

Mapping the Margins of Europe

Race, Migration, and Belonging

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“SOMETHING UNIQUE IS AFOOT IN EUROPE, in what is still called Europe even if we no longer know very well *what* or *who* goes by this name. Indeed, to what concept, to what real individual, to what singular entity should this name be assigned today? Who will draw up its borders?” (Derrida 1991, 5) Jacques Derrida uttered these words in 1990, a time of extraordinary transformation in Europe. The Berlin Wall had fallen, the Soviet Union had collapsed, and the anxiously anticipated Maastricht Treaty, which would formally establish the European Union, was around the corner. Today, in 2017, Derrida’s words have at least as much resonance as the day they were spoken.

In 1990, the geopolitical and economic borders of Europe were metamorphosing into those of the European Union. Old hierarchies were being overlaid with new ones, disclosing and producing a complex bricolage of affluence, renewal, erosion, and dispossession. A quarter of a century later, both Europe and the EU—two entities that are perhaps more visibly discrete than ever before—still struggle to discern and respond to what is afoot, and decide what or who goes by these names: Europe and the EU. Skepticism, anger, and indignation at the postwar European project are at an all-time high. The question of what will become of Europe and the EU looms on the horizon. The borders of both entities are, as always, multiple and in flux, and the questions of who draws them and how they are drawn are as contested as ever.

The disputed economies within older Europe, including Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Spain (often collectively designated by the disturbing acronym PIIGS), have been rendered peripheral through austerity. These newly marginalized spaces are also places of transit, absorption, and rejection for increasing numbers of migrants and refugees fleeing social and political conflicts as well as economic and environmental devastation in the Middle East and Africa—conflicts and devastation in which Europe has been and remains complicit.¹ As the recent influx of Syrians seeking refuge by attempting to traverse the borderscapes of Europe makes painfully clear, Europe continues both to signify an object of desire and function as an apparatus of necropolitics (Grzinić and Ttlić 2014).

This newest, though by no means only, refugee crisis reveals much about Europe's long-standing unwillingness to reckon with the consequences of its historical and contemporary colonial and imperial exploits and entanglements. It illuminates also the internal social, political, and economic hierarchies and borders Europe and the EU continue to proliferate. Situated within persistent conflicts over belonging and Europe's indebtedness to those it includes and excludes (Bojadzijeve and Messadra 2015), the refugee crisis likewise throws into sharp relief Europe's reluctance to attend to the question of race, and the myriad racializations and racisms that have formed part of Europe's anatomy (Arendt 1951; Foucault 1997). As Fatima El-Tayeb elucidates, there is a refusal to see racialized minorities as Europeans. She explains this is because the continent is framed

as a space free of “race” (and by implication racism), [which] is not only central to the ways that Europeans perceive themselves, but has also gained near-global acceptance. Despite the geographical and intellectual origin of the very concept of race in Europe, not to mention the explicitly race-based policies that characterized both its fascist regimes and its colonial empires, the continent often is marginal at best in discourses of race or racism. (El-Tayeb 2011, xv)

Thus, the margins and borders of Europe have been drawn by ongoing, shifting, and competing internal processes of *othering* that simultaneously racialize so-called non-Europeans and deny recognition of minority statuses within national discourses (Wekker 2016; Welch 2016). “Migrant” and “refugee” have come to brand the newest wave of mobile masses traversing circuits of survival, histories of colonialism, and contemporary capitalism within Europe and on its margins. But “migrant” and “refugee” have also come to operate as racializing categories that permanently anchor multigenerational communities to an outsider status, confirming Étienne Balibar's (1996, 362) concern that European citizenship, if not rendered radically open, will operate instead as a system of apartheid.

