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Sanctuary Space, Racialized Violence and Memories of Resistance

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Abstract
Sanctuary, which comes from the Latin sanctus, meaning 'holy', has played a strategic role in political resistance for hundreds of years. Today the concept has returned as one of importance in the protection of refugees worldwide. In this article, which focuses on sanctuary practices in Germany, we examine the importance of the spaces of church-based asylum—the structure, physical spaces and neighborhood of the church itself. We investigate the ways in which these spaces are constitutive of collective memories of alternative justice and resistance, and how these memories are used to transform the actions and possibilities of the present. The article builds off other non-linear, counter-hegemonic concepts of space and time, such as the *demonic*, as ways of moving beyond normative assumptions of the cultural landscape. The demonic challenges both the abstract space of modern liberalism as well as the absolute space of the sacred; it is a radical reworking, one that relies on forgotten or hidden pasts yet remains new and open-ended. For sanctuary to contest the racialized violence of modern state governance it likewise must both remember and rework the idea of sacred space and sacred time in new, materialist and fluid forms. Drawing on a case study from Berlin, the article explores ways to conceptualize the temporal and spatial anchoring of alternative, non-liberal memories and their potential for contemporary resistance. The Heilig-Kreuz church and its pastors and allies, as well as an associated church network, the German Ecumenical Committee on Church Asylum, provide the empirical case studies.

Introduction

With the rise of far-right populism and the spread of white nationalist sentiment worldwide, refugees are increasingly at risk (Rydgren 2018; Torre 2019).[1] To combat the violence of the present, and to carve out zones of safety, some migrant activists and allies in Europe have turned to the ethics, practices, and spaces of sanctuary. Sanctuary, which comes from the Latin *sanctus,* meaning 'holy', has played a strategic role in political resistance for hundreds of years. Today the concept has returned as one of vital importance in the terrain of radical politics and numerous scholars have investigated its origins, geographies, effectiveness, and limits (see, e.g., Lippert 2006; Ridgely 2008; Marfleet 2011; Lippert and Rehaag 2013; Bagelman 2016; Darling and Bauder 2019; Roy 2019). This robust body of research underpins our study here, which focuses more specifically on the *spaces* of church-based sanctuary practices—the structure, physical spaces and neighborhood of the church itself. We are interested in how these spaces are

constitutive of collective memories of alternative justice and resistance, such that older concepts and practices can be reactivated to transform the spaces, actions and possibilities of the present.[2]

These older concepts and practices include ideas about sacred space. Passed down over generations, notions of exceptional, holy, and consecrated space have afforded the church a certain power or *asylia* in the wider landscape. This place-based power has, time and again, played an important role in political struggles, since it creates a location that is, to some degree, off-limits to sovereign (monarch or nation-state) control.[3] The efficacy of sanctuary practices relies on these alternative rationalities of government. To legitimize sanctuary practices, religious institutions and actors call upon something much older: theological tradition and divine law (see, e.g., Just 2013; Raiser 2010; Moyn 2015). This ecclesiastical legacy works alongside, and often against, the orthodox authority and bounded spaces of sovereign forms of power. In providing refugees protection from sovereign violence, church-based sanctuary assumes and relies on an alternative relation to space, one that challenges contemporary liberal norms.

While religious institutions have a long history of reaction, violence, and exclusion in Europe and elsewhere, it is also possible to identify multiple examples of how the alternative, non-liberal or 'sacred' spaces of the church have served, both physically and symbolically, as sites of political resistance (Smith 1996; Lippert 2005; Neufert 2014; Carney et al, 2017; Mitchell and MacFarlane 2019; Berhman 2020). This article contributes to these insights by documenting some of these forms of resistance and showing how they are *embedded in specific church spaces and associated memories over time*. It does so through an investigation of a particular church and related church network and actors, the Heilig-Kreuz (Holy Cross) Church and the German Ecumenical Committee on Church Asylum (GECCA) in Berlin.[4] GECCA is a network of Protestant, Catholic, and independent church parishes in Germany that are willing and ready to offer sanctuary to refugees (GECCA 2021). The Heilig-Kreuz Church, a member of GECCA, is a Protestant church originally built between 1885 and 1888 in the Kreuzberg district of Berlin. Church pastors have been battling poverty, racism, and now gentrification in the neighborhood since the 1960s, and the church is widely known for its longstanding support and highly public work on behalf of the homeless and refugees (Heilig-Kreuz Kirche 2021a, 2021c). In early 2014, for example, the church stepped in and offered refugee activists temporary shelter in the building and church-affiliated accommodations after they squatted a school, a hostel, and a

nearby church in Kreuzberg and there was a tense stand-off with the authorities (Menzemer and Conrad 2014). These actions were part of a much larger set of migrant squats and other protest actions in Berlin that took place in the preceding year (Vasudevan 2015; Ataç and Steinhilper 2020).

