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The "crucified people" as place of a heterotopic utopia[1]

Introduction

The title of my paper—"the 'crucified people' as place of a heterotopic utopia"—links different concepts. On the one hand it links Ellacuría's concept of utopia to his concept of the "crucified people", on the other hand it brings both of them together with the concept of "heterotopia", developed by the French philosopher, historian, and social theorist Michel Foucault in the 1960s. By doing so, the title suggests that Ellacuría's utopian thinking is intrinsically linked to a very specific place, which is best designated by the term "crucified people", and that Foucault's concept of "heterotopia" can somehow help to determine and reinterpret this place. I want to develop these ideas in three parts.

In a first part I want to outline briefly how the lack of concrete location constitutes one of the main points of criticism of utopian thinking, already in Foucault, but even more in German speaking theology, namely in the theology of Hans-Joachim Sander, professor of dogmatics in Salzburg, who uses Foucault's distinction between utopia and heterotopia to question utopian forms of theology and criticizes them exactly for the lack of this concrete location.

In the second part I will try to interpret liberation theology as a heterotopic theology and show how Ellacurías concept of "the crucified people" both fulfills but also transcends many characteristics of Michel Foucault`s "heterotopias". I want to argue that the location of utopian thinking in this specific heterotopia of the "crucified people" meets many of the criticism of utopian thinking as it prevents it from becoming naïve, exclusivist or totalitarian. As the "crucified people" for Ellacuría is something which continuously needs to be contextualized I, thirdly, want do express a few thoughts about Lampedusa, which might be read as one of the heterotopic places where "the crucified people" finds embodiment today and where therefore also utopian thinking has to be rooted, at least form the perspective of Ellacuría.

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1 Foucault`s distinction between utopias and heterotopias

Already in his early writing "*Les motes et les choses*" (engl.: *The Order of Things*)[2], published in 1966, Foucault distinguishes between utopias and heterotopias. Utopias would afford consolation, and create "fantastic, untroubled region[s] […] where life is easy", whereas heterotopias are "disturbing" places, that "secretly undermine language […] because they shatter […] common names, […] destroy 'syntax'" and "contest the very possibility of grammar at its source".[3]

Only a few months later, in a lecture given for architects—"*Des Espaces Autres*" ("*Different Spaces*")[4] Foucault develops the concept of heterotopia further and relates it to the concept of utopia. Both, utopias and heterotopias would be different from all other spaces, because they have the "curious property of being connected to all the other emplacements"[5]. In contrast to what he says in "*Les motes et les choses*" for Foucault in "*Des Espaces Autres*" utopias *and* heterotopias designate and represent, place under suspicion, neutralize, contradict and invert "all the other"[6] emplacements. The difference, however, is that for Foucault "utopias are emplacements having no real place. They are emplacements that maintain a general relation of direct or inverse analogy with the real space of society. They are society perfected or the reverse of society, but in any case these utopias are spaces that are fundamentally and essentially unreal"[7] whereas the heterotopias are "real places" "outside all places", "which are sorts of actually realized utopias[!] in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within the culture are, at the same time, represented, contested and reversed."[8]

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[2] Foucault 1966 and 1970.

[3] Foucault 1970, p. xviii.

[4] Foucault 1967 and 1998.

[5] Foucault 1998, p. 178.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

To explain both the similarity and the differences, as well as the complex interwovenness of utopias and heterotopias Foucault uses the metaphor of the mirror:

> I think that between utopias and these utterly different emplacements, these heterotopias, there must be a kind of mixed, intermediate experience, that would be the mirror. The mirror is a utopia after all, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror I see myself where I am not, in an unreal space that opens up virtually behind the surface; I am over there where I am not […]. But it is also a heterotopia in that the mirror really exists, in that it has a sort of return effect on the place that I occupy. Due to the mirror, I discover myself absent at the place where I am, since I see myself over there. From that gaze which settles on me, as it were, I come back to myself and I begin once more to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am.[9]

The example of the mirror makes it clear that for Foucault the power of heterotopias to contest, to criticize, or to reverse reality is much greater than that of the "utopias". "Utopias" let us see ourselves in an "unreal", "virtual" space. They allow us to see ourselves "where we are absent", whereas heterotopias force us to re-direct our eyes toward ourselves and to "reconstitute" ourselves "there where we are". However, for Foucault (at least in "Des Espaces Autres") each heterotopia to some extent also seems to have a utopian dimension and each utopia a heterotopic.

