Border Internalization as a Gendered Process

A Conversation among Feminist Scholars

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Abstract: This text summarizes a conversation among feminist scholars examining the gendered dimensions of the European border regime, particularly in relation to the underexplored concept of internalization, i.e. how border policies reshape social, political, and normative frameworks. The discussion highlights how borders are gendered, e.g. how discourses and practices around borders often frame migrant men as threats and women as victims. The scholars explore the intersection of gender with race and class, showing how border policies produce gendered as well as racialized subjects. These dynamics extend beyond the border itself, affecting broader societal structures and contributing to the internalization of exclusionary practices within European societies. Against this background, the conversation addresses the lasting effects of colonialism and racialized politics that perpetuate dehumanization and marginalization. Highlighting also questions of methodology and ethical responsibility entailed in researching border regimes, the authors stress the crucial importance of using gender as a critical lens to understand the complex and often violent processes of border internalization.

Keywords: gender, borders, internalization, intersectionality, racialization

In 2023–2024, twenty international border and migration scholars assembled at the University of Bielefeld's Center for Interdisciplinary Research (ZiF) to discuss the social and normative effects of the European Border Regime on societies on either side of the EU's external borders, under the heading of »Internalizing Borders«. While »externalization« illuminates the extent to which states impose border logics, discourses, and practices upon societies and geographies beyond their national territories (Bialasiewicz 2012), »internalization« conceptualizes the discursive, social, and political processes that border regimes unleash ›at home‹. Even among studies that theorize the border as a political technology of citizenship or an ordering mechanism for the labor market, few analyze how the border regime eats into the social and political fabric. A key question of our research group was: How does the EU border regime affect the moral and normative matrix of European societies, eroding basic rights and endangering the democratic system (Cohen 2020)? Whereas our discus-

sions identified race and racialization as central to internalization, gender seemed to recede from view.

The following conversation emerged from a roundtable discussion among five feminist scholars on borders, gender, and internalization convened at ZiF's »Internalizing Borders« workshop in June 2024. Leslie Gross-Wyrtzen works on race and mobility between Africa and Europe, Sabine Hess has published extensively on the genesis of the EU border regime, and Elissa Helms' research focuses on social transformations just outside the eastern borders of the EU. Mareike Gebhardt brought in her perspective as a political theorist interested in the nexus between border regimes and the production of ›Others‹. Levke Harders is a historian working on gender, migration, and bordering in the nineteenth century.

THE GENDER-BORDER NEXUS

Elissa Helms (EH): Political scientist Cynthia Enloe (2014 [1990]) once showed how vast areas of otherwise ignored histories, relations, and dynamics of international politics were illuminated by simply asking »where are the women«? This made sense in the male dominated arena of international politics because gender is relational—finding the women in a system where the gender of men goes unmarked revealed many invisible relations of power that »made the world go round« as Enloe put it (ibid.: 1–18). Although there are more complex understandings of gender than this simple binary, organizing social life around men and women in a heterosexual frame remains prominent both materially and symbolically. Research, including critical migration and border studies, always runs the risk of reproducing an essentialized vision of gender if the heteronormative gender order is not reflected on analytically.

If we ask questions about how gender structures something like borders, we start to see more than static categories of nationality, race, religion, or reason for moving. Gender shapes all of these classifications, leading to different sorts of judgements about the legitimacy of people's aims to cross borders, to ask for asylum or the right to work, or to be granted assistance along the route or upon arrival. The reasons for the existence of borders, what levels of control and surveillance they need, and what sorts of threats are imagined that need to be kept out, controlled, allowed in, or protected are also filtered through normative assumptions about gender and sexuality. And gendered metaphors often extend to borders themselves—they can be cast as feminized objects of protection, symbolized by female figures of the nation characterized as noble mothers or chaste maidens, or framed as aggressive and protective male soldiers armed with surveillance technology meant to protect the (feminized)

nation/land/culture from external threats assaulting the border. My research and that of others has shown that the rhetoric and practices around the current EU border regime are no exception: both within the EU and in places outside it, border discourses promote a militarized masculinity whereby European women—imagined as white and vulnerable—must be protected from young male migrants seen as threats based on certain representations of racialized maleness. In this framing, migrant women become objects of pity or simply invisible.