The need for radical openness in Europe has also preoccupied Derrida, and grounded his reimagining of Europe as a Europe of hope. But is there hope

in and for Europe? Is there much left to salvage? Are there good reasons to not give up on Europe? For most of its internal and external *others*, Europe has signified colonialism, racism, fascism, nationalism, and war. For centuries, those constructed as non-European within and outside its fluid borders have been subjected to physical and symbolic violence. Is that not reason enough to abandon Europe and dispense, once and for all, with the idea of its potential? For Derrida and many of his interlocutors, the answer continues to be a firm “no.” While the potential and promise of Europe continues to be unfulfilled, it remains anchored in values associated with some of the neglected trajectories of the Enlightenment, democracy, hospitality, and responsibility (Borradori 2003, 116; Derrida 1991, 78; Redfield 2007, 382). Despite the scores of self-inflicted wounds produced by centuries of devastation, hope can still be unearthed in today’s Europe. But what kind of Europe is this Europe of hope? Or, better put, what kind of hope still lies in Europe?

In 1990, Derrida opened his discussion of a Europe of hope by suggesting the need to deconstruct, as opposed to abandon, the concepts of identity and culture. Deconstruction, unlike abandonment or destruction, is affirmative. On this, Derrida is unequivocal: “deconstruction is always on the side of the yes, on the side of the affirmation of life” (Derrida 2007, 51). Deconstruction enables us to challenge accepted social, political, and cultural truths, while denaturalizing and revaluing accepted values. But in doing so, it also enables the disclosure and emergence of something else, of another way of being. It is thus necessary to deconstruct modern, indeed European, interpretations of culture and identity, characterized by *ipseity*² or self-sameness, if hope can be maintained in Europe. Derrida’s deconstruction produces a conception of identity and culture as non-self-identical, always already in the process of becoming other than what they are. Identity, culture, and Europe itself never *are*, but are always already produced as a process of becoming. As Derrida suggests, “*what is proper to a culture is not to be identical to itself*. Not to not have an identity, but not to be able to identify itself, to be able to say ‘me’ or ‘we;’ to be able to take the form of a subject only in the non-identity to itself or, if you prefer only in the difference *with itself [avec soi]*” (1991, 9–10, emphasis in original).

If there is to be hope for and in Europe, it must not only take responsibility for the destruction it continues to wreak, but must also engage in self-deconstruction, acknowledging that it lacks a proper self. It must acknowledge that its propriety is precisely the lack thereof; that its identity lies precisely in its non-identity to itself and its perpetual deferral of meaning; that its nonessential essence is *différance* itself.³ The hope of Europe, argued Derrida, “consists precisely in not closing itself off in its own identity and in advancing itself in an exemplary way toward what it is not” (Derrida 1991, 29). Europe’s hope lies, in other words, in an essential openness to that which it simultaneously is and is not. Europe must thus “invest itself in the always fragile and unstable distinction between self

and other” (Fristch 2008, 188), recognizing the other within the self and thus guarding against the foreclosure of “any openness to the other, to everything non-European” (Gasché 2007, 5). A Europe of hope will thus welcome foreigners and accept their alterity; it will respect minorities and singularities; it will oppose racism and xenophobia; it will have “no given borders” (Derrida 1991, 30, 77–78).

Derrida’s emphasis on the absence of borders should not be taken lightly. Almost a century ago, prior to the proliferation of border studies, Georg Simmel argued that the border “is not a spatial fact with sociological effects, but a sociological fact which takes a spatial form” (quoted in Acuto 2008). Borders, as border studies literature has convincingly demonstrated, do not always take on a spatial form. As some of the essays in this issue show, borders are often inscribed and articulated through bodies. Yet Simmel’s insights into the “sociological” quality of borders remain apposite. In suggesting that borders are not spatial but sociological facts, Simmel and more recent border theorists challenge the very rigidity, stability, and fixity ostensibly evoked by the concept of “border,” a concept grounded in the demarcation and indeed protection of the inside from outside, the self (and self-same) from the other. In suggesting that a Europe of hope must be marked by the absence of given borders, Derrida can thus be read as again pointing to the essential absence of *ipseity* that conditions the possibility and hope of another Europe.