Foucault in his text develops various characteristics of heterotopias, here I will focus only on the most important of them, namely their capacity to "represent, contest and reverse" "all the other real emplacements" of society. The concrete forms in which the heterotopias "represent, contest and reverse" all other spaces are "very diverse"[10], they change from society to society. For Foucault basically they oscillate between two extremes: On the one hand heterotopias can create "a space of illusion that denounces all real space, all real emplacements within which human life is partitioned off, as being even more illusory"[11]. That would be what happens at fairs or brothels. On the other hand heterotopias can also represent, contest and reverse all other sites by creating a space that is "as perfect, as meticulous, as well-arranged as ours is disorganized, badly arranged, and muddled"[12]. This would have been the function of the

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[9] Ibid., p. 178–179.

[10] Ibid., p. 179.

[11] Ibid., p. 184.

[12] Ibid.

perfectly planned colonies in Latin America, like the Jesuit reductions in Paraguay, or Puritan societies founded in Northern America.

Foucault gives a long and quite diverse list of examples for heterotopic places. He mentions cemeteries, prisons, retirement homes, and military barracks, but also gardens, theaters, libraries, and museums. The "heterotopia par excellence" for Foucault is the ship, a "placeless place" that goes "from port to port, […] from brothel to brothel", from colony to colony.[13] For western civilization the ship from the sixteenth century until the present would have been "the greatest reservoir of imagination"[14]. "In civilizations without ships the dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police that of the corsairs."[15]

2 The reception of Foucault`s distinction between utopias and heterotopias in theology: Hans-Joachim Sander`s critique of liberation theology for being "utopian"

In the field of theology Foucault's distinction between utopias and heterotopias was taken up und developed further by the German theologian Hans-Joachim Sander.[16] By using Foucault's categories of utopia and heterotopia Sander, however, significantly transforms them. His perspective is driven by the search for discourses and places that counteract the hegemonic order—he is considerably concerned with emancipation, something that is not that clearly visible in Foucault's "heterotopology".

Another difference lies in the fact that while utopias and heterotopias in Foucault's texts appear to be somehow related to each other (as shows the example of the mirror), Sander brings them into a clear opposition. Utopian thinking would invent a "fictitious countervailing power, totally opposed to the real world"[17], whereas in in the heterotopias one would find *real*

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[13] Ibid., p. 184–185.

[14] Ibid., p. 185.

[15] Ibid.

[16] In addition to Sander there are also other theologians who try to make the categories developed by Foucault fruitful for theology. Cf. Bauer 2003; Carette 2000; Galston 2010; Hoff 1999; Steinkamp 1999; Tran 2011 and others.

[17] Sander 2006, p. 49.

discourses opposed to the hegemonic order, which have the potential to generate *real* countervailing powers. While utopian thinking remains blind to difference and otherness, and therefore easily turns into exclusivism and totalitarianism, Sander believes that by identifying the specific heterotopias of a certain society one obtains an instrument to analyze and counteract the structures and the specific mechanisms of exclusion of the hegemonic order. In the biblical tradition, the paradise, the ark of Noah, the promised land, the mountain Sinai, the crib, the cross, the empty grave and heavenly Jerusalem would represent heterotopias, whereas the Tower of Babel has to be understood as "utopia".[18] For Sander, "liberation theology" also represents a utopian form of theology, and therefore also the danger to ignore difference and to fall into religious fundamentalism and violence.[19]

