

EMBODIED SITES OF
COLONIAL MEMORY
Citizenship's Feminized Others

Workshop by
MANUELA BOATCĂ,
ISABELLE IHRING,
TANJA OSTOJIĆ
& JULIA ROTH

In her contribution to the *Memory in Motion* workshop, Manuela Boatcă spoke about unequal citizenship or the ‘coloniality of citizenship’, which borrows from Aníbal Quijano’s concept of the ‘coloniality of power’ developed in the 1990s. Even if countries have achieved independence from colonial rule, Quijano discussed how the hierarchies put in place by colonialism and shaped by labour regimes, gender, and racialization remain. Colonial relations of power persist in different forms of inequality, including citizenship. The Henley Passport Index, for example, shows how unequal the world is based on annual passport rankings. Today, citizenship is ‘sold’ to the highest bidder, mainly wealthy men. The workshop focused on how women and feminized others have historically been the most vulnerable migrants, especially those who are not wealthy. It examined how women and feminized others often embody mobility by anchoring their strategy of moving in their own bodies, either by offering the possibility to their children to be born in a country that confers citizenship or by migrating under the terms of someone who is interested in their body, not necessarily as a form of sex tourism but as a transaction based on sexual favours that can become a condition of migration.

Julia Roth’s contribution focused on migration and citizenship in the Americas, with a particular emphasis on gendered aspects, which Quijano did not consider. She identified continuities in the trafficking of women, including the exchange of women between colonizers and colonized men; sex and romance tourism; and forms of mobility generated through erotic capital and childbirth, which transfers mobility to the next generation. For example, if a child is born on US territory, they acquire certain citizenship rights, and at the age of twenty-one they can also give citizenship to their parents—which is at odds with Donald Trump’s plans to end birthright citizenship through an executive order on day one of his presidency. At the same time, wealthy women are often free to visit and settle in the United States.

Tanja Ostojić presented her radical artistic works from the early 2000s that dealt with questions of migration, undocumented border crossings, and marriage for citizenship papers, which the artist experienced herself in 2000, from which she created the project *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport*. Her contribution highlighted the fragility of gender in the context of migration, including in situations that are not typically considered

colonial. One participant asked whether Ostojić had considered the aspect of desirability in *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport*. Who responded to her advertisement offering herself to marry someone with an EU passport? Ostojić explained that the project was meant to spark discussion on the political topic on a platform for people to share their different experiences in the form of a visual or text contribution. In the end, she married a person who fully understood the project and who wanted to support her right to freedom of movement.

Isabelle Ihring spoke about female genital mutilation as gender-specific reason for asylum. Some participants who identified themselves as Argentinian activists said that concepts of gender and race are products of modernity, and that *white* citizenship has historically been constructed in binary terms. They argued for the importance of understanding citizenship in a more contextualized way. The challenge is to think of citizenship from an anti-colonial, anti-racist, and multi-gender perspective. This requires transversal engagement across different viewpoints and dismantling barriers through an intersectional approach to rethink practices from our privileged point of view.

Other participants agreed on the importance of exploring these possibilities for transforming how we think about belonging and how citizenship is about being present and existing in a space rather than being included. At the same time, as long as being in a place needs to be negotiated with institutions designed to include some and exclude others, tensions will persist. Considering how most countries have seen few progressive steps towards the official recognition of different gender identities in passports, the institution of citizenship is grappling on an international scale with its origins in the wake of the French revolution, when it was limited to propertied, literate men; everyone else was required to derive their citizenship through their relationship to such men. These relations were created to sustain citizenship as a logic of exclusion. As long as citizenship remains organized in this way, policies will not be progressive enough to accommodate those currently excluded from its framework.

Report by Melissa Makele

Translated from German by Colin Shepherd