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Reviewing *Sanctuary City: A Suspended State*

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Sanctuary City: A Suspended State

By Jennifer J. Bagelman

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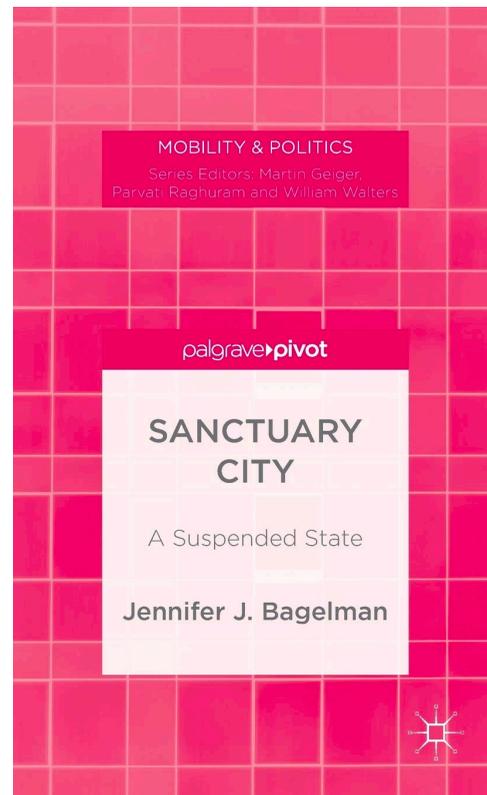
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In *Sanctuary City: A Suspended State*, scholar of borders and lecturer at Newcastle University, Jennifer Bagelman examines asylum and how the problems facing refugees in the city mirror those facing displaced people in other contexts. Glasgow, according to Bagelman, occupies a place of conflicting status. On one hand, it has a reputation of providing pastoral care to newcomers, but on the other it normalizes deferral and deportation. According to Bagelman, sanctuary cities are not just about competing policies between municipalities and others forms of government, but they are also about temporal tension and conflict. *Sanctuary City* therefore reframes a way in which these cities are understood.

Bagelman begins *Sanctuary City* by arguing that the “three ‘D’s” of asylum, deportation, detainment, and dispersal, are in some way insufficient, and that the “three-pronged restriction regime” (2) is incomplete: according to Bagelman, deferral is the fourth and overlooked component of asylum that needs to be accounted for. After arriving in a sanctuary such as Glasgow, asylum seekers are welcomed by the “soft and seemingly innocuous hand of sanctuary” and the “well-intentioned

forms of pastoral support or charity-like work” (6) but this welcome can be contrasted against the uncomfortable reality of waiting. With no clear path to citizenship and limited support, asylum seekers encounter the reality where they must “hurry up and wait” (6). This creates “hostile politics” for people seeking sanctuary, since waiting indefinitely is fundamentally opposed to well-intentioned charity. She notes that even while waiting, the state encourages asylum seekers to “become good,

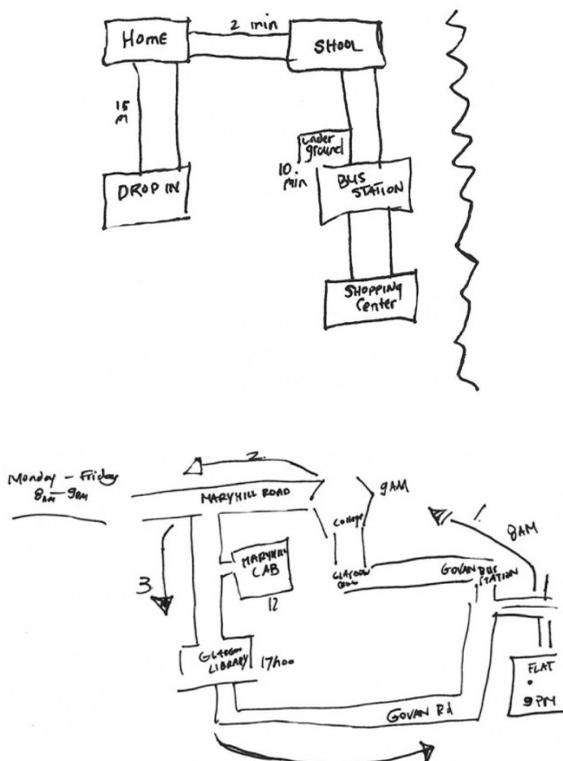


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aspirational citizens" and that this creates a challenging contradiction (8). Her core argument in this chapter is therefore the idea that deferral is an overlooked reality of asylum.

