Postmigrant Europe: Discoveries beyond ethnic, national and colonial boundaries

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The critical debate of postmigrant research was initially an intervention focused on Germany. But does this limit its validity to Germany and other national contexts in which migration and its consequences are thought about in a similar way? Or is it also possible to identify overarching European realities postcolonial that have not yet been sufficiently explored? To what extent is European postcolonial history and its conjunctions marked by the mostly invisible, long-term presence of migration? And, conversely, to what degree is migration repeatedly perceived and treated as 'Other' in the context of historical and current EU/European borders? Can and should the postmigrant perspective, in other words, also be considered when looking at the construction and practical realities of Europe? And which marginalised, hidden European 'Others' can be exposed and brought into focus from such a perspective?

I would like to address these questions here and, in doing so, first draw on aspects of the discussion in Germany that I consider particularly important for a Europeanisation of postmigrant thinking. In a further analytical step, I will then explore the possibilities of a post-migrantisation of Europe – and conclude by asking what significance this European dimension has for the German discussion.

From the margins to the centre: Migration and the nation state

The critical intervention, related to the concept of postmigration, was originally formulated by Shermin Langhoff within the world of theatre. It was quick, however, to take root in parts of German-language migration research, in particular in those parts of the research which were struggling with a specific – and partly self-produced – concept of migration and its political impact. In this context, Langhoff's demand for a postmigrant theatre that does not focus on the "Other", but instead on the society created by the "Other", was inspiring: it resonated strongly with those parts of the migration research that wanted to overcome

migration as a "special research area" and replace it with a critical, postmigrant social analysis (Bojadzijev/Römhild 2014).

In the Migration Lab at the Institute for European Ethnology in Berlin[1] those discussions led to intensified criticism of traditional migration research, typically conducted as research into migrants and their seemingly separate worlds. In repeatedly new narratives, such "migrantology" (ibid.: 10) reproduced the image of the ethnicised, racialised, religiously connoted 'Other', defining migrants as foreign minorities on the margins of society. And, in doing so, it also constructs a 'white majority society' positioned at the centre of the nation as its unmarked counterpart.

Migration research has, in this way, continuously – and often unintentionally – contributed to the production of the self-image of a society, which is characterised by a seemingly clear distinction between 'domestic' and 'foreign'. This also counts for most of the transnational research, often inspired by new concepts of diaspora. Typically, transnational research aims to provide insights into the cross-border, networked, mobile lives of migrants and thus, by doing so, to expose the idea of the culturally homogeneous, sedentary nation as fiction. Despite those critical intentions, however, it did not really question the inner boundary between potentially mobile migration and a fixed nation. Rather, this distinction is further strengthened by situating people in the transnational space of migration even after generations and, resultantly, leaving them permanently marginalised and still to be integrated, both academically and politically (Mezzadra/Neilson 2013).

In the discussions within the Migration Lab this inner relation between migration research and the border politics of the nation-state was addressed self-critically and often strongly rejected (Labor Migration 2014). During those discussions, we came to the conclusion that a change of perspective is urgently needed: in particular, we voiced the need to move away from a "migrantology" in migrant research, focussing exclusively on migrants and their descendants, and to work towards research that examines and analyses society as a whole from the perspective of migration. To this end, we developed the often-quoted formula that migration research must be "demigrantised", while, at the same time, there must be a "migrantising" of social research (Bojadzijev/Römhild 2014: 11). This change in perspective allows to depict the postmigrant realities of the society and, in addition to that, to counter the obsession with treating refugeeism and migration as seemingly new phenomena with ever new arrivals. A postmigrant perspective unveils the migrant prehistory of today's refugee and migration movements and helps to understand how the society as such is shaped by this prehistory of migration and flight.

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1   Institute for European Ethnology, https://www.euroethno.hu-berlin.de/en/standard?set_language=en (accessed October 31, 2017).

Refuge, migration and borders in a postcolonial Europe

To what extent can this perspective of migration be extended to Europe? Can such a perspective help to uncover a decidedly European dimension beyond the context of the individual nation state with its postmigrant realities? And to what extent is national and transnational European migration research still lagging behind existing postmigrant realities? Accordingly, I am not concerned here with other European member states and their respective 'national' negotiations of migration – even though interesting comparisons with and cross-references to different European countries are already being discussed (cf. the contribution by Kijan Espahangizi in this volume, as well as Schramm/Petersen/Wiegand 2019: 26-49). Rather, I am concerned with a specific 'European' dimension, as it occurs within the framework of the EU-European debate on migration and, in particular, within the scope of current border politics.