Levke Harders (LH): As a historian, I am interested in how borders and migration control came into being, how they affected mobile and sedentary people alike, and how the gendered order of European societies relates to border and migration regimes. Borders and their functions have changed throughout history. Historical approaches often connect current borders in Europe to the construction of European nation-states after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and the French Revolution in 1789. These studies often reproduce forms of methodological nationalism and do not take gendered orders of (historical or present) societies into account. They also overlook fundamental power asymmetries in these processes: based on imperial and colonial exploitation, European nation-state building (re)produced highly unequal societal structures that excluded different groups, e.g., mobile people, racialized residents, impoverished people, or women in general. The nation-state and its borders, thus, have always been intertwined with gendered, racialized, and class-based exclusion policies that have to be studied critically (Boatcă/Roth 2016). Borders have had severe impacts not only on marginalized groups but on society at large. This is what the concept internalization of borders is about (Heins 2024): how the current European border regime changes societies within its reach in regard to legislation, politics, normative concepts, emotional registers, and so on. How is exclusion of and violence against certain people legitimized and practiced and what does this violence also do to groups not directly affected by it?

Present processes of border internalization in and beyond Europe are different from the nineteenth or early twentieth century, but there are also continuities particularly in regards to gendered processes of border internalization. For example, the notion of ›migrant masculinity‹ as deviant and opposed to hegemonic masculinities imagined as white, Christian, middle-class, and heterosexual can be traced back to earlier discourses and practices. In my research on European migrants who settled in France in the nineteenth century, I came across letters in which migrant men used and reproduced norms of hegemonic masculinity: writing to state authorities to apply for citizenship, they emphasized their financial solidity, profession, and families to legitimize their belonging to a strictly gendered bourgeois society in France (Surkis 2018,

3; Aprile, et al. 2022). At the same time, movement itself is rather not mentioned explicitly, i.e., the narrative of successful migration is only an implicit argument of belonging. The same is true for race or stereotypes of national or ethnic identities as these migrants within Europe were (seen as) white and Christian. Interestingly—and this is related to border internalization—local and regional authorities, family members, and other social or professional networks supported these gendered and classed arguments for belonging. Central authorities, on the contrary, were less willing to accept these migrants' claims. Gendered ideas of migration, thus, not only influenced a migrant's position and ability to act, but the constant negotiation of exactly who belonged or not changed administrative practices of border and migration control. They also shaped normative ideas of mobility in relation to gender.

What this shows is how gender operates as a transmission belt for border internalization, as Sabine Hess framed it. Gender is not only deeply embedded in and a driving force of policies and practices of border regimes, but it is also an intrinsic part of the broader context of biopolitics and necropolitics, coloniality, and violence—closely connected, of course, to race, class, ability, sexuality, and so on. Gender structures borders. And at the same time, borders affect gender and the gendered order of society.

Sabine Hess (SH): The gender-migration-border nexus certainly has a long history, but the EU border regime gives it a new twist. There is an enormous amount of literature showing how gender helped to organize the nation in a patriarchal, racialized, and nationalized way and that the national claim to protect its ›own women‹ was an invitation to the ›nation's women‹ to integrate into the national project. This nationalized gender in as much as it gendered the nation. Gender was also a transmission belt for the colonial project as it was portrayed and actively enacted as a ›white women's burden‹ to emancipate ›Brown women‹, to paraphrase an insight from postcolonial theory. Both dimensions can be found in the EU migration regime, especially in its early construction phase in 2000. Gender was the ideological glue for constructing the EU border regime with its characterizing mix of securitarian and humanitarian ideologies and policies. Gender—as Miriam Ticktin put it—became the »language of border control« (2008). That means gender was not only the ›subject matter‹ of the European border and migration regime in the sense of how it impacts gendered subjects—analyzed in a vast amount of migration and border studies research on gender- and sex-based violence and discrimination (Freedmann 2016; Shekhawat/Del Re 2017). Rather, as I have argued, the border regime itself is based on the articulation of gender and sexuality, using a lot of ›gender expertise‹ e.g., in the context of the

broad field of anti-trafficking politics. In other words, gender is strategically invoked and performed by the border regime (Hess 2012; Hess et al. 2022).

