards with passages of sacred scriptures, and dressing in T-shirts that portrayed religious iconography or messages (see Figures 1 to 3). Some of the religious messages were politically overt, as appreciated in Figures 2 and 3.

These marches marked a new momentum in religious activism in favor of immigrants, but they were by no means the first or most enduring expressions of it. In Southern California, religious mobilization in public space for immigrants and by immigrants has a long tradition, and is particularly colored by the current dynamics at the border region. In the 20th century, César Chávez was an iconic, faith-motivated figure who worked for social justice. Chávez, an immigrant farm worker who organized for labor justice with the United Farm Workers, infused this movement with Catholic Mexican themes and rituals. The movement’s actions included rallies and marches, together with fasting, processions, masses, performances, and other religious events held in public space.

In another example, the Virgin of Guadalupe, a main figure in all religious and secular events in support of Latino immigrants, has been “elevated to the status of transnational symbol of immigrant hope” (Miller et al., 2002, p. 109). Not only are festivities for the Virgin of Guadalupe celebrated in churches and public spaces, they also take place in private outdoor shopping malls, such as in Plaza Mexico in Lynwood, California (Figure 4; Gómez-Barris & Irazábal, 2010; Irazábal & Gómez-Barris, 2007).

As all these manifestations constitute an important symbolic capital for Latina/os in the United States, a greater challenge becomes to transform symbolic capital into social capital, mobilizing faith-based leadership and agency in the community. This has been the challenge, and to a certain extent, the attainment of Posadas Without Borders and New Sanctuary Movement.

Posadas Without Borders

The Posadas during Christmas time, a tradition originally from Mexico, have also become popular celebrations in public spaces in many U.S. cities. They reenact the Bible story of Mary and Joseph looking for inn as they arrived in Bethlehem to be censured as requested by the Roman Empire. They had traveled from Nazareth for long and were hungry and exhausted. Mary was about to give birth to Jesus, and yet, nobody offered them inn. Finally, a man offered them shelter in his stable, and it was there among animals that Mary gave birth to her son and placed him in a manger. The parallels to the current conditions of many immigrants in the United States are evident. Many are compelled—through systemic forces they do not control—to leave their native land and engage in a risky trip to the United States. For those who successfully cross the border, usually many hardships await—difficulties to find decent shelter, job, and other services and opportunities. Thus, Posadas in the United States are sometimes linked to political mobilization, such as in the case of “Posadas Sin Fronteras” (Posadas Without Borders) celebrated in several



Figure 1. “Viva the Virgin and the immigrants!” sign in pro-immigrant march in San Francisco, California
Photo courtesy: Gabriel Fumero, May 2006.



Figure 2. The traditional immigrant crossing sign reinterpreted as the Holy Family in pro-immigrant march
Photo courtesy: Clara Irazábal, May 2006.

places along the U.S.–Mexico border, in protest and despite its fortification (Hondagneu-Sotelo et al., 2004; Hondagneu-Sotelo et al., 2007).¹

The U.S.–Mexico border is a unique place many scholars have written about (see, e.g., Dear & Burrige, 2005; Dear & Leclerc, 2003; Herzog, 2004). Because of its increased militarization, one to two Mexicans die daily in their migration efforts toward the United States. The novelist Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) created a vivid metaphor for this space: an “open wound where the third world grates against the first and bleeds . . . the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a



Figure 3. “God loves everyone. Why can’t Republicans?” sign in pro-immigrant march in Los Angeles, California

Photo courtesy: Gabriel Fumero, May 2006.



