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Transnational Migration: Borders, Gender and Global Justice Challenges

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Migration processes are a paradigmatic example of the dialectical relationship between global conflicts and local contexts. Research on migration significantly contributes to the reflection on global justice and the construction of borders as it concerns topical questions about membership and political community, geopolitics and political economy, human rights, structural inequalities, intercultural relations, transnational gendered vulnerabilities, and the institutionalisation of other forms of injustice. Moreover, critical migration studies pose important challenges for the mainstream social sciences in connection with overcoming disciplinary fragmentation and methodological nationalism as the dominant research frameworks.

Setting out from a critique of methodological nationalism, transnational migration studies goes beyond conceiving migrants as a threat or abnormality and 'elucidate the mutual constitution of the global, national and local' (Glick Schiller 2009: 4; cf. Sager 2018; Wimmer, Glick Schiller 2002; Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 2013). It situates migration among other social processes and cross-border interactions in relation to social institutions and forms of life within and across borders and in relation to global inequalities, conflicts, and power. Despite a current resurgence of nationalism, our social reality is fundamentally shaped by global interactions, and global issues or risks can hardly be effectively dealt with at the level of the nation state. However, methodological nationalism's cognitive bias brackets out transnational and global connections and falsely constructs normality within state borders, hyperbolised by the wave of border walls being erected all over the world. While migrants from poorer countries are considered undesirable economic migrants, migrants from wealthy

countries are considered expatriates. In the last instance, this distinction does not lie between low-skilled and high-skilled workers. It is a product of transnational regimes of professional standardisation and the capitalist grammar of social contribution, anchored in the racialised historical formation of whiteness and western hegemony. The term transnational, therefore, refers to a whole scale of causes and consequences of social practices and forms of life rather than to just the location where these practices and phenomena take place. On the one hand, this understanding of transnational migration practices allows migration/refugee dynamics to be conceived beyond the frame of the nation state as the main unit of analysis, which in turn challenges the push-pull linear approach to understanding migration. On the other hand, it does not postulate that all migrants lead transnational lives in a global space of flows but makes it possible to capture the relationship between diverse socio-spatial levels. Furthermore, by integrating a feminist perspective, migration research offers an account that goes beyond a descriptive analysis of women's and men's different gendered experiences with migration, feminist transnational migration studies analyse structural gendered vulnerabilities and injustices that lie behind migrants' everyday experiences.

Disputes over migration and the responses of the EU and EU member states are pronounced today. Yet, recent developments are only the tip of the iceberg. Even though the more restrictive migration policies that were recently instituted by many countries are often defined at the level of national law, their stimuli and causes are transnational and global. Transnational migration and the growing number of refugees coming to the EU today are the result of long-term development in the global political economy and the geopolitics of the era of colonial imperialism, postcolonialism and the Cold War, the War on Terror, and other conflicts (Uhde 2019). Nicholas De Genova argues that border violence and the large number of deaths of migrants, mainly from Africa, in the Mediterranean Sea are not accidents but a predictable consequence of the EU's immigration laws (De Genova 2018). These restrictive immigration policies have left most migrants systematically marginalised, either fencing them out or including them as a precarious labour force (Castles 2004; De Genova 2018; Kušniráková and Čižinský 2011). Moreover, how migration policies construct the roles of migrating women and men serves to reproduce traditional gender roles (Ezzeddine 2011).

The EU has been turning its attention to outsourcing its border controls to non-member countries in order to 'manage' migration, often using strategies of exchanging development aid for migration control. On the one hand, this policy strategy has consequences in terms of increasing the risks and dangers to life faced by people on the migratory routes as well as supporting authoritarian regimes, which undermines local protests and efforts to introduce political changes. On the other hand, instead of targeting the structural causes of transnational migration, the money flows are

