

Freedom to Move, Freedom to Stay,

Freedom to Return

A Transnational Roundtable on Sanctuary Activism

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This roundtable focuses on the concept of sanctuary in different national contexts of migrant solidarity activism, putting into conversation activists in the United States, Europe, and Australia. This transnational forum is based on interviews I did individually in 2017 with sanctuary and Palestine solidarity activists in the San Francisco Bay Area (Lara Kiswani and Sagnicthe Salazar); in London with an activist from the UK organization Right to Remain (Lisa Matthews); and with activists from a *sans-papiers* solidarity organization in Basel, Switzerland (Fabrice Mangold, Olivia Jost, Jana Haeberlein, Claudia Berger). These interviews were part of pilot research that I did in the context of growing public interest in sanctuary activism in the United States in the era of President Donald J. Trump, and my own desire to learn from experiences of migrant solidarity organizing in Europe. This dialogue also draws on a sanctuary activism workshop I co-organized in San Francisco in October 2017. “Community and Movement Defense in the Trump Era” involved forty community activists from different organizations in the Bay Area, the US–Mexico border, as well as from Europe and Australia (including Kiswani, Salazar, Haeberlein, Maurice Stierl from Germany, and Charandev Singh from Australia). It included a prominent faith leader of the US sanctuary movement from Arizona (Rev. John Fife); Oakland activists from the abolitionist organization Critical

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Resistance;¹ and a Syrian activist based in Switzerland (Osama Abdullah), who participated virtually as he was denied a US visa after Trump's travel ban. The San Francisco workshop sought to share strategies, link movements across borders, and foster historical connections drawing on the insights of sanctuary leaders of the 1980s.²

The virtual roundtable I have curated here, based on my interviews and the workshop discussion, creates a conversation among activists who were not all able to physically meet in the same room—precisely due to the obstacles posed by borders, in some instances. This format offers a multivocal dialogue between activists from diverse backgrounds challenging state, supra-state, and colonial borders. The roundtable also features images of posters and graffiti that visually illustrate sanctuary activism in public spaces—on windows, walls, sidewalks, and in rallies. These artistic interventions attempt to transform the public sphere in relation to migration and belonging. These artworks support the growing sanctuary city and immigrant solidarity movement, across national borders, by making visible solidarity with those migrants disappeared through detention and deportation.

The roundtable does not offer a seamless narrative or comprehensive account of sanctuary activism, nor does it document the (shifting) migration policies in these different countries. Instead, it emphasizes the activists' voices and struggles against border imperialism and the ways they understand the concept of sanctuary, highlighting the tensions among their varied uses of this term. Their insights also allude to the ways migration-control policies of different states inform one another and how activist strategies travel across borders. Some activists, such as Rev. Fife and Rev. Michael Yoshii, belong to faith-based sanctuary movements upholding Christian principles of aiding the oppressed and “welcoming the stranger”;³ in the United States, sanctuary churches have provided refuge to Central Americans fleeing US proxy wars in the 1980s and denied asylum in the United States, which evolved into the New Sanctuary Movement in 2007.⁴ Other activists—such as Abdullah, Matthews, and Stierl—are part of the global No Borders movement, a network of organizations in Europe that challenges state borders, demands freedom of movement, and organizes direct action. Most activists here engage with migrant solidarity activism based on antiracist, anticapitalist, and anticolonial principles that contest a liberal democratic approach to sanctuary, that is, one that seeks only to provide a safe haven to vulnerable immigrants without challenging the nexus among border regimes, Western imperialism, and neoliberal capitalism. My interest in learning from these activists emerged from my organizing with a Radical Sanctuary collective I cofounded at UC Davis in 2016 after Trump's election. Beyond resistance to deportations, we opposed white supremacy, fascism, neoliberal capitalism, heteropatriarchy, Zionism, and imperialism.

While I cannot delve into the specific historical, legal, and political details of each regional context, different policies and histories of migration shape the possibilities of sanctuary. Switzerland, a small nation-state with a very high percentage of

noncitizens due to restrictive citizenship laws, has intensely profiled and deported “illegal aliens” since the 1990s, with the “foreigners police” (*Fremdenpolizei*) often targeting Black migrants.⁵ There have been occupations of churches by activists, asylum seekers, and *sans-papiers* (undocumented) immigrants and an emergent “City for All” movement, based on the right to the city (for example, “We are all Zurich”), as I discuss below.⁶ Across these contexts, migration and asylum are increasingly charged with rising right-wing populism, particularly in UK debates about Brexit. Further, the UK has its own border-control regime distinct from that of the EU. Since 2007, the UK “City of Sanctuary” movement has formed a national network of cities such as Sheffield and Cambridge that have passed city council motions supporting local refugee communities. This movement has organized solidarity activities promoting a “culture of hospitality” for noncitizens and challenged indefinite detention as part of Right to Remain’s campaign, *These Walls Must Fall*.⁷ Australia is a laboratory for immigrant detention, and Prime Minister John Howard’s “Pacific Solution” made it a model of offshore incarceration in “remote island locations,” like Indonesia and Nauru, to isolate and conceal migrants and refugees.⁸ Activists like Singh have challenged Australia’s “border imperialism” and observed that it is “built on the foundations of the White Australia policy, racism, and imprisonment,” organizing campaigns with refugees and ex-detainees against policies of mandatory immigrant detention and refoulement.⁹ Singh’s insights crucially highlight how strategies for immigrant incarceration developed by states like Australia are adopted by other states.¹⁰