Figure 4. Children dressed in traditional costumes for the festivity of Virgin of Guadalupe in Plaza Mexico shopping mall, Lynwood, California

Photo courtesy: Gabriel Fumero, December 2005.

third country—a border culture” (p. 25). The U.S.–Mexico border culture includes both ongoing faith-based activism and religious cyclical events linked to the liturgical calendar in support of immigrants. Among the ongoing activism, some prominent examples are the works of Humane Borders, *Casa del Migrante*, BorderLinks, No More Deaths, The Samaritans, and Ministries of Mary (Menjívar, 2007). Among the religious cyclical events, the *Posadas Sin Fronteras*, the *Via Crucis del Migrante Jesús* (*Via Crucis* of Migrant Jesus), and *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) are now celebrations held at several locations along and across the border. These religious engagements are usually full of sociopolitical commentary, even if covertly. The events, “usually conducted in situ, in strategic sites along the border fence” constitute what Hondagneu-Sotelo et al. (2007, pp. 122, 137) have called “an expressive culture of antiborderism” (p. 137).

Posadas Without Borders are a powerful example of the role of space in allowing participants to understand immigration and border issues through the lenses of social justice, Christian theology, and Catholic-Latino influenced rituals. The event offers a poignant critique of current immigration policies and practices, but most important, offers hope that they can change and helps to build solidarity among activist groups.² One participant in the U.S. side of the border describes the Posadas Without Borders as,

[a]n obvious metaphor for the whole immigration issue in terms of Joseph and Mary going from place to place seeking shelter and being turned away and the great rejoicing when the innkeeper says, “Well, I’ve got a stable and you can stay.” . . . To hold that vision in our minds in the midst of all this xenophobia is very important, and what’s so neat is that we celebrate with the people of Tijuana at the border fence. (Rosemary Johnston, in Hondagneu-Sotelo et al., 2007, p. 123)

In one of these Posada celebrations, doves were released from Mexico and sent to fly over the border fence via the United States. In another, candies were thrown from Mexico to the United States by Mexicans symbolically offering *posada* to the participants in the U.S. side of the fence. In yet another Posadas, white balloons were released to float over the border fence as the names of dead migrants were read. A testimony from a participant in the event located in the Mexican side of the border highlights the relevant role of space in the ritual:

When we would call out each name of the migrants who had died that year, we’d let loose one white balloon. That’s one of the deepest images I hold. To see that white balloon go up towards the border, and [*speaking slowly, for emphasis*] to cross *la frontera*. These were very strong, significant gestures and symbols . . . And with a wall dividing us . . . and with immigration policies causing these deaths of so many of our brothers and sisters, and yet to see that people from that side [the U.S. side] who were deeply hurt by what was happening, who were in solidarity with us, and who weren’t necessarily Mexican but rather gringos and American . . . We’d say what do we believe? That one day, this wall will disappear. (María Lourdes Arias Trujillo, in Hondagneu-Sotelo et al., 2007, p. 133)

Posadas Without Borders are held annually during the Christmas season in several places along the U.S.–Mexico border. One of such places is the border fence between Border Field State Park near San Diego (on the U.S. side of the border) and the city of Tijuana (on the Mexican side). At this site, the dense, built environment of Tijuana ends abruptly against the seemingly impenetrable border fence, to lend space to vast desert lands at the other side of the border. This surreal collision of disparate landscapes is further reinforced by the irruption of the fence far into the ocean. The human-made barrier would like to cut the ocean in two separate halves to produce two seemingly irreconcilable scapes as it does on land with the intricate urban fabric of Tijuana vis-à-vis the open space of San Diego’s State Park. It fails to do so in practice, though, as the water is too fluid to be contained at either side of the border, the ocean too vast to be subdued to human caprice. The border fence does succeed in making it harder for humans to cross the border and thus solidifies in many people’s minds the abyss that separate the “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1999) of the two countries that grate against one another and bleed in this place.

About 100 people congregate at each side of the border for the Posadas, densely populating for some 3 hours an otherwise desolate and grim place. People pack against each other and against the fence, always aware of the limitations posed by the fence, yet always challenging them (Figure 5). In Mexico, families encompass the majority of attendees. In the United States, there is a more visibly eclectic group of ecumenical clergy, activists, families, and mixed-race attendees. They look for holes in the fence through which to shake hands with one another and



Figure 5. Posadas Without Borders in Tijuana–San Diego, looking toward Tijuana (Mexico)
Photo courtesy: Isidro Cerda, December 2007.

