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Introduction to the Special Issue : Gender and Violence in Contexts of Migration and Displacement

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2018

https://doi.org/10.25595/2317

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version
Working Paper

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Hofmann, Susanne; Senoguz, Hatice Pinar: *Introduction to the Special Issue : Gender and Violence in Contexts of Migration and Displacement*. Göttingen: Gender(ed) Thoughts - Working Paper Series, 2018. DOI: https://doi.org/10.25595/2317.

Erstmalig hier erschienen / Initial publication here: https://dx.doi.org/10.3249/2509-8179-gtg-4

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New Perspectives in Gender Research

Working Paper Series 2018, Volume 1

Susanne Hofmann and
Hatice Pınar Şenoğuz

Introduction to the Special Issue "Gender and Violence in Contexts of Migration and Displacement"

GÖTTINGER CENTRUM FÜR GESCHLECHTERFORSCHUNG
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New Perspectives in Gender Research
Working Paper Series

(ISSN 2509-8179)

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF
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Official Series of the Göttingen Centre for Gender Studies (GCG)

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2018, Volume 1

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Suggested Citation
Hofmann, S. and Pınar Şenoğuz, H. (2018) Inroduction to the Special Issue *"Gender and Violence in Contexts of Migration and Displacement"*; Gender(ed) Thoughts, Working Paper Series, Vol. 1, p. 1-7
https://dx.doi.org/10.3249/2509-8179-gtg-4

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Introduction to the Special Issue

Gender and Violence in Contexts of Migration and Displacement

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This special issue originates from the Summer Symposium *Reconsidering gender-based violence in the context of displacement and migration* held at the Georg-August University of Göttingen on 6-7th July 2017. It was organised in collaboration with the Gender and Migration Network @ Lower Saxony, the Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Studies (IMIS)/University of Osnabrück, and the Göttingen Centre for Gender Studies (GCG)/Georg-August-University Göttingen and hosted by visiting guest professors Susanne Hofmann and Zeynep Kıvılcım.[1]

The aim of the symposium was to reconsider gender-based violence in the context of displacement and international migration across different regional and cultural contexts. Interrogating gender-based violence has been a critical part of the project of feminism, with grassroots activism playing a key role in raising consciousness and mobilising support and resources to challenge violence against women and other groups such as LGBTQI. However, we were concerned that recent processes of displacement and international migration had led to an intricate collusion between feminist anti-violence activism and state agendas of border control and migration management.

We therefore wanted to caution against analyses of gender-based violence that reproduce stereotypes of victimhood and marginalisation. Instead, we were interested in exploring the role of power in different forms of gender violence, and in scrutinising the complex inequalities that structure victims' lives, by taking an intersectional approach to gender violence. As the definitions and meanings of violence are discursively produced by societies and represent sites of continuous struggle, re-examination of changing understandings and cultural codifications of gender violence in the context of human mobility is important. We hold that gender violence must be considered, firstly, in the context of governance structures and border regimes that produce exclusion and vulnerability, and secondly, in conjunction with discourses about migrants and refugees that are gendered, classed and racialised, as well as entwined with global inequalities of power.

At the symposium, ten presenters from the United States, Mexico, Turkey, Spain, UK and Germany discussed gender-based violence along the following themes: 1) state violence and the violent effects of border regimes, 2) masculinities and gender violence, 3) violence against LGBT populations and displacement, 4) processes of institutionalisation and professionalisation of violence in transit migration, and 5) culturalisation and instrumentalisation of gender violence in policy-making contexts.

[1]The symposium was funded by the Ministry for Science and Culture of Lower Saxony.

The intension of the symposium was to challenge inadequate conceptualisations of gender-based violence in the context of migration and displacement and seek other approaches to understanding the experiences of violence of differently racialised, classed, ethnicised and sexualised people in conditions of mobility within or across borders of nation states. For this, we considered actor-focused, intersectional and decolonial perspectives as crucial for the development of emancipatory understandings of gender violence.

To introduce this special issue, which includes three of the symposium papers, we explain the academic debate from which the symposium and consequently the special issue emerged, bringing some of the highlights of the presentations and discussions which unfolded in Göttingen into conversation with existing literature on gender violence in migration and refugee studies.