Different terms circulate in relation to sanctuary activism. For example, *sans-papiers* names undocumented migrants in Switzerland and France, and *solidarity city* describes sanctuary cities in Western Europe. “Welcome” culture often encapsulates the principles of sanctuary and solidarity with migrants in Europe. In the United States, too, no single definition of sanctuary exists, with sanctuary jurisdictions among municipalities, campuses, and congregations enacting a wide variety of meanings. In 2018, the Oakland mayor publicly defied the Trump administration’s crack-down on undocumented immigrants, as had California. In response, the Justice Department sued the state, opposing the sanctuary laws that prohibit cooperation between federal immigration officials and local and state law enforcement, and the US attorney general condemned Oakland’s “radical open borders agenda.”¹¹

The roundtable addresses three key themes: (1) the meaning of sanctuary in various campaigns that enact the right to freedom of movement across borders, in defiance of state laws, border policing, and imperial wars; (2) the binary of “good,” or deserving, versus “bad,” or unworthy migrants that characterizes the increasing institutionalization of migrant solidarity activism (for example, as demonstrated by the formal employment of sanctuary activists by nonprofit organizations); and (3) an abolitionist sanctuary model that goes beyond harboring undocumented immigrants and links border violence to carcerality, neoliberal capitalism, white supremacy, settler colonialism, and fascism.

Solidarity

Alyn Maria, US migrant solidarity activist, No More Deaths/No Más Muertes, Arizona—humanitarian organization that aims to end deaths, disappearances, and suffering in the US–Mexico border through direct aid and advocacy: We run a hotline and provide resources, such as water and medical care, for migrants crossing the [US–Mexico] border. We have a sanctuary camp on the border which was raided by border patrol agents, and they have apprehended border crossers. . . . The border has moved into the interior of the US, and they are testing practices on the US–Mexico border of collaboration between immigration agents and police.¹²

Sagnicthe Salazar, community organizer, Xicana Moratorium Coalition, Third World Resistance Network, Oakland, California: Our basic definition of sanctuary is providing safety in an imperial state where no place or person is safe. We want to reimagine sanctuary beyond the migrant rights movement. . . . There is a particular role for activists who are in the belly of the beast to address the impetus for forced migration from overseas. . . . We need to acknowledge that there are people who are not able to physically be at the workshop today [in San Francisco] due to racist border policies, such as Osama [Abdullah, who was denied a US visa].

Osama Abdullah, Syrian migrant and activist based in Zurich; volunteer with Alarm Phone/Watch the Med, a phone hotline run by European and North African activists supporting migrants crossing the Mediterranean and remotely assisting rescue operations (participating in the San Francisco workshop via Skype): I've been involved with the Alarm Phone (AP) since 2015. I help with translations into Arabic and with my knowledge of the Turkish-Greek border crossing context. My brother crossed to Greece when he fled Syria, also many of my friends. The AP plays a major role in supporting migrants—calling coast guards, sending out alarms on social media, providing language translation. Our team started with five people in Switzerland, and now we're thirteen. There is no hierarchy. People step in when they can. Our work comes from a moral compass; we want to change the situation and be active. In 2015, migrants collectively crashed the borders of the EU. We helped people directly then, but we never claimed to be a humanitarian organization. Our aim was to create a political movement based on solidarity.

We are part of an amazing network of organizations providing support and solidarity. For example, it includes the No Borders campaign in Greece and activists working on the ground who go to the borders and [migrant] camps, provide consultation for migrants, and give them advice on options and routes for travel. The situation keeps changing. I am also part of a new project, Moving Europe, which is a small group of activists, and Welcome to Europe, which does research on the [migration and asylum] laws in different countries in Europe and makes them accessible to people entering Europe, monitoring the situation at borders, human rights

Figure 1. Refugee solidarity flier posted in public spaces in the Bay Area after Trump's election. Designed by Jewish Voice for Peace.



violations, police practices. It is based on the principles of the right to information and the right to freedom of movement. Our solidarity network is based on antiracist principles: the belief that the laws are discriminatory.¹³ We believe in the right to shelter, the right to food, the right to documentation. We help people in flight—this might be considered a form of sanctuary for people in need; for example, someone at sea who's in distress. The concept of sanctuary is based on working to keep one another safe at borders and challenge exclusion. It is inspired by the Underground Railroad. . . . There are ordinary people traveling around Greece or Germany who give migrants a ride. There are churches, especially in Germany, that offer asylum and advocate for asylum seekers, and also in Switzerland where they have housed families.



Figure 2. Alarm Phone informational flier for migrants. Courtesy the Alarm Phone.

Rev. Mike Yoshii, pastor and faith-based activist, Buena Vista United Methodist Church,¹⁴ Alameda, California: We are involved with sanctuary work at different levels. There is an East Bay sanctuary network. We belong to the Methodist Church's national immigration task force, whose chair [Bishop Minerva Carcano] has an explicit focus on sanctuary; and there is the western jurisdiction of churches. . . . We are part of a statewide network of churches across denominations and faith groups, the Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity. Last April [2017], Buena Vista declared it was a sanctuary church. The city of Alameda has declared it is a sanctuary city.

Our church was always a sanctuary space. The congregation is historically Japanese and Asian American. It was founded in 1898 to serve immigrants from Japan facing racism. This is not today's definition of sanctuary. But in World War II, Japanese Americans who could not get housing lived in the church. . . . Not all

Figure 3. Welcome banner, Our Lady of Lourdes Church, depicting Mary and Joseph as travelers seeking shelter, Oakland. Photograph courtesy author.



churches are involved in justice making, but for us, it's core to living with our faith in action. It is based on the theology of supporting those who are oppressed and marginalized—also a spiritual sense of sanctuary.

Rev. John Fife, foundational US interfaith sanctuary activist and cofounder of No More Deaths/No Más Muertes, Arizona¹⁵: In the 1980s, Central American refugees arrived on the border of the US. There were detention facilities on the Southwest border, and legal aid clinics could not help Salvadorans to get asylum. With the help of a Catholic priest in Mexico, we smuggled people across the border into the church. We contacted congregations across the US and the movement for sanctuary started. This was a specific notion of sanctuary. We were testing: Could faith communities be centers of nonviolent direct action? The government did not want to indict us, though we were infiltrated by the FBI and had to deal with surveillance and entrapment. They indicted eighteen of us but the movement doubled during this time with support generated through public media. . . . We also sued the US government for violating refugee asylum laws. . . .

