

REPORT FROM THE FIELD

INTRODUCING ICORN – THE CITY AS A SANCTUARY

MAŁGORZATA RÓŻAŃSKA-BRANIECKA¹

Jagiellonian University,
Villa Decius Association, Poland

This report aims to introduce an organisation called the International Cities of Refugee Network (ICORN). Derived from the Sanctuary Movement, ICORN assists refugee artists around the world. The Sanctuary Movement was developed in the United States and Canada as a network of over 500 safe havens for Central American refugees. From the 2000s on, the movement focused more on moral injustices in the national immigration system and sought to confront global injustices on local levels. In turn, in the UK and Ireland the City of Sanctuary movement started in 2005 and turned into a network of over 60 towns and cities proud of being safe places for people seeking sanctuary and helping them to integrate in the local communities. Each ICORN city focuses on one writer/artist at a time and provides him/her with a safe place to stay and economic security for a standard term of two years. Currently, over 55 cities worldwide are part of the network (ICORN 2016).

Keywords: sanctuary city, refugees, artists

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Sanctuary as a '*refuge or safety from pursuit, persecution, or other danger*' (Oxford Dictionary 2016) is an ancient one and can be traced back to the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Old Testament, according to which God commanded Moses to create places where persons, escaping both lawful and

¹ Contact: gosia@villa.org.pl

unjust persecution, could find shelter and protection. This tradition was continued both in the Roman, medieval and English common law, where places of worship were recognized as places of asylum. In nineteenth-century America, the Sanctuary concept was implemented by the abolitionist movement, through systems like the Underground Railroad which provided a protection network for African Americans escaping slavery in the South. In Europe, the sanctuary tradition was realized by housing Jews during World War II (Schwartz, 2010). In more recent times, in the 1980s, various denominations of churches in North America created both a religious and political Sanctuary Movement: a network of over 500 safe havens for Central American refugees fleeing civil wars in Guatemala and El Salvador. The Sanctuaries were places where refugees could find shelter, food and legal advice. The movement itself was an expression of civil disobedience as it responded to federal immigration policies of the Reagan times, which made obtaining asylum almost impossible for Central Americans (Coutin, 1993).

Within the framework of the movement, Sanctuary Cities were being established both in the U.S. and Canada. They were developing and implementing policies aimed at protecting undocumented immigrants. What is more, they did not allow the use of municipal funds or resources for the enforcement of federal immigration laws. This sanctuary policy was implemented for the first time in 1979 in Los Angeles (Mancina, 2012) and spread to more than 200 state and local jurisdictions in the USA (Pearson, 2015). From the 2000s on, the movement focused more on moral injustices in the national immigration system and sought to confront the global injustices on local levels by, for example, bringing fair legal representation to undocumented workers in deportation jails, educating Americans about the current needs of immigrant communities or promoting changes in city policies concerning how the police is treating immigrants (Schwartz, 2010). With the growing anti-immigration attitude and fear of immigrants, since 2007 several states have prohibited sanctuary city policies within their boundaries, i.e. Georgia, North Carolina (Tong, 2016) or Wisconsin (Federation for American Immigration Reform 2016). The death of Kathryn Steinle on 1st July 2015, who was shot by an undocumented immigrant with a felony record, has put even more spotlight on the Sanctuary City policy and turned it into a part of the presidential election campaign in the U.S., with Hilary Clinton's campaign spokesman stating that *'Hillary Clinton believes that sanctuary cities can help further public safety, and she has defended those policies going back years'* (Gamboa, 2015). In turn in Canada the movement is gathering momentum since in 2014 Toronto, Hamilton and Ontario announced themselves as Sanctuary Cities (Nursall, 2014). Last but not least, in the United Kingdom the City of Sanctuary movement, which began in October 2005 in Sheffield, turned into a network of towns and cities proud of

being safe places for people seeking sanctuary and helping them to integrate in the local communities. After two years, in 2007, Sheffield became the UK's first City of Sanctuary. Henceforth, over 60 City of Sanctuary initiatives have been established in towns and cities both in UK and in Ireland. The movement is a grass-root one, where local organisations from all sectors unite and cooperate with each other for the sake of refugees' integration. It aims at providing opportunities to build relationships between the locals and the asylum seekers and additionally promotes the positive aspect of hospitality (City of Sanctuary 2016). Most of the above discussed examples of Sanctuary initiatives are expressing the tension between universal and national concepts of rights and citizenship. Sanctuary Movements and Cities perceive themselves as a part of a transnational community with rights and responsibilities that transcend national ones (Mancina, 2012). The same inevitable tension was also present within the Cities of Asylum Network and its current successor: The International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN).