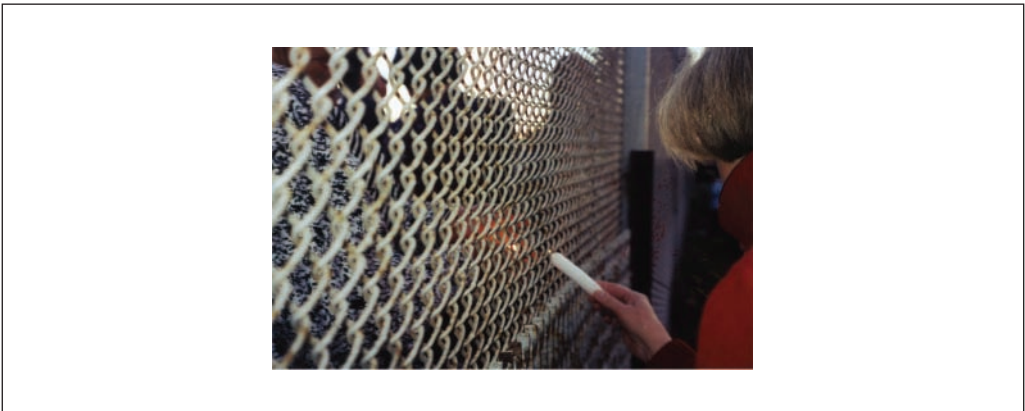


Figure 6. Lighting candles across borders through a hole in the fence. Posadas Without Borders in Tijuana–San Diego
Photo courtesy: Isidro Cerda, December 2007.

exchange physical objects across the border (friendship bracelets, crosses, candles, songs' words, food; Figure 6). Meanwhile, they join in one spirit as they share songs and prayers in English and Spanish. The mellow dwindling of daylight as the sun sets further shapes the peaceful and solidaristic mood of the event and makes evident the passing of time. The people who have died crossing the border are named, and also remembered by crosses on the land or on the fence, and by candles lit in paper bags that carry their names and shine more vigorously at twilight. The spatial atmosphere surprisingly accommodates the most disparate of sentiments, including reverence, peace, frustration, hope, and defiance.

Participant in Posadas Without Borders embody a different sort of postborder politics, reminding the world of what the world still is not, enacting a PoieticScape through prayer, music, and



Figure 7. Coalitional announcement for the inauguration of the New Sanctuary Movement in Los Angeles, Plaza Olvera

Photo courtesy: Grace Dyrness, January 2007.

the exchange of sensorial and symbolic expressions through a wall that is rendered surmountable by faith, hope, love and sheer political will. At the end of the evening, people silently retire but the place remains marked, by the crosses, the candles, the names of those lost to the violence of the border, by the memories impregnated in the land and its call for the reenactment of the ritual, once more, until the wall falls.

New Sanctuary Movement

In the 1980s, the Sanctuary Movement, a movement confronting both U.S. immigration policy and foreign policy in Central America became “one of the most important acts of resistance of the late twentieth century” (García, 2005, p. 159). Numerous scholarly accounts have analyzed this movement (e.g., Bibler Coutin, 1993; Cunningham, 1995; García, 2005; Lorentzen, 1991; MacEoin, 1985). Arguably dead or at least lethargic since the 1980s, the now-called New Sanctuary Movement was revived in the 2000s as a civic and religious reaction to migratory policies that are conceived as inconsistent, inhumane, or unfair against unauthorized immigrants from Latin America and elsewhere.

While the work that led up to the group’s creation had been a long time coming, the New Sanctuary Movement was named out of a January 2007 meeting of diverse faith-based organizations. Representatives from a multitude of faith-based groups nationwide gathered in the nation’s capital to hear testimonies from immigrant families that were facing deportation and family separation. The goal of the movement is “to protect immigrant families from unjust deportation, affirming and making visible these families as children of God and awakening the moral imagination of the country through prayer and witness” (New Sanctuary Movement, 2007). By May 2007, faith-based organizations from 20 cities nationwide had joined the New Sanctuary Movement (Terry & Jiménez, 2007; Figure 7). As of September 2007, more than 50 churches, synagogues, and temples had joined the movement, 35 of which were located in Southern California (Dyrness & Irazábal, 2007) and more than 50 U.S. cities were in the process of setting up sanctuary programs. The first religious denomination to sign on nationally was the Unitarian Universalist Association, yet the movement includes members from a variety of faith denominations, including Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, Muslim, Evangelical and other faiths, and is coordinated principally by three organizations: Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice in Southern California, Interfaith Worker Justice in Chicago, and New York–based Sanctuary Coalition (Skinner, 2007).