It is important to remember that, for a long time now, migration and border politics have not been administered solely by the nation states, but have also been shaped by the European Union, even beyond its external "European" borders established after 1989. It is precisely in this field of border demarcation that the EU co-governs the policies of its member and neighbouring states.

Typically, the EU seeks to balance and to negotiate the contradictions and conflicts emerging in this context: for example, in the context of possible membership negotiations with neighbouring countries such as Turkey, or in the tension between normative humanitarian invocations on the one side, and the demands that countries such as Italy and Greece, whose coasts are besieged by stranded migrants, secure their borders by military means if necessary on the other. The paradoxical strategy of preventing the stranding and multiple deaths of people at the EU-European borders by controlling and battling migration movements into the EU is the result of those struggles. Accordingly, the border-political intervention in national sovereignty has to be understood as one of the areas of the Europeanisation process, in which the EU generally tests, designs and expands its own political space beyond its borders (Transit Migration Forschungsgruppe 2007).[2]

Moreover, on closer examination, the border space of the EU created in this way is by no means a new construct, but rather stands in the tradition of long-term colonial, imperial spaces and identity politics. The distinctions made at today's borders of the EU are, in other words, not just the postcolonial result of current political calculation alone. They are rather the consequence of postcolonial interdependencies that are biopolitically remobilised in today's construction

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[2] Cf. also the MigMap cartography developed as part of the Transit Migration project as an attempt to make clear this close interweaving of border politics and Europeanisation policy, http://www. transitmigration.org/migmap/home_map3.html (accessed October 31, 2017).

of "Europe" and its "Others". At the borders, for example, it is not a question of combating mobility per se, but of implementing a mobility regime in which very specific migrations, namely those from the former colonies and from "crypto-colonial" spaces (Herzfeld 2002) are regulated and limited, while others, namely those from the European West and the 'global North', are explicitly permitted and promoted (Glick Schiller/Salazar 2012). This shows an old biopolitical commitment to colonial patterns and power relations that, at the borders of the EU, is working to identify and to affirm the idea of a "European people" (Balibar 2003). In other words: Within the framework of its border politics, the European Union invokes an identity-based political space in which a certain 'white' history of enlightenment and modernity, of Christianity and secularism, of the nation state and democracy (as well as associated values), are effectively elevated to the standard of an alleged 'European' identity – and, furthermore, as a general model of social development (Randeria/Römhild 2013; Stam/Shohat 2012: 61-67).

Consequently, assumingly "natural" boundaries are established in relation to an "Other", marked by a cultural distance to that idealised "European" standard. This applies to Islam, which is located beyond the idea of Christian-Jewish influenced, enlightened secularism (Asad 2003), to not (completely) "white zones" on the margins of or even beyond Western European modernity (Herzfeld 2002) as well as to postsocialist regions and players of the formerly "totalitarian Eastern bloc" (Buchowski 2006; Hann 2007). In Gayatri Spivak's words, "the West" has, in a powerful process of "othering", created a world order in which both "others" and "the West" themselves have been placed in separate, hierarchical positions: a process of "worlding" that has become so powerful precisely because it has succeeded in concealing the history of its production and in naturalising its result – the knowledge of "Others" on which the order of this world is based (Spivak 1985).

Despite all the changes, intersections and decentralisations that this secular arrangement of the "West and the Rest" (Hall 1992) has experienced since then in real political terms, the images and figures behind this "Other" of European-Western modernism prove to be surprisingly durable. The immediacy and easiness with which these images and figures can be invoked and used politically in our days suggest that their naturalisation is still effective. In particular, Islam is becoming the traditional "Other" again, against which "Europe", in its old tradition, forms itself in terms of identity politics. This construction of an European identity is built on the idea of a confrontation with a supposedly external Islam, ostensibly carried across borders by migration – completely ignoring the inner presence and history of a European, for instance Bosnian, Islam. Nowadays, this confrontation with a Muslim "Other" is almost exclusively the place where public debate about a European self-understanding is conducted (Göle 2015; Bunzl 2005; Korteweg/Yurdakul 2016). And this unifying concept of Europe is extremely influential, building bridges between liberal positions and the extreme right: even

where the arguments and rationalities are different, both nationalist right-wing populists and left-liberal democrats appear to transform themselves into 'Christian' and/or 'secular', 'enlightened', 'white' Europeans with the help of this "Other" (Mutluer 2017).

