

❖ **Thematic Focus** ❖

Who Embodies europe?
Explorations into the Construction
of european Bodies

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ABSTRACT

In this special issue we focus on processes of europeanisation and the work of colonial legacies and their impact on the production of the european body, a body that is always already racialised, classed and gendered. ‘european body’ can be observed in discourses and practices that constitute the normal/desired/legitimate body and concomitantly impacts notions about the civilised/cultured body, often linked to *whiteness*, secularism, legitimate class and gender performances. We ask to look back across pasts and into the present in order to explore who currently marks the boundaries of what is considered civilised, cultured, “normal” and comes to define what is considered a european body. What embodies the present, which and whose body epitomises europeaness and how does europeanisation generate (tacit) knowledge about the legitimate body?

KEYWORDS

bodies, embodiment, *whiteness*, europeanisation, europe

Is there a ‘european body’,¹ and how is europeanisation embodied? What is a ‘european body’ then? Jean Comaroff (1993) has once shown that:

‘nationality, culture and physical type are condensed into the language that [...] would mature into scientific racism’ which ‘imprinted the physical contours of stereotypic others on the European imagination – and, with them, a host of derogatory associations’ (309).

Taking this quote as a starting point in this issue, we would like to question how a european body is constructed in multiple but not uncontested ways and how european imperial legacies (Stoler 2013a; Stoler and Cooper 1997) continue to produce what we see as ever-new emanations of the ‘european body’.

In recent years both the so-called refugee crisis and the eu enlargements amplified anxieties that often make use of the category of ‘europe’. Such ‘europe’ has different meanings depending on the



geographical and cultural positioning of those applying it. Currently, both in ‘the east’ and in ‘the west’ of the eu, it is often a notion that stresses difference from the Muslim Other. It is applied by such parties as the Alternative für Deutschland (Germany), Partij voor de Vrijheid (NL), Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden), Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Poland) and Fidesz (Hungary) to produce both an antielitist and antitolerant discourse against ostensibly leftist elites who are said to impose an ‘irrational’ discourse of tolerance and multiculturalism. Such dynamics depict how racism and hierarchies ingrained in it, albeit for different reasons and for different aims, continue to be the fuel of europe, both in ‘the east’ and in ‘the west’ (Böröcz and Sarkar 2017; Melegh 2006; Weber 2016).

Moreover, in the past years and along the upsurge of these racist discourses, we could observe stark debates on sexual rights and emancipation that have elucidated how sexual freedoms, emancipatory values and gender equality are increasingly linked to european identity and, in paradoxical ways, to national identities (Fassin 2010). In these debates sexual rights and freedoms play a growing role in discussions on modernity, democracy and human rights. Tolerant attitudes towards non-normative sexualities (less, though, towards nonbinary gender identities) have been increasingly intermeshed with racist discourses and became markers of freedom and difference (Brown 2008; Butler 2009; Castro-Varela and Dhawan 2009; Dietze 2009, 2016; Kosnick 2013; Puar 2007). What is inherent in these debates are discourses on liberal personhood, through which the liberated and free subject is constructed that stipulates new forms of hierarchy building and new markers of civility, dignity, modernity and even humanity (Brown 2008; Mahmood 2015; Pollock et al. 2002; Povinelli 2006).

The debates over Brexit in the UK, however, have also shown that in the ‘old’ europe there are different shades of *whiteness* and europeaness measured by the capability to perform a particular set of values and sensibilities allegedly impossible to reach by some of the people from new member states of the eu (Böröcz and Sarkar 2017; Fox, Morosanu and Szilassy 2014; Lewicki 2017). They construct a silent but powerful discourse on cultural hierarchies that conflate essentialised national representations with lifestyles, class, gender performances and race (Lewicki 2016; Ryan 2010). These phenomena show that there is a ‘spectre of Orientalism’ (Buchowski 2006; see also Melegh 2006) and (post)imperial dynamics (Cooper and Stoler 1997; Stoler 2013b) that continue to shape the modern european everyday realities both in ‘the east’ and in ‘the west’, although in different ways and with differing

