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About

Gender forum is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. *gender forum* also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

Opinions expressed in articles published in *gender forum* are those of individual authors and not necessarily endorsed by the editors of *gender forum*.

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Target articles should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition) and should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words in length. Please make sure to number your paragraphs and include a bio-blurb and an abstract of roughly 300 words. Files should be sent as email attachments in Word format. Please send your manuscripts to gender-forum@uni-koeln.de.

We always welcome reviews on recent releases in Gender Studies! Submitted reviews should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition), have numbered paragraphs, and should be between 750 and 1,000 words in length. Please note that the reviewed releases ought to be no older than 24 months. In most cases, we are able to secure a review copy for contributors.

Article Publishing

The journal aims to provide rapid publication of research through a continuous publication model. All submissions are subject to peer review. Articles should not be under review by any other journal when submitted to *Gender forum*.

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Editorial

1 In a 2016 music video, “Borders”, the ever-controversial M.I.A., herself a Tamil refugee, comments on the gendered aspects of Western anxieties in the on-going refugee ‘crisis’: images of endless masses of all-male refugees of colour resonate with right-wing myths of uncivilized brown invaders, stealing jobs, raping white women and undermining Euro-American gender progressivism. In fact, gender issues are a constitutive force not only in refugee status and immigration law, but also in media discourses and popular knowledge production about refugees. “[T]reated as interruptions, intermittent presences” (Said 1986), the Othered gendered practices of refugees are fused into a negative dispositive against which Western host countries can repeatedly rework their gender and sexual exceptionalism. Headscarf debates, “saving brown women from brown men” narratives (Spivak 1988), as well as affective slippages between refugee masculinities, terrorism and perverse sexualities (Puar 2007) are coming to a new head. They hint at the ‘truth’-producing power of neo-Orientalist, neo-liberal vocabularies of gender, family and sexual norms in negotiations of refugee integration, cultural clashes, *our* and *their* values. This issue engages with this subject that is wide as it is controversial and persistent.

2 Benay Blend’s article “‘O My Language, Help me to Learn / So That I May Embrace the Universe’: Transnational Feminist Communities in the Work of Palestinian Women Writers” quotes Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008) in its title, evoking Darwish’s desire for a space that preserves Palestinian identity within a wider culture. Rather than leaving ties to Palestine behind, Darwish, like other writers included in this article – Susan Abulhawa, Hala Alyan, Randa Jarrar, and Naomi Shihab Nye, to name a few – puts his homeland within a framework of diasporic space. Similarly, Rana Barakat views exile as both an individual “shipwreck” and a communal journey, a stance that reflects intersectional feminist values. Negotiating “the isolation of the individual within our shared collective condition,” Barakat offers what Anna Ball terms a “transnational feminist approach”. She joins a larger body of post 1948 writers who construct what the “poet of witness” Caroline Forché calls “assembled communities”, groups of friends who, she says, are “varied in the universe” but come together via various kinds of communication in order to discuss common issues (cf. Wright). The article seeks to explore a variety of transformative dialogues which transcend difference by standing together for justice, equality, and peace. How might feminist writers and activists negotiate a balance between connecting to their homeland but also recognize the potential that arises from the transnationalism of Avtar Brah’s concept of “diasporic space?” As a place

marked by hybridity, where tradition is continually transformed, this theoretical concept addresses the confluence of migrating populations, capital, commodities and culture. Furthermore, the article builds on Steven Salaita's *Inter/Nationalism: Decolonizing Native America and Palestine* (2016), a work that explores how such dialogues across borders offer a viable means of resistance. 3 Our second contribution by Pietro Vulpiani addresses the subject of female genital mutilation (FGM) and what European governments have formally committed to in order to prevent its occurrence during the last decades. These practices have been tackled with specific laws and projects, but scaremongering has also been rife. In Italy, prevention has partly relied on sensationalist and top-down approaches that do not help ethnic communities understand the problem. A survey involving migrant women revealed misunderstandings, conflicts and ambivalent attitudes towards the norms and values these practices are based on and the laws introduced to put an end to them. Women thus face an impossible choice (between their family or the host society), while both entities exploit similar bio-political processes to activate either social inclusion or exclusion policies. For the community to which they belong, a mutilated body guarantees identitarian acknowledgement, but the host country refuses it and holds their community responsible. If the abuse is reported or the practice rejected, one may be guaranteed international protection but will probably be ousted by one's family and community. Vulpiano argues that culturally targeted communication, based on tailor made and peer-mentoring exchanges, can create bonds of trust between victims, institutions and services.

3 Our third contribution by Nasrin Khandoker, titled "Love beyond Boundaries: Subjectivity and Sexuality through Bhawaiya Folk Song of Bengal" focuses on her research on the Bhawaiya songs of Bengal and the transgression of boundaries, as she reads them as inherently subversive. According to Khandoker, most love songs in Bhawaiya are about 'illicit' love, deviating from social norms and often occur in reaction to oppressive marital circumstances. They are a gateway to exploring female narratives of subjecthood and desire, in which women are the agents of their own sexuality. Her focus is on deviance from marriage in the Bhawaiya folk songs as a form of subversion. Understanding Bhawaiya and its subversive existence requires an understanding of political, religious, linguistic and cultural boundaries of the Bhawaiya areas. Cooch Behar, the birthplace of the Bhawaiya genre, has historically been situated on blurred boundaries: between the cultural borders of Bengali and Rajbangshi, the religious borders of Islam and Hinduism, the governmental borders of the British Raj and Hindu kingdom and the borders of the Colonial and Bengali nationalist narratives. Khandoker argues that even now, the Bhawaiya areas are divided by the

international borders of Bangladesh and India. These blurred boundaries create a space for marginalised peoples to develop and create their own cultural products, using the language of affection to resist and subvert patriarchal social rules. In her article she explores the subversive existence of female desire within Bhawaiya, and examines its feminist possibilities.

4 Michael Reinhard's review on Stan Hawkins's 2016 published book *Queerness in Pop Music: Aesthetics, Gender Norms, and Temporality* and Christina Parker-Flynn's of *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) complete the last issue of this year.

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