Connected to Bagelman's use of deferral in *Sanctuary City* is the idea that sanctuary cities are part of a "venerable practice that boasts roots in ancient times" that cannot be reconciled with the reality of those facing asylum (46). According to Bagelman, these cities give way to "politics of ease" where the lofty goals of sanctuary assuage the realities facing migrants. To illustrate these problems, Bagelman includes four maps in her text that illustrate the spatial context of those seeking sanctuary (two of the maps are reproduced here). The first map demonstrates how one asylum seeker plans their day around five areas, home, a shopping centre, bus station, school, and drop-in services. The asylum seeker writes, "this is Glasgow" and notes that a jagged line on the map represents an area of the city where she does not go (50). Bagelman shows another map of an asylum seeker's route, which is centred around similar key areas, but includes departure times. The maps have asylum seekers planning their days around common areas such as libraries, drop-in centres, parks, and schools, which helps to illustrate the spatial dimension of asylum. Paradoxically, the maps seem to convey containment despite the idea of sanctuary cities as being a place of refuge and hope; asylum seekers are often "place-bound" upon arriving in their new homes.



Bagelman then adds to her argument on the spatial limitations placed on asylum seekers in *Sanctuary City* by discussing the historical tradition of the supplicant. Supplication draws on the idea of *hiketeia*, which originated in classical antiquity and involves those seeking asylum partaking in rituals. For example, a supplicant partakes in the practice of "kneeling at the altar of the image of a god holding a certain symbol identifying him as a supplicant" (80). Here, the supplicant becomes publicly visible as seeking refuge and adopts a lower status position to gain favour. This activity casts the supplicant as having limited power and acting as a "humble victim" (80). In Greek mythology, supplicants were portrayed as "sheep" that were waiting to be herded or a "flock of misery", similarly highlighting their vulnerable position. Bagelman notes that advocates for modern sanctuary mistakenly advocate for their existence based on their history of openness. However, sanctuary cities then are not drawn from a tradition of unconditional openness, but rather are based on the supplication. This discussion then highlights the historical basis of vulnerability in sanctuary.

Following the discussions of deferral, spatial maps, and the history of supplication, Bagelman then develops the idea that sanctuary cities are not fundamentally opposed to the state, but rather are one form of reproducing power. While sanctuary cities are often thought of as being opposed to central government, they reinforce state power by only bestowing token freedoms upon asylum seekers. Sanctuary cities invite those seeking asylum to become citizens, but also ritualize deferring citizenship. On this basis, Bagelman suggests that the salient discussion is not the tension between municipalities and the state, but rather about the temporality involved in how governments control their subjects. Bagelman quotes the scholar of sanctuary cities Saulo Cwerner who argues that those who study them "need to think more seriously about time" and the "time politics of asylum" (98). The state's power should not only be understood in reference to its spatial borders, but also its temporal borders. Sanctuary cities involve an important time component that cannot be overlooked.

Bagelman's *Sanctuary City: A Suspended State* examines challenges that are inherent in these cities and argues that deferral is a crucial component of sanctuary policy. To underscore the conditions and plight of migrants, the work includes sketches of the activities of asylum seekers and the limitations placed on their activities. Bagelman notes that the historical basis of sanctuary can be drawn from supplication and a precedent of accepting a lower position in the eyes of the host society. She contends sanctuary cities are not in tension with the state, and that in fact both ritualize deferral. *Sanctuary City* therefore challenges assumption about the key issues in these cities and suggests that the potency of deferral cannot be overlooked.