

# Discussing Europeanization and East-West dynamics of race, gender, and sexuality

Anika Keinz and Paweł Lewicki

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**ABSTRACT:** *In the following dialogue, Anika Keinz, the invited discussant at the panel »Struggles over Europe« forming part of the »Troubling Gender« conference, and Paweł Lewicki talk about how race, gender, and sexuality are not only entangled in the East-West dynamic but co-constitute the East-West dichotomy too. They discuss racial relations and states of morality, in grappling with the question of what exactly race-critical studies can contribute to both the improved analysis of this dichotomy and to the examination of developments in Europe: What can we observe when looking, for example, at gender and sexual politics in Poland from a race-critical perspective and what can this tell us about nationalisms? Doing so, they take up the discussion Lewicki started, together with Randi Elin Gressgård and Rafał Smoczyński, in the special issue of Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics »Struggles over Europe. Postcolonial East/West Dynamics of Race, Gender and Sexuality« (2020, 6/3). This special issue explores the dynamics pertaining to (racialized) gender and sexuality, as well as their local expressions, and asks how they are embedded in broader dynamics and discourses on Europe, Europeanization, and the transformation of (il)liberal states. Lewicki and Keinz then continue their conversation and pick up on certain aspects that came up during the panel discussion. They reflect on how categories such as »race,« »gender,« and »sexuality« contribute to the reproduction of various understandings of »Europe« and »European modernity« and to the (self-)produced notions of »East« and »West« respectively.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Europe, Europeanization, race, gender, sexuality*

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**Anika:** Thank you, Paweł, for the invitation to continue our discussion that began during the conference. As a starting point, may you explain to our reader the ideas and intentions you had with the special issue? What did you want to emphasize with this publication? Could you say a few words about it?

**Paweł:** The special issue is one outcome from a longer discussion we have been carrying on together with Randi Elin Gressgård and Rafał Smoczyński. Our ambition has been to make greater sense of the political dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe and the rise of populism and nationalism throughout the continent that in turn spurred growing discus-

sions about the division into »East« and »West«—particularly within the European Union, but also beyond. While nationalism is present in the West and many nationalist-populist parties are very strong in »old« Europe (France: RN; Germany: AfD; the Netherlands: PVV and FvD; Italy: Lega and FdI; Norway: FrP; Sweden: SD; Switzerland: SVP; Austria: FPÖ), it is the governments of Orbán in Hungary and Kaczyński in Poland and, to a lesser degree, former government of Babiš in Czechia or Janša in Slovenia that recently lost power but nevertheless seem to have induced these discussions.

The so-called LGBT-free zones in Poland, the introduction of a homophobic law in Hungary, and political developments in the past—such as the introduction of the homophobic law in Russia in 2013 as well as cultural dynamics around sexual politics and racism—provoked new conjunctions of race-critical and post- as well as decolonial studies pursuing Europeanization, gender, and sexuality research. We framed the East-West dynamics as entangled—similar to critical race theory where whiteness is dependent on someone else's status as black or as interdependencies and mutuality in Randeria's »entangled modernities« (Adam et al. 2019). This dynamic in reference to Europeanization, gender, and sexuality is accompanied by (self-)hierarchizations and essentializations of »East« and »West«—as orientations that people use to make sense of the world. In the special issue, we capture, for example, how gender and sexuality are instrumentalized in struggles over citizenship and Europeanness in Poland (Gressgård/Smoczyński 2020) or how European sexual citizenship lost traction in post-EU enlargement Poland, giving way to new definitions of »homonationalism« (Baer 2020).

Contributions to the special issue show also the interdependencies between »progressive« and »European« gender and sexualities, as well as the ways in which Eastern Europe people and those coded as coming from the East are racially marked as not fitting into »Europeanness« (Gressgård/Husakouskaya 2020; Krivonos/Diatlova 2020; Lapina 2020). Both in the special issue and in the panel »Postcolonial East/West Dynamics of Race, Gender and Sexuality«<sup>1</sup> at the »Troubling Gender« conference,<sup>2</sup> we wanted to problematize the civilizing discourses linked to sexual politics and tolerance present in Europeanization processes. We also wanted to point out the co-constitutive constructions of »East«/»West« vis-à-vis Europe, rather than reproduce the unmarked »civilized« norm of the West or the »white innocence« of the East. Such a perspective inevitably draws attention to national discourses activated by gender and sexuality politics in Europeanization processes. I think that critical race theory and particularly critical whiteness scholarship (Dyer 1997; Krivonos/Diatlova 2020; Rzepnikowska 2019; Shmidt/Jaworsky 2021) have had an important impact on problematizations of Europeanization, as they have enabled us to highlight the renounced racism, both in the East and the West as well as between them, alongside also the civilizational discourses attached to Europeanization and gender and sexuality politics.