The New Sanctuary Movement invites faith-based groups from across the country to offer refuge to undocumented immigrants in church, temple, or synagogue premises in a symbolic attempt to shelter them from arrest, detention, and deportation, and ultimately prevent what the group views as an unjust separation of families as a result of deportation. As of September 2007, the New Sanctuary Movement had given sanctuary to eight immigrants, five of whom took sanctuary in Southern California (Dyrness & Irazábal, 2007). Evidently, the group does not seek to shelter the approximately 12 million unauthorized immigrants who currently reside in the United States. Rather, through selecting a few volunteer immigrants to offer sanctuary to and by making their names and stories publicly known, they hope to call attention to the millions of immigrants who face similar struggles to stay united with their families due to current immigration laws.

The use of space, and specifically, the dichotomy between religious and nonreligious spaces that this practice puts in evidence, is central to the New Sanctuary Movement. The designation of religious spaces as the last places in which immigrants can find refuge and feel safe, calls attention to the lack of safety that immigrants face or perceive in other (secular) urban spaces. This spatial dichotomy—safe versus unsafe spaces—has been enacted in recent demonstrations and protests around the New Sanctuary Movement. For instance, in protests against the movement, members of the anti-(unauthorized) immigration groups Save our State, the Minuteman Project, and FIRE (Federal Immigration Reform and Enforcement) gathered outside of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Long Beach, California several times since July 2007 to protest the church's decision to offer sanctuary to a Mexican immigrant facing deportation. These groups demonstrated by standing on the corner of 7th and Alameda streets directly in front of the church, highlighting the dichotomy between the space of the church (safe for immigrants) and the space of the streets (unsafe for immigrants). Through their performative actions, the anti-(unauthorized) immigration groups attempted to mark the streets as banned spaces for immigrants. The same groups have also organized protests against the Church of Christ in Simi Valley, California, that was giving sanctuary to the same undocumented immigrant facing deportation, after she was moved to this city from Long Beach. During these protests, the groups stood in front of the church and used blow-horns and other protest strategies to emphasize their disapproval of the church's decision to shelter the immigrant, using the space surrounding the church as a stage on which to perform their views of immigration.

The street demonstrations in Simi Valley prompted the mayor of the city to invoice the church for \$40,000 for alleged expenses in police force trying to control the protest, and to write an official letter to the federal agency Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) denouncing the "illegal" stance of the church and prompting ICE to resolve the matter. These actions of the mayor against the church and the immigrant who had been the targets of the protest, rather than against the demonstrators who caused street disturbances, caused tremendous controversy in the community. In the resolution of this conflict, the billing could ultimately be considered a violation of the First and Fourteenth Constitutional Amendments; but if deemed legal, it could set a dangerous precedent that could be used against other victims of protests or organizations with controversial politics (Dart, 2007).

While the actions and rhetoric employed by the New Sanctuary Movement signal a differential level of safety in urban spaces for (unauthorized) immigrants vis-à-vis natives, the New Sanctuary Movement ultimately seeks to create a oneness of urban space for all "children of God"—immigrants and native-born. Reverend Salvatierra, a leader of the movement, also uses performative language in describing one of the primary purposes of the New Sanctuary Movement: "making immigrant families visible as children of God" (Salvatierra, 2007) and "offer[ing] a witness to an immigration system they believe is broken" (Kennel-Shank, 2007). Performing actions in defiance of a system it considers unjust, the movement engages space as a means through which to visualize the plight of immigrants facing deportation and ultimately all the injustices it perceives to dominate current immigration policy. To enact these views and emphasize that religious