consequences. What these dynamics have in common is the reproduction of discourses and markers of civility and europeaness that are applied to claim cultural superiority over Others, be it refugees from predominantly Muslim countries or migrants or employees from new eu member states. An old colonial and imperial discourse gains new momentum both in ‘the east’ and in ‘the west’ and reveals new bordering and distinction mechanisms while also reshaping and reactivating racialised, gendered and classed boundaries in new ways. Matti Bunzl (2000) identifies what he calls the ‘construction of sexuality and the body as the arena of cultural differentiation and Othering in the modern world’ (76) or ‘a topography of embodied otherness’ (87).

Against this background in this issue we turn the focus on different forms of europeanisation and embodiment and suggest we explore the work of imperial legacies (Stoler 2013a) ethnographically in the production of the legitimate – precious and prosperous – european bodies (see also Hirschkind 2011; Stoler 2002). We ask in which ways these formations mutually embody the Other and the european self and how a body is constructed as specific type of body that is embedded in imaginations of ‘the west’ – of progress, freedom, and modernity – in representations, images, politics and everyday life (Keinz 2010: 67).

We suggest to look back across pasts and into the present in order to explore the current boundaries of who and what is considered civilised, cultured, healthy and ‘normal’ and comes to define what is considered a ‘european body’. Which and whose body epitomises europeaness, and how does europeanisation generate (tacit) knowledge about the legitimate body?

Thus, we suggest a three-fold approach in order to explore the hegemony and contestation of the ‘european body’:

- (1) Following a postcolonial perspective as well as critical research on europeanisation (Adam et al. forthcoming), we suggest to inquire into the legacies that constitute and reproduce imaginations and embodiments of the ‘european body’ and the effects this body has on the cultural spaces and places it inhabits. These lines of inquiry run along habitus performances, subjectivisations, racialisations, class distinctions, gender normalisations and, particularly, the intersections of these processes that led and lead to the (re)production of the ‘european body’. How is the modern, secular, liberal body generated by or negotiated in and through imperial legacies? Haraway, in her famous article ‘Situated Knowledges’, draws attention to ‘the embodied others who are not allowed *not* to have a body’ (1988: 575). Although stemming from a different context (knowledge production

and feminist objectivity meaning situated knowledges [Haraway 1988: 581]), it draws attention to the silent norm, the legacies thereof and the processes and forms of inscription whereby a body becomes racialised, classed and gendered. Feminist and queer theory as well as race-critical perspectives redirect the focus to different but inter-linked processes of normalisation and regimes of the normal, such as binary gender order, heteronormativity, colour-coded visibility and middle-class consumerist distinctions. We suggest to consider the situatedness of bodies and processes of embodiment by observing how they are living in the world and how *whiteness*, class, racism, sexism, nationalism and the binary gender order impact personhood, self and subjectivity.

- (2) Drawing on anthropological studies on power that focus on body and embodiment (Bourdieu 2010; Csordas 1994; Mauss 1973; Taussig 2012), we invite the reader to look at the racial, gender, class and other discourses as well as their intersections in order to trace the processes of the embodiment of 'europe': individual, social and material as well as across different spaces and times. Understood as text, symbol, habitus or body-self, the body constitutes a research field to reveal broader sociocultural processes that involve power constraints, ideologies, agency and change.

From an anthropological point of view, these questions do not intend just to examine the function of differences or reading differences on the surface of the body but rather pace Ahmed 'to account for the very effect of the surface, and to account for how bodies come to take certain shapes over others, and in relation to others' (Ahmed 2000: 42). Hence, we see the body as a theoretical and political question that has experiential, practical, affective and relational dimensions.