**Anika:** I believe that it is postcolonial and race-critical perspectives more than critical whiteness scholarship that started the problematization of Europeanization and progressive gender and sexuality politics. And I fear that the women scholars who studied the gendered processes of the political- and social-transformation processes after 1989 and in the EU in the 1990s are often forgotten here. Individuals such as Chris Corrin (1999), Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (2000a, 2000b), Barbara Einhorn (2000), Ziliah Eisenstein (1997), and Peggy Watson (2000)—to name but a few.

**Paweł:** I think in the context of European East-West dynamics it is the critical whiteness perspective that enables us to problematize Eastern claims to moral superiority and to

»white innocence.« Of course, this perspective stems from critical race theory, but the specific perspective offered on whiteness enables us to bring to light the subtle production of differences and hierarchizations—ones not necessarily referring strictly to race. Nevertheless, we wanted to use a gender and sexuality perspective as a lens that enables us to search for answers to the questions we addressed both in the special issue and during the conference: How do categories of gender and sexuality contribute to the production of various notions of »Europe« and »European modernity,« as well as of »East« and »West«? How are dynamics pertaining to gender and sexuality expressed locally, and how do they feed into the upsurge of nationalism? How are they inscribed into broader dynamics and discourses on Europe, Europeanization, and transformations of the (il)liberal state?

Such a move is something you already did in *Polens Andere* (Keinz 2008), when you looked at Poland before and after its EU accession. I think now times are different, plus we problematize these East-West dynamics. Gender and sexuality became more prominent in the West as a way to mark those who do not belong; there are similar processes in the East too. We build on the research and literature on these processes.

**Anika:** Yes, gender and sexual politics, as well as what Judith Butler in her book *Frames of War. When Is Life Grievable?* (2009) calls »progressive freedoms,« have become ever more prominent; in tandem, a new racialization of gender and sexual politics, a sexualization of racial politics, and the nationalization of both have come about too. We could observe this in regard to the citizenship tests introduced in several countries in the first decade of the new millennium. In the course of this, both sexual and religious minorities have been increasingly racialized—albeit in different ways. Old dichotomies and binaries have been revitalized, and a series of discourses and policies coined such as »integration discourses,« »immigration policies,« and »discourses of belonging.«

**Paweł:** I think the issues of Europe and Europeanization, and the dynamics they activate, have become even more tense than in the first decade of the new century. It became painfully clear with Brexit, but also with national politics in Hungary and Poland. Approaching Europeanization from postcolonial and critical race perspectives enables us to see it as a dynamic, sometimes contradictory, social and political but most of all relational process in and between East and West. Similar to what you did in problematizing »progressive« genders and sexualities and their connection to notions of »Europe.« Critical race theory and postcolonial scholarship have shown how gender and race in European colonies would intersect to exert power over colonized populations and how gender became a tool to control what »whiteness« and »Europeanness« mean (McClintock 1995; Stoler 1997, 2002). What this scholarship showed was how skin color, with time, became glossed over by notions of »civilization« and »cultural belonging« to Europeanness (Boatcă/Parvulescu 2020; Stoler 2002). A similar dynamic can be observed today in Europe between East and West, where notions of »proper« Europeanness are connected to gender and sexuality—albeit these categories are differently conceived nowadays. Hierarchy-building and essentializations of the respectively constructed Other in terms of gender and sexualities between East and West have a racist genealogy and point to a racist legacy permeating the whole continent.

**Anika:** I would probably not completely agree with this comparison, but I admit that I almost but not entirely omitted the racialized history of Eastern and Western Europe—particularly the historical racialization of Eastern Europe that was and still is linked to civilizational discourses. However, I did argue with Watson (and she was of course not the only

one who wrote about this) that the West operated as an unspoken reference point for the representations of Eastern Europe. Watson (2000) recognized that this West-centeredness structured interpretations of change analogous to whiteness. Back then, this was the lens through which critical scholars of the political-transformation processes interpreted the so-called postsocialist transformation processes (including the idea of »path dependency«). But today, research solely on postsocialism is not really a thing anymore. So, could you say a bit more about today's critical race theory in conjunction with gender (and sexuality) in East-West dynamics?