One of the first policy papers in the EU that worked explicitly with a strong gendered narrative was »Secure borders. Safe Haven« by UK Prime Minister Tony Blair in 2002. It demanded and pushed for externalization based on the narrative of protecting passive and helpless women forced into migration by human traffickers, and it called on the EU to securitize migration routes and to enforce the border regime to combat trafficking (FitzGerald 2012). In a similar way, asylum was used to legitimize a selective, highly securitized system to protect those in need (Hess/Karakayali 2007). This offered the possibility of connecting the border regime with the wider field of international feminist struggles against trafficking in women at the turn of the millennium in the context of the ratification of the so-called Palermo Protocol (Askola 2007; Doezema 2002). Thus, the EU border regime from its onset was built around gendered narratives and politics. Strange alliances emerged between state agents and some factions of the women's movement, especially western, European, state-centered ones, which recognized that aligning with states' punitive functions provided an opportunity to advance their own agendas (Schwenken 2006; Aradau 2004), resulting in what Janet Halley et al. (2018) have called »governance feminism«.

In the aftermath of 2015, we have seen a similar development. We saw an increasing awareness of gender in the field of asylum and reception policies, dominantly framed as ›vulnerability‹ concerns whereas several studies have shown how vulnerability discourses rather victimize refugees and silence them (Elle/Hess 2020). Gender was also used in anti-migration campaigns framing migration more firmly as a security threat. The discourses following the events in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015 have been symptomatic of a new articulation of racism and gender (see Dietze 2017): on the one hand these discourses invoked the trope of a foreign »toxic masculinity«, and on the other hand, they promoted the idea that gender equality is integral to western Europe's DNA and must be defended against the »newcomers« (Keskinen 2018). This post-liberal racism in the name of ›anti-sexism‹ is an ideological cornerstone of the radicalization of some sections of the center-left, now demanding a strong state to protect the liberalism of the middle classes by further securitizing migration (Gutekunst/Hess 2023).

And in fact, we have seen a new surge in ›sexual panic‹ politics related to refugees that has been a vital resource to widely promote racist agendas. Tudor and Ticktin describe this convergence of gender, race and migration as a central characteristic of the contemporary political conjuncture (2021). These »right wing times«, they argue, can be understood as a regime that forces migration, race and gender into the same

frame of reference. This enables right-wing parties like the German AFD to claim that they are fighting for women's rights by demanding to stop »mass migration from archaic cultures« (Gutekunst/Hess 2023: 1). Such narratives orientalize sexualized violence and patriarchal structures and use them as key tropes against migrant communities. They are found not only in the context of far-right parties but across a much wider political spectrum. They also inform recent gender equality measures for refugee women and anti-violence policies in refugee camps where gender equality measures become a disciplining technology, teaching refugee women to bring their male relatives in line with imposed equality standards (Elle/Hess 2023).

Border Subjectivation: Gender, Race, Intersectionality

Leslie Gross-Wyrtzen (LGW): Despite the different locations and temporalities of their research, my colleagues have shown us how gender facilitates the internationalization of securitized border regimes and legitimizes racialized distinctions between ›us and them‹ and ›inside and outside‹. The construction of feminine subjects as vulnerable also enables the production of two hyper-masculine, racialized figures: first, the white, militarized protector who appears as border guard, police officer, or politician who is tough on immigration. And second, the non-white (or Muslim) refugee or migrant aggressor who appears as potential terrorist, sexual predator, or bearer of foreign culture that threatens not only to violate individual women but disrupt the family structure and, by extension, the nation itself.

