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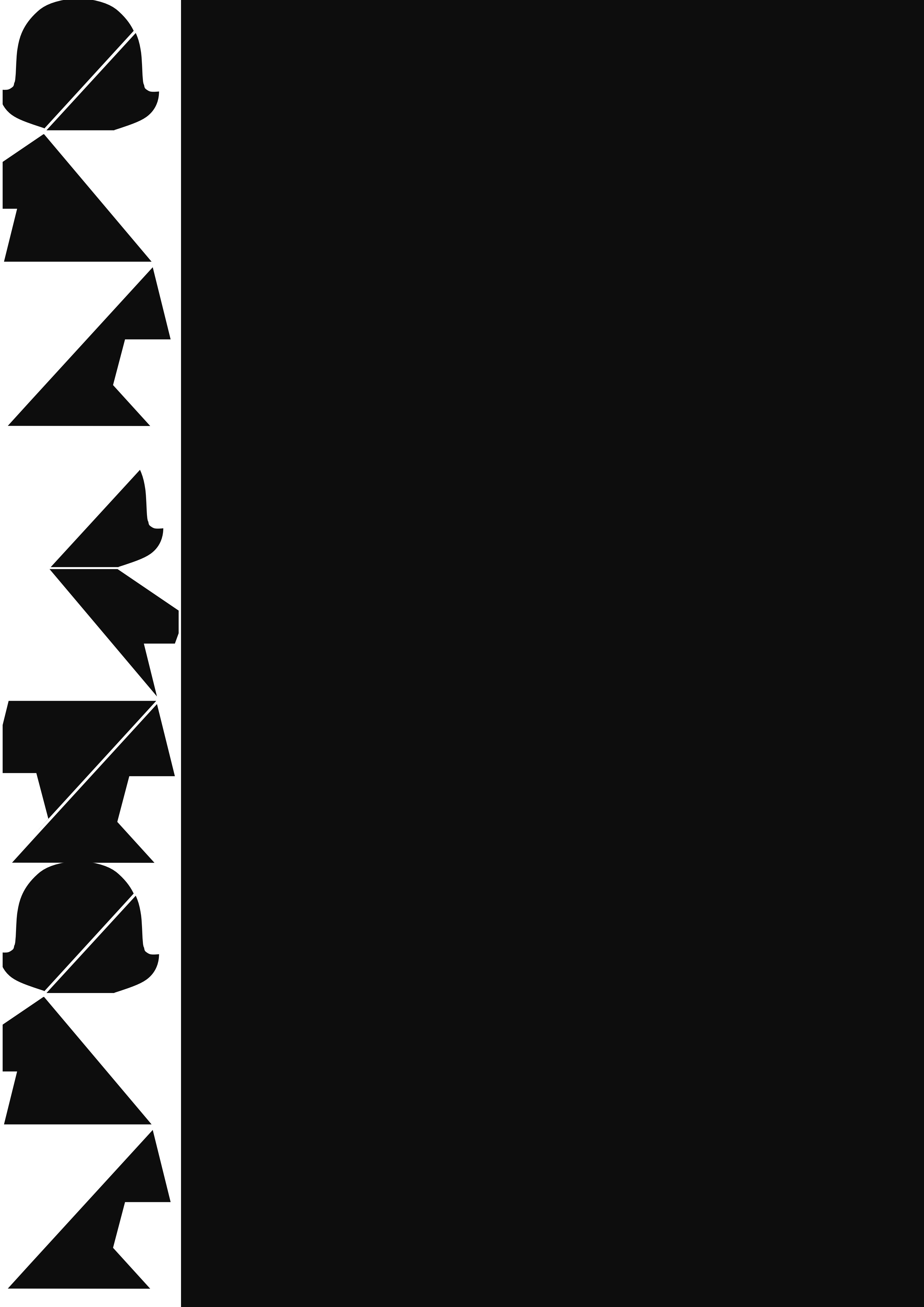
Troubling Gender

Anthropological Perspectives on Gender Politics in/of Europe

Beate Binder, Čarna Brković, Sabine Hess, Marion Näser-Lather, Ronda Ramm (eds.)

In recent years, the politics of gender and sexuality have turned extremely hostile across Europe. Long fought for rights and antidiscriminatory politics have come under heavy attack, while Gender Studies programs have been banned. In tandem, feminist arguments are being instrumentalized by right-wing movements and gender/sexuality are used as markers of both progress and backwardness within the postsocialist European landscape reproducing old and creating new hierarchies within the societies and between them. »Troubling Gender« brings together queer/feminist voices and ethnographic analyses from the Eastern and Western European contexts seeking to make sense of these developments and of their local and regional articulations; it examines the possibilities for solidarity across different positionalities and engages with diverse histories of struggle.



Inhalt

Troubling Gender. Anthropological Perspectives on Gender Politics in/of Europe

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Troubling Gender. New Turbulences in the Politics of Gender in Europe. Some Introductory Remarks

Beate Binder and Sabine Hess, for the editorial team

ABSTRACT: *Some introductory remarks to the volume »Troubling Gender. New turbulences in the politics of Gender in Europe«.*

KEYWORDS: *Anti-feminism, gender, Ethnography, Europe, Gender politics, Anti-Genderism*

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In 2021, we organized a conference on »Troubling Gender: New Turbulences in the Politics of Gender in Europe«. Deeply concerned about recent developments in the European regions and beyond, the Commission for Gender Studies and Queer Anthropology[1] of the German Association for European Ethnology and Empirical Cultural Analysis (DGEKW) wanted to facilitate exchange between scholarly disciplines as well as between scholars and activists from Western and Eastern Europe. The aim of the conference was to analyze anti-gender and anti-feminist developments with ethnographical means, to discuss possible interventions and to examine potential strategies of solidarity across the European regions. Due to COVID-19, the conference took place online. Nevertheless, participants were highly engaged in presentations and discussions, working on a better understanding of how gender and sexuality had become battlefields in recent political struggles over hegemony and providing insights into the ongoing authoritarian transformation of European politics and societies. Last but not least, the conference hinted at practices of resistance and offered interpretations of as well as approaches to the current conjuncture of »right-wing times« (Tudor/Ticktin 2021). In our invitation to the conference, we wrote:

> »The latest events in Europe indicate that the politics of gender and sexuality is becoming extremely hostile. Many gender-related topics are (again) open for a discussion. In Poland, Hungary, and Croatia there are attempts to limit or to revoke the right to abortion; Gender Studies have been banned at universities in Hungary and Bulgaria; Austrian FPÖ/ÖVP government has severely limited the money for the research of gender politics. LGBT rights have been questioned in France and Italy, while in Poland we witness the emergence of the so-called »LGBT-free zones« and the diminishment of LGBT rights. With the rise of the AfD in Germany, gender imaginaries and anti-feminist discourses (believed to had been long overcome) gain more and

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> more prominence, while the successes of gender democracy and the attained liberalization of gender relations and sexual practices are increasingly framed as threats. At the same time, arguments for gender equality are used to criticize immigration, while gender is used as a marker of modernity and distinction in Western countries as well as in post-socialist societies.« (https://troubling-gender.eu/about/)

Reading this invitation from today's perspective, we cannot but admit that the situation has become even more serious and that attacks on queer and feminist movements and initiatives have become even more aggressive. Right-wing politics on gender and sexuality has produced a hostile landscape for even more people in even more European regions. We are concerned about the diminishing legitimacy of anti-discrimination policies and rights regarding bodily autonomy, the criminalization of abortion in several European countries and the ongoing ignorance or intentional rejection of transnational conventions, such as the Istanbul Convention against sexualized violence.

Furthermore, as feminist and queer scholars, we are confronted with the fact that right-wing movements have been occupying feminist arguments with ease, putting forward interpretations of concepts developed by gender and queer scholars and activists that are in line with racist and Islamophobic positions. Finally, and importantly, we as Gender Studies scholars experience attacks on ourselves, our colleagues and our study programs, being aware that such anti-gender and anti-feminist attacks do not require any knowledge of or engagement with Gender and Queer Studies and their findings but are mostly stereotypical attributions dressed as arguments and repeated monotonously.

At the same time, we are convinced — and some scholars have shown this in more detail (cf. Pető and Barat in this volume; Dietze/Roth 2020; Köttig et al. 2017) — that these attacks are not only meant to delegitimize Gender and Queer Studies across European regions. Gender and sexuality themselves are the ground on which an ongoing struggle for political hegemony is taking place (Tudor/Ticktin 2021; Jounait et al. 2013). This battlefield has successfully mobilized a great number of people across various political spectra and is working as a kind of ideological or »symbolic glue« (Kováts et al. 2015; Pető in this volume). Attacks on (non-hegemonic forms of) gender and sexuality are used as a foundation for the re-establishing of national narratives based on heteronormative family patterns; they enable the legitimization of the prohibition of any modes of education on sexual diversity, of literature and children's books on non-normative family constructions and queer identities. The restriction of human rights regarding sexuality and reproductive health in Europe goes hand in hand with the strengthening of the coalition of religious movements and »anti-gender« politics (cf. https://www.epfweb.org/node/837). These attacks have also fueled new-old articulations of racism in Europe as they seemingly create a favorable moral breeding ground for intensified politics of difference and fear (Kuhar/Paternotte 2017).

Since long, gender, sexuality and race have been serving as a benchmark for distinguishing between progress and backwardness within the colonial matrix — in the current conjuncture, these colonial images and hierarchies are heavily re-worked in the midst of the globally ongoing polycrisis in order to define who is part of the club of wealthy Europe. With the collapse of the socialist system, the capitalist-driven transformation of the postsocialist countries in the East and the EU enlargement process towards the East, the situation of women* as well as the handling of sexual diversity and gender equality more broadly have gained new momentum as markers within the emerging highly uneven postcolonial/postsocialist European landscape (Blagojević 2009; Busheikin 1997; Einhorn 1995; see also Boatcă 2015). As several articles in this volume show, race, gender and sexuality are not

only entangled in the East-West dynamic but have been made highly productive to co-constitute the East-West dichotomy itself, both between countries and within their respective societies (cf. Lewicki 2023). As Altman and Symons point out with their notion of »queer wars«, the relentless struggle between the advocates of LGBT rights as human rights and their opponents is often »perceived as an inevitable cultural clash between western democracies and ›the rest‹« (Altman/Symons 2016, 3). In sum, gender and sexuality function as a lens that allows for studying broad social, economic, cultural and political transformations and upheavals.

Based on the 2021 conference, this issue of *Berliner Blätter* assembles analytical papers as well as polyvocally written discussions on how to make sense of these developments and their local and regional specificities and effects. Following the aim of the conference, the issue brings together queer and feminist positions and analyses from Western and Eastern European contexts and investigates possibilities of solidarity across different positionalities and histories of struggles.

The papers in this volume start from a notion of Europe that stresses its globally entangled character. As Adam et al. discuss in more detail in their paper (in this volume), Europe is not a confined geographic space, a distinct cultural area or a historically exclusive »project sui generis« but multiple and incomplete, both product and producer of its colonial projects and imperial relations past and present (Adam et al. 2019; Chakrabarty 2000). From this perspective, we can see clearly the ongoing process of Europeanization, the contested nature of its borders, the struggles over questions of belonging and policies of exclusion.

The developments discussed above are often summarized with generalizing concepts such as homonationalism, postsocialism, neoliberalism or authoritarianism. The articles in this issue show that these phenomena need to be researched and discussed in a more nuanced manner in order to understand the respective logics and everyday practices that produce these social and political situations. Bilić et al. (in this volume), as the participants of a round table at the conference, argue that it is necessary to acknowledge the fragmented nature of the gender-queer intellectual, academic and activist landscape in Southeast Europe, which evolves around multiple struggles and points of contention — something that we can assume to be true for other regions as well. What becomes evident is the need for a more nuanced theoretical toolkit that takes into consideration the different specific situations. Ethnographic research urges us to paint a differentiated picture, making it possible to discern differences as well as commonalities of local conditions, developments and outcomes as effects of situated and globally entangled politics. Given the traveling of concepts and theories (Binder et al. 2011; Said 1997), ethnographic research can follow translations, shifts and contradictions. Against the backdrop of a careful examination, it is possible to reconsider and describe in more clarity the tensions that occur when postsocialist and postcolonial constellations meet and overlap. This seems to be the necessary precondition if we want to be able to formulate criticism and resulting political strategies in a way that makes it possible to respond to the specificities of the respective situations.

With this in mind, for this collection, we strongly supported collective writing projects, polyvocally written papers and curated discussions. These modes of writing and (re)presentation enable us to bridge disciplines and geographies; they create spaces of conversation between activists and more academically positioned perspectives and modes of knowledge production; they make it possible to think through the current turbulences and the related multiple traps, contradictions and ambiguities and reclaim feminist analytics as critical and profound reflection. Overall, this issue contributes to a gender-queer critical ethnographic analysis of the contemporary conjuncture of the politics of gender in/of Europe; it takes

part in the struggles of feminist and queer lives to build a future and in the ongoing — and increasingly urgent — search for other modes of doing and being.

Gender Politics of/in Europe

For the first section of this issue, we have assembled contributions that take a closer look at current intersectional gender politics in so-called Central and Eastern Europe. Although proper Europeanness is associated with former colonial powers, ´whiteness´ as an identity marker and defining feature of ›Europe‹ is also eagerly reproduced by nationalist and right-wing populist movements outside the European »core«, notably in so-called Central and Eastern Europe (Böröcz 2021; Kalmar 2023). Proceeding from various starting points, the papers focus on notions of gender and sexuality and discuss their contribution to the production of different understandings of Europe and European modernity as well as to (self-)produced concepts of East and West. How are dynamics pertaining to gender and sexuality expressed locally, and how do they feed into the upsurge of nationalism? How are they inscribed into broader dynamics and discourses on Europe, Europeanization and transformations of the (il)liberal state? *Anika Keinz* and *Paweł Lewicki* aim at »Discussing Europeanization and East-West dynamics of race, gender and sexuality«. Both have long been working (together and separately) on questions of gender, race, and sexuality politics in Poland. Based on this long-term experience, they are interested in racial relations and states of morality, aiming to explore the contribution of race-critical studies to better understand, for example, gender and sexual politics in Poland and the newly emerging strong nationalism. Against the backdrop of a panel discussion held at the conference, they examine how categories such as »race,« »gender« and »sexuality« contribute to the reproduction of various understandings of »Europe« and »European modernity« and to (self-)produced notions of »East« and »West«.

Poland is also the field of *Agnieszka Balcerzak's* study. She is interested in the symbolic intensity and turmoil the »Political Aesthetics of Visual Pro-Choice Protest in Poland« produces. These »angry posters« — as Balcerzak calls the protest images and signs supporting the pro-choice movement in the Polish »war on abortion« — draw on feminist imaginaries, symbols and aesthetic codes while appropriating pop-cultural elements and (anti)national visual rhetoric. Against this backdrop, Balcerzak discusses implications for feminist practice more generally. The examples she draws on in more detail show the shifting entanglement of feminism, universal pro-choice demands and national symbolisms, demonstrating how visual images and (inter)national codings have become a means of contestation within Poland's highly polarized society.

The following two papers shift the perspective to the West. First, *Beatrice Odierna* shows, in her paper on »Social Work ›with refugees‹ as a site of gendered everyday bordering«, how social workers put integration politics into daily practice in the context of counseling, administering, and accommodating refugees as well as how their daily routines are structured by gendered imaginaries of the »other«. Often the first contact for many with the German welfare system, social workers become both a target and an instrument for the implementation of (gendered) integration policies. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, *Odierna* describes and reflects on social work with people categorized as refugees as an important site of gendered forms of everyday bordering.

Next, *Miriam Gutekunst* and *Sabine Hess* pick up the thread laid out by the other contributions and discuss the contradictions and ambivalences entangled with queer and feminist

politics in the context of the current rise of right-wing nationalist politics. Their paper starts from the seemingly contradictory observation that some right-wing politicians present themselves as engaged in equality and diversity politics while attacking feminist and especially queer politics. This »politics of reversal« shows »dangerous convergences of gender and race in migration and feminist politics« that can be observed not only in right-wing contexts but across the political spectrum in Germany. By drawing on their differently positioned ethnographic research fields — the EU migration and border regime on the one hand and feminist movements in Germany on the other —, the authors explore how culturalist and racializing gender discourses within current migration and feminist politics reinforce each other on the level of macro politics as well as on the level of movements strategies and show what kinds of alliances emerge (intentionally or unintentionally) between the two scales.

The section closes with a polyvocal paper presented by scholars deeply entangled with or based in Southeast Europe. Asking the question »Can we fight together?«, *Bojan Bilić*, *Linda Gusia*, *Nita Luci*, *Diana Manesi*, *Jovan Džoli Ulićević* and *Čarna Brković* discuss multi-layered debates, struggles and points of contention that shape gender-queer scholarship and activism in Southeast Europe. They show which impact these situated debates have on claims, often-used notions and political positions, for example in regard to progress, civilization or Europeanness. Against this backdrop, it is a highly controversial question whether it is possible to fight together for social justice and the overcoming of the current state. How could it be possible to bring together the concern for the problems caused by unjust economic redistribution with those caused by unjust patterns of cultural recognition? This discussion reinforces the call to listen carefully and recognize on equal terms the different experiences across the European regions in order to strengthen the efforts of a transgressive progressive politics for social justice.

Gender Studies under Attack

The second section of this issue is devoted entirely to attacks on Gender Studies as an academic program, as well as those on feminist scholars, politicians and activists. Here too, we have brought together papers from different contexts and regions in Europe.

Betül Yarar and *Yasemin Karakaşoğlu* start this section with an article that reflects critically on the complicated situation of »Feminist and Gender Studies Scholars in Exile«. The experiences of scholars who came to Germany because they had to leave the academic community in their home country show in startling clarity the neoliberal and eurocentric state of academia in Germany. Forced migration, which culminated in 2015 under the influence of wars and war-like conflicts and the rise of anti-democratic regimes all over the world includes feminist and queer Gender Studies scholars targeted by authoritarian regimes due to the latter's symptomatic anti-gender policies and discourses. The authors explore the experiences of these scholars who encompass both the uneven ground and efforts of integration as well as the overall gendered and epistemic inequalities structuring the neoliberalized higher-education system in Germany.

Andrea Pető focuses on the situation of Gender Studies in Hungary where Gender Studies programs have been closed down. The paper — originally presented at the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Berlin, which we thank for permission to reprint the text in our issue — discusses multiple reasons why Gender Studies have changed due to illiberal and anti-feminist attacks. Even though the work of Gender Studies scholars is acknowledged by a larger audience, they are under constant attack via »online public harassment«. *Pető* shows how these

attacks resonate with campaigns initiated by anti-gender movements as a nationalist, neoconservative response to a multilayered crisis. She points to how gender works as »symbolic glue« to create alliances of hate and exclusion in order to re-establish an order considered »normal«. As her paper shows in more detail, the invocation of Gender Studies scholars is full of paradoxes — as are the lessons to be learned from this »paradoxical recognition«.

Concrete experiences with anti-feminist and anti-gender attacks are also discussed in the next contribution. Looking for »Counterstrategies against Antifeminism«, *Marion Näser-Lather*, *Dorothee Beck*, *Sabine Grenz* and *Ilse Lenz* give insights into their current research projects in the field of Gender Studies that have been (and still are) under attack. The authors argue for a more nuanced and critical investigation of these attacks in order to develop more in-depth conceptual work that bridges academia and practice. Only a collaborative engagement that considers its own omissions in respect to racist and intersectional power structures makes strengthening the common project of fostering social justice possible.

Queering Europe

The third and final section of this issue puts the notion of »queer« center stage. Again, the papers in this section start from different positions and follow different interests.

First, *Erzsebet Barat's* contribution focuses on »Political Struggles around ›Gender‹«, asking whether the recent »war on gender« in Hungary might have an impact in »de-centering queer theory«. She takes three legislative acts that were passed during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic to show, in a nutshell, the effects of the government's anti-gender propaganda as closely entangled with the right-wing regime that has been in place since 2010. Barat argues that attempting to define gender as a proper object, as some feminists have done, is insufficient in view of the ongoing attacks. Rather, it seems necessary to bridge internal divisions, navigate differences and shift away from a focus on hate to a trust-based queer solidarity. Only then will it be possible to fight the ongoing hate attacks and all forms of hegemonic masculinity.

Next, *Bogdan Popa* presents a »Marxist case for abortion«. »[R]ethinking the imagination of bodies in Soviet Marxism«, he develops a new view on current anti-feminist movements as well as recent anti-abortionist positions. Starting from current developments induced by the overturn of Roe v. Wade in the US, *Popa* analyses Romanian film productions from the 1960s in order to show the relevance of a historical argument for a Marxist pro-abortion politics. This way, he traces an ideological shift from the Marxist concept of a productive body to a politics of natality, which was followed by an abortion ban in 1966. He provides a psychoanalytical Marxist critique that makes it possible not only to reject the rhetoric of »individual rights« but also to develop a dialectical interpretation of capitalism.

Last but not least, a text collage offers some thoughts on the possibilities of »Queering Europe«. In this collage, *Jens Adam*, *Beate Binder*, Čarna Brković and *Patrick Wielowiejski* bring different anthropological research fields into conversation with each other. Against the backdrop of a fishbowl discussion that took place during the conference, this paper demonstrates the productivity of thinking across gender-queer theories and anthropological Europeanization research. The authors offer three possible starting points for a queering of Europe as a mode of knowledge production and political vision: the deconstruction of hegemonic imaginaries of Europe; attention to the pluralistic and fragmented nature of Europe(s) and Europeanization processes; and practices of producing and archiving imaginaries of Europe. With their strong emphasis on the productivity of ethnographic research,

the authors show the capacity of a double attentiveness — for that which emerges in the »gaps and cracks of Europeanization« and for the ways in which institutions working in the name of Europe generate heterogeneous experiences and resulting inequalities. Queering Europe makes it possible to grasp the central role of the sexual and the gendered for the constitution and stabilization of Europe while staying with the desire of a doing otherwise (Weiß 2016) and to foster solidarity across the European regions.

Our attempt to bring together academic and activist voices from Western European (mainly Germany) and Eastern European contexts at the conference as well as for this issue of *Berliner Blätter* followed this very desire of doing academia otherwise through listening and learning. Acknowledging that (violent) histories frame and have an important impact on the present of gender and sexual politics on the macro level as well as on the micro politics of the everyday, the contributions in this issue show that, again and again, politics of gender and sexuality can easily be connected to and have been instrumental for nationalist, exclusionary projects that aim to legitimize hierarchies within and between societies, partly in the name of progress, partly in the name of tradition and »security«. Conversations across disciplines and regions as well as between academia and activism also showcase that one of the first targets of authoritarian transformations are gender and sexual rights, bodily autonomy rights as well as the right to live in and with differences. Gender Studies and Queer Anthropology are well-equipped to analyze the present conjuncture as an archive of the present and make sense of current struggles over hegemony of which we as Gender and Queer Studies academics are part.

We would like to express our gratitude to a great number of people who helped with organizing the conference, inviting speakers and preparing this publication. We are incredibly thankful to Svenja Schurade (University of Göttingen), who worked as program organizer on the conference, and Ronda Ramm (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin), who helped — as a student assistant — set up the conference and — now as a member of the academic staff — prepare this issue. We also want to thank Jelka Günther (University of Göttingen) for her initial help with various applications and setting up the conference website. We are also very grateful to the staff of »Neue Rituale«, the studio that designed and implemented the conference website as digital infrastructure for hosting the conference online. It was a great pleasure to work with them on creating a website that resonated with the conference topic both visually and practically.

We are enormously grateful to the different funding bodies that made the conference and book project possible as an interdisciplinary and European endeavor. Specifically, we thank the Ministry for Science and Culture of Lower Saxony, which made this project possible with its large grant as part of the program »Niedersächsisches Vorab«. We also thank LAGEN (the Association of Women and Gender Studies in Lower Saxony), the Göttingen Center for Gender Studies as well as the Institute for Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology at the University of Göttingen, both of which worked in close cooperation with us (the Commission for Gender Studies and Queer Anthropology) to make the conference happen.

Special thanks also go to our partner commission at the DGEKW, »Europeanization_ Globalization: Ethnographies of the Political«, which collaborated with us in the programming and realization of the conference. This cooperation was a great resource and provided great depth to all discussions.

Last but not least, we are very grateful to *Berliner Blätter* and the *Gesellschaft für Ethnographie e.V.* for granting us the opportunity to publish this issue as open-access within the scope of their publishing endeavors. In this context, we also thank James Powell for his

highly professional proofreading and copy-editing work, Armina Hübner for dealing with all the formalities and Harry Adler for the layout and production of this issue.

We hope this issue will foster cooperation and discussion across disciplines, between academia and activism and across all European regions.

Berlin and Göttingen, August 2023

Note

1 At the time of the conference, the commission was still called »Commission for Women's and Gender Studies«.

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Berliner Blätter 88/2023, 11–22

Discussing Europeanization and East-West dynamics of race, gender, and sexuality

Anika Keinz and Paweł Lewicki

ABSTRACT: *In the following dialogue, Anika Keinz, the invited discussant at the panel »Struggles over Europe« forming part of the »Troubling Gender« conference, and Paweł Lewicki talk about how race, gender, and sexuality are not only entangled in the East-West dynamic but co-constitute the East-West dichotomy too. They discuss racial relations and states of morality, in grappling with the question of what exactly race-critical studies can contribute to both the improved analysis of this dichotomy and to the examination of developments in Europe: What can we observe when looking, for example, at gender and sexual politics in Poland from a race-critical perspective and what can this tell us about nationalisms? Doing so, they take up the discussion Lewicki started, together with Randi Elin Gressgård and Rafał Smoczyński, in the special issue of Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics »Struggles over Europe. Postcolonial East/West Dynamics of Race, Gender and Sexuality« (2020, 6/3). This special issue explores the dynamics pertaining to (racialized) gender and sexuality, as well as their local expressions, and asks how they are embedded in broader dynamics and discourses on Europe, Europeanization, and the transformation of (il)liberal states. Lewicki and Keinz then continue their conversation and pick up on certain aspects that came up during the panel discussion. They reflect on how categories such as »race,« »gender,« and »sexuality« contribute to the reproduction of various understandings of »Europe« and »European modernity« and to the (self-)produced notions of »East« and »West« respectively.*

KEYWORDS: *Europe, Europeanization, race, gender, sexuality*

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Anika: Thank you, Paweł, for the invitation to continue our discussion that began during the conference. As a starting point, may you explain to our reader the ideas and intentions you had with the special issue? What did you want to emphasize with this publication? Could you say a few words about it?

Paweł: The special issue is one outcome from a longer discussion we have been carrying on together with Randi Elin Gressgård and Rafał Smoczyński. Our ambition has been to make greater sense of the political dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe and the rise of populism and nationalism throughout the continent that in turn spurred growing discus-

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sions about the division into »East« and »West«—particularly within the European Union, but also beyond. While nationalism is present in the West and many nationalist-populist parties are very strong in »old« Europe (France: RN; Germany: AfD; the Netherlands: PVV and FvD; Italy: Lega and FdI; Norway: FrP; Sweden: SD; Switzerland: SVP; Austria: FPÖ), it is the governments of Orbán in Hungary and Kaczyński in Poland and, to a lesser degree, former government of Babiš in Czechia or Janša in Slovenia that recently lost power but nevertheless seem to have induced these discussions.

The so-called LGBT-free zones in Poland, the introduction of a homophobic law in Hungary, and political developments in the past—such as the introduction of the homophobic law in Russia in 2013 as well as cultural dynamics around sexual politics and racism—provoked new conjunctions of race-critical and post- as well as decolonial studies pursuing Europeanization, gender, and sexuality research. We framed the East-West dynamics as entangled—similar to critical race theory where whiteness is dependent on someone else's status as black or as interdependencies and mutuality in Randeria's »entangled modernities« (Adam et al. 2019). This dynamic in reference to Europeanization, gender, and sexuality is accompanied by (self-)hierarchizations and essentializations of »East« and »West«—as orientations that people use to make sense of the world. In the special issue, we capture, for example, how gender and sexuality are instrumentalized in struggles over citizenship and Europeanness in Poland (Gressgård/Smoczyński 2020) or how European sexual citizenship lost traction in post-EU enlargement Poland, giving way to new definitions of »homonationalism« (Baer 2020).

Contributions to the special issue show also the interdependencies between »progressive« and »European« gender and sexualities, as well as the ways in which Eastern Europe people and those coded as coming from the East are racially marked as not fitting into »Europeanness« (Gressgård/Husakouskaya 2020; Krivonos/Diatlova 2020; Lapina 2020). Both in the special issue and in the panel »Postcolonial East/West Dynamics of Race, Gender and Sexuality«[1] at the »Troubling Gender« conference,[2] we wanted to problematize the civilizing discourses linked to sexual politics and tolerance present in Europeanization processes. We also wanted to point out the co-constitutive constructions of »East«/»West« vis-à-vis Europe, rather than reproduce the unmarked »civilized« norm of the West or the »white innocence« of the East. Such a perspective inevitably draws attention to national discourses activated by gender and sexuality politics in Europeanization processes. I think that critical race theory and particularly critical whiteness scholarship (Dyer 1997; Krivonos/Diatlova 2020; Rzepnikowska 2019; Shmidt/Jaworsky 2021) have had an important impact on problematizations of Europeanization, as they have enabled us to highlight the renounced racism, both in the East and the West as well as between them, alongside also the civilizational discourses attached to Europeanization and gender and sexuality politics.

Anika: I believe that it is postcolonial and race-critical perspectives more than critical whiteness scholarship that started the problematization of Europeanization and progressive gender and sexuality politics. And I fear that the women scholars who studied the gendered processes of the political- and social-transformation processes after 1989 and in the EU in the 1990s are often forgotten here. Individuals such as Chris Corrin (1999), Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (2000a, 2000b), Barbara Einhorn (2000), Ziliah Eisenstein (1997), and Peggy Watson (2000)—to name but a few.

Paweł: I think in the context of European East-West dynamics it is the critical whiteness perspective that enables us to problematize Eastern claims to moral superiority and to

»white innocence.« Of course, this perspective stems from critical race theory, but the specific perspective offered on whiteness enables us to bring to light the subtle production of differences and hierarchizations—ones not necessarily referring strictly to race. Nevertheless, we wanted to use a gender and sexuality perspective as a lens that enables us to search for answers to the questions we addressed both in the special issue and during the conference: How do categories of gender and sexuality contribute to the production of various notions of »Europe« and »European modernity,« as well as of »East« and »West«? How are dynamics pertaining to gender and sexuality expressed locally, and how do they feed into the upsurge of nationalism? How are they inscribed into broader dynamics and discourses on Europe, Europeanization, and transformations of the (il)liberal state?

Such a move is something you already did in *Polens Andere* (Keinz 2008), when you looked at Poland before and after its EU accession. I think now times are different, plus we problematize these East-West dynamics. Gender and sexuality became more prominent in the West as a way to mark those who do not belong; there are similar processes in the East too. We build on the research and literature on these processes.

Anika: Yes, gender and sexual politics, as well as what Judith Butler in her book *Frames of War. When Is Life Grievable?* (2009) calls »progressive freedoms,« have become ever more prominent; in tandem, a new racialization of gender and sexual politics, a sexualization of racial politics, and the nationalization of both have come about too. We could observe this in regard to the citizenship tests introduced in several countries in the first decade of the new millennium. In the course of this, both sexual and religious minorities have been increasingly racialized—albeit in different ways. Old dichotomies and binaries have been revitalized, and a series of discourses and policies coined such as »integration discourses,« »immigration policies,« and »discourses of belonging.«

Paweł: I think the issues of Europe and Europeanization, and the dynamics they activate, have become even more tense than in the first decade of the new century. It became painfully clear with Brexit, but also with national politics in Hungary and Poland. Approaching Europeanization from postcolonial and critical race perspectives enables us to see it as a dynamic, sometimes contradictory, social and political but most of all relational process in and between East and West. Similar to what you did in problematizing »progressive« genders and sexualities and their connection to notions of »Europe.« Critical race theory and postcolonial scholarship have shown how gender and race in European colonies would intersect to exert power over colonized populations and how gender became a tool to control what »whiteness« and »Europeanness« mean (McClintock 1995; Stoler 1997, 2002). What this scholarship showed was how skin color, with time, became glossed over by notions of »civilization« and »cultural belonging« to Europeanness (Boatcă/Parvulescu 2020; Stoler 2002). A similar dynamic can be observed today in Europe between East and West, where notions of »proper« Europeanness are connected to gender and sexuality—albeit these categories are differently conceived nowadays. Hierarchy-building and essentializations of the respectively constructed Other in terms of gender and sexualities between East and West have a racist genealogy and point to a racist legacy permeating the whole continent.

Anika: I would probably not completely agree with this comparison, but I admit that I almost but not entirely omitted the racialized history of Eastern and Western Europe—particularly the historical racialization of Eastern Europe that was and still is linked to civilizational discourses. However, I did argue with Watson (and she was of course not the only

one who wrote about this) that the West operated as an unspoken reference point for the representations of Eastern Europe. Watson (2000) recognized that this West-centeredness structured interpretations of change analogous to whiteness. Back then, this was the lens through which critical scholars of the political-transformation processes interpreted the so-called postsocialist transformation processes (including the idea of »path dependency«). But today, research solely on postsocialism is not really a thing anymore. So, could you say a bit more about today's critical race theory in conjunction with gender (and sexuality) in East-West dynamics?

Paweł: I think we need to consider the global political and social dynamics that have led to new perspectives and research developments. I mean here, for example, migration within the EU—which has clearly showed different shades of whiteness to it. I think for many people coming from new member states, the different ways in which whiteness is raced were and are a traumatizing experience, one occurring on a massive, unprecedented scale (Rzepnikowska 2019; Fox/Moroşanu/Szilassy 2014). But I also think a relevant question is: How did these experiences of being racialized impact racist processes in Poland? Goods and money flow within the EU, but more sophisticated forms of border and migration control are implemented, while nation-states are unable to give answers to questions of equal rights, diversity, and dignity (Mezzadra/Neilson 2013). On the other hand, we see clearly racist policies on the Polish-Belarussian border; the ramifications of the massive Ukrainian migration to Poland remain to be seen, meanwhile.

The COVID-19 pandemic in the EU / Europe and the sudden strict border controls as a consequence of its outbreak, like no other event in the recent past, highlighted in a short period of time the racialized differences within and beyond the continent (let me remind you about special charter flights for Romanian workers to Germany, where sanitary and medical regulations were apparently not as important to keep as for the local population). And racial and imperial genealogies also reemerged, already before the pandemic, in the East—for example in the ways many governments of the new EU member states pass down racial hierarchies and essentializations to migrants. Either to refugees or, as is the case in Poland, to millions of Ukrainians who take over predominantly badly paid jobs in the service sector. These racial mechanisms, the many interrelated tendencies notwithstanding, do not constitute unified phenomena. But in the context of the growing pressure of global capitalism and of Europeanization, they do gain social and political relevance as they may nurture feelings of agency and collective identity.

However, racist genealogies have been present, as I claim, for a long time in Poland, due to its »inter-imperial position,« to use a term coined by Laura Doyle (2020). Europeanization has only exacerbated these genealogies. The latter fed the narration of »defense« against imperial neighbors.

LGBT-free zones are a good example of how this script of »defense« is revived against the enemy that is called »gender ideology.« These zones emerged in early 2019 when around 100 municipalities, counties, and provinces in Poland passed nonbinding resolutions termed a »Local Government Charter on the Rights of the Family« or a »Resolution against LGBT Ideology.« Usually they do not explicitly refer to LGBT people and were passed on the initiative of Ordo Iuris, a fundamentalist Polish Catholic organization that has global networks. Still, together with other changes in legislation referring to kinship, abortion, as well as further gender and sexuality policies introduced by the nationalist-conservative government, these LGBT-free zones stand for a politics that envisions a new type of Polish and European citizenship. This is something that Gressgård and Smoczyński (2020) described in their

contribution to the special issue: namely as negotiations over dominant notions of »civic responsibility« and »Europeanness« along gender and sexuality lines.

In my paper presented during the conference,[3] I focused more on how these notions establishing LGBT-free zones are built on a narrative of »defense« of »Polish tradition« and »normality.« These are implicitly coded as heteronormative, as deeply entrenched in Polish history and national narratives—something you already showed in your book *Polens Andere* (Keinz 2008) and in your article on European desire and national bedrooms (Keinz 2011). If we look at this narrative from a critical race, postcolonial perspective, its racist background becomes more evident. It was produced not only in opposition to the Mongolian, Ottoman, and later Russian, German, as well as Austrian Empires, but it was and is also directed inward and based on an anti-Semitism that has fueled the national narrative in Poland and struggles over superior whiteness.

My point is that »Polishness,« narrated as based in Catholicism and moral superiority, developed in a historical process via differentiation from the proximate »Other«—namely Jews. This acts as a projection screen for the production of the morally just and better Polish self. Other minorities—particularly in the regions called the »Eastern Borderlands« (Kresy Wschodnie) of the First and Second Polish Republics—also had this role, but Poland's relationship to them was framed more in a civilizational and developmental discourse than in a moral one—so one could assign them the position of being lesser Poles anyway. In such a situation, and due to the instability of whiteness, racist dynamics required constantly more sophisticated and continuous (moral) differentiation. There are several researchers who show how anti-Semitism in Poland and the production of Jewish Otherness can be traced back even further into the past (to the end of the eighteenth century when Poland was on the brink of modernity), but most of all how it was produced in religious and moral terms (Cała 2018; Michlic 2006; Tokarska-Bakir 2019). The Polish government now wants to use these to position itself in the European arena—that is, as a country representing greater morality and the »true spirit« of Christian Europe.

Resolutions on LGBT-free zones passed by local governments in Poland, with their moralist and defensive tone, are very much in line with these narratives. Announcing such zones is intended to protect communities and regions from the »rotten West.« They are also designed to shield against something that is present though not quite visible: »LGBT ideology.«

Anika: To me, it is interesting to hear about the current discourses and dynamics in Poland. You show impressively that gender and sexual politics are still a huge area of conflict in Poland, some aspects very similar to other countries. You relate it to Europeanization and colonial projects. I have two questions regarding these relations: You say that the notion of »LGBT-free zones« is partly a local response to global dynamics but fueled particularly by Europeanization and struggles to become European. Poland, you say, has its own imperial ambitions and tries to be »the better Europe.« So, you see Poland as an active agent, is that right? And second, you argue with the notion of »Europeanization« and you see these phenomena as having a racist genealogy and a colonial- or racist epistemology. I am only familiar with epistemic racism. Could you elaborate on what is meant by »racist epistemology« in this particular context, and give us an example of how it is useful for analyzing the charters and discuss what these concepts can contribute?

Paweł: I think that the LGBT-free zones, as I have tried to outline above, are an emanation of that longing to have agency and gain position in a global hierarchy of value (Herzfeld

2002). It is a narrative of national moral superiority, something that emerged in the historical process regarding Poland's inter-imperial position and the existing racism expressed in anti-Semitism—a white supremacist narrative, in other words. There was no other tool to build a national narrative in the context of the non-existent Polish state and imperial pressure—imperial Russian and German discourses most of all—as well as of circulating racial theories in Europe (Law/Zakahrov 2019; Shmidt/Jaworsky 2021).

My argument shows that we need to underline the relationality in these racist dynamics, not only within and between countries but also between East and West. Decoloniality, as a perspective that claims the global impact of European colonialism and racism, is certainly helpful to map these racisms. These perspectives refrain from a linear and dichotomizing consideration of Self and Other, where one side is active and the other is passive or a victim. So I think we also need to see Europeanization as both a linear but also a dynamic, entangled process, one that stipulates »progress« but also »counterprogress.« And, how these two phenomena are interconnected and relational.

Therefore I would not repeat the idea that West is progress and East is backward, but rather say that West is as progressive as East (self-)constructs itself as backward—although the latter wants to be superior, yet not by way of »progress« but in moral terms. I think also that these discourses of greater morality and superiority are coming from Catholicism and its universal claims, they are claiming new meanings for »Europe,« the »real« Europe, and for »Christian« as opposed to »Western« Europe. So here another version of claims to whiteness is visible, one not necessarily connected to the West but certainly coded as superior and Christian. In such frames, the exclusion of LGBT people from the national community is a European process of producing internal Others and echoes long processes of racialization on the continent.

Anika: If you frame it in such a way, it remains unclear what is meant with »progess.« The West is supposedly advancing in terms of progressive freedoms regarding gender and sexuality, while the East feels progressive in terms of its moral standing, seeing itself as morally superior because it cherishes conservative, traditional, or Christian values—for example heterosexuality, marriage, and similar. It seems then what is at stake here is what I discussed in my book: a cultural and political battle over values. European values such as freedom, equality, and dignity are Christian and at the same time liberal values. We could discuss to what extent the Enlightenment or Christianity have defined these values. Though, I think, it is more important to see that what is covered by them has changed not only over time; they are always already becoming. Finally, their content and meaning are sometimes interpreted through the lens of science (e.g. medicine and biology), sometimes through the lens of law and the language of human rights as (linked to moral-philosophical perspectives), and other times through the Social Sciences, religion, or the arts (and all of the aformentioned do not speak in unison).

I think we need to carefully differentiate out the various contexts and spheres wherein gender and sexual issues, or gendered ones, are addressed and debated (politics, law and policies, the public sphere, the media, internatonal relations, Europeanization, or everyday life) and those where gender is and remains absent but structures politics, perceptions, promotions, feelings, careers, and the like regardless. Conservative and traditional positions often accept »equality in difference«: they even promote equality, but emphasize the different social roles of men and women and root them in biology and the binary gender system. In the same way, they promote the right to cultural difference, identity, and national preferences.

Regarding our topic at hand, Europe is again divided into (at least) two parts that interpret these values differently. If that is the case, once again, we, the researchers, risk falling into the dichotomies we set out to deconstruct. At the moment, what we observe in the EU may not really help us refrain from falling back into these binaries. But I think we should resist the temptation here. One important question for me is: What changes if we think from the perspectives of those affected themselves—be they LGBT people or migrants? To me, this is the only way to refrain from reintroducing these dichotomies. As long as we look from the perspective of either the nation-state or the EU we already follow their logic, which is a trap as it does not allow us to think differently. And is Ethnography not made for thinking from the perspective of subjects, because the discipline's focus is their own outlooks and experiences?

I think that is what Fadi Saleh does in his research on LGBTQI refugees from Syria, particularly trans refugees who made it to Germany and the Netherlands and later decided to leave—and I quote from his panel paper—»the safe queer haven that is Europe« and be smuggled back into Turkey.[4] By telling Tina's, Samara's, and Leen's stories from their own perspectives, Fadi queers the recurring »migration to liberation« narrative pattern that goes along also with the one that further presents Western nations as liberal and tolerant in contrast to the Middle East, therewith claiming a linear migration movement of LGBTQI refugees to the West (and fixes identity categories). Fadi queers this homonormative colonial discourse and the motives and decisions that lead to migration, redirecting our (the reader's) gaze to values such as interdependence (and family) as important factors in migration stories. And, once more, he dispels another narrative too: that LGBTQI people from the Middle East are rejected by their families.

And that is what I would like to see more often: the interrogation of whatever the dominant or hegemonic narrative, perspective, gaze is. The outlook from migrants themselves—or, to put it differently, from migration—allows Fadi to discuss the grand narratives of »Western civilization,« implicitly interrogating the meaning and importance of values such as democracy, freedom, justice, equality. This points to an older and more philosophical queston: What is a good life? What constitutes a good life?

Paweł: A racist genealogy is visible in these constant strivings to essentialize Others and to place them on a civilizational hierarchy, a cultural move that is in itself relational. So that already moves us away from dichotomies and linear and spatial understandings of (cultural) borders. Nevertheless the relationality of the categories of »East« and »West« becomes more visible if we look at gender and sexuality (politics) in Europeanization, for example in the constant narrative of »fight« and »defense« against a morally corrupt West and a Christian Orthodox, uncivilized, and authoritarian East. »Gender« and »Europe« only revived these discourses and struggles to gain a position that, according to their own understandings, must be constantly reaffirmed and fought for anew. This rhetoric also enables one to reposition oneself always on the side of »good,« and through that claim whiteness. This rhetoric is also used by far-right parties in the West.

What is different since the time when you were doing research in Poland is that society there has become more pluralistic and diversified, also in terms of gender and sexuality. In turn, the mass experience of Poles migrating and their racialization in the West aside (Krivonos/Diatlova 2020; Rzepnikowska 2019), this has activated old imaginations about the grand Polish nation and a recreation of the »old order«—as is so visible in the language and references made in »Family Charters« and and in these anti-LGBT resolutions. What is different now are also the experiences of those whom you called »Poland's Others« (Keinz

2008)—feminists, gays and lesbians, and activists. In the face of state and structural discrimination, and of disappointment with the EU, they have learned how to cope with these issues and with international neoconservative networks without counting on Europe and cultivating hopes about its symbolic power (Baer 2020). This disillusionment with the West, its gender policies, attitudes toward the East, and its neoliberal capitalism (that nevertheless, as Monika Baer shows, also brings new possiblities for LGBTQI groups) gives voice to more critical perspectives. Maybe not ones so loud and spectacular, but for example opinion polls in Poland show slow but steadily increasing acceptance of same-sex partnerships.

Anika: The disillusionment with the West, or more precisely with the EU, was already evident in the first decade of the new millennium. The women I interviewed in 2004 and 2005 expressed their own disappointment here. However, they also understood that they could use the EU as a vehicle. Today, gender and sexual politics remain a central point of conflict in Poland, but what exactly it is leveraged for has been changing since the turn of the century. In my book *Polens Andere*, I described gender politics as an instrument employed to negotiate what »democracy« means. In Poland, it was used to negotiate national identity and belonging to the nation, or more precisely what it means to be Polish (or more accurately: what defines this). Finally, I saw it as a means to fight over visions of Poland's past, present, and future. And, of course, in the 1990s the battles over gender equality and abortion rights were clearly part of the process of pluralization—of issues, voices, opinions, and so forth. What would you say is different today?

Paweł: I think gender politics is used in such a way as to create divisions and to delineate belonging—yes, so similar to what you described, it is a discussion about the nature of democracy and of society in general. What might be different now is the more explicit European context, where the governing party is using »Europe,« as Randi and Rafał show in their article in the special issue (Gressgård/Smoczyński 2020), to mobilize conservative and class-based gender narratives to fill this empty signifier with their own content. In Bourdieu's terms, this denotes redefining and imposing an understanding of »European« that refers to »normal« genders and sexualities as well as to Christianity. Homosexuality, meanwhile, is taken to threaten Western civilization, which Poland will then defend. Let me remind you that the Polish government created a »Plenipotentiary for European Identity« at the Office of the Prime Minister that is supposed to defend the model »normal« family. Plus, there are anti-liberal and misogynist abortion laws that have been introduced.

As you have already shown in your book, these discourses are also used by conservatives to create some essentialized vision of »Polishness,« and references to an older nationalist discourse are meant to secure the PiS's political legitimacy. However, I think they already failed in that—as Baer shows in the special issue (2020; see also, Mizielińska 2020). People found a way to live alongside or without these essentializations or exclusions. So »gender« and »sexuality« are used to determine the criteria of belonging to »Polishness,« but such notions today are also social and cultural markers—they ascribe belonging to certain social strata and denote ideological belongings, which are also connected to Europe—as you already remarked in your book.

Anika: I am not sure if I can see a difference here with the first decade of the new century. Back then, political parties as well as actors such as nongovernmental organizations and informal networks had partially different understandings of what democracy *means* or *entails*. Is it, for example, the protection of minorities or is it majority rule? That was a debate that

came up again and again. Just remember here former Polish president Lech Wałęsa, who stated that democracy is the rule of the majority when he denounced the Parada Równości (Equality Parade) in 2005. In these debates, we can clearly see that the pluralism accompanying democracy (and after or »post« socialism) was an issue. And how could it not be?

Gender politics and sexuality were essential ingredients in that struggle (and obviously still are). »Polishness« in the conservative vision back then meant being heterosexual, white, Catholic. It was also defined against »Others«—European Others and internal Others—since those who were not heterosexual, white, or Catholic were considered not only not Polish but anti-Poland. In fact, it was about national identity and what it means to be a good Polish citizen—hence cultural citizenship. It is these debates and processes I observed between 2004 and 2006, as described and analyzed in my book. In the past few years, however, I have increasingly come to wonder whether gender and sexual issues are so readily used because they are directly connected to morality; the latter has been an issue ever since the elections of June 1989, both with and without regard to gendered debates and sexual politics. From 2004 to 2006, PiS tried to stir a moral panic. They were talking about the Fourth Republic and about *moralność publiczna* (»public morality«). Morality became an issue both connected to gender and not. It almost functioned as an empty signifier. Morality (as the buzzword »public morality« introduced by PiS and the League of Polish Families party shows) was code in political discourse for a connection to (good) »Polishness,« to pureness (as opposed to so-called immoral homosexuals, feminists, leftists, or Western Europeans; in brief, »Others«). It was both linked to the past (»immoral communists«) and to an envisioned future (Christian Poland). What does moral superiority entail today?

Paweł: I think you are already answering here in part the question of what the difference is in the meaning of »gender« in Poland between 2004 and 2006 and now. Back then, it was a marker of belonging to »Polishness« and »Europe.« But the early years of the new millennium were also the time when it started to become so strongly connected to morality. »Gender« in Poland has been redefined according to conservative and historical scripts, but what is specific now is the more pronounced presence of Catholic morality as well as of an undertone of moral superiority vis-à-vis the West.

According to these narratives, the East—particularly Russia—is »less civilized« particularly in moral terms. What is different now is also how these discourses overlap with racist dynamics that divide the world into areas of worthiness and dignity, positioning the people coming from these regions accordingly. These divisions and markings were reinvigorated by Europeanization and migration to and from Poland. The country, despite the claims of politicians, within a quite short space of time became woven into global migration movements. Racist scripts build on past narratives about the fight against enemies—something that is so present in these resolutions on LGBT-free zones, where the enemy is »gender ideology.« These narratives are also a response to said migration (of Ukrainians into Poland and Poles to the West) and to the demographic crisis, both of which are more present now than back then. But again, I think they have an unmarked racist genealogy within that was always present—albeit undiscussed.

Anika: I am thinking now of Hannah Arendt, who said that the present decides how the past will continue to be meaningful. The question being then: What knowledge about the past is desired, wanted, permissible? Which pasts? Who and what is involved in the debates today—which actors, which discourses, which practices (as potentially differing from the first decade of the new century, particularly regarding global movements and actors)? Which

ideas of morality are expressed in what language? Which fears are articulated, and which are played with? We certainly cannot answer these questions, but it was really fun discussing the issues at stake here. I think a lot of these questions are also addressed by critical race theory scholarship.

Paweł: Yes, it is fascinating how new approaches can shed further light on current and past issues, and how they enable us to better understand the present.

Notes

1 https://intersections.tk.hu/index.php/intersections/issue/view/24
2 https://troubling-gender.eu
3 Forthcoming as »Racist and imperial genealogies in LGBT-free zones and struggles over Europe in Poland« in: K. Loftsdottir, S. Ponzanesi, B. Hipfl (eds), Creating Europe from the Margins: Mobilities and Racism in Postcolonial Europe.
4 Cf. https://troubling-gender.eu/events/struggles-over-europe-postcolonial-east-west-dynamics-of-race-gender-and-sexuality/.