Borders are always subject to contestation, challenge, and reinterpretation. Those vested in preserving the *ipseity* of identities and cultures often construct these contestations as moments of danger or crisis. Yet, as in the case of deconstruction, the threat implied by crisis, and indeed, by an existential crisis of being (a threat stemming from the abandonment of *ipseity*), is simultaneously a chance—a chance to open up to the unforeseeable other, to another future, or as Derrida suggests, to the *to come*. At a moment when, as Balibar puts it, “several critical developments are taking place at the ‘borders’ of Europe,” it is essential to embrace the crisis at and around the borders of Europe as an opportunity to reclaim its potential (Balibar 2016, 166). The crises on the Eastern margins, Atlantic borderlands, and the “center” of Europe that the essays in this issue explore exemplify the unsustainability of borders and the *ipseic* cultures they claim to ensconce.

FEMINISTS MAPPING THE MARGINS

In putting together this collection of essays, we asked feminist theorists to examine the complex and contested margins of Europe, focusing on its racialized borders and peripheries. The four contributions to this special issue interrogate where and how the margins of Europe are constituted; how they materialize on institutional, psychic, ethical, and performative registers;

whether and how Europe's limits are transgressed; and what futures such transgressions can open up.

The authors featured here interrogate Europe's borders and borderlands through lenses of race and gender in order to grapple with what is "afoot in Europe." As a point of departure, the authors begin with the fundamental assumption that Europe is a historically contingent and contrived object whose meanings and margins are articulated and rearticulated in human rights discourses, epistemic maps, performative interventions, and psychoanalytical imaginings. Grounded in this assumption, the essays scrutinize the reproduction of the Western and Eastern reaches of Europe, complicating the idea that it is naturally bounded by the Atlantic or "the East." Two of the essays directly explore the simultaneous marginalization of former Eastern Bloc EU member states and the work they do on behalf of Europe, reinforcing the borders of the EU and serving as a convenient racialized insider/outsider that buffers the EU's "core" from external or more other "others."

In addition to reflecting on the borders of Europe, the essays provocatively reveal how processes of fixing borders (and immunizing the center) entail the externalization and "enfleshment" of migrant bodies. For example, the essays draw attention to the notion that the border is not merely a physical object or zone, but is articulated and performed on and through the bodies of migrants, refugees, and other marginalized populations. In Europe, attempts are made to make visible the precarious lives of those bodies, as the Dutch migrant rights organization *Wij Zijn Hier* (We Are Here) exemplifies. Yet more often than not, migrants and refugees continue to be rendered invisible, or, as one of the essays in this issue argues, their presence (alive, as well as dead) is used, if inadvertently, to reinforce the nationalist underpinnings of European discourses and practices.

THE ABJECT ATLANTIC AND PERSISTENT "EAST"

The European narrative of racelessness is pernicious, if uncanny, because of the centrality of European colonial projects in modern racial formations. It could be that the "natural" (if fluid) boundary of the Atlantic has played a role in constructing the idea of Europe as separate from other geographies, rendering the violent circuits of exchange across the Atlantic external to it. In this vein, Ashley Bohrer argues in her essay, *The Abject Atlantic: The Coloniality of the Concept of "Europe" in Its Maritime Meridian*, that the Atlantic is "lurking, haunting even conversations that would seem to be about other places, other things, other times" (221). Bohrer explores the historical significance of the Atlantic world in the formation of the idea of European unity, suggesting, "the content of 'Europe' as an idea, an aspiration, and an imaginary was furnished through the violent conquest and exploitation of the lands and peoples of the

Atlantic” (216). Yet despite the centrality of the Atlantic world in fashioning the epistemic, subjective, political, and geographic borders of Europe, it is often renounced as constitutive of Europe. This, Bohrer notes, is due to the abject positioning of the Atlantic world vis-à-vis Europe. “The multi-regionality of the Atlantic world,” Bohrer argues, “allows us to see not just how abjection functions differentially, but to see how the concept of abjection is itself a symptom of the larger questions of Europe” (229). Indeed, Bohrer suggests, we must situate Europe *in* the Atlantic world as much as on the geographical landmass known as Europe. Bohrer’s essay makes clear the persistence of the abject Atlantic in conceptualizations of the boundaries of Europe through the example of the role of the Atlantic world in the invention of racial slavery. It thereby raises the question of the connections between the Atlantic world and conceptualizations of Eastern Europe. Given the etymological derivative of *Slav* and the term slave, Bohrer suggests, the Atlantic is part of the “contestation between Western and Eastern Europe” (235).

