

9. Conclusion: Contested Home

This book explores home in the context of asylum-seeking by utilizing ethnographic research to examine and better understand the intersection of home, church, and asylum-seeking. It engages the question of asylum-seeking and home within the ecclesiological context of Projekt DA-SEIN, a church-based outreach program to asylum-seekers and refugees in Basel, Switzerland. Considering migration, and particularly the experiences of recently arrived asylum-seekers to Switzerland, within questions of home and church provokes theological and social reflection, reveals new characteristics of church outreach, and offers points of friction for how home is understood.

The Offene Kirche Elisabethen fills a unique theological and social role in the landscape of the city of Basel. As a historical building of the Evangelical-Reformed Church in Switzerland, it carries forward the religious history of Basel. As a City Church, it is attentive to issues particular to its urban context. As a church committed to openness, it embraces diversity within the city. As an ecumenical (and post-denominational) church, it straddles ecclesiological divides and offers possibilities for future iterations of church. The surge in arrivals of refugees and asylum-seekers, beginning in 2015, posed the question of how to live together as a global community in local spaces. From its place at the intersection of established communities and local systems and new models of church, the Offene Kirche Elisabethen attempts to answer this question through Projekt DA-SEIN.

In considering the example of Projekt DA-SEIN, I conclude by reflecting on two questions about home, migration, and church. First, how can churches take seriously the importance of place without becoming entrenched in established definitions of home and belonging? And second, what is a possible and productive theological engagement with home as it is seen through the lens of asylum-seeking? By drawing on the work of the OKE and the experiences of asylum-seekers, I consider home as a contested site that straddles the local and the global, the public and the private, and the settled and the migrant. To do this, I take into account how the OKE attends to the public sphere by working both in the local community and within a global context. Attending to global issues in the local context addresses complex forces at play in urban centers and considers those most impacted by these forces,

including those on the margins, such as migrants. Yet, it can also inadvertently center normative markers of belonging and reinforce social hierarchies by overemphasizing local definitions of place. There is a tension between ensuring the ability of migrants (and others) to participate fully in the established society while also acknowledging their diverse contributions and practices.

Understanding home as contested is a perspective that is especially relevant in situations of migration, where home is both a central question and one that is often determined by systems of government or sociopolitical conflicts. Amid this tension, I offer three additional examples of how the OKE engages with a contested home in the context of asylum-seeking: by countering the isolation of migration, by arguing for the grievability of marginalized lives, and by reflecting on the role of vulnerability in engaging home. I also consider the possibilities of “de-heimatizing” belonging or disassociating home from belonging.¹ What are other possibilities for considering home, and in what other places might belonging and community reside, especially as revealed through the experiences of asylum-seekers? By exploring the tensions embedded in questions of place and home, I consider home within the border spaces revealed in this book: between settled and migrant, helping and agency, familiarity and unfamiliarity, conviviality and integration, staying and going, absence and presence, and waiting and acting.²

In a similar way, Christian theology often reflects on home as a journey using the metaphor of being on a pilgrimage and temporarily establishing a home on earth, yet it is not the final destination. This acknowledgement of the centrality of longing for home, as part of its very definition, can help churches create room for other people and ideas and avoid reified definitions of home and belonging. Churches can also acknowledge their own location on borders, including between new and old forms of religious practices, between the political and the religious, and between settled and seeking.

For this reason, theologian Polak and others suggest that considerations of home should begin from the perspective of migrants.³ As theologian Elaine Padilla argues, instead of centering nation-states’ definitions of who does or does not belong, we would do well to consider border spaces as generating new social definitions, including new understandings of home.⁴ Considering border spaces reveals the complexity of home that is often overshadowed by entrenched and sentimental definitions of home. Home has most often been defined either by nation-states or by comfortable

1 Ayata, “Prologue.”

2 Joisten, *Philosophie der Heimat*; Ralph and Staeheli, “Home and Migration.”

3 Polak, “Migration as a Sign of the Times.”

4 Elaine Padilla, “Expanding Space: A Possibility of a Cavernous Mode of Dwelling,” in *Contemporary Issues of Migration and Theology*, ed. Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan, Christianities of the World (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 69.

personal associations. Yet many scholars and writers advocate for considering home through the lens of diaspora, migration, and multiplicity.⁵ It is at these interstices that home emerges.⁶ Acknowledging these intersections offers an opportunity to destabilize home from its moorings as fixed and unchanging. The following reflections on the OKE's relationship to the public sphere and its theological engagement with a contested home, including themes of isolation, grief, and vulnerability, serve to broaden definitions of home.

9.1 Engaging in the Public Sphere

In this section I consider how churches can expand their understanding of home and migration and reclaim practices that deepen their connection to place *while also* acknowledging home as both complex and contested. In other words, how can churches take seriously the importance of place without becoming entrenched in established definitions of home and belonging? And what is a possible and productive theological engagement with home as it is seen through the lens of asylum-seeking? In a similar way, Grau asks several theological questions (referenced in Chapter 2) about how to live generatively within the tension between migrant and settled theologies.⁷ These theologies are, on the one hand, the Exodus, and, on the other hand, settlements and land claims. She challenges Christians to not only focus on the Exodus narratives but to also take seriously the stories of settlement, including the biblical stories of Israel's eras of establishing kingdoms and holding slaves.⁸ To do this she asks:

How do we reroot ourselves and become people of the land wherever we are? How do we understand land and home on a planet where a changing climate is forcing many to migrate? What in the narrated changes and shifts of population allows the preservation of important cultural elements, while being open to other cultural practices? What would be a viable theological engagement with land, community, and livelihood seen under the aspect of migration?⁹

These questions challenge normative assumptions about place and land that have undergirded expansionist and missionary tendencies of the church. Christian the-

5 R. P. Paudel, "Unholy Home: Cultural Encounter of Diaspora in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Name-Sake*," *NUTA Journal* 6, no. 1–2 (2019): 71, <https://doi.org/10.3126/nutaj.v6i1-2.23231>.

