SPECIAL
SECTION

Resisting Anti-Migrant Politics:
Challenging Borders, Boundaries, and Belongings in Europe and Africa

Edited by **Kenneth Horvath**, **Elise Pape**, **Catherine Delcroix**, and **Lena Inowlocki**

With an Introduction by the Editors

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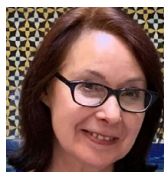
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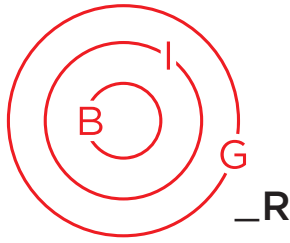
INTRODUCTION
Resisting Anti-Migrant Politics: Challenging Borders, Boundaries, and Belongings in Europe and Africa

Kenneth Horvath, Elise Pape, Catherine Delcroix, Lena Inowlocki *

This special issue argues that the novelty of current migration realities is not so much due to the scale or forms of migration practices as it is to as the rise of anti-migrant politics, which has led to the institution and differentiation of novel border regimes. Over the years, practices of resistance have developed against these regimes and these politics in different places and on various scales. This special issue highlights the emergent interplay of anti-migrant politics and everyday practices of resisting and subverting them. In their combination, the four articles in this issue make two important contributions: they address the increasing need to unveil unexpected forms of challenging dominant regimes of borders, boundaries, and belongings, and they present a specific case-study-based methodological perspective for capturing counterintuitive and unexpected forms of resisting anti-migrant politics. This special issue stresses the importance of studying resistant practices in different local, regional, national, and continental settings in a comparative and longitudinal manner. Additionally, it emphasizes the consideration of the role of anti-migrant politics and practices as they relate to resistant practices in countries of departure, as in geographic contexts such as the African continent, even if—and especially when—attempts of migration fail due to enhanced border control.

Migration is one of the key political and social issues of our times (Peters 2017). This special issue starts from the proposition that the novelty of our current migration realities is not so much due to the changing scope or forms of *migration practices* themselves as it is to the rise of a political configuration that can be characterized as *anti-migrant politics* (Castles & Miller 2013; Carvalho et al. 2019). Repeatedly, since the mid-2010s, migration scholars (e.g. Rea et al. 2019) have highlighted the fact that current European states do not face a "migration crisis", but rather a "reception crisis". At the same time, practices of *resistance* towards anti-migrant politics have developed in different places and at various scales over the past years (Scheel 2019): resistance by migrants and their families themselves, by civil society actors in countries of arrival, but also by political players on different levels, be it in national or supranational political arenas such as the UN or on the communal scale, such as through the emergence of so-called sanctuary cities (Bauder 2016).

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The idea for this special issue emerged from the Midterm Conference of the European Sociological Association's (ESA) Research Network 35 "Sociology of Migration", that took place at the University of Strasbourg in January 2019 and that focused on the manifold entanglements of politics and biographies in current, highly politicized migration contexts. It is based on the Franco–German research project "Migreval: A Biographical Policy Evaluation of Policies Concerning Migrants" at the University of Strasbourg (migreval.hypotheses.org). Debates in these two contexts led to the idea underlying this special issue: to explore and highlight different forms of resistance and the subversion of currently dominant anti-migrant politics, from biographic and more widely qualitative methodological empirical approaches.

The geographic focus of the collected articles is on the current European context in its deep historical, social, and political interrelations with the African continent (Benoît 2019). These two world regions are interwoven through myriad postcolonial entanglements. The European Union provides a specifically challenging analytical case due to the overlapping of different border regimes (Engbersen et al. 2017): supranational EU regulations work together with varying national regulations and policies, which in turn translate into highly diverse legal and political settings on the communal and local level. Europe thus provides an outstanding example for the complexity of anti-migrant political landscapes, and at the same time for the many forms of agency that develop in relation to them (Mezzadra & Neilson 2012). Migrants from African countries can be singled out as those that are most affected by these complex border and migration regimes. Not only are they regularly forced into highly precarious legal positions and marginalized living conditions, they are also framed as a key target group of control and surveillance policies. These considerations are reflected in many ways in the four articles of this special issue, be it by comparing local dynamics in different European countries or by following the trajectory of migration projects across African and European political and social spaces.