CITIES OF ASYLUM NETWORK & INTERNATIONAL CITIES OF REFUGE NETWORK

The Cities of Asylum Network (INCA) was established in 1993 by the International Parliament of Writers (IPW), an organization established as a response to the fatwa issued on the well-known writer Salman Rushdie and a growing number of similar attacks on writers. The Parliament aimed to protect both freedom of expression, freedom of publication and helped to maintain the physical safety of writers (Drabble, 2001). At that time the IPW was represented by Salman Rushdie himself, Vaclav Havel, Jacques Derrida and Harold Pinter. Until its dissolution in 2005 the Cities of Asylum Network, administered by the writers themselves, associated 25 cities primarily in Europe, Latin America and Africa (ICORN 2016). In 2006 the idea of shelter cities was revived in the form of ICORN:

ICORN is an independent international organisation of member cities and regions, offering safe havens for persecuted writers/artists; advancing freedom of expression, defending democratic values and promoting international solidarity (ICORN 2016).

Writers and artists have constantly been targets of politically motivated threats and persecution, and the network believes it is necessary for the international community to formulate and implement an appropriate response. The term writer is understood very broadly, so it includes novelists, non-fiction writers, playwrights, songwriters, bloggers, poets, editors, translators, publishers,

journalists and cartoonists. Since 2014 a trial period allowing cities to invite persecuted visual artists and musicians has started, so an expansion of the network's scope can be observed. Each ICORN city focuses on one writer/artist at a time and provides him/her with a safe place to stay and economic security for a standard term of two years. Currently, over 55 cities worldwide are part of the network (ICORN 2016). The structure of the network can be described briefly as:

(...) both decentralized and co-ordinated. The Administration Centre in Stavanger, Norway, serves as the communication hub for the independently managed ICORN cities. The international board consists of member city representatives, elected biannually by the General Assembly' (ICORN 2016).

Proportionally, the biggest amount of work is carried out by the cities themselves, what is consistent with the philosophy of the network stating that the major asset should be the city itself, while the administration of the network should be kept on the lowest possible level. The cities have most of the resources and are the base of the network's activities, both locally and internationally, but a dynamo in form of the Administration Centre is needed to provide a smooth functioning of the whole. In each city an institution/organisation acts as the operator of the persecuted writers/artists stay. Operators are mostly public libraries and municipal departments responsible for culture and/or refugees, but also NGO's. Each operator delegates a coordinator, who is the writers'/artists' contact person and works with them on an everyday basis. The Administration Centre also acts as a contact point and cooperation incubator for both the cities, operators, coordinators, writers/artists and cooperating institutions (Różańska-Braniecka, 2015). The idea of the network is a challenging one, as it is based on a fusion of artistic and humanitarian approach; it can neither be seen as a purely literary organisation nor as a refugee one. The uniqueness of the program is further fuelled by the fact that it is at the same time a long-time and temporary placement system. For the coming years ICORN is planning to develop *'into a global forum for sharing, exchanging ideas, and learning'* (ICORN 2016). Statistically speaking, ICORN is constantly growing as the number of applications the network is receiving is on the increase. It went up from 70 applications in 2014 to as many as 109 in 2015, most of which were from Bangladesh (23), Syria (11), Ethiopia (10), Iran (8), Burundi (8) and Iraq (6). The number of writers/artists that could be offered shelter within the network has also risen from 15 in 2014 up to 28 in 2015. ICORN is cooperating with many other networks and institutions, both on a local, regional, national and international level, with for example PEN International, the EU Commission,

UNO, UNHCR, Article 19, Reporters without Borders, Free Dimensional, Scholars at Risk, Frontline Defenders, Freemuse, Arts, Rights & Justice, On the Move, Tactical tech (ICORN, 2016).