3 Replying to the critique: Liberation theology understood as a heterotopic theology

In order to reply to the critique of Sander, I would like to argue that when using the categories of Foucault liberation theology, much more than a utopian theology, has to be considered a heterotopic theology. Of course "utopian" thinking played and still plays a decisive role in the discourses of liberation theology[20], however I believe that the central concept of liberation theologies is not so much "utopia", and not even "liberation", but the "option for the poor", that is the option for a specific place, or better to say for specific places. Although in liberation theologies the so-called "option for the poor" is intrinsically linked to a sort of liberating praxis with somehow universal pretensions, within this intrinsic unity, priority lies not on the aspect of liberation but on the option for the poor. It's the option for the poor that founds, motivates, orientates, and also criticizes liberating praxis and not the liberating praxis that would justify the option for the poor. Bringing supposedly "utopian" liberation theologies

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[18] Sander 2006, p. 34–35, 49.

[19] Cf. Sander 2016, to be published. A very significant aspect of the transformation of the categories of utopia and heterotopia in Sander lies also in the linkage between utopian thinking and Foucault's concept of "disciplinary power". For Sander utopias exert strong disciplinary effects, something which does not appear in Foucault's characterization of the „utopias".

[20] Cf. the text of Hans Schelkshorn in this volume.

in opposition to heterotopic forms of theology ignores the importance of this heterotopic moment at the heart of liberation theologies.

4 The rootedness of Ellacuría's utopian thinking in the historical reality of the crucified people

The crucial importance of the concrete places of the poor is also quite clear when we turn to Ellacuría's text about "utopia and propheticism from Latin America"[21]. Prof. Tamayo emphasizes in his paper that Ellacuría's utopian thinking can be characterized by a double linkage: On the one hand it is linked to prophetic protest and on the other it is linked to a specific geographical and social place: Latin America and the poor and oppressed majorities of the continent.[22] Without the rootedness in this specific place, for Ellacuría "the unavoidable thrust of the principle of reality disappears, and without that both utopia and prophecy are a mental game, more formal than real"[23].

It is curious to notice that the place of Latin America in the utopian thinking of Ellacuría resembles many of the characteristics of Foucault's heterotopias. So Latin America for Ellacuría in some way is a place outside of the other sites, excluded from the cultural, economic and religious centers of the globalized world. Nonetheless it is a *real* place, with a specific location within this hegemonic order, which at once represents, contests and reverses this order:

> The conditions suffered [by Latin America] in its own flesh, along with its effective protest, constitute trustworthy evidence that convicts the historical world order […] and by negation, announces a different order. The real truth of the present-day historical arrangement is cruelly reflected […] in the reality of the Third World consciously expressed in Latin America´s many-sided protest.[24]

> The very reality of Latin America, especially when seen from the vantage point of Christina faith, constitutes a radical prophetic protest against the international order, both in its North-South confrontation and in its East-West confrontation. It is also a protest against the attitude,

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[21] Ellacuría 1989.

[22] Cf. the text of Juan José Tamayo in this volume.

[23] Ellacuría 1989, p. 9.

[24] Ibid., p. 16.

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behavior, and expectations promoted by those in the cultural vanguard and the models previously proposed as ideals of freedom and humanity.[25]

Ellacurías interpretation of the significance of the reality of Latin America, however, goes far beyond Foucault's ideas about heterotopias, when he introduces a clear messianic perspective on this reality, which discovers in it the features of what he calls the suffering Christ.