The diagnosis of anti-migrant politics that informs this special issue points to two interrelated developments: first, the massive politicization of migration that has taken place on a global scale over the last several decades and has gained significant traction after the end of the Cold War (Hammar 2007; Brug et al. 2015). Paralleling this politicization of migration, we have seen the rise of new right-wing formations that organize their political strategies around anti-migrant rhetoric and campaigning, thereby also affecting the positioning of mainstream political parties (Lefkrofridi & Horvath 2012; Dennison & Geddes 2019). Second, there has been a pronounced shift towards restrictiveness in migration regimes across the global North and West (Horvath et al. 2017; Eule et al. 2018; Pott et al. 2018). This general tendency has been discussed intensely over the past few years, leading to the establishment of entire new

research fields, such as the studies of the "securitization of migration" (Huysmans 2006; Borbeau 2011; Banai & Kreide 2017; Jaskulowski 2018; Deleixhe et al. 2019), "deportation regimes" (de Genova & Peutz 2010; Benoît 2019; Cleton & Chauvin 2019), and increasingly militarized "border zones" (Walters 2006; Mezzadra & Neilson 2012; Fauser 2019; Scheel 2019; Ambrosini et al. 2020).

In contrast to the post-WWII period, migration and border regimes today are highly differentiated. After 1945, migration and integration regimes around the globe were organized mainly along the boundary of collective categories, such as national citizenship (Pott et al. 2018). There was therefore a strong overlap of national territorial borders and the legal and social positions and opportunities one could enjoy. Further categories (such as exact world region of origin, age, education, etc.) played only a marginal role for the allocation of civic, social, and political rights. The situation today is very different. On the one hand, borders today are stratified political technologies—porous and almost inexistent for some, insurmountable and all-encompassing for others (Walters 2006): while EU citizens, for example, face almost no borders within Europe, access to the European continent for non-EU citizens has become increasingly difficult.

On the other hand, new geopolitics of mobility (Hyndman 2004; 2012) have emerged that come with far more complex and nuanced forms of differentiation. Different groups of migrants today possess different sets of rights, or different opportunities to gain access to these rights over time (Engbersen et al. 2017). They also enjoy strongly varying chances of moving to and settling in countries of the global North and West in the first place. This differentiated treatment of groups of mobile individuals along categories such as national origin, age, education, language skills, etc. is the reason why we speak of anti-migrant politics, not of anti-migration politics. Human beings are thus framed and targeted in a highly nuanced and demarcated manner, with wide-reaching consequences for biographies, living conditions, and life chances—intersectional orders of violence and violation (Chattopadhyay 2018).

This differentiation between migrants and migration is crucial for a full understanding of the situation being faced. Actually, and perhaps surprisingly, even the most outspoken anti-migrant parties are seldom fully opposed to immigration as such. On the contrary, they often even lobby for specific forms of migration (Horvath 2014). These pro-migration stances of anti-migrant parties can take the form of favoring long-term immigration perspectives for those considered "deserving" or "belonging". They can, however, also surface as campaigns for temporary migration programs targeted at filling labor market needs in sectors such as agriculture or construction, with migrant laborers largely deprived of any rights or prospects of long-term settlement ...

Focusing on anti-migrant politics also shifts our view to how those who are addressed in politics, targeted by border regimes, and framed in narratives respond and react to the circumstances they are facing. In doing so, the vivid and varied forms of resistance that develop against current restrictive regimes of mobility and belonging become apparent.

It is against this background—one of highly politicized migration discourses, stratified immigration and settlement regimes, and resistant agencies by migrant actors and others—that migration scholars have paid growing attention to borders, border zones, and border technologies. It is fair to say that the study of migration has increasingly become a matter of understanding the form and functioning of borders and boundaries in their interrelations with orders of national and social belonging. There are three main starting points for understanding this rising confluence of migration and border studies.

First, debates on migration regimes mark a key facet of current migration studies (Pott et al. 2018). The notion of migration regimes is polysemous and used in very different ways (Horvath et al. 2017). In each of these different understandings, however, the focus shifts from studying migration practices to analyzing the concrete ways in which states and other actors (such as supranational organizations or private security companies) regulate international mobility and settlement. Borders are the most important component for understanding these regulatory frameworks (Walters 2006). Thus, scholars have highlighted how border crossings are presently monitored and controlled in ways that are very different from how the same task had been understood and implemented only one or two decades ago—which is to say far more subtle, yet at the same time also far more pervasive. Furthermore, the border configurations that migrants face today are often layered (involving local, national, and supranational regulations and surveillance) and lasting (with controls extending far beyond territorial borders and also extending over time).