Faith communities can be effective sites of public resistance because the state doesn't know how to deal with faith institutions. Faith institutions are cross-

border, transnational institutions. But we need layers of organizing to resist attacks on our communities: in cities, universities, with labor. We need civil disobedience against the “civil initiatives” in order to protect people against the abuses of the government. . . . Sanctuary provided the context from which refugees could speak.

Rev. Yoshii, Buena Vista United Methodist Church: Churches were a key element in the sanctuary movement because they provide a physical space; the identity of the church is a deterrent to state intrusion, it is a space of moral authority, and so you can leverage the space and identity of the church for building the movement. Tactically, it creates a public debate vis-à-vis the state.

Fabrice Mangold, Olivia Jost, and Jana Haerberlein, Swiss and German migrant solidarity activists, Anlaufstelle für San-Papiers (Bureau for Undocumented Migrants),¹⁶ Basel, Switzerland

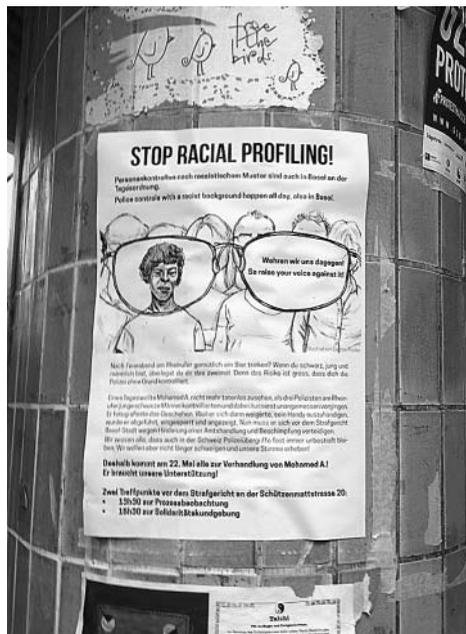
F: Some immigrants who wanted asylum and sans-papiers occupied churches in Switzerland and sought sanctuary, as well as solidarity activists.¹⁷ The demand at the time was for regularization of immigrants without papers. . . . “Kirchenasyl” (church asylum), which makes a church the sanctuary, . . . has no legal basis [in Switzerland], but it is a kind of tradition. Two years ago, the police raided a church in Basel, where some activists tried a revival of this tradition, and deported all the people who slept there.

O: In 2008, refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea, and other countries who did not get asylum also sought refuge in churches. Around 2001, the No One Is Illegal movement was launched in Germany;¹⁸ Swiss activist groups draw on organizing models in Germany and France. The French region in Switzerland is more progressive; there are more labor unions and more activism. It has been challenging for the migrant rights movement to sustain itself in Switzerland. . . . Switzerland is very small, very controlled, and it is difficult for undocumented migrants to escape control.

F: Unfortunately, there is no city or canton in Switzerland that would officially support undocumented people, which makes it difficult to start using the concept [sanctuary]. . . . Historically, there is a strong resistance to immigration in Switzerland and xenophobia and racism have long been a part of Swiss politics. Since September 11, 2001, there has been rising Islamophobia and racism here. It is difficult for migrants to get jobs due to racism; there is more profiling of Black people on the streets. There was the [mosque] minaret order passed in 2009.¹⁹ Citizenship in Switzerland is based on the principle of jus sanguinis (blood), not on jus soli, so antiracist principles are important in migrant rights. Our principles are that of no borders and we use human rights.

J: For me, the term “sanctuary” has a decidedly North American connotation. It is close to what in German is called “*Bleiberecht*”—right to stay—but seems to be used here much more in reference to actions and political positions you find in North American cities and that activists here would like to achieve, too, at some point in the future. . . .

Figure 4. Antiracist flier, Basel, Switzerland.
Photograph by author.



There seems to be some overlap with the term “urban citizenship” in demands to introduce a so-called city card in Zurich, for example, though the implications are different, because people here are obliged to carry an official identification document with them at all times; a solidarity card here just does not have the same power as in other places.²⁰ Urban citizenship refers to claims to the city/town made by migrants and nonmigrants alike, to equal participation and access to resources and rights. But the gap between sans-papiers and other marginalized people in Switzerland with citizenship rights seems to be much greater here than in the US, because even though there is poverty and there are homeless people here, the state still cares for everyone much more.

Lisa Matthews, British migrant rights activist, Right to Remain, London, UK: Many cities, such as Sheffield and Bristol, have passed symbolic statements of sanctuary.²¹ In the UK, deportation is used to describe those migrants with criminal sentences while “removal” is the term used to describe routine deportations. . . . There have been charter flights flying people back to Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, or Ghana. Some people refused to be deported on these commercial flights. There are also instances of pilots refusing to carry deportees against their will. There’s a long history of direct action resisting flights for at least ten years.²² Activists would book seats on their flights in order to prevent deportations. They managed to shut down a deportation from Stansted Airport. There have also been anti-raid actions in the UK and across Europe. . . . There are a lot of asylum seekers in Glasgow, and the “Glasgow Grannies” on housing estates had an alarm phone to allow people to



Figure 5. Right to Remain postcard against immigrant detention.

escape and resist officials. They actually managed to stop some dawn raids and blocked vans from leaving [with immigrants]. This has also happened in South London; for example, in Brixton people have chased out vans. There is an anti-raid network on Twitter. . . . I think this is the closest action to sanctuary activism in the UK. There have also been huge protests outside immigrant detention centers, and activists have blocked coaches leaving detention centers with Sri Lankan refugees being deported.