APPLICATION PROCESS

In order to apply for an ICORN residency, writers/artists have to complete an application form in English, where they need to prove that they have been persecuted on the grounds of their creative work or expressed opinions. As it was mentioned above, the term writers/artists is understood broadly and therefore also includes creative writers, non-fiction writers, editors, publishers and translators, as well as visual and performance artists and musicians. To start with, the applicants have to provide documentation on their creative work, usually in the form of a portfolio containing published texts, albums, cartoons, exhibition catalogues, etc., also commercially published ones. Further, they have to document the fact of being persecuted. The persecution may manifest itself both in the risk of being killed, kidnapped, physically attacked, sentenced to prison, and in the inability to express oneself freely out of justified fear of probable reactions of either government or non-governmental entities in the country of residence. All the possible persecutions must however be connected to the artistic activities or productions of the applicants. In order to enable ICORN an efficient and fast assessment, the writers/artists have to make sure that they provide all the necessary information and documentation while completing the application form. All the information given to the network is treated as confidential. ICORN also allows for the possibility that someone else applies on behalf of the persecuted writer/artist. After the application has reached the network's Administration Centre, it is reviewed both by the ICORN staff and PEN International's Writers in Prison Committee in order to check references, declared dangers and artistic outputs. All applications are examined thoroughly and the applicants are informed as soon as the assessment process is over. The duration of the process varies from case to case, depending on the completeness of the application, the number of applications pending, the accessibility of the given references, etc. As processing times for the applications vary, the network always recommends the applicants to search for other solutions and possibilities to improve their situation. If an application is rejected, the writer/artist is encouraged to reapply when the situation changes. If the application is approved, the profiles of the applicants are presented to these ICORN member cities which are at that time ready to host a new writer/artist. An applicant

cannot choose the hosting city, as the decision is made by the city itself, but it is possible for the applicant to decline a city's invitation. Being approved in the application process does not necessarily mean that the writer/artist will receive a residency place. It is always the city that chooses the writer/artist from the pool of applicants recommended by the Administration Centre. If the chosen applicant accepts the invitation, all logistic procedures (visa application, travel arrangements, etc.) are launched and the writer/artist is put in touch with the respective city. In case the applicant rejects a city's invitation, he/she may be chosen by another city but this cannot be guaranteed (ICORN 2016).

In 2016 the number of cities in the ICORN network amounted to 55 and is still growing. Since 2010 the network is an independent membership organisation open to cities and regions that share a common vision: *'to preserve freedom of expression and to respond to politically motivated threats and persecution that writers and artists face in their home countries and beyond'* (ICORN 2016). By joining ICORN, cities may have both a symbolic and practical contribution to the promotion of human rights, solidarity and hospitality. Further, they are becoming part of a global network of cities, writers/artists, human rights and art organisations, which are devoted to fight with repressive regimes via creative and artistic means. In order to join the network a city has first to find partner and coordinating institutions, secure funding for the program's implementation, find appropriate accommodation, etc. The preparation process differs from city to city and is dependent both on the national and local regulations, resources and customs. After the preparatory time, a city has to sign the ICORN Membership Agreement in order to formally join the network. The city thereby commits to take care of the relocation, reception, accommodation, scholarship, and integration of the hosted writer/artist. Support in legal and practical matters is also declared within the framework of the Agreement (ICORN 2016).

KRAKOW IN ICORN

Krakow joined the ICORN network in 2011 as the first city in Central and Eastern Europe and decided to host the invited writers/artists for a time period of one year. The operators of the program are the Villa Decius Association and the Krakow Festival Office. The director of the Villa Decius Association, Dr Danuta Glondys, has been a member of the network's board since 2014 and the implementation of the ICORN program is a crucial part of Krakow's strategy as a UNESCO City of Literature. Because of its geopolitical situation, Krakow is functioning as a *'Gate to the East'* (ICORN 2016) both in terms of

being a good residency destination for the numerous persecuted writers/artists from the countries of the former Soviet Union, as well as promoting the values of the network in the macro-region.