Second, the notion of boundaries has moved center stage in migration studies (Wimmer 2013). Boundaries are here understood as lines of differentiation that gain social and political meaning for assigning human beings into different categories, thus allowing to distinguish "us" from "them". Interest in the making and unmaking of such boundaries in migration contexts has grown steadily over the years. Boundaries are mainly treated as discursive phenomena—as orders of social meaning. The crucial question for current migration scholarship is how these boundaries become interwoven with borders. Many social categories such as age, level of education, and occupation have become effective in the drawing of boundaries between "deserving" and "undeserving" or "belonging" and "not belonging" migrants. As soon as these patterns of drawing boundaries become effective in policies and regulations, they become part of border regimes. Boundaries and borders become intersected (Amelina & Horvath 2021).

Third, increasing attention has been paid to how migrants themselves develop agency in dealing with complex and pervasive configurations of borders and boundaries, resulting in an analytical decentering of the state (Shachar 2022). The notion of "autonomy of migration" (Mezzadra & Neilson 2012; Scheel 2019) captures these countermoves and underlines that no matter what forms of surveillance and control states establish, migrants will respond by developing creative and rebellious practices aimed at circumventing border controls and responding to the boundaries of belonging they face on an everyday basis. Securitized and militarized "borderlands" (Agier 2016; Deleixhe et al. 2019; Fauser 2019) emerging across the globe and on different spatial scales have become privileged sites for studying both border regimes and migrants' strategic agencies in response to them.

The four articles compiled in this special issue represent a variety of methods of resistance to anti-migrant politics. All are based on qualitative empirical studies. In their combination, they make two important contributions.

First, they address the increasing need to focus research on different scales and fields of resistance towards anti-migrant politics in order to unveil unexpected forms of challenging borders, boundaries and belongings. The articles analyse rural settings (Bertaux & Bevilacqua), neighbourhoods of large cities that have particularly diverse populations (Salzbrunn), individual life courses of politically engaged migrant women who have lived in Europe for over twenty years (Gatti), and strategies on the family scale to organize clandestine migration from an African country to Europe (Ngom). These contributions highlight the importance of connecting different scales and levels of analysis with one another: the interplay of local authorities (especially mayors), state and church actors, actors of privately run reception centres for asylum seekers, and inhabitants of small municipalities (Bertaux & Bevilacqua); collective mobilizations, national politics and individual experiences of district actors (Salzbrunn), the national, associative, family and individual level (Gatti), and the international level concerning border control, family mobilizations and individual migration (Ngom).

Second, there is a need to develop research methods and methodologies that allow capturing counterintuitive and unexpected developments in the field of resistance to anti-migrant politics. The articles in this special issue share a specific research strategy: all employ quite radical case study designs. The cases are indeed defined quite differently—the articles treat families, events, villages, or female migrant biographies as units of analysis. While it is clear that such case study designs do not yield statistical representativity, concentrating on few cases has two

specific methodological advantages. First, it permits the capture of a high degree of complexity involved in the interplay of biographies, migration projects, border regimes, and anti-migrant politics. Second, careful attention to single cases is necessary in order to be sensitive to the perceptions and perspectives that more often than not run counter to what we have come to accept as social realities. European borderlands look very different when seen through the eyes of Senegalese families jointly planning a migration project.

Following this general and shared idea, referring to a large qualitative databank allows the development of a novel perspective on the reception of refugees in rural areas of France and Italy (Bertaux & Bevilacqua), a field that has received little attention in migration research up until now. Furthermore, adopting visual methods and focusing on events rather than on social groups permits the unveiling of unexpected forms of collective resistance to stigma and gentrification (Salzbrunn). Focusing on gender-related experiences through ethnographic observations, biographical interviews, and the mapping of migrant associations over an extended period of time (six years) makes it possible to explore different forms of resistance of migrant women against marginalization and to highlight the multiple facets between the migration–citizenship nexus (Gatti). Departing from the context of departure in an African country and conducting interviews with several members of family groups finally makes collective familial mobilizations for migration visible, a largely under-researched topic in social science (Ngom).