We were previously called the National Anti-Deportation Campaign but we had a major shift in our framework since 2013 to supporting grassroots groups and providing them with tools, building their [organizing] capacity. Earlier, the focus was only on the ultimate experience of deportation, but after prevention of deportation, we realized that life was still very precarious, and meaningless for many. So now we are called the Right to Remain. We developed a toolkit [about rights and options in the UK immigration and asylum system],²³ because we realized that after migrants and asylum seekers arrive here, they may face removal. Many are from Syria (about 85 percent of whom are granted asylum) and Iraq (only 10 percent are granted asylum). There is an appalling disparity in the granting of asylum, and there is very low acceptance of Afghan asylum seekers.

Lara Kiswani, Palestinian activist; Executive Director, Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC), San Francisco;²⁴ organizer with Third World

Resistance Network, Bay Area: Sanctuary is a form of community self-defense. The attacks on immigrant communities are also attacks on community organizing. So we need to defend communities and also defend our movements under Trump. There has been a criminalization of dissent. We need to organize defense at meetings, at protests, against digital surveillance and entrapment of young Arab males on electronic media. We need to consider the intersections of fascism and Zionism. For example, Arab and Muslim communities and refugees are dealing with forced migration due to wars. The same countries targeted for war are also the countries listed in the travel bans. AROC tries to lift up these contradictions and show solidarity with other communities also experiencing immigration exclusion.

There has been a politicizing of Arab communities here after Trump's ban and the attacks on immigrants. Many of them came out to SFO [airport] for the travel ban protests. . . . Thousands of people have signed up to volunteer for the rapid response network in the Bay Area [to support undocumented migrants facing ICE raids]. Currently there is greater awareness and publicity of deportations, but after 9/11 there was less visibility of deportations of Muslims and Arabs, greater fear, and those who were targeted felt more isolated. Now we're reaching out to them in their neighborhoods and workplaces.

Charandev Singh, activist and paralegal, RISE (Refugees, Survivors, and Ex-detainees), Melbourne, Australia: RISE is a refugee-led organization that promotes a radical notion of solidarity based on indigenous sovereignty.²⁵ . . . Australia is a major laboratory for border control, and it is a site of extreme carcerality. Aboriginal people [in Australia] are the most incarcerated indigenous people on the planet.²⁶ . . . There is indefinite detention of immigrants and asylum seekers in Australia which is arbitrary and mandatory, in theory, till death. This also includes detention of stateless people. There is total privatization of immigrant detention and a normalization of this carceral infrastructure. Carceral colonialism in the Pacific includes offshore prison camps run by Australia in Nauru and Papua New Guinea. . . . Over two thousand people have died crossing the sea [to Australia].²⁷ Since 2001, Australia has had a military blockade in the North Sea to deter migrants and stop people leaving to seek asylum. Australia has deported refugees to war zones and supports militias in other countries who obstruct asylum seekers.

Maurice Stierl, German scholar-activist, Watch the Med/Alarm Phone (AP), Frankfurt, Germany: There are similar forms of policing of migration across national borders at what are now global frontiers. . . . In 2015, 1 million people crossed the Mediterranean. . . . Now we see the closing of land routes for migration, increased deportations, a strengthening of Frontex [the EU border control agency], and a delegitimization of activists and humanitarian NGOs who support migrants. But the legacy of the long summer of migration in 2015 is that new communities formed in Europe, and new structures of solidarity resisting detention and

deportation and the criminalization of migrants. The AP was founded in 2014 and is a form of flight help.

We also should note that migrant communities are already providing sanctuary as they facilitate unauthorized movement. . . . Some AP members are former migrants who crossed borders. We are committed to freedom of movement and creating safe spaces for precarious people on the move. . . . There has also been a shift to the right in Europe with greater xenophobia and a division between “economic migrants” and “refugees.” We need to move beyond humanitarian approaches and hierarchies of care.

“Good” vs “Bad” Migrants and Refugees

Fabrice, Olivia, Jana, Claudia; Anlaufstelle für San-Papiers

F: Switzerland is good at splitting up migrants into different categories: the “good” refugees vs. the “bad” refugees. . . . There is a double divide, first, between “expats” (highly qualified, welcomed migrants) and other migrants, basically refugees. In the latter category, there is a divide between real refugees and “adventurers,” who just seek work or a better life. There is a very strong tendency to put as many people in the adventurer category, no matter why these people came or what is threatening them in the countries they left. . . . Switzerland is one of the most conservative countries in Europe (let’s say, central and western Europe) when it comes to migration politics and is also at the forefront with new “migration management strategies.”²⁸ . . . Because of the sharing of data across the EU, many are trapped due to the collaboration between [EU] states. The only thing the EU states can agree on is having [migrant detention] camps in North Africa! Frontex is exporting borders. They have also created “hot spots” inside EU borders so they can check asylum seekers and send them back from there.

O: There is an image of “good” migrants who are hard working. People begin to define themselves via these categories and internalize them. We want to challenge these binaries, but it can be hard in organizing not to fall into these categories. Illegal immigrants are not as organized; they just want permits. A lot of our work is focused on people who work and want permits, so we end up supporting these immigrants too. The core issue is freedom of movement. . . . But some migrants do not agree with the political framework of activists. Some No Borders activists are dismissive of migrants who don’t believe in “no borders, no nations,” and some migrants are nationalist, so in some cases there can be contradictions between activists and migrants.

J: I myself really believe in the double-barreled approach of the Anlaufstelle: to try to change the current social order towards a plural society in which people may lead their lives self-determined and independent of their residence status. It takes political action and argumentation to fight for these aims. At the same time, sans-papiers

remain in dire straits . . . so we also need to provide some direct help to them. No one is illegal. . . . Since the divide between welcomed “expats” [professionals working in pharmaceutical and biotech companies in Basel] and less educated refugees, asylum seekers and sans-papiers is so clear-cut, since there is no social consensus that sans-papiers have a right to stay here, it is hard to act politically, to lobby in public and make our points as Anlaufstelle clear. We always have to keep in mind that many people here—even in one of the most left cities in German-speaking Switzerland—don’t favor sans-papiers staying here, and that limits our possibilities of action.