The Villa Decius Association, responsible for the everyday implementation of the program, was founded in 1995 by a group of well-known Polish representatives of the world of culture and science, including such outstanding artists as Krzysztof Penderecki and Andrzej Wajda; academics like prof. Jacek Woźniakowski and prof. Andrzej Zoll, and young Central Europeans who engage in artistic, cultural and educational cooperation. Within the years of its existence the Association has developed into an international cultural institution that has greatly contributed to research on European and global issues and has become a platform for human rights, intercultural dialogue as well as artistic and civil society cooperation. Among the most distinguished guests and experts of the Villa Decius programs have been the Presidents of Poland, Slovakia, Lithuania, Ukraine and Vice President of the USA; HRH Prince Charles and HRH Prince Edward; politicians and intellectuals: Jan Kavan, Erhard Busek, Tom Koenigs, Władysław Bartoszewski, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Jiří Dienstbier, Alaxandr Milinkiewicz, Borys Tarasyuk, Unni Wikan, Dominique Moïsi, David Miliband, Lord Patten, Fredric Barth, Josep Ramoneda, Timothy Garton Ash, Paul Berman, Nawal el Saadawi, John Ralston Saul, Üstün Ergüder, Shevah Weiss and Fébé Potgieter-Gqubule. Many of the projects implemented by the Association are interdisciplinary and enable a multidimensional approach towards culture, international cultural cooperation, culture management policies and culture financing schemes in the contemporary world. Equally important for Villa Decius are artists/writers and translators and their role in social dialogue, European integration and heritage, ethnic minorities and promotion of attitudes of tolerance and openness. The Association's four main areas of activity are literary, educative, artistic and social programs (Villa Decius Association 2016).

The Krakow Festival Office, responsible for the formal and PR-related part of the ICORN residency, is a leading Polish institution implementing the most important cultural events both on a national and European level. It is the operator of the program of Krakow as the UNESCO City of Literature, and within the framework of readership promotion it is undertaking a series of literary initiatives: literary walks, the Second Life of Books, literary benches or the mobile application Read KRK! The Office organizes prestigious festivals like the literary Conrad Festival and Milosz Festival, as well as the music festivals Misteria Paschalia and Sacrum Profanum. The Festival Office also promotes cultural projects such as the Krakow Music Film Festival, the International Festival of Independent Cinema NETIA OFF CAMERA and Opera Rara. The

Festival Office is also the publisher of the magazine 'Karnet', operator of the Krakow Congress Centre ICE and the Krakow Film Commission, as well as the operator of cultural events in TAURON Arena Krakow. Furthermore, the Krakow Festival Office is the administrator of the Tourist Information Points InfoKrakow and runs thematic portals such as Krakow.travel, or Kids In Kraków (Krakow Festival Office 2016).

ICORN WRITERS IN KRAKOW

Since entering the network, Krakow has hosted six persecuted writers/artists for one year long residencies: Marie Amelie (North Ossetia / Norway), Kareem Amer (Egypt), Mostafa Zamaninija (Iran), Lawon Barshcheuski (Belarus), Asli Erdogan (Turkey) and Felix Kaputu (Democratic Republic of Congo). During the residential stay the writers/artists not only continued their artistic work, but also became a part of the local and national cultural scene. All of them gave new creative impulses to the artistic life in Krakow and contributed on the spot to the cultural diversity and debate. The ICORN writers/artists have great linguistic expertise and abilities and a wealth of knowledge concerning their home culture and heritage, so they often acted as great ambassadors and spokespersons of their cultures.

The first ICORN resident in Krakow was Marie Amelie, a young writer who was originally from North Ossetia. Because of political and safety reasons her family had to flee first to Finland and later to Norway. They have been living there illegally for about 8 years, until in 2004 their application for asylum was refused. Without an identity card or insurance, Marie Amelie finished her master studies at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology and worked as a volunteer at the Norwegian Culture Institute. In 2010 she published her first book '*Ulovlig norsk*' ('*Illegally Norwegian*'), which caused a media storm and national debate concerning the perception of immigrants and refugees in Norway and other Scandinavian countries. The book became a bestseller but Marie Amelie was required to leave the country, what divided the Norwegian society into followers and opponents of the existing immigration policy. During a literary event in 2011 Marie Amelie was arrested, kept in confinement and then deported to Moscow. From there she came to Krakow and worked constantly on her second book about the experiences after being arrested. Because of huge social pressure a change in the Norwegian immigration law was implemented, so that after finishing her stay in Krakow she could go back to Norway (Marie Amelie, personal communication, June 12, 2011).