**Paweł:** I think we need to consider the global political and social dynamics that have led to new perspectives and research developments. I mean here, for example, migration within the EU—which has clearly showed different shades of whiteness to it. I think for many people coming from new member states, the different ways in which whiteness is raced were and are a traumatizing experience, one occurring on a massive, unprecedented scale (Rzepnikowska 2019; Fox/Moroşanu/Szilassy 2014). But I also think a relevant question is: How did these experiences of being racialized impact racist processes in Poland? Goods and money flow within the EU, but more sophisticated forms of border and migration control are implemented, while nation-states are unable to give answers to questions of equal rights, diversity, and dignity (Mezzadra/Neilson 2013). On the other hand, we see clearly racist policies on the Polish-Belarusian border; the ramifications of the massive Ukrainian migration to Poland remain to be seen, meanwhile.

The COVID-19 pandemic in the EU / Europe and the sudden strict border controls as a consequence of its outbreak, like no other event in the recent past, highlighted in a short period of time the racialized differences within and beyond the continent (let me remind you about special charter flights for Romanian workers to Germany, where sanitary and medical regulations were apparently not as important to keep as for the local population). And racial and imperial genealogies also reemerged, already before the pandemic, in the East—for example in the ways many governments of the new EU member states pass down racial hierarchies and essentializations to migrants. Either to refugees or, as is the case in Poland, to millions of Ukrainians who take over predominantly badly paid jobs in the service sector. These racial mechanisms, the many interrelated tendencies notwithstanding, do not constitute unified phenomena. But in the context of the growing pressure of global capitalism and of Europeanization, they do gain social and political relevance as they may nurture feelings of agency and collective identity.

However, racist genealogies have been present, as I claim, for a long time in Poland, due to its »inter-imperial position,« to use a term coined by Laura Doyle (2020). Europeanization has only exacerbated these genealogies. The latter fed the narration of »defense« against imperial neighbors.

LGBT-free zones are a good example of how this script of »defense« is revived against the enemy that is called »gender ideology.« These zones emerged in early 2019 when around 100 municipalities, counties, and provinces in Poland passed nonbinding resolutions termed a »Local Government Charter on the Rights of the Family« or a »Resolution against LGBT Ideology.« Usually they do not explicitly refer to LGBT people and were passed on the initiative of *Ordo Iuris*, a fundamentalist Polish Catholic organization that has global networks. Still, together with other changes in legislation referring to kinship, abortion, as well as further gender and sexuality policies introduced by the nationalist-conservative government, these LGBT-free zones stand for a politics that envisions a new type of Polish and European citizenship. This is something that Gressgård and Smoczyński (2020) described in their

contribution to the special issue: namely as negotiations over dominant notions of »civic responsibility« and »Europeanness« along gender and sexuality lines.

In my paper presented during the conference,<sup>3</sup> I focused more on how these notions establishing LGBT-free zones are built on a narrative of »defense« of »Polish tradition« and »normality.« These are implicitly coded as heteronormative, as deeply entrenched in Polish history and national narratives—something you already showed in your book *Polens Andere* (Keinz 2008) and in your article on European desire and national bedrooms (Keinz 2011). If we look at this narrative from a critical race, postcolonial perspective, its racist background becomes more evident. It was produced not only in opposition to the Mongolian, Ottoman, and later Russian, German, as well as Austrian Empires, but it was and is also directed inward and based on an anti-Semitism that has fueled the national narrative in Poland and struggles over superior whiteness.

My point is that »Polishness,« narrated as based in Catholicism and moral superiority, developed in a historical process via differentiation from the proximate »Other«—namely Jews. This acts as a projection screen for the production of the morally just and better Polish self. Other minorities—particularly in the regions called the »Eastern Borderlands« (Kresy Wschodnie) of the First and Second Polish Republics—also had this role, but Poland's relationship to them was framed more in a civilizational and developmental discourse than in a moral one—so one could assign them the position of being lesser Poles anyway. In such a situation, and due to the instability of whiteness, racist dynamics required constantly more sophisticated and continuous (moral) differentiation. There are several researchers who show how anti-Semitism in Poland and the production of Jewish Otherness can be traced back even further into the past (to the end of the eighteenth century when Poland was on the brink of modernity), but most of all how it was produced in religious and moral terms (Cała 2018; Michlic 2006; Tokarska-Bakir 2019). The Polish government now wants to use these to position itself in the European arena—that is, as a country representing greater morality and the »true spirit« of Christian Europe.

