

Contested Home

Asylum-seeking in Switzerland and the Politics of Belonging, Place, and Religion

'Home' is both personal and political, static and dynamic, familiar and unfamiliar. Through ethnographic research with asylum-seekers at a church-based refugee program in Basel, Switzerland, Katherine Kunz explores the role of government, church, volunteers, and refugees in defining belonging. By examining asylum systems, the role of place and agency, and religious motivations, she reveals home as shaped by systems that often obscure its essential vulnerability and multiplicity. This study is of interest to anyone who has considered belonging through the lenses of migration, borders, or religion and to those who have questioned their own relationship to home.

1. Why did you choose this topic? When I was four years old I had moved five times – to different countries, states, and cities. In 1986 I moved to Berlin and experienced the surveillance of borders and the heartbreak of divided homes. This led me to pursue my Ph.D. in Basel with a focus on international migration and religion. I was curious what defines home and belonging for both settled populations and those who migrate. A church-based outreach program to asylum-seekers provided a rich context to explore these questions. 2. What new perspectives does your book offer? The book interweaves politics, cultural studies, and religion to reveal the complexity of finding and claiming home. By considering home through the lens of asylum-seeking, it reveals subtle issues behind the polarizing public debates on migration. It offers perspectives on home beyond definitions of safety and familiarity to include multiplicity, vulnerability, and absence. It offers insights to settled and mobile populations and reflections on ethical and relational ethnographic research. 3. What makes your topic relevant for current research debates? The question of how to live well together in a complex, global world is deeply shaped by our views of home and home and belonging - views that are political, religious, and social. Questions of who belongs are central to national and global debates on migration. How religious organizations speak to social and political issues is central to contemporary religious life. And this book includes attention to agency, public scholarship, and power differentials within ethnography. 4. Choose one person you would like to discuss your book with! I would like to discuss this book with two migration scholars one in the U.S., Dr. Irene Bloemraad at UC Berkeley, and one in Europe, Dr. Bilgin Ayata at Universität Graz. I am interested in the perspectives they bring from their respective contexts. 5. Your book summary in one sentence: Contested Home draws on research with asylum-seekers to consider the relationship of migration, borders, and religion to home and belonging.



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