He most clearly developed this basic intuition in his text "The Crucified People: An Essay in Historical Soteriology"[26], published in 1978. Starting from the idea of St. Paul, that Christ`s afflictions still lack something which has to be filled up[27], Ellacuría argues in this text that the salvific suffering and resurrection of Jesus Christ have to be continued in history and that in each period it has to be critically discerned, who is the one most prepared to do so. Ellacuría finds the criteria for this discernment in the songs of the Servant of Yahweh in Isaiah, certainly one of the key texts for each Christian soteriology, where we learn that the messianic figure of the Servant lacks all "form", "majesty", and "beauty", that he is "despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief", one "from whom men hide their faces", one who is esteemed as "smitten by God" and as "cut off of the land of the living". We learn that the Servant even is buried with the "wicked", although he "has done no violence" but is being "pierced" for the "transgressions" of others.[28] The one who most resembles the characteristics of the Servant of Yahweh in history would be the most appropriate to continue the mission of Jesus in history.

Also the servant of Yahweh in Isaiah can be read somehow as a heterotopic figure. He is "outside of all places", "cut off of the land of the living", and condemned by the predominant symbolic order - he is considered as "smitten" by God and buried with the "wicked". Although excluded both from the social as from the religious order, the servant at the same time represents, contests, and reverses this order. He bears the guilt, the grief and the sorrows of the others, his fate reveals the malice of the people that surround him, and his suffering and death bring peace and salvation to the people. The servant of Yahweh, however, cannot be

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[25] Ibid., p. 18.

[26] Ellacuría 1978.

[27] Cf. Col 1,24.

[28] Cf. Is 52,2–12.

reduced to his heterotopic function. He is at once a heterotopic, a messianic, and a utopic figure. In the end, it is the transcendent God himself who inverts the meaning of what is happening to the servant by constituting him as his privileged instrument to bring light and justice to the nations, to "open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners form the dungeon, [and] from prison those who sit in darkness"[29]. God himself inverts the meaning of what is happening by choosing him who is despised and rejected for this extraordinary task and by awarding salvific significance to what at first gaze seems to be an act of absolute injustice. The Servant for his part is promised to see his offspring: "he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand"[30].

Latin America for Ellacuría is an outstanding place for the practice of a powerful prophetic utopianism because parts of it reality can be understood as an embodiment of the messianic figure of the Servant of Yahweh: Latin America is "a continent with particular characteristics like those attributed to the Servant of Yahweh"[31], Ellacuría writes. "It is a region ill-treated ever since the armed conquest effected by Spanish Christendom. Without losing its human heart, it nonetheless has its face disfigured, almost unrecognizable as human except in its pain and tragedy. (Is 52:2-12)"[32] Because of carrying the characteristics of the Servant of Yahweh, the suffering majorities of Latin America can, for Ellacuría, be regarded as the historical body in which the salvific mission of Christ gains historical flesh.

It is, however, of crucial importance not to understand the embodiment of Christ in the suffering majorities of Latina America as an exclusive identification. Because of its intrinsic historicity Christian salvation for Ellacuría cannot be separated from history, but this does not mean it can be reduced to it. By transforming history Christian salvation makes in history something present which is more than merely historical. The place of the crucified people therefore has to be considered as both a historical and a transcendent reality. Its transcendent character hinders the "crucified people" from being fully identified with any specific group or at least with all characteristics or a specific organization of this group. The "crucified people" transcends each concrete, historical figure and therefore necessarily remains "of a certain

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[29] Cf. Is 42,7.

[30] Cf. Is 53, 10.

[31] Ellacuría 1989, p. 15.

[32] Ibid.

indetermination"[33]. That the crucified people transcends each concretion, however, does not mean that it can avoid historical concretion. So for Ellacuría the biblical texts are concrete enough to clearly distinguish which groups and which people are more in line with the mission of the suffering Servant and which are not. For Ellacuría, for example, in his day it was obvious that the so called "third world countries", the oppressed and those who are struggling for justice and liberation are closer to the mission of the Servant of Yahweh than the "first world countries", the rich and the oppressors.[34]

5 The challenges of the place of the crucified people to utopian thinking

I believe that the decided location of utopian thinking in the "crucified people" can serve as a critical corrective, which prevents utopian thinking from becoming an escapist, exclusivist or totalitarian ideology. This for four reasons:

1. The historicity of the crucified people forces to link utopian thinking to a specific "geo-socio-temporal"[35] space, and confronts it with the challenges of a concrete context. In this way it hinders utopian thinking from turning itself into an abstract, individualistic escapism.