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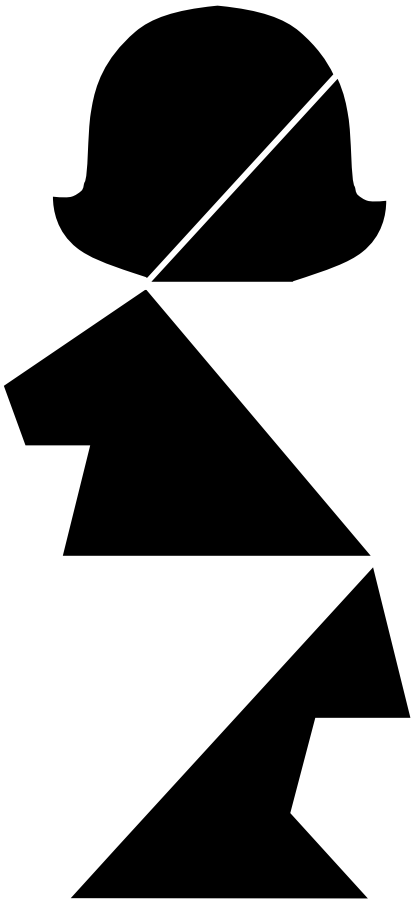

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Angry Posters. Decoding the Political Aesthetics of Visual Pro-Choice Protest in Poland

Agnieszka Balcerzak

ABSTRACT: *Stigmatization, illegality, and a gradual removal from public health services in Poland since the late 1980s indicate that abortion is a seismograph for changes in politics, public debate on ethics and religion, and the country's prevailing »traditional« nature. This article—drawing on theoretical approaches to visual culture and the politics of aesthetics, movement framing and protest mobilization, and emotions as cultural practice—examines the evolving role of political aesthetics, its associated turmoil, and its symbolic intensity in Polish pro-choice discourse. It investigates how protesters produce, circulate, and shape pro-choice protest through visual signs and slogans, as well as the role and impact of protest images within the Polish »war on abortion.« Three »angry posters« involving, respectively, symbolic appropriation, (anti-)national subversion, and the citation of popular culture are presented: Barbara Kruger's Your Body Is a Battleground (1991/2020), Jarek Kubicki's FUCK OFF! / This Is War (2020), and Ola Szmida's Fighting Polish Woman (2016). The article addresses the highly expressive takeover of imageries, symbols, and aesthetic codes by women's rights and pro-choice activists as a political collective fighting against the religiously inflected »traditionalism« propagated by church and state. Finally, some implications of visual images for feminist practice are considered in aiming at a critical discussion of feminist imageries and their political power (or also lack thereof) regarding either withstanding or bringing about transformative social change in a time of rising populism, anti-genderism, and religious fundamentalism in Europe.*

KEYWORDS: *Poland, feminism, pro-choice activism, visual culture, protest poster*

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> The political slogan, the poster, the sign or symbol of a movement or group [...] speak the voice of an individual but capture the voice of the many and on occasion even the voice of a generation. These images matter, they are the signs of the unrest in our souls, they tell us of our will to freedom and of our unwillingness to conform. (Kapoor 2019, 9)

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Introduction: Pictorial Politics against Poland's Anti-Abortion Law

Warsaw, 2020. Almost 30 years after it was first plastered on walls around Poland as women's rights were being eroded in the Eastern European country following the fall of communism, a poster with the message *Twoje ciało to pole walki* (»Your body is a battleground«) reappeared in the Polish capital and caught the eye of passersby. The seminal black and white, famed text-based artwork is the Polish version of the silkscreen portrait made by the United States feminist artist Barbara Kruger to support the Women's March 1989 in Washington, DC. The iconic pro-choice poster returned to Poland as visual protest against the tightening of the abortion law and curtailing of reproductive rights there. To a country where differing visions of society and the state, the role of religion, and the limits of individual freedom clash.

Political struggles over conception, contraception, and abortion are long-standing in Poland (Mishtal 2015; Suchanow 2020; Wężyk 2021). With the rise of right-wing parties and fundamentalist religious movements across Europe in the last three decades, their agendas have come to dominate the public debate in Poland too, centering around the Catholic Church, the protection of »traditional values,« and »restoration of the natural order«—therewith pushing a populist cocktail of anti-feminist, anti-progressive, and anti-abortion rhetoric (Kuhar/Paternotte 2017; Graff/Korolczuk 2022). *Contemporary Women's Hell* (2005): under this title the leading Polish feminist organization *Federacja na Rzecz Kobiet i Planowania Rodziny* (Federation for Women and Family Planning, FEDERA) published already midway through the first decade of the new millennium its eye-opening report on the lack of safe abortion services in Poland. The victory of the right-wing populist and national-conservative Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) party in the 2015 parliamentary elections was the starting point for a massive »cultural backlash« amid the ongoing efforts of the Catholic Church and fundamentalist »pro-life« organizations to ban all abortions. Despite the biggest protests nationwide of the post-communist era—the so-called Black Protests and Women's Strikes starting in 2016 and continuing in the years that followed—a new draconian law making the majority of abortions in Poland illegal still came into force in 2021. The country has now one of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe after the constitutional tribunal banned abortion for severe and irreversible fetal defects on the grounds that it would violate Article 38 of the Constitution, which ensures the »legal protection of the life of every human being.«[1] The tightening of the law reignited the debate over abortion access in the country, proving that the right to legal abortion represents one of the most contentious and polarizing issues in Polish politics.

The present article, based on a methodological triangulation of visual discourse analysis and participant observation, grows out of the investigation of pro-choice demonstrations and cultural pro-choice events during several field stays in Warsaw in 2019/20 and 2022. These were complemented by digital ethnographic observation of the online presences and social media channels of select feminist organizations and their supporters. These include the aforementioned FEDERA[2] as well as Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet (All-Polish Women's Strike, OSK). The latter is a bottom-up women's right movement established in 2016, responsible for the organization of the Black Monday on October 3 of that year, the first mass demonstrations in the series of the Black Protests across the country. OSK was also behind the subsequent protests on October 22, 2020, as thousands of people took to the streets once again to oppose the constitutional court's decision to ban nearly all abortions.[3] Since 2016, graphic designers and artists from all over the country have supported the protesters

with their striking visual graphics and posters. In the last five years, over 100 visual artists have designed more than 200 pro-choice protest posters and made them available to protesters free of charge as part of online projects such as *Plakaty na Strajk* (Posters for the Strike) and *Pogotowie Graficzne* (Graphic Emergency Service).[4] To challenge existing forms of political and legal legitimacy, the protest community has downloaded, shared, printed, and displayed the posters in a wide variety of forms and formats in the country's public space and on social media as an expression of anger, solidarity, and will to a collective voice against the religiously inflected ethnonationalist and anti-progressive campaigning ongoing in Poland.

The outlined developments, actors, and actions serve here as the backdrop to the exploration of the overlapping boundaries between pictorial politics, political aesthetics, and pro-choice activism when abortion becomes aesthetically and emotionally (de)coded. This analysis at the intersection of gender, protest, affect, and visual studies focuses on the emotive-aesthetic dimension of protest posters as communication media providing a powerful vehicle for dramatizing injustice and urging change. It suggests an interesting ambivalence of Polish (female) activists toward their understanding of nation(ality) and belonging to a political collective. Furthermore it indicates militarization, interweaved by the topos of a persistent resurgence of »good« versus »evil,« as one of the dominant narratives and leitmotifs in the public debate on gender and reproductive rights in Poland. Herein, the war metaphor dominates the public rhetoric and imagery circling around emotionally charged buzzwords such as »war,« »fight,« or »battlefield« (cf. Suchanow 2020). (Anti-)abortion images or protest posters become »war pictures« then, and the emphasis on visualization in the political struggle over abortion a form of surveillance and »attack« (cf. Halfman/Young 2010).

The selected »angry posters«[5]—with signal slogans »Your Body Is a Battleground,« »PIS OFF / This Is War,« and »Fighting Polish Woman,« created by politically conscious artists with a sharp edge—are puissant visual images documenting the tense relationship between art, politics, and social activism. On the one hand, the posters are echoes of earlier protest struggles, for example of the 1980s anti-communist *Solidarność* (Solidarity) movement or of the feminist activism seen in the early 1990s. On the other, they are a new chapter in Polish feminism's struggle with national symbols or utilize innovative political aesthetics, whose material, visual, and symbolic manifestations become means of mobilizing and contesting in an age of global social networking and intervisuality. This article is an attempt to investigate how protesters document and produce this pro-choice sentiment through visual aesthetics, as well as the cultural meanings, emotional strategies, and social impacts of such protest posters within the Polish »war on abortion.«

Abortion in Poland: Volatile Political Struggles, Progressions, and Regressions

Poland is a prime example of how the issues of abortion and legal restriction can repeatedly resurface even after years of, to some degree, liberal and socially accepted legislation. During the communist period, abortion was widely practiced in public hospitals and private clinics. After the end of communist rule in 1989, access to abortion turned out to be more difficult. In the early 1990s, related legislation became the subject of controversy, thrusting abortion to the top of the political agenda. The fall of communism resulted in an increase in the political power of the Catholic Church: religion as a subject of school education was introduced in 1990; church officials now entered mainstream public life, becoming visible

and influential therein; and, the Church assumed the proportions of being the main driving force behind the criminalization of abortion, as guided and supported by the »Polish Pope« John Paul II. With the election of a noncommunist government, increasingly stringent requirements (medical as well as psychological certificates and fees) were put into place for women trying to obtain an abortion.

A major change came in 1993 when a new bill, »Act on Family Planning, Human Embryo Protection and Conditions of Permissibility of Abortion,« was passed. It removed entirely »difficult living conditions« as accepted grounds for the termination of pregnancy and, in real terms, criminalized abortions carried out based on social considerations (Nowicka 2007, 170f). Furthermore, therapeutic abortion and abortion for reasons of facing criminal charges, which had been legal in practice, became almost completely inaccessible. The »abortion compromise«—shorthand for the new legislation—pushed the procedure into expensive and often dubious »underground« facilities,[6] planting the seed for eternal divisions within Polish society over reproductive rights. Three years later, socioeconomic considerations were reintroduced by a left-leaning government as the legal basis for abortion, with restrictions on gestational duration to 12 weeks and requirements for women to receive counseling before going through with the procedure.

Since the 2010s, claims for limiting or banning access to legal abortion have initiated a new, more radical chapter in the Polish »war on abortion.« Between 2011 and 2018 several bills were introduced to the Sejm, the lower house of the Polish parliament, seeking to impose such changes and fueling anti-abortion rhetoric in the public debate. The bills were drafted by »anti-choice« organizations, primarily by the ultraradical Catholic legal organization *Ordo Iuris*,[7] in being supported by the Catholic Church and right-wing politicians in the Sejm—especially by the PiS. In April 2016, the *Stop Aborcji* (Stop Abortion) initiative, headed by the ultraconservative foundation *Pro — Prawo do Życia* (Pro — Right to Life),[8] began collecting signatures to support a bill proposing a complete ban on legal abortions. At the same time, the *Ratujmy Kobiety* (Save the Women) pro-choice initiative for the liberalization of related laws also started to collect signatures in support of their own proposal.[9] Both bills reached the Sejm in summer 2016, but only the former one was passed to the upper house after a vote (Król/Pustułka 2018, 373). The outcome of the latter sparked the aforementioned Black Monday mass demonstrations across the country, which took place simultaneously in almost 150 Polish cities, towns, and villages, bringing together an estimated 100,000 participants (Korolczuk 2016, 98). This moment marked the birth of a wider social movement fighting for reproductive and women's rights in Poland, under the umbrella term »Black Protests.«

The Polish »war on abortion« reached its next stage four years later. On October 22, 2020, the constitutional tribunal, which lacks legal validity and independence due to the influence of the incumbent PiS over it, ruled that the existing legislation allowing an abortion on the grounds of fetal abnormalities was unconstitutional. Enraged, Polish citizens launched again mass demonstrations. Despite the protests, the much-disputed law—leading, as noted, to some of the most draconian restrictions across Europe in this domain—came into force on January 27, 2021, after the constitutional court published the law in the government's official journal. The ruling was condemned by international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, and by opposition MPs, who staged a protest wielding placards with the hashtag *#ToJestWojna* (#ThisIsWar) in parliament.[10]

The new law recognizes abortion as legal only in cases of rape, incest, or if the mother's health is at risk, making up some 2 percent of all abortions in Poland. Even before the ruling, the number of legal pregnancy terminations was low countrywide—at around 1,000 per year, 98 percent of them due to serious fetal impairment.[11] In practice, however, it is almost impossible for those eligible for a legal abortion to obtain one, leading to a boom in »abortion tourism.« Every year thousands of women leave Poland to access abortion care in other European countries or import medical-abortion pills, with total estimates lying between 100,000 and 150,000 cases hereof.[12] Since 2016, the feminist collective *Aborcyjny Dream Team* (Abortion Dream Team) has opposed the ban by organizing demonstrations and workshops teaching women how to obtain and self-manage a medical abortion.[13] In 2021 alone, the collective—a founding member of *Aborcja Bez Granic* (Abortion Without Borders), an initiative of several organizations across multiple European countries working together to help people access abortions either at home with pills or in clinics[14]—has spent PLN 1.5 million to help 32,000 persons from Poland to obtain the procedure abroad.[15]

Yet, the constitutional court's decision had an immediate chilling effect: Polish women express fear of getting pregnant amid concerns they will not be able to abort in case of complications that could endanger their lives; doctors and hospitals are scared of being prosecuted, and now tend to be overzealous in their respecting of the law.[16] Moreover, the new draconian legislation took its first toll on human life: since its implementation, six women have officially died because they were refused abortions even though their own health was in peril. Izabela, a 30-year-old woman in the 22nd week of pregnancy who died in late 2021 of septic shock after doctors waited for the fetus' heart to stop beating, was the first victim of the new ruling.[17] Her death sparked massive protests under the hashtag *#AniJednejWięcej* (#NotASingleOneMore) and reignited the debate over abortion access in Poland, a country that has confirmed its status as one of Europe's most restrictive on the issue.

Approaching Protest Images: On Aesthetics, Spaces, Materialities, and Emotions

Visual culture and protest images have existed throughout history, but in recent decades the »pictorial turn« (Mitchell 1995) has gained momentum, with graphics and placards now made to accompany all manner of marches and movements (McQuiston 2019; Rippon 2019; McGarry et al. 2020). Protest image and image-making are central to the politics of aesthetics (Rancière 2004), understood in the sense of *aesthesis*—as referring to humans' capacity to perceive the world with their senses and to interpret it accordingly. As an inalienable part of political aesthetics, protest imageries have the potential to become real weapons in struggles over narratives, presence, and visibility—or even to unleash »image wars« that place the medium »at the heart of political struggle, which has become an endless process of images battling, reversing, erasing and replacing other images« (Khatib 2013, 1). With respect to protest, visual imagery—posters, photographs, drawings, banners, and symbols—provides a powerful means of mobilizing and contesting, often becoming a first step toward self-determination and dignity for those involved.

These very processes of mobilizing and contesting take place in traditional media, in the streets, and on the Internet. They create a specific »mental climate« (Debord 1995, 18) of a social movement, city, and urban space, where demonstrations and collective actions occur; they also reveal those ruptures where protest should begin and seek to initiate sociopolitical change. To get the latter underway, social movements transform the public space—and

especially the streetscape—into a venue of ritualized forms of public protest culture. As a result, the street and the urban sphere become the interface of local, virtual, and media spaces. Also the production, dissemination, and circulation of protest imagery take place in a hybrid communication realm that connects three protest topographies: the street, traditional media, and the communication space of the Internet. The overwhelming majority of activists and their supporters connect and exchange within like-minded »virtual communities« (Rheingold 1993), but their »ar/ctivism« (Hamm 2004)—a collaboration between artists and activists—plays out in both physical and virtual space.

This hybrid activism, including the production and dissemination of protest images, is accompanied by strong emotions. Taking our cue from James Jasper's (1998) work on the role of emotions in social movements and Monique Scheer's (2016) Bourdieuan »doing emotion« approach that understands emotions as cultural practices, such powerful sentiment does not render the protestors irrational. Instead, as reactions to respective events, emotions frame protest activism and provide motivations, goals, and affective bonds or loyalties. As Barbara Rosenwein (2020) indicates, anger can be a leading emotion of activism and it can emerge before individuals join protest groups—both in public space and virtually. It can also be formed or reinforced in collective actions as the example of the later analyzed pro-choice imageries. Furthermore, conceptualizing such emotions as a practice produced by the habitus (Bourdieu 1977) allows a fundamental connection to be established between discourse and physicality. The common denominator of these two factors, to refer again to Scheer, could be described as materiality: »[F]eelings [...] can be experienced sensually through material anchors and therefore strengthened and consolidated« (2016, 28).

Posters, banners, or other protest objects take, then, this function of material anchors. It is, therefore, important to stress the emotive and symbolic dimensions of material objects, as Karl-Sigismund Kramer (1962) emphasizes by drawing on the revealing concept of »thing significance.« This approach refers to the affective and emotionally charged meanings of everyday objects, which go beyond their material properties, and to the instrumental and functional use of things such as posters as protest requisites. It allows considering the feminist pro-choice protests and their visual framing as »emotional communities«: that is, »groups that share the same [...] norms and values about emotional behavior and even about feelings themselves« (Rosenwein 2006, 3).

Whether on advertising pillars, house walls, or billboards, the political poster has one goal: to attract attention and convey a message. While the heyday of advertising posters for theatre, cabaret, or film began at the end of the nineteenth century, the political poster as a mass and protest medium was first established in the course of the French Revolution of 1789. Since then, the poster has become an integral part of sociopolitical struggle. It still dominates the urban streetscape and seeks to »crawl into the minds of the masses« (Böhm et al. 2009, 238). To attract the viewer's attention, the design should be conspicuous, catchy, and effective. Using a large format, distinctive font and graphic elements, concise color scheme, and diverse visual forms (among others, depictions of people/objects, personifications, symbols, or allegories) can all be helpful in ensuring the desired effect. These aesthetic means of advancing posters as »war pictures« may express political standpoints, strengthen collective identities, and convey (counter)narratives or leitmotifs in political struggles—here, over abortion.

Your Body Is a Battleground: The Recurring Universality of Visual Pro-Choice Imagery

Kruger's aforementioned *Untitled (Your Body is a Battleground)* print is a prime example of visually coded and politically substantial »war pictures« being used in the abortion debate. Known for her confrontational silkscreens from the 1980s, she combines easily understandable graphics with critical texts set in the characteristic Futura Bold font. Her work is dominated by the colors black, white, and red, and draws on Soviet avant-garde and US advertising of the 1950s. Kruger's critical prints focus, among other things, on issues of gender, inequality, and women's emancipation. *Your Body Is a Battleground* is a powerful site of resistance to the objectification of women, becoming the slogan of the international pro-choice movement.

Kruger created this iconic piece in 1989, in response to the numerous anti-abortion laws that were seeking to undermine Roe versus Wade.[18] The poster shows a woman's face that vividly intersects with one half black and the other white, staring directly at the beholder. The image is overlaid with an inscription, printed in white sans-serif font on red background stripes: »Your body is a battleground.« Using the determiner »Your,« Kruger connects the viewer to the image and focuses their attention on the divisive topic of reproductive rights. Initially, the piece appears to split the reproductive-health discussion into two camps: those against a woman's right to choose and those who support the latter, shown by the simultaneous negative and positive renditions in the image. By making it so, the artist is able to depict the ambivalences of the abortion debate: pro-choice versus »pro-life«; women versus patriarchal society; medicine versus religion; »good« versus »evil.« However, the caption »Your body is a battleground« denotes just how the fight for reproductive autonomy has an entirely different nature to political battles: when it comes to abortion, the emotional struggle for freedom of choice transpires outside a woman's body and turns it into a »combat zone« that she both struggles over and in. Kruger's work draws much of its impact from the tension between image and text: the printed words are an ironic commentary on the image, which loses its original function and gains a political veneer instead. By means of juxtaposition and decontextualization, this art piece thus questions the status quo. As the artist herself would say about this work: »I try to be affective, to suggest change, and to bid defiance to what I perceive on some level as the tyranny of social life.«[19]

In the early 1990s, Kruger expressed her support for the Polish pro-choice movement for the first time. On the occasion of her exhibition at Ujazdowski Castle Center for Contemporary Art in Warsaw, the artist presented the Polish version of her emblematic feminist artwork with three additional slogans: *Broń praw kobiet. Walcz o prawo do aborcji. Żądaj edukacji seksualnej* (Defend women's rights. Fight for the right to abortion. Demand sex education). As a political statement within the heated debate on reproductive rights that led the way for the 1993 »abortion compromise,« the Ujazdowski Center plastered in autumn 1991 and spring 1992 hundreds of copies of Kruger's poster across the Polish capital. The emergence of this expressive poster in Warsaw's public space sparked a vivid discussion about reproductive rights and sex education. As the exhibition's curator Milada Ślizińska recalls, the posters were quickly »torn off the walls as spoils [of war].«[20] They were put up again with the help of feminist activists, this time high on poles and walls to ensure their more enduring presence and impact in the streets of Warsaw.

Kruger's iconic artwork returned to Poland's public space a quarter century later, in 2020, after the aforementioned constitutional court ruling imposing a near-total ban on abortion. The struggle over body autonomy had clearly lost none of its virulence in the

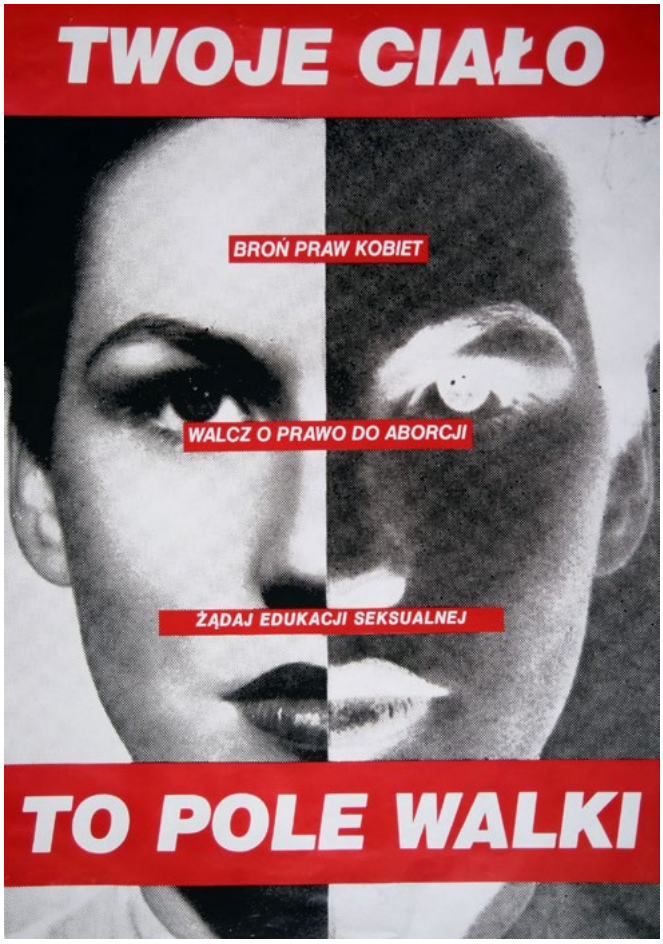

Figure 1. Barbara Kruger: Untitled (Your Body Is a Battleground) / Twoje ciało to pole walki), 1991/2020

country. Shortly thereafter, TRAFO Center for Contemporary Art in Szczecin, the capital city of West Pomerania, received the Polish reproduction of Kruger's print courtesy of the artist and her agency, Sprüth Magers Berlin. As a form of materialized protest that goes hand in hand with recent demonstrations in and around the country, TRAFO organized an installation of Kruger's Polish version of the poster and placed it on the Center's facade as well as around Szczecin. This offered to passersby strolling through the city's streets a meaningful and emotional visual statement against the violation of women's rights. »With politicians trying to objectify the female body, Kruger's work remains extremely relevant and ›ready to use‹«[21] comments TRAFO director Stanisław Ruksza on the spatial use, political context, and aesthetic universality of this emblematic poster.

The topicality of Kruger's print—in right-wing discourse critically presented as »the frontline in the culture war«[22] between the pro-choice and »pro-life« movements—has been acknowledged also by Magdalena Lipska, Sebastian Cichocki, and Łukasz Ronduda, the curators of the 2021/2022 *Kto napisze historię łez* (Who Will Write the History of Tears) exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. This exhibition explores the tensions and relations between the female body, repressive laws, and women's ongoing battle for their reproductive rights. Its curators turned back to the political aesthetics of Kruger's artwork and placed the prominent *Your Body Is a Battleground* poster next to another black and white print by the same artist showing a screaming female face overlaid with the eponymous question: Who will write the history of tears?

In answer, the curators focused on the key narratives, threads, and leitmotifs that different artists have stressed when addressing pregnancy and abortion: the brutal reproductive realities of the post—Second World War period; changes in perspective within the broader process of sociopolitical transformation; contemporary tensions and mass protests in Argentina, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, or the US; the use of traditional herbal remedies, modern pharmacology, or surgery in the »abortion underground.« Finally, there have been the personal voices of female artists who themselves experienced a pregnancy termination and examine abortion through emotions that help manifest its existential and individual dimensions. As Lipska explains, the aim of the exhibition was to »wrest the topic of abortion from the control of political clichés,«[23] to destigmatize it, and to place the focus on female artists who draw on real stories by encompassing a whole spectrum of politically aesthetic allusions, images, and codes—therewith conveying the complexities of pregnancy and abortion.

PIS OFF / This Is War: National and Pop-Cultural Symbols in Favor of Women's Rights

The 2020 mass demonstrations after the draconian constitutional court ruling vested the verbal and visual language of the heated public debate on abortion with a new quality and political intensity. What becomes here undeniably visible is another chapter in »Polish feminism's dialogue and struggle with national symbolism« (Graff 2019, 472), via contestation of the dominant understanding of nationhood, national belonging, and the appropriation of national imaginaries by right-wing, masculinized political forces and the Catholic Church. A paragon of this protest for women's equality and body autonomy, in the form of aesthetic acts of resistance to nationalist and Catholic rhetoric, is Jarek Kubicki's both brilliantly witty and vulgar design *WYPIERDALAĆ!* (Fuck Off!). The forerunner to this »angry poster« is M's (an anonymous artist) black-and-white print *PIS OFF!*, created for the aforementioned 2016 OSK Black Monday mass rally and employed nationwide at pro-choice protests in public space.[24] The white slogan »PIS OFF« being featured on a black background, symbolizing anger and grievance, is a multilayered stroke of creativity, linguistically mixing the English swearword »piss off« and the Polish acronym PiS standing for the ruling party's name. The author added the final touch to the critical poster through the chosen design of the vowel »O,« which assumes the shape of a vagina as an allegory for women's right to body autonomy (see Figure 2 below). The aesthetically formulated demand »Keep your morality out of our vaginas« is an emotional manifestation of collective anger, addressed to the Catholic Church, the PiS, and their allies.

The vulgar imperative »Fuck off!« was repeatedly chorused by pro-choice demonstrators, sung in protest songs, or appeared on posters and handmade banners from the first Black Protests of 2016 onward. Kubicki combines it with an important Polish national symbol of resistance: the logo of the *Solidarność* trade union that was crucial in Poland's peaceful revolutionary fight against communist rule in the 1980s. The designer adapted Tomasz Sarnecki's famous *Solidarność* campaign poster from 1989, when Poland held its first semi-free elections. The latter artwork shows the movement's logo placed behind an image of Gary Cooper, appearing as a fearless cowboy and upright sheriff in Fred Zinnemann's famous 1952 Hollywood Western *High Noon*. Sarnecki replaced Cooper's pistol with a ballot paper and added the Solidarity movement's logo above his sheriff's badge to equip him for a »high noon« moment: June 4, 1989.

Figure 2. M for Graphic Emergency Service: PIS OFF!, 2016

On this historic election day, the once-outlawed Solidarity party swept to success—with Tadeusz Mazowiecki becoming Poland's first noncommunist prime minister. One year later, Lech Wałęsa—the leader of the Solidarity movement and later Nobel Peace Prize laureate—won the country's presidential elections and became the first freely elected noncommunist head of state in 45 years. As Sarnecki explains, the design of the poster was supposed to depict »the only righteous man, who, thanks to his magnificent, noble, seamless image, would have been able to lift a weight beyond the strength of a single person« (Balcerzak 2020, 347).

Iconic about the poster is not only its layout and symbolism but also the characteristic all-caps, red *Solidarność* sign. Conceived by the graphic designer Jerzy Janiszewski, the logotype known as *solidaryca* is a joined-up font with the Polish flag waving from the letter »N« in *Solidarność* to embody a unified country. Kubicki adapts this font, which carries strong symbolism and is highly recognizable. He further reworks the original poster by adding the slogan »Wypierdalać!« instead of the union's logo and by replacing Cooper's sheriff with female action heroes from well-known Hollywood movies. Kubicki would explain the idea behind the design thus: »[W]omen we know from cinema roles in which, when they say ›Fuck off,‹ you are going on the run, even if you are a beefy bad ass. Or a priest. Or a right-wing politician. Or another jerk who dreams of restricting the rights of others.«[25]

He created several versions of the poster that immediately went viral and became a recognizable symbol of the 2020 pro-choice and anti-government protests. We see, among others, Ellen Ripley from Ridley Scott's 1979 *Alien*, the Bride from Quentin Tarantino's

Figure 3. Jarek Kubicki for All-Polish Women's Strike: WYPIERDALAĆ!/FUCK OFF! To jest wojna/This Is War, 2020

Kill Bill neo-Western martial arts film, or Imperator Furiosa from George Miller's 2015 post-apocalyptic action movie *Mad Max: Fury Road*. Ripley for instance, a fictional war captain and strong heroine played by the American actress Sigourney Weaver, is one of the first and most significant female action protagonists in cinematic history and a prominent figure in popular culture. Kubicki presents her wearing military fatigues, armed with a weapon hanging over her shoulder, strong-willed and ready to fight. An additional text in the upper-left corner of the poster reads *To jest wojna* (This is war), accompanied in its lower part by the contact details for Abortion Without Borders and the characteristic OSK logo—a black silhouette portrait of a woman with a red lightning bolt in the middle.

Kubicki transformed these tough female Hollywood protagonists into steadfast warriors for Polish women's reproductive rights, echoing the former's qualities in the process. The visually catchy graphics seemed to perfectly capture protestors' emotions after the tightening of the abortion law, immediately spreading on the Internet. Many Polish women, including left-wing MPs, created similar images with themselves in the foreground.[26] This »(en)gendering of patriotic symbols as a feminist strategy of choice« (Graff 2019, 481) can be interpreted as both an aesthetic expression of »patriotic« feminism on the one hand and as »anti-patriotic« provocation or even as a criminal offence on the other. In so doing, progressive feminist activists, organizations, and informal networks forge a political collective that challenges the masculinized ethnonationalist, anti-liberal, and religiously homogeneous understanding of state and national belonging propagated by the Catholic Church, the ruling party, and the far right in Poland (cf. Balcerzak 2020, 143ff).

The political staging of Sanja Iveković's 2009 artwork *Invisible Women of Solidarity* during the first Black Protests is another example here. The Croatian artist's remake of the iconic poster, designed on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the *Solidarność* revolution, reads »High Noon: 1989 – 2009« and features a black and faceless cowgirl figure expressing a harsh critique of the invisibility and exclusion of women inherent in the masculinized ethnonational tradition. Black Protests participants demonstrated with fliers, stickers, and banners carrying Iveković's design, and some provided the female silhouette with an umbrella as another iconic symbol of these events. They had to face legal consequences in the aftermath: Solidarity, which has been closely affiliated with the PiS and the Catholic Church for years now, accused the feminist protesters of the »unlawful« use of their legendary logo—understood as a national symbol. The lawsuit was eventually resolved in favor of the protesters. Still, the case led to an emotionally charged debate on the right to use, interpret, and reframe culturally significant symbols and visual aesthetics (cf. ibid., 349).

Fighting Polish Woman: (Re)framing Powerful Allegories of »Connective Activism«

The last politically engaged poster analyzed here provides another vivid example of discord regarding uses and abuses of national symbols that challenge the right-wing monopoly on »patriotism.« At the same time, it also indicates the emergence of a new modus operandi regarding feminist interventions, civic activism, and protest framing. The new wave of pro-choice feminism arising in Poland, as initiated by the 2016 Black Monday mass demonstrations, is a political collective and »networked social movement« (Urzędowska/Suchomska 2020, 9) hybrid in nature. This is because it oscillates between taking the form of multichannel online activism and that of visually stunning mass rallies in the public space. Elżbieta Korolczuk explains the phenomenon by adducing the »connective activism« occurring in the course of both online and offline encounters, »[as] based on the use of flexible, easily personalized action frames, which were also well-embedded in cultural narratives referencing the fight for Poland's independence and resisting the oppressive state« (2016, 108).

The protests erupting against the abortion ban have demonstrated that there is an organizationally strong network of women's nongovernmental organizations and civic initiatives able, as a political collective, to coordinate national actions, provide social technology, and produce a body of knowledge disseminated in hybrid protest spaces. Mobilization occurs first online, with hashtags trending on social media and visually ingenious protest images playing a key role here. The enormous differences between participants, the lack of top-down coordination, and the huge scale and largely improvised nature of these protests have made it impossible to maintain control over the cultural meanings of the polyvalent symbols that are used in them. Paradoxically, however, these symbols and images—ones carrying important aesthetic and emotional functions—have served as »recruitment tools in a structureless context« (Graff 2019, 489), shaping the country's protest spaces and acting as a key resource for mobilization.

One of the most prominent and iconic symbols of these aesthetic »recruitment tools« is the red lightning bolt, as integrated by Kubicki into his posters. In addition to the coat hanger (the best-known symbol of the dangers of illegal backstreet abortions), the lightning bolt has been one of the most striking and enduring symbols of the pro-choice protests. It was created in 2016 by Ola Jasionowska as the official OSK emblem. »It says: Watch out, beware. We will not accept to deprive women of their basic rights« its creator would explain.[27] This

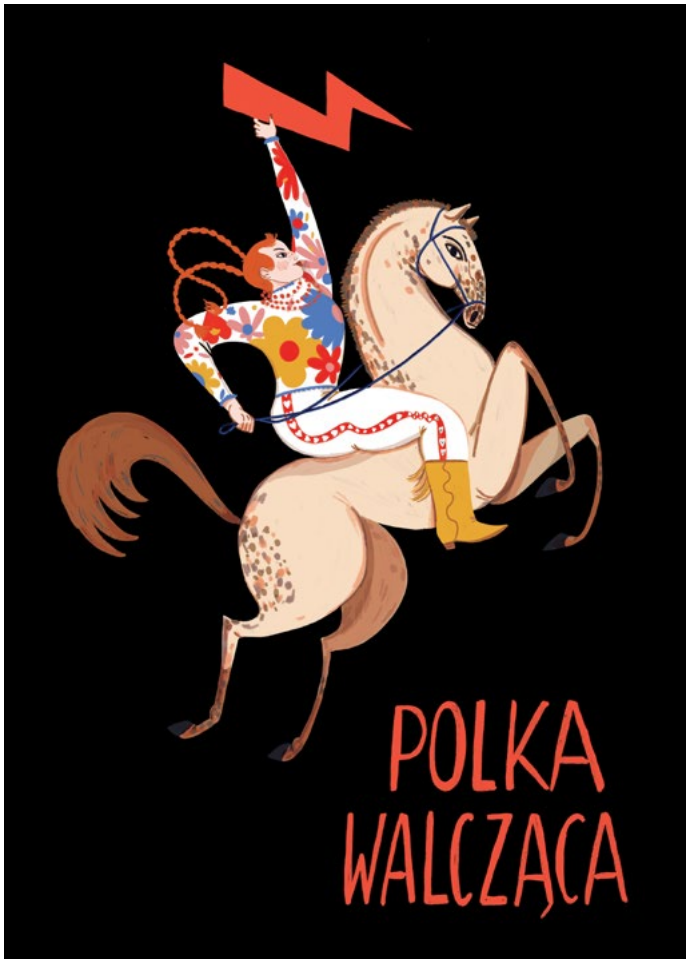

Figure 4. Ola Szmida for Posters for the Strike: Polka Walcząca / Figthing Polish Woman, 2020

globally known symbol—which has since been displayed on posters and banners, painted on the body, or sprayed onto walls—serves, then, as a warning. Such code has been seized on by right-wing critics, who have repeatedly referred to pro-choice protesters as »left-wing fascists« and drawn links between the lightning bolt and totalitarian symbols such as the insignia used by the SS, as one of the major paramilitary organizations propping up Nazi Germany.[28] With this absurd distortion of facts and the attempt to reframe the symbol as negative, and thus worthy of condemnation, its critics have overlooked the fact that the OSK logo is different in color, shape, and style to the SS insignia, and that lightning bolts are a globally common symbol for an array of different groups and objects—as just one of many examples, for high-voltage areas.

In 2020, in the course of the massive protests against the constitutional court's ruling, the young female illustrator Ola Szmida designed the »angry poster« *Polka Walcząca* (Fighting Polish Woman) with two significant codes: the lightning bolt and the figure of a female warrior. The poster, of black background representing the protesters' grief and anger, shows a strong woman on a horse with a red lightning bolt in her hand that she is about to throw. The horse is standing on its hind legs, a silhouette to symbolize battle readiness. Szmida drew her inspiration from the canon of Polish folklore art and Greek mythology. She depicted the young Polish woman as an Amazon—a female warrior and hunter known for her extraordinary physical agility and strength—dressed in a top with a floral pattern and wearing a red bead necklace, as characteristic accessories of Polish folk costumes.

By calling the figure Polka Walcząca, Szmida circles back to the *kotwica* (anchor)—another fiercely contested national symbol and important Polish historical sign associated with the Home Army and the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. It was created in 1942 by Anna Smoleńska, a member of the underground resistance, and henceforth used as a symbol of the struggle against Nazi occupation. The *kotwica* has a shape showing the letters »PW,« which stand for *Polska Walcząca* (Fighting Poland) and visually resemble an anchor. The 2016 Black Protests opened up a new chapter in the history of the feminist appropriation of this powerful symbol, as taking place in dialogue with national tradition and the previous monopolization of it by right-wing/far-right forces.

In 2013 the illustrator Maja Rozbicka designed for the oldest and largest Polish feminist demonstration, Manifa, the poster *O Polkę Niepodległą* (For Independent Polish Woman). The print inscribed the anchor into a woman's displayed body and transformed the patriotic phrase *O Polskę Niepodległą* (For an Independent Poland) in order to claim independence for women as individuals (instead of Poland as the nation-state). In 2016, a new, simpler, and catchier design of the *Polka* sign, with two dots turning the arms of the anchor into breasts and a braid attached at the top to resemble a women's body, flooded the country's protest spaces (cf. Balcerzak 2020, 319). This aesthetic and symbolic political activity offered female Black Protests participants a sense of unity and solidarity, allowing them to identify themselves as »female warriors« and to set their struggle for reproductive rights in dialogue with Poland's exclusionary national tradition.

Eventually, the designs of Szmida and others reinterpreting and reframing the »Fighting Poland« sign shared a similar fate to the feminist remaking of the *Solidarność* poster: namely much public debate and a number of court cases. As a national symbol and common good, the sign is protected by law, which is why the ironic *Polka* remake has been viewed as offensive by both right-wing radicals and some protest participants themselves. While Solidarity's copyright claim was adjudicated to be invalid, in the »Fighting Poland« case this symbolic appropriation was ruled to be a breach of »patriotic« decorum.[29] Regardless of the legal consequences, such as financial penalties,[30] the appropriation of the *kotwica* fulfilled the role of being a connective aesthetic intervention and at least temporal emotional unifier that favored the cause of the pro-choice protests—helping mask the enormous differences between participants in terms of age, social background, and political outlook. Finally, the case vividly testifies that image-making is central to political aesthetics and to social movements seeking to dislodge or change a political system and »traditional« order. Thus, politics is not produced exclusively by the vocalized claims or demands of protestors but above all by their actions. Herewith the aesthetics of protest reveal how democracy is shaped through »a complex interplay of performance, images, acoustics and all the various technologies engaged in those productions« (Butler 2015, 20).

Conclusion: Contested Imageries, or Who Has the Right to Visual Aesthetics and How Powerful Is It?

Abortion has emerged as one of the most divisive issues in Poland, particularly since the right-wing PiS took power in 2015 promising a return to the »traditional« model of society. Abortion reflects the tenor of discourses on equality and women's autonomy, the mother role and family, the secularization of public life, and on national »traditions.« By analyzing three protest posters, this article investigated how activists document and produce their pro-choice stance through visual aesthetics. It also considered the predominant cultural

codings, emotional strategies, and social impacts of contested visualities within the Polish »war on abortion.«

The presented case studies certify that political aesthetics, understood as cultural signs and slogans, are harnessed by sociopolitical actors—pro-choice activists, graphic designers, and protesters—through actions vesting them with the power to challenge existing structures, ideas, and national orthodoxies. These aesthetics are constantly and dynamically politicized images, words, objects, and spaces of importance to the (inter)national imaginaries that comprise material and performative culture—ones with a high potential to be replicated digitally and shared across social media, ideological terrains, state borders, and linguistic frontiers. Protest-related visual framing and image-making help to communicate emotions such as anger or solidarity, to raise awareness and visibility, and, finally, to act as connective recruitment tools for further mobilization.

The aim of the article was to capture the aesthetics of the Polish pro-choice protests, their visual, material, and virtual dimensions, as well as their vocalizations and rhythms against the backdrop of the related activism spanning from the 2016 Black Protests through the mass rallies after the 2020 near-total ban on abortion. The chosen examples show the dynamic relationship between feminism, universal pro-choice demands, and national symbolisms, indicating how visual images and (inter)national codings have become a means of contestation within Poland's highly polarized society. This strategy—which includes the appropriation, reinterpretation, and subversion of historically potent symbols and slogans such as the Solidarity poster, the anchor, or the lightning bolt—makes clear that political aesthetics are not only powerful but also a multivocal site of »war« over meanings, forms of belonging, and modes of use. The protesters have taken shape as active and increasingly self-reflective political collectives in this »war of symbols« based on their related activities, which include reframing and reconfiguration, humor and vulgarity, as well as citing popular culture. They have produced and distributed in both online and offline encounters posters with competing interpretations, evoking a sense of unease, grievance, and anger. Reinforced by Poland's militarized verbal and visual call to battle, the posters formulate demands and defend against the alliance of fundamentalist right-wing forces, the Catholic Church, and the ruling PiS. Barbara Kruger's *Your Body Is a Battleground* stands for this fight as no other. It speaks to feminism, universal women's rights, and communicates a powerful message for the viewer to ponder—even if for only a split second.

These aesthetically reinterpreted and reframed designs—like Jarek Kubicki's *FUCK OFF!* print echoing and transforming the legacy of the Solidarity movement or Ola Szmida's *Fighting Polish Woman* displaying the red lightning bolt, materialized as poster, pin, or sticker—have become a popular protest accessory that certifies how Polish feminism is an artistic, literary, and intellectual movement. Furthermore, the symbolic takeover of the anchor has challenged the right-wing monopoly on national symbols and the Polish emancipatory discourse. »[The] imaginary rivalry between *Polska* and *Polka*« (Graff 2019, 479) challenged the intense and durable Polish trend of attributing to women the role of both biological and cultural reproducers of the nation rather than considering them equal agents of history and as subjects of rights. This ongoing marginalization of women's rights and claims—ingrained in the intimate symbiosis in Poland of the Catholic tradition and »patriotism,« with their ideological exclusiveness—has filled the national imaginary with powerful allegorical representations of woman- and motherhood such as Matka Polka (Polish Mother), Matka Boska (Virgin Mary) as queen of Poland, or Polonia (Poland) as a suffering woman. This cultural repertoire—dominated by the topos of heroic, divine, and self-sacrificing patriotic women and mothers, always called on to remain passive, charming, and eternally

grateful—emphasizes the urgency and drama of the national cause, with it prevailing over the rights and demands of Polish women themselves regarding the state, politics, and social change.

Finally, the presented highly expressive, rich-in-metaphor, and full-of-wit protest graphics speak about the female body—deconstructed, sliced up, and appropriated as a field of ideological and political struggle. But Poland serves here as merely a testing ground for reactionary ideas on the broader European level, especially in the Eastern Europe context. As images spread worldwide of the 2020 strike by Polish women following the constitutional court ruling against almost all abortions and, one year later, international media informed people about 30-year-old Izabela being the first victim of this new draconian law, this was actually, in fact, only a new chapter in the long history of European struggles over feminism, anti-genderism, and liberal democracy.

The argument in Croatia over the Istanbul Convention concerning violence against women, the Estonian referendum on LGBT rights, or the heated Lithuanian public debate on abortion are only a few examples of this deep-rooted European conflict. In these contexts, too, the question of the exact function, circulation, and impact of visual images arises. What will the competing narratives be? Who will achieve success here, and on the basis of which toolsets, cultural effects, and affective strategies? Will pictorial politics be powerful enough to either withstand or bring about sociopolitical change? The answers to these myriad uncertainties are yet to emerge, drawing attention to the existence of the multivocal narratives and multiple meanings challenging existing forms of political collectiveness and legitimacy.

Notes

1 Cited from Article 38 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland adopted on October 2, 1997: https://www.trybunal.gov.pl/en/about-the-tribunal/legal-basis/the-constitution-of-the-republic-of-poland (last accessed February 10, 2022).

2 https://www.federa.org.pl (last accessed February 12, 2022).

3 All-Poland Women's Strike, which currently counts over 500,000 followers on Facebook, was created as one of the feminist pro-choice groups responsible for the organization of the 2016 Black Monday mass demonstrations. The latter were inspired by 1974's Black Thursday in Iceland, when 90 percent of women there decided to rally for equal rights by refusing to work, cook, or perform childcare. See: https://www.facebook.com/ogolnopolskistrajkkobiet (last accessed December 12, 2022).

4 See the online presences of *Plakaty na Strajk* (https://www.plakatnastrajk.pl) and *Pogotowie Graficzne* (https://pogotowie.tumblr.com/post/633034533139251200/to-jest-wojna) (both last accessed December 18, 2021).

5 I use the term »angry posters« in reference to the publication *Angry Graphics. Protest Posters of the Reagan/Bush Era* (Jacobs/Heller 1992).

6 Once abortion left the public sphere, it entered the gray zone of private arrangements. With somewhere around 150,000 abortions per year, a rough estimate of USD 95 million is being generated annually for doctors who are earning both unregistered and tax-free (Chełstowska 2011, 98).

7 https://www.ordoiuris.pl (last accessed February 15, 2022). The organization is part of a global ultraconservative network that was founded in Brazil in the 1960s. It was Ordo Iuris that drafted the 2016 anti-abortion bill in Poland: https://www.ordoiuris.pl/stop-aborcji (last accessed February 15, 2022). For further information, see: Wielka Koalicja za Równością i Wyborem (2020).

8 See its campaign »Stop Abortion«: https://stronazycia.pl/stop-aborcji (last accessed February 15, 2022).

9 The draft bill »Save the Women«: https://archiwumosiatynskiego.pl/alfabet-buntu/ratujmy-kobiety (last accessed February 16, 2022), collected almost 500,000 signatures. In 2018, the Sejm rejected it. The goal of the bill was the liberalization of abortion regulations, reliable sexual education in schools, and free access to contraception.

10 See the statements of Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatović (https://twitter.com/Dunja_Mijatovic/status/1320781834112933888) and of Amnesty International (https://amnes-

ty.org/en/latest/news/2020/10/polands-constitutional-tribunal-rolls-back-reproductive-rights) (both accessed February 15, 2022).

11 In 2020, 1,074 legal abortions—26 less than in 2019—were performed in Polish hospitals according to data obtained by FEDERA from the Ministry of Health in July 2021: https://federa.org.pl/dane-mz-aborcje-2020 (last accessed February 16, 2022).

12 These estimated figures are based on information provided by FEDERA's director Krystyna Kacpura in 2019: https://federa.org.pl/terminacja-ciazy-2019 (last accessed February 18, 2022).

13 See the website of Abortion Dream Team: https://www.aborcyjnydreamteam.pl (last accessed February 16, 2022).

14 Except for Abortion Dream Team, the network consists also of organizations from Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom: Women Help Women, Ciocia Basia, Abortion Network Amsterdam, Abortion Support Network. It also encompasses support organizations in, for instance, Austria or the Czech Republic: https://www.abortion.eu (last accessed February 16, 2022).

15 According to the data provided on January 27, 2022, by Abortion Dream Team on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/aborcyjnydreamteam/posts/3868231153401236 (last accessed February 16, 2022).

16 See the Euronews report from January 27, 2022: https://www.euronews.com/2022/01/27/polish-women-scared-to-be-pregnant-a-year-after-near-total-abortion-ban-came-into-force (last accessed February 20, 2022).

17 Ibid.

18 Roe versus Wade was the 1973 landmark ruling to protect a pregnant woman's right to have an abortion. The US Supreme Court overturned Roe versus Wade in 2022, holding that there is no longer a federal constitutional right to an abortion in the country.

19 As cited in the online art marketplace Fineartmultiple: https://fineartmultiple.de/barbara-kruger (last accessed February 10, 2022).

20 As cited in *Magazyn Szum:* https://magazynszum.pl/plakaty-barbary-kruger-zrywano-ze-scian-niczym-zdobycze-rozmowa-z-milada-slizinska (last accessed February 10, 2022).

21 As cited on TRAFO's official website: https://trafo.art/en/barbara-krugertwoje-cialo-to-pole-walki (last accessed February 10, 2022).

22 As stated by Piotr Bernatowicz on March 4, 2021, in the online art magazine *Obieg*: https://obieg.pl/en/209—barbara-kruger-s-poster-and-the-frontline-in-the-culture-war (last accessed February 10, 2022), on the occasion of the »Who Will Write the History of Tears« exhibition. Since 2020, the right-wing and PiS-friendly art historian has been the director of the Ujazdowski Castle Center that accommodates the original 1991 Polish version of Kruger's *Your Body Is a Battleground*.

23 As cited in the exhibition's description on the website of the Museum of Modern Art: https://artmuseum.pl/pl/wystawy/kto-napisze-historie-lez (last accessed February 10, 2022).

24 For instance as big protest transparences prepared by three young Polish women for the 2016 Black Protest in Poznań, as depicted in Stepan Rudyk's photograph for *Polityka:* https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1678804,1,czy-czarny-protest-zmieni-polityczne-uklady.read (last accessed February 12, 2022).

25 As cited on October 25, 2020, in the biggest liberal Polish daily newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*: https://trojmiasto.wyborcza.pl/trojmiasto/7,35611,26433558,ellen-ripley-i-wypier-pochodzacy-z-trojmiasta-grafik.html (last accessed February 12, 2022).

26 One of them was, for instance, Magdalena Biejat, Warsaw sociologist, feminist, and member of the progressive party *Razem* (Together), as her Facebook post on October 30, 2020, proves: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=391635995543589&id=104180510955807 (last accessed February 12, 2022).

27 As cited on October 29, 2020, on *Polki.pl*: https://polki.pl/magazyn/o-tym-sie-mowi,-co-naprawde-oznacza-czerwona-blyskawica-symbol-strajku-kobiet,3466,wideo.html (last accessed February 12, 2022).

28 Compare, for instance, with the argumentation of right-wing historian Tomasz Panfil in an interview with the fundamentalist, far-right online portal *Polonia Christiana PCh.pl* on October 28, 2020: https://www.pch24.pl/runa-sieg---od-nazizmu-do-feminizmu,79427,i.html (last accessed February 14, 2022).

29 See other cases of the appropriation of the »Fighting Poland« sign and the legal consequences thereof: https://www.prawo.pl/prawo/znak-polski-walczacej-zniewazenie-zasady-uzywania,453057.html (last accessed February 14, 2022).

30 In 2017, a court in Kielce found one of the co-organizers of the Black Monday protests guilty of publicly insulting »Fighting Poland« and sentenced her to pay a PLN 2,000 fine. See the report in *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna* on May 12, 2017: https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/artykuly/1042338,zniewazenie-symbolu-polski-walczacej-podczas-czarnego-protestu.html (last accessed February 15, 2022).

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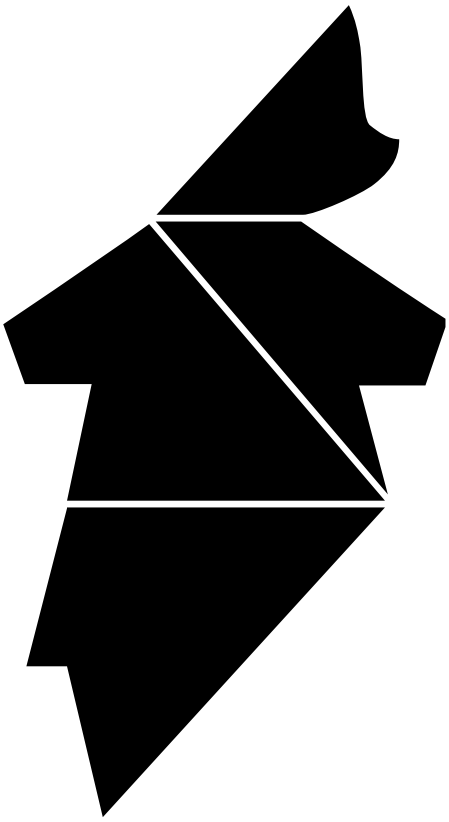
List of Figures



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Social Work ›With Refugees‹ as a Site of Gendered Everyday Bordering

Beatrice Odierna

ABSTRACT: *Recently, gendered images of people categorized as ›refugees‹ became ubiquitous in German media and also awakened many researchers' interest. However, less attention has been paid to how gendered images of refugees are put into practice in daily life — also with regards to Social Work, notwithstanding its growing societal importance. Since 2015, many social organizations have become involved in the administration, accommodation and counselling of refugees. Often constituting their first point of contact with the German welfare system, they are both a target and an instrument for the implementation of (gendered) integration policies. As observed during ethnographic fieldwork (2020—2022), perceptions of gendered agency become increasingly important as markers of difference here. Against this background, I argue that Social Work with people categorized as ›refugees‹ can be considered an important site of gendered forms of ›everyday bordering‹. To support this argument, I present special programmes ›for refugee women*‹ as well as funding procedures as two examples of where ideas of gender (relations) and agency become intertwined in bordering processes.*

KEYWORDS: *Social Work, Social Anthropology, agency, gender, refugee reception*

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Introduction

In the course and aftermath of the »long summer of migration« (Hess et al. 2017, 6), gendered images of people categorized as ›refugees‹[1] featured extensively within the German media. Already in July 2015, the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, one of Germany's highest-circulating newspapers, asked why it was mainly young men*[2] who were fleeing (Schulte von Drach 2015; see also, Elle/Hess 2017, 9).[3] If women* were the topic of media coverage at all, the reports focused on their alleged vulnerability (Auer 2015).[4] Subsequently, the image of the female* refugee as the »exemplary« victim became more and more influential (Malkki 2015, 80 ff.; Ticktin 2011, 250; Elle/Hess 2017, 9).