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Discussions about particular forms of gender violence within specific groups of immigrants became invigorated in Europe from the early 2000s on, with terms such as "cultural gender violence" or "tradition-contingent violence" (in German: traditionsbedingte Gewalt) circulating in the media and in public discourse. They related to practices such as forced marriage and female genital cutting, hence attributing a clear gender focus to the debate on violence in immigrant communities. In this discourse, immigrant women are defined as a problematic group, and as ethnicised victims in a public discourse that stresses the risk and threat that stems from "dangerous brown men" (Bhattacharyya 2008), from which immigrant women must be saved. This debate has been widely criticised by scholars from different disciplines (Sauer 2011; Strasser 2008; Hess 2012; Neuhauser, Hess and Schwenken 2016; Lingen-Ali and Potts 2016).

In the past decades, we have observed that a focus on women as particularly vulnerable to violence and exploitation has generated punitive humanitarian responses, rather than social and economic justice-based responses. In the context of policies to combat gender violence in situations of mobility, such as anti-trafficking campaigns in the United States, for instance, we have seen the rise of what sociologist Elizabeth Bernstein (2010) calls "carceral feminism". The concept of carceral feminism refers to a feminist politics that has left behind earlier demands for economic justice,[2] and instead strives to accomplish gender justice primarily through carceral strategies (that is a focus on criminal justice and the persecution of perpetrators). At present, feminist activists – in different parts of the world – who are concerned with combatting violence and the exploitation of women have embraced the state, its criminal justice institutions and security forces as key agents in their struggle towards gender equality and justice. To save 'vulnerable brown women', some feminists go so far as to approve of military interventions in countries of the Global South (for a critique of such "militarized humanitarianism" see Bernstein 2010 or Amar 2012).

Discourses of tradition-based gender violence in the context of migration and displacement invisibilise structural causes of violence, such as lack of educational and well-paid employment opportunities, socioeconomic inequality and women's economic dependence on men. They also ignore restrictive immigration regulations and laws and exclusions from citizenship rights.

Sabine Hess (2017) points out that gender-specific protection discourses can be considered an instrument of border regimes. Appeals to border securitisation and immigration control are presented in public discourse as measures to protect women and other 'vulnerable groups' from the violence and exploitation of traffickers, for instance. Thus, gender specific protection demands are integral to the hybrid military-humanitarian assemblage of border regimes, which Hess terms the "vulnerability apparatus" (ibidem), following Miriam Ticktin's (2008) work on sexual violence as the language of border control. Ticktin (2011) contends that states pretend to protect 'vulnerable' women while

[2] A process that has been described for the United States by Kristin Bumiller 2008.

protecting borders, yet simultaneously implement state practices that criminalise the majority of undocumented migrants at the expense of care for the exceptional few.

Such a discourse disguises the role of structures that channel people into insecure spaces, as Ailsa Winton (2017) has shown in the context of LBGT communities who are pushed into gang territory in the Central American region. US border externalisation measures in Mexico subsequently further aggravate LGBT migrants' risk of falling victim to violence in their attempt to seek safety. Sanem Öztürk (2017) asserts that it is impossible to adequately analyse the violence experienced by women and LGBT people in contexts of migration and displacement without discussing simultaneously their access to identity cards and other kinds of documentation and therefore to rights and economic resources.