spaces must not be the only safe-spaces for immigrants, the New Sanctuary Movement has also taken its message to the streets through processions, vigils, prayer walks, marches, ecumenical services, and other physical manifestations of their faith-based view of immigration. In these demonstrations, Reverend Salvatierra and other religious leaders recite from the Old Testament of the Bible—a text that Christians, Muslims, and Jews alike share—and instruct listeners to treat foreigners like they would the native-born: “Treat the stranger as you would the native. Love him like one of your own. Remember you were once foreigners in Egypt” (Leviticus, 19: 33-34). By taking their faith-based actions and messages out of the religious space of the church and performing them in streets, parks and plazas, the New Sanctuary Movement seeks to emphasize that these two spaces (religious and nonreligious) should not be so different in their treatment of immigrants. The New Sanctuary Movement highlights the difference between the two physical urban spaces only to ultimately call those differences into question and advocate a oneness of space where the movement’s aim is attained.

With these practices, the New Sanctuary Movement is one powerful instance through which a “new politics of citizenship” is being spatially defined, which helps subordinated subjects achieve enfranchisement (Rosaldo & Flores, 1997). With the New Sanctuary Movement, participating religious institutions position themselves as the sites of distinctly theological politics challenging the current statecraft around immigration and foreign policy, showing that another world—radical utopias of justice and love—is possible.

Immigration, Religiosity, and Space: Concluding Thoughts and Steps Forward

This article explored the interaction between religiosity and place in spaces where immigrants and their supporters work for immigrant social justice in Southern California. We claim that, in many of these struggles, religiosity and place are mutually constitutive dimensions that have provided a synergistic platform for the mobilization of immigrants and supporters, the empowerment of these groups, and the transformation of the national political climate around immigration reform. In both the Posadas Without Borders and the New Sanctuary Movement, space is constituted as a vehicle of new ethnoreligious politics to advance immigrant rights.

Our explorations of the interplay of immigration, religion, and space lend us to some concluding observations and lessons. First, while the everyday living conditions of many immigrants, particularly the unauthorized Latino immigrants, forces them into an embodied disciplinarity that maintains spatialities of restricted citizenship, the public demonstrations, marches, and appropriations of space for and through religious practices allow them—even if only momentarily—to express an embodied transgression. These corporeal and intercorporeal practices in public space help realize spaces of freedom and hope, however ephemerally. The temporary suspension of imposed, and to a great extent internalized, identities (as alien, illegal, noncitizen, and even criminal) is achieved here through the embodied practices performed in these spaces of collective construction. In addition, these performances help immigrants rehearse what it would mean to subvert the meanings of these imposed identities and to reinscribe citizen normativity in space and the polity in a manner that includes them. Potentially, these rehearsing exercises can help revert internalized disempowering subjectivities and create social empowerment.

Second, some negative stereotypes about immigrants held by the larger public can also be challenged through these spatial practices, as the public demonstrations make visible the invisible. The incorporation of colorful, sensual, and festive religious rituals in Latino and immigrant activism serves as a conduit to integrate Latina/os across generational lines. Through these practices, U.S. Latina/os find ways to reconnect with the cultural roots of their ancestors, while immigrants are socialized into their new political reality and educated on their rights and opportunities. To

many U.S. citizens, these practices that appear like folk culture are usually fun to watch and participate in, and are rarely interpreted as politically charged in a manner that is truly challenging of the status quo. However, they are conduits of political education in the ongoing struggle for social justice.

Third, Latino immigrant civic and religious activism usually differs from Anglo-American forms and methods. Shaped by education, income, human and institutional capacity, denominational support, religious activity, and social capital (Espinosa, 2005; Espinosa, Elizondo, & Miranda, 2005), it is also strongly shaped by legal status in the United States. Because of that, Latino immigrant activism is often more politically covert and more religiously overt than Anglo-American activism, more visible through street politics than in the public spheres of official politics (e.g., at the ballot and in the city council and legislature meetings). This condition accentuates the importance of public space for the religious and political expression of immigrants.