The second ICORN resident was Kareem Amer, a young Egyptian blogger, journalist and human rights activist, born and raised in an ultraconservative Salafi family. From 2004 to 2006 he published on his blog a series of posts criticizing the Al Azhar University (where he was enrolled at that time) for promoting extremist ideas. Moreover, he criticized concrete operations of the Mubarak regime. As a consequence, he was the first Arabic blogger sentenced to prison for four years for *'insulting Islam'* and *'spreading false information concerning president Mubarak'*. This sentence caused worldwide protests expressed, amongst others, on the webpage freakareem.org. After being released, he was still persecuted, followed, intimidated and received constant death threats from Islamic extremists. His activities concentrated on showing the mechanisms of fundamentalists coming to power and on promoting the secularity of the state, where freedom of religion, tolerance and openness are crucial values. Kareem Amer's work was highly appreciated by the international community of journalists and reporters, and that is why in 2007 he received the Prize Reporters without Borders. His texts were often cited by global news agencies as an assertive voice of the new Egyptian generation that had led to political and systemic changes. At the same time his activities were perceived as good examples of using the internet as a tool for promoting human rights in Arabic countries. He escaped to Krakow in 2012 when his name was put on the death list of the Egyptian Salafi movement (Kareem Amer, personal communication, March 10, 2012).

A further resident of the ICORN program in Krakow was Mostafa Zamani Nia, an Iranian writer, publisher, lecturer and literary agent. He published not only numerous texts devoted to Iranian history and culture, but also poetry, novels, screenplays and essays. His novels (i.e. *'Kudām zamīn shādtar ast'* and *'Rāh-i Darāz-i Istānbūl'*) were banned in Iran, while the comprehensive work *'Farahan, An Ancient Land'* became a benchmark for historians researching the literature and culture of ancient Persia. The writer was persecuted, arrested and censored by the Iranian authorities since the 1980s, but after the presidential elections in 2009 the attacks escalated. In this time he wrote an open letter to the Iranian government in which he criticised the censorship and harassment of the Green Movement. As a consequence, he was arrested and his works and publications were confiscated and later destroyed by agents. He came to Krakow in 2013 in order to be able to continue his work on the next part of *'Farahan, An Ancient Land'* (Mostafa Zamani Nia, personal communication, March 20, 2013).

Krakow's ICORN resident in 2014 was the Belarusian writer, translator, poet, politician and human rights activist Lawon Barszceuski. His political activity began already in 1991, when he became a Member of the Belarusian Parliament and participated actively in many working groups devoted to educational and

minority issues. Since 1991 he was also Vice-Director of the Belarusian Education and Cultural Centre of Human Sciences at the Belarusian Ministry of Education, which was officially dissolved in 2003 and has since then been functioning illegally as the Belarusian Secondary School of Human Sciences. In 1995, after participating in protests against laws introduced by President Lukashenko, he was excluded from Parliament, but in the years 2007–2009 he became the chairman of the opposition party, the Belarusian People's Front. Despite serious political discrimination he remained active in the field of human rights and culture and translated works from Latin, Greek, German, English, French, Polish (such as Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Franz Kafka, Bruno Schulz, Czesław Miłosz). He was the chairman of the Belarusian PEN in the years 2003–2005 (Lawon Barszczeuski, personal communication, February 3, 2014).

The fifth ICORN resident in Krakow was Asli Erdogan, a Turkish writer, journalist and human rights activist. Despite studying Computer Engineering and Physics, and conducting PhD research on the Higgs particle, she quit her scientific career and started writing. Up until 2016 she published several books: novels, novellas, collections of short stories, poetic prose and political essays. Simultaneously, she engaged herself in journalism and started working as a columnist for Turkish left-wing intellectual newspapers i.e. *'Radikal'* and the bilingual Turkish-Kurdish magazine *'Özgür Gündem'*. In her texts she dealt with such controversial topics as state violence, discrimination and human rights, what resulted in her being persecuted, harassed and threatened in many ways. Her texts have been translated into several languages, including English, French, German, Italian, Swedish, Norwegian, Arabic and Bosnian (Asli Erdogan, personal communication, June 15, 2015). After the ICORN residency in Krakow she decided to go back to Turkey and was arrested on 19th August 2016 on the charges of 'membership of a terrorist organisation' and 'undermining national unity' (PEN International 2016).