Frequently, refugees are put into allegedly 'safe' camps, where they are exposed to new forms of violence (Freedman, Kıvılcım and Özgür Baklacıoğlu 2017). Several scholars have pointed up situations where early and forced marriage were on the decline in refugees' countries of origin, only to experience a resurgence in contexts of displacement. The rise is to do with some parents' desperate attempts to marry their teenage daughters into safety from war (Öztürk 2017), or with the denial of resources to young women, such as access to schools or health care, leading parents to look for well-off care takers for their minor daughters through marriage (Buckley-Zistel and Krause 2017). Öztürk (2017) also alerts us to the desperate steps that some Syrian women are taking in order to get out of refugee camps, where they experience sexual violence. Seeking partners via Facebook matchmaking pages, they strive to leave the camps, however, in doing so, they knowingly expose themselves to continued risks of rape and sexual exploitation. Turkish scholarship has drawn attention to the Turkish Government's failure to prevent and sanctioning of sexual abuse in marriage in general, and in polygamous marriage in particular, the latter being socially accepted among some Syrian refugees, as well as in parts of Turkey (Kıvılcım 2016). Rejane Herwig's (2017) account illustrates an existing tension regarding polygamous marriages in her fieldwork site Şanlıurfa, a Turkish city near the Syrian border. On the one hand, the author emphasises that Turkish women in the area perceive the Syrian refugee women who could act as potential second wives as a threat. On the other hand, she portrays the Turkish women as strong-willed agents who in everyday life are able to pursue their own self-interested strategies.

Úrsula Santa Cruz Castillo (2017) foregrounds the colonial context of violence and war, challenging the common preference for a narrow focus on gender violence over confrontation with structural forms of violence such as colonialism, race and class. Departing from empirical studies that document rising intimate partner violence during war, and thereby emphasising the impact of war and the relevance of broader contexts of liveable life and peace, she challenges Eurocentric understandings of gender violence. She highlights that for many women in the Global South patriarchy is not the only or most significant system of oppression. Consequently, she regards the contemporary hegemonic discourse of gender violence in the context of migration as utterly flawed. Portraying brown men as the principal perpetrators of violence against women from the Global South invisibilises the ways in which brown men are also subjected to different forms of violence and oppressions related to class, race and religion. Santa Cruz Castillo raises the significant question of the place of enunciation and the power that is associated with it. What counts as violence? From which place is spoken? She criticises Western feminist movement's narrow focus on interpersonal and direct violence, which avoids the denunciation of indirect and structural violence. Santa Cruz Castillo reminds us of colonialism's legacy – the "colonial matrix of power"[3] (Quijano 2000) –, which

[3] Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2000) coined the expression "coloniality of power" to name the structures of power, control and hegemony that have

persists to this day and impacts on contemporary experiences and discourses of violence.

Cecilia Menjívar (2017) calls attention to the multiple forms of violence experienced by women. While gender violence is a common reason for women leaving their location of origin, they often re-encounter violence during their journeys and after arrival at their destination, hence experiencing a continuity of violence in their lives as migrants. Menjívar asserts that cultural explanations for violence constitute a dead-end road and distract from root causes. In the Americas, a focus on the intentionality of violence glosses over structural forms of violence such as global inequality and restrictive immigration regimes, thereby helping conceal the United States' responsibility for the suffering of migrants. Menjívar draws our attention to the fact that violence always takes place in a context. Often gender violence is exacerbated in contexts in which families have few opportunities. She points to issues such as teen marriage, *feminicides* in Central America and the legal violence of abortion prohibition in some states, all of which significantly complicate the lives of young women and increase their risk of exposure to violence. Central America as a region has a history of violence characterised by US military interventions and its legacies, such as corruption and unaccountable state institutions, which continue to produce violent impacts in everyday life. Experiences of violence are multilayered and cumulative. Women's and gender non-conforming people's risk to exposure to violence may be aggravated as a result of limited access to education and employment; trade agreements can function as structural violence erasing all opportunities to sustain a dignified life in their community; and racial discrimination against members from Africa-descended and indigenous groups in destination countries constitute overlapping forms of violence.

Nina Held (2017) discusses the re-victimisation of LGBT refugees through the asylum procedure, highlighting that asylum adjudicators tend to recognise only stereotypical narratives of homophobic violence or trafficking, for instance, as credible reasons for asylum. Mirroring Lionel Cantú's (Cantú, Naples and Vidal-Ortiz 2009) findings about queer asylum seekers in the United States, Held notes that, to be successful, asylum claims must correspond with stereotypical imaginations of LGBT lives. That is, characterised by desires for Western gay lifestyles based on visibility, particular practices of socialising, patterns of consumption and displays of bodily appearance and sexuality. Held discovers that asylum decision makers do not allow for nuanced personal histories or ambivalent sexualities, thereby complicating the asylum claims of queer and bisexual refugees in particular.