Daniel Bertaux and Stefania-Adriana Bevilacqua explore the encounters and interactions between village inhabitants and refugees in four small municipalities in Molise (Italy) and Alsace (France). They depart from an apparent paradox: if one takes the percentage of the far-right vote as an indicator of hostile feelings towards immigrants, it becomes apparent that this percentage is highest in places where there are no or few migrants (mainly rural areas), while in places where there are many (large cities), the percentage falls drastically. Bertaux and Bevilacqua compare small villages located in Italian and French regions that bear relatively high numbers of extreme-right votes. Through ethnographic research and qualitative interviews with different village actors, they demonstrate the crucial importance of spatial proximity in the integration process of refugees and in the deconstruction of stereotypes of French and Italian citizens. The authors argue that while migrants in cities tend to remain in "urban voids", empty spaces do not exist in villages, thereby enhancing possibilities of interactions between migrants and non-migrants. This contribution shows how numerous migrants finally prolong their migration into cities, in the search for professional integration or better life opportunities, while also displaying the way that transitory phases in rural spaces constitute a sort of "decompression chamber" in their asylum journey.

Monika Salzbrunn analyses the resistance towards stigmatisation and gentrification through art and activism in two French and Italian districts: the Parisian district of Belleville and the Maddalena district of Genoa. Both neighbourhoods boast particularly diverse populations and suffer from negative stigmatisations in a context of growing extreme-right discourses. Both are part of gentrification processes that threaten socio-cultural dynamics of these neighbourhoods. Salzbrunn analyses two self-organised fashion and music shows in these districts that valorise multiple belongings, reverse the stigma, and fight against local politics of gentrification. While research perspectives on migration studies too often focus on national belonging, Salzbrunn argues that "event lenses" can constructively replace "ethnic lenses", question supposed homogeneities, and highlight processes of multiple belonging. Studying an event by situational and visual analysis allows one to "observe how strategic groups emerge around a common political goal". While refugees without a legal status most often cannot express their claims vis-à-vis institutional state actors, this contribution shows how novel strategies for speaking up publicly become possible through collective events.

Rosa Gatti focusses on the link between immigration and citizenship from a gender perspective by analysing citizenship practices of migrant women engaged on a collective and associative level in the Italian public sphere. Departing from a qualitative study of migrant women of different origins in Naples, she presents an in-depth case study of a Somali woman, Farhio (pseudonym), who arrived in Naples in the 1980s. Gatti presents the particularly restrictive nature of accessing citizenship in Italy that this case study—as well as most other women encountered in her research—encounter, even after twenty years of residence in the country. At the same time, she shows how, counterintuitively, procuring Italian citizenship did not lead Farhio to develop a stronger sense of belonging in Italy, nor to improve her living conditions. On the contrary, the author shows how family- and gender-related experiences—and the geographic distance of family relatives who could support her in childcare—instead put Farhio's professional, social, and political inclusion in Italy at risk. The author thus highlights the multiple factors that interfere in the migration–citizenship nexus. She shows how, counterintuitively, accessing Italian citizenship, in the case of Farhio, allowed for a follow-on migration project taking her to another European country, making proximity to family relatives possible.

Abdoulaye Ngom finally analyzes family mobilizations for migratory departure in Senegal. Existing research has analysed clandestine migration mainly from an individual point of view, retracing the routes and the obstacles encountered by migrants trying to reach the European continent. Through biographical interviews and crossed life stories with several members of the same extended family groups in Senegal prior to

emigration and during the migration process, Ngom adopts a rarely employed empirical approach in migration research. He shows how, far from being an individual project, clandestine migration often results from collective strategies on the family scale. Departing from an in-depth family case study, he first shows the process of selection of the family member designed for emigration, the motivations for collective support, and the ways large families with limited income concretely manage to raise sums of several thousands of euros over extended periods to make emigration possible. Ngom also highlights forms of family solidarity when attempts of migration fail because of enforced border controls, and the mid- to long-term effects of European anti-migrant politics on families in Senegal.

In sum, this special issue stresses the importance of studying resistance towards anti-migrant politics in different local, regional, national, and continental settings. The four articles presented depart from two main European national settings: France and Italy, and show the epistemic gains from comparing these two national contexts with one another on different scales: the municipal, district, regional, and national levels. They also demonstrate the importance of considering migration paths of individuals and their families on the long term over several decades, an approach that often makes visible further intra-European migration. This special issue finally calls for the urgent need to not only consider resistance to anti-migrant politics in Europe, but also in countries of departure in the African continent, even if—and especially when—attempts of migration fail due to enhanced border control.

Acknowledgments

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