6 Joisten, *Philosophie der Heimat*, 33.

7 Grau, "Circumambulating Exodus-Migration-Conquest."

8 Grau, "Circumambulating Exodus-Migration-Conquest," 15.

9 Grau, "Circumambulating Exodus-Migration-Conquest," 12.

ology also identifies with a migration history through the Israelites' exile as well as Jesus' itinerant ministry and welcoming of the stranger.

In fact, Christianity has also been affiliated with a settled history and associated with established institutions and governments. These questions highlight tensions raised in this book between home, place, and migration. Who can claim home, and where and under what circumstances can it be claimed? Home is often evoked as an ideal, desired space, but it is also a concept that motivates political and social action, both to protect and delimitate. For example, the Offene Kirche Elisabethen created Projekt DA-SEIN due in part to their access to physical infrastructure, funding, and community connections, including the Swiss religious and governmental systems. Yet, the OKE also created Projekt DA-SEIN *because* of their willingness to live within the asymmetry of being both settled and migratory.

One answer on to the question of how to engage home and place without resorting to entrenched definitions of home is to foster a deeper engagement with the public sphere. In this vein, Padilla explores the tensions between global connectivity and local identity, writing: "On the one hand, there may be a universal welcome; on the other, a localization of origins may lend itself to entrenched views on identity."¹⁰ As seen at Projekt DA-SEIN, teaching local customs, language, and practices often becomes a focus of the program, despite a desire for more convivial and balanced relationships. This emphasis on helping often defines ways that churches respond to migration, with a focus on direct service and pastoral care.

Projekt DA-SEIN's response to migration reflects unique political and ecclesiological qualities. As an urban church in Switzerland, the OKE prioritizes responding to issues that impact their local environment. Attending to the city and the well-being of its residents is at the heart of the church's theology of openness, which demands an inclusive response to the social and demographic character of the city. In this way, the Offene Kirche Elisabethen occupies a specific place in the context of Basel and responds politically as well as religiously to the city, including the asylum-seekers who reside there. The OKE attends to the intersection of the personal and political through Projekt DA-SEIN, through hosting cultural and social events, and through the church's physical openness. Thus, the OKE prioritizes community at the level of the city by attending to the needs and realities of the urban context and acting politically to engage and care for all members of the greater community. This acknowledgment of a political response has repercussions for the discourse on home. While home is often understood at the personal level as household and family, the OKE's focus on the city expands home beyond the personal and into the public and urban space.

10 Padilla, "Expanding Space," 65.

As Hannah Arendt posited in *The Human Condition*, the social emerges at the intersection of the personal and political.¹¹ While the city might provide housing to asylum-seekers, *living* in the city, perhaps even finding *home* in the city, demands far more. On the part of churches, this demands an openness to the ways home is construed for newcomers, even if these are unusual or unfamiliar. Scholars such as Joisten and Bhabha likewise view home as deeply intertwined with the familiar and unfamiliar. As Bhabha writes, “The home does not remain the domain of domestic life, nor does the world simply become its social or historical counterpart.”¹² Instead, recognition of home as personal and public is often unsettling, especially when these new aspects feel alienating. Thus, that which is other from the dominant local definitions of home is considered outside that definition. This is seen within the asylum process, where integration is understood as a one-way project, compelling newcomers to adopt to the normative culture without similar requirements for the receiving community.¹³ Similarly, churches often “include” diverse practices instead of recognizing that the other already exists.¹⁴ Doing so reinforces the power differential of hospitality, where those with more access to resources can offer welcome and control access.¹⁵

For migrants, especially those waiting for decisions on their cases, home is shaped within the tension between the restrictive systems of their current place and the affective associations they have with family and community. Holton describes this dialectic of home as consisting of locations that shape people’s everyday lives and of the affective feelings they generate, such as security and belonging.¹⁶ This can generate a tension in home between its locality and its existentiality. Ahmed describes these aspects of home as a place of sensory and embodied experience (in the lived locality) and a place of identity formation (consisting of affective and imagined experiences).¹⁷ The OKE and Projekt DA-SEIN seek to bridge these two poles of connectivity by bringing the local community together – connecting both asylum-seekers and longer-term residents. It can be argued that Projekt DA-SEIN exists in a liminal space between the precarious situation of asylum-seeking and the established government and social systems of Switzerland, including churches.

11 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959), 26–27.

12 Homi K. Bhabha, “The World and the Home,” *Social Text* 31–32 (1992): 141, <https://doi.org/10.2307/466222>.

13 Mey und Streckeisen, “Integration Von Ausländern.”

14 Richard Fenn, “Diversity and Power: Cracking the Code,” in *Making Room at the Table: An Invitation to Multicultural Worship*, ed. Brian K. Blount and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale (Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 65.

15 See: Derrida and Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*; Dufourmantelle, “Hospitality”; Russell, Clarkson, and Ott, *Just Hospitality*; Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*.

16 Holton, *Longing for Home*, 17.

17 Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 89–90.