But there are contradictions within anti-immigrant, ›strong borders‹ discourses. As Sabine Hess noted, even as they reinforce normative conceptions of citizen-masculinity, they also locate traditional patriarchy or hegemonic masculinity outside of Europe—we see this in Gayatri C. Spivak's (1988) classic formulation of coloniality: »white men saving brown women from brown men,« which Lila Abu Lughod (2002) notes often expresses itself through militarization. In this sense, the militarized border is articulated as a way to preserve the liberal, progressive values of Europe even as many migrant and refugee women are victimized by European police, border guards, asylum judges, employers, and condescending aid workers. The border also mobilizes sexuality for its own ends, especially through discourses about migrant men harboring ›regressive‹ ideas that put not only women at risk but queer people as well—what might be formulated as straight white men saving queer brown men from straight brown men (Jung 2015; Puar 2007).

What these examples illustrate is border-work as a process of subjectivation. In other words, the border actively produces gendered subjects who then circulate beyond ›the border‹ to other spaces in and beyond Europe. As a lens, gender illuminates how we are all being produced as gendered (and racialized) subjects through the politics of immigration and practices of bordering, whether we are internal to Europe or not. And that means that society itself is being reworked.

Of course, a gender lens also prompts us to see how gender intersects with other axes of difference, especially race. Stuart Hall famously said of the United Kingdom that race is the modality in which class is lived, meaning that race indexes a particular class position and set of relations—we read class through race, and class struggle plays out through racism and racial politics (1978: 394). I think gender is the modality in which race is lived, especially in the context of internalization. We can agree that immigration is racialized today in Europe, but it is gendered and sexualized subjects who experience this racialization. Black women, women wearing hijab, or women bearing some other marker of non-normative European culture or race, are subjected to the paternalist state that tells them how to raise their children, get an education, which domains are appropriate for them to work (i.e., low-paid care work or other reproductive labor), or that they have false consciousness in believing that they are choosing to dress modestly or live according to a particular set of values read as non-liberal or non-European (Hess and Nagel 2021). Dark-skinned men, brown men with beards, those who pray at a mosque or wear dress associated with a cultural or racial group (from traditional Muslim dress to hip-hop styles) are subject to surveillance and over-policing, or marginalized from the public sphere.

Mareike Gebhardt (MG): Borders (re)produce power. Gender, as an analytical lens, helps us to unpack the violence and inequality inherent to border power. It also draws our attention to how borders reinforce normative and binary orders of sexuality. Heteronormativity is a powerful tool in the hand of border work because it strengthens naturalized visions of the state, the nation, and the family. Furthermore, liberal democratic borders rework and incorporate counter-hegemonic knowledge on gender, sexuality, and, increasingly, queerness. Through so-called vulnerability screenings or asylum interview procedures of LGBTIQ+ refugees, liberal democratic discourse produces tropes, narratives, and understandings that define how people are supposed to look and behave to be evaluated as ›truly vulnerable‹ or »properly queer subjects« (Puar 2017: xxi; Bonjour/Westra/Evaldsson Mellström n.d.). Homonationalism offers another way that EU borders draw lines within liberal European society between those citizens and residents deemed internal to Europe and those who are not (ibid).

To deconstruct the power mechanisms within gendered societies and sexualized orders, feminist epistemologies develop tools that excavate their deep layers. For instance, Enloe's notion of »womenandchildren« shows how femininity and youth are deployed as indicators of victimization to legitimize a hierarchy of rescue (2014 [1990]). In our collaborative research on civil Search and Rescue in the Mediterranean (ZivDem), my colleagues and I find reiterations of this trope regularly. Prioritizing the rescue of women and children presumes them to be normatively more valuable than the rescue of (racialized) men. This knowledge is deeply embedded in the gendered order of European societies. But the hierarchy of rescue is not only known but felt; it activates affective economies in which different affects adhere to different genders. Complicit with the affective economies of bordering are visual representations. Combining knowledge, feeling, and visualization, media outlets often only moralize the deaths of people on the move. Consequently, the European *politics* of letting die are rendered invisible (Gebhardt 2020). Media outlets thus reduce gendered and racialized people to mere victims and deny them political agency. For instance, the media coverage of the Lampedusa shipwrecks in October 2013 and the death of Alan Kurdi in 2015 predominantly focused on the putative tragedy, not on the politics and policies that directly led to these deaths. Meanwhile, images of shipwrecks and unseaworthy boats were so routinely shown to European audiences that people drowning in the Mediterranean became normalized. On the flip side of this politics of visualization are the images of migrant boats full of able-bodied Black and Brown men. Not only in far-right or conservative but also in center-left, white, bourgeois feminist debates, these boats have been (re-)inscribed to a colonial and racist symbolic order that depicts racialized men as hypersexualized predators that threaten seemingly progressive ›Western‹ gender orders and women's liberation. In contrast to representations of women and children as at-risk, migrant men were demonized as risks. The gendered victimization and demonization of ›the Other‹ affirms and thus fortifies the internalization of borders within European societies.