C: There is a hierarchy among immigrants of those who work and refugees who don’t work. In Europe, in general there is more focus on refugees, on people on the move, and not so much focus on undocumented migrants, as opposed to the US.

Lisa, Right to Remain: The sanctuary model here—much of which is based on church activism—is generally about welcoming only asylum seekers (the “good” migrants). Many provide aid. But this act of welcome is often apolitical. Some nonprofit organizations also reinforce this state-sanctioned binary of the “good” vs. “bad” migrants and refugees . . . only advocating for those who are not criminalized.

Immigration is viewed in such a negative way in the major news media. In the Brexit referendum, immigration was a cipher for other things, such as deindustrialization, impoverishment. . . . There is racial scapegoating. But the polarization has galvanized people to come to protests and boosted the movement. After Brexit, there was a campaign called Day without Immigrants, drawing on the campaigns organized by Cosecha in the US [which called for a boycott and strike after Trump’s election]. We have drawn on the US movement-building model, such as the Dreamers movement.

Sagnicthe, Xicana Moratorium Coalition: There are divisions in Oakland and tensions between Black and Brown folks and between immigrant groups . . . for example, only 67 percent of [undocumented] youth benefited from the DREAM Act. There is a binary of “good” and “bad” immigrants. . . . We want to create unity among Brown folks and challenge antiblackness. Oakland Sin Fronteras is [a community organization] based on organizing against state violence, prisons, walls, [travel] bans, and policing. We show how police terror is linked to ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] and challenge internal divisions within our communities as well as the criminalization of youth and youth cultures.

Charandev, RISE: We need to remember that US and Western imperialism has played a role as wars and occupations are driving migration. It is summed up in the slogan, “We are here because you were there.” . . . We need to be careful not to create states of exception: sanctuary for some but not for others, or cages for some but not others. We need a radical challenge to carcerality. Australia is a prison nation, and an international crucible for incarceration.

Sanctuary and Abolitionism

Alyn, No More Deaths/No Más Muertes: International anti-immigrant policies are focused on the repression of social movements and political struggles. Can a sanctuary framework extend beyond “rights”?

Sagnichte, Xicana Moratorium Coalition: Schools are a place of education and also of sanctuary. We do workshops for educators with the Immigration Liberation Movement and . . . train teachers and support students in crisis. We need to reenvision the notion of safety. We’re educating families about a form of safety rooted in their neighborhoods and training first responders so they don’t have to call the police. . . . We want to end reliance on outsiders to the community. We’re also working with local business owners to support the community given the high level of policing [in East Oakland], surveillance, and deaths of youth. We have to do trainings block by block, school by school. We hold block parties where we can discuss organizing with the community. We involve gang-involved youth in community organizing and community art projects for decolonization, such as murals. The principle is self-determination.

Charandev, RISE: Aboriginal activism focused on refugee solidarity challenges the Australian state’s settler jurisdiction and exclusive control of national borders. Activists have created aboriginal passports and entered detention centers to welcome refugees and refuse settler logics. The work of RISE is based on an expansive notion of sanctuary that centers aboriginal sovereignty. This is a notion of radical sanctuary—radical in the sense of “deeply rooted.”

Border imperialism and carceral colonization are rooted in the colonization of indigenous people and repression of indigenous resistance. Centrally, we need abolitionist resistance. Aboriginal peoples in Australia have been defying borders for 229 years! . . . Indigenous and aboriginal sovereignty are important in this debate. RISE has a Sovereignty and Sanctuary campaign. The question is: How do we challenge the forces of power from which people seek sanctuary? How do we focus on the contexts from which people flee, so they can stay?

Lara, AROC: The slogan for the Bay Area sanctuary movement has been “No Ban on Stolen Land” [in response to Trump’s anti-Muslim/Arab/African travel bans].²⁹ We need to think about how these borders have emerged—they are colonial borders. . . . Sanctuary is a form of liberation and of self-defense of liberation movements.



Figure 6. Flier courtesy Arab Resource and Organizing Center, designed by Design Action Collective and AROC.

Rev. Yoshii, Buena Vista United Methodist Church: The question is also sanctuary from what? We need sanctuary from the manifestation of the military-security-industrial complex. The wall in Palestine is connected to the walls and fences on the US–Mexico border. We need sanctuary from the siege of policing and prisons. . . . Palestinians need sanctuary as a persecuted population. What is causing the refugee crisis in Palestine? There is a connection between Palestine and immigration. The military-industrial complex is connected to the [border] security complex. But these connections are not highlighted in relation to Palestine. For me, there’s also a clear connection to the legacy of Japanese American incarceration. . . . We need to get to the root causes of militarism and racism.

We also support sanctuary for LGBT persons and disabled persons. That is part of our statement in support of sanctuary. We see the interconnectedness and intersectionality of these issues as part of a broader notion of sanctuary that includes advocacy and accompaniment [for undocumented immigrants] as well as the right to housing.

Sharif Zakout, AROC: People who live in the Mission [neighborhood of San Francisco] today are generally supportive of sanctuary, but aren’t they also complicit in producing displacement via gentrification? What can we do to provide sanctuary in a city where people can’t afford to live?³⁰ Immigrants are being pushed out to rural areas that are not liberal communities or sanctuary spaces. . . . The meaning of sanctuary is safeguarding people, and information.

Fabrice, Anlaufstelle für Sans-Papiers: I would say that most activists [in solidarity with sans-papiers] consider themselves part of a movement that sees migration in the context of capitalism and the laws trying to control migration in the conservative upsurge in Europe.