The OKE strives to build community outside of dominant frameworks of power and definitions of belonging. Dominant frameworks can reinforce hierarchies of power, especially hierarchies that exoticize or other those who fall outside accepted definitions of belonging. These frameworks exist in political systems as well as in ecclesiological settings that prioritize existing structures. Projekt DA-SEIN's goal of offering asylum-seekers a "piece of home" is an acknowledgement that home is available even to those categorized as not belonging. In this way, Projekt DA-SEIN facilitates interdependence and relational agency through its welcome by creating a space to freely come and go, by limiting programming, by encouraging participants to engage as they choose, and by offering opportunities for participants to contribute their expertise. Within Projekt DA-SEIN, being together is emphasized, especially as it is reflected in a theology of convivence.¹⁸ Although convivence is a missional concept, it moves away from knowledge production that is one-directional. Convivence aspires to increase relational agency and decrease the hierarchical nature of helping and hospitality, shifting away from a model where those with more power serve those with less power. Instead, convivence acts to support the contributions of all participants, who are encouraged to share their expertise and leadership. Projekt DA-SEIN creates an open space for asylum-seekers to bring themselves, their concerns, and their contributions. Sharing stories and skills, negotiating power dynamics, and building networks, both vertical and horizontal, create opportunities for reciprocity (and also reveal efforts that sometimes fell short).

Focusing on the multiple impacts that shape understandings of home can help to decouple home from rigid definitions of place, which are often rooted in sentimental attachments that obscure the complexity of home and exclude that which is considered other. These complexities of home are rarely taken up in the face of localized social and political systems. How a church, which is both socially and theologically informed, responds to and acts within this debate speaks to its larger role in the public sphere. By attending to the needs of the city and the diversity of its residents, which includes recognizing asylum-seekers as part of the city, the OKE gestures towards an understanding of place that is both historically informed and open to expanding iterations of home. In this way, the OKE addresses both the local impact of migration politics and their own responsibility to respond to the city. For example, the OKE attends to the public sphere by acknowledging the global realities that have brought asylum-seekers to the places in and around Basel. On the one hand, technology and globalization have expanded connections and opportunities to engage with communities across geography. On the other hand, globalization has also intensified local definitions of identity and culture, leading to increased na-

18 See my discussion in Chapter 5 of a theology of convivence (*Konvivenz*), as developed by Theo Sundermeier.

tionalism and populism. International and national politics, as well as economic and social forces, shape specific urban contexts and the communities who live there.

A response to the local environment is a response to global issues. In this way, churches have the opportunity to broaden their definition of home by bringing a sharper lens to their particular social, physical, and political locations, by engaging more deeply with their place in the public sphere, and by broadening their response to global issues, including migration. Even as the OKE reflects aspects of the political systems of citizenship and asylum by focusing on integration and helping, it also asserts that home is not exclusively an established and settled concept related to territory and settlement. In doing so, it holds out hope for the possibility of a different future that is open to the unsettling aspects of home. This hope for a different future is especially relevant within the life-and-death reality of migration.

9.2 Theological Engagements with a Contested Home

The OKE acknowledges the presence of asylum-seekers and opens a space where they are not only served and welcomed but also invited to co-create. Drawing on theological commitments of openness, convivence, and ambivalence as well as values associated with home, such as security, belonging, and relationships, Projekt DA-SEIN offers a “piece of home” to asylum-seekers in Basel. Through relational agency, “being there,” and acknowledging the fullness of each person’s experience, Projekt DA-SEIN welcomes the varied histories of asylum-seeking and recognizes the potential of individuals, beyond their need for asylum. Projekt DA-SEIN opens a co-creative space for the city to negotiate what it means to live together, in the original spirit of convivence, living well together.¹⁹ Drawing on the model of Projekt DA-SEIN, this section considers a possible and productive theological engagement with home as seen through the lens of asylum-seeking. To do this, I elaborate on three examples of how “being there” offers this engagement with home through disrupting isolation, grieving and remembering, and engaging vulnerability. By disrupting isolation and providing opportunities for grieving and remembering, the OKE creates a space that counters dominant interactions with asylum-seeking. In addition, I reflect on vulnerability and its challenges in relation to home and convivial relationships.

9.2.1 Disrupting Isolation

Projekt DA-SEIN embraces several approaches that are counter to the dominant narrative of asylum-seeking. First, the OKE and Projekt DA-SEIN offer an alterna-

19 Bliese, “Convivence and Globalization,” 235.

tive space to the isolation of asylum-seeking. The politics of asylum-seeking occur in a context of death and isolation. From unseaworthy boats crossing the Mediterranean Sea, to overcrowded refugee camps, to the circumstances that cause people to flee in order to preserve their lives – asylum-seeking is a life-or-death project. When arriving in a country to apply for asylum, bureaucratic systems work to keep asylum-seekers in isolation. While Switzerland offers basic sustenance to asylum-seekers, these accommodations also separate them from other parts of Swiss society. Asylum-seekers are housed in asylum homes, given a modest stipend, and precluded from engaging in work, education, or other social programs. In addition to these tangible forms of isolation in Basel, there are also numerous losses, including the death of people along the way, people lost to the system or to traumatic experiences, losses of family due to distance, and losses of not being able to fulfill cultural obligations, such as caring for aging parents.