We argue that such histories and biographies of struggle and resistance are located in and associated with the material structures, spaces, and surrounding neighborhood of the church, which draws on local traditions of care, resistance and justice, as well as associated traditions of sanctuary based on biblical texts. These textual, historical and contemporary actions are joined together to provide the literal grounds for sanctuary in the present; they provide memories of alternative justice that, through time, can be and often are reactivated by GECCA and other activist organizations and actors as needed. In this way, it is possible to see how the temporal dynamics of resistance are grounded and actualized in and through space. While we are examining specific practices of resistance associated with what some hold to be 'sacred' space, we are interested in the broader theoretical potential of non-liberal histories, fragments and memories of spatial resistance more generally. We contend that spatially grounded sites and repositories of collective memory are important for both academic theory and radical politics because they place political alternatives less in the imagined future than in the archive of what already exists (cf. Benjamin 2003).

In the next section of the article, we introduce some older theoretical frameworks on space, memory and resistance, focusing on the ways that philosophers and geographers have considered concepts such as sanctuary or *asylia*, holy space, and residual landscapes and how they can contest normative, liberal structures and systems. We then point to more recent work on Black and Indigenous geographies which, we believe, productively critique and augment this older work, providing important new ways of conceptualizing the possibilities of spatial memories, place-making, and embodied practices of resistance. Following this, we provide a brief history of sanctuary practices and networks in Europe and a discussion of the contemporary sanctuary politics of the Heilig-Kreuz Church and church actors. The conclusion returns to the question of radical politics, where we argue that considering the materiality of space in theories of imagined alternatives is vital for any possibility of real and sustainable political change.

Producing space and reworking the sites/sights of memory

jidian

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre (1991: 229) evoked the "metaphorical shorthand of strata, periods, and sedimentary layers" in discussing how previous social formations persist in space over time and continue to "underpin what follows." Such a theory allowed Lefebvre to nuance his well-known argument about the historical transition from the "absolute space" of ancient and medieval Europe to the "abstract space" of modern capitalist society (see also Kinkaid 2020; Loftus 2015; Roth 2009). In Lefebvre's schema, absolute space was the subterranean and cosmological space of religion, ritual, and fragmentary nature; it was fundamentally holy space. In absolute space, Lefebvre argued, lay the seeds of political power, which he traced back to the Roman villas, and prior to that, to ancient Greek temples. Abstract space, meanwhile, stood for the disenchanted and quantified space of modernity, marked by grids, plans, and bureaucracy. While Lefebvre believed that there was a general shift from absolute to abstract space, he insisted that the transition between the two was never complete.

Lefebvre's argument helps us to understand why sanctuary space remains such a powerful political force today. "The space of a sanctuary," Lefebvre argued, "*is* absolute space". Following his lead, we can trace the concept of sanctuary back to the Hellenistic Greek tradition of *asylia*, literally "immunity." *Asylia* was the practice of declaring certain religious sites to be "sacred and inviolable" and therefore off-limits to civil authority (Rigsby 1997: 1; see also Ridgely 2008; Hendel and Šakaja 2009; Darling 2010; Squire and Bagelman 2012). Under *asylia*, physical spaces such as temples, altars, statues, and sacred groves were placed under the watch of divinities and deemed "unplunderable." At these sites nothing – and no one – could be harmed. In direct contrast to the *homo sacer* of Roman Law—a figure who could be freely killed by the sovereign—spaces of *asylia* protected their inhabitants from sovereign violence. Importantly, sacred life was attributed, not to a sacrificial human figure, but to the land itself, forming a kind of *terra sacer* or, more precisely, *topo asylias* ('place of immunity').

In Giorgio Agamben's terms, sanctuaries are incubators of *zoe* and *bios*. They protect biological life (*zoe*) while working to restore the political life (*bios*) of those who have been stripped of it, reduced to the figure of *homo sacer* or bare life through the sovereign's state of exception (Agamben 2008). What Agamben's framework does not fully account for, however, is

how questions of life are rooted in space and time. By overlooking differences in geography and positionality, Agamben was able to make the totalizing claim that we are all *homo sacer*, eliding the fact that some humans, such as refugees, are far more vulnerable than others (Pratt 2005; Mitchell 2006; Gregory, 2006). When the materiality of space is foregrounded theoretically, not only does Agamben's *homo sacer* begin to lose some of its coherence, but sites of (spatial) resistance start to emerge. It becomes possible to recognize places of immunity or *asylia* that are, to varying degrees, sealed off from sovereign power. Sanctuary is, in this way, an exception to the state of exception. It names the geography of what is off limits to the state, and thus what exceeds the boundaries of bare life. *Asylia,* as a place-based practice, provides an example of where *homo sacer* fails to apply, where life itself (*zoe* and *bios*) is placed under protection. Rather than a site of extra-legal violence, *asylia* provides a site of extra-legal protection today for groups such as refugees. It is an alternative space saturated with the power of collective memory.