2. The location in the crucified people links utopian thinking to the reverse side of history. The places of suffering, oppression, marginalization, exclusion and death are not merely the starting point of Ellacuría's utopian thinking but remain its permanent point of reference. Ellacuría insists that each step in the process of realization of the utopia has to be assessed by the consequences it brings to the people who are at the very bottom of society. The irrenouncable linkage to the victims of the history avoids utopian thinking from turning itself into an exclusive totalitarian or elitist project.

3. For Ellacuría the crucified people is not only the object, but also the subject of salvation.[36] The crucified people is the chosen instrument for God to realize Gods salvific action in history. From a Christian perspective the realization of a utopian project therefore cannot primarily be considered the task of politicians or intellectuals, but has to be understood

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[33] Ellacuría 1978, p. 168.

[34] Cf. ibid.

[35] Ellacuría 1989, p. 9.

[36] Cf. Ellacuría 1978, p.141.

fundamentally as the task of the crucified people itself. Intellectuals, theologians, philosophers and scientists are important to critically accompany the praxis of the crucified people but they are not the ones who can substitute this praxis or even claim a privileged position within it. The privileged position Ellacuría gives to the action of the crucified people contradicts all megalomaniacal pretensions of intellectuals and politicians who consider themselves the natural leaders of society and expect the "ignorant mass" to follow.

4. Because the crucified people due to its transcendent character can never be fully identified with any specific group or organization there is no historical instance that can claim to fully represent its salvific mission.[37] Who would, in a certain moment, represent the crucified people has to remain open to a permanent process of discernment and critical discussion.

6 Lampedusa as heterotopic place of prophetic utopianism

Following closely on this last point, I would like to end my paper by attempting to locate the crucified people today. If we want to further use Ellacurías concept of the crucified people we have to critically ask, who are and where we are confronted with the embodiment of the crucified people today, 25 years after the assassination of Ellacuría?

In our complex and globalized world, the instances of oppression and exclusion, of exploitation and discrimination, of marginalization and suffering are plural and hence also the location of the crucified people must be plural and varied. One might think for example of the human tragedies that occur in Syria and Iraq or of the situation of laborers in East Asia, Saudi-Arabia or Qatar. One might call to mind the situation of indigenous people in Latin America, of violated women in India, civil wars in Africa, or the nearly one billion people in the world who do not have enough to eat.

In the following section, I will concentrate on only one of these places, which gained worldwide attention due to the visit of Pope Francis last year: Lampedusa. To do so I want to come back to some of Foucault's reflections about heterotopia I sketched in the first part of this paper.

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[37] For Ellacuría the pretensions of the communist parties in orthodox Marxism to fully represent the proletariat and therefore the universal subject of history fall into this ideological trap.

Curiously, at the moment when Foucault becomes most utopian in his text about heterotopias, he also becomes most ideological and unfaithful to his own concepts, namely at the moment when he speaks (with a certain nostalgia) about the ships of the European colonizers—the heterotopia "par excellence"—as "the greatest reservoir of imagination" and as a place of "adventure" opposed to espionage and police. Seen form the European perspective the ships of the European colonizers fulfill exactly the function that Foucault himself ascribes to utopia in "Le mots et les chose". In the European imagination, the ships of the colonizers represent "fantastic, untroubled region[s] […] where life is easy", and have nothing to do with the "disturbing" places that undermine language, which according to Foucault in the very same text are the heterotopias. Foucault obscures that the adventurous ships he writes about have been places of brutal discipline and squalid conditions and that of course from the perspective of the peoples to be colonialized the European ships were symbols not of "adventure" but of exploitation and domination.