This experience of isolation was revealed in comments and conversations with asylum-seekers. One man from Afghanistan lamented that in the neighborhood in Basel where he lived, he often said hello to people but did not get a response.²⁰ Another man from Afghanistan, who had studied art, expressed disappointment that he did not have a place to do his art since the space of the asylum home was so limited. Rooms are often shared, common spaces are crowded and not always well-maintained, and privacy is limited.²¹ Due to the traumatic experiences of fleeing and the uncertainty of their present circumstances, it was not uncommon for asylum-seekers to report that they had trouble sleeping or concentrating. Several asylum-seekers shared that before coming to Projekt DA-SEIN, they stayed in their rooms in the asylum home and did not interact with others. In addition, isolation occurs through traumatic experiences and the loss of physical, economic, social autonomy as well as the experience of not being able to pursue significant life milestones, as explored in Chapters 7 and 8. Many asylum-seekers tried to distance themselves from the stress of isolation through focusing on meeting requirements, through coping mechanisms such as smoking, or through engaging in activities at Projekt DA-SEIN or at other organizations.²² One asylum-seeker told me that “It is not good to be sad.”²³ He told me that his mother always taught him that Allah likes it when people

20 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, July 26, 2018: 20180726_DA-SEIN_Input_v1_PO, Pos. 228.

21 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, November 21, 2018: 20181121_1AS_DA-SEIN_II, Pos. 3.

22 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, April 12, 2018: 20180412_18AS_DA-SEIN_II, Pos. 6; Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, July 13, 2018: 20180713_3AS_IN, 123–37; Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, February 15, 2018: 20180215_2AS_DA-SEIN_II, Pos. 15.

23 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, February 15, 2018: 20180215_2AS_DA-SEIN_II, Pos. 16.

laugh. She told him that when he is with others and makes them laugh, then God is also laughing, and that is good. He always remembered this story and, in Basel, he began to engage with others, make friends, learn German, and attend Projekt DA-SEIN.²⁴

This diverse community of people and experiences at Projekt DA-SEIN counters the dominant approach to asylum-seeking, which separates those in the asylum process from the wider Swiss community while also insisting they make efforts to integrate and adopt the “Swiss way of life.”²⁵ Several asylum-seekers told me they appreciated Projekt DA-SEIN because they could learn about people from other countries and connect with them despite having different backgrounds.²⁶ Projekt DA-SEIN attempts to create an ephemeral community that is different from the asylum system and that interrupts practices of isolation. Projekt DA-SEIN counters the isolation of migration by offering experiences of home through convivial interactions of sharing time, food, and stories.

Projekt DA-SEIN disrupts isolation through everyday activities such as dropping by, having conversations, playing games, cooking meals, and negotiating relationships. In doing so, Projekt DA-SEIN interrupts the experience of isolation. It is a political act to shape practices that counter a context where isolation is part of the systematic treatment. Simply being invited into a Swiss church to meet and interact with people who live in Basel is unusual. During my time at the program, there were many intentional moments of creating this political community. New asylum-seekers were picked up and introduced to the program, including a group of women who had recently arrived from Eritrea, and trips were organized to cultural and social events.²⁷ Yet even beyond these specific actions, the political intention of building community together, as reflected in a theology of convivence, motivated and infused the program, its activities, and its ideals.

While people often meet in homogenous groups in churches, Projekt DA-SEIN is a heterogeneous community. There is a diversity of asylum-seekers, though they share a similar path, as well as a community of diverse Swiss residents who are interested in engaging with asylum-seekers. They are religious and non-religious, young and old, and Swiss citizens and non-citizens, including ex-pats or migrants who are

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- 24 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, February 15, 2018: 20180215_2AS_DA-SEIN_II, Pos. 16.
- 25 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, FDJP, Foreign Population and Asylum Statistics 2018.
- 26 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, July 13, 2018: 20180713_3AS_IN, Pos. 378–82; Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, July 5, 2018: 20180705_2AS_IN, 149.
- 27 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, July 11, 2018: 20180711_DA-SEIN_v2_PO; Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, July 12, 2018: 20180712_DA-SEIN Wanderung Reigoldswil_v2_PO; 2 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, May 30, 2018: 20180530_DA-SEIN_v2_PO.

more established. Even without knowing a lot about each other, the project creates a sense of community grounded in simply being there together.

In addition, Projekt DA-SEIN asks what people from different backgrounds can bring to Swiss society. While this sometimes focuses on food, cooking, or arts, there is an openness to diverse opinions, an appreciation of the skills and knowledge asylum-seekers bring, and an acknowledgement of the limited opportunities many of them have to use and share these skills in Switzerland. The program creates opportunities for acknowledging asylum-seekers in ways that Swiss integration requirements do not, and it supports them as much as is legally and practically possible to secure jobs or succeed in their asylum applications. Acknowledging the range of what asylum-seekers bring can serve to counter isolation by offering them opportunities to lead, teach, and share their skills. Projekt DA-SEIN creates a space that allows for people's potential, even if it is limited in the moment. In this space, asylum-seekers project themselves into a livable future by acting where they can.

9.2.2 Grieving and Remembering

Another way of attending to the situation of asylum-seekers and countering isolation is to create space for practices of grief. During many conversations and interviews, I listened to stories about grief and loss. Expressions of grief usually fell into two categories: grief, loss, and longing for the people and places that were left, and grief, uncertainty, and powerlessness in the face of the asylum process, its rules and regulations, and the length of time the process took. In addition, grief emerged from past traumatic experiences, including lengthy imprisonments of themselves or family members, and the difficulty, pain, and fear endured while traveling to Europe, including imprisonment, hunger, extortion, and imminent threats to life. Asylum-seekers were faced with the precariousness of their own lives, which was often experienced in boats on the Mediterranean. Many people expressed the difficulty of fleeing home, traveling to Europe, and now waiting for years without resolution of their asylum applications. This difficulty was also seen in concern about when and if they would be able to see their family again.