SH: If we think of internalization as the process by which border enforcement policies ›talk back‹, or have effects on the societies that enact them on Others and themselves, I would say that in view of the current conjunctures of the EU border regime, we have to focus on violence as it has been normalized as a legitimate practice against ›rightless‹ Others. Violence and rightlessness are gendered just as they are racialized: European feminist movements have had some success in enlarging rights and repressing violence for *some* women—but never for all. Thereby, racism always also functions as an avenue for *some* women to be integrated into the national project. Currently we see how white women are increasingly active in right-wing women's

movements or in border vigilantism in places like Bulgaria or the US. We also observe in testimonies of pushback victims that border guards and non-state actors conducting pushbacks think of themselves as gate keepers and modern crusaders who are defending Europe as a white Christian project against the barbarian rest. In this, they draw on narratives of absolute otherness marked by fantasies and imaginations of race, ethnicity, regional origin, religion, and gender.

EH: That project of being the »bulwark of Christendom« is especially strong in Central and Southeastern Europe where imperial conflicts between expansionary empires took place historically and have survived in national myths. Heroic stories of fending off the Muslim Ottomans are made to fit contemporary narratives of threats to a white, Christian Europe posed by local Muslim populations or migrants and refugees glossed as Muslim (Baker 2024; Rexhepi 2022). The well-established gendering of nations and of military conflict harking back to Ottoman invasions re-entrenches the notion of Islam as an external military threat, thus making it easy to understand young Brown or Black men crossing borders as battle-capable soldiers, invaders bringing an alien way of life, and sexual threats to ›our‹ (European, white) women – whether they are at the border or within countries affected by it.

Border internalization can also be seen in how racism shapes gender and sexuality in discourses and policies around reproduction (Siddiqui 2021). As immigration and refugee advocates point to European countries' need to reproduce the labor force, some advocate instead for increased reproduction of the (white, middle-class) ›home‹ population (while discouraging births among racialized groups such as migrants or Roma). Hungary has been a stark example of this—virulent and violent measures against irregular (Black and Brown) migrants and refugees have been accompanied by incentives for white (non-Roma) Hungarian women, middle class and educated, to increase births. This is then also tied to the Hungarian government's »anti-gender« campaigns against LGBTIQ+ people that works to prop up a white, Christian, heterosexual family order all in the name of resisting »Brussels« and its demands for Hungary to take refugees (Fodor 2022; Hanebrink 2024). There are several layers here of internalization directly connected to border policies: laws and tax codes, labor participation, access to social welfare benefits, care work, family structures and marriage, relations of sexuality, race, and class are all affected.