To correct this inconsistency, I would like to suggest that not the ships of the European colonizers, but instead the overfilled refugee boats in the contemporary Mediterranean Sea, like those who try to reach the coast of Lampedusa, ought to be considered as the heterotopias "par excellence", at least from a European perspective. In contrast to what Foucault says about the ships of the European colonizers these boats are no "reservoir of imagination". They are sites of desperate and betrayed hopes. The people in these boats do not have a home neither where they started for their journey nor where the human traffickers (a sort of postmodern corsairs) promise to bring them. A few square centimeters on an overfilled boat is the only place they are allowed to occupy. The one why dies on sea does not leave any trace behind, no place where he could be remembered or commemorated. Perhaps hardly anyone can be considered as more 'placeless' than the people on these refugee boats.

Inverting what Foucault says about the civilizations that do not have ships, namely that in these civilizations dreams and visions dry up, I think we can say that the refugee boats of Lampedusa dramatically indicate the 'drying up' of the much invoked dreams and visions of Europe. Like in a *mirror*, the spirit of adventure of the European colonizers who embarked to discover and conquer new lands is reflected in the desperate adventures of people who try desperately to reach Europe from the former colonies, highlighting the reverse under side of the colonial "adventures" of Europe's past. The refugees confront Europe with the truth of its

own imperialist history and with its own utopic infertility today. They force us to radically rethink what the project of Europe, its economic and political system, religion and society, democracy and human rights, humanism and human values are really worth, when faced to the dramatic situation of these people.

From a theological perspective it is easy to discern in these 'boat people' the characteristics of the crucified people as Ellacuría describes it: a people which is deprived from its "majesty" and "beauty"; a people which is "despised and rejected by men"; a people "of sorrow and acquainted with grief", a people "from whom men hide their faces", "cut off of the land of the living". Perhaps the renewal of utopian thinking, if it claims to be more than a merely "mental game" depends today to a large extent on whether it achieves to credibly incarnate itself in sites like those of Lampedusa and to develop visions of an alternative politic, economic, social, symbolic, and religious order where also these people can find places where to live with dignity.

Pope Francis' visit to Lampedusa shows that in this process, perhaps the church can also play a decisive role, be it in form of prophetic protest or in form of effective help and engagement in the necessary transformation processes in society. The ship, the heterotopia "par excellence" always has been also one of the most important symbols of the church. Perhaps by turning Christian sites into places of hospitality and safe havens for refugees, as Pope Francis required the Christian monasteries some weeks after his visit to Lampedusa[38], the empty church naves in Europe might regain significance and relevance in (post)modern, pluralized, and post(secular) European societies and turn into small islands of a "realized" utopia, a utopia which is not a "fantastic untroubled region" but disrupts and "interrupts"[39] the spreading "culture of comfort"[40] of our times. At least the future of Christian theology in

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[38] "Dear men and women religious, your empty convents are not useful to the Church if they are turned into hotels and earn money. The empty convents do not belong to you, they are for the flesh of Christ which is what refugees are. The Lord calls us to live with greater courage and generosity, and to accept them in communities, houses and empty convents." (Pope Francis, September 10th, 2013)

[39] For the German theologian Johann Baptist Metz "interruption" constitutes "the shortest definition of religion". (Cf. Metz 1981, p. 86)

[40] "Today no one in our world feels responsible; we have lost a sense of responsibility for our brothers and sisters. We have fallen into the hypocrisy of the priest and the levite whom Jesus described in the parable of the Good Samaritan: we see our brother half dead on the side of the road, and perhaps we say to ourselves: 'poor soul…!', and then go on our way. It's not our responsibility, and with that we feel reassured, assuaged. The culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people, makes us live

Europe seems to be closely related to whether or not it is able to give space and voice to the experiences of suffering of these people within contemporary European discourses.

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in soap bubbles which, however lovely, are insubstantial; they offer a fleeting and empty illusion which results in indifference to others; indeed, it even leads to the globalization of indifference." (Pope Francis, July 8th, 2013)

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