In addition, there was grief due to lost opportunities as a result of bureaucratic regulations, age, and other limitations. While many people I spoke with had excelled at school, held leadership roles in their communities, or dreamed of leading particular lives, their opportunities in Switzerland were limited, even if their asylum applications were accepted. It was not uncommon for asylum-seekers to tell me their actual age, which often varied from their official age because some opportunities, such as schooling, are limited by age requirements and because there are advantages to being young. In addition, some Swiss cantons had more generous programs for asylum-seekers than others. I noticed this in particular around access to Ger-

man courses, which varied depending on the canton where an asylum-seeker was assigned.

The Offene Kirche Elisabethen and Projekt DA-SEIN's value of ambivalence provides opportunities for engaging in celebration and joy as well as grief and loss, including through aesthetics and art. At Projekt DA-SEIN's festivals, asylum-seekers shared original poetry, music, and songs from their countries of origin, participated in dance and performance pieces, and created visual art and short films about their experiences. At the Projekt DA-SEIN fall festival, I offered an opportunity to create collages about home. Often the images selected conveyed longing – a field of flowers that were reminiscent of the flowers that bloomed during spring in that person's country of origin, or religious images that spoke of a sense of being protected.²⁸ At the program after dinner, often when everyone was engaged in chores, it was common for someone to play music from their country of origin, which often caused people cleaning in the kitchen to start singing the lyrics and dancing. Songs specifically about longing and grief were also shared. One day an asylum-seeker described a song from Iraq. The song said: "If you lose gold, you can always buy more gold. If you lose your home, you cannot get it back."²⁹

In the face of tragedies that cannot be resolved, it is important that there are places that provide a space where grieving is possible. Projekt DA-SEIN offers an example of how grief is acknowledged, without forcing asylum-seekers to tell their stories. It was an emphasis of the program to avoid prying questions or direct inquiries about stories of fleeing; these inquiries can be traumatic and unwelcome. Yet, building relationships and trust creates places where stories might emerge and be shared. In addition, practices of the program provided opportunities to acknowledge grief in a way that allowed grief neither to be productive, in terms of illustrating a point or legitimating a claim for asylum, nor to be fully resolved or healed. In this way, asylum-seekers were able to step outside of the extractive grasp and outside of a focus on their "pain narratives," which serve bureaucrats, academics, and interested citizens at the expense of the personal stories of asylum-seekers and cultivate a singular focus on their pain.³⁰

Projekt DA-SEIN creates opportunities to connect in the midst of grief as a political act in the context of asylum-seeking. The OKE, by creating a space for grief, creates a space for life. Judith Butler offers a concept of the "grievability of life," arguing that only under conditions when loss would matter does life appear. Butler

28 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, November 3, 2018: 20181103_30AS_Herbstfest_II.

29 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, August 23, 2018: 20180823_DA-SEIN_v1_PO, Pos. 10.

30 Tuck and Yang, "R-Words."

writes, “Precisely because a living being may die, it is necessary to care for that being so that it may live. Only under conditions in which the loss would matter does the value of the life appear.”³¹ This “grievability of life” is unequally applied. In many circumstances, certain lives are more grievable than others. This has been seen in the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected some countries and racial and economic groups more severely. Other examples are found along the U.S.-Mexico border, where one deterrent strategy is to allow for the possibility that people will die while attempting to cross the desert, and in global inequities in access to health care and life-saving measures. The question of whose life is worth grieving is a political question.

In Basel, considering the grievability of the lives of asylum-seekers is likewise a political question. For Projekt DA-SEIN, grief is considered not only in retrospect, but also in its future possible iterations. The results of an asylum interview, the possibility of securing work or schooling, and even the ability to connect with family and friends or to learn German all impact the grief that is possible in life. Likewise, Butler’s theory considers the potential for grief as something that energizes and supports life. “[G]rievability is a condition of a life’s emergence and sustenance,” Butler writes.³² Without the potential for grief, life is not really life. Similarly, Martha Nussbaum argues in her philosophy of compassion that compassion entails judgments about the significance, worthiness, and connection we feel for those suffering.³³ Nussbaum goes on to say that compassion emerges only when a common human worth and vulnerability are acknowledged.³⁴ By caring for the lives of asylum-seekers, offering compassion, and celebrating and grieving losses, the OKE broadens definitions of who matters in the local definitions of home.³⁵

Projekt DA-SEIN also provides opportunities for collective expressions of grief. This occurs through Christian practices, such as remembering the dead on All Saints Day, and community rituals, such as gathering to send prayers and thoughts to a community member detained under new asylum laws (see section 6.2). These rituals of remembrance were often opportunities to acknowledge the loss and trauma with which many asylum-seekers live. At Easter, the story of Jesus’ last supper was presented in the context of Jesus’ solidarity with the poor and with those who lack political and social rights. Good Friday, the commemoration of the crucifixion of Jesus,

31 Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (Verso, 2009), 14.

32 Butler, *Frames of War*, 15.

33 Lisbeth Lipari, *Listening, Thinking, Being: Toward an Ethics of Attunement* (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), 180.

34 Marta Craven Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, 8th ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

35 Butler, *Frames of War*, 14.

was contextualized within the sadness and grief that is part of every life and is recognizable in our own disappointments and regrets.³⁶ On All Saints Day, a small bonfire was lit in the courtyard and the significance of remembering the dead was explained, including the theological roots of the holiday and the common rituals and practices around death. Notecards were passed out where asylum-seekers could write the name of someone who had died that they wanted to remember. These were then added to the fire, along with prayer cards that had been left in the church throughout the year. This ritual used fire to symbolize the releasing of prayers, both those left in the church and those contained in remembering the dead. This ritual created room for remembrance of the diverse and sometimes difficult experiences of asylum-seekers, including loss, death, and grief. In addition, it involved asylum-seekers in engaging with the longing and prayers of others, by bringing the prayers left in the church to the fire and offering them to God. Handling the hopes and longings of others was a powerful reminder of the universality of hopes and prayers as well as of loss and longing. It was also a way to acknowledge and cultivate interdependence, even amid the differences in access to political and social capital.