The issue of gendered media representations has since been taken up in many scholarly works (Akdemir et al. 2023; Horz 2020; Messerschmidt 2016). However, less attention has been paid to the ways in which gendered images of people categorized as ›refugees‹ and ›the Other‹ are constructed and put into practice in daily life. One social sphere which has

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been neglected in this regard, also in the ethnographic research done by anthropologists, is the realm of Social Work targeting people categorized as ›refugees‹ (*Fluchtsozialarbeit*). Since 2015, this subfield of Social Work has taken on a new societal significance: a large number of social organizations, both state-funded social welfare agencies and non-governmental organizations, have become (often for the first time) involved in the administration, accommodation and counselling of people applying for asylum. Thus, together with engaged citizens (Braun 2019), Social Work provides an important point of contact for people categorized as ›refugees‹ with the German welfare system as well as a structuring element of their daily lives. At the same time, and maybe because of this particular position of Social Work, social workers increasingly become both a target of and instrument for the implementation of integration policies — and its gendered implications.[5]

Interactions between social workers[6] and women* categorized as ›refugees‹,[7] for example in the special programmes (*Angebote*) often offered in the context of ›communal reception centres‹,[8] can be considered as highly structured by an unequal distribution of power — between helpers and recipients of aid, between putative members and non-members of a community, and between women* who are assumed to fulfil certain societal ideals of emancipation and those who allegedly do not (Braun 2019, 295). Within my ethnographic fieldwork,[9] ideas of gendered agency became increasingly important. For example, the narrative that so-called refugee women are responsible for the integration of their children but incapable of appropriately fulfilling this task provided both a marker of difference as well as in some cases a legitimation for social workers' intervention. Against this background, I would like to argue that *Fluchtsozialarbeit* can be considered a significant but neglected site of gendered forms of ›everyday bordering‹ (Yuval-Davis et al. 2018) — namely, »the everyday construction« (ibid., 229) of social boundaries — towards people categorized as ›refugees‹. To support this argument, I draw on examples from my fieldwork in Bavaria from 2020 to 2022 in six communal reception centres. In particular, I focus on special programmes offered by social workers ›for refugee women*‹ as well as their funding efforts — which form central fields of action in Social Work regarding those categorized as ›refugees‹.

The article is structured as follows: beginning with a critical reflection on ›agency‹, I refer to feminist and postcolonial anthropologists' critiques of the concept as a theoretical frame. The next section is then dedicated to elaborating the argument that Social Work targeting people categorized as ›refugees‹ provides a neglected site of (gendered) everyday bordering: after a brief description of the living conditions — and, in particular, women's* experiences of precariousness in communal reception centres — it is shown how so-called refugee women become the object of a specific form of ›activation‹ by Social Work — which might be traced back to the latter's history and the establishment of the ›activating welfare state‹. Subsequently, I examine special programmes as well as funding procedures as two examples of where ideas of gender (relations) and agency become intertwined in processes of everyday bordering. To contextualize my observations, I refer to the ambiguous position of Social Work both aiming for the enhancement of their ›clients‹[10] and simultaneously being existentially dependent on their continuous neediness. The conclusion summarizes the findings and draws attention to colonial legacies of (gendered) everyday bordering in Social Work targeting refugees.

Agency: Reflections on the Concept within Anthropological Research and ›the Field‹

As a start, I would like to briefly address the concept of ›agency‹, which — in the sense of a »capacity to act« (Ahearn 2000, 12) or »the capacity to take the initiative, to make beginnings« (Sökefeld 1999, 424) — has become a very influential concept in Social and Cultural Anthropology since the 1970s. At that time, anthropologists increasingly turned their backs on structuralist explanatory models (Ortner 1996, 7–8; Ahearn 2000, 12). Subsequently, approaches such as ›interpretative anthropology‹ (Geertz 1973) and ›practice theory‹ (Bourdieu 1976; Giddens 1984) would become more influential instead.

In everyday language, agency is commonly associated with autonomy and intentional forms of action — a notion heavily indebted to the relatively young »idea of freedom and liberty as *the* political ideal« (Mahmood 2005, 14; italics in original) of modernity. While this understanding of agency was challenged by various schools of thought, the relationship between actor and structure provides a constant point of conflict in Social Science. For example, while some poststructuralists argued respectively for the death or the decentring of the independently acting subject (Spies/Tuider 2017, 5), practice theory eschewed this complete renouncement of agency (Ortner 1996, 6–9). In contrast to poststructuralist perspectives, representatives of practice theory sought to emphasize the interdependency of agency and structure (Giddens 1984, 22; Ortner 1996, 2): in their reading, a person can never act completely free, while at the same time structure does not entirely determine his or her actions (Ortner 2006, 133).

The study of agency also became a major concern of early feminist anthropologists, for example in the course of so-called re-studies — targeting either their own former research fields or earlier works by male* anthropologists (Goodale 1971; cited in Lewin 2006, 15). In critiquing the male bias and the neglect of women* in classical anthropological studies (Lewin/Silverstein 2016, 9), they highlighted the role and agency of their female* interlocutors. Moreover, feminist anthropology focusing on the Middle East simultaneously tackled the colonial undertones (Sehlikoglu 2018, 73) here and criticized marginalizing representations of especially ›Muslim women*‹ (ibid., 74). This re-focusing of the anthropologist's gaze signified an essential turn within the history of the discipline, especially with respect to the acknowledgement of women* as research partners and the challenging of the then common representation of gender relations in non-European societies as being defined by patriarchy and oppression (Mahmood 2006, 37).

However, while the critiques and insights offered by feminist ethnography have been and remain highly important, an attentive re-reading of some studies from early feminist anthropology as well as more recent works from the Anthropology of Gender (e.g. Ammann 2020) calls attention to a core problem in the studying of agency. Namely, the absence of reflection regarding the researchers' own presuppositions about which actions they consider expressions of agency and those they do not recognize as such (Mahmood 2006, 38). One step on the way here might be to relativize and contextualize personal perceptions of what ›agency‹ means, for instance by relating it to both the historical and contemporary discussion of the concept within Social Anthropology, and also within one's own field of research — as I will try to do in the following.

As a concept, ›agency‹ is intimately connected to ideas of autonomy.[11] With regards to the latter, feminist scholars criticize implicated »masculinist ideas of personhood« (Stoljar 2018).[12] However, some feminist and postcolonial anthropologists argue that agency should be critically examined also vis-à-vis the presupposition of a Eurocentric and modernist com-

prehension of the subject (Asad 2003, 70–71; Mahmood 2005, 14). This understanding, so they argue, might result in a reductive conceptualization of ›agency‹ as resistance against institutionalized or patriarchal power (Mahmood 2006, 38).

Given the difficulties and disagreements in defining the relationship between the individual's actions and her or his surroundings, Asad concludes that

> there is no point in anthropologists trying to solve the old philosophical problem of free-will when theorising about the notion of agency. They would be more usefully employed enquiring into the conditions in which »notions of freedom,« and of what counts as its absence, are used to assess behavior and assign consequences to that behavior in different traditions. (2000, 33)

Applying this line of thought to my own field of research, the question arises of how such »notions of freedom« (Asad 2000, 23) — as conveyed by both the denial and the attribution of agency — are deployed rhetorically, especially with regards to so-called refugee women. Consequently, my primary concern is not to assess who has how much agency, but rather to examine how the latter is used as a ›frame of reference‹ by different actors in the field. For example, in some cases social workers use the argument of ›refugee women's*‹ lack of agency as a legitimation for their intervention, thereby defining them as deficient Others. This interest in how agency is employed as a frame of reference is thus linked to the question of in what ways Social Work represents a site of everyday bordering towards people categorized as ›refugees‹. Here, ideas of gendered agency play an important role, as I outline in the following section.

Encountering Social Work as a Site of ›Everyday Bordering‹

Throughout and sometimes also after their asylum procedure, people categorized as ›refugees‹ are observed and managed by different representatives of Social Work such as the Asylum Seekers Social Service (*Asylsozialdienst*), family counselling centres, specialized departments of the Job Centre or school employees. Depending on their status as receivers of benefits under the Asylum Seekers Benefit Act,[13] they have to fulfil a ›duty to cooperate‹: this includes not only cooperation with regards to identity clarification (see § 15 AsylG) but also in some cases the obligation to take part in ›integration‹ courses or language classes (see § 44a AufenthaltG).[14] Furthermore, non-participation in events such as open counselling sessions regarding adequate childcare or special programmes in communal reception centres — which are often advertised as voluntary — can result in the greater attention of the welfare system's representatives, sometimes provoking the unforeseen and undesired consequence of becoming a case of Social Work.

This turns particularly interesting when combined with reflections on processes of ›everyday bordering‹ — a term coined by Yuval-Davis et al. to refer to »the everyday construction of borders through ideology, cultural mediation, discourses, political institutions, attitudes and everyday forms of transnationalism« (2018, 229). While these authors focus particularly on the execution of internal border controls by employers and other ordinary people as an addition to the ones carried out at designated border checkpoints by immigration officials or police, it might be argued that everyday bordering could also be understood in a broader sense: namely, not only in reference to the control of documents but rather as a tool to investigate practices of constructing societal Otherness[15]. That is, the ›boundary

drawing‹ (Simonsen 2016) in daily life to which ›ordinary people‹ such as volunteers, teachers or social workers contribute. A similar argument is made by Rumford (2012, 898) in developing the concept of ›borderwork‹: namely, that the role of ordinary people is not investigated as much or as often as it needs to be in research on borders. Therefore, and in reference to the work of Anzaldúa (1999) and others, he advocates an understanding of »borderwork [which] centres on the ability of ordinary people to *make* borders, not the ability of people to opportunistically use borders to reinforce identity or seek material gain« (Rumford 2012, 898; italics added for emphasis). Following this line of thought, also the settings or activities organized by social workers especially for people categorized as ›refugees‹ — who are by this very action constructed as a societal Other — might be considered sites of everyday bordering (or the everyday making of borders, in Rumford's terminology).

This kind of perspectivization promises a more detailed insight into how Social Work as an important societal institution contributes to the Othering of those categorized as ›refugees‹. Furthermore, it seems noteworthy that gender images (for example regarding appropriate female* behaviour or occupation) play a major role in these processes of everyday bordering (Yeğenoğlu 2009). As I elaborate on in the following, this entanglement becomes particularly evident in the specific ways in which women* are activated by social workers in communal reception centres, where many of them have to live during and sometimes also after their asylum process.

Social Work in communal reception centres and the paradigm of ›activation‹

In Bavaria, as in the rest of Germany, people applying for asylum have to live in special accommodation where they are separated from the rest of society, for example either in *Ankerzentren*[16] or in the regular communal reception centres. As criticized by inhabitants themselves, social workers, medical staff (Elle/Fröhlich 2019, 314) as well as NGOs (for example BFR 2019),[17] the situation of women* in communal reception centres is in many ways precarious (see also, Pro Asyl et al. 2021).[18] Similarly, many of my interlocutors criticize the living conditions encountered, for example long distances between family rooms and sanitary facilities as well as absent security measures such as the lack of door locks. At the same time, they do not want to be reduced to being generally vulnerable but point to the structural inadequacies in communal reception centres (Interview with Hanna Douglas, 31 March 2020).[19]

Within these accommodation sites, daily life is often tenacious and determined by recurring tasks and administrative obstacles. Therefore, special programmes — mostly free events for residents organized by the Asylum Seekers Social Service or external service providers — play an essential role. In many cases, social workers employed in this field explained to me that they wanted to offer a distraction from the dreary daily routines.

However, their engagement reaches beyond simple occupation for the people forced to live in the communal reception centres — rather, they aim for their clients‹ ›activation‹. The particular significance of activation in Social Work is closely related to its genesis and the emergence of ›enhancing the clients' agency‹ as a professional paradigm: against the background of the so-called social question in the late nineteenth century, women* from a bourgeois background started to organize support for the poor and thereby laid the foundations for Social Work's emergence as a profession. Based on the later infamously politicized idea of the »*geistige Mütterlichkeit*« (›spiritual motherliness‹) (Speck 2019, 37; author's own translation) of women* in general, primarily female* members of the working class and

women* in the colonized areas became the (involuntary) target of their support (ibid., 39). While Social Work's predecessors attempted to establish socially acceptable job opportunities for women*, it has remained a predominantly female*-dominated field of work.

Over the course of the twentieth century, Social Work in Germany became more and more institutionalized in fulfilling state duties to support people identified as in need. This institutionalization was accelerated by the turn towards neoliberalism within German welfare policy in the early years of the new millennium. The most prominent example of this shift towards the ›activating welfare state‹ is probably provided by the Hartz IV process which resulted in the issuing of the second book of the Social Security Code (SGBII), the restructuring of the Federal Labour Office and the introduction of the paradigm of ›support and demand‹ (*Fördern und Fordern*) (Graßhoff 2015, 7–11). Here, some authors detect a new form of ›politics of agency‹ (Raithelhuber 2012, 145; author's own translation) in terms of how social policy has been redesigned to support the individual to act independently and entrepreneurially (see, for example, Raithelhuber 2012, 145–146).

The establishment of the activating welfare state had a major influence on the profession of Social Work, for example with regards to cuts in funding and the new focus on the improvement of the individual client (Buestrich et al. 2010, 1). While this re-orientation was highly criticized in the scholarly debate and by Social Work practitioners, it is still very influential today. This might be connected to the simultaneously increasing importance of Social Work in the course of the alteration of the welfare system: as Kessl (2019, 120) argues, the former provides a perfect supplement for the latter because activation and a focus on the individual form integral parts of Social Work's professional self-understanding.

This development resulted in a rise of practices of controlling and the stratification of clients. Within day-to-day Social Work, for example in asylum counselling, the client's individual development is constantly evaluated through monitoring practices such as recurring case reviews, consultation protocols and ›help plans‹ (*Hilfepläne*).[20] In case of divergence from the intended development or plan, appropriate response measures are discussed and decided upon in team meetings or in consultation with other Social Work practitioners involved in the same case (the latter often without informing the persons concerned). Apart from these rather individual-based practices of Social Work, there also exist a number of group-oriented endeavours – for example, special programmes addressing different target groups. As I show in the next section, women* categorized as ›refugees‹ are subjected to a particular form of such activation.

Women* categorized as ›refugees‹ as subjects of Social Work's activation

Within communal reception centres, women* categorized as ›refugees‹ are subjected to a specific type (and intensity) of activation which differs from that of men*. Two observations support this claim: First, at the time of my research there existed relatively more activities ›for refugee women*‹ in communal reception centres than for men*. It has to be noted that not in all accommodation sites I visited during the four years of my professional involvement in Social Work as well as three years of field research were special programmes offered; but, if so, significant emphasis was placed therein on organizing them for women*. In comparison, only few activities targeted men*; these were more often advertised in a general way (for example, simply as football training) while activities for women* were especially highlighted as such. Thereby, the special nature of activities for women* categorized as

›refugees‹ is reinforced by the way in which they are advertised: namely, as extra-curricular and as explicitly designating the intended target group.

This might be regarded as an expression of the extraordinary position ascribed to ›refugee women*‹ as generally needing help. That further to the simultaneously prevailing idea women* »hold a key function within the integration process [...] of their families« (StMI 2022; author's own translation).[21] Thus, they have to be educated to this end — as the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior states with regards to its integration policy and support for organizations which offer, among other things, special programmes for women* in communal reception centres.

Here, strong parallels can be drawn to the above-mentioned approach of some of the first-wave feminists (Speck 2019, 39), recognized as the predecessors to today's professional social workers. While engaging in community service, their endeavours also implied a hierarchized relationship between bourgeois women as educators and women from less prosperous backgrounds — namely, working-class women* and women* in the previously colonized areas — as the receivers of that education. Notwithstanding its self-understanding as »a practice-based profession and an academic discipline which promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people« (International Definition of Social Work),[22] also today in Germany the profession has continued to uphold some parts of this inherited emphasis on education. For instance, Social Work is very much committed to supporting its clients to become proper social subjects (Emmerich/Scherr 2006, 170). This might be partly explained as a result of its entanglement with the German welfare state (Bommes/Scherr 2012; see also, Kessl 2019). However, it might be also argued that Social Work's aim to educate is directed not only at people regarded as citizens but equally — or maybe even more so — concerns those who are constructed as different, for instance people categorized as ›refugees‹. It seems striking that, with regards to the latter, notions of gender (roles) — for instance on the ›right‹ form of gender relations — become especially relevant (Torres 2004).

It might thus be argued that, similarly to the gendered Othering informing the efforts of Social Work's early pioneers, the homogenizing perception that women* categorized as ›refugees‹ — often those who have fled from former European colonies or mandate territories such as Syria (Schuhmann/Jud 2013) and/or those who are read as ›Muslim‹ — are not able to enhance their own situation serves as a legitimation for today's interventions. Furthermore, the intended type of education pursued in special programmes ›for refugee women*‹ is a very particular and contradictory one: as the following section demonstrates, these activities heavily draw on ideas of femininity which associate appropriate female* behaviour and occupation with the sphere of the household and childcare. Meanwhile, concurrently, they also refer to ›gender equality‹ as a marker of distinction between women categorized as ›refugees‹ and ›German‹ women.

Special programmes as spheres of gendered everyday bordering

When passing the noticeboard located next to the social workers' office in many communal reception centres, one might observe the colourful flyers and posters announcing events such as the weekly ›Café for Women‹, yoga lessons and beauty days, or creative activities such as painting, sewing and jewellery-making. Considering this range of topics, a connection is produced between good or appropriate occupations for (›refugee‹) women* and activities belonging to the sphere of the household or beauty and body care. The curricu-

lum also often includes self-defence classes and courses on women's* rights in Germany. This second focus mirrors images of ›refugee women*‹ as being caught in patriarchal family constellations and thus needing empowerment. Here, the idea of empowerment is reduced to the »systematic influencing of others« (Bröckling 2003, 324; author's own translation) — consequently, the activity foci are rarely decided on together with potential participants (Interview with Lydia Green, 8 April 2020).

However, not only the choice of topics but also the ways in which women* are addressed in the context of these activities take up and reproduce particular understandings of gender roles and relations in constructing ›refugees‹ as societal Others, as the following extract from a conversation with Luisa Hill exemplifies. Luisa is a social worker in her mid-30s, who organizes a weekly ›Café for Women‹ in the rooms of an accommodation site on the outskirts of the city. While explaining to me her work routines, Luisa states that is not at all easy to gather possible participants for the Café. She has the impression that most of the women* living in the communal reception centre spend too much time on their smartphones, instead of ›doing anything‹ and taking appropriate care of their children. Therefore, she tries to motivate them every week to take part in her Café. If they decline, she goes from door to door, knocking on each and explaining to them that they should take part. She does not consider the willingness of the potential clients to participate as a prerequisite for the event, as shown by the following statement:

> You have to really pay all your attention to them, and if they say ›no (I am not taking part)‹, you have to convince them: ›Hey, this is fun!‹ And in the end, they will have fun and even speak some German or at least *finally* do something. (Interview with Luisa Hill, 12 May 2020)

Within this short sequence, Luisa constructs a hierarchy of capabilities between ›refugee women*‹ and (mostly female*) social workers: she conceptualizes her own role as that of a professional motivator who has to work hard to convince her potential clients — on the grounds that their participation is ›for their own good‹. In this way, she refers to understandings of the role of Social Work as enabling and ›activating‹ power. At the same time, the potential clients are considered to have not much say in the matter. Instead, they can be — and indeed should be — convinced to take part in the activity at all costs. Here, ›the female* refugee‹ is constructed as incapable to decide and judge what is best for her, for example with regards to appropriate leisure-time activities. Thus, she has to be guided and activated from an external source to ›finally do something‹. At the end of our conversation, Luisa would conclude: »Many of these women*, they might not even know that they do need help.«

Regarding notions of agency, Luisa's representation of her clients mirrors familiar imaginations of ›the Other woman*‹ as being inherently helpless, un-knowing and oppressed (Castro-Varela/Dhawan 2016, 15; Mohanty 1988). As Braun points out, these kinds of »implicit gender knowledge, presumptions and perceptual schemata« (2019, 296; author's own translation) are highly influential in voluntary engagement for women* categorized as ›refugees‹. This assessment can be extended to the context of professional Social Work targeting ›refugees‹, which similarly participates in the »reconstitution of the female bourgeois subject« (ibid., 297; author's own translation) — a subject who ›knows‹ how to behave and thus can claim the position of an educating authority.

The way Luisa talks about her clients implicitly touches upon ideas of a rather mysterious ›culture‹ which can be made responsible for their way of acting. This bears a striking resemblance to what Balibar describes as differential racism (1989, 374): here, imaginations

of ›cultural differences‹ (ibid., 373; see also, Sökefeld 2004) — for instance, based on the ascription of being ›Muslim‹ — in combination with ideas of gender provide the grounds for (and serve as legitimation of) differentiation and discrimination (Attia 2007; Dietze 2016; Messerschmidt 2016). As many of my interlocutors pointed out in more recent conversations, this issue becomes especially apparent with regards to the different treatment of women* fleeing from Ukraine. While the latter were publicly constructed as ›more similar‹ than women* who fled from Near and Middle Eastern countries and who are regarded as Muslims, they experienced a different kind of welcome. Furthermore, as the European Union enacted the ›Temporary Protection Directive‹ in March 2022[23] and also the German government enabled special reception rules for people fleeing from Ukraine, they had not to endure the asylum process and were also not obliged to live in communal reception centres. It might be argued that there appeared a kind of two-class system of reception,[24] one resulting in the construction of two ›groups‹ of women* when it comes to those categorized as ›refugees‹. Subsequently, many interlocutors who had fled from countries such as Afghanistan or Syria (and are sometimes still living in communal reception centres even years after arrival) stated that they feel treated in a discriminatory manner and reduced to sometimes very vague ideas of being of a ›different culture‹.

Second, the practicing of language (skills) — which is often casually associated with the promotion of one's own ›integration‹ and thus deemed desirability — is highlighted. Here, Luisa refers to the aforementioned idea that women* are the ›carriers of integration‹ and therefore have to exhibit exemplary behaviour (for example, speak fluent German) and ensure that their families — especially their children — follow suit. Assumptions about the clients' ›ignorance‹ about what is ›best for them‹ combine with their unfulfilled responsibilities as women*/mothers to ensure their family's integration. While it is expected that they shall work towards their family's integration on the basis of ascribed gender roles, this can (by definition) never be accomplished — the assumed ›cultural differences‹ prove an insurmountable obstacle (Sökefeld 2004, 10). Accordingly, ›women's* equality‹ is defined as overcoming the (›cultural‹) constraint to it and simultaneously established as the »imperative of integration« (Elle/Hess 2017, 12; author's own translation) — an equation embracing strong colonial continuities (ibid., 12—13).

While Luisa does not seem to be very critical of her treatment and addressing of potential clients, other social workers highly refute such marginalizing representations of ›refugee women*‹. However, to escape these dominant narrations ultimately proves to be a difficult task. This becomes especially apparent in the context of supposedly more independent non-governmental or activist Social Work.

The long shadow of ›refugee women's*‹ marginalizing representations

With regards to the position of social workers operating in the field of *Fluchtsozialarbeit*, it seems extremely difficult for them to overcome dominant representations of refugee women* as ›oppressed‹. This became particularly evident in a conversation with Tina Smith*, a young social worker employed by a small NGO in Upper Bavaria. In mid-April 2020, Tina would tell me about her plans to organize meetings between women* categorized as ›refugees‹ and ›German‹ women*. In the following statement, she explains the intention behind the upcoming activity:

> Many of the female refugees we work with are active volunteers — but this is not appreciated within German society. [We try to] get them out from this position that ›refugee women have to be helped‹. They are also active — humans, they also have interests — like someone else, who does not have to live in an accommodation — to be *active*, to support other women, to do something. (Interview with Tina Smith, 17 April 2021)

In this short quote, Tina hints at how ideas of (gendered) agency pervade Social Work's daily endeavours and serve to draw boundaries between practitioners and clients. Giving the example of her clients' (in)voluntary engagement, she implies that women* categorized as ›refugees‹ are not acknowledged as active members of society. Rather, they are usually considered ›in need of help‹ — a representation which she heavily criticizes. Here, she stresses her political ambition: the neglect of these women's* agency provides a point of reference for societal critique (›they are active, but their engagement is not seen‹) and a basis for possible solidarization. At the same time, she implicitly positions herself — or rather, her organization — as capable of changing the representation of women* categorized as ›refugees‹ (›get them out‹) — a presupposition which in turn implies they cannot reach this end by themselves alone. Thus, while attempting to render her clients' capacity to act visible and counter established stereotypes, she tacitly suggests a differentiation between social worker and client in terms of their levels of inherent capability here.

But why is it so difficult, as Tina's story suggests, to escape these familiar representations of ›refugee women*‹? It might be argued that the significance of Social Work targeting ›refugees‹ as a site of (gendered) everyday bordering is closely linked to the profession's ambiguous position towards its clients more generally: practitioners advocate for their clients' interests and are at the same time dependent on their continued neediness. As I explore in the next section, the existential nature of this dependency becomes especially apparent in the context of funding efforts.

Existential dependency: Representing ›refugee women*‹ in funding efforts

In the course of the above-mentioned restructuring of the German welfare system towards the activating welfare state, state funding was reduced. Thus, many of the organizations which offer activities ›for refugee women*‹ in communal reception centres find themselves constantly underfunded and work from project to project (Elle/Hess 2023). As a result, they must seek additional funding, often in competition with the same NGOs or social agencies (*soziale Träger*) with which they normally collaborate in their day-to-day work.

However, while reproducing marginalizing representations would be an easy way to generate funding, many social workers struggle to reconcile this kind of established (and, funding-wise, promising) form of representation of their clients with their personal and professional concerns. This challenge became particularly apparent during a conversation with Marietta Jones* in spring 2020. At that time, Marietta managed a small social organization working closely with a communal reception centre located nearby. Marietta told me about her counselling of a young woman* who needed financial assistance. While several bodies were offering financial aid, it was not an easy task to pick the ›right‹ organization here, as Marietta explains:

> So, [as a team] we were thinking about this last week a lot. We need a one-time donation for a young woman [...]. Who are we going to ask for it, because we know

> roughly, who [which organization] is expecting what, you know? Also, with regards to the pictures — because every organization which provides funding also wants to put this on their website in return.

The choice of the right donor would in this case be closely linked to Marietta's and the team's assessment of what they were expected and willing to offer as a possible reward for receiving funding (for example, pictures of the beneficiary). Throughout the interview, Marietta repeatedly referred to the difficulty of negotiating between her hopes of adequately representing the women* she works with and simultaneously securing the necessary funding:

> The question is: Where do I go along with this ascription [of neediness], because it can help me to reach things [funding] faster? And where do I oppose it, because I know the consequences it will have? (Interview with Marietta Jones, 18 April 2020)

There seems to exist quite a large gap between the expectations of funding bodies (to hear heart-breaking stories and see appealing images of ›refugee women*‹ in need) and the way Marietta would like to represent the women* she works with. She is well-aware of the kind of representation and pictures she is expected to submit in the funding applications, hence struggling with the perceived necessity to meet these expectations. Marietta's case shows how the daily practices of social workers remain deeply embedded in the broader discourse on ›the female* refugee‹ and her missing agency. To act ›in the best interest‹ of their clients, social workers have to constantly navigate between the expectations of donors and their own and their clients' perceptions of appropriate representation.

This example bears a striking resemblance to the ambiguous situation of feminist activists supporting immigrant women*, as described by Miriam Ticktin. According to her: »[these activists] found themselves in the uncomfortable position of searching for evidence of gendered forms of violence, like rape or forced marriage, as these became the most significant factors by which one could prove one's ›humanity‹, worthy of humanitarian exception« (Ticktin 2011, 2—3). Similarly, Marietta described feeling pushed to emphasize her clients' exceptional need to potential donors, for example with reference to their particular situation as women* living in communal reception centres.

As Marietta's case shows, some social workers very critically reflect upon their way of representing their clients and attempt to avoid reproducing stereotypical images thereof — however, they still have to adapt their strategies in light of established narratives vis-à-vis women* categorized as ›refugees‹. This also has to be contextualized with regards to the paradoxical situation which social workers find themselves in. On the one hand, they aim for the improvement of their clients' position based on the attribution of deficiency. On the other, they are simultaneously dependent on their continuous neediness. The existential dimension of this ambiguity becomes particularly evident in the context of funding efforts where social workers like Marietta (have to) refer to established images of ›refugee women*‹ as victims in need to ensure the acquisition of funding and other forms of support. Thus, social workers in the field of *Fluchtsozialarbeit* — mostly women* working under precarious conditions — find themselves in the undesirable position of having to participate in the (re)construction of ›refugee women*‹ as a deficient Other through the ways in which they address, treat and represent them as clients. It might thus also be argued that these acts of gendered everyday bordering suddenly appear closely connected to the ambiguous positionality and precarious working conditions of the social workers themselves.

Conclusion

In this article I have sought to substantiate the argument that Social Work with people who are categorized as ›refugees‹ should be considered an important social domain wherein ›everyday bordering‹ (Yuval-Davis et al. 2018) takes place. As demonstrated with regards to the special programmes as well as funding practices in circulation, ideas of gendered agency — which serve as markers of difference, for example concerning ›the female* refugee‹ in need of social workers' activation or of assistance as a victim of circumstance more generally — play a major role in determining the nature of these activities. As exemplified by the vivid theoretical discussion in Anthropology and neighbouring disciplines, ›agency‹ is an extremely fraught concept. On the part of feminist and postcolonial scholars, ›agency‹ has been criticized for its proximity to modernist and masculinist understandings of ›the subject‹, its Eurocentrism and for its frequent conflation with resistance (Asad 2000; Mahmood 2005; Stoljar 2018).[25]

As such, the researcher's presuppositions about what agency ›truly means‹ have to be (self-)critically evaluated with regards to its similarities to existing discourses hereon — with reference to the ideal of the liberal subject, for instance. While this is no easy task, it might be helpful to investigate more fully how perceptions of agency are used and interpreted in the context of ethnographic fieldwork — by researchers and interlocutors alike. Furthermore, a closer look at how and why ideas of gendered agency are utilized in the field — such as to legitimize social workers' professional interventions — can help shed light on how perceptions of those categorized as ›refugees‹ and societal ›Others‹ become (re)produced and productive within the day-to-day-business of Social Work, as an increasingly important societal institution.

The activation of clients forms a central part of social workers' everyday practice; its paradigmatic status can be traced back to the profession's genesis. Social Work originated from the attempts of bourgeois women* to support working-class women* and women* in the colonized areas while at the same time generating socially accepted job opportunities for women*. With the establishment of the activating welfare state, Social Work became more and more institutionalized and integrated into welfare policies. Subsequently, the aim to oversee the enhancement of clients, among them many people categorized as ›refugees‹, developed into a professional paradigm.

Communal reception centres form an important contact zone wherein social workers and women* categorized as ›refugees‹ interact on a daily basis. Here, especially women* experience the living conditions as precarious and unsafe. At the same time, they are subjected to a specific type of activation which differs from that of their male* counterparts, who are the recipients of less attention and fewer targeted activities. In the course of my research, I had the impression that there existed relatively more activities ›for refugee women*‹ than for ›refugee men*‹. This emphasis could be explained by the prevailing imagination of women* categorized as ›refugees‹ being the main bearers of integration, a notion reproduced within state funding programmes. This results in the contradictory situation whereby special programmes for women* in communal reception centres are often limited to activities either referring to the sphere of housework or beauty/body care while simultaneously proclaiming the need for women's* (external) empowerment. Accordingly, the notion of ›gender equality‹ is instrumentalized as a sign of integration (Elle/Hess 2017). This might be read as yet another expression of ›differential racism‹ (Balibar 1989, 374), which becomes effective through the establishment of a particular idea of gender relations as a marker of ›cultural difference‹.

Considering the examples of Luisa, Tina and Marietta, it can be concluded that in their working with women* categorized as ›refugees‹, social workers are inevitably entangled in dominant narrations of the gendered Other. While organizing and carrying out special programmes ›for refugee women*‹ and applying for funding, they position them as a target group and as being vulnerable and in need. Although many of them are very much aware of their own participation in reproducing these images, they describe only limited opportunities to circumvent this process. In that way, social workers contribute, albeit reluctantly, to a kind of gendered everyday bordering towards people categorized as ›refugees‹. This assessment might be considered ›troublesome‹ — following the conference theme ›Troubling Gender‹ which inspired this special issue — as it challenges the common perception of Social Work as a neutral supporter of the ›needy‹ — a moral stance often also claimed by representatives of a »new humanitarianism« (Ticktin 2011, 16), which has likewise been criticized.

Social Work targeting ›refugee women*‹ thus both refers and contributes (sometimes unwillingly, yet still effectively) to their ongoing (re)construction as a particularly indigent Other while concurrently establishing insurmountable ›cultural differences‹ based on assumptions of gender inequality. This kind of representation bears striking similarities to colonial imaginations of the Other woman* (Mohanty 1988), ones which continue to resonate in attempts to legitimate educational interventions regarding those categorized as ›refugees‹ — as not limited to, then, but also supported by Social Work's daily practices.

Notes

1 ›Refugees‹ do not provide a self-evident topic for anthropological research, but a legal and social category (Malkki 1995, 496). To emphasize the constructive nature of this description, I use ›refugees‹ in quotation marks when referring to people categorized as such.

2 The asterisk indicates that categories such as ›men‹ and ›women‹ are socially constructed. It is meant to open the category up to all who refer to it or share the experience of being addressed that way, see: Frauen*beauftragte ASH Berlin (2019): Hinweise und Empfehlungen für geschlechtergerechte Sprache an der ASH Berlin. Available online at: https://www.ash-berlin.eu/fileadmin/Daten/Einrichtungen/Frauenbeauftragte/Geschlechtergerechte_Sprache_Hinweise_und_Empfehlungen_an_der_ASH_Berlin_April_2019.pdf (last accessed 24 July 2023).

3 Schulte von Drach, Markus (2015): Flüchtlinge in Europa: Warum vor allem Männer Asyl suchen. See: https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/fluechtlinge-in-europa-warum-vor-allem-maenner-asyl-suchen-1.2584201 (last accessed 20 July 2023).

4 Auer, Katja (2015): Übergriffe in Asylunterkünften. Frauen in Bedrängnis. See: https://www.sueddeutsche.de/bayern/uebergriffe-in-asylunterkuenften-frauen-in-bedraengnis-1.2574277 (last accessed 23 July 2023).

5 See, for example, the integration policy line ›Integration of Women‹ issued by the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior, which provides funding for organizations offering special programmes ›for refugee women*‹. Bavarian Ministry of the Interior (2022): Integration von Frauen. See: https://www.stmi.bayern.de/mui/integrationspolitik/integration_frauen/index.php (last accessed 22 July 2023).

6 Such differentiations between social workers and women* categorized as ›refugees‹ should not be taken for granted, as one category might blur into another. For example, two of my interlocutors who came to Germany via family reunification and as so-called quota refugees later became social workers themselves.

7 In the following, I am referring to a particular »community of experience« (Weißköppel 2007, 186) among women* categorized as ›refugees‹, namely those who came to Germany mostly between 2014 and 2019. Although my interlocutors have very different biographies and came from different countries (including Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria), they have one thing in common: their experience is much different from that of women* who have fled from the Russian war on Ukraine since 2022, especially with regards to their social reception as well as legal categorization.

8 In the following, I use ›communal reception centres‹ as an umbrella term to refer to different types of

accommodation for people categorized as ›refugees‹, including state and communal *Gemeinschaftsunterkünfte* (collective accommodations) and *Flexi-Heime* (smaller houses with only four or five families, often located on the outskirts of the city).

9 During my fieldwork (2020 – 2022), I accompanied and interviewed nine young women* categorized as ›refugees‹. Furthermore, I had the chance to conduct interviews with around 20 social workers working in organizations providing activities ›for female* refugees‹ in the city of Munich, its surrounding district and some smaller towns in Upper Bavaria. While not all of them had studied Social Work, they nevertheless occupied the positions of social workers within their organizations. The fieldwork was conducted as part of my PhD studies within the DFG-funded research project ›Processes of Subjectivation and Self-formation of Young Women* Categorized as Refugees in Germany‹ at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich.

10 In my interlocutors' terminology, ›client‹ is used to refer to the counterpart or addressee of Social Work.

11 For a summary of feminist critique regarding the concept of autonomy, see: Stoljar, Natalie (2018), ›Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy‹. In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edward Zalta (ed.). Available online at: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/feminism-autonomy/ (last accessed 24 July 2023).

12 Stoljar (2018) (see endnote 11): abstract.

13 My interlocutors are in different legal situations: while some of them are officially entitled to asylum, others hold a temporary suspension of deportation.

14 Similar to people who receive unemployment benefits (§31a SGB II), beneficiaries living under the Asylum Seekers‹ Benefits Act (§1a AsylbLG) can be sanctioned for failing to fulfil their ›duty to cooperate‹, which leads to a reduction in their awarded income.

15 See also, Fabian 1983.

16 The *Ankerzentrum* is the first place of stay for people applying for asylum. In theory, applicants should pass through all parts of their asylum process during their stay, see: Bayerischer Flüchtlingsrat (BFR) (2019): Positionspapier Ankerzentren. Available online at: https://www.fluechtlingsrat-bayern.de/hintergrund/positionspapier-anker-zentren/, 1 – 2 (last accessed 25 July 2023).

17 Bayerischer Flüchtlingsrat/BFR (2019): Positionspapier Gewaltschutz. See: https://www.fluechtlingsrat-bayern.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Positionspapier_Gewaltschutz.pdf (last accessed 25 July 2023).

18 Pro Asyl et al. (eds) (2021): Zur Umsetzung der Istanbul-Konvention in Bezug auf Geflüchtete Frauen und Mädchen in Deutschland. See: https://www.proasyl.de/material/zur-umsetzung-der-istanbul-konventionen-in-bezug-auf-gefluechtete-frauen-und-maedchen-in-deutschland/ (last accessed 8 July 2023).

19 All names used in the text are pseudonyms.

20 Help plans are mainly employed in the context of youth welfare. For a more detailed investigation of the function of help plans in Social Work, see: Freigang (2009).

21 See: Bavarian Ministry of the Interior/StMi (2022): Integration von Frauen. Available online at: https://www.stmi.bayern.de/mui/integrationspolitik/integration_frauen/index.php (last accessed 25 July 2023).

22 See: International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) (2014): Global Definition of Social Work. Available online at: https://www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work/ (last accessed 27 July 2023).

23 See: Kleist, Olaf (2022), Rückkehr zur Flüchtlingspolitik des Kalten Krieges: Vom universalen Schutz zur Re-Politisierung? Available online at: https://fluchtforschung.net/blogbeitraege/rueckkehr-zur-fluchtlingspolitik-des-kalten-krieges-vom-universalen-schutz-zur-re-politisierung/ (last accessed 27 July 2023).

24 See the statement by PRO ASYL regarding the differential treatment of people fleeing from Ukraine with regards to their passports. PRO ASYL (2022): Keine zwei Klassen von Flüchtlingen! Schutz für internationale Studierende aus der Ukraine. Available online at: https://www.proasyl.de/pressemitteilung/keine-zwei-klassen-von-fluechtlingen-schutz-fuer-internationale-studierende-aus-der-ukraine/ (last accessed 25 July 2023).

25 Stoljar (2018) (see endnote 11).

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Politics of Reversal: Dangerous Convergences of Gender and Race in Migration and Feminist Politics

Miriam Gutekunst and Sabine Hess

ABSTRACT: *Right-wing politicians who speak out for women's rights while attacking emancipatory feminist politics appear to be a contradiction. Nevertheless, studies show that this is a widespread Western phenomenon in fact. It represents a discursive construction, one that Suvi Keskinen understands as a »politics of reversal«: namely as »the adoption and rearticulation of central feminist ideas [...] to promote racist agendas« (2018, 161). However, racialized and culturalist gender discourses and images cannot only be found in the context of far-right parties and groups that can be easily and readily defined as »femonationalists« (ibid.). Rather, we can observe »dangerous convergences« of gender and race across the political spectrum, especially in the context of feminist and migration politics. These convergences, how they are produced within feminist as well as migration-related social fields, plus how they circulate and hence structure policies and politics are the focus of this article. We argue that culturalist and racializing gender discourses within current migration and feminist politics reinforce each other—whether intended or not. Hereby several incidences of sections of the international feminist movement deliberately opting for (racial) alliances with the state and law and order policies are illustrated.*

KEYWORDS: *right-wing times, femonationalism, feminism, migration politics, racism, border regime*

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Introduction

»By your politically correct, culturally sensitive silencing you are complicit in the loss of women's rights and liberties that have been hard won over centuries«[1] said Mariana Harder-Kühnel, member of the party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), in the parliamentary debate taking place on the occasion of International Women's Day 2022. She finished her critique of the current government with the request to stop »mass migration from archaic cultures,« which from her point of view is not a phenomenon compatible with the fight for women's rights. During the last few years the AfD has made repeated requests for forced marriage and female genital mutilation to be combated.[2] Such narratives orientalize sexualized violence against women as a practice supposedly only happening in migrant contexts, and use it as a key trope to prove their »backwardness« and »cultural incompatibility« with

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Western, allegedly women-friendly societies—tendencies many studies have highlighted by now (Erdem 2009, 187; Petzen 2012).

Right-wing politicians who speak out for women's rights in the German parliament and use feminist topics and narratives while criticizing emancipatory politics as »gender madness« appear to be a contradiction (Lang 2018). Nevertheless, as scholars have also indicated, this is a widespread Western phenomenon in fact (Keskinen 2018; Sager 2018; Ticktin/Tudor 2021). It represents a discursive construction, one that Suvi Keskinen understands as a »politics of reversal«: namely as »the adoption and rearticulation of central feminist ideas [...] to promote racist agendas« (2018, 161). However, as we will argue, such racialized and culturalist gender discourses and images about the »dangerous patriarchal migrant man« and the »helpless vulnerable (migrant) woman« who needs saving are not only be found in the context of far-right parties and groups that can be easily and readily defined as »femonationalists« (ibid.).

Rather, we can observe »dangerous convergences« of gender, race, and migration across the political spectrum, which Miriam Ticktin and Alyosxa Tudor (2021) also note as being one main characteristic of the contemporary political conjuncture they call »right-wing times.« These right-wing times can be understood as »regimes,« per Ticktin and Tudor, that force race, migration, gender, and sexuality into the same frame of reference (ibid., 1648 – 1649). For Germany, the discourse following the events of New Year's Eve 2015 became paradigmatic of this convergence: it produced the mediated figure and trope of a »toxic masculinity« in relation to refugees and laid the discursive grounds for a new surge in »sexual panic« politics as a vital resource in promoting racist agendas (see also, Dietze 2016). Precisely this specific gendering of the asylum and migration discourse—wherein certain feminist actors like Alice Schwarzer were heavily involved—contributed to problematizing the »long summer of migration« and led to a subsiding of the country's hitherto welcoming attitude (Willkommenskultur).[3]

These culturalist perspectives are not only powerful in more or less mainstream and liberal discourses on migration as well as in feminist debates: they also form a decisive narrative and lens helping structure European and European Union migration policies. These framings and convergences, how they are produced within feminist as well as migration-related social fields, plus how they circulate and hence structure policies and politics are the focus of this article. We argue that culturalist and racializing gender discourses within current migration and feminist politics reinforce each other—whether intended or not. In a first step, we show how gender entered the political field of EU migration and border policies long before its recent discursive conjuncture in the aftermath of the 2015 events quickly labeled a »European refugee crisis.« Hereby we will demonstrate how the EU migration and border regime could draw on an alliance between itself and certain feminist positions—especially within the field of politics seeking to counter violence against women—long before the events of 2015/2016, when gender and sexuality now reappeared in public discourse as a central analytical lens (Hess et al. 2016; Elle/Müller 2019).

In a second step, we then demonstrate how the production and depreciation of the »cultural Other« has always been constitutive of the Western feminist movement and is kind of a long-produced »blind spot« that can be easily instrumentalized to justify nationalist anti-immigration policies. Even though this orientalizing narrative continuously structures certain feminist discourses to a great extent, there is also a growing awareness within the heterogeneous feminist movement about the core dilemma that comes along with such narratives: namely that the critique of sexism in racialized contexts always runs the risk of being instrumentalized for nationalist and racist political agendas, and as such is silenced

altogether. We shed light on different strategies to deal with this danger—María do Mar Castro Varela and Nikita Dhawan speak here of a »tricky situation« (2016, 21)—of playing into the hands of right-wing politics as a feminist.

In a third and final step, the reasons for these »dangerous convergences« are explored. We argue that the mutually reinforcement and affirmation of these two political fields—of migration and feminist politics—through culturalist and racialized gender discourses is embedded within a certain political configuration in Europe: the current hegemony of post-liberal racist politics drawing on supposed European values like gender equality and the acceptance of homosexuality.

The analysis presented here draws on the material derived from two empirical-research endeavors. The two authors conducted their respective projects independently from one another and only developed their common argument beginning with this article. The first such endeavor is based on 15 years of research on the EU border and migration regime and its gendered dimensions (Hess 2010, 2013), with focus mainly on a recent three-year project on »Gender, Forced Migration & the Politics of Reception« conducted by Sabine Hess and Johanna Elle (2020). By applying a praxeological and intersectional approach, one based on notions of the anthropology of policy as well as of legal anthropology, the two researchers explored how gender narratives were used by different actors in the field with highly ambivalent repercussions and contradictory material effects.[4] The insights of these studies inspired the analyses of the first section below.

The second such endeavor, meanwhile, is an ongoing research project on »Ambivalent Gender Knowledge — Negotiations of Cultural Difference in Feminist Initiatives of the Post-migrant Society« conducted by Miriam Gutekunst. This actor-centered and praxeological study looks at feminist initiatives that are engaged in struggles against forms of so-called culture-based violence like forced marriage or female genital mutilation. It aims to scrutinize the gender knowledge of these initiatives, as crucial sites for the (re)production and negotiation of knowledge about the relationship between gender and cultural difference.[5]

When Protection Turns into Exclusion: The Allying of Agents of Migration Control and Western Feminist Movements

Already in 2008 Ticktin would analyze for France how culturalist gender narratives, externalizing and racializing patriarchal violence as deeply rooted in the culture of the »Muslim Other,« were increasingly being used to argue for and legitimate restrictive migration policies. Sexuality and gender, as she put it, had become the »language of border control« (Ticktin 2008, 1). This served to produce alliances between government actors and sections of the Western feminist movement.

An extensive literature in Migration Studies has shown how gender and sexuality are core factors structuring migration experiences and projects and how, vice versa, migration structures gender relations and practices too. Yet, there is still no broadly established research agenda that considers border/migration control, gender, and sexuality intersectionally (Shekhawat/Del Re 2017). While there have been a few anthologies and research endeavors working thoroughly from a gender-analytical perspective in Refugee Studies in recent years (Freedmann 2016; Buckley-Zistel/Krause 2017; Freedmann et al. 2019), the analytical category of »gender / sexual orientation« has not yet appeared among international border studies—a handful of exceptions aside (Luibhéid 2002, 2013; Shekhawat/Del Re 2017; Gutekunst 2018). If gender and sexuality do appear in such works, they often do so

by specifically addressing forms of discrimination, suppression, (gender-based and sexualized) violence, and suffering (see also, the critique by Saleh 2020).

This kind of perspective has not only far-reaching consequences for the populations addressed in these ways but significant epistemological effects too. Gender and sexuality hereby again remain »the Other« of the border regime—its objects. Such an empirical perspective fails to illuminate how the border regime itself is based on the articulation of gender relations as well as on »gender expertise«[6] (FitzGerald/Freedman 2021) and as such how gender and sexuality have been strategically invoked and performed in the attempt to regulate and control migration and refugee movements ever since the 1990s (Hess et al. 2022).

Thereby the specific architecture and rationale of migration and border policies that have been gradually harmonized within the EU context since the so-called Schengen Treaty of 1985 must be considered here. To cut a long, complex, and contradictory story short (Lahav/Guiraudon 2000; Lavenex 2004; Hess/Tsianos 2007), the creation of an external EU border regime on the one hand as well as a »Common European Asylum System« on the other—as grounded in international and European legal standards for protection such as the Geneva Refugee Convention—opened up the space for gender-based narratives to emerge. Migration control, especially how it was thought of and propagated at the turn of the millennium within European and global think tanks as »migration management« (Geiger/Pecoud 2010), was based on the technocratic vision of an »orderly migration« and the »new governance« logics (Hess/Karakayali 2007). It was envisioned as a clean, selective process[7] taking into consideration, to a certain extent, both the protective aspects of the Refugee Convention and, since the late 1990s, also of the growing field of anti-trafficking policies (Bahl et al. 2010; FitzGerald 2010; Hess 2012).

As a result, the European border regime was based on a mix of security-oriented and humanitarian discourses and practices from the very beginning—albeit to varying degrees (Ticktin 2011a; Walters 2011; Perkowski 2018). While linking these rationales is not free of contradictions, they intersect and are closely entangled in helping to build a »humanitarian-security nexus,« as Andersson (2017) argues. Also, the recent highly restrictive policies implemented to restabilize the European border regime after its near-collapse in 2015 were introduced to the public as »humanitarian measures«—that is, as ones designed to save lives by preventing refugees from taking the risky journey across international borders in the first place.

In retrospect, it is possible to see the suggestively titled »Secure Borders, Safe Haven« paper published by the United Kingdom's Home Office in 2002 as an early discursive initiation of this political rationale. The paper not only argued for a policy of externalizing migration control to countries of transit and origin—a rationale and practice forming ever since one of the main pillars of the EU border regime—but it did so by coining it as protection for migrants on the move. The paper in particular employed a gendered rhetoric by especially drawing on the discourse of anti-trafficking in women and employing the figure of the »victim of trafficking« (FitzGerald 2012) that, as Heli Askola analyses, »experienced an almost meteoric rise onto the EU agenda [in these years]« (2007, 204). The paper does so by outlining the »high vulnerability« of the female migrating body, directly coupling women's migration with their trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation (FitzGerald 2012, 232). The migration movement of women was not only presented as extremely dangerous but also as occurring against their will, a narrative that firmly structures the discourse and imagination of the gendered nature of migration. The consequence hereof is the construction of the figure of the »passive, helpless, more or less forced migrant woman« who is somehow better off staying in her country of origin (see Andrijašević 2009, 2012).[8]

This chosen phrasing of protection and saving migrant women found strong resonance even with feminist and humanitarian actors. FitzGerald (2010) as well as Ticktin noted how the figure of the female victim of sexualized violence had become the »model subject of aid« (2011b, 250) since the turn of the millennium. As Ticktin (2011a) also revealed, this corresponded with emerging political orientations within the international women's movement seeking a »compromise« between the Global North and the Global South by putting the focus on bodily integrity and a »politics of the body.« This represented a turning away from addressing international socioeconomic relations of exploitation. As she continued: »What emerged was a victim-subject, particularly one of sexual harm, seen in isolation from other injustices or forms of exploitation — this was the only way to get around the tensions between the feminist movements in the North and the South« (ibid., 17). This political shift from a »politics of social justice« to a »politics of the body« (ibid., 250) would have significant consequences.

The transformation underway was accompanied also by a further narrowing of the complex of »violence.« As intersectional feminist studies have noted, the structural socioeconomic aspects of violence—as affecting women from the Global South, racialized, socially marginalized women from the Global North, and LGBTIQ+ persons more heavily than privileged white women—have been increasingly ignored in the narratives of violence propagated within the international women's movement (Castro Varela/Dhawan 2016; Olivius 2017). In their place, articulations of violence have started to dominate political discourse and practice that rather one-dimensionally link it to the »public-private divide« and emphasize forms of interpersonal, body-related, sexualized, and domestic violence (Hall 2015). This is also reflected in the norm-building processes of international humanitarian organizations such as UNHCR, seemingly structuring public and political discussions nowadays on the specific needs and vulnerabilities of refugee women (Miller 2004; Olivius 2017).