Asylia remains a politically powerful tradition for refugee protection at least partially because of the anchoring qualities of historical spatial referents. Denis Cosgrove (1989) called this type of culturally influential space a "residual landscape." Residual landscapes are made up of physical remnants of an historical period that remain detectable and influential within the present (see also, e.g., Harvey 1979; Daniels 1993; Till 2005; Schein 2006; Tyner 2017). One example Cosgrove gives is the medieval church building, which continues to exert a powerful symbolic force over the British landscape and sense of collective identity. For Cosgrove, this type of remnant is an alternative space to the extent that it resists dominant cultural views of the landscape (Cosgrove 2006; see also McKittrick and Woods 2007; Gilmore 2008; Tolia-Kelly 2010; Schramm 2011; McKittrick 2011; Inwood and Alderman 2016; Allen, Lawhon and Pierce 2019; Wright 2020; Winston 2021). Building on Cosgrove and others, we might argue that medieval churches, as residual landscapes, resist modern, capitalist notions of progress and linear time, of the value of the rational and new over the traditions and memories of the past. As spatial remnants of alternative ways of life and place-making, they contest liberal norms by their very presence, as well as by their evocation of other webs of belief and cultural narratives and practices.

The idea of alternative landscapes as sites of potential resistance is also a key theme in the work of Katherine McKittrick on black women's geographies (see also Gilmore 2008, 2017;

Hawthorne 2019; Wright 2020; Winston 2021). In *Demonic Grounds*, for example, McKittrick (2006) encourages readers to think about space in a non-linear, non-deterministic way, as something radically unfinished. The goal of the work is to undermine existing, taken-for-granted spatial arrangements, such as those that perpetuate violence against black women and render blackness as ungeographic. To do this, McKittrick (2006: xxii) draws on Édouard Glissant's concept of 'the poetics of landscape', which she argues "creates a way to enter into, and challenge, traditional geographic formulations without the familiar tools of maps, charts, official records, and figures." Instead, the poetics of landscape *opens up* space: it "discloses the underside, unapparent histories and stories that name the world and black personhood." What is gestured towards is described as *demonic*. Drawing on the work of Sylvia Wynter, McKittrick argues that the demonic means more than the supernatural or ecclesiastical. It also encapsulates vantage points beyond normative space-time orientations, referring to a kind of geographical lack – the "absented presence of black womanhood" (McKittrick 2006: xxv).

McKittrick's concepts of the demonic and the poetics of landscape are similar in many ways to the conceptualization of sanctuary practices as non-linear, non-modern acts of resistance beyond normative assumptions of space and time. An important difference to highlight, however, is the way in which the concept of the demonic charts a newer and more expansive alternative to modernist configurations. It does not postulate a return to the absolute space of medieval religious Europe, which remains a hegemonic spatial form oppressive to blackness and women. Rather, the demonic challenges *both* abstract space *and* absolute space; it is an articulation that provides a literal opposite to a reactionary concept of the 'holy,' one which likewise resists capture by the rational norms and modes of liberalism. It is a reworking, one that relies on forgotten or hidden pasts yet remains radically new and forever unfinished. For sanctuary to achieve its progressive ends it must likewise both remember and rework the idea of sacred space and sacred time in new, material and open-ended forms. Further, this formulation challenges conventional notions of sanctuary that rest on abstracted memories of an alternative time that is static and/or disembodied. For McKittrick (2006: 33), the poetics of landscape requires memory work in a new, alternative and highly spatial mode that she calls "sites/sights of memory." These sites/sights allow us to rethink historical geographies, and through this process of rethinking to generate "new histories, and new memories." This means returning to (often painful, sometimes

buried) legacies of struggle and loss, treating them as the grounds for political reimaginations (see also Gilmore 2018; Winston 2021).