Being together and praying together is a way of supporting one another and sharing in one another's griefs and joys. Prayers and solidarity were also offered during the Input Session, described in Chapter 6, that shared relevant information about asylum laws and about how these changes had already impacted a member of the Projekt DA-SEIN community.³⁷ Coming together created a way to acknowledge the difficult impact of these changes, even though there was little direct action that could be taken. It provided a place to deal with the difficult experience of losing a friend and colleague to a system that was outside of one's control. It also created space for volunteers to confront and wrestle with the limitations of their own ability to impact the asylum experiences of those who attend the program. Despite their more privileged situation in Switzerland, volunteers had little latitude to change the impact of these laws. Input Sessions created places to be together with what had been irrevocably lost through death and deportation as well as to confront feelings of powerlessness. This acknowledgement of shared experiences, as well as of the divergent impacts of legal and political systems, brings the issue of grievability into everyday encounters and offers a broader definition of home.

36 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, March 29, 2018: 20180329_DA-SEIN_v2_PO, Pos. 7.

37 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, April 25, 2018: 20180425_DA-SEIN_Input_v2_PO, Pos. 5–64.

9.2.3 Shared Vulnerability

The grievability of life is also rooted in mutual dependence and vulnerability. At its root, vulnerability means we are reliant on the earth and others for life. This vulnerability is a counterpoint to the focus on welcome and hospitality in outreach to asylum-seekers. As reflected in the discussion about hospitality, the ability to offer welcome and resources is predicated on having control over those resources (see section 2.1.4). At the same time, the perceived dichotomy of the poles of host-guest is tenuous – the designation of host or guest can change at any moment. Admirand writes, “As displaced persons and irregular migrants know, their perceived status by the dominant group in a society can literally change overnight.”³⁸

There is an undeniable vulnerability to seeking asylum. It is visible in the images associated with migrating, in the ways asylum-seekers are categorized and discussed, and in the aid that is offered, or not offered, to them. Yet, as explored when considering agency in Chapter 8, there are moments when asylum-seekers, despite limited cultural, financial, or political resources, develop practices that resist this host-guest divide. Yet, there is also a persistent tendency of volunteers and staff to view themselves exclusively as hosts. This pattern is reflected historically in Western Christianity, which has taken on the role of host in many contexts that it has entered. This tendency is especially recognizable in missionary work, when Western Christians entered other’s homes yet took over the role of teaching, organizing, and hosting. Jennings calls this “inverted hospitality,” a phenomenon that makes people into guests in their homes.³⁹ Similarly, Christine Pohl writes, “There is a kind of hospitality that keeps people needy strangers while fostering an illusion of relationship and connection. It both disempowers and domesticates guests while it reinforces the hosts’ power, control, and sense of generosity.”⁴⁰ Instead, recognizing the possibility of both affecting others and being affected by others means that an individual moves between both the poles of giving and receiving, of being host and hosting.

This relational agency demands vulnerability on the part of all those involved. Vulnerability is a shared human condition, as are the related conditions of exile, guest, and stranger. This “fundamental vulnerability,” as Bieler describes it, is the potential to impact and be impacted, to touch and be touched by others (see section 2.1.4).⁴¹ Bieler’s fundamental vulnerability emphasizes an openness to the vulnerability of life that is inherent to embodied existence, even as some people are more impacted by situational vulnerability, which is based on circumstances, such

38 Admirand, “The Ethics of Displacement and Migration in the Abrahamic Faiths,” 676.

39 Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 58.

40 Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (W. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 119.

41 Bieler, “Verletzlichkeit,” 169.

as asylum-seeking.⁴² This openness is also at work at Projekt DA-SEIN, as seen in convivence, interdependence, and relational agency.⁴³ Yet, centering shared vulnerability could further disrupt isolation and create more mutuality between asylum-seekers and volunteers.

For example, at Projekt DA-SEIN volunteers occasionally recounted losses and migration stories from their own families. When they shared these with me, they were often presented as being “not as bad” as what asylum-seekers experienced.⁴⁴ In the same way, when sharing these histories of migration with me, they were quick to qualify that these were nothing like the experiences of asylum-seekers being forced to leave. While this reveals an important truth, it fails to acknowledge that grief and loss are a shared experience. Instead, it serves to consolidate experiences of security with volunteers while experiences of vulnerability become the exclusive purview of asylum-seekers. Yet, both guest and host are impacted by the experiences of hospitality *and* hostility (to use Derrida’s polarity),⁴⁵ or the ability to help and the need to be helped. Thus, volunteers and staff naming and sharing their own vulnerabilities and losses, in appropriate ways, can further situate home in spaces of risk and vulnerability instead of only security and familiarity. Moving home beyond definitions of home as safe and comfortable centers mutuality and connection.⁴⁶

Scholars such as Joisten, Ralph, and Staeheli situate home not only in the perceived security of staying but also in the uncertainty of leaving. Others, such as Dufourmantelle, go further to locate belonging in the original human experience of exile (see the discussion in section 2.1.4).⁴⁷ This vulnerability as a quality of home reflects human reliance on the earth and others for life. Interdependence, depending on one another and the earth, and the relational agency it affords, are necessary conditions of creating home. This foregrounding of vulnerability can stand in contrast to a focus on welcome, as at the OKE. Acknowledging the shared condition of exile instead avoids outsourcing experiences of vulnerability to the other. Focusing only on the vulnerability of migrants creates opposing poles, where migrants are vulnerable and the Swiss are secure. Instead, true relationality enters into the risks of common humanity.