MG: When we look at borders, different logics unfold for different groups. These groups are already embedded in a structure and a discourse—the social reality in which they survive—that not *only* genders, racializes, ›straightens‹ or ›class‹-es them in a putatively neat and orderly way. Instead, they are subjected to the intersections

of these different forms of discrimination. To emphasize how »multiple identities can be constantly and simultaneously present within one person's body«, Black, lesbian activists of the Combahee River Collective introduced the idea of intersectional oppression (Taylor 2020; see also Crenshaw 1991). An example of intersectional analysis at the crossroads of activism and scholarship is found in Sylvia Wynter's 1992 open letter to her colleagues following the Los Angeles riots where she exposes the discursive mechanisms of dehumanization that materialize as Black, young, jobless men are subsumed under the category of »N.H.I.«—»no humans involved«. At the intersection of race, gender, class, and age, Black people are not ›only‹ dehumanized but do not count as human at all. Historically, torture, rape, and murder of racialized men, women, and queers were not sanctioned because, as »non-humans«, they did not qualify for protection under the law (Mbembe 2003, Emejulu 2022).

The *long durée* of colonialism, where racialized people were perceived as animals, still haunts Euro-Atlantic societies and Euro-African landscapes and their migration and border regimes (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018; The Black Mediterranean 2021). Colonial racialized politics reproduce a binary gender order that echoes through the work of border internalization, for instance, in the racial profiling of Black and Brown men under constant suspicion of drug-dealing, or in the image that outlines Black and Brown women as available sexual objects of white male desire.

LGW: Black feminist thought is also very much interested in the long historical arc—internalization processes are in some sense specific to contemporary borders, and yet Black feminist thought situates them in a longer arc of anti-blackness and what Hortense Spillers (1987) called the »ungendering« of Black women through violence, through policies that fracture kinship, and through pathologizing narratives. What I have learned from Black feminists is to tell histories of the present in their entirety—what Black Radical thinker Cedric Robinson called the »ontological totality« (2000). That means that we look at the way that the past has given rise to certain conditions of possibility for the production or reproduction of racial regimes in the present *and also* the conditions of possibility for counter-racial projects: the making of (fictive) kin in the face of violent natal alienation, the creation of distinctive cultures and diasporic sensibilities in the face of cultural erasures, the imagining of a more-than-national political geography held together not by violent borders but through shared encounters with these violent borders.

GENDERING INTERNALIZATION RESEARCH

SH: Although gender is a transversal question and cross-cutting issue, I see the need for research with a specific focus on how gender narratives and gender knowledges are applied or taken up by various actors of the border regime—how ›doing‹ the border intersects with ›doing‹ gender and race. In this sense, I definitely see the need for nuanced empirical-ethnographic driven analyses of politics and policies as a mélange of discourses and practices. However, we know that feminist movements and ›gender‹-knowledge have not always been on the ›good‹, progressive side of history. My aim is to understand how questions of gender have been part and parcel of racialized and classed European-hegemonic projects, producing contradictions, ambivalences and paradoxes within feminist politics and struggles—as I have touched upon when referring to the feminist contributions to the formation of post-liberal racism, which promotes racist agendas and a disciplining of the migrant subject in the name of anti-sexism as Esra Erdem has vividly shown already in 2009.

EH: In my work in Bihać at the Bosnian-Croatian border, which became a bottleneck for people aiming to cross into the EU, I see similar gendered expectations of migrants as those applied during the Bosnian war: men as (potential) soldiers and protectors of women/nations, women as vulnerable to rape or agents of reproduction of social groups like nations (Helms 2013). Those questioning the legitimacy of young migrant men seeking asylum in the EU did so through a number of contradictory gendered assumptions: they were Islamic terrorists and would-be soldiers coming to attack Europe, or cowards dishonorably fleeing their duties as men to defend their women and children at home, they were »economic migrants« just after higher wages in the west, or lazy non-workers aiming to feed off of EU welfare schemes. They were not seen as connected to homes and destination countries by ties of family or as potentially vulnerable young people—just aggressive lone actors or members of criminal networks. In contrast, many of the young men and teenage boys I met had been sent abroad by parents or older brothers with the task of sending money back once they secured work in the EU. In these cases, they had not had much of a choice and were also dependent on family to finance their journeys. Migrant women were represented as vulnerable, more passive, whether traveling or waiting at home. Both the humanitarian-migration management system and fellow migrants considered them more vulnerable, seeing their place as in »family camps« and channeling them into more expensive but not always safer migration routes (cf. Tyszler 2019). However, as racialized migrants, women were not necessarily treated differ-

ently by the border regime—they were also beaten, robbed, pushed back, subject to humiliation, and separated from their children or partners.