Colonial Past and european Presence Embodied

Although there are studies on how nation-states and state politics are inscribed on bodies and how bodies are disciplined within a nation-state, drawing attention to the visceral emanations of modern nationalism (Herzfeld 2004; Wulff 2005), there is no up-to-date research on the body and the embodiment of 'europe'. Disciplines' interest in europe and europeanisation for many years was determined by the concept of european identities, which were 'measured' against the ec/eu cultural policies aiming to foster european identities. Another research stream was searching for this identity by 'measuring' attachment to nationality and/or region. For many years europeaness in anthropological

research spanned between nationalism, eu cultural policies and cosmopolitanism. This latter concept, as it made its career in the mid-2000s, has also been in focus with the anthropology of embodiment (Bourgouin 2012; Molz 2006; Noble 2013; Skeggs 2004: 155ff.). The studies on cosmopolitanism, however, while referring to *white* privilege and hegemonic discourses that inform visions of personhood, do so not in regard to notions of europe and europeanisation, nor do they explicitly address european legacies in embodied cosmopolitanism (see Werbner 2008 critically). Anthropological studies of institutions of the european union, where one could assume a presence of a european body, discuss various negotiations of nationally coded practices and/or existence of ‘european identity’ or style (Kuus 2015; McDonald 2006; Zabursky 2000), but they neither suggest analytical qualities nor determine empirically the construction of the european body in situ.

Although we acknowledge these research streams in the anthropology of europe and of the body, our suggestion to test how the analytical qualities of ‘european body’ leans on the postcolonial and (post) imperial perspective on europe and bodies. In this respect we follow recent studies on europeanisation that see it as a global, historical and entangled process of production of europe (Adam et al. forthcoming). We believe that this perspective helps to move anthropological research on europe and europeanisation beyond the reproduction of implicit eurocentrism. It instead turns the focus of anthropological research on europe away from doing research in europe and towards the production of europe and processes of europeanisation – ostensibly trivial cultural dynamics that activate postcolonial and imperial genealogies in embodiment, in the way bodies, as heterogenous and unsecluded processes and products of global entanglements, are living-in-the-world and emerge in relations with their surroundings as well as in distant spaces away from europe. The contributions in this issue critically look upon these processes as embodied and as europe entangled in global power formations.

Such a perspective is informed by postcolonial studies that have long demonstrated how race, gender and class, along with their intersections, constitute the modern nation and modern europe. Ann Laura Stoler (2002) shows how mid-nineteenth-century tensions around race in european colonies merge with those of class in the metropole, stipulating formations of the european bourgeois’ body and european modernity within a nation-state. She argues that the formation of the national european bourgeoisie is dependent on and fuelled by

the presence and contact with the Other (ibid.). Fear of ‘contagion’ directed mostly towards poor *white* workers, *white* soldiers and native women or their métis offspring, which were seen as straddling the cultural and racial norms and were thus not-european-enough, formed bodily and moral norms leading to the emergence of bodily culture and moral sentiment guarding european *whiteness* and national identity. Racial and class distinctions in the colonies, as various scholars show (Comaroff 1993, 1997; McClintock 1995, 1997; McClintock et al. 1997; Stoler 1997, 2002, 2008; Stoler and Cooper 1997), inform the emergence of class divisions in europe, with those left out of bourgeois privilege being not dignified and civilised enough. The culturalisation of these divisions is owed to shifting forms of racial, moral, sexual and class norms that were constantly established anew to maintain distinction and rule of power of the european bourgeoisie (Comaroff 1997; McClintock 1995; Stoler 2002). We argue that current discourses and cultural dynamics are informed by historical discourses, reproducing the norms that condition the legitimate, precious and unambiguously gendered body. At the same time this body is not only always already becoming through practices and performances but also un/done by imaginations and images, as individuals never fully embody these norms.