Maurice, Alarm Phone: As solidarity activists, we work at the sub-state level to create safe spaces for migrants. But we are also focused on the right to health care, the right to education. We want to highlight subterranean knowledges and practices—knowledge that is under the surface—to create networks of solidarity. . . . The AP is focused on the right to freedom of movement. We want to challenge the punishing of acts of flight, and we are seeing the criminalization of humanitarian NGOs and vessels in the Mediterranean. For us, movement is “motion” and *also* political struggle.



Figure 7. Graffiti, Basel, Switzerland. Photography by author.

Lisa, Right to Remain: Our work questions who has the right to say that you have the right to remain. We want people to navigate the [immigration and asylum] system and offer a broader critique. There is lots of organizing that is focused on reform of immigration detention, but the end goal for us is abolition.

Conclusion

Contesting a liberal notion of sanctuary that narrowly focuses on migrant rights and humanitarian aid, the radical perspective expressed by these left activists offers an abolitionist definition of sanctuary that challenges state violence, carcerality, wars, and settler colonization, as well as Zionism. The goal is not to reform oppressive state institutions, as stated by Lisa, Charandev, and activists from Critical Resistance who participated in the workshop; rather, the goal is to challenge their very existence. For example, during protests in the US in summer 2018 against the Trump administration's "zero-tolerance" policy of separating migrant children from their parents at the border, some activists raised the slogan "Abolish ICE" and temporarily shut down ICE facilities.³¹ Jenna Loyd, Matt Mitchelson, and Andrew Burrige observe that "a key abolitionist tool" is "the analytic ability to understand how seemingly disconnected institutions of state violence—walls and cages—are interconnected." They argue, "freedom of movement and freedom to inhabit are necessarily connected."³² Migrant solidarity activism cannot be disconnected from challenges to neoliberal capitalism, austerity measures, and broader anticapitalist struggles, as Sharif suggests in highlighting the right to housing as a key plank for radical sanctuary activism in gentrified cities. Solidarity activists build these cross-movement connections, though in some cases migrants and refugees may not necessarily share their left politics, as apparent in research on squatter movements in solidarity with migrants in Europe.³³

Sanctuary can be based in official sites, such as publicly declared churches or local jurisdictions. But sanctuary is also created in unofficial spaces, such as migrant communities, as Maurice commented, and in everyday practices and activities. These constitute what Jonathan Darling and Vicki Squire call the "everyday enactments of sanctuary" that challenge "relations of privilege" in practices of providing residential sanctuary, where some offer safe harbor and others receive it.³⁴ Activists like Sagnicthe and Lara define sanctuary as community defense and movement defense. They thus link multiple attacks on the left—on migrant, Black, and Brown communities; on indigenous sovereignty; and on sanctuary activists by the state and fascist groups in different national contexts—and the need to defend all of these communities and movements *simultaneously*.

My interviews with activists in the UK and Europe also suggest that they had a particular understanding of sanctuary as a term imported from the US associated with formal sanctuary policies or actions that prevent deportation. Sanctuary as spatial refuge for undocumented immigrants in the Bay Area was operationalized most

frequently (at the time of this research) in church spaces and by interfaith networks challenging federal laws that illegalize people, as Rev. Yoshii and Rev. Fife described. But some critics argue that refuge in a church is, in effect, a form of incarceration related to a larger carceral apparatus, including immigrant detention centers, refugee camps, offshore prisons, and enclosures by walls.³⁵ For others, like Elvira Arellano, a well-known sanctuary leader who sought sanctuary in a Chicago church, “Sanctuary is not a place where you hide,” but a platform for publicly speaking “truth to the powerful.”³⁶ Furthermore, sanctuary is imagined, and organized, by Alarm Phone activists like Osama and Maurice, not as a spatial concept based on territorial safe haven but as *sanctuary in motion*—a form of “flight help” that defies EU border control in the Mediterranean Sea. Just as the Central American sanctuary movement of the 1980s drew on the history of the Underground Railroad, reviving a tradition of fugitive solidarity across land borders, this sea-based sanctuary conceives of the ocean as a space of resistance and disobedience, challenging inhumane state policies that make racialized migrant lives expendable through drowning and death.

Sanctuary activism also includes access to information about migrant passages and migrant rights, the “subterranean knowledges” Maurice describes. This knowledge of resources for survival unknown to the state constitutes what might be called an epistemic disobedience of borders. Knowledge of border crossings is a weapon that helps the “informed migrant” to “overcome the rising walls of defense meant to block entry into Europe” and North America.³⁷ The “Welcome to Europe” booklets translated into different languages that I saw in European cities—such as the Anlaufstelle office in Basel—and the “Know Your Rights” cards distributed by activists in the US provide information to resist the global borders regime.³⁸

The discussion with migrant solidarity activists also highlights their critique of a liberal conception of sanctuary, which is a point of ongoing debate in the sanctuary movement. In supporting immigrants who have been living in the US, the New Sanctuary Movement in some instances upholds the image of “good” migrants deserving of inclusion, as critiqued by Lisa in the UK context of faith-based sanctuary (see Paik 2017, 14).³⁹ The US sanctuary movement of the 1980s centered on solidarity with Central American refugees displaced by US imperial interventions, making this particular refugee figure the pivot for sanctuary, and explicitly linking political advocacy for Guatemalan and Salvadoran refugees with denouncing US interventions in Central America. That is, it was an anti-imperial movement, making connections with resistance to the Vietnam War.⁴⁰ In fact, US sanctuary cities emerged when Berkeley declared sanctuary for conscientious objectors in 1971, following the movement of church sanctuaries for war resisters in the late 1960s.⁴¹

Yet, these lessons from recent history have failed to translate into the current moment, in which the experiences of Syrian, Afghan, Yemeni, and (doubly displaced) Palestinian refugees remain largely absent in US mainstream discourse.

