ON SACRED GROUNDS

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What can the sacred offer us? A space, an object, a building, a landscape or an ecosystem is made sacred through a common agreement about its shared value: a value that transcends individual self-interest and immediate gain. The sacred sits outside financial quantifications because its value cannot be reduced to a current selling price but is measured as inherent to the wellbeing of all who maintain its sacredness, past, present and future.

Cities in the global north leave little space for the sacred: our predominantly Judeo-Christian histories have produced a specific legacy and conception that tends to reserve it to the symbolism of an architectural object: religious buildings, monuments or memorials. While the church historically played a structuring role in the urban fabric and civic life of the city, this function has largely evaporated, its architectural skeletons offering familiar silhouettes that contribute to European cities' distinct but familiar urban flavour. Europe's sacred architecture provides a clue to where our societies came from, though no longer shapes them in a meaningful way. The progressive secularisation of our societies runs parallel to a broader erasure of the sacred as a framework for understanding our relation with the world: value is, instead, invariably assessed through an economic lens. In Des Empires sous la Terre (Empires beneath the earth, 2021), Mohamed Amer Meziane coins the term "Secularocene" to describe an extractivist colonialism that, from the late 19th century, treated the earth as inert, un-alive, without value beyond what could be exploited for profit.

Today, myriad examples of indigenous fights to have relations to and care for the land recognised as legitimate and essential, from Standing Rock to the Amazon Rainforest, highlight the inherent ecological pertinence of a conception of the earth's sacred worth above instantaneous profit potential. Indeed, the benefit of the sacred is magnified exponentially by collective action to uphold it and collective interest is assured by each individual's suspension of self interest in maintaining it. In a time of accelerating climate crisis, fracturing social contracts and a retreat to entrenched national, political and religious identities, a shared and spatially defined understanding of value beyond individual profit, encapsulated in the sacred, may offer the potential to reorient our collective priorities. Designating and constructing the sacred provides an opportunity to examine what we hold dear and define spatial forms where the rituals and acts

NEW SOUTH is an architecture, urbanism and anthropology office based in Paris and Brussels. To paraphrase bell hooks, we put the margin at the centre. We see the sacred as an invocation to examine what we hold dear, and to define spaces for the rituals of care and acts of faith required for us to live and thrive together. We investigate ways in which sacred practices of the built environment may provide a new sustainable approach to architecture and city making.

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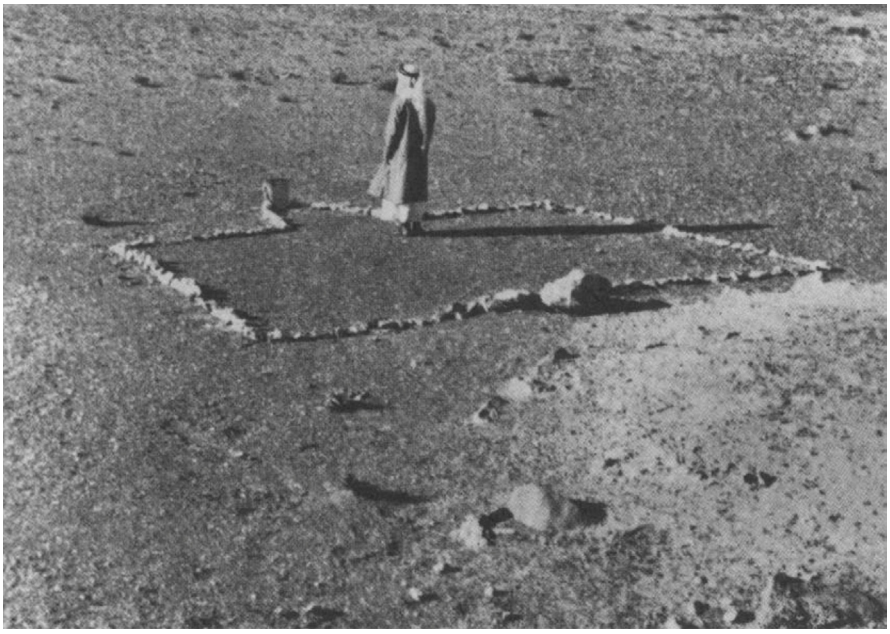
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of faith required for us to live and thrive together in contemporary society may be upheld, particularly as faith-based communities find themselves increasingly called upon to offer support to vulnerable populations, and with this, a renewed mandate to define and redefine urban space.

While Western European Judeo-Christian tradition tends to hold relations with the sacred as a private, personal affair, the relation between religious institutions and the state remains a live issue in Luxembourg. This picture has been further complexified by a diversification of religious practice, notably with the arrival of Islamic migrant populations from the Balkans in the mid-1990s. The mosque or prayer room thus takes on a role beyond the provision of a space for communal prayer, becoming a centre of community and a sanctuary for migrant populations within a majority non-Muslim context: an anchoring point within the city's urban fabric. At other moments, the spatial confines of the building may be insufficient to meet need, and overflow spaces for prayer must be found. The sacred building is transformed from symbol to a point of assembly for acts beyond its walls, projecting the sacred into the city's urban space. Sacred space is a resurgent concern, a resource for sustaining commons and a platform for collective support for vulnerable members of communities.

This research residency will aim to outline the extent and potentials of the sacred within the city of Esch, taking as a starting point specific religious institutions, their interconnections, their networks of action and support for specific populations and their spatial inscription in urban space. New South is represented by John Edom (UK) for this residency.



Bedouin Desert Mosque, Transjordan: a simple boundary spatialising the sacred. Waechter and Seton Williams 1938, pi18.