Resolutions on LGBT-free zones passed by local governments in Poland, with their moralist and defensive tone, are very much in line with these narratives. Announcing such zones is intended to protect communities and regions from the »rotten West.« They are also designed to shield against something that is present though not quite visible: »LGBT ideology.«

**Anika:** To me, it is interesting to hear about the current discourses and dynamics in Poland. You show impressively that gender and sexual politics are still a huge area of conflict in Poland, some aspects very similar to other countries. You relate it to Europeanization and colonial projects. I have two questions regarding these relations: You say that the notion of »LGBT-free zones« is partly a local response to global dynamics but fueled particularly by Europeanization and struggles to become European. Poland, you say, has its own imperial ambitions and tries to be »the better Europe.« So, you see Poland as an active agent, is that right? And second, you argue with the notion of »Europeanization« and you see these phenomena as having a racist genealogy and a colonial- or racist epistemology. I am only familiar with epistemic racism. Could you elaborate on what is meant by »racist epistemology« in this particular context, and give us an example of how it is useful for analyzing the charters and discuss what these concepts can contribute?

**Paweł:** I think that the LGBT-free zones, as I have tried to outline above, are an emanation of that longing to have agency and gain position in a global hierarchy of value (Herzfeld

2002). It is a narrative of national moral superiority, something that emerged in the historical process regarding Poland's inter-imperial position and the existing racism expressed in anti-Semitism—a white supremacist narrative, in other words. There was no other tool to build a national narrative in the context of the non-existent Polish state and imperial pressure—imperial Russian and German discourses most of all—as well as of circulating racial theories in Europe (Law/Zakahrov 2019; Shmidt/Jaworsky 2021).

My argument shows that we need to underline the relationality in these racist dynamics, not only within and between countries but also between East and West. Decoloniality, as a perspective that claims the global impact of European colonialism and racism, is certainly helpful to map these racisms. These perspectives refrain from a linear and dichotomizing consideration of Self and Other, where one side is active and the other is passive or a victim. So I think we also need to see Europeanization as both a linear but also a dynamic, entangled process, one that stipulates »progress« but also »counterprogress.« And, how these two phenomena are interconnected and relational.

Therefore I would not repeat the idea that West is progress and East is backward, but rather say that West is as progressive as East (self-)constructs itself as backward—although the latter wants to be superior, yet not by way of »progress« but in moral terms. I think also that these discourses of greater morality and superiority are coming from Catholicism and its universal claims, they are claiming new meanings for »Europe,« the »real« Europe, and for »Christian« as opposed to »Western« Europe. So here another version of claims to whiteness is visible, one not necessarily connected to the West but certainly coded as superior and Christian. In such frames, the exclusion of LGBT people from the national community is a European process of producing internal Others and echoes long processes of racialization on the continent.

**Anika:** If you frame it in such a way, it remains unclear what is meant with »progress.« The West is supposedly advancing in terms of progressive freedoms regarding gender and sexuality, while the East feels progressive in terms of its moral standing, seeing itself as morally superior because it cherishes conservative, traditional, or Christian values—for example heterosexuality, marriage, and similar. It seems then what is at stake here is what I discussed in my book: a cultural and political battle over values. European values such as freedom, equality, and dignity are Christian and at the same time liberal values. We could discuss to what extent the Enlightenment or Christianity have defined these values. Though, I think, it is more important to see that what is covered by them has changed not only over time; they are always already becoming. Finally, their content and meaning are sometimes interpreted through the lens of science (e.g. medicine and biology), sometimes through the lens of law and the language of human rights as (linked to moral-philosophical perspectives), and other times through the Social Sciences, religion, or the arts (and all of the aforementioned do not speak in unison).

I think we need to carefully differentiate out the various contexts and spheres wherein gender and sexual issues, or gendered ones, are addressed and debated (politics, law and policies, the public sphere, the media, international relations, Europeanization, or everyday life) and those where gender is and remains absent but structures politics, perceptions, promotions, feelings, careers, and the like regardless. Conservative and traditional positions often accept »equality in difference«: they even promote equality, but emphasize the different social roles of men and women and root them in biology and the binary gender system. In the same way, they promote the right to cultural difference, identity, and national preferences.

Regarding our topic at hand, Europe is again divided into (at least) two parts that interpret these values differently. If that is the case, once again, we, the researchers, risk falling into the dichotomies we set out to deconstruct. At the moment, what we observe in the EU may not really help us refrain from falling back into these binaries. But I think we should resist the temptation here. One important question for me is: What changes if we think from the perspectives of those affected themselves—be they LGBT people or migrants? To me, this is the only way to refrain from reintroducing these dichotomies. As long as we look from the perspective of either the nation-state or the EU we already follow their logic, which is a trap as it does not allow us to think differently. And is Ethnography not made for thinking from the perspective of subjects, because the discipline's focus is their own outlooks and experiences?