Within the local Bosnian community, it was the (sexual) safety of people's daughters that was first mentioned when they talked about the dangers posed by migrants. National and ethnic belonging were also evoked in accusations of betrayal against young local women who dated or worked on behalf of migrants. Bodies cast as ›our‹ women and girls then seem to rightly ›belong‹ to men of their (ethnic, national) group, again just as in discourses of nationalism, war violence, and real and imagined atrocities committed by enemy groups that have circulated in relation to the Bosnian war and the breakup of Yugoslavia (Helms 2013; Žarkov 2007).

LGW: My work also takes place largely in the »externalized border«, where the militarization of the border produces militarized and patriarchal masculinities. By border militarization I am not only signifying the involvement of defense agencies or military technology but bordering as a process of subjectivation—police, border guards, and other agents are trained to inhabit or perform militarized subjectivities. And when they return home from the external border, in much the way that soldiers returning from war do, they bring their experiences, mentalities, traumas, and ties of ›brotherhood‹ with them into their homes, relationships, work, and so on. The border's masculinities circulate along with migrants and other agents of the border.

In places like Morocco, the border is encountered quite differently by the West African and Central African women and men I work with: as the border hardens, migrant men become »soldiers«: they set out across militarized and dangerous landscapes as though going into battle; they organize according to military hierarchies in which leaders are called »generals« or »captains«; and they celebrate their successes as »warriors«, »lions«, »adventurers«. Though some migrant women also claim warrior status, few are able to »*frappe*« (attack) the border fences in Melilla and Ceuta. Instead, many women are forced to indenture themselves to afford the boat crossing—a mode of migration that does not produce a strong, triumphalist gendered subject and confirms dominant narratives of feminine vulnerability. The bifurcation of gendered migrants' paths and experiences celebrate (and vilify) migrant men's hypermasculinity and exploit migrant women's vulnerable or sexualized femininity.

But there are also disruptions: I have observed migrant men caring for children who are not their own, sometimes even as the primary care-giver, belying colonial narratives of African patriarchy. West and Central African migrants in Morocco often use a language of kinship and care to describe their relationships with other people—even those who might be in a position of authority over them or actively exploiting them. And many women refuse the label of victim, even after having experienced tremen-

dous violence, because they understand the journey through the border as a test they are determined to pass, or because they refuse to narrate the lives of their children as having an origin in sexual coercion or violence.

Feminist Ethics and Praxis

LH: Historical research benefits from these different perspectives on gender coming from border and migration studies. I have already described how I use recent studies on masculinity to analyze historical sources from this perspective. Nevertheless, as a historian I work with different and much more limited material, even more so in migration history. To analyze historical migration regimes and border internalization, historians mostly rely on archival material originating in administrative processes, legislation, or media; research on more recent phenomena can also make use of oral history. To make marginalized groups ›seen‹ or their voices ›heard‹, to reconstruct the ›doing‹ of border, gender, race, as Sabine Hess framed it earlier, means to search extensively for sources—and to analyze them from different angles. It also implies that we always have to critically reflect on what we cannot see, hear, or ›reconstruct‹. In relation to gender, for example, it has to be taken into account that women—be they residents or migrants—for a long time were not seen as legal subjects. In nineteenth-century Europe, many bourgeois societies (like Prussia and France) established a patriarchal and strictly binary gender order in which women were mainly imagined as powerless, without civil and political rights. When women migrated and settled or even tried to acquire citizenship, they faced more and different obstacles than migrant men, and even more as widows of binational marriages. Gendered (and racialized) concepts of who was able to act as a legal subject not only structured bordering, but also the archive and, as a result, historical narratives. Therefore, working empirically on gender and borders has, in my view, two implications for history: firstly, the need for close reading of archival material to make visible the agency of women and other marginalized groups as well as the gendered power structures at play—a perspective that is still far from being taken for granted in historical research. And secondly, an intersectional lens implies a critical intervention into historiography. This is why, in my opinion, migration history needs a broader conversation on methods with scholars from different fields. Critical approaches in ethnography, for example, made me rethink how to write about nineteenth-century-migrants (Harders 2019).