Catherine Keller writes about this in describing the importance of relational theology. “Every relation co-constitutes its world, for better or for worse. In the inter-

42 Bieler, “Verletzlichkeit,” 171.

43 Bieler, “Verletzlichkeit,” 169–70. Alternately, situational vulnerability is based on circumstances, personal, social, or structural, that create vulnerable conditions. This might include migration, illness, or discrimination.

44 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, September 13, 2018: 20180913_1FW_IN, Pos. 100.

45 Derrida and Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*.

46 Weir, “Home and Identity,” 8.

47 Dufourmantelle, “Hospitality,” 14.

stices of the creation, new connections are continually created. This mutual creativity offers little security. It creates at the same time our mutually assured vulnerability.⁴⁸ Keller's concept of "mutually assured vulnerability" argues that it is only when we acknowledge our shared vulnerability that collaboration and co-creative work towards a new world become possible. In a similar vein, theologian Dorothee Sölle acknowledges, in *The Window of Vulnerability*, that security is an illusion, particularly for those living in first-world countries.⁴⁹ This is illustrated in Chapter 6, where it was seen that many citizens of wealthier countries place a high value on this perceived security as a marker of home.⁵⁰ Writing in the chapter "We Want Peace, Not Security," Sölle argues, "Thus security, which we are supposed to receive in exchange when we forgo genuine peace, is increasingly neuroticized; our need for it becomes insatiable; one can never be secure enough."⁵¹ Like *Heimat* (see section 2.2.1), security becomes a seemingly innocent hope that belies its power to separate and perpetuate harm. According to Sölle, acknowledging a shared vulnerability is essential to counteracting the powerful systems that attempt to defend a sense of security at the expense of those who lack it.⁵²

Similarly, Miguel de la Torre argues in his book *The U.S. Immigration Crisis* that the virtue of hospitality is not the appropriate approach to the current immigration crisis.⁵³ Echoing Derrida, he writes, "To practice the virtue of hospitality assumes the 'house' belongs to the one practicing this virtue who, out of the generosity of their heart, is sharing her or his resources with the Other who has no claim to the possession."⁵⁴ Instead, de la Torre advocates for a deeper acknowledgement of how patterns of injustice, including U.S. political, military, and economic intervention, have created the conditions necessary for migration and a consideration of "the responsibility of restitution."⁵⁵ This discussion of restitution, shared vulnerability, and mutual responsibility is notably lacking in many conversations about migration. Instead, countries where asylum-seekers arrive are typically cast as the allowing host while the migrant remains the needy guest. As Jennie Molz and Sarah Gibson write in *Mobilizing Hospitality*, "If the immigrant is imagined as 'the guest,' the 'host nation' maintains its historical position of power and privilege in determining who is

48 Catherine Keller, *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys* (Fortress Press, 2005), 133.

49 Dorothee Sölle, *The Window of Vulnerability: A Political Spirituality*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Fortress Press, 1971).

50 Keller, *God and Power*, 133.

51 Sölle, *The Window of Vulnerability*, 4.

52 Sölle, *The Window of Vulnerability*, 4–5.

53 Miguel de La Torre, *The U.S. Immigration Crisis: Toward an Ethics of Place* (Cascade Books, 2016), 156.

54 De La Torre, *The U.S. Immigration Crisis*, 158–59.

55 De La Torre, *The U.S. Immigration Crisis*, 159.

or is not welcome to enter the country.⁵⁶ Considering the limitations of hospitality reminds us that true openness is both possible and severely limited by external circumstances. Instead, it is our shared vulnerability that ultimately deconstructs systems and builds new communities. As Russell writes, welcome is a two-way street that demands solidarity, partnership, and risk. Without this, even convivence can become one-sided comfort that stops short of mutuality and liberation.⁵⁷ Vulnerability can point the way toward an “emancipatory hermeneutics” that engages in the struggle for liberation *with* the other.⁵⁸

9.3 De-heimatizing Belonging

This book engages the context of asylum-seeking, specifically the experiences of asylum-seekers at Projekt DA-SEIN in Basel, Switzerland, in questions of home. It reveals aspects of home as they emerge amid the tensions of helping and agency, familiarity and unfamiliarity, conviviality and integration, staying and going, absence and presence, and waiting and acting. In this way, this book challenges the tendency of home to become a fixed and sentimental concept, used to bolster comfortable feelings and to exclude threats to familiarity and security through fixed definitions of place. Instead, it attempts to contribute to a new understanding of home by including even those who are between homes, who do not have homes, or whose homes are threatened.

The work of the Offene Kirche Elisabethen reveals a tension in home between its locality and its existentiality, between the concrete place of home and the affective associations with and longings for home.⁵⁹ In addition to these two poles, Sander adds a third element, the representative narrative (i.e. the expressivity of home).⁶⁰ How home is described and the stories people tell about it influence its reality, composition, and meaning. Given the narrative shape of home, it is worth considering the ubiquitous use of the word “home.” The term is often used, without much consideration, to indicate the place one lives, the people one considers family, and the affective associations that recall feelings of safety, security, and belonging. Yet, home is not a fixed entity; it shifts through lifetimes and with changes in places, relationships, and affectivities. As Knott writes in *The Location of Religion*, places “are repeatedly bounded and settled in common discourse only to be punched through

56 Jennie G. Molz and Sarah Gibson, “Introduction: Mobilizing and Mooring Hospitality,” in *Mobilizing Hospitality: The Ethics of Social Relations in a Mobile World*, ed. Jennie G. Molz and Sarah Gibson (Ashgate, 2007), 9.