This problematic oversimplification of violence and migration would lead to an ambivalent rapport between activists working to counter violence against women and the border regime, which we characterized in previous research as situative, uncanny work alliances (see also, Bahl et al. 2010; Aradau 2004). In consequence, the success of feminist anti-trafficking campaigns in the EU and United Nations arenas, at the beginning of the new century, came at a high price, since it was based on alliances with security- and migration policy actors, as Helen Schwenken's (2006) research shows as well. Especially the signing of the Palermo Protocol in 2000 was »the target of heavy feminist lobbying,« as Jo Doezema, a sex workers‹ rights activist, remembered (2002a, 20); meanwhile »two camps,« a »neo-abolitionist« and a »human rights-focused« one, were competing with their positions. It is beyond the scope of this paper to interrogate the ideological positions of the diverse actor involved in these globally organized networks here. However, researchers as FitzGerald and Freedman show how the »former position on prostitution [has] dominate[d] the policy debate [ever since]« (2021, 442).

Those responsible were so successful as they were able to frame the issue as a »threat to national security,« and as such as a question of »law and order«—meaning one for border and immigration policy. Like Schwenken (2006), Ticktin (2011b) indicates how this pertains to specific women's or feminist groups that increasingly draw on the state and particularly the judicial system—including UN fora and internationally dominant human rights regimes. Janet Halley et al. (2006) describe these practices and strategies to advance feminist political agendas by aligning them with wider state concerns as »governance feminism«—that is, as one that situates feminist positions within the regulatory politics of the state. Already in 2002, Doezema would ask at a conference being held at the University of Ghent:

»As trafficking is increasingly being used by governments and even by NGOs as an excuse for repressive policies, NGOs are left wondering: Where did we go wrong?« (2002b, 1).

This policy, also locally based on the cooperation between feminist groups and the law-enforcement apparatus, has not only lead to the criminalization of migrants perceived as human traffickers or smugglers but also, indeed, harmed those meant to enjoy protection (Andrijašević 2012; Hess 2012). Fadi Saleh describes a similar entanglement of global queer politics and the humanitarian field in the context of the Syrian exodus, creating what he calls »the figure of the suffering Syrian gay refugee« (2020, 1). In his research, Saleh illustrates the far-reaching repercussions of this discourse and political practice for the subjects addressed by a UN system that enforces on them performing suffering for protection (ibid.).

The Year 2015 and the Emerging »Dispositive of Vulnerability« in Migration Politics

Since the mass-migration movements of 2015, European media outlets, policymakers, and NGOs have increasingly paid attention to the question of »gender,« understood as mainly women and LGBTIQ+-specific experiences and structures in the context of forced migration and refugee-reception policies. Not only have women and LGBTIQ+ people become visible in the media coverage of refugee migrations (Elle/Müller 2019) but it has also been possible to observe a genuine boom in national and local programs and concepts addressing gender (and to a lesser extent sexuality) specifically in reception policies—and particularly regarding women. This we were able to earlier demonstrate for the German context (Elle/Hess 2020; on Sweden, see Olivius 2017).

The tropes informing the renewed gender debates emerging in the wake of the events of 2015/2016 show striking similarities to the previous ones outlined above, since they have also been limited to »protection« and »violence.« A review of the most recent publications in the realms of gender, forced migration, and border studies reveals that the trope of »gender-based violence« across these research contexts seems to once again have become the main perspective in the emerging field of gender-border-refugee studies, as titles such as *Gender, Violence, Refugees* (Buckley-Zistel/Krause 2017; see also, Freedman 2016) demonstrate. No doubt, there is a specific »migration-violence nexus« (Freedman 2019, 128) ensuing from restrictive externalized border policies, as Alison Gerard and Sharon Pickering (2014) convincingly point out. This migration-violence nexus causes particular challenges, difficulties, and forms of suffering for refugee women, children, LGBTIQ+ people, and other discriminated-against groups. It represents a »continuum of violence« from the context of origin to the presumed arenas of destination and reception (Krause 2012). The recent volume by Seema Shekhawat and Emanuela C. Del Re (2017), with its ten studies primarily on the relationship between gender, violence, and borders, makes clear that the border regime is indeed highly gendered, insofar as it produces specific gendered experiences, practices, and subjects/subjectivities.

However, the redundant invocation of violence as the only border experience of women, homosexual, and gender-variant persons pushes questions of practice, agency, and contestation aside, and reduces the range of accepted self-presentations. It also drastically denies the violence male-positioned and -attributed migrants experience per the ever more brutalizing forms of border deterrence deployed on the ground (Turner 2016). The forms of direct, interpersonal violence increasingly practiced in border zones operate along a »gender-race-religion« axis of differentiation that targets especially persons read as »male« and

»non-Christian,« as Simon Lauer (2020) was able to demonstrate in a recent ethnography (see also, Augustová/Sapoch 2020).

It produces as well new, highly normative images and categories that have far-reaching effects. This is true also in the asylum procedure and in related jurisdiction, forming a normative template against which self-narrations and persecution are measured and potentially discarded (cf. Hübner 2016; Schittenhelm 2018). As our own research shows, these reductive images and categorizations are paramount in the NGO and volunteer scene too, greatly affecting how projects are structured and the way »support« is understood and hence performed (Elle/Hess 2020).

With the rising focus on violence, »vulnerability« has gained—as a new *terminus technicus*—increasing significance among humanitarian professionals, volunteers, as well as actors working in the reception and asylum systems. As has already been shown (Butler et al. 2016; FitzGerald 2011), the term has specific origins in feminist discourse and epistemology. Yet, it developed as well into one of the most dominant political and operational terms for the post-2015 border and asylum regime—and this against the backdrop of acute refugee rights violations and cutbacks to procedural rights, as the dominant mode of response employed by the EU and its member states (Hess 2021). The tropes of »vulnerable groups« and »vulnerability« have played a crucial role on the legal level too. In a political and legal context characterized by a wide range of official, legally coded, as well as informal attempts by state agents to reduce access for people on the move to the international asylum-protection system, the category »vulnerability« and the ascription of being »vulnerable« were among the few means left to acquire humanitarian attention and protection. This was the case for arriving refugee migrants on the Aegean Islands (Antonakaki et al. 2016; Hänsel 2019)[9] as well as along the Hungarian-Serbian border—where the label »vulnerable« constituted one of the last available chances to access Hungary's asylum system (Beznec et al. 2016). These empirical insights demonstrate how a »dispositive of vulnerability« emerged that softens the dismantling of legal-protection standards and serves as a means for state agents and politicians to pretend to still follow a humanitarian rationale (Hess/Kasparek 2017).

On the other hand, as our research on Germany illuminates, the heightened sensitivity to gender, women-related concerns, and to the needs of vulnerable groups in the reception process was seemingly a window of opportunity to elaborate the »Minimum Standards for the Protection of Refugees in Refugee Shelters« (Mindeststandards zum Schutz von geflüchteten Menschen in Flüchtlingsunterkünften). This brought together a broad coalition of feminist organizations, welfare institutions, UNICEF, and even the Ministry for Family Affairs (2017). However, the federal as well as state-level concepts that have mushroomed in the wake of this sensitivity have not moved past the recommendation stage, so there are still no clear and homogenous rules and standards in place.[10] The implementation of protection measures is still at the discretion of the individual operator of shelters and it remains up to the wider NGO scene to inaugurate another temporary project. As such, protection measures guaranteed by international and European legislation are still not formally ratified and homogenously implemented under German law (Elle/Hess 2020; PRO ASYL 2021). A significant gap currently exists, therefore, between increased sensitivity and rhetoric on the one hand and practical implementation on the other with respect to refugee reception and accommodation policy in Germany (Elle/Hess 2020).

Additionally, there is still no secured financing for gender-/sexuality-related support infrastructures and activities in the context of refugee reception—as women's NGOs noted in interviews (ibid.). As such, relevant parties are forced to play along with a vocabulary anchored in the »dispositive of vulnerability.« This logic practically compels the (re)pro-

duction of the image of the passive, refugee woman in need of and deserving protection. Furthermore, many programs and activities follow the reductive understanding of violence outlined above and focus more or less on domestic and interpersonal forms thereof among the refugee population itself—thus negating the structural factors of the asylum and camp system, for example the lack of privacy in overcrowded camps and prohibition on working in combination with a general legal precarity and insecurity regarding even imagining a future, as refugee women kept on highlighting in interviews with Elle (Hess/Elle 2023).

This reductionist approach is often inspired by an orientalizing, culturalist, and ethnicized understanding of gender relations and practices linked to the above-outlined notions of backwardness and patriarchal cultures. This again draws on colonial legacies, rearticulating them as the »white woman's burden« to today liberate migrated women from their ostensibly patriarchal cultures (cf. Farris 2017; Braun 2019). As such, the heightened sensitivity to the gendered aspects of flight and migration in the context of the 2015/16 refugee migration movement rather led to a reinforcement of processes of the Othering and racialization of sexual and gender politics based on a Western self-perception of being »gender-equality champions.« Accordingly, those concerned not only have to protect other women but also to teach them how to emancipate themselves.

It is also important to note that even though gender—in these contexts, addressed at women's and sometimes LGBTIQ+ concerns—has taken on greater visibility and relevance in public and political discourses as well as in practical work with refugees, it is only marginally associated with a more powerful voice for these persons themselves. Refugee women and LGBTIQ+ people are rarely allowed to participate in the discourse and are not treated as experts and competent actors in the political arena who can equally take their place at the discussion table (Women in Exile 2019). Since »the victims,« as Ticktin (2011a) has shown, are purest in their passivity, they all too quickly lose their intrinsic victim quality once they actually speak out. In the following section, we will show that the heightened discussion and visibility of gender in the wake of the recent migration and asylum debate gaining momentum in Europe found as well another key focus in problematizing migrant masculinity and connecting it further with violence and criminality. Here as well, certain sections of the wider feminist movement were spearheads of formulating the trope of a »toxic migrant masculinity« (Dietze 2016).

The Production of the »Cultural Other« as an »Ignored Blind Spot«[11] of the White Women's Movement

In the process of making »Cologne« a central argument in the anti-immigration security discourse in Germany after the events of New Year's Eve 2015, feminist actors played a crucial role here—most notably Schwarzer, a key figure in the second women's movement and editor-in-chief of the feminist magazine *EMMA*. Sabine Hark and Paula-Irene Villa describe her reaction to these events as a form of essentializing feminism, »[one] that is not so much critically responding to ressentiment-filled, othering dynamics in society as it is contributing to them« (2020, 78). In her 2016 book about what happened in Cologne, Schwarzer refers to the perpetrators as »North Africans and Arabs« and explains their behavior as being due to their Islamic background, speaking of »Sharia Muslims« and even »Islamists« (2016, 17ff.). She describes the harassment as »acts of terror« and appreciates more restrictive migration measures—concretely the classification of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia as »safe countries of origin«[12]—as well as harsher penalties explicitly for young male migrants (ibid., 27ff.).

Hereby Schwarzer reproduces not only gendered anti-immigrant and Islamophobic sentiment about the »dangerous Arab man« that can be easily instrumentalized but she is even deliberately complicit in supporting anti-immigration security policies. The culturalization of gender (Dietze 2017) comes along with the self-conception of being gender-equal and emancipated: Schwarzer speaks of our »enlightened« countries to whose shores men from traditionally misogynist cultures arrive (2016, 33). This narrative wherein the »cultural Other« stands for backwardness and in need of development while one's own culture is civilized and progressive dates back to colonial times. Liz Fekete (2006) termed this »enlightened fundamentalism.« The use of clearly »femonationalist« arguments by those like Schwarzer or Necla Kelek—who also published an article in Schwarzer's book about Cologne, further to having appeared alongside the racist politician Thilo Sarrazin in the past—is a phenomenon that can be traced back to the 1990s originally. Back then, women's rights activists started to criticize a too-liberal multiculturalism and called for more restrictive migration and integration policies (Razack 2004; Hess et al. 2009; Lentin/Titley 2011; Sauer 2011).

This ambivalent positioning of feminist actors—if not altogether based on an outright racial positioning and claim to European superiority (Rommelspacher 1995; Fuchs/Habinger 1996; Petzen 2012)—can be read as a kind of unchallenged »byproduct« of the long engagement of the women's movement against gender-specific violence. In fact, in the first instance, the critiquing of a too-narrow societal understanding of »violence,« the consequential problematization of the phenomenon within familiar and intimate relationships, as well as the combating of instances of it constituted important successes of the second women's movement no doubt. This increased sensitization also led to a new focus on violence perpetrated against migrant women in Western Europe in the 1990s (Sauer 2008, 49). Labeled »harmful traditional practices,« phenomena like forced marriage, female genital mutilation, and honor killings increasingly became the focus of governments and supranational institutions like the EU and the UN, consequently now being more extensively prosecuted (ibid., 49f.).

Esra Erdem (2009, 188) writes that migrant feminists were surprised about this new attention being paid to such phenomena: despite their long-term grassroots work, nobody had been interested in the situation of migrant women until it was taken up by this emerging alliance. She criticizes the fact that the racialized debate around »harmful traditional practices«—interpreted as signs of »failed integration«—did not help the affected women per se, rather only conservative politicians. The latter capitalized on these circumstances to legitimate restrictive anti-immigration measures—like those on marriage-related migration introduced at the turn of the millennium (Sauer 2008, 51). These campaigns strongly contributed to the continued demonization of migrant men, to the victimization of migrant women, and to the culturalization of gender-specific violence as outlined above. However, and despite these public debates and revisions to migration and criminal law, opportunities for the effective prevention of violence and the protection of afflicted women, children, and LGBTIQ+ persons in the fields of migration and flight remain insufficient to this day (Elle/Hess 2020; PRO ASYL 2021).

The described intersections between feminist practice and nationalist, anti-immigrant policies are strongly entangled with the production and depreciation of the »cultural Other« within Western feminism. This Othering practice can be understood as a central historical »ignored blind spot« of that movement. Gabriele Dietze (2014) showed in her study of the United States context that women's rights groups and racial-emancipation movements have been intertwined since their inception in the nineteenth century, and they have always been antagonistic. The racist narrative of »white/female civilizational superiority«—

remaining potent to this day—was a central aspect of white women's politics at that time (ibid., 19). While their »Othering« of black women—first criticized by the enslaved freedom activist Sojourner Truth (1851)—was based on biological notions of race, in the second half of the twentieth century it was subsequently replaced by an essentialist understanding of culture (Balibar 1990). The practice of cultural Othering would be constitutive of the second women's movement as well (Hügel/Lange 1993; FeMigra 1994; Kalpaka/Räthzel 1994; Uremovič/Oerter 1994; Eichhorn/Grimm 1995; Gümen 1997; Gelbin/Kader/Piesche 1999).[13]

Birgit Rommelspacher (2010) recalls how in the 1970s the accusation of being rooted in archaic patriarchy and unable to emancipate was directed at Jews within the women's movement too, while in the 1990s women from the former East Germany would become the target of the same logic. Black women faced similar rejection within second-wave feminism (Kelly 2019; Lorde 2019 [1984]). The literature shows that feminists have hugely contributed to the orientalist, gendered stereotyping of Islamic people and strengthened the logic that Muslim women are in need of saving (Abu-Loghud 2002; Petzen 2012; Kulaçatan 2020). This has happened to such an extent that Muslim womanhood and liberty are now considered incompatible in the hegemonic Western feminist discourse (Castro Varela/Dhawan 2016, 17).

Even though such culturalist Othering has a longer history of affecting different groups of people over time, the situation has changed insofar as, according to Rommelspacher, certain feminist critiques of Islam find nowadays—at the latest since 9/11 (Abu-Loghud 2002)—the backing of a large majority of society as well as extensive support from very different political groups (2010). The »Muslim man« has hereby become a central target of surveillance and disciplining (Razack 2004, 130). Another result of this dynamic is the rendering invisible and overlooking of the self-organized migrant, as well as of the Black and Jewish feminist movements that were fairly active in the 1980s and 1990s. Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodriguez and Pinar Tuzcu criticize this neglect in their book *Migrant Feminism* (2021), which is a collection of marginalized voices speaking from within different feminist movements. Despite their multiple activities and interventions, these decades are seen as »silent time« in the dominant narrative about the women's movement in the German context (Rodriguez/Tuzcu 2021). In the debate arising after the 2015 events in Cologne, it was also noticeable that the perspectives of migrant women and women of color—who face sexual harassment as well as racist attacks in their everyday lives (Castro Varela/Dhawan 2016)—remained heavily silenced.[14]

The Dilemma of Unintended Alliances in Feminist Politics

Against this backdrop, feminists find themselves in a core dilemma that gives rises to the following key concern: How to address sexism in racialized contexts like Black, Muslim, or migrant communities without reproducing racist paradigms? And, how to address racism without neglecting sexism in racialized contexts? Drawing on empirical examples from my research,[15] I will illustrate how certain feminist groups currently handle this dilemma. Revealed is the fact that while awareness of this tricky situation is omnipresent in the German feminist movement(s), there are quite different strategies employed to deal with it: One is to acknowledge the uncertainty resulting from this dilemma and try to integrate the full complexity of race and gender relations into own feminist practice. This means, concretely, a form of de-essentialization. Another approach is to quell the uncertainty resulting from this dilemma by rejecting criticism and ignore the social effects of one's own speaking and writ-

ing. Islam and related topics like the veil or forced marriage, but also ideas of a supposedly »backward« Muslim masculinity, constitute a gender-political focal point in this context.

The public debate after the events of New Year's Eve 2015 in Cologne led to a form of uncertainty and even feelings of helplessness within certain feminist contexts. While the political closeness to conservative through right-wing thinking and politics is clear in the case of Schwarzer and Kelek, the subsequent cultural essentialization of gender as well as rise of femonationalism have affected also feminist contexts where relevant actors position themselves as left-wing and eschew anti-immigration sentiment and racist political agendas. For example the Frauenkultur e.V. in Leipzig—a sociocultural feminist center engaged in tackling racism since the 1990s—reacted as one of the few institutions and groups directly to do so to the aforementioned dilemma with an event held in May 2018. It brought together representatives from different feminist institutions combating gender-specific violence. They discussed, per the event flyer, the »question of how to deal with sexual harassment from a feminist point of view as well as the desire for answers, arguments, and discussion without ›giving food‹ to the right or *being ourselves pushed into a racist corner*.«[16]

One of the discussants, a member of a women's advisory center, described the outlined dilemma and resulting uncertainty as follows, in drawing on the example of the legal changes enacted after Cologne: The events of New Year's Eve 2015 were used to legitimate the implementation of more restrictive asylum policies and, at the same time, the reforming of the law governing sexual offenses. Feminists had been fighting for the latter for decades in Germany, which is why the discussant called Cologne also a »racist stirrup«[17] for this particular achievement. A representative of the Women's Emergency Hotline spoke, meanwhile, about young women who are active in providing refugee aid and sometimes get harassed by migrant men, but do not talk about it for the fear of contributing to blanket stigmatization. In consultation they try to take such incidents seriously and encourage the affected women to talk about it, but also to be always aware of the pitfalls of such cases and to analyze the situation and the conditions at hand in detail.

On their flyer, the event organizers also prominently wrote that »›violence against women‹ as a phenomenon cannot be traced back to nationality.« In this context, feminist actors—who were mostly practitioners—took the danger of perpetuating racism seriously, attempted to deal with the surrounding uncertainty, and sought solutions on how best to integrate the intersectional complexity of sexualized violence into their feminist practices. This works sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. However, the attitude displayed here is one of acknowledging the aforementioned dilemma of entanglements between racism and certain notions of feminism and a will »to unlearn what we thought was right« (Hark/Villa 2020, 105). Castro Varela and Dhawan conclude that there is no »good solution« in these circumstances. Rather, it is important to do always both: »The disclosure of racist practices and the thematization of violence against women (and other vulnerable subjects) within flight migration and diasporic communities« (Castro Vela/Dhawan 2016, 25f.).

In other feminist contexts, we can also observe awareness of this dilemma. However, the handling of it is quite different: namely simply ignoring the dangers of reinforcing essentialist gender discourses rather than taking them seriously. The justification for such a strategy is mostly that anti-racist critiques would lead to the trivialization of sexism and sexualized violence. For example, Inge Bell—a member of the executive board of Terre des femmes—gave an interview in the context of a rape case in Freiburg in 2018 where, among others, men of Syrian citizenship were involved. Both right-wing actors and anti-racist groups subsequently took to the streets: the first against migration, the second against right-wing extremism and the instrumentalization of sexualized violence for racist agendas.

Bell criticized the second camp on the following grounds: »It's good that people go out onto the street against the far right, but we don't need anti-racism cosmetics that encourage the protection of the perpetrators.«[18] In the same interview, she emphasized also that »one must be allowed«—as she put it—to ask what role Islam plays here.

Another example of similar positioning is the work of the feminist writer Koschka Linkerhand. In her article »Traitors. On the status of feminist Islam critique« (2020),[19] the chosen starting point is her own experience with the accusation of being racist and reinforcing right-wing discourse when criticizing Islam or Muslim people—as articulated by queer and decolonial feminists (ibid., 1). She favorably highlights the *EMMA* feminism around Schwarzer that still focuses on »sexist grievances« and does not get distracted—from her point of view—by a »mistaken and incapacitating anti-racism« (ibid., 3). She sees an opportunity in forming interesting alliances with Muslim feminists like Sineb El Masra, but also with ex-Muslims like Kelek, Mina Ahadi, and Ayaan Hirsi Ali (ibid., 8). At the same time, she criticizes the »growing reconciliation [of *EMMA*] with the nation« (ibid., 3) as well as the insensitivity of Kelek and Hirsi Ali »to patriarchal structures in the West« and »their connectivity to right-wing, anti-Muslim politics« (ibid., 6).

Bell and Linkerhand are only two examples of a larger group of feminists who argue similarly, though they represent quite different political camps. The simultaneity of their radical positioning against versions of political Islam while also being aware of the risk of being used in racist discourses indicates a deliberate attempt to reduce the complexity of the diverse global space they speak to. It also represents a liberal misconception about the power one has to determine what the effects of own speech acts are—as it can no longer be ignored that anti-Islamic narratives are firmly »married« with racist agendas in the West.[20]

Floris Biskamp (2016, 2017) analyzed the dilemma surrounding public utterances about Islam in the German context. He pointed out that—regardless of the question of whether certain critiques of Islamic milieus are reasonable or not—talking about Islam in public has always to be understood as a social action carried out in a social context that has also social effects: »It is less about what the speaking subject *wants to do*—intended or not—but rather what it *does* with its speech«[21] (Biskamp 2017, no page). The public use of essentializing notions about the dangerous Muslim man and the oppressed Muslim woman—no matter by whom, and whether intended or not—*does* indeed reinforce culturalist neoracism as well as play into the hands of the right and their anti-immigration, nationalist security policies.

Answering the question of how to address sexism in racialized contexts, then, is not a simple undertaking. It is, indeed, one that gives rise to many issues and uncertainties. However, what becomes clear is the following: While the strategy of taking the dilemma seriously by integrating complexity into one's own practice and reflecting on the social effects of one's own speech is sometimes more muted (even running into the danger of being too silent to be heard), the strategy of ignoring the dilemma and perpetuating simplistic cultural-essentialist answers rings even louder in a society marked by »right-wing times.«

Conclusion: »White Border Guard« Feminisms?

In this article we have showed how culturalist notions of gender and the racialization of sexism within feminist politics—two discursive operations that stretch back to colonial times—have become virulent in the contemporary conjuncture. We outlined how the notion of »gender equality« was part and parcel of white women's claim to civilizational superiority. Sections of Western feminist movements have perpetuated this legacy ever since as part of

what we termed an »ignored blind spot.« We also illustrated how certain feminist projects that are framed in this one-dimensional way as a fight against sexism—in our case, especially campaigns seeking to counter sexualized violence against women—are connectable to law-and-order policies in the field of European migration control. This framing has not only led to a further securitization of migration but also helped to firmly establish a link between refugee migration as a sexual threat and a decoupling of European societies from those elsewhere considered still deeply patriarchal, reinforcing the white norm of self-identifying as »gender-equality champions.«

Critical race theory extensively illustrates that once race as such became taboo, especially after the atrocities of the Nazi regime in Europe, racial knowledge and racist narratives continued to work through »proxies« (Goldberg 2008). »Culture and gender [seemingly took] a prominent place in what has been called ›neoracism'« (Keskinen 2018, 158; see also, Pieper/Tsianos 2011). Addressing the transformative capacities of racism in the new millennium, Pieper, Tsianos, and Panagiotidis speak of a »postliberal racist configuration« (2011, 194ff) that is not only characterized by its flexible (re)combining of anti-immigrant, post-/neocolonial, anti-Semitic, and anti-Islamic narratives. Rather, these three authors convincingly demonstrated how this recent racist configuration, which Alana Lentin (2016) and others have even termed »postracial,« especially works by drawing on egalitarian tropes and narratives like gender equality or the acceptance of homosexuality (see also, Puar 2007). They converge in the disciplining of »postnational subjects,« and redefine the boundaries of belonging, citizenship, and the nation-state in ever more subtle ways (Erdem 2009; Pieper/Tsianos/Panagiotidis 2011).

Since the mass-migration movement of 2015 and its right-wing politicization as a »European refugee crisis,« we can observe a new wave of what David Goldberg (2006) called »racial Europeanization«—meaning a specific regional history of constructing Europe in racial terms, whereas migration is discursively positioned as one of the main threats hereto. Recently, migration has even been depicted as a »weapon« and »hybrid attack« against the sovereignty of European nation-states and cultures (Hess 2023). This reconnects the phenomenon of migration with the survival of European values in ever-closer ways. In this regard, Keskinen speaks of a »crisis of white hegemony« that fuels right-wing, racist movements overtly calling for the defense of European values—if necessary also by violent means, as seen in many places along the EU's external borders. Such sentiments also pop up, too, in gender-equality campaigns under titles like »Our equality, our rights« that target refugee communities (Hänsel/Hess/Elle 2022).

It is the same context that allows for the renewed appropriation and instrumentalization of feminist arguments and narratives by racist nationalist agendas, what Franziska Schutzbach coins »equality nationalism« (2018, 101). We are witnessing a new generation of right-wing women—using pop-culture elements and social media channels—who present themselves as »true feminists« (Rahner 2018, 8; AK Fe.In 2019). Hark and Villa describe this kind of activism as a »genuine historic novelty«—»instead of mobilizing against ›feminism', they mobilize against an academic concept: gender« (2020, 94). Meltem Kulaçatan emphasizes that such femonationalist actions—like the activism of the Identitarian women's group *#120db*—should not be understood as feminism at all, rather as an »abuse of women's rights concerns in order to enforce restrictive political measures in the context of a strategy to prevent the real recognition of the plural and open society« (2020, 159). In this context of what Ticktin and Tudor defined as the contemporary conjuncture of »right-wing-times« now forcing gender, migration, and race into the same frame of reference as a central axis in redrawing the boundaries of belonging and citizenship in Europe, feminists need to be

more aware than ever of the underlying potentiality for gender (equality) notions to be used in the »politics of reversal« that positions certain projects as »white border guard« feminisms (Keskinen 2018, 160).

Notes

1 All translations the authors‹ own unless otherwise indicated. German original: »Und durch ihr politisch korrektes kultursensibles Schweigen machen Sie sich mitschuldig daran, dass die über Jahrhunderte hart erkämpften Rechte der Frauen und Freiheiten der Frauen verloren gehen« (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4TJJp6uhyw; 22:20 – 26: 45; last accessed December 1, 2022).

2 See, for example: https://www.bundestag.de/webarchiv/presse/hib/2020_11/808982 – 808982; https://www.parlament-berlin.de/ados/18/IIIPlen/vorgang/d18 – 2237.pdf; https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/19/227/1922704.pdf (last accessed December 1, 2022).

3 For instance, when the Munich sociologist Armin Nassehi warned of a »masculinization of public spaces« (Die Welt 05.10.2015).

4 For the project description, see: https://www.gender-flucht.uni-osnabrueck.de/en/home.html (last accessed December 1, 2022).

5 For the project description, see: https://gepris.dfg.de/gepris/projekt/492003373?context=projekt&task=showDetail&id=492003373& (last accessed December 1, 2022).

6 Also, Sharron FitzGerald and Jane Freedman reflect on the instrumentalization of gender expertise in the field of EU anti-trafficking policies by pointing to the selectivity of which feminist voices and which gender expertise are being invited and which still are excluded. Especially human rights-focused feminist positions and migrant voices »are consistently refused voice in policy-making« (FitzGerald/Freedman 2021, 3, 10).

7 This dominant policy rationale of »migration management« was certainly accompanied on the ground by diverse rights abuses and violations of legal norms, as practiced by several national border guards; at the level of policymaking and »teaching« how to do »border management,« however, the vision of a »smart border« was the prevailing logic of the day.

8 Another example of this victimization of migrant women in order to legitimate restrictive migration measures on the basis of humanitarian arguments is the policy changes made in the context of marriage-related migration in Europe and North America since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Pretending to aim at protecting migrant women from forced marriage, exclusionary instruments like needing to present a language-proficiency certificate before entry would be introduced (D'Aoust 2013; Gutekunst 2015).

9 In November 2022 the Italian government ruled only »vulnerable« groups were allowed to disembark from rescue boats, with the consequence that single men were sent back onto the high seas: https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/italien-fluechtlinge-seenotrettung-humanity-1 – 1.5688011 (last accessed December 1, 2022).

10 In August 2019, after years of controversy, protection in refugee accommodation was finally included in the Residence Act. However, this is still a provision and not a binding directive. So far, it has neither been transposed into state legislation nor into municipal accommodation practice.

11 By terming this so, we draw here on critical race theory. The latter shows that the silencing of »racism,« even the rendering taboo for many years of the term itself in German public and academic debate, can be understood as a function of its working to help produce white ignorance and amnesia (Alexopoulou 2016).

12 According to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees: »The law defines countries as safe countries of origin if it is possible to prove on the basis of the democratic system and of the general political situation that no state persecution is to be feared there as a rule, and that the State in question can provide protection against non-state persecution as a matter of principle« (BAMF 2018). Critical Migration scholars and researchers have demonstrated that this categorization mostly does not coincide with the genuine situation on the ground in these countries and with the lived realities of migrants themselves. This categorization is hence an important tool for lowering procedural as well as social rights in the asylum process (Hänsel/Hess 2019).

13 A very rich overview of the extensive literature on this debate can be found online at: https://www.rosalux.de/news/id/3860/fruehe-debatten-um-rassismus-und-antisemitismus-in-der-frauen-und-lesbenbewegung-in-den-1980er-jahren-der-brd (last accessed on December 1, 2022).

14 The voices of migrant women are only heard when they attest to the veracity of the dominant discourse: »The authentic voice speaks and says what the majority wants to hear« (Castro Varela/Dhawan 2016, 24).
15 »Ambivalent Gender Knowledge« by Miriam Gutekunst.
16 »Die Frage nach einem feministischen Umgang mit sexuellen Übergriffen, sowie der Wunsch nach Antworten, Argumenten und Diskussionen — ohne ›den Rechten Futter‹ zu geben oder *selbst in eine rassistische Ecke* gestellt zu werden.«
17 »Rassistischer Steigbügel.«
18 »Es ist gut, dass Menschen gegen rechts auf die Straße gehen, aber wir brauchen keine Antirassismuskosmetik, die Täterschutz befördert.« See: https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/plus183138074/Mutmassliche-Vergewaltigung-in-Freiburg-Lieb-gewonnener-Antirassismus-befoerdert-Taeterschutz.html (last accessed December 20, 2022).
19 »Nestbeschmutzerinnen. Zum Stand feministischer Islamkritik.«
20 For example, the veil has a different meaning in the German context—where anti-Islamic racism is quite prominent and women are attacked on the street for wearing it—compared to in the Iranian one, where women are forced to wear the hijab by the country's authoritarian regime.
21 »Es kommt weniger darauf an, was das sprechende Subjekt bewusst oder unbewusst tun will, sondern darauf, was mit dem Sprechen es *tut*.«

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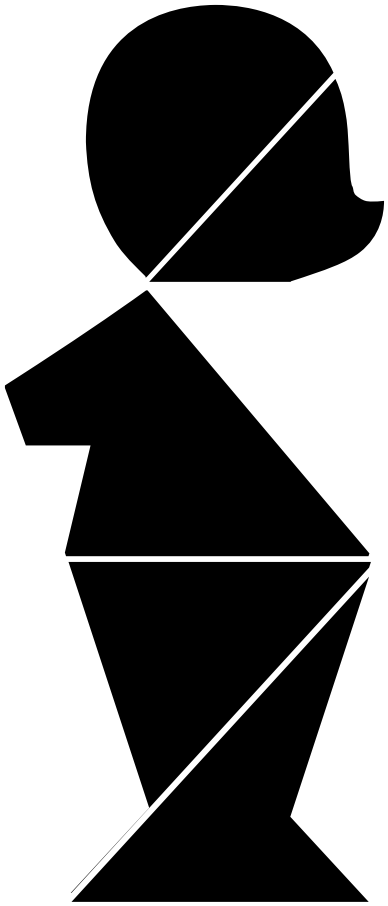

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Can We Fight Together? Contentions of Gender-Queer Scholarship and Activism in Southeast Europe

Bojan Bilić, Čarna Brković, Linda Gusia, Nita Luci, Diana Manesi and Jovan Džoli Ulićević

ABSTRACT: *This is a polyvocal paper exploring some of the debates which have shaped gender-queer scholarship and activism in Southeast Europe (SEE). Discussing four key themes — authors' backgrounds, situatedness in theory, understandings of Europe and notions of belonging (›we-ness‹) — the authors paint a picture of gender-queer scholarship and activism in SEE as a fragmented intellectual landscape fraught with multiple struggles and points of contention. The paper offers an overview of two key axes of contention. One has been the differential and racialized distribution of claims to progress, civilization or Europeanness within the SEE region. Another point of contention is the question of whether it is possible to articulate a joint struggle for social justice which would bring together the concern for the problems caused by unjust economic redistribution with those induced by unjust patterns of cultural recognition. With its theoretically nuanced reflections regionally situated within SEE, the paper also raises the question of what gender-queer scholars and activists in SEE are revealing about progressive politics beyond the Area Studies framework.*

KEYWORDS: *nesting orientalisms, coloniality, transphobia, grief, decentring Europe*

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Introduction

By Čarna Brković, University of Mainz

This is a polyvocal paper co-authored by six gender-queer scholars working on Southeast Europe (SEE): Bojan Bilić, Čarna Brković, Linda Gusia, Nita Luci, Diana Manesi and Jovan Džoli Ulićević. It presents the conversations we had during the panel ›Can We Fight Together? Contentions of Gender-Queer Scholarship and Activism in Southeast Europe‹ organized during the ›Troubling Gender‹ conference held online in April 2021.[1] Our discussions within the framework of this panel made clear that there are two key foci of contention which have shaped gender-queer scholarship and activism in SEE to date.

One of these arises around claims to progress, civilization or Europeanness asserted within the region, often on the basis of ›nesting orientalisms [...] a tendency of each region

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[in SEE] to view the cultures and religions to its South and East as more conservative and primitive‹ (Bakić-Hayden 1995, 918). As Gusia and Luci discuss, the case in point here are the orientalizing attitudes of (post-)Yugoslav feminists towards those from Kosova, whose economic deprivation and suffering under systemic political violence remains largely invisible and undertheorized. There is a longer history of relationality at play here. A generation of self-declared feminists emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in socialist Yugoslavia, which attempted to develop a ›third way‹ and a Non-Aligned perspective situated between state socialism of the East and liberal capitalism of the West (Lorand 2018). ›Comrade Woman. The Women's Question: A New Approach‹ was one of the rare meetings of feminists from both sides of the Iron Curtain which took place during the 1978 conference in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, under the slogan ›Workers of the world — who washes your socks?‹ (Bonfiglioli 2008).

The organizers of this conference articulated a critique of existing socialism in their country from a feminist perspective, while staying within the framework of Yugoslav socialist ideals and values. In doing so, their feminist project was emancipatory and original. It was also shaped by an understanding of women from Kosova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Roma and rural women from all over Yugoslavia as ›backwards‹, subjects whose ›mentality‹ and ›consciousness‹ needed to be emancipated in line with Yugoslav socialist modernity. As Gusia and Luci argue, echoes of the socialist Yugoslav colonially inflected assumptions about the distribution of ›civilizational progress‹ among women racialized in different ways are present today, too. They colour attempts to exchange knowledge and know-how across state borders. The continuous existence of such assumptions speaks clearly about the need to rethink the politics of feminist gender-queer solidarity in former Yugoslav countries from a critical anti-racist perspective (see also, Savić 2018).[2]

Another point of contention is the question of whether it is possible to articulate a joint struggle which would include both what Nancy Fraser (2000) calls the ›issues of economic redistribution‹ (class, economic and redistributive justice) and those of cultural recognition (cultural visibility, human rights and the social acceptance of various minorities). The fall of socialism in 1989 brought about a change in the grammar of political claims-making towards the vocabulary of cultural recognition. Injustices caused by economic redistribution have often been left unarticulated. This is a global issue, one which we can trace in SEE as much as in other regions of the world. After the fall of socialism, feminist activism was mostly ›NGO-ized‹, meaning it was pursued within the framework of non-governmental organizations who used the human rights discourse to demand the changing of the legislature, increased visibility and overall better recognition of women, gays, lesbians, bisexual and trans people in the cultural sphere (Hodžić 2014). However, postsocialist transformation also meant a profound economic change which left many of those same women, gays, lesbians, bisexual, trans and queer people in precarious living conditions, experiencing forms of suffering which were almost impossible to articulate — because the vocabulary of social justice and activism have been heavily oriented towards the axis of cultural recognition hitherto.

One important issue for gender-queer activist scholars in SEE — as elsewhere — is to figure out how to fight together across the line which divides injustices caused by economic redistribution from those induced by certain patterns of cultural (non-)recognition. Can we make claims to social justice in a manner which would be both critical of rigid identitarian lines and sensitive to the materiality of suffering? Working together across this distinction provides the means to go beyond both identity- and class-based politics and to forge political friendships and alliances across differences, as our authors show — both in this paper and in their own critical political praxis. In these debates, there are feminist and leftist actors who take transphobic and conservative standpoints, as Bilić and Ulićević problematize.

Other actors approach the question of how to articulate a joint struggle across differences from a queer and transformative perspective, turning grief as a shared affect into a political claim, as Manesi discusses.

The following represents a summary of the discussions we had during the panel; it is also informed by our pre-existing discussions, disagreements, collaborations and friendships. I had personally met and collaborated with all of the other five authors in some form or another during our earlier scholarly and activist work. Bilić, Ulićević and I were involved in an activist scholarly project called ›Queering Montenegro‹, supported by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (Belgrade Regional Office).[3] Kalezić Danijel and I initiated this project between 2014 and 2016 as a series of conversations taking place between scholars and activists interested in gender-queer feminism and LGBTIQ activism in Montenegro. Ulićević participated in the project as a biologist and trans activist from Montenegro. Jovan is one of the founders of Association Spektra, an organization working on the advancement of the human rights of trans, gender diverse and intersex persons in Montenegro, for whom he works as a director — which he also does for the Trans Network Balkan, a regional trans and intersex organization wherein he is also a coordinator for regional capacity-building.[4] Bilić participated in the ›Queering Montenegro‹ conversations as a political sociologist doing research on LGBTQ activisms, LGBTQ-affirmative psychotherapy and the anthropology of non-heterosexuality and gender variance in the post-Yugoslav space. Bojan holds a PhD in Slavonic and East European Studies from University College London and is the founder of the Queering YU Network. With this network, he has established an informal collective of scholars and activists who explore the history and politics of (post-)Yugoslav anti-war, feminist, LGBT and queer initiatives and who have co-authored several edited volumes hereon.[5] Bojan, Jovan and I collaborated on the volumes dedicated to LGBTIQ and trans politics and activism in the former Yugoslav countries (2016, 2022).

I met Manesi, Luci and Gusia during the planning of the workshop ›Anthropology of Gender in the Balkans‹ which Sabine Hess and I organized at the University of Göttingen in 2019 (taking place with the support of the German Academic Exchange Service, DAAD).[6] Manesi presented a paper just after finishing her PhD in Social Anthropology at Goldsmiths, University of London, on queer and lesbian feminist politics, activisms and subjectivities in Greece. Her work on the latter, a European Union country, helped us to think about the possibilities and limits of ›the Balkans‹ as a framework.[7] Luci and Gusia both teach at the University of Prishtina (UP), in Anthropology and Sociology, where they have co-founded the Program in Gender Studies and Research. Luci obtained her PhD from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and currently works as Ambassador of the Republic of Kosova to the Kingdom of Norway.[8] Gusia obtained her PhD from the UP, currently runs the Department of Sociology and combines her research with pedagogy and social involvement through feminist theory and practice.[9]

This brief introduction illustrates that what brought the six of us together for the panel and this article is not a particular ideological or political standpoint or a certain theoretical approach but, rather, a shared set of concerns, an ethnographic sensitivity to everyday life and our continued work in the field of gender-queer feminist scholarship and activism in SEE. We originally met through various scholarly and activist projects and events which tried to intervene in the social and cultural frameworks of SEE, and which were sometimes organized in that region with the help of German funding bodies (such as the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung or DAAD) and other times in Germany itself. These connections between Germany and SEE reflect the dominant landscape of aid, but they have also been influ-

enced by my personal trajectory as a gender-queer anthropologist from Montenegro who has been living and working in Germany for almost a decade now.[10]

The project-oriented character of our mutual relations is a reflection of what Paul Stubbs has called the ›paradox of the semi-periphery‹ (2015, 87) — namely, the fact that in SEE »all manner of project interventions are possible in a flexible ›open space‹ but these rarely achieve what they set out to, precisely because of the same lack of ›thick‹ structures in which they can be implemented.« With this paper, we reflect on some of the issues raised by the lack of ›thick‹ institutional structures which could support sustainable and long-term social change (see also Graan 2022). We also want to present some of the key points of contention of gender-queer scholarship in SEE and to invite *Berliner Blätter*'s readership to consider the ways in which knowledge and theoretical arguments with a regional focus on SEE could be useful in understanding other places and conversations — both in Europe and elsewhere. Translating and moving academic, policy and cultural knowledge is never a unidirectional process with clear points of departure and arrival: rather, knowledge becomes interpreted, inflected and reworked as it changes location (cf. Clarke et al. 2015). Yet, hegemonic conceptualizations vis-à-vis the ›transfer‹ of knowledge assume that it necessarily moves in but one direction: namely, from the European centres of knowledge and policy production to SEE's peripheries. The theoretical nuance and complexity of gender-queer conversations in SEE complicate this picture, however.

This paper, with its regional focus on SEE, implicitly raises the question of how can knowledge about feminism and queerness there be translated to the rest of Europe? What can gender-queer scholars and activists in SEE reveal about progressive politics as such, and not just about how the latter is reconceptualized and translated in that part of the continent itself? There are many complex and sophisticated debates about how to fight together across differences, ones which deserve significant theoretical attention — and which could perhaps be used to understand gender-queer struggles and experiences in other parts of Europe, too. Whether or not these kinds of situated perspectives and embodied knowledges about feminism and queerness in SEE remain read as ›area studies‹ or as ›theoretical knowledge‹ crucially depends on how we understand ›Europe‹. We would like our readers to think with us, then, about how to disturb the conventional ways of imagining ›Europeanization‹ and its accompanying processes.

The paper was written after our panel, as a reflection on the four key themes which emerged in the course of our conversations. The first theme we call *the background*, meaning a particular issue or set of issues relevant in one's gender-queer scholarly and activist work. The second theme is *situatedness in theory*, which gives an overview of how the individual authors locate their scholarly and activist work in the broader context of theoretical conversations about gender and sexuality in Europe. The third theme is *Europe*, which charts different visions of Europe, Europeanization and of its south-eastern periphery. The fourth theme, *›we-ness‹*, encompasses an understanding of belonging and subjectivity which makes it possible to speak about gender-queer scholarship and activism in SEE.

Behind the Veil of Feminist Solidarity

Linda Gusia and Nita Luci, University of Prishtina

Background: In Kosova, the consolidation of a women's movement came about in the early 1990s in mobilizing identity politics based on intersecting national, regional and transna-

tional alliances. The emergence of the movement coincided with Kosova's political-independence project, often conditioning and shaping the strategies adopted in its activism. During this time, most feminists from former Yugoslav spaces forged alliances through anti-war activism and were often deemed traitors to their nations as a result of their anti-military stance. Women activists in Kosova shared this anti-war sentiment but became uninterested in preserving the Yugoslav Federation and a common Yugoslav identity (Gusia et al. 2016). The ambiguities and paradoxes of the emergent women's movement unfolded in a terrain which was and continues to be shaped by discourses and practices of ethnicization and racialization marking Albanian women as the ultimate Other (Krasniqi 2021). However, the post-war landscape of women's activism and NGOs was significantly transformed by international funding streams of neoliberal and post-conflict interventions. On the one hand, it has been critical for mainstreaming gender within post-war state-building while it has also aimed to become inclusive in the kinds of actions and discourses mobilized (alliances with ethnic minorities, the working poor, LGBTQI). On the other, largely due to the material and symbolic makeup of this activism, it has failed to address the structural disempowerment of Others (Luci/Gusia 2018).

Feminist and LGBTQI activism once again places protest at the forefront of mobilization, both as a tool to express indignation and publicly unravel institutionalized sexism and racialized violence. The most recent case of the rape and trafficking of an eleven-year-old Roma girl led thousands to the streets of Prishtina, also joined in solidarity by protestors in neighbouring Albania and North Macedonia. Angered by the systematic negligence of the entire institutional chain (police, prosecution, courts and social services) which has consistently failed victims and survivors of violence, protesters are increasingly mobilizing more radical strategies to express their dissent and make demands.

This new wave of activism also aims to create linkages with, and reflect on, the experiences of the marginalized and the struggles of women, queer, transgender and racialize movement.

Situatedness in theory: Our research has focused on the multiplicity and complexity of women's activism in Kosova within the shifting ideological paradigms of the late 1980s and 1990s. Drawing from Black feminist thought and intersectional feminist approaches, we look at the negotiated experiences of Albanian women in socialist Yugoslavia and the situatedness of racialized and gendered inequalities formative of the emerging women's movement. We argue that the interplay between state socialism and nationalism was undercut by a recurrent veil concealing Albanian women's experiences and producing a lack of recognition, there with creating ontological blindness to the racialization of Albanian subjects. This blindness, predicated upon misrecognition and absence, produced a view whereby women's lives were treated as indicative of their ›subjugated position and oppression‹ under a particular cultural patriarchy (Albanian tradition), undermining recognition of the deep structural inequalities shaping their lives. The approach was more of an attempt to save and emancipate them rather than engage with the micro and macro politics of their struggles (Mujica Chao/Gusia 2022; Stavrevska et al. 2022).

In this particular space, feminist theory and methodology, postcolonial theory and race theory all travel well. In allowing the intersections, structures of inequality and agency to surface, feminist theories around racism are crucial in understanding the complexities of violence and provide the necessary vocabulary and framework to understand structural racisms in other spaces, locales and times. Du Bois's concepts of the ›veil‹ and ›double consciousness‹ can apply in social contexts beyond the United States (Itzigsohn and Brown

2020). At the same time, we have come to think of dominant geographies of scale and power (North/South, East/West, democracy/authoritarianism and similar) from the position of feminist inquiry accounting for dependencies of the past (the apparatus of state socialism) and current crises (liberal capitalism) as we grapple now with environmental degradation, authoritarianism, sexism, homophobia and racism. Understanding the interconnections of current crises with other gender and LGTBIQ injustices and violence, and aligning those with other forms of structural injustice, can create and redirect new points of mobilization against systems of oppression.

Europe: The continent holds a venerated position in the social and political identifications and collective imagination, appearing in the policy prose of legal acquis as well as in politically charged and affective historical imaginaries. In the Global North, Kosova holds a precarious position in both popular and academic texts.[11] In our research fields, this required us to return the gaze from our location on the semi-periphery and engage with a critical epistemic feminist positionality (bell hooks, 1992). The traps of persistent binaries — un/developed, centre/periphery, hetero-/homosexuality, minority/majority, sex/gender — include common juxtapositions of insider and outsider positions. They must not be avoided, but rather persistently recognized if we are to make new ground for uncovering the complexities of embodied knowledge and emerging solidarities.

From our location, a view on the axes of difference is about looking back in a way which uncovers the blindness to hierarchical relations between imagined margins and provinces, on the one hand, and the centres of progress, on the other. That is, in the past years Kosova has appeared internationally — including in Europe — first through violence and forced dislocation, then military intervention and thereafter processes of state-building. The view from the inside is different, and it requires us to locate and recognize the complexity of experiences and knowledges, and to find a new entry point to what has been considered a very troubled and conflict-driven location. Our focus has gone to intersecting matrices of oppression and the inequalities created by particular patriarchal historical, political and cultural contexts, giving rise to diverse feminist encounters. For example, we have pointed to how feminists from other parts of Yugoslavia failed to recognize certain oppressions and produced a contentious relationship with Albanian feminist activists. Women activists in Kosova foregrounded their positions by confronting the violence which came about with the dismantling of their rights as citizens under a new nationalist-authoritarian regime during the 1990s. The interplay between state socialism and nationalism was undercut, as noted, by a recurrent veil concealing Albanian women's experiences, thereby producing a lack of recognition which created ontological blindness to the racialization of Albanian subjects.

›*We*‹: The subject positions we aim to understand rely on us excavating a social history of the interactions between macro political restructurings and agential mobilization in order to render visible the positions of marginality — and often isolation — which inspired a generation of activists. Any ›we-ness‹, then, should begin, we propose, with analysis, reflection and discussion of the histories marking differences and solidarities in such contexts of change. Marginality, agency and solidarity were and are thus not only slogans; rather, they are very much categories of action too. They serve as the means through which common grounds are built, through which learning as well as embattled collisions and confrontations take place. Whether defined as ›waves‹, ›genealogies‹ or ›communities of action‹, gender equality and feminist organizing are not and have never been homogenous.

In Kosova, unaccounted-for inequalities along ethnic and socio-economic lines created uneasiness and tensions in choosing political belonging, but also made gendered identity a point of mobilization against state power and patriarchy. Mobilizing from a place where suppression, violence and conflict were ongoing required continued political engagement and often led to negotiated strategies and positionalities — whether within the movement itself or with ›outsiders‹.

Activist, academic and political contentions with patriarchy have produced varied and multiple strategies, responses and actions, rendering visible hereby the layers of entangled oppression within structures of inequality. For some it has meant contending with heteronormativity, for others securing a place at the decision-making table — and for many more besides, challenging the gendered status quo or liberal-capitalist violence. The choices made by women's rights advocates, feminists and LGBTIQ activists thus point to a diversity of political and ideological (as well as other) tensions and conflicts in these negotiated belongings.

What the trajectories of the women's movement in Kosova have taught us is the relevance of paying attention to tensions and contradictions. Specifically, this led us to situate and discern the politics, epistemologies and strategies of the movement by looking beyond the dominant feminist inquiry on nationalism to instead wider relations of power based on racialization and heteronormativity. Reflecting on our positionality as researchers, we have realized the necessity of producing practices, research and knowledge relevant to the realities we inhabit. Questions around epistemologies and systems of knowledge production can thus become translated and/or mobilized into concrete practice. Thinking through past lineages and genealogies of ›we-ness‹, we find that misrecognition of experiences and persistent structural inequalities stifles the possibilities for finding common ground; once acknowledged, however, new webs of connection can emerge. By bringing politics into what are otherwise instrumentalized identity politics, diversifying ›we-ness‹ and forging alliances which recognize and resist structural inequalities, new forms of activism and mobilization can take shape.

Ambivalences of Togetherness

Bojan Bilić, University of Vienna

Background: For me as a sociologist/ethnographer of socialist Yugoslavia and its various lives and afterlives, the question has been what and how we, as (former) Yugoslavs, could learn about our (multiple and often incompatible) selves, our erased pasts, the promises and potentials silenced — or opened up — by the discourses of ethnic homogenization. How could we as activist scholars and theoretically informed activists find a language which would acknowledge decades of destruction, while at the same time helping us to articulate possibilities of sharing and being together? How could we create a language which would situate itself in the interstices of the domineering, usually Western paradigms which delimit our (self-)understandings (Blagojević 2009)? When we manage — always temporarily and fragilely — to wriggle out of the forces of neoliberal scholarly hyper-production devoid of substance or reflexivity, our experiences of loss finally regain their affective, burning layers. In such instances, we may find ourselves restoring two crucial aspects of Social Science scholarship: On the one hand, our research/engagement re-emerges as a critique not only of the corrupt ›political elites‹ and their long-term abuses of power, but also of the discrimi-

natory regimes — like patriarchy, authoritarianism, transphobia and similar — which operate within ›our own‹ academic-activist circles supposedly committed to social change. On the other, such research/engagement re-establishes both the Social Sciences and activist initiatives as therapeutic undertakings, as a Bourdieusian ›martial art‹ (Bourdieu/Sapiro 2010) which helps us to get a grip on the world through thinking-acting both individually and collectively.