To grasp these embodiments of norms and ‘europe’ is no easy task. An embodiment of europe would entail making it (europe) tangible, so that someone could say, ‘Ah! This is Europe!’ But it does not work this way; europe does not exist in one certain way, as Abélès (2000) already once showed. The embodiment of europe cannot be easily read on the surface of bodies; there are bodies that can never fully perform europeaness (*whiteness*) due to the colour-coded visual economy. We suggest that in tracing ‘european bodies’, the past serves as an opening onto the present. Which (european) colonial legacies are actualised in order to define europeanness and generate notions of the european body? Which and whose body represents globalisation, cosmopolitanism, modernity, progress, freedom and emancipation, often linked to discourses on europe?

We propose to examine discourses, notions, representations and embodiments of the ‘european body’, taking into account the imperial legacies in its production, both within the space called europe (e.g., in racialised zones, see Gressgård 2015; Hoffmann 2017; Picker 2013) and elsewhere (Stoler 2013b). We contend that these imperial legacies constitute europe’s ‘heritage’ and become embodied in myriad ways. They also make the empire and traces of it tangible and enable us to

investigate where and how these imperial legacies emerge in different discourses (about sexuality, gender, freedom, intimacy, race, class) as well as discursive, verbal and sartorial practices and the powers intrinsic to it. This perspective elucidates how europe is grounded in ideas of naturalisation while certain criteria are inscribed onto bodies. Naturalisation and inscription, however, not only classify bodies but also shape (their) agency and (sense of) self in particular ways.

Povinelli (2006) demonstrates how intimacy is culturally coded in discourses about freedom and constraint and how these discourses are geographically distributed and contained. Similarly, we claim that europeaness today is culturally coded in historically grounded hegemonic and neo-imperial discourses referring, for example, to ‘progressive sexualities’ (Butler 2009), homo-friendliness and tolerance (Brown 2008), rational actions and ways of doing things (Herzfeld 2004), civilised manners coded in class (Lewicki 2016) and ‘rational’ gender and affective performances (see also Hirschkind 2011). Where and when is europeaness read onto a body and what myriad and different constellations of embodiments of discourses enable the identification of a person as european?

Ethnography and Body/Embodiment

The body as a research object in anthropology and ethnology has been present from the very beginning of the discipline. Out of many research traditions and research streams focusing on the corporeal (Csordas 1999a), we make use of the concept of embodiment (Csordas 1990, 1999b) and its being-in-the-world.

Studies on embodiment that follow phenomenological approaches point to the processuality and contingency of forms and ways a body comes to exist in the world. Embodiment is never static; the term itself points to the doing. To embody something or somebody is an action that implies more than one practice. Moreover, embodiment is shaped in each and every interaction. It is not limited to what somebody does; it is also dependent on how this doing is perceived and classified. Seeing and perceiving a body is structured by the categories and norms available to us. Norms regulate the conditions under which embodiments become intelligible – hence, when an embodiment is successful or fails, when it does (or does not) realise cultural scripts, possibly in ways that endorse power and legitimacy (Bourdieu 2010; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

Processes of embodiment work – among other ways – through an ensemble of discursive, verbal, sartorial and social performances. We want to draw attention to this ensemble and to discourses, practices, concepts, values and narratives that are attributed to and deployed for constructing and reproducing notions of the european body. It redirects the ethnographic gaze to those moments when bodies collide, to situated practices, where embodiment takes place. Bodies and embodiment are both embedded in interdependent categories of social positioning and interlocking systems of power that work on them and shape the lived experience. Moreover, embodiment is not something an individual does alone but rather something that happens when bodies meet. Bodies become marked when they are seen through discourses, images and imaginations of an essentialised Other. Following Deleuze and Guattari, Beverly Skeggs (2004: 12) speaks of inscription: ‘Inscription is about making through marking. Inscription cuts or scars bodies in the process of assembling them into composite forms, segments, strata and habitual modes of behaviour’.

In phenomenological perspectives, body is not only the object of power but also a site of agency; it is not only reflecting the microscopic lifeworld in which a body moves but also the macroscopic political and imperial dynamics in which it exists. We argue that these legacies – so often whitewashed from everyday common sense and lurking behind silent norms about gender, class and race – become embodied in myriad ways. By taking ‘european body’ as an object of investigation, we draw from theoretical developments in anthropology’s focus on the body and ethnography’s epistemology and methodology to highlight obscured but pertinent ways of producing bodies.