Fourth, as planners and policy makers better understand the implications and effects of religiosity and space on immigrants' empowerment and well-being, they can help create and maintain spaces that better address the changing needs of multiethnic and multifaith communities in the United States. This understanding can be factored into design, citizen participation, community-based planning, and cultural and community development programs. Further, there is a need for public administrators and policymakers to manage space and regulate their access and use in a manner that nurtures community-building practices, including culturally based religious expressions. How cities regulate and police these practices and spaces prove critical for the way they facilitate or hinder immigrant integration. A particular attention and sensibility needs to be developed to facilitate religious practices by immigrants and their supporters to represent and recreate their traditions and to progress in the search for social justice. Dispelling popular impressions that most faith-based organizations and mobilizations are sociopolitically conservative, this article shows that progressive religious individuals, groups, and coalitions can be important allies to progressive planners, geographers, and policy makers in advancing social and environmental justice for the disenfranchised. The examples discussed here also show that the theological underpinnings of such religious groups share a lot in common with planning epistemologies for the just city.

Last, there is a need for greater reassessment of Latino religiosity, including the study of popular religion or "religion of the people," religious syncretism, and other nonofficial religiosity as cultural resources and symbolic and social capital with which Latina/os shape cultural awareness, strengthen their identity in the U.S. society, and enact creative agency for community transformation (Díaz-Stevens & Stevens-Arroyo, 1998; Espinosa, 2006; Maduro, 1991, 1995; Stevens-Arroyo & Cadena, 1995) in and through space. Scholars have to further identify the ways Latinos, and particularly Latinas, make creative and indigenous use of religion in space precisely to subvert the institutional religious and social order that oppresses them (Peña, 2002). More work can also be done to better understand how subaltern ethnoreligious communities, through their ordinary and extraordinary exercises of life-in-community and in-place, carve out spaces of self-representation and empowerment at the intersection of faith and civic life. In addition, while immigrants do turn to religious institutions in great numbers to find comfort and empowerment in difficult times, in our postmodern world of transnational, fluxing identities these practices are not exclusively contained within the realm of formally sanctioned religious spaces or religions anymore. Instead, they are mixed and tailored to serve individuals' and collectives' syncretistic religious understandings, expectations, and needs. Thus, religion spills over into nontraditional spaces, in both traditional and nontraditional ways. This spatial dimension needs to be further explored, excavating the religious cartographies of social justice movements, from the local to the transnational arenas. Through an interdisciplinary methodological lens, this agenda of research should aim to reveal alternative politics of expanded citizenship for

the traditionally disenfranchised (Ramírez, 2005). In this quest, the potential synergies of immigrant, spatial theology, and spiritual geography in conjunction with planning epistemologies for a just city can prove instrumental. This agenda is particularly critical as immigration continues to increase and adequate policy reform has been resolved neither at the federal nor at the state/local levels. Thus, immigration politics are bound to remain an enduring and controversial aspect of the nation's religious landscapes.

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Notes

1. This analysis complements previous work on Posadas Sin Fronteras done by Hondagneu-Sotelo and colleagues (Hondagneu-Sotelo et al., 2004; Hondagneu-Sotelo et al., 2007).
2. For instance, the 2007 Posada Without Borders celebrated at the border fence between Border Field State Park in San Diego (on the U.S. side of the border) and Tijuana (on the Mexican side) had numerous sponsoring groups: American Friends Service Committee, Border Angels/Angeles de la Frontera, California-Pacific Annual Conference, United Methodist Church, Catholic Office for Social Ministry, Diocese of San Diego, Center for Justice and Reconciliation (PLNU), Ecumenical Council of San Diego, First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego, Foundation for Change, Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights, Immigration Ministry of the Pacific Lutheran Synod, Los Niños International, Peace Resource Center, Peace & Democracy Action Group, Strength for the Journey/Fuerza Para el Camino, Episcopal Diocese of San Diego, and USD Romero Center for Faith in Action.

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