This entanglement between slavery, the abject Atlantic, and the eastern boundaries of Europe is also explored in Annie Hill’s essay, *The Rhetoric of Modern-Day Slavery: Analogical Links and Historical Kinks in the United Kingdom’s Anti-trafficking Plan*. The post-Cold War politics of EU accession and the ongoing tensions within the EU between old and new member states vividly illustrate the persistence of an Eastern frontier of/in Europe. Hill analyzes the British government’s use of historical abolition analogies in framing the recent UK Action Plan on Tackling Human Trafficking and suggests that this framing contributed to greater restrictions on East European migration. Hill reveals how the *Action Plan* both defines and incites the problem. The state reacts not simply to an organized traffic in East Europeans, but to the uncertain future of the British nation brought to the fore by increasing, and seemingly uncontrolled, migration. Drawing on established and newly constructed ideas about East Europeans, the Action Plan secures the borders of the UK in the name of, and building on the ostensible legacy of, British abolition of slavery. Linking East Europeans with slavery also performs “the double discursive move of sidelining black people as victims of slavery and centering white people as sympathetic prey of an evil trade” (257). Thus, as Hill’s essay suggests, the racialized borders of Europe are articulated, among others, through an antislavery discourse that simultaneously fixes an eastern frontier and obfuscates the racialized implications of the concept of “modern-day slavery.” Together, Bohrer and Hill present compelling perspectives on how the margins of Europe are drawn both by the Atlantic world and in Eastern Europe: the abject Atlantic is externalized but central to conceptualizations of Europe, while Eastern Europe is marginalized, once again, to protect the integrity of an internal Europe (Wolff 1994).

Although Bohrer's and Hill's essays interrogate these processes at the level of discourse, the borders of Europe are also corporeally performed. Frequent images of refugee bodies in states of exile, from the shores of Lampedusa to the (now dismantled) migrant and refugee encampment in Calais (known also as the "Calais Jungle"), render migrant and refugee bodies as the physical limit of the nation-state. While, as previously mentioned, refugee crises are not new to Europe and the EU is not alone in managing global mobility, the precarity of migrant and refugee bodies is vividly apparent in and along the borders of Europe. In their contribution (discussed in more detail below), *The Migrant Is Dead, Long Live the Citizen!: Pro-migrant Activism and EU Borders*, Jennifer M. Gully and Lynn Mie Itagaki remind us that "wherever the border spectacle is staged a border emerges" (284). The people who swell train stations, populate makeshift refugee centers, traverse bridges, and journey on clandestine boats are thus where the border emerges.

MIGRANT AND REFUGEE BODIES—OBJECTS AND FLESH

Karolina Kulicka's contribution, *Not Refugees but Rapists and Colonizers: The "European Migration Crisis" through Object-Relation Theory*, offers a compelling approach to the relationship between bodies and borders. Interrogating the European encounter with non-Europeans through the lens of psychoanalytic theory, Kulicka suggests that the "Muslim refugee" figures as a phantasmatic *bad object* of European identity. Drawing on the notion of phantasy, as developed in Melanie Klein's object-relation theory and the work of Julia Kristeva, Kulicka points to three phantasmatic frames that shape anti-refugee discourse in Europe, and have been particularly salient in political debates on the refugee crisis in Poland: refugees as colonizers; as robbing economic immigrants; and as sexual aggressors. Having analyzed the manner in which the "crisis" has been framed in Polish parliamentary election debates of 2015, Kulicka argues that, "these phantasy constructs are formed out of the expelled and painful aspects of European history and identity," and notes that, "in spite of varying reasons for animosity towards refugees in different parts of Europe, it is nonetheless striking that similar phantasmatic frames shape the anti-refugee discourse all over the continent" (262). Kulicka's essay, however, also explores the specificities of Polish discourses, noting that, while in "Western" Europe the presence of Muslim migration is often seen as reverse colonization, "operating as a phantasmatic defense against guilt for the colonial past," in "Eastern" Europe it is seen as "recurring colonization," previously experienced as Russian and German occupation. Kulicka's focus on Poland thus aptly "brings to light how old divisions and hierarchies are used to secure Europe's positive self-representation" (262).