In a similar vein, Tiffany King (2019: 209) locates her critique of humanist, modernist projects spatially – at the intersection of Black and Indigenous thought, aesthetics, and politics. In discussing this space King relies on the metaphor of the shoal. The shoal emerges, she explains, due to "the accumulation and sedimentation of solid material offshore" (p. 201). The resulting bar or barrier poses a "danger to navigation," making it difficult for ships to pass (p. 2). As a liminal space – neither land nor sea – shoals are difficult to map; their shape, area, and density are constantly changing. King uses this indeterminacy to unsettle the idea that Black diaspora studies is necessarily bound to imaginaries of water and rootlessness and to destabilize the notion that Indigenous studies are only rooted in land as territory. As a resistant and often uncharted space, shoals provide both a metaphorical *and* literal site of interruption. They work to dislocate and decelerate modern conceptions of space and time, enabling something else to form and emerge, somewhere off the shores of Western academic and political discourse. This is accomplished, in her book *The Black Shoals*, by drawing attention to the importance of actual bodies in space, especially Black and Indigenous bodies. King points to specific ethical and aesthetic practices that, like the shoals themselves, work to slow down, and often rearrange, normative ways of thinking. This generative friction is not only temporal; it is, for King (2019: 12), intensely spatial, working to deterritorialize the continental formations of modern thought, those bound up with the violence of capitalism and state sovereignty.

Refugees and asylum seekers, as geographers have pointed out, frequently occupy spaces of limbo and liminality, including offshore detention centers, where the power and territory of the sovereign is obscure and ambiguous (see, e.g., Mountz 2011). Church sanctuary, as we argue here, provides the flip-side to these spaces of state detention. As a sedimentary collection of ancient and non-liberal traditions and rights, they appear off limits to state violence, as shoals in a sea of sovereignty. And yet they are not isolated. In this article, we discuss the ways in which sites of sanctuary in Europe form a network, a temporary archipelago of safety for refugees and asylum seekers.

McKittrick and King's work helps us to expand the map of resistance beyond sanctuary and migration struggles. Their theoretical framings of space, resistance and memory point to

some of the ways in which sanctuary practices for refugees might open up and operate in solidarity with other decolonial and anti-capitalist struggles around the world, those which also seek to undermine liberal notions of sovereignty and put an end to the system of racial capitalism that places non-white bodies in positions of exploitation and violence. We believe that an attention to sanctuary, in all its concreteness, can help us see how this global coalition of struggles relies on the recovery and reuse of collective, non-liberal, anti-hegemonic memories, memories that brush against the dominant landscape of the present, opening up new nodes of resistance. In the next two sections, we indicate some of the historical spatial referents of sanctuary, followed by an example of the concrete practices of sanctuary in Berlin.

Church sanctuary in Europe and anti-hegemonic spatial practices: A brief history

Sanctuary has existed since late antiquity and was offered by the Greeks, Romans, and Hebrews at different times. It was initially affiliated with cities of refuge and other secular sites, but began to involve churches and faith-based practices by the fourth century (Cunningham 1995). Although many cultures offered sanctuary protections, it was the early church that spread sanctuary throughout Europe. Church sanctuary was recognized by secular authorities in AD 392 in the Theodosian Code and the practice grew wherein people accused of certain kinds of crimes could be offered sanctuary in a church and thus protected from arrest (Lippert 2005). According to some scholars, this legal recognition was allowed by numerous monarchs because the protection helped in the maintenance of social order (Bau 1985; Stastny 1987). Although increasingly regulated and constrained towards the end of the medieval period, church asylum was recognized in English law up until the 17th century and in France until the French Revolution. The legal right of church asylum (*Asylrecht*) lasted until the late 18th century in Germany (Marfleet 2011; Shoemaker 2011).

Initially the space of sanctuary as a legal protection was confined to the territory of the altar, but it began to encompass a broader area of church grounds over time. The connection between sacred space and sanctuary was explicit in the Codex Theodosianus where "persons in fear" could take refuge in churches and other sacred structures (Marfleet 2011). As Christian practices spread and church power consolidated, more and more buildings—including shrines, cemeteries, monasteries, and even pilgrimage roads—took on the cultural significance and power

of the sacred. In England, by the eleventh century sanctuary could be claimed up to a mile from the church. Given frequent conflicts between local aristocrats, the lack of any systems of protection or welfare, and the absence of a standardized legal system, “the Church had a mediatory role in which sanctuary was of central importance” (Marfleet 2011: 446). During the Middle Ages sanctuary ideals of sacred space and immunity were immensely popular and sanctuary requests for protection were frequent.

Even after Enlightenment rationalities of the importance of the rule of law and systems of good governance began to override these types of practices, there remained factions that held onto some of the ideals of sanctuary, especially the notion of a space of protection outside of sovereign authority. Indeed, some nineteenth century English reformers hailed this way of thinking as one in which escape from sovereign ‘justice’ through the provision of church sanctuary could be conceptualized as an *alternate* form of justice (Shoemaker 2011). This idea has been expanded on in the contemporary period by Herman Bianchi (1994) who argues that internal asylum creates a dual system of law that is actually advantageous to normative legal systems and important to the optimal functioning of both (see also Stastny 1987: 290). Additionally, an important feature of sanctuary was the temporal delay it afforded in settling disputes and meting out punishment (Stastny 1987). Sanctuary enabled those fleeing enraged victims in the Middle Ages and earlier a framework for reconciliation—it was, in effect a form of ‘time out’ as well as a ‘space away,’ in which the affected parties could try to come to a mutually accepted resolution without bloodshed or sovereign intervention.