Moving beyond Binarisms

The phrase ‘european body’ risks reproducing set notions and images of what is perceived and seen as a european body and falling into what the inherent binarism the phrase ‘european body’ implies, the absence it entails and the Other it ultimately reproduces.

In his text ‘Of Hospitality’ Derrida begins with the ‘foreigner’s question’:

‘Isn’t the question of the foreigner [*l’étranger*] a foreigner’s question? Coming from the foreigner, from abroad [*l’étranger*]?’ And he continues: ‘Before saying *the* question of the foreigner, perhaps we should also

specify: question *of* the foreigner. How would we understand this difference of accent?' (2000: 3, italics in the original)

Derrida draws our attention to the question: What does it mean to begin with a question? What comes before the question? Which concepts and ideas condition the question?

The question and the term 'european body' similarly imply a not-unproblematic binarism. It inherently implies a negativity, something or, more precisely, some body that is either not european or not a body or neither. Which ideas have already been there, have ultimately led to or enabled the question of the european body? Which discourses, meanings and practices are attributed to the (not-)european and to what is considered a body? What ideas and concepts condition the european body? Following Derrida (2000), we ask: Who embodies the european body? Who is european? What gender is it assigned? Is it a subject? Is it a discourse? When does the discourse become embodied? Who is trying to become 'european'? Who is trying to become a body? Is there a body not recognised as body because it is not perceived european? Or, on the contrary: Who is not allowed *not* to have a body? Who has the privilege of moving bodiless – hence, invisibly? Is the body always human?

We are not talking about an existing body. There is no european body out there while at the same time some bodies are always inscribed and read as non-european in our colour-coded visual symbolic economy (Balibar 1991; Skeggs 2004). El-Tayeb (2011) terms these bodies 'Europeans of colour' to 'reference populations defined as inherently "non-European" because of a racialised cultural difference linked to a non-European origin (an origin that, as in the case of Roma and Sinti, might lie centuries in the past)' (xv).

Colonial legacies in current discourses demonstrate that the body is always already implicated by notions and fantasies of european-ness and 'fictive ethnicity' (Balibar 1991), or what Stuart Hall called 'the internalist narrative of European identity' (Hall 1991, cited in El-Tayeb 2011: xvii).

Thus, the challenge is to not readily reproduce notions of the european body and to not fall into the inherent binarism the question of the european body already implies. The second challenge is to reveal the repercussions of the modern european project in contemporary discourses as colonial legacies.

The articles in this issue demonstrate that an ethnographic assessment of practices, narratives and discourses can give nuanced insights into the european body in process. Who passes or fails to pass as

european? From a queer-feminist perspective, passing and failing have the potential to question hegemonic imaginations. A body that passes 'as if' inherently queers the markers that are read onto the body as european while at the same time questioning those markers that are predominantly perceived as european. The ethnographic task is to unravel what legacies inform these practices and perceptions. Fail or pass, ethnography enables us to inquire into the conditions of embodiment and reveals the implications of specific contexts and situations.

Gender, Race, Class and Sexuality – Interdependent Categories

Postcolonial studies discuss how the relation between colonisers and colonised is racialised, gendered and sexed and how colonial powers have constituted themselves through sexuality (McClintock 1995, 1997; McClintock, Mufti and Shohat 1997; Stoler 2002). Moreover, in the past years sexual rights as much as the right to bodily integrity play an increasing role in discussions about modernity, democracy, human rights and belonging (Ramme this volume).

Which techniques, practices and technologies (consumption, body shaping, beautifications, clothing, practices connected to legitimate gender and class performances and race, screening and/or medical technologies) link bodies to imaginations of progress and prosperity/health, modernity and freedom and which bodies simultaneously embody modernity, freedom and progress? What kind of figures are produced in these processes (e.g., the *white* gay male as symbol of modernity, the oppressed Muslima, the emancipated middle-class fully employed career woman and mother, the terrorist)? In which ways does europeanisation create such figures, and how do such bodies fuel europeanisation and policies in different locations? In short: Which and whose bodies impact cultural and policy change in europe?