Situatedness in theory: For me, more than anything, theory is a map for navigating the vicissitudes of the social world and finding a politically active place within a labyrinth of interactions shaped by racial/ethnic, class, gender, sexual and other interlocking axes of power. In this regard, our collective work on intersectional sensitivity within post-Yugoslav LGBT activist initiatives (see Bilić/Kajinić 2016; Bilić/Radoman 2019; Bilić et al. 2022) stems from the wish to establish discursive affinities between our scholarly and activist engagement as queers in (and from) aggressively neoliberal postsocialism, on the one hand, and the impressive intellectual effort of Black feminists which has underpinned and accompanied Black people's struggles against racial (and, concomitantly, Black women's struggles against gender) subordination, on the other. This parallel rests on the idea that both post-Yugoslav and, more generally, East European people — and especially the segments of these populations who do not partake in the patriarchal/nationalist canon — have often been treated as objects rather than subjects of knowledge (Bilić/Kajinić 2016). Therefore, we try to situate our sociological/anthropological work in the broader set of transnational conversations — not by replicating what is being done in the Western ›centres of academic excellence‹, but by making it harder for them to ignore us, in transforming our own space from a mere repository of empirical data into a domain of reflection and scholarly production.

Europe: In his *Barikade*, Boris Buden claims that »Europe's presence in us [from the post-Yugoslav space] is experienced just as powerfully as its absence. [Europe] is a territory of the most sublime values of justice, liberty and equality, but at the same time the place where these values are perverted. It is as much the object of our adoration and desire as the object of disillusion and abomination.« (1996, 139)

In our collective work on Europeanization and LGBT activisms in the post-Yugoslav space (Bilić 2016), we thought about what it meant for us as queer people that such an ambivalence got caught up with our non-heterosexual sexualities both in the framework of the EU's conditionality policies which insist on the protection of gay rights and the region's (declarative) wish to join the Union. In this regard, we approached ›Europeanization‹ not as a linear, unidirectional or unproblematic expansion of EU territories and ›European values‹, but rather, as a complex, dynamic and troubled ›translation‹ process reproducing asymmetrical power relations in which gays, lesbians and other non-heterosexuals become a measuring stick for progress to the point of embodying Europeanness, as surely inseparable from its (neo)colonial and capitalist dimensions. Such a nexus between Europeanness and homosexuality, which hereby makes gays the supposed ›carriers‹ of modernity, is then superimposed over long-term, power differentials within the (former) Yugoslav space — which used to be, and indeed still is, traversed by currents of racism along its North—South axis. Therefore, the question for us as activist scholars has often been about how to take recourse to our by no means unambiguous socialist heritage in a way which would help us sever the link between our sexual desires and Europe as a supposed beacon of democracy.

›*We*‹: On the one hand, this polymorphous ›we‹, often mobilized in activist narratives and discourses throughout the region, embodies a desire for belonging in a world of ›gay loneliness‹,[12] an urge not only for opening up but also for sustaining a common front of feeling and practice against the surprisingly resilient regimes of oppression. This ›we‹ — our imagined community, a place of safety — is a vital illusion energizing our movements, pushing us forward and occasionally offering a glimpse into more feminist futures. It is a fragile catalogue of all those ›Is‹ and ›Wes‹ which have been exasperated and permanently marked — or perhaps even damaged — by the experience of struggling for acknowledgement. Ours is a ›we‹ of those without a ›we‹, of those who have been long ostracized from the comforting collectivities of the family or the nation and could therefore consider alternative, more inclusive forms of being together. On the other hand, it is also a ›we‹ constantly collapsing under the burden of our insurmountable differences, smashing against the walls of social structure or dissipating through personal ambition, our idiosyncrasies and the contradictory forces of everyday life which we cannot reconcile. It is a ›we‹ of disappointments, perpetual tensions and conflicts through which our visions and undertakings are disfigured, our minds and bodies exhausted.

Europe Without a Periphery

Jovan Džoli Ulićević, Spektra, Podgorica

Situatedness in theory: I cannot say that I have written my own scholarly work yet, or that I have engaged extensively in academic conversations about gender and sexuality to date. This despite the fact that I have been in love with theory and actively discussed the topic on many occasions in different feminist and/or leftist circles. This is, I think, the case with the majority of trans persons I am in contact with from SEE. I would love for this to change. I believe that it is crucial for trans people (as well as many other marginalized groups) to be an active part of theoretical discussions. But, for this, we need to change how we frame the spaces in which these discussions occur. We need these theoretical spaces to be explicitly positioned not only as trans inclusive, meaning ones where trans people are welcome, but also as spaces whose integral components are marginalized people themselves. We need theoretical spaces which are both non-violent and unpatronizing towards those who are underprivileged, as well as ones which are welcoming of diverse forms of knowledge — including that coming from local communities, as well as that empowering the breaking down of the illusionary division between theory and practice.

I am one of the more privileged trans people I know in my country, Montenegro (in this regard, we always speak about ›conditional privilege‹ — a term used by Janet Mock in her 2014 book *Redefining Realness*). By this I mean I have the passing privilege: I managed to get educated, I am publicly out in my hometown and similar (this privilege is also dependent on context, so outside of the European ›periphery‹ it loses its significance). However, I have the experience of mostly talking about ›trans rights‹, rarely in regard to broader conversations concerning social justice — whether in activist or academic circles (the rarest spaces are the ones merging the two). This paper is, then, a precious opportunity to engage with scholars, share experiences and knowledge and to transform each other hereby.

Europe: Being based in Montenegro, an EU-accession country, the word ›Europeanization‹ is closely connected to this process. When I think about ›Europeanization‹, however, I can-

not help but think also about colonization, a practice still not overcome by Europe. In my context, ›Europeanization‹ is a process which involves the introduction of the rule of law, the respecting of human rights and learning how to accept each other — as promoted by both state institutions and civic NGOs. I have a problem with this concept, which I feel is quite patronizing and is a residual of colonial practice, as the clear opposite of it is ›Balkanization‹ — a notion invoked both by European politicians as well as liberals from the ex-Yugoslav region to describe the lack of ›civilised‹ society found there. I believe that a concept which upholds justice, equity, and human rights as a part of cultural, local and regional heritage would benefit both Montenegro as well as Europe, helping promote the narrative that countries joining the EU also contribute to it — and thus do not just take from it via their membership. I envision a Europe which does not have a periphery, in which borders are not guarded by barbed wire and guns, in which I am not racially profiled in the supermarket or the street because I am not white, and in which nobody asks me ›Is it so hard to live as a trans person in *such a patriarchal country as Montenegro*?‹ — as if patriarchy does not exist and does not kill in other parts of Europe or the world, too.

›*We*‹: The first thing which comes to mind here is the distinction between ›feminists‹ and ›LGBTIQ‹ activists, not only in SEE but also in many other places where I have had the chance to engage. The distinction is also evident in the title of our paper. I feel this distinction both as a place of connection and of division, a space where diverse backgrounds and experiences meet, merge, permeate each other but still remain separate. However, in this transformative process ›we‹ lose ourselves, we transition and ultimately change form. ›Can we fight together?‹ is a question which can be posed also as: ›Can we transform, can we transition, can we change form and shape and emerge as something new after this metamorphosis?‹. I feel this has happened in working with my writing comrade Čarna, and I must say that the ›we‹ in this transformative process has not been easy (Ulićević/Brković 2020, 2022). But knowing very well the experience of transition(s), it was illusory to believe that any (re)birth might be painless. (Re-)imagining the ›we‹ is the necessary precondition for answering the question of whether we can actually fight together — namely, what it means to engage together, to imagine and then actively create spaces nurturing of both individual and collective care.

I would also like to emphasize here the importance of the art of argument and conflict. I find practices and skills of active listening and polite conversation useful, but I also think that there is a certain value in their opposite: namely, those which create conflict. The latter can also be a space for growth and connection. I think that we should also talk about the opportunities heated discussion can provide, rather than just about the divisional nature of argument and conflict. Maybe that would change the lines of differentiation in the ›we‹: rather than making them disappear, they could manifest in diverse ways and help multiply the effects of the constellations they create herewith.

Agonistic Poetics of Queer Subjects

Diana Manesi, Athens

Background: In the last few years, Greece has witnessed a twofold antagonistic discourse: On the one hand, the rise of an anti-gender one which purports to tout the importance of preserving ›traditional family values‹ along patriarchal lines and perceives feminists and

queers as threats to the social order. On the other, the discourse of a vibrant feminist and LGBTQI movement which puts forward legislative changes (law on same-sex civil unions in 2014, the Gender Recognition Act in 2017) and pursues equality and social justice (the Greek #MeToo movement and demonstrations against femicide, LGBTQI demonstrations against homophobia, reacting to transphobia and police brutality). In all the latter cases, the differential distribution of mourning, grief, loss and survival appears to articulate a collective commitment to continued resistance against the normalization and naturalization of sexist/homophobic/transphobic necropolitics.

In this context, queer and feminist activists gather to contest the differential terms of socially situated and distributed vulnerability, articulating claims for social justice and creating affective registers which enable the mourning of lost, disavowed others and the struggling for spaces to exist. The latter enable ›touching‹ the other, namely in being spaces of ›air and tenderness‹. I am referring here to the anti-nationalist feminist organization Žene u Crnom or ŽuC (Women in Black) and their silent stand-in protests, performed throughout the years across the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere; also, the LGBTQI+ demonstrations springing up in Greece in the aftermath of the murder of gay HIV activist and drag queen Zak Kostopoulos / Zackie Oh. On Friday 21 September 2018, Kostopoulos, a young LGBTQI activist, was brutally beaten to death by a mob of civilians and by the police, in broad daylight, on a busy pedestrian street near Omonia square, in central Athens. Dozens of passers-by paused to observe a group of men violently attacking Kostopoulos, who found himself trapped inside a jewellery shop owned by one of the perpetrators. When the police arrived, Kostopoulos, already seriously injured, was violently apprehended, pinned him to the ground by nine police officers and beaten again. Kostopoulos arrived at the hospital handcuffed, and dead. Queer demonstrations following his murder deployed the agonistic slogan ›We are full of st-orgi‹.[13]

I am also referring to the anti-rape/anti-femicide demonstrations following the Greek #MeToo movement (2020). The latter gathered momentum after the allegations of rape made by former Olympic champion Sofia Bekatorou against a senior member of the Hellenic Sailing Federation. In the twelve months after Bekatorou went public, scores of women in the sports and entertainment industries in Greece would come forward to file complaints about their own experiences of sexual assault. The public sphere was fuelled with feelings of rage, as voiced by women in different social and political settings — from mainstream media outlets (television and print) to social media channels; from rape trials to street demonstrations; to the emergence of feminist grassroots collectives across the country. The agonistic slogan ›No woman left alone (to violence)‹ encapsulated women's anger against patriarchal violence and represented an affirmative gesture of solidarity among them.

My work focuses on the agonistic poetics of queer and feminist subjects and the communities they formulate in relation to affects (mourning, tenderness) and performativity. In this direction, I find Judith Butler's (Butler et al. 2016, 12—26) reflection on vulnerability and resistance particularly relevant in my work, which revolves around the following questions: How do forms of embodied resistance against gender violence and police brutality entail a politics of the performative which potentially brings about a collective vulnerability? How do the demonstrations against the racialized, gendered and police brutality which kills women and queers consist of political actions disrupting the certainty and violent truth-value of heteronormativity, and through mourning, grief and tenderness open up alternative horizons for non-sovereign action? I am interested in addressing these questions by exploring vulnerability and affects (mourning, tender rage, *st-orgi*) in the formation of non-sovereign agonistic agency and collective communities of resistance.

Situatedness in theory: My work on non-normative sexualities and genders and the LGBTQI community in Greece is well-informed by Butler's theory of performativity as well as post-structural (Althusser 1971; Foucault 1982) and feminist readings [Crenshaw 1991; Braidotti 2006b; Butler 2005, 1990, [2011] 1996; Cavarero 1997 (2000); Anzaldúa 1987] on subjectivity, subjectivation and identity formation. I am also driven by queer anthropological (Boellstorff 2005; Leap/Boellstorff 2004; Graham 2016; Morgensen 2011; Dutta/Roy 2014) and postcolonial frames (Stoler 1995; Morris/Spivak 2010; Mohanty 2003) which unpack the different geotemporal, historical and discursive lines of thought and activism between Western and Eastern Europe and between Western/Anglo-American and Southern/South-eastern countries. An ongoing debate in feminist philosophy concerns affirmation and vulnerability. On the one hand, Rosi Braidotti (2006a, 2006b, 2008), drawing from Gilles Deleuze's ([1980] 1987); see also, Massumi 1995) rhizomatic analysis of emotions and Baruch Spinoza's (1994, [1677] 2001) thinking on passions, purports to be an ethics of affirmation involving the transformation of negative into positive passions (resentment into affirmation, pain into compassion, loss into a sense of bonding) which will accelerate the subject's capacity for self-knowledge, awareness, connection to others and quest for change. On the other, Butler (2004, 2009; Butler et al. 2016), alongside Athena Athanasiou (Butler/Athanasiou 2013), positions vulnerability as being inextricably embedded in (affirmative) agency and argues for a notion of ›complicity‹ (with power) being found at the heart of subject formation and a language of aporia — as the ›not yet‹ central to the political's very existence. My ethnographic work on queer and lesbian communities and subjectivities in Greece is well-situated within this debate, whereby I argue that non-normative subjectivities and queer/LGBT community-building are both experienced as deconstructive gestures activating forms of ›self-estrangement‹ and ›not-at-homeness‹ — as all at once vulnerable and affirmative, active and passive.

Europe: Undoubtedly, the recognition of same-sex unions (2015) and the passing of the Gender Recognition Act (2017) were the outcome of a rights-based rhetoric of being European values in the Greek political context, while also resulting from the long-term internal struggles of the LGBTBQI community in Greece since the early years of the new millennium. My analysis of LGBTQI activism in Greece stretches beyond the dichotomy between pro-EU/LGBTQI rights and anti-EU/anti-LGBTQI rights, respectively. As suggested by scholars critiquing the Western-centred approach to LGBTQI rights (Mizielinska/Kulpa 2011), the pitting of a modern/pro-gay society versus a backwards/homophobic one is problematic — being deeply rooted in Western exceptionalism and orientalism (Weiss/Bosia 2013). Furthermore, the ›Europeanization‹ of LGBTQI issues in Greece is complicated by the latter's ›crypto-colonial status‹ — a term employed by Herzfeld to describe countries with a curious alchemy (Greece and Thailand), namely buffer zones between colonized lands and those yet untamed which ›acquired their political independence at the expense of massive economic dependence‹ (2002, 900).

In this context, Greece in Western eyes is seen as the spiritual ancestor of European civilization and as the political pariah ensuing from Europe's fast-tracking — an ambivalent cultural positioning which resurfaced with the austerity measures employed under the direction of the troika formed by the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The relationship between Greece and the ›West‹ as compared to between the ›West‹ and the ›Orient‹, a comparison reflected on in works addressing ›homonationalism‹ (Puar 2007; Rao 2020), brings to the fore important differences between the discourses at play here. Greece is portrayed as the building block of European

civilization, as being easily incorporated in universal European values yet also as lagging behind and stigmatized for being ›patriarchal‹ and ›backwards‹ — all while not being sufficiently far away from Europe to be discursively framed as a ›cultural Other‹. My approach to Europeanization is well-informed by the literature (Todorova 2009; Binnie 2004; Mizielinska/ Kulpa 2011; Rao 2020) critiquing and decentring a Western, linear and progressive framework when looking at sexuality and nationalism on the local and global scale.

›*We*‹: The politics of vulnerability in Southern and South-eastern Europe brings to the fore non-sovereign forms of political action, which could be seen as points of departure and differentiation in our discussion of LGBTQI activism and community-building in SEE and other parts of the world. Let me turn to two social movements here: the Women in Black one in Serbia and elsewhere and the LGBTQI movement after Kostopoulos's brutal murder in Greece, respectively. In her ethnography on Women in Black, Athanasiou (2017) discusses the movement's non-sovereign action as a form of ›response-ability‹, whereby those involved in such practices preserve their ability/capacity to respond and develop a form of reflective relationality towards the dead — who find themselves being disavowed and displaced within the dominant matrices of national memorabilia. In a similar context, the unbearable burden of grief which took hold after Kostopoulos's murder was shared and lifted up by hundreds of fellow queers in Greece who felt the response-ability to rage against this act on a national scale (Athanasiou et al. 2020). In both cases, we witness the development of a community without consistency, without clear identity and without finality (thus, not a conventional form of solidarity as objectified enclosed community) — one which strives to continue moving forward through a never-ending process of healing, mourning and grief, and remains open to the Other and to mobilized political responsiveness and collective protest.

The approach of Jean-Luc Nancy (1991) to community as a kind of ›being with‹ the Other without a consistent cause for being together is particularly useful if we are to better understand the kind of ›we‹ emerging out of queer feminist struggles and residing within the agonistic slogans ›We are full of *st-orgi*‹ and ›No woman left alone‹. The ›we‹ taking shape in the aforementioned public protests and demonstrations does not depend on preconceived forms of togetherness; it does not lead to or spring out of a unifying process from the perspective of an autonomous, rationale and invulnerable subject of resistance. It is, rather, a performative, fragile ›we‹ of ›being together‹ with no clear substance, finality or consistency.

Notes

1 https://troubling-gender.eu/events/can-we-fight-together-contentions-of-feminist-and-lgbtiq-activism-in-southeast-europe/, accessed on 15.11.2023.
2 https://www.academia.edu/43717065/Romani_womens_movement_in_Serbia_through_generations, accessed on 15.11.2023.
3 https://rosalux.rs/rosa-publications/kvirovanje-crne-gore/, accessed on 15.11.2023.
4 Jovan is also a member of the Organisational Board of Montenegro Pride, and co-chair of the Board of Transgender Europe. He studies International Relations and Diplomacy at the University of Donja Gorica, Montenegro. His work is focused on equality and social justice, using feminist, intersectional and community-based perspectives.
5 Bojan edited the following volumes: ›LGBT Activism and Europeanisation in the (Post-)Yugoslav Space: On the Rainbow Way to Europe‹; ›Resisting the Evil: (Post-)Yugoslav Anti-War Contention‹

(with Vesna Janković); ›LGBT Activist Politics and Intersectionality: Multiple Others in Serbia and Croatia‹ (with Sanja Kajinić); ›Sisterhood and Unity: Lesbian Activism in the (Post-)Yugoslav Space‹ (with Marija Radoman); and ›Transgender in the Post-Yugoslav Space: Lives, Activisms, Culture‹ (with Iwo Nord and Aleksa Milanović). He is the author of monographs *We Were Gasping for Air: (Post-)Yugoslav Anti-War Activism and Its Legacy*, and *Building Better Times: Trauma, Violence and Lesbian Agency in Croatia and Serbia*. Bojan is a Lise Meitner Fellow at the Research Unit Gender Studies, Faculty of Philosophy and Education, University of Vienna, an Adjunct Professor of Gender and Social Movements in South East Europe at the School of Political Sciences, University of Bologna, and a visiting lecturer at the University of Sarajevo Center for Interdisciplinary Studies.

6 https://genderinthebalkans.wordpress.com/, accessed on 15.11.2023.

7 Diana later worked as a researcher in the field of gender-based violence among the refugee and migrant population in Greece (Centre Diotima), as a postdoctoral fellow in Gender, Science, and Technology at the Open University of Athens, at the Gender Equality Observatory of University of Athens and as an activist who co-organized the first Lesbian Feminist festival in Athens (2022). Manesi has published works in academic journals in Greek (like *journal feministiqa*) and English (such as *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*).

8 Nita is an Assistant Professor, feminist scholar and an activist. She is currently on leave from the UP, where she headed the Department of Anthropology, and taught at the Departments of Sociology, Philosophy and Conceptual Art. Her scholarship has focused on the intersection of nationalist cultural politics, manhood, violence and political movements. She has published on topics of masculinity, contemporary and critical art practice, digital heritage, corruption and the state. In 2013 she co-founded the University Program for Gender Studies and Research, Faculty of Philosophy. She has received numerous research grants and fellowships and led teaching and research projects at the UP. She was also a Fellow at the Gender Research Institute of Dartmouth College in 2013. As co-investigator on the UK-AHRC GCRF Changing the Story projects, she has worked at the intersection of arts, heritage and human rights education in support of technological innovation in youth-centred approaches to sustainable social justice.

9 Linda is a sociologist, feminist scholar and activist. She heads the Department of Sociology and also teaches at the Faculty of Arts at the UP. Her research has focused on topics of gender, feminism, activism, space, memory and violence. She co-founded the University Program for Gender Studies and Research at the UP, where she co-organizes an annual school on gender and sexuality.

10 Čarna is Professor in Cultural Anthropology / European Ethnology at the University of Mainz. Before that, she taught at the University of Göttingen, the University of Regensburg and obtained a PhD in Social Anthropology from the University of Manchester and a Graduate Degree in European Ethnology from the University of Belgrade.

11 Kosova or Kosovë are the toponyms in Albanian, Kosovo is the one used in Serbian and frequently also in English. The choice to use Kosova in this article speaks not merely to the preference of using the native variant of the authors, but it is also the recognition of the importance naming has to representation and the support of particular narratives and histories. It is part of the attempt to decolonize knowledge about the place in question. See: https://www.sapiens.org/archaeology/kosova-or-kosovo/, accessed on 15.11.2023.

12 Hobbes, Michael (2017): Together Alone. The Epidemic of Gay Loneliness. https://highline.huffingtonpost.com/articles/en/gay-loneliness/, accessed on 2.8.2022.

13 The word *storgi*, meaning ›tenderness‹ in Greek, is here divided by a hyphen (*st-orgi*) to underline the word *orgi* within it, meaning ›rage‹ in Greek. *St-orgi* with a hyphen consists of a linguistic neologism, an agonistic term which had no prior existence to the demonstrations following Kostopoulos's murder. Rallying cries and placards at queer demonstrations employed the word *st-orgi* with a hyphen, particularly the phrase ›We are full of *st-orgi*‹, to underline the co-existence of rage and tenderness. The word *st-orgi* with a hyphen is not meant to divide tenderness from rage, but to depict the paradoxical co-existence of tenderness within rage and of rage within tenderness (Marinoudi 2020, 144).

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Feminist and Gender Studies Scholars in Exile: A Critical Reflection on Neoliberal and Eurocentric Academia in Germany

Betül Yarar, Yasemin Karakaşoğlu

ABSTRACT: *The year 2015 was a turning point in the history of migration to Europe due to the so-called migration crisis that emerged under the influence of wars, war-like conflicts, and anti-democratic authoritarian regimes in Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. These historical phenomena led to unprecedented threats to human rights, including academic freedom and freedom of expression, which resulted in the fleeing of scholars to countries in the Global North and the West, with their liberal regimes. The forced migration besetting intellectuals also included representatives of feminist and gender studies, who were targeted by authoritarian regimes due to the latter's symptomatic anti-gender policies and discourses. In the general context of forced intellectual migration from the Global South and the East to the Global North and the West, this paper focuses on scholars in the field of feminist and queer studies fleeing from Turkey to Germany after 2015. Special emphasis is placed on their experiences of both risk and inclusion at German universities following the scholarships awarded by academic-humanitarianism actors. The aim of the paper is to shed light on gendered and epistemic inequalities that are experienced by scholars in the wake of the neoliberal higher education system.*

KEYWORDS: *authoritarianism, neoliberalism, higher education, gender studies, exile, Turkey, Germany*

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Introduction

Works in the field of exile studies have generally focused on the experiences of scholars forced to flee Nazi Germany, mainly to the United States (Hagemann and Milberg 2017; Löhr 2014). However, investigations of recent forced intellectual migration and contemporary exiled scholars remain scarce (Hagemann/Milberg 2017; Lässig 2016; Löhr 2014). Some studies on the contemporary forced migration of scholars have reviewed secondhand sources on the issue, while others have only involved very focused samples on a small scale. With the aim of contributing to the slowly developing literature on this issue, on the forced migration of feminist and gender studies scholars from Turkey to Germany, the

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present article offers insights into the experiences of these exiled scholars within the latter's higher education system.

It draws mainly on the findings of the research project »In-formal Opportunities and Restrictions of German Universities Reflected in Experiences of Exiled Scholars« (Yasemin Karakaşoğlu and Betül Yarar; funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, 2019 – 2021). Within this context, we conducted 22 narrative interviews with exiled scholars and ten expert interviews with actors who supported them either in professional and/or humanitarian terms as mentors, and with directors of Welcome Center units at universities and of Scholars at Risk programs or initiatives. For sampling, we used snowball- and theoretical sampling to include informants who were diverse in terms of sex, country of origin, and scientific discipline.

In the framework of this article, we only analyze seven selected interviews with feminist and/or gender studies scholars from Turkey and the respective field notes. This special focus is because the empirical data yielded some findings shedding light on the specific experiences and observations of this subsample concerning their critical perspectives as scholars of feminist, women, and gender studies. Based on their academic expertise, these scholars have a politically engaged profile, with a critical outlook not only on the constantly intensifying anti-gender policies under the rule of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government in the period after 2015 in Turkey (Dag et al. 2021)—not least, as fostered by their personal experiences—but also on the neoliberal, paternalist, and Eurocentric/orientalist epistemic and institutional barriers inscribed in the German higher education system. Information collected from expert interviews was used as supportive data regarding various technical and procedural issues related to how scholarships and supporting practices work. For anonymization, we have removed any personal identifiers, both direct and indirect, that may lead to an individual being recognized; we also replace interviewees' real names with pseudonyms.

In examining our data, we mainly used narrative analysis (Barkhuizen 2016), but as supported by certain aspects of discourse analysis too (Hamann et al. 2019; Jäger 2001). In the approach to the university as a field in which positions must be (re)found, we relied on Cassirer's (2000) relational perspective on Bourdieu's field theory. Cassirer's understanding of the field as a relational concept, characterized by a »totality of lines of force« (Cassirer 2000, 20; cited in Hilgers and Mangez 2015, 2 – 3), shifts the research focus to a relational space-time that no longer designates an individual entity but rather a system of relations concerning the peculiarities of the higher education system. Here, one can state that relevant actors are not passive objects of the external forces deriving from the field but are rather subjects capable of orienting themselves actively, either toward the conservation or the subversion of the distribution of capital, »depending on their trajectory and the position, they occupy in the field, and by virtue of their endowment (volume and structure) in the capital« (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 108 – 9). Particularly actors who have newly entered the field and have different reference systems or habitus—those who experience some loss of capital during their transition from one context to another because of migration change—might or might not bring new dynamics here. Researchers must examine their impacts by analyzing not only consistencies and resonances but also tensions, suspensions, and disruptions in and between the rules of the field and the knowledge practices of these scholars.

Within this framework, we first provide a short overview of the political and ideological motivations spurring the authoritarian power bloc's practices in Turkey in the face of the gender-equality politics of feminist activists and academics. This is followed by a summary of the AKP's attacks on scholars and universities due to their political positions. Here,

we briefly examine the question of how these attacks have affected scholars and gender studies units in the academic field in Turkey. To understand exiled scholars' perspectives on their encounters in the German higher education system, it is reasonable, first, to have an overview of the general political conditions and higher education policy existing in Turkey. These were not only decisive for their status as exiled scholars but also contributed to their sensitivity in terms of subsequent critical perspectives on the higher education system in Germany too. Second, in the empirical part of our article, we examine the immigration processes of feminist / gender studies scholars to Germany, where they found academic support. This has led them to not only innovative subjective positions but also new types of problems and risks. Our framing argument is that the migration and replacement stories of these scholars, which are influenced by academic humanitarian-support mechanisms, reflect some further risks that cannot be confined to the sociopolitical contexts of their home country—they are also attributable to the structures, logics, and practices dominant in the higher education system of the host one too.

The AKP's Anti-Gender Equality Politics and Higher Education Policies: Recent Attacks on Academic Feminism and Gender Studies

The ruling AKP came to power in 2002 with a program linking Islamic conservatism to neoliberal forms of governmentality in Turkey, being a response to the political and economic crises of the late 1990s (Tuğal 2012; Yarar 2020). The AKP's political project, often entitled »conservative democracy,« lasted almost a decade and allowed Islamist conservatives and neoconservatives to widen their power—both within the state apparatus and society. The AKP also pursued sui generis gender politics, which would foster neoliberal and neoconservative thought as a new mode of governance (Yarar 2018, 2020). Based on this project, and under the burden of the European Union membership process, through the end of the first decade of the new millennium the AKP would enact several successful liberal reforms. Examples are amendments to labor law that further integrated gender equity into the legislative structure; certain poverty-alleviation policies (such as direct financial aid to lower-class women); and nationwide campaigns to bridge the gap in schooling between boys and girls as well as to support women's representation in the labor market and civil society. By using the instrument of the Council of Higher Education, which oversees and confirms the establishment of any research entity at Turkish universities, the AKP implemented its gender-equality-oriented policies in the field of higher education and made use of the constantly growing number of Women's and Gender Studies Centers (WGSCs) to politically influence teaching and research on gender issues (Dağ et al. 2021).

Parallel to this development, and in line with its earlier neoliberal-neoconservative feminist approach, the establishment of such WGSCs was also fostered. In an empirical study of the latter in Turkey, Dağ et al. (2021) showed that the number of such centers located in the country's universities increased from just one in 1995 to nearly 100 by 2017. They concluded that, until the 2010s, the institutional landscape of WGSCs and their gender-equality-oriented approach had been influenced by international networks and processes—such as Turkey signing international agreements like the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Istanbul Convention, as well as the country's political negotiations over EU accession.

However, at the end of the first decade of the new millennium, faced with the fallout from the global economic crisis and with the dismantlement of the liberal power bloc on which

its conservative-democracy project was based, the AKP and its leader, President Tayyip Erdoğan, henceforth adopted an authoritarian and illiberal position to remain in power. This process was accompanied by a 180 degree turn on gender-equality politics, as framed by a »conservative justice and right discourse«[1] Based on the notions of biological-divine difference and justice between the sexes, this standpoint ultimately served the process of what Kandiyoti (2016) called »masculinist restoration.« In the post-2010 period, the AKP's domestic and international politics began to be reframed by its religious-nationalist project and discourse of justice (instead of gender equality). As a result, the general political framework and the academic atmosphere within the country's universities changed hereafter.[2]

Shifting the emphasis to »sexual difference« and »justice between the sexes« rather than »gender hierarchy« and »equality« was the AKP's main adopted strategy in changing its earlier liberal policies and adapting them now to conservative-religious norms (Yarar 2020; see also, Dag et al. 2021). This saw the gradual disappearance of women as the subjects of public policies, as exemplified by the replacement of the Ministry of State for Women and Family with the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in 2011 (Yarar 2020). The change in the foundations of the AKP's politics from neoliberal to illiberal can be seen in the destructive and hostile approach of its political elite to Kemalist, feminist, and queer milieus, as taking place mainly at universities and within nongovernmental organizations (Binder et al. 2021). WGSCs that were historically affiliated with socialist, radical, and liberal feminist views and positions were now not only marginalized by pro-government WGSCs and government-operated NGOs (Diner 2018) but also, particularly in the AKP's second period of rule, faced unlawful government attacks—including against oppositional scholarly voices, activists, and their institutions.

In January 2016, an initiative called the »Academics for Peace« (BAK) petition was raised and signed by many national and international scholars. The petition called for an end to the war on civilians in the country's Kurdish regions and a return to the peace process. Among the petition's signatories were a high number of scholars engaged in women's and gender studies. The failed coup attempt of July 2016 was promptly followed by the government's declaration of a »State of Emergency,« which was used to ban, dismiss, put on trial, and even imprison thousands of education personnel. It affected more than 60,000 higher education scholars, administrators, and students. Scholars, students, and certain types of critical academic knowledge concerning issues like the Armenian genocide, the rights of Kurdish people and of LGBTQI+ individuals, as well as gender equality were attacked by government forces and mafia groups.[3] Some courses on the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals and movements were canceled, and the representatives of these programs were dismissed or forced to retire.[4] Moreover, governmental decrees were put in place to dismiss and ban further scholars from holding positions both within academia and the civil service (Aydın et al. 2021; Baser et al. 2017).

This process revealed its gender politics most starkly in the eventual cancellation of the Istanbul Convention in March 2021. The government claimed the latter was forced on Turkey by Western colonial powers to dismantle the country's family life, traditional society, and social unity. Protesting feminists, queer academics, and activists were blamed for trying to hinder the AKP's native and national-political project of transforming Turkey into a regional power.

Authoritarian Attacks, Forced Migration of Scholars to Germany and Their Encounter with Different Types of Risk due to Dominant Neoliberal Higher Education Policies

The post-2015 period in Germany and the emergence of »academic humanitarianism« as a regime governing the forced migration of scholars to Germany

The year 2015 was crucial in the history of Turkey and Germany due to the developments that occurred after the exodus then of nearly one million Syrian refugees from their native country.[5] Focusing on the reported sexual assaults in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015 and the heated public discussion sparked by these events, Boulila and Carri (2017) explored the political climate ensuing in the aftermath—as also affecting German academia. They pointed to the intersectional workings of racism and anti-feminism in the dominant societal discourse. That same year had brought two contradictory political tendencies to the fore at once. On the one hand, a German »Willkommenskultur« had been symbolized by neighbors and volunteers providing supplies such as water and shelter to these unexpected immigrants. On the other, while »the media and politicians across the spectrum lauded Germany's newfound altruism (and the covert privatization of state services), the country battled with an increasing visibility of the extreme Right« (Boulila/Carri 2017, 287).

During the same period, the forced migration to Germany of scholars due to political pressures in their home countries received timely support from the host country's government and scholars. Their practices were eventually coordinated by leading organizations like the Philipp Schwartz Initiative of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Einstein Foundation, and Academy in Exile, and led to the emergence of a new hybrid field that we call »academic humanitarianism«—which included also initiatives organized by exiled scholars such as Off-University (Yarar/Karakaşoğlu 2022b). As an ensemble of various humanitarian-academic practices and actors, it has emerged as a regime governing this problem at the intersection of humanitarianism and higher education, with the aim of giving such support to these scholars in continuing their academic work.

All academic-humanitarian actors' practices are framed by inclusive-exclusionary forces. These have emerged together with discourses on »migration society« (Mecheril 2004) and on diversity, inclusiveness, and internationalization in German higher education (Hahn and Teichler 2005; Karakaşoğlu 2016),[6] as well as with the expansion of international academic-humanitarian and rescue networks (Stoeber et al. 2020). This context led to Germany appearing to be an important migration destination for exiled scholars, as informants also proved by their statements given in interviews (see also, Yarar/Karakaşoğlu 2022a).

However, there are also constraining-exclusionary forces operating in the same field under the impact of the hegemonic neoliberal policies exported to Germany mainly from the Anglo-American context. These policies range from power dynamics embedded in humanitarian regimes (see Donini 2010; De Lauir 2016)[7] to epistemological hierarchies in knowledge-production processes (academic Eurocentrism and Orientalism; see Said 1993; Spivak 1999) and the market-oriented policies effective in higher education. Therefore, we speak here of »inclusive exclusion.« Here we will focus on the experiences of exiled scholars with respect to their encounter with German Universities and academic institutions.

»Anglo-American hegemony«, that forms the changes in the higher education system in Germany since the 1980s (Ash 2006), had not only widened the gap between epistemological geographies but also weakened the connection between research and teaching. The dominance of the Anglo-American knowledge-production system and of Eurocentrism has

led to exiled scholars being marginalized as knowledge subjects coming from the Global South and East to the Global North and West.

Furthermore, German higher education functions based on a mixed financing system, with the state's financial assistance here having decreased in the last few decades. This neoliberal process and configuration are what shape the trajectories of exiled scholars, leading them to research positions rather than teaching ones. Having been financed mainly by the public budget in being defined as a societal good and public responsibility, teaching involves various unquestioned structural restrictions when it comes to universities in Germany (Ash 2008; Kleimann 2019). As a social responsibility of the state, teaching is to be fulfilled mainly by scholars who work as civil servants in permanent positions, while teaching based on short-term contracts is very low-paid work. It is also a field of epistemic identity and requires a very high level of German. For all these reasons, exiled scholars have real difficulty entering the teaching part of the system as they have no access to permanent positions already extremely limited in number.

However, the design of the research arena within German higher education is somehow different, relying mainly on third-party funding and the precarious labor force of postdoctoral researchers.[8] This means research enjoys greater financial resources, and more positions are available therein—ones that are relatively easier to access for exiled scholars too. Here the latter work precariously (based on limited contracts) in postdoc positions no matter what their earlier titles were. They conduct their main research duties sometimes in tandem with making some modest contributions to the teaching curriculum. But even these research-based postdoc positions are limited and very competitive. The situation has even become so despite both state and private funds dramatically decreasing due to the present economic crisis in Germany and abroad.

The abovementioned neoliberal policies have been applied together with the implementation also of new (public) management and quality measures promoting institutional and individual competition to expand academic output and generate further third-party funding for research. The process has been based on »state funding allocations on comparative performance as one way of setting an incentive for competitive practice amongst universities« (Orr et al. 2007, 4). These neoliberal forces (Brown 2011a, 2011b; Pritchard 2011) are of particular interest to us here because they also form a frame for all kinds of support measures for scholars at risk. They foster the emergence of entrepreneurial universities, the transformation of scholars/universities into competitive actors in the global marketplace of academia (Deem 2001; Teichler 2015), a hierarchical differentiation through the notion of »excellence« (Ricken 2009), a rising dependency on third party-funded projects, precarious working conditions, and the marginalization of certain types of knowledge and disciplines in academia (Dougherty/Natow 2019).

Within this general context, one can ask about the positions of female scholars and Gender Studies as a discipline in German academia, topics central to our analysis of the experiences of scholars in exile in Germany. Abels stated that, within the EU, Germany is known for its low number of female professors; the Social Sciences are no exception in this regard:

> In contrast to many other countries, the German system is typified by the low number of permanent positions at universities below the level of full professorships. Academics pursuing either a Habilitation [professorial exam] or a junior professorship can, by law, only be employed at a university for six years with fixed-termed contracts. After this, they must win a permanent position, finance themselves through grants, or else leave academia. The inclusion in academic networks—traditionally »old boys'

> networks« with only a few [token] women—plays an important role in the risky game of »winning« a chair. (2016, 325 – 326)

However, Abels also added that despite the precarious nature of a professorial career and the lower-ranking positions that women tend to be awarded, they have still been steadily entering academia and are today better represented at all its hierarchical stages, including professorships, than they were a decade earlier. This is partly due to state and federal policies of »positive discrimination« (Abels 2016, 326), running in parallel to the increased number of scholars working in Gender Studies from the early 1990s. A number of factors have supported the stronger institutionalization and further development of Gender Studies as a field of scholarly inquiry in Germany: namely an increase in female faculty members, growth in the number and range of publications, and the equal-opportunity policies adopted by the German Political Science Association (Brandt/Sabisch 2017).[9]

While these factors might have created a positive environment for the epistemological and scientific appreciation of Gender Studies, it is less clear whether they were enough for gender mainstreaming within the Social Sciences in Germany. Abels (2016, 323) argued that gender studies had been barely integrated into Political Science programs in Germany and very few of the latter included gender-focused topics as a compulsory component thereof. In our material, all these inclusive and exclusionary forces are reflected in and have a great impact on the migration experiences of exiled scholars in Germany, as well as in their inclusive exclusion in universities and programs as scholars who are feminist or have an interest in gender studies (along with other topics).

Migration of Turkish scholars to Germany

Analyzing the experiences of these scholars shows that solidarity networks among academics in Turkey and Germany have been a crucial resource in their migration processes. In our interview material, all informants mentioned the importance of these network connections with feminist/queer scholars in Germany for and during their exile. Through our expert interviews with professors holding permanent positions at German universities, we noticed that these feminist or queer scholars (mainly working together with exiled peers as their mentors) have intersectional perspectives and focus not only on gender but also on migration issues. The high number of risk-scholarship programs and well-organized support practices in place have also played a role in this process. In response to this flow of scholars from Syria in 2015, Germany started to work on establishing organizations that would welcome these well-educated newcomers.

In our interviews, scholars noted their different paths to Germany. The use of informal academic-support networks is the most common aspect in their respective migration stories, leading them to short-term teaching positions, research contracts, or scholarships. In the following quote from an interview with a feminist Social Science scholar, we see how her migration decision and trajectory to Germany took shape:

> The [Turkish] university administration had immediately taken a negative attitude toward the peace signatories. Disciplinary investigations and so on, all this started right away [...]. Meanwhile, we were continuing to conduct our lessons. [...] But I started thinking I might lose my job. [...] Of course, Germany was one of the possibilities. Because most of our foreign colleagues who were active on our list of peace scholars[10] were from Germany. [...] At that time, they invited me to their conference.

> [...] It was the third or fourth day of the conference [...] the decree had been issued in the evening [...] then, out of nowhere, I was stuck here. I've been here ever since. (Interview with G. Güngör, Associate Professor of a Social Science discipline, in her late 40s, October 18, 2019)

After this moment and through the same network, she found a Visiting Professor position that required her to deliver some undergraduate courses. She got this short-term contract, which was part of an official gender-mainstreaming program for supporting female scholars in their academic careers, with the support of a German colleague who ensured that she was awarded a place on the list of applicants at short notice. Among other European countries, she decided to make her way to Germany because of the strong academic network there: »I relied on the fact that there was more networking here. I didn't go anywhere else but decided to try it here. And indeed, as I said [...] they really reacted very quickly. And I was immediately able to find a contract that allowed me to stay here« (Interview with G. Güngör).

Others came through special at-risk scholarships, many of whom took a long time to decide to leave the country despite the many threats faced. After losing her international travel rights and her job due to a government decree, another associate professor was still not sure whether to leave the country or stay until she received a scholarship offer from an academic-humanitarian initiative in Germany:

> I mean, frankly, I still didn't have much of an intention to leave. But *the whole established order was falling apart* [...]. Not sure what I can replace it with. As opposed to all these uncertainties [...] there is *a scholarship* [offered to me] here [in Germany]. I said »okay« and then I came here. (Interview with M. Teken, Associated Professor of a Social Science discipline, in her early 40s, March 10, 2020)

For Lässig (2016), despite these strong international support networks—and unlike what was the case for scholars in the 1930s who found refuge mainly in the US—today's exiled scholars are welcomed for humanitarian rather than academic reasons. Özdemir (2018) examined the experiences of politically exiled scholars from Turkey who have received temporary postdoctoral fellowships in European institutions of higher education through »academics at risk« organizations. Publicly welcomed in their European host lands as »victims« of and »refugees« from autocratic countries, Özdemir argued that these academics have the potential to be marginalized by an anonymizing victim-savior discourse, which is perfused with the moral sentiments of pity and compassion rather than an acknowledgment of the rich academic capital of those concerned. Our empirical analysis supports these arguments.

Our interviewees stressed that unlike networks of feminist and queer scholars in Germany, the scholarships and special programs in question focus not on scholars' disciplines but only on the accreditation of risk and on the strength of their applications (in terms of collaboration between candidates and their host-institution mentors). The Academy in Exile program is an exception in this respect, as it also addresses civic engagement as a reason for there being a threat to well-being and thus creates migration opportunities for scholars of gender and queer studies whose academic activities are closely linked to activist identities. On the program's website,[11] accordingly, it is stated that »Academy in Exile offers scholars who are threatened in their home countries because of their academic or civic engagement for human rights, peace, and democracy the opportunity to resume their research abroad« (Academy in Exile 2022).

Experiences of exiled scholars with German universities and their inclusive exclusion

As long as these programs offer mostly immediate and short-term opportunities, they appear to fall short of providing sustainable solutions for the upholding of academic status in Germany. However, this is mainly due to the strong barriers that exist in the German higher education system. One such barrier experienced by interlocutors in our sample is their different and unequal positioning based on being from the Global South and East, where »lower« academic standards are assumed to be in place. Together with the label »at-risk scholars,« as used in administrative processes and support practices, this might turn into a marker of their multiple forms of marginalization—both as a so-called special group of refugees and/or as scholars from the Global South and East. Mutluer, who works on this issue, positions herself as a scholar at risk, as part of a special refugee group, or as being situated among non-European intellectuals; however, she distinguishes herself from what she calls »real refugees.« Although this distinction between »real refugees« and »special refugees« appears to be a default strategy against the Western discourse perceiving all so-called real refugees as a homogenous whole without any cultural capital, it has the danger of suggesting new hierarchies within the „Other«. Mutluer explicates in her statement how she positions both herself and her reclaiming of her cultural capital back from the authorities:

> That's why the task of boosting European self-confidence as a secular and civilized saviour of humanity is assigned not to the real refugees who run for their lives from the war-torn regions of the world to reach Europe in millions, only to find out that they are unwelcome. Instead, the role of rebuilding that familiar/superior sense of a Europeanness, which offers relief to a »special« group of non-European intellectuals, is given to that special community that is relieved. In this sense, I am part of what can be called a group of special refugees, who are chosen by the western gaze as its ideal victims. Moreover, this »victim-saviour« imagery conceals the complex motives of western actors engaged in the war in Syria to pursue their own economic and political agenda. (2017, no page)

Scholars like Mutluer resent being reduced to an object of humanitarian aid and stress their professional identity by using the term »scholar in exile«—or, more recently, »exiled scholar« (Mutluer 2020). This is an example of various strategies through which these scholars position themselves in the field. It also highlights what kind of—sometimes confrontational—strategies some of them employ in struggles over the positions that are provided or denied to them.

P. Sengül (Assistant Professor of a Social Science discipline, in her early 40s), meanwhile, positioned herself critically against being put in the categories of »refugee scholar« or »scholar at risk,« which she perceives as externally constructed labels deemphasizing the academic aspects of your subjecthood in the German academic context. Instead, she stressed the importance of subjective self-efficacy: »I think it's more about how you perceive and perform yourself, rather than how others construct something for you.« Rather than being categorized as a »refugee« or »scholar at risk,« she prefers to be called an »international« or »non-German« academic:

> For example, in the context of a publication, they might ask me: »Would you like to write a review based on your own experience as a refugee academic, an academic at risk?« I say: »No, that offer doesn't appeal to me, or I do not have such an agenda

> or such a situation that I want to express, I do not look from there, I do not establish myself there.« (Interview with P. Sengül, April 22, 2020)

Sengül repositions herself as an »international scholar« even if so doing may have its disadvantages for her in terms of access to relevant support measures. Thus, she tries to escape the indecisive and highly ambivalent subject position of »scholar at risk.« The latter refers simultaneously to two distinct qualities: that of »being at risk« (like other refugees) and that of »being a scholar/academic« (like all international scholars). Thus, those who enter the system through at-risk scholarships oscillate between these two extreme positions: of being an international scholar with esteemed academic capital and of experiencing the pity felt for those refugee scholars who need to be rescued from extreme threats. The following quote from a conversation with a professor of a Social Science discipline in her 50s provides insight into this state of limbo and the indecisiveness coming with it:

> In evaluating my article for publication in their conference book, a junior German scholar addressed me from above and asked how it is possible to use such a term like »Islamist feminist.« My article touched on this political position partly in the context of my analysis of Turkish politics. I told her that »there are also Christian feminists in Europe and elsewhere. There is a large literature on this issue.« Of course, I was polite in my response. I knew such issues are very sensitive and controversial, wherever you are, but she was so directly negative in her comments on my work. I wonder if this would have been the case if she would be responding to a German professor. (Field notes, July 1, 2019)

Replicating the colonial-power dynamic of a black woman vis-à-vis her white sister, this example offers insight into the outcomes of epistemological clashes and hierarchies between various geographies of knowledge. These lead exiled scholars to perceive their (subordinated) positions relative to native professors in the field. They also give a sense of the symbolic violence that potentially occurs between feminist and queer scholars along the lines of ethnonationalism differences.

While addressing the structural and epistemological limitations that prevent them from being fully included in the host country's universities, several scholars were open to solidarity with German colleagues based on the mutually experienced systemic problems at hand. Sengül stated that she considers exiled academics like herself to be more fortunate than some German colleagues, as the former are afforded time to progress their research based on at-risk scholarships, applying for extensions thereto, or on new ones altogether. On the other hand, she refers to the problem shared with native scholars in being part of the »precarious workforce« in German higher education. In this competition, however, exiled scholars hold a less advantageous position due to language barriers, as well as to them being from a non-European country. As the precarious workforce's nature only increases the degree of competition over the limited permanent positions available, exiled scholars feel more pressure to accept temporary postdocs despite the higher academic positions already achieved in their home countries.

As set out in more detail elsewhere (Yarar/Karakaşoğlu 2022b), our general conclusion is that, among exiled scholars, it is junior academics—particularly those from popular scientific disciplines, with no family ties, but with international academic experience and networks, proficiency in English or German, and a strong research history—who feel the most confident about their futures within this highly precarious system. However, many exiled

scholars' academic and social capitals do not match this ideal profile drawn by market- and third-party funding-oriented academia in Germany. Furthermore, despite having all these social and academic capitals in hand, one may not be able to take further steps in academia simply because they do not work with a powerful professor in an internationally well-established university or as part of a third-party funding-oriented and experienced team.

In this respect, both exiled scholars and representatives of supporting institutions mentioned that working in the »right« place and with a »well-established professor« were the most important factors in being able to develop genuine long-term prospects within the German higher education system. This was expressed in the interviews with the term »luck.« Teken stated how »lucky« she was to meet her mentor, who strongly supported her all the way through her exile after arriving in Germany. She was also quite hopeful that they would oversee a joint research project together in the future. Güngör pointed out the strong position of professors in the German higher education system meanwhile:

> In Germany, the Germans are also advancing through the network [...]. It all depends on the professors. Everyone says this openly. You need to find a good professor as soon as possible. [...] The system runs on this rule. It works entirely through patriarchal relations because 70 percent of the professors are male. (Interview with G. Güngör, October 18, 2019)

Although being a female scholar does not appear to be a negative factor in their struggle for capital and for positioning at first glance, there are subtle gendered mechanisms at work in parallel with the continued underrepresentation of women, particularly in senior positions, in German higher education. In the case of exiled female scholars, such subtle mechanisms can only be perceived through an intersectional analysis considering various factors in relational terms. The gendered nature of the system, as already explored above with reference to Abels's work, might be hitting these female scholars harder due not only to their gender but also their countries of origin. Gender-mainstreaming measures and policies, which support Germany's young female scholars in their academic-career paths, do not seem to also encompass their exiled peers—mainly due to the latter's age and career level. This leads exiled scholars to find these measures more symbolic than effective. Only two of our interviewees benefited from such policies during their stay in Germany.

As scholars with profound expertise in Gender Studies, along with other disciplinary affiliations, many of our informants shared their experiences of being asked to give courses while not being able to conduct research on their core field of interest. Those who enjoyed success in their job applications and found postdoc positions in research projects appear to be not only young, with strong academic networks, and in possession of advanced English-/German-language skills but also from an Area Studies background (particularly if they expand their expertise on Turkey to a comparative, regional scale). Also, those working on popular subjects aligned with their own biographical experience, like migration. Gender Studies scholars feel, then, implicitly forced by the academic marketplace into pursuing these niche orientations.

Another factor that seems to distinguish these feminist scholars from their German counterparts is the identification of the former as activists. Two interviewees stressed that the dichotomy between politics and academia in Germany seems to be sharper than in Turkey. As a Social Sciences scholar, Güngör has a deep sense of how—in her very own discipline, indeed—this binary is a constitutive part of academic culture in Germany:

> Liberalism has such weight. They keep saying what you're saying is too political. And I say: »What you are saying is also analysis from a liberal perspective, if it is not political, why is my feminist perspective political? And even if it is political, politics is not a bad thing.« (Interview with G. Güngör, October 18, 2019)

The clash of different academic habitus in this sense eventually resulted in her alienation and loss of motivation to continue with academic work. Güngör concludes that under these circumstances she can work »not in the name of some political ideals anymore but only for money now.« Compared with Women's Studies and Gender Studies being highly politicized academic fields in Turkey, as shown in the previous section, our interview partners characterized Germany—according to their experiences with colleagues—as having generally depoliticized such realms, especially when it comes to the critical use of concepts like »fascism,« »racism,« or »neoliberalism.«

Conclusion

Fleeing from the risks produced by a Turkish regime with autocratic tendencies, these scholars immigrate to Germany with the expectation of continuing their academic work in safety. Our analysis showed that academics of both non-European backgrounds and those arriving in Germany as at-risk, refugee, or exiled scholars from Social Science disciplines (and with a focus on women's and gender studies) face structural and epistemological barriers. These were encountered even if those we talked to were able to make use of the strong international solidarity networks existing among feminist/queer scholars. In other words, their flight cannot be considered an escape from hell to heaven.

While the context of Turkey is framed by the dominant authoritarian AKP regime that emerged in response to the crisis of neoliberalism, we argued that Germany's own milieu is underscored by another aspect of neoliberal thought: namely higher education policies fostering precarious working conditions. Despite the great efforts of various actors to support exiled scholars and provide them with a safe academic space, the latter felt that they have little chance to establish themselves professionally. Only some of them consider their academic inclusion possible through working in temporary positions and niche areas within the academic marketplace.