Trump's travel bans are glossed, including by activists, as a "Muslim ban," but this erases the ways in which they are specifically *racialized* acts of border exclusion that are *also* anti-Arab and anti-Black, a targeted "Arab/African/Muslim ban." Furthermore, though this is rarely mentioned, Israel has long banned Palestinian/Arab freedom of movement, with US state support. In addition, the US role in the catastrophic wars in Syria and Yemen is obscured in mainstream discourse about migrant rights, as is US violence in Central America (including in current discussions of the "refugee caravan" from Central America).

In contrast, the European "crisis" emblemized by the figure of the (Arab, African, or South Asian) refugee dominates debates about migration, even while a problematic hierarchy has been constructed privileging some as refugees deserving of asylum in Europe (Syrians) and devaluing others as supposedly "economic migrants" (Afghans, Africans). The enduring legacy of Western imperial interventions and the impact of disaster capitalism in the global South is here, too, evaded. Furthermore, the figure of the migrant/refugee is implicitly gendered—associated with Muslim, Arab, or Black males in Europe and criminalized Latinx males in the United States. A feminist critique exposes how the debate about migrant rights rests on ideas about deserving, heteropatriarchal families and biological kin networks.

The discourse about race, of course, varies widely across national contexts, yet it is important to consider the ways in which a US discourse about white supremacy can illuminate the white nationalist and right-wing populist backlash against migrants in Europe, many of whom are from formerly colonized nations. Concomitantly, a European left framework melding the principles of antifascism, antiracism, and anticapitalism can speak to the resurgence of these perspectives in US movements and the rise of the Antifa movement in the Trump era. The roundtable illuminates the ways in which the concept of sanctuary has traveled, across space and time as well over land and oceans, and evolved through persistent organizing, the journeys of people on the move, their struggles to stay, and their dreams of return.

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Notes

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1. Critical Resistance, a foundational abolitionist organization, mobilizes to end the prison-industrial complex. See criticalresistance.org/about/.

2. The workshop, as well as my research interviews in Europe, were funded by a Public Engagement Fellowship from the UC Davis Humanities Institute awarded in 2017.
3. Orozco and Anderson, *Sanctuary in the Age of Trump*.
4. See Golden and McConnell, *Sanctuary*; Houston, "Sacred Squatting," 184.
5. No precise data on the percentage of undocumented migrants exists, but estimates approximate 25 percent of the population is comprised of noncitizens, including an increasing number of undocumented migrants. See Wicker, "Deportation," 225–29.
6. My research was with activists from Basel and Zurich, in the German-speaking region of Switzerland, which is viewed by these activists as more conservative than the French-speaking region.
7. Darling and Squire, "Everyday Enactments of Sanctuary," 192–93. See also www.righttoremain.org.uk/blog/these-walls-must-fall/.
8. Mountz, "Mapping Remote Detention," 97. This strategy of island incarceration also operates in Guam, a US territory; Lampedusa, an Italian island near Tunisia; and Lesbos, the Greek island that has become synonymous with the "refugee crisis" in Europe.
9. See riserefugee.org/sanctionaustralia/. The "White Australia" policy refers to several historical policies of the Australian government that excluded nonwhite immigrants.
10. Clearly, differences in citizen rights exist between states. Citizenship can be based on *jus soli* (citizenship rights based on birth in the nation-state, nearly unconditional in the US) as well as *jus sanguinis* (citizenship by descent). In Switzerland, *jus soli* is not available and migrants must wait for over a decade to apply for citizenship (one of the longest periods for naturalization globally), while in the UK and Australia, there is restricted *jus soli*, as generally in the EU. See Lippert and Rehaag, introduction.
11. "US Immigration Attacks Oakland Mayor for Warning of Raid That Arrested 150," *The Guardian*, February 28, 2018, www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/feb/28/ice-immigration-raid-northern-california-oakland-mayor-warning; "Justice Department Sues California over Its 'Sanctuary' Immigration Laws," *The Guardian*, March 6, 2018, www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/mar/06/california-sanctuary-cities-lawsuit-immigration-justice-department.
12. This expansion of the border refers to the apprehension of immigrants inside national borders and escalating ICE raids in the US interior and the increasing incarceration of immigrants, including children. The border extends to one hundred miles within any territorial US border, and with the Trump "Wall" Executive Order, all US territory is considered border space for unauthorized crossers.
13. AP activists challenge the EU's border and visa regimes and Frontex, the EU border control agency, which have increased policing migrants attempting to enter Europe via the Mediterranean, thereby forcing migrants to take longer and more dangerous and deadly routes. See alarmphone.org/en/category/reports/.
14. Rev. Yoshii is a progressive faith leader and activist in the Bay Area at Buena Vista United Methodist Church, which has social justice committees and community partnerships focused on immigrant rights, Palestine solidarity, disability awareness, LGBTQ issues, and housing advocacy, and is part of the East Bay Interfaith Immigration Coalition. The church has a long history of providing support and refuge to displaced and oppressed communities. See www.buenavistaumc.org/.
15. Rev. Fife cofounded the sanctuary movement of the 1980s to provide support to refugees fleeing US-supported death squads in Guatemala and El Salvador and to mobilize churches to help refugees crossing the border in defiance of federal law, as Central

American refugees were not considered eligible for asylum. He was the first pastor to declare that his church, Southside Presbyterian, would be a sanctuary for refugees. In 1986, Rev. Fife was convicted, along with other activists, of violating federal immigration law and served five years' probation. Golden and McConnell, *Sanctuary*, 46–47. See www.trackedinamerica.org/timeline/sanctuary/fife/.