channelled towards growing the business of high-technology border controls and surveillance and into the arms industry (Jakob, Schlindwein 2017). Despite the return of rhetoric about the 'root causes' of transnational migration, the way this concept is addressed in EU policy documents shows how fundamentally it has been hindered by political bias (Castles, Van Hear 2011). The concerns of irregular migration and border control block out any discussion about structural injustice of today's global political economy. Moreover, there is certainly a tendency to divert a portion of development resources to the securitisation and militarisation of borders. Borders are spaces of rights violations, but border violence is also externalised through bilateral agreements and detention centres outside the EU or deterritorialised through the deportability and detainability that migrants face and that Nicholas De Genova discusses in his essay in this issue. Borders are not merely a geographical (static) entity and neutral space and are instead a dynamic place of negotiation between the power interests of participating local and global actors, where the mobile individuals themselves are located only on the edge of these borderlands (Anderson 2014; Donnan, Wilson 2001). Borders are also places for a specific living out of a time – landscapes of time (Andersson 2014). In the migratory journey, migrants experience a shift in temporality as they leave the past behind, while their present is wholly focused on an uncertain future. In addition, a migrant's temporality is explicitly linked to the economy of migration (migration industry), for as initial attempts fail and the migrant's money runs out, stasis ensues (Andersson 2014).

Cross-border mobility, grounded in the discourse of securitisation, is organised by a set of European migration policies, adopted at the national and European levels, that distinguish between 'desirable' and 'undesirable' foreigners (Fassin 2011; Feldman 2011). These categories create both physical barriers to cross-border mobility and less tangible barriers (Geiger, Pécoud 2013). Besides mobility itself, at the borders we can also observe a process of the constituting of everyday borders. Picozza argues that migrants to Europe who are not of European descent are subjected to a discourse of othering and ordering. She critiques the provisions and limitations of the Dublin Regulation on European migration, saying that it fails to acknowledge the inequalities between different European countries and consequences of the 'external borders of Europe'. What this means logistically for migrants, Picozza suggests, is that migrants are subjected to perpetual displacement and repositioning, since the regulations make it easy to identify and deport migrants who have crossed into EU territory (Picozza 2017).

The discourse constructs the bodies of non-European migrants as unwanted and lowly, while positioning European countries as generous and benevolent. Because of the stringent and typically prohibitive legal barriers to legal entry into EU territory, migrants often must resort to inventive, strategic, and risky means of reaching territory

in which they can claim the right to seek asylum. This aspect of migration produces a rhetoric of 'desperation' that labels migrants as a homogenous mass of people willing to do anything, criminal or not, to get over the border.

Receiving developed countries seek to control cross-border mobility while they also benefit from migrant labour, especially in some areas, such as low-skilled production and and care work. Even though during recent developments and in earlier economic crises many countries restricted their migration policies, the field of care, in particular care for older people in developed countries, depends to a significant degree on the work of migrants, and migration policy regimes respond to this situation. Feminist scholarship has highlighted the gender dimension of such migration practices and the gendered gaps in transnational social rights, which has been largely overlooked in mainstream migration studies (e.g. Kofman, Raghuram 2015; Ezzeddine 2014; Uhde 2016; Lutz 2011; Ehrenreich, Hochschild eds. 2002).

Contesting borders

This thematic issue on 'Contested Borders: Transnational Migration and Gender' includes articles that exemplify the various analytical lenses through which it is possible to conceptualise borders in their material, economic, political, and symbolic meanings and with which analysis can be enriched, by considering gendered structures and constructions of vulnerabilities in the broader context of bordered spaces built on a colonial and postcolonial past and redesigned by global capitalism. Borders represent not only a geographical dividing line separating 'us' from 'others', but are also symbolic and cultural dividing lines that reinforce the hegemonic interpretation of acceptable/unacceptable practices or identities.

MariaCaterina La Barbera focuses in her article on the latter. She discusses the highly politicised and contested notion of 'female genital mutilation', or alternatively 'female genital modifications' (FGM), in relation to the practice and transformation of this ritual in the diaspora of communities with an African background. By contrasting plastic surgery and its public acceptance, on the one hand, and FGM and its homogenisation and public condemnation, on the other hand, she reveals a western-centric interpretation of female bodily integrity as underlying the criminalisation of the ritual modifications of female genitalia. More importantly, she analyses how this approach not only fails to protect girls and young women but also prevents the social transformation of these ritual practices from within the community. Women´s bodies become a symbolic battlefield of cultural differences, belonging, resistance, and situated women´s emancipation. Feminism is a part of these disputes and La Barbera argues that numerous feminist debates simplify FGM by deeming it a patriarchal practice of control over women's bodies without including women from the communities that

practice FGM in the debate, thus, reproducing the paternalistic approach towards non-western cultures. While recognising the harmful extent of some forms of FGM, she argues that the failure to differentiate between the various modifications of female genitalia and to expose the structures of dominance and oppression influencing an interpretation of acceptable and unacceptable practices hinders the introduction of alternative practices, such as initiation without cutting or ritual cutting in a hospital environment in a form comparable to male circumcision. In conclusion, La Barbera argues that there is a continuum of practices of bodily modifications and argues for a community-based approach that respects the meaning of ritual initiation and at the same time protects women's rights for self-determination.