In many ways this has also been the case with modern church sanctuary in Germany. Churches affiliated with GECCA, for example, provide six months of shelter for asylum claimants whose first point of entry is another country in the EU rather than Germany. Under Dublin II Regulations these claimants would be returned to the first EU nation-state at which they arrived (often detention centers in Greece, Italy or Hungary, where refugee camp conditions were, and remain, appalling (see, e.g., Vradis et al 2019; Tazzioli and Garelli 2020; Mitchell and Sparke 2020). If a migrant has resided in Germany for six months, however, the asylum case is tried in German courts, hence the ‘time out’ afforded by sanctuary in the church—a time wherein the refugee cannot be deported—enables the right for the asylum case to be negotiated in Germany (Evangelische Kirche 2017).

Another way that GECCA employs sanctuary and the concept of sacred space in refugee protection is through the media. Although the police have the legal right to enter a church and remove asylum seekers in Germany, this is rarely done because of the tremendous negative publicity it produces. Leaders and volunteers working for GECCA make sure that every case of refugee removal from a church is made known to national and international media outlets (author's interview with a volunteer at GECCA, 2016). They also work with other churches across Europe so that information is shared quickly and others are able to alert allies in both secular and non-secular networks. This media blitz is one of the most critical ways that church networks are able to utilize sanctuary practices effectively in asylum negotiations with state actors. The importance of the *actual physical spaces of the church* in defending refugees and in galvanizing public support against refugee removal by state actors is very clear. A long-time worker at GECCA, Birgit Neufert, wrote in an essay in 2014, for example:

> Church asylum protects people from the authorities, from police officers who come at the crack of dawn to pick up and deport people. This protection happens not in a symbolic but in a physical way. It is the closed doors of churches and parsonages that stand in the way of state power; it is church grounds that are—usually—respected by state authorities as a space not to be entered... Although there is no official right to church asylum, the state most often respects sanctuary. But there are exceptions and police might, after all, enter and clear a church. However, this never happens without public attention. (p. 36)

Highly public sanctuary cases occurred across many countries in Europe during the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Nearly all of them revolved around the cultural traditions, meaning, and legal status of a church's sacred space. In Denmark, for example, a well-known case of police forcibly entering a church building in 2009 to remove asylum seekers led to wide media coverage and a broad public debate about the normative positioning of sacred space in the (post)-Lutheran state (Christoffersen 2013). In Iceland, in 2016, a removal of two Iraqi teenagers seeking sanctuary in a Lutheran church engendered strong feelings as well (see, e.g., Fontaine 2016). The encroachment and perceived defilement of the physical spaces of the church was pivotal in driving the extreme emotions expressed by some of the key actors. The pastor said in an interview:

> There were two guys who were coming to the Seeker meetings and were going to be deported. We decided to tell them they could come to the church and "we will be with you." All through the night we had the church open. It was at night, in June—it was light out. We had music. There was a strong expression of "we're here also with you." We held hands with the two men around the altar. We didn't suppose this would hold. We formed a circle. The police came and took the men... they were dragged out of the church... Things were definitely stirred up by this action. It got a lot of attention for more than a week. "What's the meaning of a holy place?" These types of questions were raised. Strong feelings were raised about the spaces of the church. (Author's interview with Pastor Kristin T., Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland, in Geneva, October 20, 2016)

In these cases—both successful and unsuccessful—it is the physical spaces of the church and church grounds that migrants and allies utilize in their claim to the right to stay. Many of the newspaper stories, as well as authors' interviewees, focused specifically on the altar as a particularly sacred space that should not be broached by secular authorities. But even wider church grounds and accommodations are considered off limits to the police by many. When the policing arm of the state ignores these claims and associated emotions it does so with great peril to its reputation. In 2015, for example, when the hardline interior minister of Germany, Thomas de Maizière, said that "no religious institution could be above the law" and then made an association of sanctuary practices with Muslims following a form of strict Islamic law, the blowback was so extreme that he was forced to retract his statement and begin to work with church leaders (Eddy 2015).

The pastors, administrators, and volunteers of church networks such as GECCA and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) are well aware of the power of church space in connecting to popular feelings of history and cultural tradition, even among highly secular populations (Author's interviews with Doris Peschke, Director of CCME; Birgit Neufeld, volunteer at GECCA; and participant observation at conference, "Beyond Europe: Do We Protect Borders or Human Rights?" at the Heilig-Kreuz Church, Berlin, November 4-6, 2016). For faith-based sanctuary actors, these feelings are deeply personal, and connect the past, present and future through spatial references alongside biblical texts. In the next section we document in more detail the particular intersections of concrete space, historical memory, and biblical text in a study of the Heilig-Kreuz Church and its contemporary sanctuary practices, practitioners and affiliations.