57 Russell, Clarkson, and Ott, *Just Hospitality*, 122.

58 Congdon, “Emancipatory Intercultural Hermeneutics.”

59 Holton, *Longing for Home*; Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*.

60 Sander, “Religion am Third Space von Beheimatung,” 367.

and unsettled by alternative accounts. The particularity of a place arises from the complexity of its social relations and the sum of the stories told about it.”⁶¹ This narrative shape of home is grounded in relationships and affective experiences that are not fixed over time.

Yet, as seen throughout this book, stories told about home are often described in nostalgic or sentimental terms. This focus can serve to obscure the ways home can also be place of conflict, ambivalent feelings, and rigidity. As Ahmed describes, a definition of home “as a purified space of belonging” requires a narrative that is fixed and unchanging. Ahmed writes, “(T)his narrative requires a definition of home that is itself impossible: it stabilizes home as a place with boundaries that are fixed, such that the home becomes pure, safe, and comfortable.”⁶² Instead, as described in this book, home is often uncomfortable and unfamiliar. In other words, many definitions of home seek to eliminate the vulnerability that is embedded in home.

Given the ways home often obscures its more difficult sides, including its life-denying policies and practices, some scholars advocate for considering alternative ways of describing connections to place and experiences of belonging. Ayata calls this process the “de-heimatization” of belonging and advocates for decoupling home and belonging. She argues that *Heimat* (home) is not a neutral term and, therefore, cannot be neutrally reclaimed.⁶³ In Ayata’s example (see section 2.2.1), the German term *Heimat* has been distorted to support the comfort and security of some at the expense of others, for example through colonialism and restrictive migration policies.⁶⁴ As Blickle writes, *Heimat* is usually “something in the face of which one feels essentially innocent and taken care of.”⁶⁵ “De-heimatization” challenges this perceived innocence. Associating home with comfort and security creates a false sense of harmlessness that obscures the ways home does violence, for example through migration policies. This can be seen in how home has been forcibly defended from outsiders, debated during cultural shifts, and fortified through borders.

Instead, a consideration of home as contested and as emerging in border spaces acknowledges home as located in the in-between and amid multiplicity. It centers understandings of home as both concrete and local as well as defined by longing, imagination, and absence. This definition of home centers vulnerability, relational agency, grief and celebration, and familiarity amid unfamiliarity; it centers an acknowledgement of multiple social contexts and traditions and a curiosity about what new forms of being together might emerge. In this way border spaces can reveal other forms of belonging. Borders account for multiplicity, are steeped in the

61 Knott, *The Location of Religion*, 33.

62 Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 87–88.

63 Bilgin Ayata, “Der Siegeszug Des Heimatbegriffs”; Ayata, “Prologue.”

64 Ayata, “Prologue”; Blickle, *Heimat*, 6.

65 Blickle, *Heimat*, 149.

dynamics of shifting relationships, and are a nexus of beginnings and endings.⁶⁶ Thus border spaces reiterate that “Being at home is not the ending point,” as Padilla writes.⁶⁷ Instead, home is a beginning, and often contains multiple beginnings.⁶⁸

Considering home in more dynamic contexts reveals possibilities for renewed definitions of belonging that take seriously a world altered by migration and globalization. Padilla suggests that an alternate relationship to place and home might be called “dwelling hospitably.”⁶⁹ This dwelling expands on Derrida’s notion of building and dwelling to suggest that alternate spaces might entail “a sacred interdependence.”⁷⁰ As seen at Projekt DA-SEIN, interdependence and conviviality offer new iterations of belonging and being in community. While place is understood as socially produced, centering interdependence further highlights how place can generate new ways of being together. In practical, if imperfect, ways, “dwelling hospitably” exists at Projekt DA-SEIN as it creates a place located between worlds.

The OKE embraces its home in border spaces – as a City Church it is faithful both to its work as a Christian church and to its commitment to respond to the city where it is located. It embraces the privilege of being able to affect change and offer resources while also putting its focus and faith in the simple act of “being there.” By holding out the possibility of a “piece of home” for asylum-seekers in Basel, where otherwise they are considered the stranger and the other, the OKE and Projekt DA-SEIN express faith in a home that is more than political designations and more than security and comfort. Instead, home is an expression of mutuality and liberation that centers belonging. Several asylum-seekers expressed how the place of Projekt DA-SEIN provided something that was missing for them, namely connection to others and a place to belong.

The first time I attended Projekt DA-SEIN, I was like: “Oh my God, I’ve been looking for this place!” Because being a refugee with little money, you cannot go everywhere and make friends. You need a place where you can feel a bit comfortable and be judged for who you are. The project gave me a lot of things – I made a lot of friends, I learned about the culture and, I mean, I even made my German a bit better here [...] Even though sometimes my friends, they are kind of making fun of me: “Oh, you are going to the church, and there is a project in church.” And I say, “Well, for me church, mosque, or any God, all these are the same places.”⁷¹

66 Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*; Padilla, “Expanding Space.”

67 Padilla, “Expanding Space,” 57.

68 Padilla, “Expanding Space,” 63.

69 Padilla, “Expanding Space,” 54.

70 Padilla, “Expanding Space,” 66–68.

71 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, September 5, 2018: 20180905_6AS_IN, Pos. 329, 337.

For this asylum-seeker, the place of church and mosque were not defined by their doctrinal aspects, but instead by the places they represented in his life. For him, church was a place he had been searching for, without knowing that it was a church. What he found there was an experience that went beyond categories of church, mosque, or God. He found comfort, friends, opportunities for learning, and a place to go that was, at least partially, his own.