16. Anlaufstelle für Sans-Papiers is a migrant solidarity organization in Basel and the first support service for undocumented migrants in German-speaking Switzerland, established in 2002. It supports migrants seeking residence and work permits and provides legal counseling, medical consultations, information, and advocacy.
17. Switzerland (while not a member of the EU) signed an agreement upholding the Schengen Agreement, which unified the external borders of the EU while officially abolishing internal border controls, which made it more difficult for those outside Europe to enter Switzerland after 2008. No precise data exists for Switzerland, but undocumented migrants from the global South have increased. See Wicker, "Deportation," 225–29.
18. The campaign No One Is Illegal (Kein Mensch ist illegal) was launched in 1997 to support undocumented migrants and resist deportations, and led to a global network of antiracist and faith-based asylum groups.
19. The right-wing, Islamophobic Swiss People's Party generated the referendum banning all minarets, though only four minarets existed in the country. Nick Cumming-Bruce and Steven Erlanger, "Swiss Ban Building of Minarets," *New York Times*, November 29, 2009, www.nytimes.com/2009/11/30/world/europe/30swiss.html.
20. Campaigns for "We are all Zurich" have created unofficial citizenship cards to pressure the local government based on the right to the city. See Bauder, *Migration*, 95–101.
21. See detention.org.uk/brighton-hove-and-cambridge-city-councils-say-these-walls-must-fall/.
22. See www.righttoremain.org.uk/blog/the-swedish-students-protest-was-brave-and-remarkable/.
23. See www.righttoremain.org.uk/toolkit/.
24. AROC is a grassroots social justice Arab American community organization that also provides legal and community services for Arab immigrant communities in the Bay Area. See araborganizing.org/.
25. RISE is the first and only refugee organization in Australia governed by refugees, asylum seekers and ex-detainees: riserefugee.org/.
26. One in four indigenous Australians were in prison in 2011, despite indigenous Australians being only 2.5 percent of the population, and the rate of indigenous incarceration has risen rapidly with mass incarceration, accompanied by more deaths in custody. "Aboriginal Crime and Punishment," December 15, 2011, Crikey, www.crikey.com.au/2011/12/15/aboriginal-prison-rate-continues-to-rise-is-neoliberalism-at-play/.
27. John Power, "Australians Demand End to Manus Island and Nauru Refugee Centres," *Al Jazeera*, March 25, 2018, www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/australians-demand-manus-island-nauru-refugee-centres-180325101723423.html.
28. Hans-Rudolf Wicker notes that Switzerland now has an uncommon "infrastructural strength," with a "foreigners police," as well as "panoptically designed surveillance and repression" of immigrants ("Deportation," 227–28). The Department of Migration and Security has built emergency shelters, or what activist Claudia Wilopo calls an "invisible

- border or camp,” for rejected asylum seekers outside cities as part of a strategy of “containment and control” (interview, March 24, 2018).
29. #NoBanOnStolenLand was introduced by indigenous activists at the 2017 US airport protests against Trump’s travel ban targeting Muslims, Arabs, and Africans, that spread across the border to Canada. Lenard Monkman, “‘No Ban on Stolen Land,’ Say Indigenous Activists in US,” February 2, 2017, www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/indigenous-activists-immigration-ban-1.3960814.
 30. Housing prices in the San Francisco Bay Area have skyrocketed in recent years, partly due to the influx of tech company employees from Silicon Valley, leading to a housing crisis. Districts like the historically Latinx Mission neighborhood have become highly gentrified and unaffordable, leading to intensified antigentrification struggles.
 31. For example, Occupy ICE protesters in Portland blocked the entrance to the local ICE office and managed to shut it down temporarily, sparking similar protests in New York, Los Angeles, and other cities. Leah Sottile, “Portland ICE Protest Grows,” *Washington Post*, June 27, 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/national/2018/06/27/portland-ice-protest-grows-demonstrators-seek-abolish-agency-amid-immigration-crisis/.
 32. Loyd, Mitchelson, and Burridge, “Introduction,” 9–10.
 33. For example, radical activists might not believe in petitioning state institutions for papers, while migrants may want authorization to stay, and direct action or antinationalist politics may not always be shared by stateless refugees or undocumented migrants vulnerable to arrest and those involved in national liberation struggles; at the same time, there are unequal relationships between white solidarity activists and migrant squatters. See Mudu and Chattopadhyay, introduction. On the plight of Syrian refugees in the UK placed in substandard housing, see www.righttoremain.org.uk/blog/we-came-here-for-sanctuary-we-didnt-come-here-to-be-abused/.
 34. Darling and Squire, *Everyday Enactments of Sanctuary*, 191. Grace Yukich (“US New Sanctuary Movement,” 113) describes the range of activities beyond physical sanctuary in the New Sanctuary Movement as “radical accompaniment,” such as “legal, spiritual, and financial support.”
 35. Mielke, “Objectifying the Border,” 14–16.
 36. Cited in Caminero-Santangelo, “Voice of the Voiceless,” 102.
 37. Wicker, “Deportation,” 237.
 38. The Welcome to Europe booklets contain information in different languages for migrants entering the EU about migration, asylum, detention, and deportation policies in different European countries as well as resources for medical care, work, and safety at sea; see <http://wzeu.info/index.en.html>. There are various iterations of the Know Your Rights fliers and wallet-size cards that are intended to provide undocumented immigrants (and allies) what their legal rights are in encounters with federal immigration officials, local law enforcement, and FBI agents. For example, see www.aclu.org/issues/immigrants-rights/know-your-rights-discrimination-against-immigrants-and-muslims?
 39. Caminero-Santangelo, “Voice of the Voiceless,” 97–98.
 40. Golden and McConnell, *Sanctuary*.
 41. The Berkeley City Council resolution refusing city cooperation with federal laws regarding military service became a model for the City of Refuge movement in solidarity with Central American refugees. It also provided a context for resistance after 9/11 in different communities to racial profiling of Arab and Muslim Americans. See Ridgeley, “The City as a Sanctuary,” 219–22, 228.

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