The most recent artist hosted in Krakow within the framework of the ICORN network was Felix Kaputu, a Congolese writer, academic, literary critic and social activist. He is a specialist in the field of African studies, art and philosophy. In his scientific work he has researched gender, mythology and African literature. He is the author of six book publications and approximately 60 texts, many of which are devoted to the difficult situation of African women and HIV/AIDS issues. In 2003 he received a Fulbright Scholarship at the University of California in Santa Barbara. In 2005 Dr Kaputu was arrested by the Congolese National Security Agency and falsely charged with leading a rebel group of 20 000 soldiers in the Katanga Province, trafficking arms and inciting students to rebel. The proposed penalty was 30 years in prison or a death sentence. He was released

out of the Makala prison in Kinshasa under the pressure of international media, organisations such as Amnesty International and fellow scientists. In 2006 he was allowed to leave the country for the Scholars at Risk scholarship and since then has never returned. Instead he continued his research and lectures at Harvard University in Cambridge/USA, the International Centre for Japanese Studies in Tokyo/Japan, African Studies Centre in Leiden/Netherlands, Ghent University in Ghent/Belgium (Felix Kaputu, personal communication, April 6, 2016).

REFERENCES

- Coutin S. B. (1993), *The Culture of Protest: Religious Activism and the U.S. Sanctuary Movement*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Drabble M. (2001), Why authors need a refuge, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/dec/08/politics> [Accessed: 07.07.2017].
- Federation for American Immigration Reform, <http://immigrationreform.com/2016/02/17/wisconsin-assembly-passes-bill-to-ban-sanctuary-cities/> [Accessed: 12.08.2016].
- Gamboa S. (2015), Clinton Campaign: Sanctuary Cities Can Help Public Safety, NBC News, <http://immigrationreform.com/2016/02/17/wisconsin-assembly-passes-bill-to-ban-sanctuary-cities/> [Accessed: 15.08.2016].
- ICORN, <http://www.icorn.org/> [Accessed: 12.08.2016].
- Krakow Festival Office, <http://en.biurofestiwalowe.pl/about-us.html> [Accessed: 18.08.2016].
- Mancina P. (2012), The Birth of a Sanctuary City: A History of Governmental Sanctuary in San Francisco, in: Lippert R., Rehaag S. (eds.), *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspectives: Migration, Citizenship, and Social Movements*, New York: Routledge, pp. 205–218.
- Nursall K. (2014), Hamilton declares itself ‘sanctuary city’ for undocumented immigrants, *Toronto Star*, https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2014/02/12/hamilton_declares_itself_sanctuary_city_for_undocumented_immigrants.html [Accessed: 15.08.2016].
- Pearson M. (2015), What’s a ‘sanctuary city,’ and why should you care?, *CNN*, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/07/06/us/san-francisco-killing-sanctuary-cities/> [Accessed: 20.08.2016].
- PEN International, <http://www.pen-international.org/newsitems/turkey-writer-human-rights-activist-asli-erdogan-held-on-terror-charges/> [Accessed: 30.08.2016].
- Redfield R., Linton R., Herskovits M. (1936). *Memorandum on the study of acculturation*. “American Anthropologist”, Vol. 38, pp. 149–152.
- Różańska-Braniecka M. (2015), *Best Practice Catalogue for Coordinators*. Kraków: Villa Decius Association.
- Schwartz D. (2010), Searching for a New Sanctuary Movement, *Dissent Magazine*, https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/searching-for-a-new-sanctuary-movement [Accessed: 14.08.2016].
- Tong A. (2016), What Exactly Is a Sanctuary City?, *Governing*, <http://www.governing.com/topics/public-justice-safety/gov-sanctuary-city-congress-georgia-north-carolina.html> [Accessed: 14.08.2016].
- Oxford Dictionary, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/> [Accessed: 15.08.2016].
- Villa Decius Association, <http://villa.org.pl/villa/> [Accessed: 16.08.2016].