Today, such othering also functions without territorial worlding, that is, beyond a geopolitical locating of the other. This can be seen in the dominant figure of the Muslim migrant: this figure bears the mark of belonging to a 'foreign' space beyond secular modernity and beyond the borders of Europe, thereby implementing a de-territorialised border demarcation within European societies as well (Spielhaus 2010). In the paradoxical hybrid of the 'secular Muslim', this de-territorialised border becomes all the clearer (Amir-Moazami 2010; Tezcan 2010). At the same time, Eurocentric and modernist ways of thinking also belong to the notions of analysis and self-understanding in non-European societies and European border regions – including processes of self-othering. The colonial matrix of "modernity and its Other" has long since become a global cultural heritage that can be reactivated anywhere and reinterpreted in the interests of varying power politics. Instead of defining the postcolonial world order geographically, for example in geopolitical discourse of the "West" and "South", it therefore seems more appropriate to look at the de-territorialised forms of "coloniality" (Quijano 2007), which contribute to the global persistence of colonial power relations and raise the question of a decolonisation of epistemic and political world orders that is far from being completed (Quijano 2000; Morana/Dussel/Jauregui 2008; Mignolo 2007; Grosfoguel 2008).

Behind the scenes: The colonial and migrant history of EU/Europe

As far as I can see, these postcolonial continuities of current EU-European border and migration politics remain insufficiently addressed by research that considers both borders and migration-movements as more or less new phenomena, detached from the colonial history. This also applies, in part, to research that is critically interested in the new European border regime, but even more so to migration research that omits these European dimensions as a whole, continuing to refer to the nation-state context as seemingly the only politically relevant one, and thus remaining firmly attached to methodological nationalism.

Behind this postcolonial gap in the current debate on the borders and identity politics of the EU/Europe, another issue opens up: the omission of an equally long history of migration as a long-term foundation for the present. It is necessary to bring colonialism and imperialism into the discussion much more intensively than before, with particular consideration given to the migration regimes and the resulting global interdependencies in Europe. Stuart Hall has addressed

this largely obscured context against the background of his own migration history, which brought him from Jamaica to Great Britain: "People like me who came to England in the 1950s have, symbolically, been there for centuries. I was coming home. I am the sugar at the bottom of the English cup of tea. [...] That is the outside history that is inside the history of the English. There is no English history without that other history." (Hall 1991: 48-49). It can be concluded that there is no European history without this other history: the history of its colonial mobilities and interdependencies. For the genealogy of today's Europe includes the colonial and imperial-induced migrations of the "middle passage", in which people emigrated from Europe to the "settler colonies", while people from Africa were enslaved and forced into the "New World" of the colonies where indigenous populations were violently expelled. After their liberation from colonial rule, many people, as described by Stuart Hall, set off in the direction of the former colonial "mother countries" within the framework of postcolonial mobility. The "Black Atlantic" (Gilroy 1995) became one of the main passages of this enduring history of mobility and interconnectedness. Viewed as a whole, colonial migration movements and their consequences as well as the exodus of Jewish Europeans fleeing from the Holocaust have decisively shaped and changed the world and its populations since the 15th century. Neither Europe nor other parts of the world can be imagined today without this history of intertwining and overlapping migrations.

Looking at present day Europe through the lens of this prehistory, it becomes inevitably clear, that the present Europe can only be understood as postmigrant. For past migrations have long since inscribed themselves on present Europe and its societies, influencing and shaping Europe since generations. Categorising those histories again and again as "migratory" follows the logic of an exclusionary migration policy, conducted by societies that refuse to recognise and acknowledge the migratory-foundations of their own present. Critical migration research can, therefore, only speak of postmigrant realities, in which migration is *aufgehoben* – with the ambivalent duality of this term referring to both the overcoming and the preservation of migration. And, just as it is the case of the nation states and their nationally focussed migration research, the history of migration seems to play little role in the current negotiations of EU/European borders and identities. Also in this context, we see a lasting amnesia and 'dis-membering' of the transnational, postcolonial interdependencies with the worlds of those who today are perceived as 'strangers' at the borders of Europe. On a European level, in other words, the same obsession of constantly seeing refugeeism and migration as new phenomena, as new arrivals without a common history, is dominating – including the tendency to scandalising them accordingly (Spielhaus 2014). Additionally, it is often overlooked that refugees and migrants enter postmigrant societies, typically with a long-term presence of migration from their respective countries of origin. This long term presence of migration helps to facilitate the

conditions of their arrival and creates the supporting structures, which they can rely on – and which can be activated in different times and contexts. Accordingly, in Germany a large part of the considerable "welcome culture" in the long summer of migration in 2015 was not achieved by "white Germans" as suggested by Angela Merkel's dictum of "Wir schaffen das!" (We can do it!) – often understood as a national self-affirmation –, but rather by a postmigrant society beyond the bounds between the "majority" and the "minority" (Gerlach 2017; Schiffauer 2017). Similarly stories of migration characterise all Western European immigration societies with a colonial history of interconnectedness, but the same also applies, to a lesser extent, to Eastern European societies that have pursued their own globalisation projects throughout their socialist history, for example, in the context of supporting anti-colonial struggles in the so-called Third World or within the framework of the transcontinental non-aligned movement (Slobodian 2015; Hüwelmeier 2017; Miscovic/Fischer-Tine/Boskovska 2014). Following the example of Western Europe, these interconnections and the mobilities associated with them are also being dis-membered today, which is encouraging new racist nationalisms in both East and West.