With respect to methodology and data collection, the empirical research for the article was conducted in several European cities for four months, from early September through December, 2016, and in Geneva in summer, 2019. It involved archival work at several church institutions including GECCA in Berlin, the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva, and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) in Brussels. It also involved participant observation at the Heilig-Kreuz Church for a full three-day conference in November, 2016, as well as four other conferences and workshops on sanctuary and migrant protection in Vienna, Brussels and Geneva. Each of these conferences lasted from one to two days. Additionally, the research involved 32 in-depth interviews and several briefer interviews with ministers, pastors, priests, EU bureaucrats, church organization leaders, and migrant activists. The in-depth interviews were scheduled in advance, conducted in English, and followed a prepared set of questions; they ranged in time from 40 minutes to two hours. The first participants for these longer interviews were chosen because of their public stance on sanctuary or because of their positions as the directors or heads of organizations such as the CCME or GECCA. These early participants then provided the names of others whom they felt might be willing to be interviewed on the subject of sanctuary and refugee protection in Europe. The brief interviews were spontaneous and often occurred during or just following one of the conferences or workshops. These interactions lasted from ten minutes to half an hour. One of the authors speaks intermediate German and the participant observation was aided with the help of a translator at the Heilig-Kreuz Church. The other conferences were all held in English. Neither of the authors is involved with the churches or church networks that were part of the research study.

The Heilig-Kreuz Church and the German Ecumenical Committee on Church Asylum

The Heilig-Kreuz church was almost completely destroyed by bombing during WWII and rebuilt from 1951 to 1959 (Heilig-Kreuz Kirche 2021b). Following the end of World War II and throughout the Cold War, the neighborhood of Kreuzberg was one of the poorest neighborhoods in West Berlin. Cheap housing made it attractive for immigrants and students and from the late 1960s to reunification it became known for its diverse population, art scene, and radical activism, as well as economic impoverishment (Ataç and Steinhilper 2020). Despite widespread gentrification over the past two decades, Kreuzberg still has areas of high

unemployment and many residents who do not have German citizenship (Kil and Silver 2006; Güney et al. 2017).

The pastors who have worked at the Heilig-Kreuz Church are known for their progressive views and actions on immigration and refugee politics, urban policy and homelessness, and poverty. Pastor Jürgen Quandt took over from this activist tradition when he began working at the church in 1980. The original sanctuary case in Germany took place at the Heilig-Kreuz Church in 1983, when Quandt and his congregation admitted and protected three Palestinian families facing deportation. This case initiated the German church asylum movement and is well known to those who have been involved with sanctuary practices in Europe (for a detailed description of the event see Just 1993). In an interview with one of the authors in 2016, Quandt gave his interpretation of the events that galvanized the modern sanctuary movement. He reported how the Palestinians came to the church and asked him to protect them.

> They asked us what can we do? I was a priest here since 1980. They asked, Can't you help us? I said, Yes, what should we do? They said, You have an old right—asylum in the church. It is from the medieval period. In the Bible you can find stories – come into the sanctuary. This is your tradition, you should do it. I initially said No. I said, Here we have modern laws and rights. But they said, We think you should. I said Okay, I'll discuss it with my members of council... There was a huge media around it – a big event... That was the beginning – then ten years later we started in 1994 with more again. Then we worked with young politicians from Kreuz and other congregations followed our lead – working groups came together and we discussed and formed a network of church leaders and politicians. (Author's interview, November 5, 2016)

It is important to note here that those requesting Quandt's support made their request for protection and aid to a specific actor and a specific church. Similarly, when they referenced the Bible and stories of coming into the sanctuary, they said, "This is *your* tradition." The intersection of biblical text and spatial location is notable. By 'tradition' they referred to both the traditions they were aware of from biblical writings *and* the supportive, radical traditions of the Heilig-Kreuz Church and its progressive pastors. The reference thus encompassed and conjoined alternative justice traditions in two different registers. According to Pastor Wolf-Dieter Just, who was an important figure in the early movement, the congregation agreed to shielding the families because they were open to refugees already and supported their pastor politically. "He was a '68

minister" Just said in an interview, meaning that Quandt was left-leaning politically and open to political conflict and radical change (Author's interview, November 6, 2016).