What does this debate imply for re-conceptualisations of gender violence in the context of migration and displacement? What counts as violence? How can structural and legal oppressions such as immigration legislation be meaningfully included in both our definition of gender violence and our demand for new policies? How can safe mobility and security be achieved for women and LGBTQI-identified people? Does the concept of gender violence inevitably imply "discursive colonization" (Mohanty 2002) and hence represent a Western perspective?

Some scholars opt to entirely disregard gender violence as an analytical concept – the experience of women in the Global South not being separable from the oppressions of brown men in a meaningful way – and instead focus purely on larger contexts of structural violence. Gender itself (obviously a crucial component of the concept of gender violence) has been heavily challenged by decolonial scholars as a Western

emerged during the modernist era, the era of colonialism, which stretches from the conquest of the Americas to the present. The coloniality of power constitutes a *matrix* that operates through control or hegemony in four interrelated domains: 1. economy (land appropriation, exploitation of labour, control of natural resources); 2. authority (institution, army); 3. gender and sexuality (family, education), and 4. subjectivity and knowledge (epistemology, education, and formation of subjectivity). The imposition of the colonial matrix of power always simultaneously implied the dismantling of existing forms of social organisation and ways of life.

concept that was transported into other parts of the world during colonialism and imposed on cultures that were not structured in that way (Lugones 2008; Espinosa Miñoso 2016).

Following this analysis, it is relevant that re-conceptualisations of gender violence take the heterogeneous experiences of violence in different regions of the world into account, with "Global South-ness", for instance, being dissimilar to and implying different forms and experiences of violence than "racialised minority-ness" or "refugee-ness", specifically avoiding Eurocentric interpretations of violence as well as hetero-centric perspectives. It is imperative to expose, counter and abandon conceptualisations of gender-based violence (and subsequently policies based on those) that are grounded in the experiences of white, middle-class Euro-American feminists, as they often contribute to perpetuating and exacerbating racist oppression of native or brown men.

Doing justice to gender violence as experienced by people from the Global South means taking seriously the multiple oppressive and harmful impacts of the "contemporary modern/colonial/capitalist world-system" (Grosfoguel 2002)[4], in which gender violence cannot be eradicated while other oppressions such as resource extractivism, war, invasion and racism against brown men prevail. Considering the systemic embeddedness of gender violence in the modern/colonial/capitalist world-system, to what degree can then policy changes help to address gender violence? How can state institutions be pushed to regard gender violence through a lens that takes experiences and perspectives from the Global South seriously? What should be the role of the state in our academic theorising of gender violence and our activism to achieve safety for women, LGBTQI communities, migrant minorities and refugees?

A crucial insight that came out of this symposium, which allowed us to bring together critical migration and border regime scholars from the Americas and Europe, was that security is relational. Firstly, individual security cannot be established and maintained if the communities the individual forms a part of are not themselves able to survive and flourish. Secondly, individual freedom from violence and exploitation is intimately related to unequal global power relations, which currently impede the flourishing of vast communities located in the Global South. Whilst the following working papers do not answer the above questions in a theoretical way, they deeply engage with the structures that form the basis of migrants' and refugees' gendered experiences of violence.

[4] The concept "modern/colonial capitalist world-system" departs from Immanuel Wallerstein's (1974) modern world-systems approach that uses historical systems, rather than societies, as a central unit of analysis. Grosfoguel, however, reinterprets important aspects of Wallerstein's capitalist world-systems theory by integrating Walter Mignolo's (2000) proposition of the modern/colonial world-system, which integrates an epistemic perspective from the subaltern side of the colonial difference, and helps counter certain limitations of the world-systems approach. Mignolo's (2011) basic argument is that "modernity" is a European narrative that conceals a "darker side", which is "coloniality". Coloniality, however, is constitutive of modernity. Mignolo contends that coloniality has brought about modernity, hence there is no modernity without coloniality. "Global modernities", for instance, always simultaneously imply "global colonialities"; hence the compound word "modern/colonial".

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