As at the national level, it can be critically asked to what extent research on Europe, its borders and migration-movements, fosters this amnesia – in particular when submitting itself to identity categories of the nation state and Europe: for example, by constantly creating and affirming "migration" as a category of "Otherness" – albeit with an emancipatory and activist intention. Instead of focusing on connections and new alliances beyond the bound of the ethnic, new separations are created within and in opposition to those marked as "Other". Accordingly, the ubiquitous focus on "refugees" – including the new branches of research that follow – is counterproductive as long as the implicit connections with the seemingly different categories of illegal migrants or those migrating with a tourist visa are concealed instead of revealed; as long as dividing lines are strengthened between "other" migrants, for whom "economic" reasons are attributed instead of "humanitarian" ones – and as long as these politically effective, classificatory boundaries are adopted into research instead of being called into question. It was not for nothing that earlier critical research on migration and borders had been resolutely opposed to such distinctions, which were understood as part of the border regime: the aim of this earlier critical research was typically to not separate the often overlapping multiplicity of reasons for migration, avoiding the risk of pitting them against each other. Research on so-called guest worker migration has shown that economic reasons were not the only determining factor here, but that this specific migration also offered many people the opportunity to escape the southern European dictatorships of the postwar era. Thus 'guest work' was in many cases often synonymous with political exile (Kölnischer Kunstverein et al. 2005). Accordingly, the flight from political persecution and the desire for a life

without material deprivation are not mutually exclusive. The attempts to establish categorical distinctions between those different forms of migration inevitably leads to exclusion. For example, the humanitarian impetus often cited in political speech about refugees today is discredited by the fact that it focuses only on very specific origins, from certain war and crisis zones, while others, such as Roma EU citizens, are not granted the same right to escape from existentially threatening conditions. The distinctions effective in this context allow human rights to be measured according to double standards.

With regard to migration too, the critical question emerges as to how this category operates in the context of mobility and the mobility regimes that differentiate and govern it.[3] Additionally, it proves counterproductive to try to distinguish struggles for residence rights and citizenship according to subject categories, i.e. to separate political fights for rights of migrants from those of refugees, as well as separating them from the struggles of those born in the country, which are marked as "Other" by their "race". It is rather important, one can argue, to acknowledge what connects them and how they are intertwined. The questioning of the purported cultural homogeneity of the 'white nations' of Europe against the background of the call for recognition of their postcolonial realities is an important goal of scientific analysis and political critique. However, this can only succeed if these postcolonial realities are viewed in conjunction with their preceding and constituent migrant mobilities and postmigrant presences, instead of separating them as "Other".

Between the posts: Overcoming x-exclusions

Do we then need another "post" construction at all, and in relation to which "X" would it have to be constructed (Mecheril 2014)? My answer to this question is that, with the concept of postmigration, the role of "migration" as political category, demarcating inner and outer borders, can be criticised without invalidating the significance of migration as a political practice. On the contrary, it seems to me that it is only possible with this concept to identify the (often neglected and forgotten) constitutive and shaping role of migration within the society – now described as "postmigrant society". And it is only with the concept of postmigration that migrant histories and struggles can be brought to the fore and be seen as the foundations of today's arrivals and be used to counter the social obsession of defining migration as the "Other" and, by doing so, constantly excluding it from the society's own self-perception. Thus, it is not a question of questioning migration itself, but of questioning

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3   According to a discussion launched at a Migration Lab conference: "Migration_Mobilität_Gesellschaft. Umkämpfte Politiken der Klassifikation", Institut für Europäische Ethnologie, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 10.-11.06.2016.

its academic and political instrumentalisation as a designation of a specifically hierarchical subject relationship between "natives" and marginalised "Others". Similar to gender, migration also designates a biopolitically normative and hierarchical setting – and, at the same time, also a place from which this regime can be fought. This in turn links postmigration with other attempts to challenge existing border regimes. The concept of postmigration opens up the possibility of identifying new connections and interfaces between those struggles – for instance in relation to gendered and postcolonial power regimes – and of establishing cross-disciplinary alliances. A postmigrant perspective allows to explore and to challenge x exclusions in academic and political discourse about European "nations" and their borders – filling gaps and intervening in the existing research in the field.

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