The specific, individual action of this particular pastor and his church scaled up rapidly as the church joined regional and international sanctuary networks, including the burgeoning sanctuary movement in the United States. As Quandt noted in the November 6 interview, the church asylum movement in Germany quickly expanded after the initial successful sanctuary protection of the Palestinians in 1983. It gained further public recognition and support in 1984 after the violent removal of Susan Alviola and her children from a church in Hamburg—an action that angered many and brought both national recognition of church asylum and widespread opprobrium of forced church removals (Just 1993). Following this, sanctuary incidents increased and church asylum networks developed locally and regionally, including GECCA, which was formed in 1994 at a national church asylum conference. According to Just, the founding of this network was galvanized by the anti-refugee mood of the conservative Kohl government and the so-called 'Asylum Compromise' of 1993, when the Constitution was altered, leading to negative impacts for asylum seekers.[5]

Starting in 1994, GECCA became heavily involved in facilitating connections between individuals, refugee activists and churches, as well as publicizing refugee and sanctuary information in newspapers and other media. Their efforts to notify the public of any forced evictions has continued since that time and still plays an important role in state policy-making (see Asyl in der Kirche 2016). According to Just, the critical role of the organization was not in the actual numbers of people protected but in the "political significance" of what they were doing; especially that it "became known as a possibility" and that they were doing "theological work from the Bible to show the basis of this work in faith." He noted that in 1995, a poll showed that 70 percent of respondents thought church asylum was a positive action (Author's interview with Just, 2016).

GECCA has members from across Germany, but a key node in the network remains the Heilig-Kreuz Church and its associated actors in Berlin. In 2010, the organization held a major international conference at the church entitled 'New Sanctuary Movement in Europe: Healing and Sanctifying Movement in the Churches'. It was attended by individual actors, NGOs and faith-based institutions from across Europe as well as Canada and the US (GECCA 2011).

Conference speakers included the well-known sanctuary activist John Fife, who was a major figure in the sanctuary movement in Tucson, Arizona in the 1980s. Just and other GECCA members had met with Fife in an exchange in 2008 in Tucson, and then again in 2009 in Germany, where they compared notes and learned from each other (Author's interview with Just, 2016). This kind of networking involved ongoing personal exchanges, practical examination of effective site-specific sanctuary practices, historical references to previous sanctuary moves and movements, including the Underground Railroad in the United States, and frequent reference to biblical passages. The *Charta of the New Sanctuary Movement in Europe,* adopted by GECCA after the 2010 conference, for example, specifically linked refugee activism with the Christian faith, spatial ideas of a 'safe haven, a sanctuary', and biblical texts:

> Because we want to welcome strangers we have agreed this Charta of the NSM in Europe... As Christians, we are unwilling to put up with this way of dealing with people in need. We stand together with them... All of Europe must become a safe haven, a 'sanctuary' for migrant men and women. To this we commit ourselves—in the conviction that God loves the strangers and that in them we encounter God herself/himself (Matt. 25, 31ff). (GECCA 2010)

The Heilig-Kreuz Church again served as the site of another conference on church asylum in November, 2016. This conference was called "Beyond Europe: Schützen wir Grenzen oder Menschenrechte?" (Do we protect borders or human rights?). Conference organizers invited government officials from BAMF (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees) as well as representatives of activist pro-immigrant organizations such as Pro Asyl, numerous other non-governmental organizations, and faith-based organizations to speak on panels. The main conference and most of the panel discussions took place in the altar space of the church, deliberately articulating the secular and non-secular in deliberations about church asylum and other issues impacting refugees and refugee policy and politics (See Figure 1). The importance of thinking about and using space, including what constituted 'safe' space for refugees, how sacred space could and should be used in refugee protection, and the spatial politics of church squatting came up in several different discussions during the conference.

In the afternoon of November 4, for example, the president of GECCA, Dietlind Jochims, spoke about current developments in church asylum to the whole assembly. She also answered a

number of questions from conference participants. One member of the audience brought up church squatting by refugees, asking whether leftists who supported squats were putting church asylum into a bad situation. This led to a discussion between Jochims and audience members about forms of spatial resistance involving the church. A portion of this discussion is translated and paraphrased below:

> "The question is" whether left extremists put church asylum into a bad situation... yet others might think that being more activist is a good thing. Church squatting and refugees themselves have made demands and been public. For example, there was the church squat in Berlin that church leaders didn't support. We should get used to this. It might get louder and more tense... *Squatting a church is a political instrument*. It helps to raise things and make it public. We need to think more about how we can change our concepts and let the self-organized groups challenge our own understanding of the political role of the church. (Participant observation, November 4, 2016, with translation assistance from Brigit Neufeld; italics ours.)