The interplay or even contradiction between the meritocratic and humanitarian logics of the German higher education system in terms of including exiled scholars hinders their recognition as, in fact, knowledge subjects who can strongly contribute to that domain. This is related to historically rooted epistemological hierarchies between geographies of knowledge and science, literally between universities of the Global North and the Global South. These dynamics influence eye-level academic relationships between exiled scholars and their counterparts in the German higher education system in all Social Science areas, including women's, gender, or queer studies. Existing structural problems, as reflected in the gendered hierarchies of universities, show the cumulative impact here: namely very limited options for exiled scholars to find a new academic »home« in the German milieu. Consequently, even if there is a strong will to offer temporary support, the higher education system as a field of relations between forces and positions (Cassirer 2000) cannot overcome its own shortcomings. As such, it is unable to compensate for the problem of status devaluation or loss caused by the process of forced migration.

Notes

1 One of the authors of this article has previously defined the AKP's gendered discourses and policies in its second period of rule as being »neoconservative feminism« (Yarar 2020). In the present case, however, she revises her earlier point, and so replaces here »neoconservative feminism« with the concept of »conservative justice and right discourse« to emphasize the AKP's political shift to an anti-gender equality stance.
2 See also, Kandiyoti (2010).
3 See: https://www.diken.com.tr/yeni-akit-nefret-sacmaya-doyamadi-kahpe-diplomali-sapkinlar-atin-bunlari/ (last accessed March 18, 2022).
4 See: KAOS GL (2017, 14.06.): Queer Siyasetin Imkânları Bugün Queer Teori'de. https://kaosgl.org/haber/queer-siyasetin-imknlari-bugun-queer-teorirsquode, (last accessed on March 18, 2022) and https://www.uni-bremen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/fachbereiche/fb12/fb12/Interkulturelle_Bildung/Dag/Research_Project_Report_2019.pdf (last accessed March 18, 2022).
5 See: Christoph Hasselbach, »Syrian refugees find a safe haven in Germany,« DW, March 15, 2021, https://www.dw.com/en/syrian-refugees-find-a-safe-haven-in-germany/a-56872099 (last accessed November 24, 2022).
6 Noting that educational migration has gained importance over the last ten years in Germany, Neusel (2017) stated that this trend is also confirmed by the growing cross-border mobility of students and lecturers at universities, with a strong increase in the number of foreign academics now employed.
7 Donini (2010) noted that although humanitarianism historically emerged in confrontation with power, it has now been transformed into a form of the latter. De Lauir (2016) agreed with this analysis.
8 A recently published International Labour Organization report asserted that the precarity of academic research careers is a widespread phenomenon across OECD countries and across different research systems. The situation has become even worse for the research »precariat« (a term defined with respect to postdocs holding fixed-term positions based on limited contracts, often short-term or part-time in nature) under the impact of COVID-19. Field- and lab work, research projects, as well as academic recruitment processes have been canceled or postponed, and many businesses and foundations are reducing their investment in research. Although precarity is not a new phenomenon, due to the current pandemic it has become more severe and thus is in need of tackling (»Reducing the Precarity of Academic Research Careers,« OECD Science, Technology, and Industry, Policy Papers, May 2021, No. 113).
9 See: https://www.gender.hu-berlin.de/de/links/links_renamed (last accessed March 18, 2022).
10 Here she means the international-supporters email list that was compiled as part of the BAK initiative in Turkey.
11 See: https://www.academy-in-exile.eu/ (last accessed March 6, 2022).

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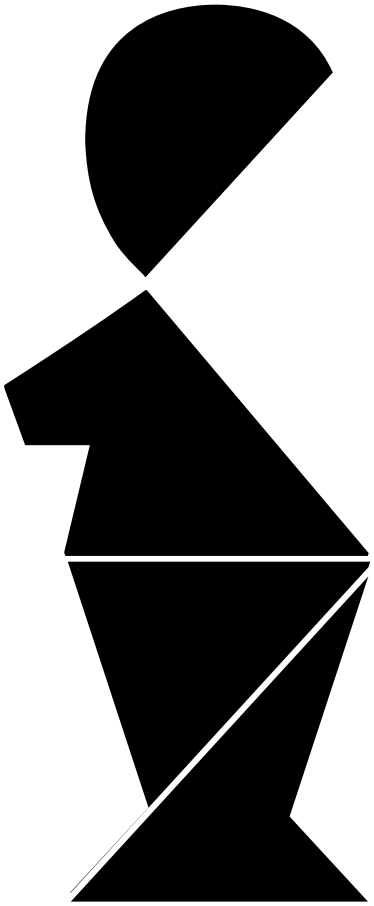

Berliner Blätter 88/2023, 111–115

Four reasons why Gender Studies has changed because of illiberal attacks, and why it matters

Andrea Pető

ABSTRACT: *In her article, originally published by the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Andrea Pető analyzes the contradictory approach to gender studies. Gender Studies scholars cannot complain about the lack of wider social interest in their work. Faculty members' email boxes are filled with emails inquiring about their research, invitations to public debates in different media outlets and comments for the press. At the same time, Gender Studies scholars are targeted by »online public harassment,« and have found themselves being listed by name as enemies of the nation on front pages of national newspapers, with the aim of silencing and humiliating academics. These systematic and systemic attacks on Gender Studies are part of anti-gender campaigns associated with the anti-gender movement, a nationalist, neoconservative response to the triple crisis (migration, financial and security) induced by the global, neoliberal world order. It uses gender as symbolic glue to create alliances of hate and exclusion, to redefine what is »normal« and create liveable, desirable alternatives for voters to liberal democracy. These anti-gender movements, while attacking Gender Studies as an academic discipline, are gaining much support all over Europe.*
The lessons we learn from this present »paradoxical recognition« of gender studies are, not surprisingly, also full of paradoxes..

KEYWORDS: *gender studies, anti-gender movements, gender as symbolic glue, higher education*

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I was still living in Budapest,[1] unlike now, in exile with the Central European University (CEU)[2] in Vienna, when one morning I went to buy my fresh bread at the local bakery. Two construction workers were having their breakfast, and while waiting for my turn I overheard their conversation. To my great surprise, it concerned different definitions of gender covered in a tabloid article they were discussing while sipping their coffees. It was a moment that Éric Fassin would refer to as »paradoxical recognition« (Fassin 2016, 178).

Recently, Gender Studies scholars cannot complain about the lack of wider social interest in their work. Faculty members‹ email boxes[3] are filled with emails inquiring about their research, invitations to public debates in different media outlets and comments for the press. At the same time, Gender Studies scholars are targeted by »online public harass-

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ment«, (Pető 2020, 16) and have found themselves being listed by name as enemies of the nation on front pages of national newspapers, with the aim of silencing and humiliating academics.

These systematic and systemic attacks on Gender Studies are part of anti-gender campaigns associated with the anti-gender movement, a nationalist, neoconservative response to the triple crisis (migration, financial and security) induced by the global, neoliberal world order. It uses gender as symbolic glue to create alliances of hate and exclusion, to redefine what is »normal« and create liveable, desirable alternatives for voters to liberal democracy. These anti-gender movements, while attacking Gender Studies as an academic discipline, are gaining much support all over Europe.[4]

The lessons we learn from this present »paradoxical recognition« of gender studies are, not surprisingly, also full of paradoxes.

Gender Studies as pop-science

Due to the anti-gender campaign, Gender Studies‹ knowledge production has changed forever as Gender Studies has become a popular science. Politicians, public intellectuals and even workers having breakfast in a bakery are making self-assured and authoritative public statements on professional issues such as sex education or the curriculum of Master's studies, without any knowledge or training in Gender Studies. As Sara Garbagnoli has pointed out, books of Judith Butler and other Gender Studies scholars are now shelved in bookshops right next to anti-gender volumes, as if they had the same scientific weight in gender studies (Garbagnoli 2016, 200).

This is happening, paradoxically, during the resurgence of credibility of science and experts because of the global pandemic. This revival of trust in science has not remained undetected by illiberal actors, leading to illiberal state officials applying the very same toolkit of science in their fight against Gender Studies by citing a hodgepodge of surveys in an ad hoc manner, which allows them to undermine the relevance of gender research and its empirical findings, as well as the value and legitimacy of its scientific endeavours in general.

Change in academic authorisation

Parallel systems of academic authorisation are being developed by illiberal states. The illiberal state systematically destroys any other existing mechanisms of scientific evaluation, turning higher education institutions into performative formalities, and rendering them mere simulacra of the original institutions. While the polypore illiberal state[5] hacks quality assurance via accreditation committees, it also mimics the neo-liberalised scientific evaluation system of indices. For example, due to recent modifications in the Collection of Hungarian Scientific Works (MTMT, *Magyar Tudományos Művek Tára*[6]), where all Hungarian academics must upload their published work along with citations, publication in a Q1 journal (the highest internationally ranked journal) is only worth as much as a publication in any of the Hungarian scientific journals. The same is happening in Poland:[7] during the recent modification of the evaluation system, international, peer-reviewed English language journals have been replaced on the list of required publications with local, Polish journals, whose profiles and, of course, editorial boards are pro-government. During this hacking of the quality assurance system, the previous consensus on publishing in English

in scientific journals has also been called into question. This is signalling a change in scientific orientation; instead of the global North, scientific discourse now rather orients to the East, to Russia and China. This changing geopolitical focus is paradoxically, implementing a twisted de-colonisation of science: making it less democratic and less inclusive which? instrumentalises the post-colonial discourse and uses it for its own hegemonic purpose. For Gender Studies, where the »Holy Grail« had been being published among others in *Signs,*[8] *Feminist Theory*[9] or *The European Journal of Women's Studies*,[10] all those achievements have suddenly been made to disappear.

From Gender Studies to Family Studies: lessons learned

What can all those Gender Studies scholars do when their field, their work and their publications are labelled not only worthless and useless, but also dangerous, and they cannot or do not want to immigrate to where the shrinking global academic space will soon not offer academic employment anyway (Pető 2016, 297). As the authentic study of Gender Studies is blocked by the »science policy« of illiberal states, and the study of family policy as a scientific endeavour and a professional lifebelt has been established, many scholars have seemingly resurfaced as experts in family policy or family studies. This follows the development in Russian Gender Studies, where Gender Studies programmes are becoming family studies programmes (Moss 2021, 17 – 36). This strategy of adaptation is well-known to middle-aged intellectuals from the communist era: one may pursue a career and publish, only *if* one is not openly against the regime. Corvinus University of Economics and Business in Budapest (one of the first privatised institutions in Hungary)[11] was formerly a Gender Studies pioneer through the work of its sociology department. The very first Gender Studies centre[12] was founded there, and a stream of young, gender-sensitive political and social scientists graduated from it. A new English-language MA in Economics of Family Policy and Public Policies for Human Development (in Hungarian for distance learning) has now been established there as part of the government's family mainstreaming concept, with the contribution of the most well-known feminist gender experts. In Poland, women's studies and research on women have experienced a new revival (Mrozik 2010, 25), not without theoretical and political risk (Grzebalska 2017, 40).

Indexing academic freedom – a mission possible?

The European scientific infrastructure was unprepared for the emergence of illiberal science policy and illiberal scientific institutions,[13] which look like any other scientific institution, but in reality are not.[14] This is clearly illustrated by the fact that the Hungarian Accreditation Committee obtained its European license[15] from ENQA[16] only after CEU was forced into exile[17] and the two-year master's program in Gender Studies was struck from the accredited study list.[18] These illiberal institutions use the neoliberal language of excellence, competitiveness, impact, social outreach, and indices; however, they are all fraudulent and empty. One possible strategy has been proposed in the recent report by Scholars at Risk:

> »Academic freedom is not acknowledged in any of the influential university rankings. As a reference point for scholars, university administrators and governments, datasets such as the Shanghai Ranking, the *The Higher Education* World University

> Ranking, the QS World University Ranking or U-Multirank are in a unique position to improve academic freedom by altering incentive structures for students, scholars, universities and governments.« (Kinzelbach et al. 2020, 25)

It is questionable whether bringing in academic freedom as an index in the neoliberal rankings would contribute to meaningful change, and, more importantly, would prevent the spread of illiberal governing practices in higher education. The question is what the impact will be if the institutional attitude to Gender Studies the measurement of academic freedom will be globally.

Gender Studies as an academic discipline found its »paradoxical recognition« via the attacks of illiberal forces. This institutional and academic vulnerability of Gender Studies is increasing because of re-evaluation of their position in the field of science. Government propaganda has deliberately undermined the social and symbolic legitimation of Gender Studies, which has only exacerbated the panic and bitterness felt among those involved (Pető 2018, 155–156). Debates between feminist scholars have intensified and have often copied and internalised the style and tone of the attacks by the illiberal state. This professional communication has become ruthless, and instead of constructive and much needed debates we rather see attacks. Time will show if the present reactivity of gender studies can be transformed to proactivity for the sake of a better science for all of us.

During these years of gender studies contestation as an academic discipline new insight has been gained. Bridging political and scientific cleavages, previously thought to be theoretically unbridgeable, has led to collaborations between secular and religious political forces and academics, which have turned out to be the most promising for creating spaces of resistance to illiberal politics. It is unusual within the field of Gender Studies that practice precedes theory, but the swift and unexpected developments due to the anti-gender movements have brought unforeseen results in developing intersectional and transversal theory towards »deep coalitions« (Lugones 2003, ix).

Notes

1 The paper was published first at https://eu.boell.org/en/2021/05/03/4-reasons-why-gender-studies-has-changed-because-illiberal-attacks-and-why-it-matters.
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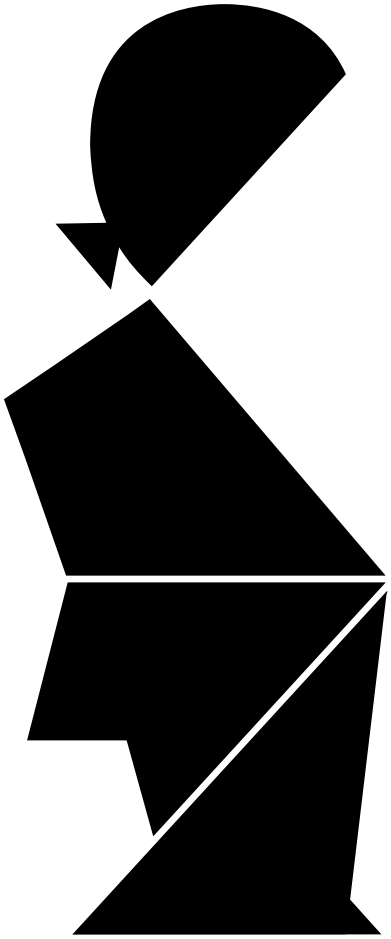

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Counterstrategies against Antifeminism: Academia Meets Practice

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ABSTRACT: Based on examples of antifeminist and anti-»genderist« attacks against scholars in Women's, Gender and Feminist Studies (WGFS) as well as practitioners and activists, this paper proposes relevant counterstrategies. After briefly outlining the characteristics of current antifeminist and anti-»genderist« discourses, we share our own experiences with such attacks. We discuss criticisms of and defamations against WGFS inside academia, antifeminist interventions in journalistic public spheres and difficulties encountered in collaborations between WGFS scholars and activists. From our experiences, we derive seven suggestions for strategies which WGFS could utilize to counter attacks in a transdisciplinary, intersectional way.

KEYWORDS: *antifeminism; counterstrategies; Gender Studies*

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Introduction

As a new and critical field of research, from the start, the academic field of Women's, Gender and Feminist Studies (WGFS)[1] has struggled with institutionalization and has frequently been challenged by various actors and movements, in German-speaking countries and elsewhere.

These challenges are directed against the predominant impetus of WGFS: to critically engage with hegemonic gender relations, gender hierarchies and gendered power relations in society. The political aim is ending discrimination against women[2] and other non-hegemonic genders and gender identities. The accusations mainly refer to two aspects: the alleged political or ideological character of WGFS, which is said to lack scientificity; and the term *gender*, which allegedly neglects the biological fact of sex as binary, and supposedly contributes to destroying the »normal« (cis-heteronormative) family. In addition to feminist activism, Gender Studies scholars who see themselves as feminists have aimed to conduct research for marginalized and subaltern groups. Feminist research aimed at both giving a voice to and improving the situation of marginalized women and other »Others«. There is an ongoing debate on whether and to what extent WGFS research should engage with particular political fields or social activism (Hark 2005). Last but not least, there are attacks

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against WGFS from self-declared »gender-critical« feminists who aspire to a feminism that excludes certain subjects and topics.[3] While »gender-critical« feminism is noteworthy because it opens feminist doors to the political right, it will not be discussed in this paper. Instead, this paper presents a follow-up elaboration of an expert discussion at the conference »Troubling Gender«, which featured Dorothee Beck, Sabine Grenz, Eszter Kováts, Juliane Lang and Ilse Lenz and which was moderated by Marion Näser-Lather (Näser-Lather et al. 2021).

We analyze backgrounds and influential factors concerning challenges and attacks in different social fields in Germany and Austria: the political sphere, the academic community and journalistic media. We outline difficulties in countering attacks, and we point out counterstrategies. We discuss how WGFS scholars might react to these confrontations and how they can collaborate with activists.

Counterstrategies are in themselves a form of activism. However, we do not only reflect on the conflictual relation between academia and practice. Rather, we also look beyond the academic field to discuss the zones of conflict outlined above. In this sense, we regard transdisciplinarity as a discursive and practical exchange between academia and practice (understood as other than academic bodies of knowledge). Hence, we do not follow a hierarchical understanding of knowledge but rather aim for an exchange on equal terms. Additionally, since the authors of this paper have different disciplinary backgrounds (European Ethnology, Gender Studies, Political Science and Sociology), we write in a both trans- and interdisciplinary research context.

Our paper is divided into three sections. We begin by briefly contextualizing antifeminist and anti-»gender«[4] discourses and analyzing their background as well as the contested institutionalization of Gender Studies within academia. In the following part, we discuss four arenas relevant to antifeminist/anti-»genderist« attacks against WGFS researchers, practitioners and activists and their effects on WGFS: first, the antifeminist devaluation of gender research by self-declared »experts« on WGFS from within academia from different disciplinary backgrounds; second, antifeminist/anti-»genderist« articles, editorials etc. in leading print media; third, engaging with Gender Studies students on the topic of antifeminist attacks; and, fourth, feminist activism. In the last section, we propose inter- and transdisciplinary measures and strategies which can help to counter such attacks.

Contexts: Anti-»genderism« and antifeminism in wider society and academia

Positions against feminism, women's rights, »gender« and/or the denormalization of heteronormative gender relations have been articulated by a spectrum of actors from Christian fundamentalist to conservative and right-wing extremist circles in different European countries since the 1990s and have gained popularity since the beginning of the current millennium. In their discourses, Women's, Gender and Feminist Studies (WGFS), gender mainstreaming, gender equality policies and gender-inclusive language are constantly being conflated as well as challenged and devalued (cf. Hark/Villa 2015; Lang/Peters 2018; Näser-Lather et al. 2019; Henninger/Birsl 2020).

There has been some debate regarding whether such discourses and movements should be called *anti-genderism* or *antifeminism* (e.g., Hark/Villa 2015; Paternotte/Kuhar 2017). For example, Maihofer and Schutzbach (2015) argue that these discourses and efforts go beyond pure antifeminism because they simultaneously target the struggle against the leveling of the gender gap, the acceptance of homosexuality and (Muslim) migration. Howev-

er, following the argument outlined in the introduction to the edited volume *Backlash?! Antifeminismus in Wissenschaft, Politik und Gesellschaft* (Näser-Lather et al. 2019), we prefer to call this phenomenon *antifeminism* (Kemper 2012; Kemper 2014; Scheele 2016; Lang/Peters 2018; Lang/Fritzsche 2018) to avoid taking up the term *genderism* as a polemical political slogan that was coined primarily by right-wing actors (cf. Rosenbrock 2012, 116; Lang/Fritzsche 2018). Furthermore, our concept of feminism refers to an understanding of an intersectional movement that aims for the abolition of regimes of domination around gender, gender identities and/or gender roles and that includes perspectives on sexuality as well as racialized and classed power structures (Kurz-Scherf 2002, 44; Lang/Fritzsche 2018, 340; Lenz 2019). Therefore, in this paper, antifeminism is understood as discourses and activities directed against intersectional feminist aspirations and achievements. Antifeminism can be defined as »an ideological counter-movement immanent to the respective historical process of emancipation, universalism, socio-political liberalization and denormalization of gender relations« (Birsl 2018, unpublished manuscript).

The struggle for emancipation is not only an issue of wider society. Rather, academia, being a part of society, is one of the fields of conflict and therefore could be aligned with other forms of activism in other social areas. For instance, the underrepresentation of women professors — they make up only one quarter of all professors in Germany and Austria — provides evidence for the claim of gender inequality in academia. Additionally, the weak institutionalization of Women's, Gender and Feminist Studies (WGFS) as well as the skepticism with which gender scholars are frequently confronted are further indicators of androcentrism and sexism.

WGFS have developed as an interdisciplinary field since the 1970s and brought about an immense body of literature and academic structures. Gender courses, positions in academia, regular academic conferences, awards etc. have been established. Hence, »WGFS has become [...] an academic institution in itself, one which is more or less (inter)disciplinary [...] and autonomous and has its own structures of creation and validation of knowledge and its canonical but contested narratives about what its objects, boundaries, aims and histories are, or should be« (Pereira 2017, 29). These structures form a »post-discipline« (Lykke 2010), an innovative academic field that creates new standards for collaboration as well as new forms of intellectual engagements with feminists' own tradition building (van der Tuin 2009; Hemmings 2011; Liinason 2011). This has been accompanied by ongoing lively and controversial debates about the conflictual relation between academic research and political activism (Schindler 2005; Villa/Speck 2020).

Nevertheless, it is a field that until today is less institutionalized than others and, as a result, is structurally and financially disadvantaged (Kahlert 2018). Furthermore, although the field of Gender Studies is officially supported in Germany by several academic institutions such as the Federal Ministry for Education and Research, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft[5] and most recently the German Science and Humanities Council,[6] the relevance of gender-related research and teaching continues to be questioned in universities (Marx/Kotlenga 2017, 13; 18). Hence, WGFS enjoys a lower epistemic status in academia than other fields (Pereira 2017). Scholars and their research are frequently reproached for being »too political« or »ideologically stained« (cf. Pereira 2017; Grenz 2023). This is partly related to the political implications of research on inequality more generally. It is further linked to the transdisciplinarity of several areas of research in WGFS such as research on violence against women, which seek social and political change. To some academics, cooperating with practitioners in academic knowledge production conflicts with their hierarchical understanding of knowledge, which ascribes more validity to academic knowl-

edge production than other bodies of knowledge. Additionally, it is sometimes assumed that WGFS research projects subordinate the research process to political goals and that they are thus biased and lacking openness to results. Other reasons for negative attitudes towards WGFS include simple sexism and, last but not least, the fact that WGFS scholars question mainstream modes of knowledge production from an intersectional gender perspective. This scrutiny has revealed the mostly hidden partiality and positionality as well as neglected aspects in research. It has also led to the development of new epistemologies and methodologies that have the potential to transform academia (e.g., Ernst 1999; Richardson 2010; Schiebinger 1999).

WGFS research intends to make academic research more inclusive. For instance, in Literary Studies, feminist research critically reflects on androcentric, heteronormative and Western canons. In the field of History, WGFS approaches aim at making women, queer, trans and intersex persons in history more visible, among other things, through a focus on everyday history. In Religious Studies, they interrogate everyday religion in the context of patriarchal official religions and make androcentric and Western research biases visible. By questioning mainstream epistemologies and methodologies as well as arguing for an encompassing inclusion of marginalized positionalities, feminist and gender researchers have been activists in academia themselves. In the current situation in which WGFS research is more institutionalized and has developed its own structures, the political relevance of all knowledge production is recognized and connected to issues of responsibility in doing research as well as teaching and statements in the public sphere.

Yet, as we learn from Tanja Paulitz (2010), WGFS is not the first academic field that had to struggle for acceptance by established academics and their fields. For instance, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Engineering Sciences, as a then new scientific field, also had difficulties proving their academic status. The knowledge on which the new field drew came from technical areas and was seen as being too technical to be academic. Tanja Paulitz (2010) traces negotiation processes around hegemonic masculinity involved in the establishment of and challenges to Engineering Sciences as a struggle of the traditional academic against the engineer. One could argue that here, too, transdisciplinarity as well as the applicability of knowledge led to skepticism. This example clearly shows that epistemic struggles are not only about criticism and interrogation as a normal feature of academic discourse in which positions that are criticized are simultaneously recognized as being part of that discourse; rather, epistemic struggles constitute *power* struggles in the context of which the ability to participate in this discourse is challenged by denying a discipline its scientificity, i.e., its ability to speak. This is particularly true in relation to WGFS because WGFS scrutinizes male, heteronormative, racial and other biases.

Examples: Coping with anti-»gender«/antifeminist claims inside and outside of academia

Example 1: Instrumentalizing the weak institutionalization of Gender Studies

The so-called »gender hoax« by Peter Boghossian, James A. Lindsay and Helen Pluckrose has become famous among antifeminists. The three hoaxers spent a year inventing studies in the field of WGSF and, thus, cheating journals focused on different areas of discrimination. They managed to place one of their fake studies in *Gender, Place and Culture*, which sparked a public response that partly questioned WGFS as a valid field of research. Com-

paring this reaction to responses to fraudulent articles in natural scientific journals such as papers about the creation of stem cells and a causal relationship between vaccination and autism, the stark difference is obvious. Whereas in these (and other cases), the scientists who published such articles are seen as deceiving the journal as well as the peer reviewers and the academic community as a whole, the hoax in *Gender, Place and Culture* was taken by some as proof of WGFS's lack of scholarliness. However, Boghossian's employer, Portland States University, made it clear that such acts of deception are no trivial offense by disciplining him for violating research ethics.

Attacks against WGFS from within academia by scholars from a variety of disciplines also exist in Germany. Marion Näser-Lather examined them in a case study as part of the interdisciplinary project REVERSE (»Crisis of gender relations? Antifeminism as a threat to social integration«) at the Center for Gender Studies and Feminist Future Research at Philipps-Universität Marburg (2017–2019). In her study on »›anti-genderist‹ argumentations in academic contexts«, Näser-Lather analyzed texts by scholars who position themselves against »gender«. In publications, interviews and lectures, anti-»genderist« academics devalue WGFS as unscholarly and demonize WGFS as a danger to society. They do not take note of the current state of research and the heterogeneity of the interdisciplinary field of Gender Studies, but rather present it in a generalizing and distorting way, citing only a fraction of often older publications. They equate Gender Studies with neglecting the materiality of the body and abolishing gender identity. As social consequences, they imagine, among other things, the decline of moral values and the threat to the »normal« family. They impute a »radical constructivism» as the central approach of Gender Studies and accuse the field of being unscientific, driven by a political agenda, and preventing open-ended research. Importantly, in doing so, some of them utilize unscholarly strategies of argumentation themselves, such as distorted or false representations, conspiracy narratives, ad hominem attacks and false conclusions (Näser-Lather 2020). What makes these attacks concerning not only for academic freedom but also for democracy in general is the fact that they can be – and are! – used in the mainstreaming of right-wing extremist positions.

From the very beginning, the REVERSE project caught the attention of antifeminist actors and media, including *Sciencefiles*, a right-wing blog co-edited by Heike Diefenbach, one of the academics whose publications were examined in Näser-Lather's study. This blog launched a shitstorm against the REVERSE project and its team, disparaging its approach as well as claiming that the research was biased and that some of the team members had gained their positions through corruption. Furthermore, the right-wing extremist party *Alternative for Germany* (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) submitted a parliamentary inquiry to the German Bundestag about the project. One of the study's findings was that academics attacking WGFS are noticed primarily in right-wing and Christian-fundamentalist publics and that some of them, including Diefenbach, also participate in corresponding networks.

Diefenbach sued Näser-Lather for publishing the findings above. Even though she lost the case, this incident demonstrates the need for protecting researchers as well as developing strategies for coping with such attacks. Universities and their legal departments are the first points of reference in such cases. However, Philipps-Universität Marburg initially treated these attacks as a private issue of the academics involved. It was only later, after repeated interventions by the principal investigator of the REVERSE project, that the university administration realized the importance of the case for academic freedom and decided to lend their symbolic support. However, Näser-Lather had to find a lawyer outside the university and, as a consequence, felt, at first, left alone in this stressful situation. This experience shows that much work is still necessary regarding the sensitization of university

administrations and training for universities' legal departments. Thankfully, Näser-Lather received declarations of solidarity from both the German and the Austrian societies for European Ethnology.

Critically engaging with research results and individual scholarly work in the field of WGFS is productive and legitimate. However, academics who position themselves against ›gender‹ frequently articulate pseudo facts about WGFS or criticize the field in general, without engaging with specific scholarly work. They are rarely experts on gender research, but, as members of an academic community, form part of an institutional field that provides them with symbolic capital and, hence, enables them to gain discursive power in the public. This is particularly true in the aforementioned conservative and religious publics, but, as we show in the next section, also reaches beyond these fields into mainstream society. While two of the ten authors examined in Näser-Lather's study also published their criticism and attacks in academic publications, most of their texts consisted of (guest) articles in mainstream conservative newspapers such as *Die Welt* and in right-wing and religious »alternative media« (Näser-Lather 2020). Faced with this situation, Näser-Lather deemed it necessary to challenge them, since their argumentations did not take place in a closed intra-academic conversation, in the proverbial »ivory tower«, having practically no influence on the public. Rather, their texts and public lectures are a discursive bridge that can mobilize parts of the public to take a position against developments which we consider desirable, such as the denormalization of heteronormative gender relations and LGBTIQ+ rights. This impact of antifeminist scholars on certain sub-publics as well as potential reactions are also illustrated by the following examples.

Example 2: Interventions in print news media

As mentioned above, antifeminist scholars publish essays and statements in mainstream print media and, hence, address a broader public. In her study on »Genderism in Media Debate. Thematic Cycles from 2006 to 2016«[7] (Beck 2020), Dorothee Beck analyzed such media discourses referring to different issues concerning the term »gender«. The main findings were that, first, conservative or liberal media only referred to WGFS in a positive and serious way in relation to issues such as women's heart attack risks. Academic research by more activist networks (e.g., about antifeminism of the far right) was hardly acknowledged, and if so, then usually as an expression of a political opinion. Second, media outlets mostly did not engage with current academic discourse themselves when publishing on WGFS, gender-related issues or gender-inclusive language. Instead, they invited guest authors such as academics and politicians, many of whom fit into the political tendency of the respective outlet, in order to support their own perspective on gender issues. Hence, and third, in antifeminist and anti-»genderist« discourses (and probably in other discourses as well), news media did not merely act as the Fourth Power, providing an impartial and critical view »from outside« as a form of control of political powers. Rather, they set their own agenda and participated in these discourses as actors on their own account (Beck 2020).

Media articles critical of gender issues predominantly lacked seriousness. The authors did not seriously engage with WGFS research results and gender-inclusive language but ridiculed both in an abstract way (ibid.). Some print media, conservative or liberal, implicitly or explicitly blamed women for an alleged crisis of masculinity. They supported hegemonic masculine values and heteronormative gender hierarchies. Some even served as platforms for male supremacists or took up male supremacist narratives and arguments themselves. In doing so, they supported male resovereigning (Forster 2006) and helped build discursive

bridges to antifeminist political positions (cf. Beck 2021a; Beck 2021b)[8]. Hence, in the discussion on some topics, the majority of positions presented were male supremacist ones, including in readers' comments on media websites, even though masculism represents only a tiny, extremely loud minority of men in society as a whole (cf. Rosenbrock 2012; Beck 2021b).

The problem of anti-»genderist« media pieces continues to exist after the conclusion of Beck's study in 2016. Conservative newspapers and tabloids in particular continue to unite in the defamation and devaluation of WGFS, claiming that the field lacks scholarly seriousness and relevance and accusing it of engaging in political lobbying disguised as academic work, of being ideological and, thus, a waste of research funds, etc. Relatedly, there is a constant stream of derogatory comments on WGFS and gender-inclusive language, subsuming both topics under the unifying accusation unintelligibility. Gender-inclusive language is accused of constituting linguistic barbarism, concealing the cultural heritage of the German language, incomprehensibility and political instrumentalization, as well as restricting freedom of speech.[9] Similarly, Gender Studies is accused of using a hermetic language.[10] As these examples show, accusations are often brought forward in the context of discourses about »political correctness«, »wokeness«, and »cancel culture« (e.g., Schubert 2020; Cammerts 2022; Beck 2024).

At the same time, liberal left and left-leaning media have changed their attitude towards WGFS, WGFS topics and gender-inclusive language. In the 1980s, the left-wing newspaper *die tageszeitung* was an early pioneer in using gender-inclusive language. In recent years, other newspapers such as *Frankfurter Rundschau* set up rules for gender-inclusiveness in their articles.[11] Additionally, some well-known presenters of TV magazines such as *heute journal* (ZDF), *Aspekte* (ZDF) and the comedy show *ZDF-Magazin Royale* regularly use gender-inclusive language. The range of political positions in the media on topics related to sexual diversity, LGBTIQ+ matters and diversity-oriented sex education has also widened significantly (Beck 2024). These examples show that gender issues are being taken more seriously, which in turn means that collaboration with the media can be a way for counterstrategies against anti-»genderist« discourses to succeed: after years of attacks on WGFS and gender-inclusive language, there are certain media and media actors who are allies to WGFS scholars in the discourse on WGFS and gender-inclusive language.

Example 3: Making attacks a subject for teaching and public academic events

One example for a functioning cooperation between academics and journalists comes from an interview in the newspaper *Der Standard,* which was published in 2017 when Sabine Grenz took office as professor for interdisciplinary Gender Studies at the University of Vienna. The journalist Beate Hausbichler interviewed her about the objectives of gender research more generally as well as about her own work (Grenz/Hausbichler 2017). Very quickly, nearly 700 comments were posted in response to the interview on *Der Standard's* online forum. Compared to the usual 35 comments per article, this is an extraordinary number. Since most of the postings positioned themselves against WGFS, the forum's reaction seems to be an example of online coordination among men's rights and anti-»gender« activists as described by Rosenbrock (2012). Consistently, commenters rejected the need for gender research, voicing assumptions that there was no discrimination against women anymore, that men and women simply had different natures and that sexism had long been overcome.

The interview was published in the »Science and Humanities« section of the newspaper. Interestingly, and supporting the findings in Beck's »genderism«-study, this was taken

up by many postings, with commenters stating that gender research was unscholarly and, thus, a waste of taxpayers' money and resources. They also made use of academic terms such as »objectivity« but used them in a way that lacked academic differentiation. Overall, their understanding of scholarly methodology and output was very limited (Köhnen 2014). They argued from a pseudo-neutral position in order to disguise their own political interests and authoritarian gestures. As Juliane Lang argues, such an understanding is widespread among opponents of WGFS (Näser-Lather et al. 2021). However, commenters often referred to hearsay and alleged common sense, indicating that they lacked reliable knowledge about the field. All in all, their comments also resonate with our arguments above regarding the low epistemic status of WGFS within academia (cf. Pereira 2017). On this basis, they create links to more mainstream thinking about WGFS.

The distorted perceptions of academic research evident in these comments are not only problematic for researchers but can be unsettling for students. Such attacks can put students off studying Gender Studies. They contribute to the fact that Gender Studies students are frequently questioned about choosing their specific subject. For this reason, Grenz taught a research class on »anti-genderism« in which students conducted a discourse analysis of the entire body of postings. Their analysis centered on the following questions: Who speaks in this forum? What or who is silenced? What is portrayed as absurd/uncanny? How did the commenters construct their authority to judge? Their findings were that a few commenters wrote most comments and that most defined themselves as men. Those commenters indicated a belief that discrimination against women has been overcome; other forms of gender discrimination were not really on their horizon. In addition, the commenters did not know what gender research is about and their goal very obviously was to silence other perspectives. The experience of conducting this analysis was empowering for the students: while they occasionally felt insecure reading the statements at first, they were able to deconstruct them in the end.

It was even more empowering for them that Beate Hausbichler, the journalist who had conducted the interview, continued the cooperation and wrote an article about the results of this research.[12] The students were thrilled and motivated.

Interestingly, this article gained even more comments (about 2,000). One of the reasons might be that the article mentioned one observation of this study on the interview: pro-WGFS interview statements were only posted in response to negative comments but not in order to initiate new threads. Clearly, some pro-WGFS activists took this up and started threads in reaction to the second article by commenting directly on the importance of gender research. Although this provoked even more counterstatements from anti-»gender« activists, it did effect a slight change in the discourse.

In addition to teaching, public academic events give opportunity to raise the issue of attacks on gender research. For example, the research network *Gender and Agency*[13] at the University of Vienna organized a series of talks to enhance the relationship between media and academia. For one slot, Hausbichler and Grenz were invited for a discussion on this case.

Example 4: Transdisciplinary cooperation

Besides academic communication, cooperation with journalists and teaching, transdisciplinary collaboration with activists or even acting as activists can be a way for WGFS scholars to counter antifeminist discourses and attacks. In the following section, we examine conditions and modes of collaboration and intervention from an intersectional perspective.

As already mentioned, there is a link between academic and activist feminisms as well as feminist practitioners in various social fields. This form of transdisciplinarity is both historical and still relevant (cf. Hark 2005; Hemmings 2011). As a result, we can see a constant debate about and (re-)negotiation of transdisciplinarity by which academic knowledge is generated, applied, discussed and/or (re-)evaluated in different social and political fields and their bodies of knowledge.

The disciplinary perspective from which WGFS scholars speak, of course, influences positionings concerning the question of activist engagement of WGFS researchers (see Villa/Speck 2020). For example, in Anthropology and European Ethnology, the question of whether intervening in the field should be considered an option or even obligation for researchers has been discussed at length. Positions have ranged from the emphasis on the freedom of value judgment and the neutrality of science (e.g., D'Andrade 1995; Heimerdinger 2017) to the moral obligation to stand up for human rights (Scheper-Hughes 1995; Ong 1995) or the advocacy of an engaged anthropology, which aims to support partners in the field, e.g., through collaboration or activism (Binder/Hess 2013). According to the minutes of the conference at Falkenstein 1970 (Brückner 1971), the aim of European Ethnology should be »to participate in solving socio-cultural problems« (ibid., 303; our translation). Kaspar Maase even questions the legitimacy of research that does not meet this perceived obligation (Maase 1999: XIII). In contrast, Hamm (2013), in reflecting on dual positions as researcher and activist, regards the role of intervening researcher in her own case as presumptuous. She argues against participatory, action-oriented research and in favor of dialogic ethnography. Like all ethical issues regarding field research, this question calls for case-by-case solutions.

While there is an ongoing academic discourse about intervening in the field of research, political and professional groups may have high expectations regarding WGFS. Equal opportunities commissioners working in local administrations are responsible for the implementation of equal opportunities laws. However, some of them are »lone fighters« without a team, and some only have a few spare hours per week available beside their »normal« work in public administration. Unsurprisingly, they are strongly interested in counterstrategies against antifeminism or arguments for the introduction of gender-inclusive language in administrative communication. Yet, they often do not find solidarity. In some local authorities, antifeminist arguments or even attacks are reproduced without opposition. Sometimes this is because equal opportunities policies require funding that others seek to claim for other issues. Equal opportunities commissioners are attacked in local media or on social media (Juraschek 2023). They appreciate it, when these offenses are acknowledged and contextualized politically or academically so they can recognize (and internalize) the fact that these attacks are not their individual problems, but form part of a larger political struggle. Thus, WGFS could and should provide background information, arguments, and feminist solidarity.[14]

WGFS scholars appear in fields dealing with antifeminism as actors with a variety of simultaneous, intertwined roles and can articulate different critiques in these positions: as researchers committed to methodological norms, as scholars cooperating with activists, as activists in academia or as feminist activists in movements. This latter role, in fact, is quite different from their role as scholars. Researchers can contribute their academic knowledge about antifeminism and feminism in cases of attacks or exclusions. Scholars can cooperate with activists according to the latters' needs. They can cooperate in events or launch joint research projects; they can provide access to international scholarly networks, to the media or to politicians. For instance, in research on migration, it may be fruitful to be in touch with migrant feminist groups in the region, which tend to be invisible or stereotyped, as well as

consider engaging in joint research on their aims and the limitations they face. To give an example, since 2022, Ilse Lenz has been cooperating with a transnational group in Berlin to gain justice for »comfort women«: women who were forced to provide sexual services to Japanese soldiers in camps in World War II. The group erected a statue to protest sexual violence in war and to commemorate the »comfort women« (Mladenova 2022). The Japanese government demanded its removal, but the group succeeded in their protest, relying, among others, on international support from Southeast Asia and Japan.

Activism in academia means supporting the formation of intra-university alliances and sensitizing university administrations to struggles over gender. On a more basic level, it is also about working for equality and anti-discrimination in the academic system, including, for example, working against the hegemony of the majority position via quotas for marginalized groups. Of course, scholars can directly participate in activism. The design and agreement of the roles of researcher and activist and the extent to which they can be separated is the subject of long-standing debates. In our view, however, the ideal (which we are aware is unattainable, but which we nevertheless want to strive for) should be the separation of analysis and positioning. It may therefore be advisable in individual cases to make clear whether one is speaking from a researcher's or an activist's position. Additionally, when antifeminist or anti-»gender« events take place at universities, scholars can take a stance and organize parallel events.[15]

Solidarity and mobilization can emerge due to manifold experiences of vulnerability and violence. However, possible barriers between academia and practice exist, resulting from different language logics and uses. Additionally, differences in the intersectional positioning of academics and activists make relations between the two groups complex. However, relations can change, for example by working on conflicts; this can be conceptualized as processual intersectionality (cf. Lenz 2019). Scholars are always involved in conflicts in many ways in their efforts to do engaged research and to intervene publicly; their own position is complex when it comes to questions of solidarity. They should act in solidarity (especially with racialized groups, women, as well as queer, trans and intersex people) while reflecting on their own diverse positions in the culture of dominance.

Strategies for the struggle against anti-»gender«/antifeminist activism in and beyond academia

In this paper, we pursue the interrelated questions of what can be done to counter anti-»gender« activism and how we can cooperate with practitioners and activists in different fields, as well as how we can work inter- and transdisciplinarily to further these goals. We have considered four arenas: academia itself, its relation to the media, teaching, and relations between academia and activism. In our final part, we draw on these examples and the ongoing discussions in the field in order to propose a structured approach consisting of seven suggestions for strategies regarding academic communication, journalistic and social media, academic teaching and the academic system, as well as concepts for defending ourselves and our research against attacks.

1. Unmasking antifeminism as a reactionary and undemocratic ideology

Above all, we should continue to act as Women's, Gender and Feminist Studies scholars, i.e., analyzing antifeminist actors, contexts, intentions and effects on regional, national

and international levels as well as from an intersectional perspective. We should reveal the de-democratizing effects of an ideology that regards »gender« as a biological, natural or God-given fact. The effect of such an ideology is not only a hierarchical gender binary, but also a denial of the existence as well as the right to exist of people whose gender identity goes beyond the binary. We have good arguments against the racist and transphobic character of antifeminism, above all because this ideology limits gender-based and sexualized violence to specific persons without regarding structures. Male Muslim or Black »Others« are suspected as perpetrators, while the widespread gender-based violence in our societies is neglected (Bergold-Caldwell/Grubner 2020). LGBTIQ+ people are imputed to destroy »normal« families (Mayer et al. 2020). Trans women are accused of actually being men and of threatening »real« women (Klapeer/Nüthen 2024). There is a rich body of feminist scholarly work about antifeminism. And there are more research questions waiting to be elaborated.

2. Teaching in higher education

We need to include the issue of antifeminism into our teaching and discuss it with our students. Some might simply be insecure about their work in the field, but others are affected by antifeminist lobbying. Together, we can analyze and deconstruct antifeminist statements. Not only is it an empowering process in which students recognize the poor argumentation of antifeminists. Students will be better able to counter such arguments wherever they are confronted with them. Also, they can become proactive actors. Cases that might be discussed with students include the double standard in the (public) evaluation of WGFS, e.g., taking the example of the hoax by Boghossian, Lindsay and Pluckrose who were celebrated for »revealing« the supposedly low standard of gender research. In addition, we can include topics such as science communication, engaging with the media, and protection concepts such as the one proposed here in our teaching.

3. Institutionalization of interdisciplinary gender research

In academia in general, we should continue to work for a better institutionalization of WGFS. This is necessary within individual universities, since within many institutions, gender research is not sufficiently visible. However, better institutionalization is also necessary in funding bodies. For instance, as has been frequently discussed, institutions such as the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft could introduce an interdisciplinary review board with adequate funding for interdisciplinary Gender Studies for which, for instance, an intersectional gender focus is a criterion for quality in research. Currently, research proposals with a gender focus compete with other proposals in established academic disciplines. As a result, gender research has to be conceptualized within these disciplines in order to be successful, whereas interdisciplinary research faces difficulties in acceptance — this applies to other interdisciplinary fields as well. Additionally, we should strive to establish appropriate working conditions: fighting precarity in academia in order to enable us to establish long-term research cooperations as well as collaborations with activists. For this purpose, solidarity that crosses disciplinary boundaries is essential.

4. Protection concepts for research on sensitive topics

We need to establish protection mechanisms against hate speech, silencing and other antifeminist efforts. Additionally, we should act in solidarity with persons and groups under

attack while at the same time retaining a self-critical, self-reflexive, postcolonial and trans- and intersectional perspective in order to gain insight into and deconstruct the complexity of power relations.

More concretely, the REVERSE research group developed a protection concept which aims to improve reactions to such attacks and to minimize emotional stress for the persons attacked. The concept entails the following points:

- A risk assessment should be conducted, if possible, before a project is initiated. It should consider the characteristics of the field which the project plans to investigate, what reactions to the research can be expected, and what precautionary measures should be taken, e.g., asking how the contact options on the project homepage should be designed to reduce the risk of stalking.
- When attacks occur, emotional detachment is necessary, i.e., using strategies for distancing oneself and reflecting on one's own emotional affectedness. The person affected should not react immediately to the attacks and should not respond to attackers directly or on their platforms and media. This is because in most cases, they are not interested in dialogue and will use the response for further attacks. In order to differentiate between the relationship to the field and the content of the attack, the person affected should not enter into non-academic discourse; they should not react affectively to what is affectively charged.
- Constant documentation and archiving of the attacks is important. However, documentation should be performed by those not directly affected, e.g., other team members, colleagues, etc.
- Continuous communication with the team and/or supporters is necessary to stay up to date on current developments.
- Support should be sought as early as possible. This includes institutional support by the legal department and the administration of the university/research organization as well as by professional associations and third-party funding bodies. In addition, counseling services for victims of right-wing attacks and legal advice can be approached. However, specialized counseling and support services for researchers in the academic field need to be developed and made widely accessible because of academia's specific institutional and employment-related conditions. Anyone doing research in such sensitive fields should take out legal protection insurance. In addition, solidarity with other groups of actors should be sought, e.g., by networking with media, foundations, NGOs or politicians.
- Scholars should carefully consider when, how and where publicity is to be generated (e.g., via statements on the university's website, articles in newspapers, etc.) — including possible dynamics and unintended effects. Näser-Lather made the attacks public by addressing them in lectures.
- At Alice Salomon University for Applied Studies, a pilot project has been set up to develop a model for such protection concepts.[16]

In all possible reactions to attacks, it is important to remember that individual scholars are differently vulnerable, depending on the precariousness of their status in the academic qualification process, their academic position (e.g., tenured or not), their socio-economic situation, etc.

5. Proactive and intelligible science communication

Since constructivist (intersectional) understandings of gender may, to some, appear to be removed from and irrelevant for everyday experiences, they can be perceived as creating unreasonable demands (Schindler 2005: 101). As a result, many people are not concerned about attacks against »gender«. Thus, WGFS scholars should get involved more strongly in public and media debates about intersectional gender relations and hierarchies as well as conversation about the best ways to strive for equality. To achieve this goal, we must make our theories, concepts and findings intelligible in order to make their relevance clear to people without an academic background. It has become obvious that in order to counter antifeminism, it is not enough to claim academic freedom or autonomy. The question of whether we should leave the field to right-wing antifeminists, male supremacists, »gender-critical« feminists etc., has been discussed on WGFS conferences and workshops.[17] One of the results of these discussions is the implementation of the campaign *#4GenderStudies* on December 18 as a proactive strategy to foster the perception that gender research is useful. It is a day on which scholars in German-speaking countries make the public aware of gender research by using a range of channels including social media, websites and lecture halls.[18]

6. Professionalism in communicating with journalists and on social media

Media in general could use their position as independent actors to provide more information about the relevance of WGFS as well as gender-inclusive language than they currently do. Yet, we must keep in mind that journalistic media as well as social media follow different rationales from academia. Both sides seem to have too little an understanding of the specific conditions and constraints in the respectively other field. For instance, scholars aim to increase complexity through research and theorizing, while the media seek to decrease complexity to provide explanations for their audiences that are easier to understand. Thus, one side is criticized for complicated language and the other for unacceptable simplification. Additionally, time and space in the media are limited, driving a constant competition between journalists for placing their topics, texts, features or reports. At the same time, in academia, referencing is much more regulated than in the media, where for the most part, a single reliable source is sufficient. As a result, each side might accuse the other of ignorance, neglecting that they only follow their respective inherent rules and logics (cf. Lünenborg 2008).

7. Transdisciplinary cooperation with WGFS and feminist practitioners and activists

One problem that arises time and again is the lack of continuity in cooperations between scholars, journalists and activists, as scholars are often forced to withdraw from the field after completing their projects. Networks therefore dissolve quickly. This is related, among other things, to framework conditions of higher education, such as the Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz (WzVG, Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act) in Germany, which regulates for how long academics can be employed on fixed-term contracts: academics have to leave academia after 12 years without a permanent contract. This creates precarity for scholars and endangers intra-academic continuity of work and cooperation. At the same time, however, university administrations and third-party funding institutions are increasingly demanding public engagement from academics — sometimes referred to as academia's »third mission«. While desirable, the idea of the academic third mission comes with its own issues. As Sabine Grenz and Juliane Lang noted, knowledge transfer projects often require a lot of

work and time but tend to not be sufficiently taken into account in applications for funding or in the assessment of academic careers (Näser-Lather et al. 2021).

To summarize our considerations, and as Lenz (Näser-Lather et al. 2021) as well as Thym, Mayhofer and Luterbach (2021) suggest, we should continue our lively and controversial debates. WGFS should not fall into the trap of adopting a defensive mode of argumentation. We should not stop addressing different positions among gender scholars, and we should not smooth over critical points and controversies within WGFS. Academic controversies are the norm, not the exception, and flattening them out could be criticized as unscholarly. Instead, WGFS scholars could point out and elaborate on current internal debates and central differences. This would also make it clear that there is no such a thing as a single homogeneous feminism, but different strands of feminisms.

Notes

1 We borrow the acronym from Maria do Mar Pereira (2017).
2 By »women«, we mean all people who self-identify as women, regardless of the gender assigned to them at birth.
3 For the interconnectedness between these different movements cf. Tudor 2021.
4 We write »gender« in inverted commas to clarify that we do not refer to the meaning of this term in WGFS, but to its distorting and derogatory use by antifeminist actors. In their terminology, »gender« is employed as an empty signifier that encompasses heterogenous phenomena such as Gender Studies, gender mainstreaming and measures for the liberalisation of gender relations. Because of this blurriness, Gender Studies can serve as a canvas onto which diverse negative attributions can be projected (see Näser-Lather 2019, 107).
5 The DFG or Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, the most important German national funding organization, has published rules and standards for gender equality and diversity in their funding programs: https://www.dfg.de/foerderung/grundlagen_rahmenbedingungen/chancengleichheit/index.html, accessed 29 September 2023.
6 The German Science and Humanities Council evaluated the structures of Gender Studies in Germany and published their results on 10 July 2023: https://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/2023/1385-23.html, accessed 13 July 2023.
7 Funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and the Arts in the State of Hesse from August 2017 to January 2019.
8 According to the findings of the »genderism« study, the male supremacist activist and writer Ralf Bönt was a frequent author in the conservative daily newspaper *Die Welt*. Jan Fleischhauer, a columnist in the conservative weekly news magazine *Focus*, and until 2019 in *Spiegel Online* (SPON), was frequently cited on male supremacist websites such as *Genderama*, *man tau* or *Sons of Perseus*. SPON runs one of the most-visited internet forums in Germany, in which male supremacists can reach far more readers than in their own media.
9 Way, Ingo, Der Wokeness-Wahn, Teil 3. Gerechte Sprache, schwere Sprache. Cicero Plus. https://www.cicero.de/kultur/-der-wokeness-wahn-teil-3-gerechte-sprache-gender-gendern-n-wort, accessed on 30.9.2022.
10 Basad, Judith Sevinç/Hans-Jörg Vehlewald (2021): Woke*-Wahnsinn in Deutschland. Wie *wache Aktivisten Bestimmen wollen, was wir noch sagen und tun dürfen. In: Bild.de. https://www.bild.de/politik/2021/politik/woke-wahnsinn-wie-aktivisten-bestimmen-was-wir-noch-sagen-duerfen-76753802.bild.html, accessed on 13.2.2023. Roedig, Andrea (2012): Über Begriffsdrachen, Der Freitag, 9 November 2012., Roedig, Andrea (2012): Wenn die Begriffsdrachen schnauben, Die Wochenzeitung, 13 December 2012.
11 Kaspar, Thomas (2020): Wie gendern? In: Frankfurter Rundschau Online. https://www.fr.de/politik/wie-gendern-sprache-editorial-frankfurter-rundschau-90037079.html, accessed on 30.12.2022.
12 Hausbichler, Beate (2018): Gender-Studies? Erfundene Probleme der Hysterikerin! In: Der Standard, 14 February 2018, https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000074199471/gender-studies-erfundene-probleme-der-hysterikerin, accessed on 13.2.2023.