In her contribution, Elsa Tyszler focuses on constructions of masculinities and femininities in the border zone between Morocco and Spain – or in other words between Africa and the European Union. She situates her analysis in the broader geopolitical context of the increasing militarisation and securitisation of so-called border management, which contributes to the deterioration of the international human rights regime through the outsourcing and externalisation of border controls. She refers to this development as an ongoing war on migrants, in which African migrants are dehumanised by political institutions and military forces. At the same time, the current racial constructions of African migrants echo the colonial practices of the past and reinforce a racialised European identity that is inextricably linked to global capitalism and postcolonial representations. Her research is based on lengthy ethnographic research in Ceuta and Melilla where she captured the dynamics between men and women attempting to cross the borders, migrants who established themselves in the border-crossing business and temporarily benefited from it, military bodies, and humanitarian organisations, which she found in some instances to be enacting soft bodily control over migrants within the humanitarian-security nexus, referring to a concept developed by Ruben Andersson. She shows that strong collective mobilisation exists among migrants, which is necessary for a successful border crossing, and that there are also power relations among migrants themselves. In the overly militarised space, masculinity and femininity is contrasted by evocations of male forces and soldier discipline on the one hand, and women's sexualised bodies and reproductive role on the other hand, even though these traditional divisions are disrupted by the altered social context of waiting at a border. While migrant men are rendered highly visible by the mainstream media discourse, women in the border space are to a large extent made invisible. They become visible mainly as the alleged beneficiaries of the fight against trafficking and sexualised violence, which, however, as Tyszler argues, does not protect women, and serves instead to legitimise border violence and reinforces the racialised migration regime.

Petra Ezzeddine analyses the moral economy of transnational motherhood in the

case of Ukrainian women employed as domestic workers in the Czech Republic. She examines what role is played by remittances and gifts in the maintenance of relationships between mothers and their families and the kinds of social circumstances and interactions in which this 'sentimental money' emerges. In her ethnographic research Ezzeddine shows how geographical borders shape the life trajectories of transnational mothers, enabling the women to live parallel lives in a transnational space, where they move back and forth between their reproductive and productive roles. The borders of nation-states also, however, determine their legal status as 'third-country foreigners' who have limited opportunities for family reunification, which means that they have to search for other ways and strategies by which to fulfil their motherhood. Sentimental money works to validate and justify the difficult decision to go away and work abroad, compensates for the mother's physical absence, and symbolically reconstructs and remotely maintains family relationships. At the same time, however, it underscores the new productive role of women as the main breadwinners in the family. Ezzeddine's article not only sheds light on how maternal practices are changing in the era of late capitalism, but also reveals the gender, social, and glocal equalities in the context of two post-socialist societies in transformation.

The last essay can be read as a critical reflection on the current trend of the deteriorating international human rights regime by anti-migration policies. Here, Nicholas De Genova builds on his account of the productive power of the border. In particular, he focuses on the deportability and detainability of migrants as instances in which migrants are criminalised for who they are, i.e. non-citizens. As a constant threat, deportability and detainability are used to discipline migrants' lives and establish their conditions of precarity virtually outside the law. He evokes Arend's notion of the banality of evil and Agamben's account of sovereign power to show how this administrative power over migrants constitutes a brute authoritarianism, normalising the situation in which some people are arbitrarily considered to be 'unworthy of justice'. He points out that these detentions place migrants in a situation of existential precarity, subject to the whims of state authority, in a place distinct from the institution of prison and more like a labour or concentration camp.

The special issue also contains several book reviews focused on transnational migration. The reviewed books deal with migrant protest, interrogating the possibilities and practices of cosmopolitanism from below, and with transnational care practices. In particular, two of the books reviewed are devoted to care migration and focus on the region of central Europe and analyse various aspects of hired domestic work and the migration of domestic workers, a trend that is not only transforming care practices in this region but also illustrates the deep-rooted structural inequalities that exist within the EU.

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