A psychoanalytic interpretation of European anti-refugee discourses discloses the paranoid and innermost parts of European identity. As Kulicka

argues, object-relation theory can help “capture a more integrated picture of European identity, consisting of both its internalized and expelled elements” (264). These inner demons emerge in contemporary political realities as, among others, the affective power of anti-migrant sentiment in the UK’s affirmative referendum to leave the EU, and attempts to reconstruct strict border regimes in Sweden, France, Hungary, and elsewhere. We are thus faced with the question of how to transcend this persistent othering—a question that is both practical and symbolic, as Kulicka and Bohrer convey in their essays.

Gully and Itagaki take up similar questions in their analysis of a Berlin-based activist group, the Center for Political Beauty (*Zentrum für Politische Schönheit* or ZPS), and its attempt to thrust the precarious lives of migrants and refugees into mainstream German consciousness. In the widely praised and controversial performance piece, “The Dead Are Coming!,” ZPS exhumed the body of a drowned migrant interred in an anonymous grave in Sicily. The body was of a woman whose family managed to survive the journey to Germany. With the family’s permission, the body was reburied at the “heart” of Berlin, and arguably, Europe, in an attempt to claim the unknown migrant for the German body politic. In analyzing this performance and the “artivism” of ZPS, Gully and Itagaki aim to push critical border studies to more seriously consider performance art as part of the performativity of the border itself. The authors argue that the ZPS’s performance pieces “are usefully conceptualized as ‘border spectacle[s]’” (284) and, thus, moments or practices that themselves constitute and reconstitute, or indeed perform, borders and practices of bordering.

As an “artist” strategy, as Gully and Itagaki point out, “The Dead Are Coming!” memorializes migrants in a manner similar to the ways in which unknown soldiers have been memorialized by the nation-state, and in turn, have immortalized the nation. In repeating that gesture, the memorialization of the unknown migrant attempts to “force . . . German and EU audiences to recognize migrant lives under mortal threat by incorporating them into the body politic and resacralizing their deaths through human rights discourses as well as nationalist ones” (288). This is a provocative strategy. Yet, as Itagaki and Gully argue, the strategy that aims to reassign human value to anonymous migrants paradoxically reinscribes their vulnerability and mortality as the invulnerability and immortality of the body politic. Thus, the ZPS’s “elevation of the dead migrant’s body to a new symbol of the nation, and ethical symbol that reminds Europe, but especially Germans, of the sacred obligation their privileges of life and security demand, depends on the reaffirmation of the nation-state and the opposition between citizens and non-citizens” (296).

Taken together, the essays in this issue point to some of the complexities, and indeed, irresolvable aporias that ground and constitute “this little thing that is Europe” (Gasché 2007). While they certainly do not offer (nor aim to offer) a resolution to any of the multiple and recurring existential crises they

explore, in attempting to understand and explain what is “afoot in Europe,” they contribute to the intellectual work and critical self-reflection that is necessary if there is to be hope for and in Europe.

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NOTES

1. The joint 2015 statement on “Peripheralizing Europe” brought together east/south dialogues and perspectives. The statement is available in English, Romanian, Italian, German, Slovenian, Spanish, and Hungarian. See: <https://peripheralizingeurope.wordpress.com/coomon-statement-eng-ro-de-slo-it-cast/>. Accessed April 21, 2017.
2. In *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (2005, 11), Derrida defines *ipseity* as, “some ‘I can,’ or at the very least the power that *gives itself* its own law, its force of law, its self-representation, the sovereign and reappropriating gathering of self in the simultaneity of an assemblage or assembly, being together, or ‘living together,’ as we say.”
3. In the translator’s note to *The Ear of the Other*, Peggy Kamuf situates *différance* at the intersection of the spatial and temporal sense of the verb *différer* (1985, xii), that is, “to differ” and “to defer” (Derrida 1981, 8).

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