In debates on security, terrorism and of late sexism, usually two bodies are being opposed to each other; the european body is usually being racialised (*white*) as well as gendered and classed, whereas the 'terrorist' body is simultaneously but differently racialised, classed and gendered. The racist mythology of the threat of the black male body or the 'Arab' body comes to mind. Here, the surface of the body determines whether it belongs and is seen as european respectively. However, we contend that it is never only the surface of the body

(skin colour, veiling, clothing) that determines how a body is categorised and ultimately seen as belonging to the nation or to europe (Gilroy 2000). Floya Anthias (2013) draws attention to belonging (and disbelonging) having experiential, practical and affective dimensions (326). Grada Kilomba (2010) gives not only an account of these dimensions but also of the *white* fantasies that reveal the *white* imaginary: 'In the *white* conceptual world, the Black subject is identified as the "bad" object, embodying those aspects that *white* society has repressed and made taboo, that is, aggression and sexuality' (18). Disbelonging is ascribed discursively through attributing practices such as sexual assault and harassment, use of language (loud, quiet, elaborate, sloppy), violent acts that are assumed to be exercised more by certain bodies and lesser by other bodies. This does not only mean that assaults are immediately assumed to have been exercised by bodies read as Muslims or the black male body, but also if an assault has happened, *white* discourse immediately assumes that these bodies have been involved.

The *white* imaginary includes the self-conception of liberal democracies. It entails powerful political and social imaginations of belonging. *White* imaginary revitalises articulations of racism and sexism by associating homophobia, sexism or misogyny as well as inequality and unfreedom as cultural conditions of Muslims and refugees, more precisely of persons read as Muslims and refugees. 'Civilised masculinity', on the contrary, is framed as an achievement of *white* men (see Dietze 2016). Nuanced insights into these discourses and debates elucidate how social norms function. However, it is not only discourses but also comments, gestures, gazes, '(ethno)sexism' (Dietze 2016), racism and nationalism that shape lives and bodies or, to put it differently, that generate and rank bodies. Consumer practices, pornographic bodies and visibility converge into one image of freedom, which ultimately turns the 'gay' (the *white* gay male) into a symbol of modernity (Keinz 2010). Which differently gendered bodies (Weston 2002: 113) are recognised as modern and free and which gendered bodies are seen as unacceptable?

Outlook and Contributions

The contributions in this issue demonstrate that productions of the european body are largely informed by contemporary debates and developments in european countries, however deeply ingrained in

colonial and orientalist discourses. They inquire into cultural and social discourses and, to varying degrees, the legacies that condition the constitution and reproduction of imaginations of the european body and embodiment, of ‘east’ and ‘west’, of civilised and uncivilised and how these dichotomies become inscribed onto bodies, where a desired body is implicitly *white*, often male, heterosexual, middle class and (west) european. Thus, perspectives from postcolonial scholarship as well as race-critical and queer-feminist perspectives are indispensable when exploring constructions of the european body and processes of embodiment.

Andreea Racleş and Ana Ivasiuc carefully unpack the construction of ‘Gypsiness’ by inquiring into the relationship between space and olfactory dimensions, respectively the social production of smell and how sensorial experience is racialised, classed and gendered. Although their research fields are set in two different regions, the outskirts of Rome and a small Romanian town, by drawing on sensorial anthropology and debates on material culture, they discuss how the body becomes a means of legitimising social hierarchies in the european space while constructing a putative europeanness legible through the body and the Gypsy Other.

