Introduction: Bamberg GNPT

The articles in this special issue originate from the consultation of the Global Network for Public Theology at the Dietrich-Bonhoeffer-Research-Centre for Public Theology at Bamberg University in 2019. The selected papers reflect the geographically and theologically diverse discussion of the consultation. Other parts of the consultation will be published separately in the anthology *Space and Place as a Topic for Public Theology*, edited by Thomas Wabel et al.

The Bamberg consultation addressed many dimensions of the topic space and place: space / place to live, sacred space, space and speech, politics of space, God and space. In the large field which the authors address these dimensions are visible. So this volume offers many topics and a variety of subjects, at the same time this variety mirrors the structure of the topic space and place by its dimensions. We name these in brackets when presenting the contributions:

In his article ‘Displaced People and Public Mercy’, Theodros Assefa Teklu deals with the figure of the displacee, thereby following Mbembe (‘politics of space’). Taking Gregory of Nyssa into account, Teklu emphasize that mercy is a virtue and asks for theological consequences (‘God and space’).

Kathrin Winkler’s contribution on ‘The Provocations of Contact Zones’ focuses on contact zones, spaces and places arising from migration, in post-migration societies. Her analysis of the migrants’ exclusion – among other things referring voices of young refugees – leads Winkler to the vital speech against anti-migrant refusals (‘place to live’).

In their presentation on ‘Space, Place, and the Church’, Caroline Powell and Ntandoyenkosi Mlambo discuss spatial justice in post-apartheid South Africa with a focus on the church (land) in land restitution processes. Powell and Mlambo give an overview on the land’s history and action discussed and taken by different churches (‘space to live’).

Tony Franklin-Ross analyses different contexts which base different positions regarding a safe place for LGBTQI+. In his article ‘Looking Behind the Blue Cards’, Franklin-Ross takes his experience of the World Council of Churches 10th Assembly in Busan, 2013 as a starting point for a public ecumenical theology on sexuality (‘space and speech’).

In her article on ‘Public Theology Facing Digital Spaces’, Frederike van Oorschot asks how a digital culture including its new types of public changes
Van Oorschot opts for a public theology as a collaborative practice of witness (‘space to live’, ‘sacred space’).

**Dianne Rayson**'s contribution ‘Time and Space in the Kingdom of God’ deepens the understanding of time and space in the age of the Anthropocene. She argues that, in this age, Bonhoeffer’s worldly Christianity should be understood as earthly Christianity (‘God and space’).

This large spectrum of themes is obviously also due to the places from where the contributors speak, which rate how important topics are for a public theology in their context. But in spite of this diversity it seems that there is a shared move: all articles address a certain spatial conflict, something structural disharmonic which initiates a further and deeper thinking.

Teklu describes that the figure of the displacee is disruptive for theology: ‘certain phenomena such as the displacement of people can potentially have a “disruptive” impact – understood to mean any event that tests theologies and identities generally taken for granted – on the theological domain, rendering it an on-going reflective enterprise. Our global past and present are replete with accounts of disruptions.’ Winkler speaks of ‘provocation of contact zones’. ‘Places such as those described [that is, reception camps or collective housing for asylum seekers] are a provocation, a call, a request to deal with different, migration-related forms of social and physical exclusion and marginalization.’ Mlambo and Powell note: ‘The history of South African land is one marred with conflict and dispossession.’ Since the ownership of places (land) is discussed, the spaces as justified ones, in consequence, are challenged as well.

Van Oorschot notices how the structure of the public sphere is changed in the digital spaces. The digital spaces question certainties of the nondigital spaces: ‘Digital spaces create plural and fluid publics. They thus expand the concept of ‘publicness’ – and at the same time lead it ad absurdum.” In this way, digital spaces break common concepts of the public sphere.

Franklin-Ross searches for a way to overcome divergent theological positions to a non-heterosexual life not by discussing sexual-ethics but stating a mismatch between different perspectives on the relationship between theology and world. Therefore, he asks for the space behind theological positions, the context. Franklin-Ross wants to construct a meeting place by reflecting on the ways of conceptualizing the relationship between religion and world.

Rayson transforms the worldly into the Earthly in consequence of Bonhoeffer. Thereby, she places the ecologic crisis in the centre of her contribution – deepened by the feeling of *solastalgia* which could be understood also as a deep feeling of loss and an indicator of something that went wrong, of a deep and ontological false, in Christian perspective an indicator of destruction creation in a deep sense.
It seems that our shared globalized world is pervaded by a structure of misfitting: the contributions show a lot of different spatial conflicts. By showing how the relation between humans and their places seemingly misfit, it becomes evident that parts of modern society’s structures are misfitting, since they are unable to structure space and place in a way that benefit humans.

Here now the theological task of a public theology can be seen: to take the misfitting seriously as the place from where to act, for instance by letting the misfit challenge one own’s opinion on successful and happy life and how to support others. Therefore, it is not sufficient if public theologies ask for a shared common ground. While space and place, at the first glance, seem to be something which all people have in common (for instance we all live in the same world), this special issue shows that the topic space and place reveals conflicts that one can hardly see in a differentiated perspective otherwise. Spatial conflicts and tensions deepen our experience of the world and our theological reflection as the contributors show. In this way, place and space are more than subjects to reflect. Furthermore, they are hermeneutic categories adequate to name fissures and tensions.

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