MG: My work is not empirical in a strict sense; I am a political theorist. However, I ›do‹ political theory as part of the world (Arendt 1998 [1958]), and I am positioned

within this world that I try to work through and make sense of—and this matters. Contrary to a common misconception—even among political theorists—political theorists do not observe the world from a putatively neutral or objective point of view. We are entangled with the messiness of the world: its gendered, racialized, classed, and ableist power structures. As a feminist political theorist interested in the complexities of democracy, migration, coloniality, gender, and race, my work relates to concepts, notions, and ideas that help unpack power processes and to identify and eventually fight against social injustices. My experiences and conversations—within and beyond academia—shape this work. Therefore, it is indebted to those who work with me and to those things that surround me whether texts or people. Consequently, to me interdisciplinary research and collaborations with colleagues from critical social sciences or cultural studies such as ethnographers are crucial. A constant, collegial, supportive, and understanding conversation between theory and praxis is the very atmosphere that I aim to be part of.

EH: My work is ethnographic, carried out over as long a period of time as I am able to live in a place and make visits afterwards. This entails engaged participant observation: in my recent research on the border, it meant taking part as a volunteer in camps, distributing aid, attending protests against migrants, participating in everyday life and neighborly relations, and so on, along with ethnographic interviews, analysis of media and social media discourses and interactions (Helms 2023). Following principles laid out by feminist ethnographers—which I feel should guide all social research—I aim to uphold an ethics of care towards the people I do research among, to be in dialogue with local debates and scholarship, and to transparently reflect on my positionality and the research process (Davis/Craven 2022). This is not always straightforward or even fully possible. In Bihać, there were challenges in navigating relationships I built with autonomous aid givers under pressure of de facto criminalization of aid, in volunteering in official camps while also witnessing their appalling conditions (cf. Rozakou 2019), and in understanding the motivations of those who supported the expulsion and dehumanization of migrants. As these dilemmas continue to present themselves during the writing process, they push me to think through, among other things, how people's lives and the broader social and institutional context in which they live have been shaped by the »migration crisis« and the workings of the nearby EU border. In other words, the entanglements of ethnography, while challenging, can be powerful tools for unpacking exactly how border internalization works, even ›externally‹ from the EU.

LGW: Ethnography has brought me into relationships and spaces of intimacy and vulnerability and with this has come obligations and commitments. Feminist anthropologists have long argued that ethnography is intersubjective—the researcher and her interlocutors are engaged in the co-production of knowledge across uneven terrains of power and how they go about this has impacts on this terrain. For me and my interlocutors, our entanglements of obligation and affection means that ›the field‹ is now a shared space in which we all have a stake even as we are differentially positioned in terms of our relative power. This reality inflects my understanding of internalization as the recognition that I, as a white, minority world researcher, am implicated in bordering and in the lives and outcomes of my interlocutors. But within this recognition of our entanglements—the fact of belonging to each other—are possibilities to collectively counter the border's exclusions.

MG: We have talked about the production of power through racist, classist, heterosexist, cis-patriarchal, and nationalist discourse, tropes, and narratives. However, power, seen as productive, also entails emancipatory struggles. When we look into the archives, read texts, or talk to people, what is astonishing to me are the many sites of resistance we encounter in these different places, spaces, and times. When we decenter our view to hidden knowledges, forgotten archives, and lost repertoires, we find populations fraught with hi/stories and experiences of liberation. In the exposure to (a long history of) intersectional violence and oppression, we salvage solidarities in ›impossible‹ places or alliances we never thought possible. Feminist activism and research are part of the recovery of these counter-cultures and emancipatory struggles. Despite the reoccurring complicity with power, feminist projects can amplify and ally these (hi-)stories of resistance that, sometimes loudly, sometimes silently, shape the present and enable us to keep striving for feminist futures beyond borders.

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