13 https://genderandagency.univie.ac.at/en/
14 As a lecturer in Political Education (»Politische Bildungsarbeit«), Dorothee Beck often meets equal opportunities commissioners in workshops and trainings. On these occasions, she learns about their working conditions.
15 A recent example for such a strategy is the one-day workshop »We are the feminisms in the lecture theatres (and in the streets)«, organized by SOAS scholars with colleagues from UCL and LSE. It took place on 4 February 2023 at the University of London to counter a conference entitled »Bringing feminism back to the lecture theatres« at UCL which was organized by »gender-critical« feminists. This workshop made it clear that feminisms are alive in academia and that they need to be intersectional and inclusive.
16 Alice Salomon Hochschule (2022): Start eines Pilotprojekts zur Schutzkonzeptentwicklung. Zum Umgang mit (sexualisierter) Diskriminierung, Belästigung, Gewalt und Antifeminismus. https://www.ash-berlin.eu/hochschule/presse-und-newsroom/ash-news/start-eines-pilotprojekts-zur-schutzkonzeptentwicklung/, accessed on 13.2.2023.
17 E.g., the conference »Feminismus und Öffentlichkeit: Kritik, Widerstand und Interventionen im medialen Wandel« (Frankfurt am Main/Germany, 4 – 6 October 2017).
18 This day was first established in 2018. International participants are welcome.

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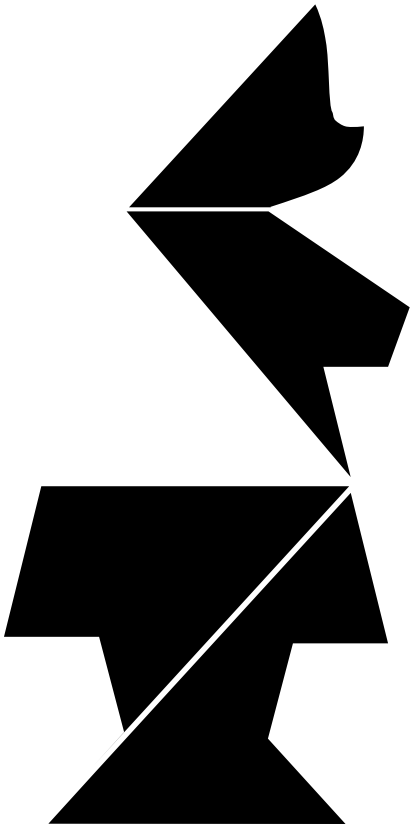

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Political Struggles around »Gender«: Decentering Queer Feminism (?)

Erzsébet Barát

ABSTRACT: *This article focuses on the recent struggles around the concept of »gender« in the context of the anti-gender(ism) propaganda of the incumbent Hungarian right-wing populist regime since the year 2010. The government's »war on gender« is discussed through the analysis of three legislative acts passed under the precarious conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim in their analysis is, on the one hand, to illuminate how a certain radical feminist discourse that self-identifies as a »gender critical« position has emerged, one simultaneously finding itself caught up in the official routine intimation of hate speech. On the other, it is to forge an intersectional position that may speak across this harmful internal division by shifting the critical gaze onto the shared enemy of hegemonic masculinity and to propose a trust-based queer solidarity.*

KEYWORDS: *Hungary, genderism, right-wing populism, hegemonic masculinity, queering solidarity*

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The past 13 years of rule by the current Hungarian regime can be seen as the normalization of hate speech, with the escalation of government attacks on the analytical category of »gender« in feminist scholarship and movements. The official stigmatization of the category as »dangerous ideology«—one that should, in consequence, be seen as a legitimate target of attack, as should anything that can be explicitly or indirectly associated with it too—has also invited feminist scholars and activists to understand the reasons for the success of this official propaganda. Part of this self-criticism has entailed an act of disidentification with queer scholarship for its alleged depoliticization of feminism and discrediting of the category of »gender.«

The current article is a critical study of the order of discourses of gender, exploring the relative but relevant differences within the advocated perspectives and their potential to serve the ideological purposes of labeling—regardless of the actual prodemocratic or illiberal declarations of the participants in the debate. The aim here is to point out the ways in which the self-critical feminist discourse has become caught up within the official rhetoric of fear. The focus is on how much the logic informing the »gender critical« argumentation has reiterated official hate speech instead of producing a space for its effective feminist

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critiquing. I analyze and depict how the category of »gender« functions as the link helping articulate the misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic ideologies forming part of a systemic attack by the Hungarian government, as seen specifically in three legislative acts passed under the pretext of COVID-19 emergency governance in the course of the past two and a half years.

More importantly, I trace gender's reiteration in the feminist discrediting of queer approaches and contend that it is indispensable for us, as feminists, if we are to assume a sufficiently different logic that intimates trust instead of hate. The possibility of such a shift is argued to depend on taking an intersectional approach to multiplicity, one that entails categorization practices drawing on making relative distinctions. The either/or principle informing absolute distinctions inevitably sees (sexual or gender) differences as absolute, with the critical feminist discourses of binaries (structural criticism against and over identity critique) playing into the hands of government propaganda—regardless of participants' actual intentions.

Official Anti-Gender Propaganda: Its Rhetoric and the Legislative Decisions Taken during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The concept of »gender« has become a heavily contested site of political investment by the current Hungarian right-wing populist regime during their three consecutive periods of rule over the past 13 years. In the three four-year periods of a FIDESZ-Christian Democratic Party coalition since 2010, »gender« has been fiercely disowned, while producing a right-wing populist anti-gender discourse of hate (Barát 2021a). The concept of »gender ideology« at the center of that discourse has rendered the analytical category of »feminist critique« virtually antithetical to its function, undermining the feminist politics of empowerment. Being labeled as an ideology takes place through the routine intimation of hate in government propaganda on two intertwined grounds. First, »gender« is invoked only to be relegated to the past through its connotation of »communism« in post-Soviet Hungary and, second, it is associated with »liberalism«—as attributed to a »hostile« European Union, the trope of the ultimate enemy of the Fidesz regime's ideal of »illiberal democracy« (Tóka 2014).

The association with communism goes back to the 1990s, when the right-wing opposition mostly outside parliament tried to discredit the newly emerging feminist voices in the print media (Barát 2005). Since the 2010s, meanwhile, such discrediting has reemerged, but now as locating the »ideology« in the EU's liberal values, and as arising explicitly from within government rhetoric. It conflates all forms of feminist thinking and their conceptualizations of »gender,« »queer feminism,« »trans-feminism,« »liberal feminism,« and »radical feminism,« accusing any feminist agenda of striving to gain power with the ultimate aim of undermining what government propaganda defines as the »Christian values« of the family—therewith, too, upholding a traditional femininity of reproductivity.

In this hate rhetoric, importantly, »feminism« is not even mentioned; rather it is substituted by »genderism.« Unlike in the 1990s when »feminism« surfaced in the wake of system change as the focal point of discussions, it is now actively silenced and disarticulated in official government propaganda against »gender«—as mediated through the affect of hate speech. This shift from »feminism« to »genderism« has resulted in the articulation of »gender« as now the »weapon of the LGBTQ lobby« in government propaganda and legislation, precluding the possibility to see sexuality and gender in an intertwined relationship of rel-

ative difference. This also serves to discredit critiques of the regime's misogyny and trans-/homophobia when using »gender« as the category of analysis here. More painfully, the government attacks have also resulted in the antagonizing of »progressive« feminism and queer feminism around the figure of the trans woman and LGBTQ activism—leaving trans feminism to still be accommodated, and accusing trans politics of entrenching neoliberal capitalism and women's rights (Barát 2021b).

An ubiquitous discourse of hate has seen the current regime's propaganda stigmatize a number of analytical categories since 2010, when the Fidesz-Christian Democrat coalition under the leadership of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán first came to power, gaining and maintaining a super majority in parliament, as noted, three times to date. One of the key categories discredited through the discourse strategy of stigmatization occurring during the formation and normalization of such (radical) right-wing political communication is »gender.« The stigmatization of the latter, specifically under the pejorative terms »gender ideology« or »genderism,« was forcefully brought to the fore in the context of banning the MA in Gender Studies in 2018.[1] The government's arguments were articulated explicitly only in response to a written question submitted by an independent member of parliament, who had addressed it to the secretary of state—the minister responsible for higher education and research—after the public announcement of this degree program.[2]

The four points made in the state secretary's reply, which have been widely recycled in the public discourse ever since, questioned the viability and academic status of the degree (Barát 2019). The alleged concerns about »viability« appeal to notions of »utility,« refusing to allegedly waste the national budget and the university's human resources in the name of the degree's unsustainability. The fact that the fee-paying option was banned at the same time exposes the ideological motivation behind the claim about the alleged low numbers of admissions to the degree program—a number that is defined in each program by the Ministry of Human Resources anyway. The concerns about status, on the other hand, argued that the degree does not constitute an academic discipline but an ideology like Marxism-Leninism and is therefore inappropriate for university education. Further, it was posited that the degree program's curriculum stands in contradiction to the government's concept of »human nature« (Barát 2019, 136). The so-called human nature evoked in the secretary of state's answer draws on an essentialist understanding of gender reduced to a biological binary of sexual difference. The coextensive relationship between sex(uality) and gender makes the latter a tautological repetition and unnecessary category at best. Or, if used against this »obvious« logic, »gender« is deemed a »secret hideous« code of nonnormative sexuality attributed to a so-called LGBTQ conspiracy at worst.

I see the banning of the degree as the articulation of a »war on gender« situated within the Orbán regime's broader »cultural war« that has been expanding further and further over the course of the past 13 years (Ágh 2016). This »cultural war« was officially announced by that name, and positioned as the focus of the regime's activities going forward, shortly after their third victory at the ballot box in 2018. This happened specifically at the summer university in Tusványos, Romania, that Fidesz has traditionally organized for the Hungarian minority youth since July 1990: »We need a new intellectual and cultural approach. Undoubtedly, we shall see great changes as of September.«[3] The MA degree was its very first target. This strategic cultural war—aiming to replace the Hungarian cultural and academic elite and restructure their institutions with ones loyal to the regime—has rendered »gender« an empty signifier (Laclau 1996, 36–46) at the intersection of four narratives, with a particular figure targeted at the center of each (Barát 2020).

The four narratives were first epitomized in the discourses around the banning of the MA degree, then reiterated in the three laws passed over the past two and a half years of the COVID-19 pandemic. The stigmatization of »gender« as the »hideous weapon of LGBTQ lobbyists« is indirectly articulated out of the meanings of the four identity categories these narratives mobilize. »Nonproductive, parasite intellectuals,« »Brussels-affiliated liberals,« and »Islamic male migrant terrorists« are all accused of threatening the »traditional Christian Hungarian nation«—both from »within« and from »outside«—by way of the alleged »financial and ideological support« of a »Soros plan« (see below)—this fourth narrative evoking the trope of the »hideous Jew« (Barát 2021b). The success of the stigmatization of »gender« hinges on its capacity to evoke the four, often contradictory tropes rendered in a chain of equivalences (Laclau/Mouffe 1985). As a result, each trope may emerge as a constitutive element of the meaning of the other three without their explicit mention, thereby effectively legitimizing and reinforcing the forceful rhetoric of hate. The most concerning effect of such rhetoric is the intensified normalization of a commonsense belief that the only »natural« response to (sexual or gender) difference is hate, routinely inviting the citizenry »to courageously wage a war against this alien enemy.«[4]

The logic that scapegoats any scholarly dissent criticizing the misogynistic gender politics of the Hungarian regime works as follows. The anti-intellectual revoking of the MA in Gender Studies as a »nonscientific and nonproductive« activity is intertwined with the discourse of anti-Semitism, through the original, fated location of the degree in question at the Central European University (CEU)—the target of an earlier legislative act. The amendment to the Higher Education Law in April 2017 changed retroactively the conditions for establishing foreign-university branches in the country.[5] The government's hostile move was indirectly legitimized by a covert appeal to anti-Semitism through calling the institution »Soros University«—thereby scapegoating George Soros, the founder of CEU in 1991, who is of Hungarian Jewish decent. The anti-Semitism behind the Soros trope had already been established in the government's anti-migrant billboard campaign in 2015, establishing the notion of a »sexually violent male Islamist terrorist« sponsored and imposed on »us« by »Soros.« The country was flooded with blown-up photos of him maliciously grinning and staring down at »us« (Barát 2017).

Such a stigma has been ready ever since to be mobilized against anything attached to that name, as a way of »proving« the hostility of the targeted events and groups that are undermining »us«—by implication—, the Christian Hungarian nation. Furthermore, the liberal values associated with the »Soros« figure now embody all political ones seen to be in the way of the regime's so-called illiberal democracy, entailing in its foreign policy an opening to »the East.«[6] Consequently gender, LBGTQ equality, as well as the recognition of refugees' right to seek asylum have come to be categorized as »liberal values,« ones argued to have been imposed on »us« by »Brussels« (»the West«)—only to undermine »our political and cultural sovereignty« through their attacks on »Christian values,« and as allegedly »financed,« as noted earlier, per a »Soros plan.«

The COVID-19 pandemic playing out since February 2020 would emerge within this established order of discourse. The pandemic has been used by the government as an opportunity to introduce a system of rule by decree that is not limited either in time or scope. Rather, it gives Orbán and his government the right to suspend the enforcement of certain laws as well as to introduce new ones under the pretext of a state of emergency. This centralized ruling would be then legitimized by the »moral mission of the state,« which allowed the government to successfully wield the power of stigmatizing »gender« in support of their most recent legislative measures against women and LGBTQ people. I argue that

the targeting of these two groups is not coincidental but rather an inevitable consequence of the foundationalist biological view of sex(uality) established by the »gender ideology« discourse.

The heightened legislative activity seen under the pretext of the pandemic saw three acts be passed: one introducing »sex at birth,« as the Hungarian government's very first pandemic emergency measure in March 2020; the parliament majority's »declaration« refusing the ratification of the *Istanbul Convention* in June 2020; and, the legislation on »pedophilia« in June 2021 in the alleged interest of child protection, which in fact criminalizes the public visibility of LGBTQ people in sex education unless parents agree on their inclusion in the curriculum, in television programs broadcast before 10pm, and in bookstores selling young adult literature representing relationships other than heterosexual ones unless they dsiplay a warning on the cover of the book in question. All three bills were submitted by the Christian Democrats, the minority party in the Fidesz-led coalition.

The deputy prime minister, who is also the leader of the Christian Democrats, submitted the following »resolution« to MPs. It was approved within 24 hours, with the coalition abusing its holding of a two-thirds parliamentary majority here. Ironically, the Istanbul Convention was signed by the same government back in 2014. Yet, in the meantime, in line with their misogynistic gender politics and homo- and transphobic sexual politics, the refusal to now ratify it singled out two reasons for that decision. Namely, the very concept of »gender« and the critical approach it entails as well as the ensuing arrival of further »migrants« in the country respectively:

> We do not support the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, on the one hand, because it prescribes an approach based on the concept of »gender« when ratifying it and parliament does not wish to integrate into our national legislation either that concept or the gender perspective of the Convention. On the other, we also do not support ratification because the granting of refugee status on the grounds of gender[-based discrimination] is in contradiction with the political objectives formulated in the 36/2015 (September 22) Parliamentary Decision and the Hungarian legal context granting effective measures against illegal migration.[7]

The seemingly odd intersection of the anti-gender discourse and the Islamophobic anti-migrant one in the legislators' rationale is mobilized indirectly through invoking the very first legislative measure passed during the COVID-19 rule-by-decree period some three months before—which introduced, as noted, the concept of »sex at birth.« The latter, although never explicitly acknowledged in the official rationale given for the decree's passing, was in fact a response to the Constitutional Court of Hungary's decision in 2018 instructing parliament to rectify this gap in Hungary's legislation. That gap was exposed by a case concerning the issuing of an identity card to an Iranian refugee trans man, who successfully applied for refugee status in December 2015. He was granted that status on the grounds that he had been persecuted in Iran due to his (trans)gender identity.

Yet, the Hungarian authorities had refused to issue an identity card with the indication of his sex as »male« because in their understanding they lacked the jurisdiction to issue a new birth certificate to a non-Hungarian citizen. The Constitutional Court of Hungary argued that the right to change one's name follows from the Hungarian foundation law's defense of the inviolability of human identity and human dignity. Outrageously, the legislator decided to attend to the gap instead by introducing the »sex at birth« paragraph to »Act I of 2000 on the Registration of Citizens' Personal Data and Address,« which in fact now takes

away the rectifiability of the family register with respect to one's sex at birth from all citizens instead of bringing asylum seekers under the scope of Hungarian law too (Barát 2021a).

Given these changes, it is not surprising that the third decree of June 2021—which was in fact a set of legislative proposals—emerged as the explicit stigmatization of nonheterosexuality in the name of »defending our children« from »their propaganda.« It was submitted to parliament as a way to amend several existing pieces of legislation: the »Child Protection Act,« »Family Protection Act,« »Act on Business Advertising Activity,« »Media Act,« and the »Public Education Act.« All changes were passed, conflating nonheterosexuality with pedophilia and criminalizing the public visibility of nonheterosexuality as a form of illegal propaganda, trying to force members of the LGBTQI community to hide their sexuality around children. The government refutes all criticism of its decisions taken here by arguing that adult beings can »enjoy the freedom of intimacy,« therein drawing on the assumption that sexuality should start abruptly only at the age of 18.[8]

Gender-Critical Feminist Discourses in the Face of Government Propaganda

The most vocal feminist scholarly and activist response to the order of discourses regarding »gender ideology« has been to argue for the primacy of critiquing unequal relations within the political economy. In these individuals' understanding, this also requires the redefinition of »gender,« moving away here from any implications of »transgender.« Their effort to produce the »proper definition of gender« both within feminism and outside, for the unknowing public, is motivated by the hope that they can then successfully explain that the stigmatization of the concept in government propaganda is wrong for reasons of ideology—namely for the incumbent regime to be able to undermine feminism by conflating its gender politics with transgender activism.

In my reading, the »gender critical« discourse voiced by women who self-identify as »progressives« not only, ironically enough, reduces the complexity of the sociocultural moment of right-wing populism to the question of the »correct meaning« of »gender.« The proposed alternative gets caught up, further, in an essentializing logic of biologization, which rests on a referential binary relationship between reality and language (Barát 2021b). Such a move has nothing to say about the actual institutional conditions of the systemic discrediting of the concept under the 13 years of the contemporary regime. This is a paradoxical moment of critique, in that such »gender critical« efforts are voiced as if an inevitable either/or choice—one that is simply a matter of willpower.

For successful feminist mobilization, goes their counterargument, we need to turn to the structural conditions of women's inequality under capitalism instead of certain »identity politics of recognition only.« That is, while accusing trans activism of undermining the feminist agenda by misappropriating the term »gender« to mean »gender identity only,« the progressive position vindicates the very power of the word. However, that stance—reducing trans discrimination to a matter of purely consequential acts of signifying, and as such »only« a form of cultural injustice (if at all)—has partly played into the hands of the government's »anti-gender« propaganda. The progressive logic entails exploiting class inequality to advance transphobic discourses in defense of their understanding of »real« feminism and the »appropriate« category of gender. As a result, both the government and the progressive feminist positions have become entangled in the ideal of a traditional femininity of reproductivity that hinges on the resurgence of thoroughly biological sexual difference. This is, in fact, a regressive political stance, one leaving hardly any room for challenging

the foundationalist government notion of men's and women's fundamental difference, and thus eroticizing gender relations of unequal power.[9]

My point is not about disavowing the contradictory nature of any position or the possibility of escaping altogether the dominant discourse. It is, rather, about the dangerous political consequences of the entanglement of the progressive feminist discourse with government propaganda—what can be called the »spectatorial sports of self-destruction among harmed collectives [this time, that of the different feminist approaches] in the public sphere while reiterating the complex order of hegemonic entitlements [of heteropatriarchy]« (Berlant 1996, 243). This conveniently diverts the critical gaze away from the ultimate beneficiary of gender- and sexuality-related entitlements and privileges: hegemonic masculinity. Consequently, in a situation where »gender«—our key concept to expose heteropatriarchy—has become the site of merciless contestation, focus should turn instead to hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005, 2014) as the bearer of agency. Instead of fighting each other, then, we should do battle rather with hegemonic masculinity and explore how it responds to losing its anchoring ground of a fear of femininity, which it hopes to put back in her place—namely that of procreation.

In building solidarity, our job does not—at least initially—consist of pursuing reasoning that exposes the contradictions in the misogynistic and transphobic logics of authoritarian power. As argued earlier, the very objective of government propaganda is to build and mobilize the empty signifier of the »enemy« at the intersection of multiple, contradictory discourses. That is, it thrives on contradictions. They are integral to the formation of the affect of fear, shoring up nationalism, misogyny, xenophobia, anti-Islamism, and transphobia for mobilizing the citizenry under the »guidance« of the intensified rhetoric of hate in defense of some kind of ethnonationalist understanding of »we the people.« The anti-gender discourse enunciated from a position of authoritarian power by an ever-radicalizing right-wing populism can only be toppled if we seek and build alliances across differences and mobilize through a different affect: in short, that of trust.

However, the appeal to a »gender critical« stance in feminism is an act of accentuating our differences in the name of an »authentic« definition of »gender« while trying to secure one's own disciplinary boundaries. Essentializing difference is the strategy of hate employed within government propaganda, an effective means of othering anyone who is not exactly like us. This cannot be considered a fruitful countermove in the face of the enormous sense of precarity delivered to us on a daily basis by the regime. Rather, we should build a coalition for transformative action and move toward a solidarity that intimates the aforementioned affect of trust. Acknowledging the importance of trust-based solidarity will not preclude difference in promising a certain »sameness«: establishing a space for trusting the other / others is not only oriented to the act of agreeing but to disagreement as well, therewith accepting discomfort as a productive place to start from. I think such a dialectic understanding of »trust« can bring about a politically effective contingent feminist solidarity, one that cuts across the current divisive boundaries between feminist and trans positions.

As long as we understand that masculinity for its hegemonic hold today turns on its cis-ness, as is the case in the introduction of »sex at birth« to the Hungarian legislation on citizens' registration, we can open up space for working out a coalition. Such a moment may create the possibility for debate, which is not only pleasurable but necessarily painful—while ultimately also productive. This would help move the struggle beyond its anchoring in a thoroughly biological »sex,« as yielding unearned privileges. This is not to say that where the respective discourses of the Hungarian government and »gender critical« progressives find alignment is necessarily programmatic on the part of the latter; yet, even

if coincidental, it is still very harmful. The latter reality lies in the impossibility of substantiating the important claim that a woman's body should not be available as a commodity to be bought by photographers or media, nor should it be owned by her »lawfully wedded husband«—only herself. Fighting against gender-based violence in the name of a woman's entitlement to her body cannot be effectively supported by an appeal to the innateness of absolute sexual difference.

We cannot make the government, for instance, ratify the Istanbul Convention, which the parliamentary majority »invited« it to avoid doing in June 2020. This is precisely because, according to the current government's logic, »gender« does not make sense: the distinction between men and women is already grasped by biological sex and so insisting on the use of the term is merely the »gay lobby's« interest in making those boundaries fuzzy in disguise. Social injustice is not going to be any less material or structural in nature if it is not anchored in the notion of biologically given sex. Nor should gender identity be reduced to trans men's and women's identity, as if to be an act of purely linguistic claiming that refers back to some »materiality«—there is, indeed, a sense of collective identity involved in feminist struggles against inequality in the political economy as well.

The only viable way out of that impasse is to accept the fuzziness, the relative boundaries drawn between categories. That can be achieved by »queering masculinity.« Jack Halberstam (1998), for instance, argues against masculinity owning »maleness« and for the importance of other, nonhegemonic forms of masculinity instead. Examples are female masculinities of gender indeterminacy without the cis-male body, such as trans men or drag kings, as they can help generate social change.

Solidarity through the Intimation of Trust

In addressing the importance of acts of affect in working out solidarity, I draw on Sara Ahmed's (2004, 209) tenet that our political activities have emotional dimensions to them. These emotions then shape the ways we feminists inhabit the world with other feminists, what we say and do in the name of feminism. In short, emotions do things; they are acts. Hence, a feminist position that is caught up in the intimation of fear and hate helps reiterate the dominant discourses of stigmatization vis-à-vis »gender« being »trans ideology«—despite one's best intentions. This is what Lisa Duggan and José Esteban Muñoz call »an act of political complacency« (2009, 280). Intimations of trust—seen as the intertwined dynamic of agreeing and disagreeing—could take us beyond pitting ourselves against each other, making us proactive instead of only reactive.

The solidarity mediated by the affect of trust does not, then, necessarily require deliberation on sameness. The dialectic of trust serving to create space to agree and disagree is something organized internally by plurality and open-ended in nature. In this regard, it is very similar to Judith Butler's ethics of cohabitation—understood as an ethical binding that arises from the precariousness of bodily life, »[it] emerge[s] from the social conditions of political life, not from any agreement we have made or from any deliberate choices. [It] is necessarily committed to the equal value of lives« (2012, 150). In other words, this dialectic conceptualization of trust that is proposed here is not homogenous but entails rather enduring insecurities and ambivalences.

The ongoing negotiations taking place across constitutive differences could be imagined in terms of Clare Hemmings's suggestion that a transformative feminist politicization »begins from experiences of discomfort without generalising these as shared by all subjects or

as the basis of transcendence of difference« (2012, 158). Hemmings argues for the possibility of a feminist politics that begins from lived experiences of discomfort, without assuming that participants' positions should be imagined within a framework of reciprocity or of a sameness transcending all of their respective differences:

> Dissonance *has to* arise if a feminist politics is to arise [...]. This may be a productive basis from which to seek solidarity with others, not based in a shared identity or on a presumption about how the others feel, but on also feeling the desire for transformation out of the experience of discomfort, and against all odds. (ibid., 158; italics in the original)

Hemmings' position in acknowledging the indispensability of discomfort is partly inspired by Ahmed's work, who herself argues for the possibility of feminist solidarity even if we do not inhabit the same social locality of contentment: »There is solidarity in recognizing our alienation from happiness, even if we do not inhabit the same place (and we do not). There can be joy in killing joy. And kill joy we must, and we do« (2010, 87). In other words, Ahmed's invitation is for us to see how feminist critique and intervention have historically been concerned with inhabiting possibilities other than the forms of hegemonic happiness women are expected to desire. Examples here are: the Hungarian government's propagandistic heteronormative marriage and giving birth to children (and the accompanying myth of domestic life); desiring biologically grounded sexual difference, as the progressive feminist position would have it; or, all the promises articulated in the incumbent regime's rhetoric and policies.

Ahmed, in fact, puts possibility and chance (the »hap«) back into »happiness«; in my reading, that allows for having »happenstance« be part of solidarity once more, with difference becoming integral to the latter's formation. It is this insertion of »happenstance« that substantiates Ahmed's (2004) argument that our political activities are not purely rational but have emotional dimensions to them as well. Integrating the moment of disagreement into »trust« precludes imagining its normative, teleological meaning as but a space of sameness, one wherein participants should strive toward homogenized promises—including the progressive feminists' heteropatriarchal desire to exclude the »QTI« letters and willingness to acknowledge only »LGB« people.[10] More importantly, this perspective could, at the same time, subvert the routine perception of those individualizing institutional relations of power that reads feminists »as being unhappy, such that situations of conflict, violence, and power are read as about the unhappiness of feminists rather than about what feminists are unhappy about« (Ahmed 2010, 583).

The concerns that I encountered when proposing for the first time the intimation of trust—namely in response to my talk (Barát 2021c) at the annual national gender/sexuality conference »Possibilities of Resistance and Cooperation« of the University of Szeged, Hungary, in 2021—were about losing sight of the particular interests of women as well as of gains achieved if the trans woman is seen as »one of us.« Keeping that anxiety in mind, what I have tried to underscore in the current article is how the solidarity of trust is organized by plurality. It is conceptualized in such a way as to allow for the recognition of differences, namely when seen as a dynamic space of both agreement and disagreement. Trust requires working around such differences. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's (2003) intersectional position argues, in this vein, that the lived lives of women are intertwined out of historical similarities and differences, being in a complex relationality with one another necessitating a solidarity other than the Western ideal of »sisterhood«—one that should be, rather,

transversal. To be caught up in the rhetoric of fear counts as accepting the false happiness of a foundationalist reproductive femininity instead of inhabiting other, transformative possibilities of fuzziness through the intimation of trust. Therefore, I would encourage us to embrace Ahmed's perspective and understand that she is not celebrating unhappiness; rather, she invites us to assume the position of feminist killjoys and to challenge the current rhetoric of hate in right-wing propaganda.

Notes

1 The ban was simply announced through Decree No. 188/2018 (X. 12.), published in the *Hungarian Gazette* without any debate. It was a massive abuse of centralized power, violating academic freedom left granted even in the new constitution, in spite of all autocratic changes introduced in the revised version thereof (renamed as »fundamental law«) in 2011 (Barát 2019).

2 See: https://www.parlament.hu/irom40/14056/14056—0001.pdf (last accessed August 22, 2022).

3 All translations from the Hungarian original are by the author herself. See: https://nepszava.hu/3003117_orban-uj-korszakot-es-kulturharcot-hirdetett-tusvanyoson (last accessed August 22, 2022).

4 For a detailed analysis of the regime's ongoing strategy of generating »enemies,« see: Nemzettudat, identitáspolitika és nemzetpolitika a mai Magyarországon. [Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung — Policy Solutions], (2019) Budapest: Political capital and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

5 Though the infamous »lex CEU« was struck down by the European Court of Justice in the meantime, the decision could not change the situation and CEU is now located in Vienna. The judgement was announced on the University's website in October 2020: https://www.ceu.edu/article/2020-10-06/landmark-judgment-lex-ceu-struck-down-european-court-justice (last accessed August 22, 2022).

6 For discussion of the »Orbánization« of Hungary, see Wilkin (2018). He addresses the tension between liberal and illiberal tendencies within the global context, meaning both in the EU and beyond. He explains how such a system fosters anti-Enlightenment values as well as other divisive policies and propaganda based on ethnonationalism.

7 See: https://www.parlament.hu/irom41/10393/10393.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1MXwzCwhrac85QAURyZ8b0NWRwbf6—Z8A-QOKb4NjKKFwmweNuRMtdOv0 (last accessed August 22, 2022).

8 For a detailed discussion of the content of the changes, see European Sources Online (2021): https://www.europeansources.info/record/hungarian-law-banning-provision-of-lgbtqi-content-to-minors/ (last accessed August 22, 2022).

9 This failure most painfully manifested when the current government, using its two-thirds majority in parliament, blocked the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in May 2020, in the very context of a global rise in reports of domestic violence during the pandemic. The same regime had signed it without reservation back in 2014 (see the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) report published in 2020). As a result, feminists have lost a powerful legal instrument for preventing and combating violence against women, especially in intimate relationships.

10 See the most recent formulation of the »progressive« feminist position on the independent media news platform atlatszo.hu (Transparent). The article criticizes members of the opposition for embracing unconditionally trans and queer people's cause in the face of the Hungarian government's so-called pedophile law instead of siding with »gender critical« British feminists in the debate first started by J. K. Rowling (Kiss and Feró 2022). See: https://videkicsajok.atlatszo.hu/jk-rwling-a-nemvalto-ovodasok-es-a-magyarorszagi-valasztasok/ (last accessed August 22, 2022).

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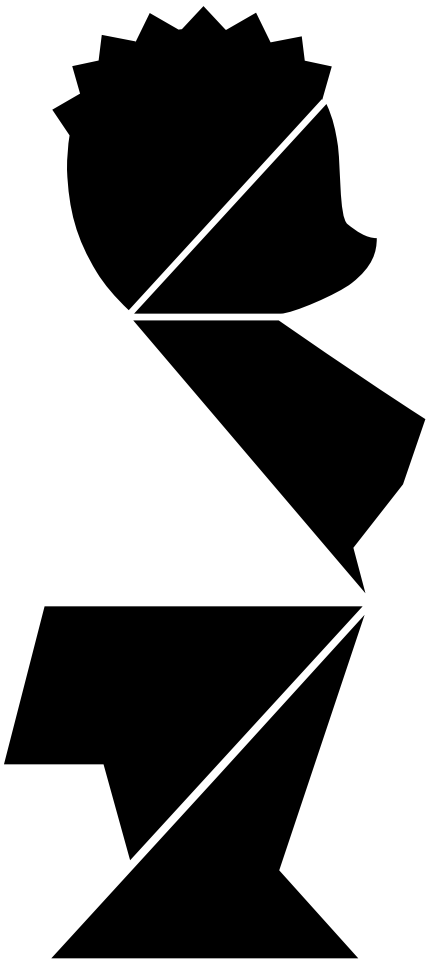

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The Marxist Case for Abortion: Rethinking the Imagination of Bodies in Soviet Marxism

Bogdan Popa

ABSTRACT: *This article proposes to rearticulate a pro-abortion Marxism to offer an alternative to current debates that posit individual rights versus anti-abortion advocacy. [1] The 2022 decision of the Supreme Court of the United States to overturn Roe v. Wade (1973) raises the specter of the consolidation of the anti-abortionist movement in Eastern European countries, which are strongly influenced culturally and politically by the North American country. To advance a psychoanalytic Marxist critique, I concentrate not only on a critique of individualism but also on a dialectical interpretation of capitalism. I make two arguments here. First, that while US social constructionism saw bodies as formed from a naturally given material, productivist bodies were a vehicle for a Soviet Marxist ideology that aimed to emancipate the entirety of humanity. Second, I trace an ideological shift in Romanian cinema from a Marxist body to a politics of natality, which provided the basis for the 1966 banning of abortion in that country. While I criticize Soviet productivism as a theory that sought to undermine capitalism (like Slavoj Žižek (2014), I see such materialization as the wrong Marxism), I show the relevance of a historical argument for a Marxist pro-abortion politics.*

KEYWORDS: *Eastern Europe, Marxism, Romanian socialism, abortion, psychoanalysis*

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Current debates about »postsocialism« investigate the relevance of the term to current circumstances, given that Eastern European states have become pillars of a world order dominated by NATO and economically sustained by the European Union. The concept raises questions about the ability of socialism to endure, circulate, and take new forms as part of a reflection on urban infrastructures, material objects, and subjective experiences in Eastern Europe. For some scholars, ones who advocate dispensing with the term »postsocialism,« concepts such as the »Global East« (Muller 2019) have the advantage of creating unexpected connections between topics and institutions that have been reduced to regional concerns. In reply, defenders of »postsocialism« (Chelcea 2023) ask for the preservation of the concept since it is anchored in an important socialist history that has represented the ideological glue within and between Eastern European countries.

In this article, I add a different angle to the argument about the relevance of »postsocialism.« In doing so, I focus on the importance of a Marxist ideological critique in debates about abortion. The 2022 decision of the Supreme Court of the United States to overturn

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Roe v. Wade (1973) raises the specter of the consolidation of the anti-abortionist movement in Eastern European countries, which are strongly influenced culturally and politically by the North American country.[2] In this context, I deploy the term »postsocialism« because it gestures to an epistemology of human bodies that has revolutionary underpinnings, one that is different from dominant individualistic ideas about people's identities. As opposed to liberal rhetoric in the US, which has emphasized abortion being an individual right, I recover a Marxist perspective that concentrates not only on a critique of individualism but also theorizes a dialectical view of human bodies. This epistemology had direct and practical effects on the politics of abortion and reproduction in socialist Eastern European states. As Josie McLellan (2011, 1–4) showed, divorce rates soared and abortion became commonplace under socialism, which indicates that Eastern European regimes had a much more emancipatory politics about bodies than their Western counterparts. Historians of sexuality such as Dagmar Herzog, meanwhile, have documented how in East Germany, unlike in West Germany, sexual liberation was engendered by a »combination of institutional structures and strong rhetorical support in the East that made women's work for wages not only possible but also much less guilt-inducing« (2005, 193).

This article first advances the case for abortion by critically assessing Soviet Marxism. The latter offered an alternative to concentration in the US on social constructionism, but it had its theoretical flaws. I introduce the idea of a »productivist body,« which emerges in Soviet and Romanian politics and cinematography as a modality to understand bodies and their political relationships. While social constructionism saw bodies as formed from a natural given material, productivist ones were a vehicle for a Soviet Marxist ideology that aimed to emancipate the entirety of humanity. While I acknowledge the important historical dimensions to productivism, I also argue that it is plagued by its desire to actualize the secret of capitalism (namely, from its viewpoint, class conflict). Based on Slavoj Žižek's (2014, 148–149) ideology critique, I see capitalism's secret (class conflict) as an impossibility around which it actualizes its production of commodities. The article's second contribution is to historicize the abandonment of a Marxist epistemology about bodies in Romania, which reached its zenith in the »Thaw« period (1955 to 1965) when socialist and capitalist regimes had become ideologically closer to each other. In doing so, I trace an ideological shift in Romanian cinema from a productivist body to a politics of natality, which provided the basis for the 1966 banning of abortion in that country. The politics of natality is an attempt to replace a regime of labor production with a new nationalist ideology, as stemming from the actualizing of the national body in the form of producing new citizens. In this version of Soviet Marxism, the real indicator that could overcome capitalism was no longer labor but population increase.

In light of the new anti-abortion politics taking shape in the US, a Marxist case for abortion is still relevant in the form of ideological critique. First, our new predicament needs to create critical temporal and ideological connections to a Marxist politics, which created the material conditions for equality between men and women. »Postsocialism« recovers a dialectical understanding of capitalism, which represents a critique of the key element (class conflict) that plays the role of its own impossibility (Žižek 2014, 148). Second, not only important lessons about how cinematic tropes regarding abortion can travel transnationally but also about how a Marxist epistemology has served as the grounds for pro-abortion politics are provided. In doing so, I argue that a pro-abortion politics is possible on the basis on a critique of individual rights that imagines a better future for all.

Productivist Bodies: Dialectics and the Subversion of Capitalism

Productivism was an important theoretical thread in Soviet Marxism, particularly in its emphasis on destroying an old capitalist system by abolishing its epistemological premises. Instead of merely living in a world, productive bodies were designed to be political and artistic devices to achieve communism. For Soviet Marxists, productive labor was to be »the foundation of the educational process [and the development of the communist child]« (Pavlidis 2017, 1–7). In the words of Anton Makarenko, one of the most influential theorists of pedagogy in the Soviet Union, education was primarily a collective task (ibid., 8). As he also argued, a productivist approach to becoming communist was an anticapitalist program that could lead to world revolution: »The Soviet collective defends the issue of world unity of the working humanity as a matter of principle. It is not merely a biotic unification of people, but a part of the humanity's battle front in the era of the world revolution« (ibid., 9).

Productivism was not only a strong approach in education but also a key philosophy of organizing the political economy of the state. A vital goal for socialists was the refusal of individualistic bourgeois ideology, with Lenin making that task very clear: »We want to establish, and we will establish, a free press, free not simply from the police, but also from capital, from careerism, and what is more, free from bourgeois-anarchist individualism« (C. Vaughn James 1973, 12). As Serguei Oushakine (2014, 203) showed, the political economy of socialists functioned according to a productivist system that rejected the principles of the market economy. Oushakine develops his theory from Boris Arvatov's thinking, who formulated the idea of »a thing« system that offers an alternative to the market-dominated economy. Before becoming a commodity on the market, the product of labor was still »a thing« and was imagined as serving the population's core needs. For Arvatov, as Oushakine (2014, 203) shows, »a thing« was not a commodity in two main regards. First, commodities were designed for the market and did not fit the needs of the people. In reversing this relationship, »a thing« was a product that should correspond to its social value and not to its alleged market one. Second, a commodity relied on a profit-driven marketization that deprived it of its connection to labor production. In turn, »a thing« was aimed at showing its connection to a socialist mode of production and its labor rather to its exchange value. In socialism, not only commodities were transformed but also bodies. The communist production emphasized not only objects but »the forms of being« as well (Arvatov 2017, 111).

The problem with Soviet Marxism, as Žižek argues, is that it sought to discover the secret behind capitalism and to actualize it:

> [T]he thing that it masks is not society's hidden essence, but rather the void, the impossibility around which the old of society structures itself. This is why the »critique of ideology« no longer seeks to pierce the hidden essence. Instead, it subverts the ideological edifice by denouncing the element of the edifice that plays the role of the whole's own impossibility. (2014, 148)

Arvatov's »a thing« falls short here, however, given that it does not allow for the difference between an empty space—»an ahistorical kernel around which the symbolic network articulates itself« (Žižek 2014, 176)—and the real »thing« that is produced by socialist regimes. Soviet realism thus sought to actualize »the thing« itself, namely the excess that undermines capitalism. This was a dominant Soviet productivist epistemology with a basis in Lenin's and Marx's ideas, one that focused on themes such as the relationship between art and the people, the class underpinnings of art, and the role of the artist in supporting the

mission of the Communist Party (C. Vaughn James 1974, 1). In the realm of art, this generated a Marxist epistemology of bodies: the basic function of socialist realism was »to create socialism—Soviet reality, and not an artifact« (Dobrenko 2008, xii). The goal was that every object and human person in socialist countries would become a product of a communist and collective artistic production (Arvatov 2017, 107—108).

In a revolutionary society, the meaning of art was thus to engender new material relations to escape the fetishization of commodities. Socialist sexed bodies were not only created by communism but they were elements that also sought to lead this transformation. For Soviet Marxists, the process of achieving communism was more important than the idea of a final stage where it had been fully actualized. One of the main innovations of socialism was the emphasis on production itself rather than on a product of labor (Dobrenko 2008, xviii). Communism being considered a process of production is key to understanding the reconceptualizations that would take place in Soviet socialism. This theoretical novelty had extraordinary consequences regarding the production of sexed bodies. Rather than products in themselves, as per individualistic understandings, socialist bodies were a collective entity that accelerated the movement to a higher phase of historical consciousness. Instead of having a gender waiting to be discovered, productive bodies were organized around an epistemology that aimed to fully realize humanity's potential as a whole.

The difference between the theories of productivism and social constructivism point to important ideological contrasts during the Cold War era. Unlike a US understanding of identity, political bodies in socialism were neither individual territories of freedom nor subjectivities who fought the conformism of an established ideology. They produced instead the aspired-to future society by acting in line with the Communist Party (Goldiș 2016, 90). Yet this iconoclasm was abandoned after the Stalinist takeover of power:

> No longer was it necessary to use iconoclasm to attack bourgeois culture, now that the economic basis and social classes that had spawned that culture had been eliminated in the Soviet Union. This is why the Soviet state in the mid- 1930s tilted away from iconoclasm and radicalism in a range of fields, from art and architecture to education and history writing. (Hoffman 2018, 6)

However, Soviet Marxists rearticulated an important element in their ideology: namely how socialism *produces* human subjectivities based on their social value, as opposed to the US emphasis on the social that *constructs* a given body and personality. If the body is a social construction, it does not produce; rather, it merely reflects a social situation that is already given. In turn, productive bodies were imagined as ideological devices to forge better anticapitalist bodies and sexualities. Given that individualism was the tactic and philosophy of capitalism, Alexandra Kollontai, for instance, wanted a communist sexuality that abandoned monogamy: »The old ideal was ›all for the loved one‹; communist morality demands all for the collective« (Carleton 2005, 41). In contrast with a theory that sees gender as the process by which bodies »enter into sociality,« socialism situated human beings in one of material transformation (Verdery 1996, 62).

The process of producing communists was more important than the achievement of freedom for the male and female body alike. The function of the Party was to lead the journey toward realizing communism. In socialist realist films, characters were conceptualized as a critique of the idea of having an individual identity. Since communist ideals did not primarily describe the role of the individual body, they were rather invested in the achievement of collective organizations. Communist bodies, like »the things« produced in socialism, had

rather a use value instead of an exchange one. Via this lens, bodies were, like »things« that had not become yet commodities, entities not separated from their conditions of production. Oushakine (2014, 202) showed that the Soviet system of productivism led to *storage* being its main economic outcome and not, as previously understood, the production of commodities for the market. This emphasis on a process of production vis-à-vis material bodies, rather on the finished product, is consistent with socialists' rejection of individualism. Socialist realist strategies, such as dialectical conflicts between activists and workers, were also designed to generate a new type of human being that had a superior consciousness and education.

How, then, do bodies function as anticapitalist »things« in socialist cinematography? *Alone* is a prototype for master plots in a later Soviet aesthetic (Widdis 2017, 238). It is one of the first Soviet films situated at the point of transition from mute films to audio socialist realism. In it, bodies are shown to become communist when they seek to abolish capitalism. Kuz'mina, a female-bodied city resident in Moscow, has graduated as a teacher and wants to remain and work somewhere urban. She is sent to a post in the Altai Republic. The film critiques the residues of the market economy in the USSR, which were part of Leninist politics in the first years after the October Revolution. What *Alone* does is to show us an interruption in Kuz'mina's desired trajectory because, despite her wanting commodities, she is not yet a commodified subject. Her transformation into a potential Soviet body is realized in an encounter with the sensuous world of the Altai people. In the Soviet imagination, these indigenous people are shown to be closer to labor production and the material world of objects. They grasp, cut, and rub the wool and live in a world where they are part of the natural cycle of life. Widdis (2017, 240) argues that Kuz'mina develops a different sensory relationship to objects when she moves to the Altai, the springboard for her becoming a communist. The film captures the transition from a desire to possess commodities to a socialist experiential world, one deeply connected to the materiality of objects. This new material register is articulated particularly vis-à-vis the use value of objects. In the Altai, Kuz'mina is redeemed because she becomes a producer of »things.« Like the »thing« system that she becomes part of, she turns into a »body thing« whose value is given by her rejection of a profit-oriented world.

A Soviet film epistemology was very influential in Eastern Europe's new socialist countries. For instance, Romania's cinematography after 1948 was shaped by the understanding that communism was an actualized ideal in the new republic, like a production of »what already existed« (Dobrenko 2008, 5). This led to the development of socialist realism in Romanian cinematography, from the 1949 *The Valley Resounds* to late Marxist-inspired films such as the 1982 *Love and Revolution* and the 1983 *Impossible Love*. The idea of a body as a noncapitalist »thing« is present in early socialist films, such as the 1961 *The Man Next to You*. Like Kuz'mina, Corina is a city girl, a lawyer accustomed to urban attractions such as high-end restaurants and museums. But when she falls in love with Ticu, an engineer who works on a construction site in Bicaz in the north of the country, she renounces the city life for that instead of a married woman in a small town. Corina's desiring of the world of commodities is shown by her fashionable shoes, skirt, and shirt, which fit with the urban landscape that they are designed for. Yet, this style of dressing becomes an impediment when she visits her husband on the construction site. The fashionable silhouette, similar to the figure of Kuz'mina's body in front of the kitchen shop, shows the lure of the world of exchange value. Corina fundamentally changes when she becomes a piece of a larger assemblage producing state socialism. After she abandons her passive role of wife, she not only contributes to building the dam but also becomes a communist person. The white

shoes disappear; Corina, like Kuz'mina, becomes part of the production of »things.« Her subjective self is less of a commodity and more of a piece in a socialist assemblage that is deeply connected to the conditions of producing her own existence.

This socialist epistemology of bodies was deeply entrenched in Romanian socialist film productions. In *The Valley Resounds*, the boundaries between masculinity and femininity were subsumed to Marxist goals of revolutionary activity. Put differently, gender does not exist in this film outside the call to abolish a bourgeois distinction between the »male« and »female.« A key moment in the film is when we are shown that bodies under socialism have to be read according to a productivist labor politics and its refusal of individual identity. Radu, a miner from Lupeni, returns to a construction site (șantier) to bury his brother who was accidently killed following an act of sabotage by nefarious capitalists. When he walks on a dirt road close to the șantier, he is surrounded by his comrades who cheer him up: »Courage, Radule« (»Curaj, Radule«). Radu decides to speak to his comrades and honor his dead sibling. What does he say to praise his brother to an audience of workers who are mourning the death of their comrade? Radu tells them that »Petre was a good, trustworthy kid. He was like a diligent girl. They did not care enough for his life.«[3]

In *The Valley Resounds*, abolitionist politics rests on the possibility of the reversal of bodily identification, so that man and woman can lose their anchor in capitalism. Socialists took the abolition of capitalism's sexed identifications as seriously as the production of communist people per se. Unlike in the US model of gender performativity, Radu's speech is not an act of disidentification from heteronormative socialism. Radu upholds the political establishment and does not criticize it. His statement is not an act of freedom either, one whereby a heroic character fights against a system of injustice that he/she denounces publicly. The moment of praising a male-bodied character as a girl is, rather, an act of disidentifying from capitalist norms about strictly male and female roles. To praise Petre as »the diligent girl« shows that in the socialist world one could move away from a single sexed identification. In Romanian socialism, the state project had at its core the aspiration to educate a new generation of young activists—not unlike what McLallen (2011, 26) noticed about East Germany's communist youth. Discipline children, indeed, but keep an eye also on their process of moving beyond capitalist ideas about men and women.

In relation to Soviet Marxism, the current analysis of gender erases the communist ideal of abolishing capitalist sex roles. Verdery (1996, 66) insightfully noted that categories of gender were deployed by socialist leaders in Romania as ones of political education. For instance, even when he described it as a woman's supreme mission, the socialist president Nicolae Ceaușescu presented »motherhood« as a profession, which helped equalize »male« and »female« forms of work. Yet the crucial question here is whether gender, along with its assumptions about freedom and individuality, can give us a true account of what socialism was. While male-bodied workers were overwhelmingly idealized as part of the future of socialism, they also showed the path to human emancipation. While gendered identities can reveal a structure of inequality that was to be found at the heart of state socialism, the problem with dispensing with this theory is that doing so eliminates also the Marxist epistemological assumptions about communist bodies. In turn, to rehistoricize socialist histories I draw on the concept of »productive bodies« as a way to excavate a rival theoretical view of gender difference. Rather than acquiring a gender identity, be that of male or female, socialists saw communist bodies as unfinished »things« that sought to destroy the capitalist system.

A second important component of socialists' refusal of individual gender was the dialectical relationship that involved two or more than two individuals. Building communism involved a historical process featuring struggles and failures, but one that could follow the overall direction of human emancipation. In socialist realism, communism emerged from a relationship between two kinds of heroes: the party activist who is sometimes depicted as intellectually brilliant but removed from real problems and the working-class hero who is uneducated but can act effectively to promote socialist goals. In many accounts, dialectics functioned when a party activist and a worker guided each other along the path to communism. This process was theorized not only at the level of method but also of cinematic aesthetic. The technique of montage was considered key to a new Soviet understanding of art and film production. It served as a principle of producing a new society, as well as art objects, by placing two elements in a formative relationship with one another. Unlike the historical strategy of the bourgeoisie, which was focused on representing reality in art (or what Arvatov calls »depictive art«), productivism called for the dialectical production of facts. In Arvatov's words, art should create a new society by uniting an objective gaze with »a montage of actual facts« (2017, 118). When discussing the latter, Arvatov was, like the Soviet film director Lev Kuleshov, interested in the capacity of art to produce a new element out of two juxtaposed images.

The classic example hereof in socialist realist film is *Chapaev*. In it, the party activist and the Red Army commander have a tense but productive working relationship. In *The Valley Resounds*, too, the party activist has to work with ordinary workers such as Petre and Radu to fight against capitalist saboteurs. When one dies, the surviving one becomes the person embodying revolutionary hope. Such dialectical conflict is important to the realization that communism is primarily a productive and collective activity of bodies, in contrast with the liberal model concentrated on the transformation of individual identity. In socialist narratives, film characters are helped by other participants in the same struggle to become productive. Individual transformation has to be oriented toward the transformation also of the collective. In *The Man Next to You*, Ticu and Corina change roles with regard to their work on the construction site. When Ticu works as an engineer, Corina is a housewife, but they swap roles when Ticu loses his job and Corina becomes involved in the construction of the dam. The film suggests that they need to help each other in the construction of socialism, while the party secretary, Muică, and other committed comrades are also intricately involved in this process. The film shows that producing socialism cannot be done without laboring with others to produce goods that fulfill people's needs. Similarly, *The Valley Resounds* also focuses on the collective nature of producing a new society but seeks to show further how party activists and workers strive for the same goals.