Victor Trofimov allows us to see how recent discourses on the modern, homo-friendly and tolerant ‘west’ impact the everyday social and cultural world where different bodies collide – in a drop-in centre of an organisation directed towards young male sex workers in Berlin. In his contribution he inquires into how a self-identified gay hustler from Romania tries to distinguish himself from his Romanian colleagues by emphasising his homosexual identity, simultaneously drawing upon the image of eastern backwardness in order to frame his colleagues as homophobes. Trofimov discusses how values and identities attributed to western europe – such as individual freedom, tolerance and being openly gay – inform the sociocultural dynamics and bodily performances as well as evoke imaginations about nationality and civility.

Chiara Pussetti problematises in the Forum section how hegemonic imaginations of the ‘european body’ work in different locations and beyond the geographical entity called europe. She shows how colonial legacies are ingrained in imaginations about a body beautiful and how they stipulate labour on body and with body – plastic surgery, cosmetic alteration, skin whitening, fashion practices – that allow to modify the body into a desired, dignified, respected body that is read as european and, hence, endowed with capital.

Although the divisions into ‘east’ and ‘west’ may seem ever present, the contributions in the Forum section show how looking at bodies may problematise these divisions.

The contribution of Livia Jiménez Sedano (Forum section) examines the so-called world-dance aficionados, a group of seemingly *white* european, highly educated, mobile and middle-class people and the world-dance market. The market and its consumers respectively echo postcolonial stereotypes and an Orientalist grammar of identity and alterity. The author intervenes into this Orientalist mindset and imaginary by debunking european notions of sophistication, moral superiority and self-acclaimed capability of movements.

The distribution of ideas of what is european and its opposite in space and time, the production of ‘real’ europe and ‘to-be-europe’, is depicted in Tanel Rander’s contribution (Forum section), where he claims that bodies of eastern europeans (or, rather, those living in post-Soviet Estonia) are symbolically in the west, while their minds and heads are still in the east. He uses this metaphor to show the entanglements of the colonial politics of the Soviet Union and the capitalist west as well as their local consequences in the everyday lives of people in Estonia. The division metaphor and his autobiographical reflection serves Rander to depict how imaginations fuel realities on both sides of the metaphorical division.

Taking a closer look at the discourses on LGBT rights in Ukraine, Nadzeya Husakouskaya shows how the discourse about the ‘east’ and ‘west’ petrifies the imagination about allegedly backwards and intolerant ‘east’ and progressive ‘west’. She carves out ruptures in these essentialising discourses by looking at practices pointing to other legacies than that of ‘tolerant’ europe, namely to that of the (post-)Soviet Union. While progressiveness towards LGBT rights and, in this case, particularly trans* rights are seen as a litmus test for democracy, she takes a look at local actors in Ukraine who oscillate between using europe as a tool in order to fight for trans* rights and showing how trans*people use other possibilities in the post-Soviet space to fulfil their needs.

A similar observation is made by Jennifer Ramme. She discusses the autonomy of the women’s body, present in many legal acts on the eu and european level and perceived by many as a ‘european value’. europe as vehicle and claims to autonomy serve as a counter argument against nationalist and misogynist discourses of the ruling party in Poland who want to curtail the autonomy of women’s bodies. The body becomes a battlefield, but the dichotomy of european and

national is contested by claims for multiple belongings of women's bodies.

The contributions in this issue shed light on the social imaginary and construction of europeanness and how it works upon bodies. They inquire into discourses and materiality, practices as well as emotional, affective and sensual/olfactory dimensions, stipulating new research perspectives on body, embodiment and europeanisation. They contribute to the closure of the epistemological gap and account for (post) colonial processes in knowledge production about europe in crucial times, intervening in racist, xenophobic and sexist discourses that are currently widely employed.

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Note

1. In our wording we follow the suggestion of Maureen Marsha Eggers, Grada Kilomba, Peggy Piesche and Susan Arndt in their book *Mythen, Masken und Subjekte: Kritische Weißseinsforschung in Deutschland* (2005). We use small letters for european and the eu (European Union) and italicise the terms white and whiteness in order to purposely interrupt the reading flow and eurocentric ways of reading.

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