The afternoon discussion was part of a longer three-day set of deliberations involving a heterogeneous set of actors and institutions from around the world. All of these players were cognizant of the location of this conference in the church and neighborhood where so many past sanctuary practices and conferences had taken place. In this particular impassioned discussion in 2016, some of the elements of radical remembering *and* rethinking of sanctuary and what it can do and mean are very apparent. Jochims brought up the question of change, and of how the church's relationships with other groups, even if fractious, might work in positive ways to challenge their own understanding of the church's political role and associated sanctuary practices. While the spatial politics of squatting was not embraced uniformly, with many dissenting voices from church members, these ideas were productively debated over the course of several hours. In this way, through both discussion and the possibility of collaboration with other social movements, the potential of sanctuary was expanded beyond the more limited assumptions remembered from sanctuary practices of the past.

Conclusion

In this article we examined how sanctuary practices and other spatial forms of resistance on behalf of refugees have challenged and transformed normative legal and judicial practices in Germany, and how the collective memory of these challenges endures in the physical structure of the church, traditional beliefs about non-liberal (sacred) space, and biblical texts. These types of memories of resistance and alternative justice are important not to uncover past wrongs, but for their potential to be reactivated in the service of contemporary struggles. As Benjamin (2003) wrote in his final work, "On the Concept of History," sites of struggle such as these are not isolated, self-contained moments but rather can be linked critically across both space and time. Here we have focused on the ways that the physical space and structure of a specific church and an associated church network helped to ground and anchor articulated memories—including textual memories—forming a temporary network of protection for refugees in Germany.

As a concept and set of practices, sanctuary possesses the capacity to contest the existing order of things and to open up another way of thinking. This alternative way of thinking involves conceptualizing both space and time in a non-liberal, non-modernist way, and linking this framework to radical political actions. In this article we have sought to underline how in actualizing this capacity for radical politics it is necessary to employ concrete analysis to theory; to avoid abstracting away from the material presence of specific places and actors, as well as the specific power relations, structure of institutions, and biographies of practitioners (cf. Pred 1986). It is the focus on the geographical that is often missing in recent accounts of sanctuary by political theorists, who have touted its radical possibilities. Tomba (2019b), for instance, speaks of the practice and tradition of sanctuary as one of anachronism, as posing a frictional challenge to the temporality of modern political sovereignty. Our contention is that temporality alone cannot fully account for the political potential of sanctuary. That potential, its anachronistic force, is always grounded concretely in space, across particular landscapes and particular bodies.

Such groundedness is important because it allows us to consider the ways in which sanctuary practices differ across space, even if they may share an "insurgent universality" (Tomba 2019a). If radical politics today requires a new universality, then it is imperative that we map out its geographical specificities and differentiations, so as to avoid repeating the colonial horrors of European modernity and its universal human subject, as King identified in *The Black Shoals* (see also Roy 2019). Black geographies can help to point the way forward, but more work

needs to be done to explore the frictional relationship between these nodes – how mapping different struggles and memories alongside one another, from refugee protection to the Black Radical Tradition to Indigenous sovereignty, can generate new rhythms, spaces, questions and forms of refusal and rebirth.

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[1]**Notes**

Our usage of the term “refugee” encompasses all of those who are fleeing violence, not just those who have been granted this status by the state.

[2]**Notes**

By ‘collective memory’ we are referring to shared beliefs and a historical consciousness that is distributed and renewed through small group interactions as well as instrumental actions such as cultural narratives (Wertsch 2009). Bernard Stiegler (1998) argues additionally for the importance of collective memory in shaping individual subjectivities, which is also a recurring theme in sanctuary work.

[3]**Notes**

There are numerous historical and contemporary examples in Europe of effective church refuge provided to those perceived as lawbreakers by the monarchy or the state. In these cases, for the most part, the policing arm of sovereign power will not overtly contest the ‘right’ of the church to offer refuge—at least for a time. For an overview of the historical period see Shoemaker (2011) and Cox (1911). For more recent examples see Rabben (2016) and Cunningham (1995). Interestingly, although other non-Christian religious actors and institutions were (and remain) involved in refugee protection in Germany and both Judaism and Islam hold similar tenets of welcoming the stranger, the concept of sanctuary as *a space of protection and physical refuge* appears to be uniquely utilized by Christian actors and institutions. During the period in which this research took place many of the refugees seeking sanctuary in churches were Muslim, but there were no instances of mosques offering physical refuge to refugees that we were aware of, and it is not evident to us whether or not the extra-legal 'leeway' given to churches in these situations would have also been given to mosques or temples.

[4]**Notes**

While there are many different forms of sanctuary and multiple actors and institutions involved in refugee protection worldwide, we focus here on German Protestant church-based sanctuary practices wherein asylum claimants are given food and shelter in the spaces of the church or church-associated accommodations.

[5]**Notes**

Just noted that four sentences were added to the protection clause of the Constitution, including “This does not apply to those coming from a safe country...” These additions remain directly implicated in internal EU deportations under the Dublin II and now Dublin III Regulations (Author’s interview with Just, 2016).