In productivist theory, the gender categories of »man« and »woman« consolidate the norms of Soviet communism and do not function as potentially subversive identities that are discriminated against under capitalism, as Medevoi (2005, 320) suggested in his critique of queer theory. More than that, categories such as »masculine« and »feminine« were not praised in themselves as valuable, but were instead part of a process of building a new communist person. As Žižek (2014, 185) pointed out about Soviet productivism, its Marxism functioned, however, as a phantasy that did not articulate a full-fledged ideological critique. Soviet Marxism fell short of understanding that dialectics is not primarily about the actualization of a subversive element in capitalism; rather, it is primarily the presence of an impossibility that has historically made the latter function. Ultimately, Soviet Marxism appealed to the imagined embodiment of the »Big Other,« which created its own problems. A prominent example hereof is Stalin's policies:

> »In his writings, communists are made of sterner stuff, they are not susceptible to everyday concerns, to the passions and weaknesses of ordinary men. It is as if they possess a sublime body beyond their ordinary physical body, that they inhabit the realm »between the two deaths,« that they are, in a certain sense, »walking dead,« still alive and yet unaffected by passions or furies. In short, that they are the immediate embodiment of the Big Other of History.« (ibid., 185)

For Žižek, then, the biggest issue with Soviet Marxism was its flawed understanding of dialectics. His work represents a substantial critique of this body of work, achieved by proposing a different Hegelian psychoanalytic theory that derives from other assumptions and leads to alternative conclusions. The actualization of genuine class conflict, as would be articulated in Soviet Marxism, is cemented as an impossibility in psychoanalytic Marxism.

The Gradual Disappearance of the Productive Body

We now move on from early productivism in the USSR to the politics of sexuality in Romanian state socialism in the mid-1960s. Focusing on a 1964 Marxist Romanian film, *The District of Gaiety*, it will be shown how the increased role of anti-abortion trends during the Cold War led to an important shift in the epistemology of productive bodies in Romanian socialism. During the opening up to economic and cultural exchange with the West, the so-called Thaw, socialism's lines of defense—which were organized around socialist realism and productive bodies—started to be seriously transgressed. The US had an important impact on Soviet cinema and television during the Cold War era (Zhuk 2014, 593). The key to inserting capitalist tropes in state socialism's art and cinematography was to integrate them into Marxist ideology. If in *The Valley Resounds* the plot centers on the fight for the abolition of capitalist gender roles, *The District of Gaiety* suggests a change now to new goals such as participating in the increase in population size to help win the Cold War. The anti-abortion themes addressed in the film indicate a gradual withdrawal from the epistemology of Marxist productivism.

Rather than looking at Romania's policy of limiting abortion as derived primarily from the ideology of state socialism, as Gail Kligman (2000, 12–15) claims, I introduce the abortion politics of Romanian socialists in the broader context of the Cold War. While the USSR and most of the Eastern European countries had pro-abortion laws, Ceaușescu's Romania chose to limit abortion drastically after 1966. Abortion had been legal for the first time in the history of the Romanian state between 1957 and 1966. My claim is that the Romanian policy of severely restricting abortion was shaped by an international trend toward naturalizing conservative sex roles, as playing out at the end of the 1950s in Europe around the themes of Nazism and its aftermath (Herzog 2005, 96). The conflict between Eastern socialism and Western capitalism was a war over biopolitical weapons such as demographics. As part of this conflict, the idea of natality became a key element in defining the role of women under socialism. Romanian Marxists thought that natality politics offered them a competitive edge in their fight against capitalism, particularly given the growth in birth rates in the US after the Second World War. Both the West and the East wanted to oversee an increase in population size as proof that their politics is better than that of their systemic competitor.

In a psychoanalytic Marxism such as Žižek's, we can understand this transformation from actualizing »the thing« of labor to »the thing« of natality. This ideological fight had a direct impact on Soviet-style communism in Romania, which previously depicted the so-

cialist body as a weapon to help abolish capitalist sex roles. In *The Valley Resounds*, Radu and Sanda are, accordingly, two characters mobilized to show how to destroy such undesirable norms. Under Romania's mid-1960s state socialism, however, the politics of sexuality had shifted to communists now helping the state to produce more children instead. How did socialist politics about natality also change?

Herzog (2005, 64) offers a potential answer here in focusing on the shifts induced by attitudes toward Nazism after the Second World War. »Nazism« was now used as a term and ideological formation to explain everything related to sex: from the alleged marital crisis, to issues of sexuality, to the disappearance of eroticism. In post–Second World War Germany, for instance, Nazi politics constituted the main referent for public debates about sexuality (ibid., 72). While the figure of the Nazi had a particular role in Germany, it was also deployed in state socialism to support its demographic politics. Herzog traces an important transformation at the beginning of the 1950s, when conservative politics intensified its rhetoric: »Many of the sexually conservative attitudes now customarily associated with the 1950s, and particularly with the especially stuffy West German version of them, only became consolidated gradually in the course of the early 1950s« (ibid., 72). The Catholic Church had an important role to play in arguing for sexual restraint. It utilized and solidified the perception that there had been a close connection between Nazi criminality and sexual pleasure (ibid., 75). To mobilize opposition to abortion and contraception, Catholics attacked Nazi politics as that of unrestricted sexuality. Walter Dirks, a postwar Catholic intellectual, bluntly argued, for instance, that abortions emerged from Nazi ideology (ibid., 76).

The conservative movement in Germany deployed the Nazi legacy to underscore why some issues had to be addressed while others must remain undiscussed. For instance, the Nazi emphasis on pleasure and sex outside of marriage was completely discarded since it was a key element that contradicted the narrative about Germans being victims of national socialism. The conservative movement gained many supporters because it was able to portray itself as an answer to the evil of the latter, provided that it presented itself as victim rather than »supporters and beneficiaries« (ibid., 104). Nazism deeply affected not only right-wing politics but also the left's. Unlike what the student movement believed at the end of the 1960s—namely that the Third Reich was sex hostile and pro-family—conservative postwar politics was a new invention in reaction to Nazism (ibid., 98). Both the left and the right in Europe put at the core of their political proposals a refusal of Nazism's legacy, yet they chose different elements to emphasize as key to their respective programs.

In *The District of Gaiety*, anti-abortion politics derives from the same aversion to Nazism that Herzog describes in her study. The socialist epistemology of productive bodies incorporates conservative ideas, given that the problem of natality takes center stage. In the film, Lia and Dima are two young people who are fighting on the side of the Romanian Communist Party. The action takes place sometime in 1938, when a coalition of right-wing parties are in power in Romania. The main theme of the film, namely that true love between comrades leads to marriage and children, is foregrounded from the opening shot. The film starts not only with a wedding in »the district of gaiety« (Rahova neighborhood in Bucharest), but also with Lia and Dima's first meeting at the cinema. The initial shots combine a bride dressed in white and the march of a wedding party with Lia and Dima flirting and walking side by side. The conflict in the film derives from the protagonists' efforts to overcome various obstacles to their continued relationship. Lia's older brother, Gheorghe the second (Ilarion Ciobanu), does not like the budding flirtation between his sister and Dima. In addition, the police try to arrest him and blackmail Lia into denouncing her lover.

In comparison with *The Valley Resounds*, the emphasis in *The District of Gaiety* is on the romantic interest between the two young communists. Kollontai's desire that communism should not be about the individual love of two persons but about a collective process of forging a new society has disappeared from the concerns of Romanian socialists. While Radu and Sanda in *The Valley Resounds* fight for the abolition of capitalist gender roles, Lia and Dima are two characters that share conservative assumptions about marriage and the politics of reproduction. Whereas Radu and Sanda's relationship is a product of the fight against capitalism, Lia and Dima end up in conflict with the fascist police by accident.

The District of Gaiety justifies anti-abortion politics as an effect of opposition to Nazism. The plot in the second part of the film revolves around a political murder. Dima witnesses the assassination of a socialist journalist who denounced the exploitative politics of the Rahova factory, runs away, and hides while the police seek him out. Lia is threatened by police agents, but she manages to warn Dima that they are looking for him. The scene that follows Lia's intervention takes place in the office of a gynecologist. The head of the police (Commissar Buhăneanu), who is portrayed as a Nazi, enters the room and asks Lia if she wants to have an abortion. Lia says »no« and leaves the room. The head of the police then asks »the other« people to enter. Female-bodied people, who we learn are sex workers dressed provocatively, enter and take off their clothes. The camera follows the gaze of the commissar who stares intensely at the half-naked bodies. We are watching the sense of satisfaction that the commissar extracts from the scene. He takes off his glasses and his gaze alternates between sexual arousal and childish innocence. To portray Buhăneanu as a voyeur, the film connects the commissar's sexual curiosity to his threating behavior toward Lia.

A conservative politics of sexuality begins to inform, then, the socialist narrative about the future of Marxist society. This represents the deployment of productivism in the new circumstances of an emerging Cold War debate about natality. Sexual pleasure and Nazism are indistinguishable, almost as if they cannot be thought of separately. In the following scene, Lia is beaten by a police officer who informs the commissar that she does not want to denounce her lover. In response, the commissar tells Lia that she will be released from detention if she betrays Dima. When she refuses, Buhăneanu threatens her with abortion. Lia begs the doctor to let her keep the baby. The commissar calls the doctor and asks him to perform the abortion. The doctor refuses because, he argues, his professional ethics will not overstep the explicit interdiction of a patient. The commissar uses Nazi language to argue that the hysterical communist, »Lia,« will give birth to a criminal and a degenerate, who will be of inferior race. As a final argument, the commissar claims that in the Third Reich abortion politics with regard to communists is official law. The doctor tells Lia that she needs to keep a secret and asks her to pretend that she had an abortion. To show how generous the doctor is, his final line is »God bless you« (»Dumnezeu să te ajute«)—serving to contrast his religiosity with the commissar's fascism. To underscore the message about the increasing danger of Nazism, the following shot is an excerpt from a newsreel about Hitler and goose-stepping SS soldiers.

The District of Gaiety marks an important shift in how productive bodies are deployed in Romanian socialism. Reproduction thus becomes a key site for justifying the politics of the Romanian Communist Party. Like in Germany, where Catholic intellectuals deployed images of Nazi sadists to buttress support for their cause, national socialism helped Romanian socialists to increase the pressure to regulate sexuality. Abortion was an issue that simplified a broader range of topics touching on body control and desire. To prepare the grounds for justifying the Party's decision to severely limit abortions, the film deploys women's bodies to promote a rhetoric of natality. A woman consciously keeping her child is

counterposed with a Nazi who wants to deny her that choice. Women's decision to have babies, as a measure to fight Nazism, was an important element in anti-abortion rhetoric of the mid-1960s. Invoking Nazism was not the only vehicle for strengthening normative ideas about sexual behavior, however. In the 1966 *Virgo*, sex outside marriage leads to the death of two young people by suicide. The vehicle for criticizing nonnormative sexuality herein is not the figure of the Nazi but Greek mythology, which cautioned that unrestricted sex can lead to incestuous relations. Unlike casual sex, which can be tied to multiple stories about the sources of such deviant behavior, abortion politics had to be politically connected to the legacies of Nazism.

If we compare *The District of Gaiety* with earlier Soviet productions, the difference vis-à-vis abortion politics is significant. In the 1927 *Bed and Sofa*, Liuda chooses to keep her baby despite the opposition of her two lovers. In the film, Liuda and her husband Kolia live in a one-room basement in Moscow and have marital problems. When Volodia, Kolia's friend, arrives, he starts a relation with Liuda, but he reveals himself to be even more dictatorial and insensitive than Kolia. In the end, Liuda decides to leave town; like Lia, she seems to embody the figure of the emancipated communist. In *Bed and Sofa*, abortion is the strategy controlling men deploy in the face of women's own desires. Like Lia, Liuda refuses to abort—but this time her lovers (Volodia and Kolia) ask her to go see a doctor at a private clinic. Rather than fascism, an abusive and noncommunist masculinity seems to be the target of the director's anger here. Both in the USSR and under mid-1960s Romanian socialism, pro-natalist policies portray women as liberated—but only when they aspire to becoming mothers. Thirty years later, however, Romanian socialists would need the figure of the Nazi to underscore the necessity of an increased population size to help win the Cold War. The productive body, a key anticapitalist epistemology for Eastern Marxists, hence begins to gradually incorporate elements of a conservative sexuality from Western Europe.

Concluding Remarks

The term »postsocialism« remains relevant because socialism still »has as a potential future,« as Chelcea (2023, 10) argues. Since »›(post‹)socialism as an ›unfinished business‹« (ibid., 10) is a condition taken seriously by scholars and activists alike, I proposed to recover a Marxist epistemology about bodies alongside simultaneous acknowledgment of its theoretical failings. To offer an alternative to current individualistic justifications about abortion, I argued that we need ideological critique based on historical examples illustrating not only the potential but also limits of Soviet Marxism here. Instead of the current slogan »my body is my right,« it was suggested to see the human body as the site where the contradictions of capitalism are materialized. Bodies function as an element of their own impossibilities, since they are required to labor, be part of commodification, give birth, and to flourish.

In light of this argument, current forms of pro-abortion politics should not be limited to a liberal defense of bodies as the property of individuals. Abortion rights should be protected, rather, because they allow for a socially flourishing life and the development of multiple senses. In Marx's language, in an emancipated future »the *senses* have therefore become directly in their practice *theoreticians*« (1959, no page; italics in the original). But a Marxist pro-abortion politics also needs to understand the limits of Soviet socialism, which sought to actualize elements that function rather as impossible limits to capitalism itself. Stalinist bodies were supposed to suffer a transubstantiation and become *sublime bodies*, because they incarnated historical necessity (Žižek 2014, 185). And that was the key problem under-

mining socialist regimes. Any positive project of future socialism should understand that revolutionary bodies need both an emancipatory element and a serious account of their actual material impossibility. By working with this paradox, we can start accepting a defense of Marxist pro-abortion politics moving forward.

In this article, it has been shown that socialist Romania offers two key historical lessons about gender and abortion. First, anti-abortion politics were embraced because, at least in cinematography, the socialist government absorbed the conservative politics about natality of Western European countries. During the Cold War, the politics of demography had become a key point of contention that led to Ceaușescu's decision to restrict abortion. A similar historical trajectory can be seen as current possibility, particularly in a political climate that represents a new phase in the old Cold War divide. Demography is a key variable in the economic standoff between China and the US, which makes the recent decision of the latter's Supreme Court relatable to future decisions about the necessary military recruitment to sustain a war. Parties of the right and extreme-right in Europe offer a politics that emphasizes the role of families and natality to help strengthen nation-states. Ceaușescu's anti-abortion decision reveals that film holds a key position in the propaganda apparatus because of its popular appeal and wide availability. The 1966 abortion ban in Romania might serve the anti-abortion politics of current times, which will organize itself—like Stalinism—around so-called subversive material elements in capitalism: namely family, children, and national security.

Second, I suggest that a refusal of anti-abortion politics can be deployed in terms that do not presuppose an individual right to abortion. Instead, a pro-abortion politics can be conceived according to a socialist imagination of human bodies, where they are not deemed individualistic entities but constitute people working together to achieve an emancipated society. In this regard, abortion should not be seen primarily as a right. Instead, it can be conceptualized as a modality by which bodies become part of a revolutionary society that has to fundamentally transform its mode of production. In postcapitalist society, which will have a different distribution of social roles, abortion should be part of fulfilling the needs of all. In pursuing emancipation, our judgments will not be based anymore on individual orientation; we will dialectically transform reality as social organs instead (Marx 1959). The socialist lesson is that, historically, abortion was justified on the grounds that a body would be better at feeling and living than its capitalist counterpart.

Yet, any imagination of a pro-abortion Marxism will have to take into account the eruptions of the real, as emerging from bodies' own material impossibility. Socialist imaginaries need to abandon communist cartoonish bodies, »who confront every obstacle only to emerge stronger still [which] is [the] same phantasy as the cat whose head explodes [after getting] blown off by dynamite but who, in the very next scene, appears once again intact and continues his pursuit of ›the class enemy‹, the mouse« (Žižek 2014, 185). The project of a Marxist pro-abortion politics has not yet started. Our uses of history need to acknowledge that, although important, Soviet Marxist policies were a mistake; paradoxically, this could lead us to a newer form of abortion politics.

Notes

1 This article draws on my previous published work in De-centering Queer Studies: Communist sexuality in the flow during and after the Cold War (Manchester University Press, 2021). I want to thank Dr. Čarna Brković and Dr. Beate Binder for their invaluable assistance during the editing and publishing process.
2 Aratani, Lauren (2022): Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and House colleagues arrested during pro-choice protest. In: The Guardian, 19 July. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/19/aoc-arrested-protest-abortion-rights-democrats
3 In the original Romanian: ›era ca un copil bun, încrezător. Era ca o fată vrednică. N-au avut grija de viața lui‹ (my translation).

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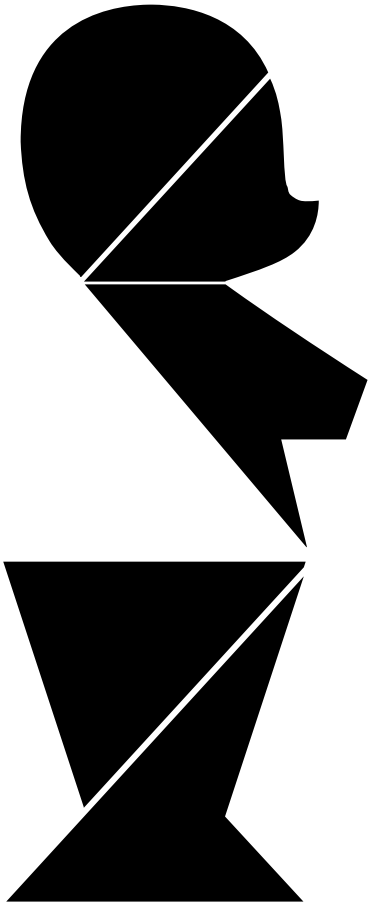
Films:

Romania
The District of Gaiety (*Cartierul veseliei*, Marcus, 1964)
Impossible Love (*Imposibila iubire*, Vaeni, 1983)
Love and Revolution (*Dragostea și Revoluția*, Vitanidis, 1982)
The Man Next to You (*Omul de lângătine*, Popescu, 1961)
The Valley Resounds (*Răsună Valea*, Călinescu, 1949)

USSR
Alone (*Odna*, Kozintsev and Trauber, 1931)
Chapaev (Furmanov, 1934)
Bed and Sofa (*The Third Meschanskaya*, Room, 1927)



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Queering Europe: Anthropological Perspectives in Conversation. A Text Collage

Jens Adam, Beate Binder, Čarna Brković, and Patrick Wielowiejski

ABSTRACT: *Starting from a fishbowl discussion, which has taken place at the conference, this paper discusses what can be gained from thinking across genderqueer theories and anthropological Europeanization research. It argues that thinking queerly includes a skepticism toward identitarian and normative understandings of Europe, as well as an ethnographic attention being paid to that which emerges in the gaps and cracks of Europeanization. The ways in which institutions working in the name of Europe generate heterogeneous experiences resulting in unequal and differentially distributed, multiple Europes are also key. »Queering Europe« oscillates between an emphasis on the central role of the sexual and the gendered in imaginations of Europe and destabilizing notions of Europe in a more general sense; as such, it is closely related to post-/decolonial approaches. This analytical move has three dimensions to it: First, queering Europe aims at deconstructing hegemonic imaginaries of the continent. Second, it makes visible the pluralistic and fragmented nature of Europe(s) and the ambivalent and sometimes unforeseen consequences that processes of Europeanization are accompanied by. Third, queering Europe can be envisioned as a way of imagining and thinking about Europe through a »critical utopianism« (Mbembe 2019) that puts solidarity center stage. Ethnography informed by decolonial critiques as well as by proposals for queering methodologies constitutes our chosen epistemological tool regarding investigating queering Europe as a mode of knowledge production and political vision.*

KEYWORDS: *Europe, Europeanization, queer theory, futurity, critique*

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Recent debates in queer as well as in Europeanization studies have spurred investigations into the idea of Europeanness as inherently liberal and tolerant, especially in terms of gender and sexuality, vis-à-vis an intolerant, pre-modern, non-European »Other.« Indeed, gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity have long played a central role in imaginations of Europe. Consider, for instance, the mythological origin of Europe, the story of Zeus, who was in love with Europa, decided to abduct her from the shores of the Levant, rape her, and make her the first Queen of Crete (cf. Hard 2019). This illustrates not only that these imaginations have been gendered and sexualized—and violent—from their very inception, but also that they have also always been intersectional with other categories of difference.

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Taking our cue from a »fishbowl« conversation during the online conference »Troubling Gender: New Turbulences in the Politics of Gender in Europe« that was initiated by the Commission of Women and Gender Studies together with the Commission Europeanization_Globalization: Ethnographies of the Political in the recently renamed *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Empirische Kulturwissenschaft* (DGEKW, German Association for European Ethnology and Empirical Cultural Studies), we are going to discuss what a queer intervention into critical research on Europe might look like. What can gender and queer scholars and cultural anthropologists interested in studying Europeanization learn from each other? And, what role could ethnography play in exploring and advancing the potentials of this conversation?

When we speak of »Europe« here, we do not mean a clearly limited geographic space, a distinct cultural area, or a historically exclusive »project sui generis.« Along the lines of a critical Europeanization research—as it has emerged over the last few years within the anthropological disciplines (Borneman/Fowler 1997; Poehls/Vonderau 2006; Hess/Tsianos 2007; Welz/Lottermann 2009; Welz 2015; Adam et al. 2019; Römhild 2021)—we understand »Europe« instead as a globally entangled formation, multiple and incomplete, a product and at the same time producer of its colonial projects and imperial relations both past and present (Adam et al. 2019; Chakrabarty 2000). Like in a »hall of mirrors,« it modifies its shape and extent according to one's respective position and angle of view (Beck 2019, 227). Borders, horizons, and relations can shift, »others« once being included, once excluded, depending on a particular standpoint and perspective.

Consequently, the anthropological object of study is not »Europe as such,« but the manifold, often contradictory processes and »projects of Europeanization« (Welz/Lottermann 2009). We need to distinguish hereby between, on the one hand, a descriptive reference to »EUropeanization« understood as a rather narrow, politically intended and driven dynamic, initiated and steered by agencies of or close to the European Union and, on the other, »Europeanization« as an analytical anthropological concept that allows us to examine the multiple, polymorphous, and open-ended processes via which contemporary Europe is produced as a contradictory and internally hierarchized figuration. Some of these processes still take their beginnings in the institutions or policies of the EU, but can still induce unintended and unforeseeable effects once they »hit the ground« in their translocal development; others have their starting points in less visible transborder exchange and relations, through migration movements, and in artistic or political counterprojects (Römhild 2020). As Gisela Welz highlights, this analytical understanding of »Europeanization foregrounds becoming rather than being European, paying special attention to the unevenness and discontinuity of the process, instead of expecting convergence and increasing cohesion« (2015, 5).

Sexuality was examined already in an early seminal article as one of the fields in which these dynamics play out (Borneman/Fowler 1997). We position »queering Europe« as a further contribution to these discussions. What new insights, then, can we gain about Europe as a globally entangled and internally fragile—as well as often brutal—formation, about political struggles around democracy and authoritarianism, about marginalized subjects and emerging utopias when we look at it through a queer lens?

Our title uses the word »queer« as a verb on purpose. Thus understood, queering is a deconstructive practice that questions the supposedly unquestionable truths of identity and normativity—not limited, indeed, to gender and sexuality. As Sara Ahmed writes, »[t]o make things queer is [...] to disturb the order of things« (2006, 161). Thinking queerly about Europe, then, would mean not only to be skeptical towards identitarian, essentialist, and normative understandings of the continent, but to pay attention to that which emerges in the

gaps and cracks of Europeanization, and to focus on the ways in which institutions working in its name generate heterogeneous experiences resulting in unequal and differentially distributed, multiple Europes (Boatcă 2021). Queering Europe, thus, oscillates between putting emphasis on the central role of the sexual and the gendered in imaginations of Europe on the one hand and destabilizing notions of Europe on the other. In this latter sense, it does not have to refer exclusively to sexuality and gender. It is sensitive to the heterogeneity of experiences in and with Europe, and it also takes into account the roads not taken as well as lost archives. As we will argue, »queering Europe« is not only a deconstructive move but also one that creatively constructs futures otherwise. In short, it is related to processes of re- and decomposing (Verran 2018).

To illustrate our argument, we consider the dividing lines between Europe's East and West, which are oftentimes taken to run between the acceptance of nonnormative sexualities in the West and their nonacceptance in the East. Thus, important for our point of departure, the discursive production of a »homophobic East« is not only a side effect of the EUropeanization of LGBTIQ rights, but rather a constitutive element in the construction of the imagined community called »Europe.« What Stuart Hall (1991) termed the »internalist« story of Europe, the story of European identity that is often told as if it had no exterior, turns out to be one that all too often neglects the legacies of European colonialism and imperialism. A queer critique—that is, a genealogical one of European LGBTIQ subjectivity—can make us aware of the (post)colonial exclusionary operations of the very emancipatory ideals of the fight for LGBTIQ rights. Zooming in on the central position of »coming out« in LGBTIQ identity, Judith Butler asks:

> »For whom is outness a historically available and affordable option? Is there an unmarked class character to the demand for universal ›outness'? Who is represented by which use of the term, and who is excluded? For whom does the term present an impossible conflict between racial, ethnic, or religious affiliation and sexual politics? What kinds of policies are enabled by what kinds of usages, and which are backgrounded or erased from view?« (1993, 19)[1]

Focusing on such questions, critical debates around notions such as »homonormativity« (Duggan 2002) and »homonationalism« (Puar 2007, 2013) have taken center stage in queer studies in recent years—as we will elaborate on later.

But it is particularly queer of color critique that has highlighted the potentials of the term »queer« beyond a focus on the sexual and its intersections with other categories of difference. The concept of »disidentification« introduced by José Esteban Muñoz is a good example of how a queer notion can be used to understand processes of marginalization more generally. »Disidentification,« Muñoz writes, »is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship« (1999, 4). In this sense, Fatima El-Tayeb makes use of disidentification as a »minoritarian strategy of queering ethnicity« (2011, xxxiii). We believe that this could be a good starting point for queering Europe as well.

In the following, we would like to suggest that there are at least three dimensions to these issues worthy of further exploration. First, queering Europe aims at deconstructing hegemonic imaginaries of Europe. In this sense, queering can be mobilized as an oppositional project against both homonationalist renderings of Europe as an imperial liberal formation and the protectionist, neo-authoritarian counterhegemonic forces that strive to

generate a purified, essentialist, and identitarian notion of the continent. Second, queering Europe makes visible the always multiple and fragmented nature of Europe(s) beyond such normative and identitarian imaginaries. It asks us to pay attention to the ambivalent and unintended consequences of Europeanization. In this sense, queering problematizes simplified dichotomies of East and West or North and South, and highlights both internal European differences and the postcolonial entanglements of Europe with its external »Other.« Third and finally, we envision »queering Europe« as a »critical utopianism« (Mbembe 2019) in the sense that it makes visible ways of imagining and thinking about Europe in which solidarity is put center stage. In this sense, it takes inspiration from queer and feminist imaginations for other ways of being in the world. Queerness, thus understood, is the »warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality« (Muñoz 2009, 1).

In all three dimensions ethnography is our chosen epistemological tool, as informed by decolonial critiques as well as proposals for queering methods and methodologies. This toolkit helps to avoid the problems associated with what Dace Dzenovska calls a »diagnostic mode of knowledge production« (2018, 87). This mode measures how particular people and places fare in relation to an already-defined problem and aims to identify and correct social »ailments« that prevent the presumable full achievement of EUropeanness, understood as a combination of liberal democracy and free-market economy. Our focus on an ethnographically informed mode of critical knowledge production teases out the differential and unequal effects of processes of Europeanization as they are experienced by various actors in different parts of the continent. In order to achieve this goal, we also take gender theories and concepts into account, which we understand as tools that can help us to analyze the power dimensions and the gendered nature of both Europeanization processes and their accompanying effects.

Deconstructing Hegemonic Imaginaries of Europe

In hegemonic, neoliberal discourses of Europe, women's and LGBTIQ rights have been used to legitimize the »war on terror« or the sealing off of »fortress Europe.« This appropriation of liberal values, often considered as universals, in the name of imperial and exclusionary nationalist politics has been discussed for some time via notions such as »homonationalism« (Puar 2007; 2013), »sexual nationalism« (Mepschen/Duyvendak/Tonkens 2010), »queer necropolitics« (Haritaworn/Kuntsman/Posocco 2014), »sexual exceptionalism« (Dietze 2019) and »femonationalism« (Farris 2017; see also, Gutekunst/Hess in this volume). A common feature of homo- and femonationalist discourses is that they postulate the superiority of the West vis-à-vis either an external, uncivilized, non-white Muslim »Orient,« or an internal, not-quite-modern-yet, postsocialist Eastern Europe (although these two points might converge: think here of Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Kosovo). Although women's and LGBTIQ rights have been hard and long fought for in the West time and again (and must continue to be), »tolerance of homosexuals« is now regarded as the defining criterion of Europeanness—or, more accurately, EUropeanness—par excellence (Ayoub/Paternotte 2014). Identitarian LGBTIQ politics, from this perspective, has become an instrument of governance: it is but a tool for a Western European exceptionalism that claims that it is only here queer people can live well, for the establishing also of parameters to measure »developmental progress« throughout the world.

The case in point is (South)Eastern Europe, where the EU institutions have taken the success of LGBTIQ activism as a litmus test for the »European progress« of various coun-

tries (Renkin 2009). Understanding EUropeanization as a normative and civilizing project, embodied in the protection of LGBTIQ people's human rights, has made it impossible to consider how to relate forms of belonging and difference that have been historically developed in Southeastern Europe to contemporary LGBTIQ politics. One example are the traditional forms of queerness and third sex / third gender expression in Southeastern Europe such as ostajnice / burrneshe / »sworn virgins.« This local form of what Herdt (1993) calls »third sex / third gender« has been described by ethnologists (Šarčević 2004; Kaser 1994), but left out of most contemporary theorizations of queerness and gender in the region (but see Kapetanović 2022; Brković 2021a).

Another issue is that EUropeanization as an LGBTIQ framework has created »binary and exclusionary Queer / Islam divisions that prevent the emergence of intersectional solidarities and subjectivities such as queer and Muslim« (Rexhepi 2016a, 32; see also, Slootmaeckers 2020). The process of EUropeanization has motivated policymakers in Southeastern Europe to make sure to fulfill the EU-prescribed parameters of progress in order to advance their country's accession. This has foregrounded fast-paced legal changes in the area of LGBTIQ human rights protection. Yet, social transformations might take a different tempo from legal changes. Queer anthropological and sociological researchers have shown that the focus of LGBTIQ activists on legal change meant that questions of how racism, economic (in)equality, and class issues shape coming out and queer visibility have received much less activist attention. This has resulted in the rendering invisible of certain forms of vulnerability and hurt of LGBTIQ people who live on the European peripheries, especially in its rural parts (Bilić 2016).

In the process, »complex queer subjectivities among Muslims in Albania and Bosnia are essentialized and reduced to Eurocentric binary sexualities to promote European belonging in these two countries« (Rexhepi 2016b, 147). In Croatia, as Nicole Butterfield (2016) shows, relying on the external pressure imposed by the EU, major LGBTIQ activist organizations have focused on lobbying for legislative protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In doing so, they have constructed a hierarchical differentiation between what they call »professional activism« focused on legal change and so-called amateur or cultural-based activism. These organizations have embraced lobbying strategies similar to those used by transnational LGBTIQ organizations in the EU. These professionalized approaches have reproduced discourses of human rights and European identity that may foreclose recognition of difference within the diverse LGBTIQ communities of Southeastern Europe (Kalezić/Brković 2016). The case in point are LGBTIQ people living in small towns and rural spaces, where the ongoing process of coming out undermines the imagined hierarchical distinction between the rural and urban, and merges acceptance and silencing of queerness in complicated ways (Butterfield 2017). The liberal grammar of EUropean discourses of civilizational difference makes it almost impossible to address in theoretical, political, and activist terms how best to support LGBTIQ people in communities where family relationships strongly shape one's economic opportunities and the household economy is vital to survival.

In the wake of EUropeanization as a disciplinary project on the edges of Europe, the Australian political scientists Dennis Altman and Jonathan Symons have observed a rising global polarization on issues of sexual and gender diversity. What they call the »queer wars« between the advocates of LGBTIQ rights as human rights and their opponents is often, as they say, »perceived as an inevitable cultural clash between Western democracies and ›the rest‹« (2016, 3). Indeed, this curious anxiety around sexuality has led to a culturalization of geopolitics. As Phillip Ayoub and David Paternotte note, »actors at both ends

of the ideological and political spectrum repeat [...] this mantra, the idea that Europe and LGBTIQ rights are linked« (2014, 3). LGBTIQ activists both inside and outside of the EU invoke the language of Europe in order to legitimize their positions, while their opponents use exactly the same language to contrariwise delegitimize them. This is evident, for example, in the derogatory term »Gayropa,« which is used by anti-gay, anti-Western forces in Russia (Graff/Korolczuk 2022).

In these antagonistic struggles, however, there is more at stake than a specific civic liberty. The right-wing populist and national authoritarian attacks on the right to abortion, gender activism, or the visibility of LGBTIQ people are directed at constructing a purified political community, one in which women make do with their reproductive role and certain categories of humans are rejected. In many European countries, right-wing populist or national conservative governments have been pushing forward anti-progressive rhetoric and policies as a way to consolidate their grip on power. Attacks on women's and minority rights, the promotion of nationalistic politics of memory, the introduction of religious, often explicitly anti-liberal ideologies in school curricula, or the questioning of academic freedom are just some of the political techniques to move public debate and societal consensus to the right. In countries like Hungary or Poland, these strategies have been combined with governmental measures to take over and dominate public or state institutions. Constitutional courts have been packed with party loyalists, the judiciary instrumentalized for political purposes, and public television and radio stations transformed into one-sided propaganda tools.

Fabricated narratives about the »attacks of the international LGBT movement« against Poland and Polish families, or about migrants »storming Poland's and Europe's external borders,«[2] can easily be circulated through these hijacked infrastructures (Adam et al. 2022). Power takes on authoritarian forms here: divergent positions are excluded and problematized, polyphonic debates closed off, and unbridgeable antagonisms put in place. By queering Europe, we would like to contribute, then, to ongoing interdisciplinary efforts to study how exactly these processes come together. Struggles around gender and sexuality are taken as entry points to study under what conditions democratic power is gradually becoming authoritarian.

These struggles and the accompanying authoritarian shifts have multiple European dimensions to them. In December 2021, for instance, the leaders of numerous right-wing populist and nationalistic parties from all over Europe gathered for the »Warsaw Summit.« Establishing a right-wing alternative to the »progressive« visions formulated in the coalition agreement of the newly elected German government was one declared intention of this meeting: a Europe of independent »fatherlands« based on »normal families« and »Christian values,« with fortified external borders instead of the successive federalization of the EU and a gradual but steady transfer of national sovereignty to supranational institutions.[3] Anti-gender and anti-migration rhetoric and policies provide the basis for this dystopian, transnational vision of a purified, white, and heteronormative Europe.

A racialized idea of the continent forms the background to further political projects, too. Homonationalism, on the one hand, can be understood as a hegemonic relation that positions subjects along the axis of civilized/modern/tolerant/Western/liberal versus barbaric/primitive/violent/non-Western/illiberal. For those seeking to oppose neoliberal Western hegemony, on the other, this geopolitical relation might rather figure as a fight between a traditional, Christian, masculine, heterosexual, illiberal East and a decadent, sinful, effeminate, gay, liberal West. Either way, in both of these opposing hegemonic projects, Europe is imagined as a white community in need of protection from others that threaten its very

essence—regardless of whether the latter is seen as residing in »Western liberalism« or »Judeo-Christian culture« respectively. Against this background, queering Europe could itself be understood as an oppositional force against phantasies that seek to »purify Europe.«

Showing the Multiple and Fragmented Nature of Europe(s)

In order to counter these developments and to undermine the illusion of the possibility of creating a single unified Europe, it is necessary to better understand the processes of its production. Going further in this direction, critical postsocialist studies might help in the endeavor of queering Europeanization—especially as it resonates with utopian thinking in queer studies. As the recent turn to authoritarianism echoes some of the earlier geopolitical symbolization of the »West« and the »East,« it might be helpful to reconsider Europeanization from the perspective of critical postsocialist studies. Such perspectives strive to decenter Europe in ways that are close to the postcolonial approach, while not necessarily being exactly the same. Critical postsocialist studies start with the question of why postcolonial studies produced knowledge that was accepted as an important theoretical contribution relevant for thinking about other places differently, while postsocialist studies are still largely read as area studies (Chari/Verdery 2009). Although postsocialist studies have generated complex and subtle theoretical insights, to this day they are largely approached, in hegemonic fashion, as a regionally specific body of knowledge: that is, one not having a broader relevance for thinking about other people and places differently. One reason for this discrepancy is the different relationships that postsocialism and postcolonialism have had with Western Europe's sociopolitical orders: postcolonialism is positioned as a clear and unambivalent Other to the former colonial centers in the Global North. Postsocialism, on the other hand, is positioned as sort of an internal Other—not quite one that carries the potential for politically inspiring a world otherwise, but rather a close cousin who »lags behind« and who needs help to develop (Majstorović 2007).

This hegemonic way of positioning knowledge about postsocialist people and places is also reflected in the production of Eastern Europeans as people who are non-»white« whites, non-European Europeans and gendered non-citizens (Blagojević 2009, 27–63). Ivan Kalmar (2022) argues that the process of EU enlargement has been shaped by the logic of racial capitalism, whereby the inability of many actors from Eastern Europe to compete on global markets has been interpreted as a sign of racialized backwardness (see also, Lewicki 2023). At the same time, Kalmar continues, many Eastern Europeans project the same kind of racialization onto others, constructing whiteness as key to legitimating their own European belonging.

The project of EUropeanizing Eastern Europe has left no space to think together with actors from that very region about how to organize polities and societies. Hegemonically, EUropeanization was understood as a »transfer« of knowledge—this has included policy and legal knowledge, as well as knowledge on how to organize the entirety of society in accordance with »European values« (Lendvai 2007). Hegemonic ways of conceptualizing that transfer of knowledge assume it to move in only one direction: from the European centers to the (South) Eastern European periphery, which must use and implement this knowledge to »catch up« with the rest of Europe. Yet, moving academic, policy, and cultural knowledge is never a unidirectional process with clear points of departure and arrival: knowledge becomes interpreted, inflected, and reworked as it moves across locations (cf. Clarke et al. 2015).

In our reading, to queer Europe would mean, then, disturbing this conventional, hegemonic direction of the production of the continent, and understanding better how knowledge about sexuality and queer people participates in these processes. Queering Europe could mean dismantling the hegemonic geotemporal nature of EUropeanization and its dominant ideas about political development, delay, and the need to »catch up,« as Bojan Bilić and Sanja Kajinić (2016) suggest. Empirically grounded cultural research is, hence, vital for complicating and provincializing the hegemonic temporalities of EUropeanization. Rediscovering that the first European festival of lesbian and gay film was held in socialist Yugoslavia in the 1980s, Kajinić (2016) illuminates a complex and ambivalent trajectory of queer visibility in Slovenia, where socialism, capitalism, democracy, and grassroots activism have come together to form a messy constellation that challenges the linear progress implied by the image of the »end of history.« Rahul Rao suggests »to provincialize the time of Western modernity« and »to make visible the manners in which subjects and populations placed in positions of temporal belatedness, or outside of time altogether, have ›defied, deflected, and appropriated‹ their temporal emplacement« (2020, 26). In line with such analytical moves, we suggest that queering Europe allows us to consider the ways in which variously positioned queer people do not lag behind or progress ahead of others, but simultaneously constitute part of the continent's political present.

Queering Europe as »Critical Utopianism«

Following Rao's reflections, we see a third possibility for queering Europe. We propose to connect to debates in queer studies about temporalities, the assembling of new archives, forms of the latter that allow us to imagine a being otherwise, and the possibilities of queer futures. That is, we relate our reflections to ongoing feminist and decolonial debates about archives and archiving practices. With their broad understanding, these debates address the archive as an institution as well as its imaginative horizons (Bradley 1999; Danbolt et al. 2009; Hartman 2007, 2009, 2019; Arondekar et al. 2015). There are at least three potential points of departure in queer debates on temporalities. The first, related to the above-discussed politics of homo- and femonationalism, investigates the politics of time as a driving force for the production of the dichotomies, such as progressive/backward or modern/primitive, which inform the imaginary of the outlined East-West divide.

As Neville Hoad (2000), among others, has shown, the spatialization of time is used not only to construe racial otherness but also allows sexual difference to be taken as a marker for racialized hierarchies. Following Hoad, Rao argues that it is not only the notion of sexuality and its interconnection with a Western concept of selfhood that is part and parcel of the postcolonial situation, rather the very project of queer politics itself: »[S]eeking to win recognition for a diversity of sexual identities to which individual selves might have access, contemporary LGBT activism is both enabled by and further entrenches ontologies of personhood originally forged in conditions of colonial modernity« (2020, xix). Thus, the ongoing fight of gaining hegemony in the field of sexual politics might itself be so deeply entangled with modernist concepts that they contradict the endeavor of queering Europe. But is not this critique itself a product of a privileged situation, or at least of a relative safety and predictability to the social (cf. Loick 2021)?

Per the famous words of Wendy Brown, there have always been rights that »appear as that which we cannot not want« (2000, 231). The »suffering of rights« (Brown 2000) becomes even more paradoxical in the current moment, with LGBTIQ rights and those of sexual au-

tonomy now being endangered or even already denied again in certain parts of Europe. Nonetheless, we may look, with Rao, at the ongoing struggles from another point of view, not so much critiquing the entanglements with modern concepts but in seeking to make use of the differing temporal situations. Rao suggests that even though »queer postcolonial presents are marked by the shadow of both past and future« these »temporal zones« themselves offer »distinct resources and terrains for struggle« (2020, 10). Or, put differently, the temporal zones within the contradictory situations found all over Europe may offer ways to transcend »business as usual« even vis-à-vis queer politics and contain some of those utopias that allow one to imagine another world.

Here, the second strand of discussion takes its starting point. It is strongly related to the notion of the »simultaneity of the non-simultaneous,« coined by Ernst Bloch (2016) to understand the temporal logics of Nazi Germany. Taking up this notion, a nonlinear understanding of history is the point of departure for disentangling the different layers of time. In so doing, it is possible to acknowledge and reflect on how the present accommodates numerous and sometimes radically differing temporal life worlds (Danboldt et al. 2009; Freeman 2010; Muñoz 2009). In respect to processes of Europeanization in the sense we elaborated above, taking up the concept of the »simultaneity of the non-simultaneous« offers two possible directions of onward travel. First, it allows us to understand Europe as always having consisted of different realities—threatening and deadly for some, full of privileged spaces of possibility for others (Das 2010; Berlant 2011). Second, it opens the possibility to grasp traces of a utopian future already existing in the current moment.

From this point of view, »queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future« (Muñoz 2009, 1). Muñoz's plea for an »insistence on something else, something better, something dawning« (2009, 189) is meant to transcend the here and now in pursuit of a utopian longing. He offers »cruising utopia« as »a flight plan for a collective political becoming« (ibid., 189), a search for the »not yet« (Bloch, cited in Muñoz 2009, 4) in the face of political pessimism and all-too-easy pragmatism:

> »It is important not to hand over futurity to normative white reproductive futurity. That dominant mode of futurity is indeed »winning,« but that is all the more reason to call on a utopian political imagination that will enable us to glimpse another time and place: a »not yet« where queer youths of color actually get to grow up.« (Muñoz 2009, 95f.)

From this point of view, a queer future might become imaginable. Namely, one in which dwells »a queer subject [...] »who is abstracted from the sensuous intersectionalities that mark our experience« (ibid., 96). Here, queerness »should and could be about a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough« (ibid., 96).

To get there, speculation may be a viable tool—and this introduces the third strand of discussion that might be taken up for the project of queering Europe. Speculation, which has long been part of feminist theory and practice, has a capacity for analyzing normative order structures and, in so doing, unfolds a generative and formative power. Historian Saidiya Hartman has demonstrated how this can be done in the face of one-sided and incomplete (colonial) archives. Her speculative narratives fight the gaps in what has been handed down by producing a »counter-narrative liberated from judgment and classification« and offering »an account that attends to beautiful experiments—to make living an art—undertaken by those often described as promiscuous, reckless, wild, and wayward«

(Hartman 2019, xiv). In speculating about the »might have been« of the past, Hartman offers counter-archives. These narratives also disturb the possibility of narration itself (Hartman 2019, 2007), as they do not simply close the gap between the known and unknown, the speakable and the silenced, but actively connect different times with each other and orient already toward visions of the future. Here as well, we can find starting points for queering Europe: This project might benefit from Hartman's proposal to overcome the limits of archives by »advancing a series of speculative arguments and exploiting the capacities of the subjunctive (a grammatical mood that expresses doubts, wishes, and possibilities)« and by deploying »critical fabulation« (2008, 11). Her identification of gaps in archives and the speculation about the not yet fully explored, alongside Donna Haraway's SFs (Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, Science Fiction, 2013) and the re-imagination of current as well as past social worlds, offer powerful tools for strengthening thinking capable of mobilizing an »other« Europe as well.

If in this sense queering Europe also includes »exercises in critical utopianism,« a notion coined by Achille Mbembe (2019), then we need a decisive look at collectivities and their imaginaries as they appear in contemporary practices. During one of his Cologne lectures in 2019, Mbembe recalled Kant's idea of »hospitality« as »one of those rights each and every human being could claim in virtue of his or her being a human being.« Arriving in another country, a person on the move could expect »not to be treated as an enemy«; to receive an answer, at least, once she or he knocks at the door. Mbembe continued on to examine in detail how, in spite of that, this right is constantly suspended by EUropean border policies that have transformed the Mediterranean Sea into a death zone and aim at restricting and preventing the mobility of Africans not only toward Europe but already on the African continent itself.

Based on this blunt analysis of a gloomy and violent present, Mbembe developed the utopian vision of an Africa that »opens to herself« by turning the continent into a waste, borderless »space of circulation,« one in which no person of African descent will be treated as a stranger or asked to leave. From this perspective, we could read the persistent migration projects of many Africans currently crossing borders and hostile environments despite all dangers, restrictions, obstacles, and violent enmity as traces of a visionary future yet to come: »[T]he rising of a new region of the world where we will all be welcome, where we will be able to enter unconditionally [...] and to embrace eyes wide open the inextricability of the world, its entangled nature and composite character« (Mbembe 2019). We take this »exercise in utopian thinking« as inspiration to speculate about comparable ways in which queering Europe can hint at a visionary future.

At the same time, practices of imagining, speculating, and anticipating are also criticized for moving too far away from the object of research and its situatedness (Best 2011; Love 2010). The demand is to endure the banality of the everyday (in the life world, in the archive, in organizational, infrastructural, and institutional logics) and to make this very banality the subject (Stoler 2010). Haraway speaks of a »thick present« in this context, calling for us to endure the intolerability of our times: »In fact, staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or Edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meaning« (2016, 1). But how is it possible—to return to the beginning of this line of thought—to endure the disparity of simultaneity and at the same time to contribute to its transformation (cf. Binder/Chakkalakal 2022)?

Maybe we are already living in a time reorganized by speculation, as Armen Avanessian and Suhail Malik argue in *The Speculative Time Complex* (2016). They posit that »human ex-

perience is only a part of—or even subordinated to—more complex formations constructed historically and with a view to what can be obtained in the future« (Avanessian/Malik 2016, 8). As such:

> »Complex societies—which means more-than-human societies at scales of socio-technical organization that surpass phenomenological determination—are those in which the past, the present, and the future enter into an economy where maybe none of these modes is primary, or where the future replaces the present as the lead structuring aspect of time.« (ibid., 8f.)

In addition to the supposed loss of a political standpoint in the present, another problematic of the future is precisely that it is not only accompanied by exploratory possibilities but also always by normative implications. These are often wrapped up in well-known temporal logics such as development paradigms or evolutionism and heteronormative time logics. That is why Arjun Appadurai (2013) insists on the political necessity of engaging in practices of future-making in order to participate in the politics of time.

Bringing these different aspects together, critical utopianism or speculative futurities must combine conceptual work and sober analysis of historic and present conditions with ethical judgments and visionary forward thinking. With regard to Europe, such an exercise has to begin with an examination of how the militarization of borders, the mobilization of hostility toward migrants, and the strengthening of anti-gender and anti-queer positions work together to transform the continent into a more authoritarian, purified and »white« formation—with imagined futures that threaten the present, and thus ones able to be used to mobilize against unwanted groups and practices. The restriction of access and categorical closures come together with the normalization of majoritarian violence: Queer and feminist life forms are denigrated, the lives of migrants and refugees harmed and put at risk.

Against this background, the stories about alternative concepts of freedom—as elaborated, for example, by LGBTIQ communities in Montenegro (Brković 2021b), or with regard to the aspirations of Eastern European sex workers in Berlin as part of inscribing themselves into European modernity that Ursula Probst (2023) introduced during the fishbowl conversation—might point to another possible future. We read them as elements of a critical utopianism about Europe. They subvert hegemonic narratives and categorical settings, they transgress boundaries and claim presence—that in line with queer critiques of the present and standpoints elaborated within critical Europeanization research. They emerge in the precarious messiness in which many life projects in and across Europe are currently situated. Consequently, we propose queering Europe as a polyphonic undertaking, in which gender and queer studies scholars, political anthropologists, and European ethnologists collaborate to excavate further sources and generate new archives for the development of a utopian vision of Europe. We envision this Europe as a globally entangled region—one where queer subjects can dwell and thrive, and one where difference is always already multiple and never reducible to dualist logics of »us« and »them.«

Notes

1 We understand, as such, the acronym »LGBTIQ« not to be an analytical category but rather a powerful discourse worthy of analysis. Identity categories such as lesbian, gay, bi, trans, inter, or even queer are products of European notions of selfhood and individuality. Furthermore, using the supposedly inclusive acronym »LGBTIQ« can serve to distract from differences and hierarchies between those subject positions, in the way that it appropriates trans, nonbinary, and inter experiences without actually paying attention to them. With this caveat in mind, we use »LGBTIQ« to refer to subject positions at odds with heteronormativity and the binary sex-gender system.

2 We refer hereby to reports and headlines broadcasted by the main news program »*Wiadomości*« of Polish public TV (TVP) in September 2021 (»attacks of the international LGBT movement«) and autumn 2022 (migrants »storming Poland's and Europe's external border«).

3 We are referring again to the wording of reports accompanying this meeting in the news programs of TVP in December 2021.

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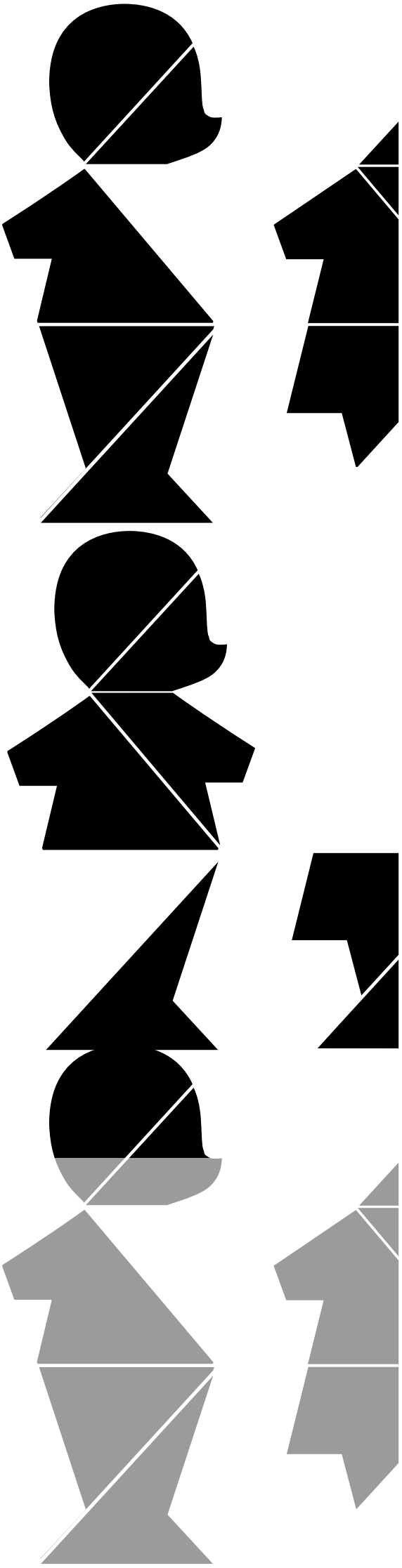

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