I think that is what Fadi Saleh does in his research on LGBTQI refugees from Syria, particularly trans refugees who made it to Germany and the Netherlands and later decided to leave—and I quote from his panel paper—»the safe queer haven that is Europe« and be smuggled back into Turkey.<sup>4</sup> By telling Tina's, Samara's, and Leen's stories from their own perspectives, Fadi queers the recurring »migration to liberation« narrative pattern that goes along also with the one that further presents Western nations as liberal and tolerant in contrast to the Middle East, therewith claiming a linear migration movement of LGBTQI refugees to the West (and fixes identity categories). Fadi queers this homonormative colonial discourse and the motives and decisions that lead to migration, redirecting our (the reader's) gaze to values such as interdependence (and family) as important factors in migration stories. And, once more, he dispels another narrative too: that LGBTQI people from the Middle East are rejected by their families.

And that is what I would like to see more often: the interrogation of whatever the dominant or hegemonic narrative, perspective, gaze is. The outlook from migrants themselves—or, to put it differently, from migration—allows Fadi to discuss the grand narratives of »Western civilization,« implicitly interrogating the meaning and importance of values such as democracy, freedom, justice, equality. This points to an older and more philosophical question: What is a good life? What constitutes a good life?

**Paweł:** A racist genealogy is visible in these constant strivings to essentialize Others and to place them on a civilizational hierarchy, a cultural move that is in itself relational. So that already moves us away from dichotomies and linear and spatial understandings of (cultural) borders. Nevertheless the relationality of the categories of »East« and »West« becomes more visible if we look at gender and sexuality (politics) in Europeanization, for example in the constant narrative of »fight« and »defense« against a morally corrupt West and a Christian Orthodox, uncivilized, and authoritarian East. »Gender« and »Europe« only revived these discourses and struggles to gain a position that, according to their own understandings, must be constantly reaffirmed and fought for anew. This rhetoric also enables one to reposition oneself always on the side of »good,« and through that claim whiteness. This rhetoric is also used by far-right parties in the West.

What is different since the time when you were doing research in Poland is that society there has become more pluralistic and diversified, also in terms of gender and sexuality. In turn, the mass experience of Poles migrating and their racialization in the West aside (Krivonos/Diatlova 2020; Rzepnikowska 2019), this has activated old imaginations about the grand Polish nation and a recreation of the »old order«—as is so visible in the language and references made in »Family Charters« and and in these anti-LGBT resolutions. What is different now are also the experiences of those whom you called »Poland's Others« (Keinz

2008)—feminists, gays and lesbians, and activists. In the face of state and structural discrimination, and of disappointment with the EU, they have learned how to cope with these issues and with international neoconservative networks without counting on Europe and cultivating hopes about its symbolic power (Baer 2020). This disillusionment with the West, its gender policies, attitudes toward the East, and its neoliberal capitalism (that nevertheless, as Monika Baer shows, also brings new possibilities for LGBTQI groups) gives voice to more critical perspectives. Maybe not ones so loud and spectacular, but for example opinion polls in Poland show slow but steadily increasing acceptance of same-sex partnerships.

**Anika:** The disillusionment with the West, or more precisely with the EU, was already evident in the first decade of the new millennium. The women I interviewed in 2004 and 2005 expressed their own disappointment here. However, they also understood that they could use the EU as a vehicle. Today, gender and sexual politics remain a central point of conflict in Poland, but what exactly it is leveraged for has been changing since the turn of the century. In my book *Polens Andere*, I described gender politics as an instrument employed to negotiate what »democracy« means. In Poland, it was used to negotiate national identity and belonging to the nation, or more precisely what it means to be Polish (or more accurately: what defines this). Finally, I saw it as a means to fight over visions of Poland's past, present, and future. And, of course, in the 1990s the battles over gender equality and abortion rights were clearly part of the process of pluralization—of issues, voices, opinions, and so forth. What would you say is different today?

**Paweł:** I think gender politics is used in such a way as to create divisions and to delineate belonging—yes, so similar to what you described, it is a discussion about the nature of democracy and of society in general. What might be different now is the more explicit European context, where the governing party is using »Europe,« as Randi and Rafał show in their article in the special issue (Gressgård/Smoczyński 2020), to mobilize conservative and class-based gender narratives to fill this empty signifier with their own content. In Bourdieu's terms, this denotes redefining and imposing an understanding of »European« that refers to »normal« genders and sexualities as well as to Christianity. Homosexuality, meanwhile, is taken to threaten Western civilization, which Poland will then defend. Let me remind you that the Polish government created a »Plenipotentiary for European Identity« at the Office of the Prime Minister that is supposed to defend the model »normal« family. Plus, there are anti-liberal and misogynist abortion laws that have been introduced.

As you have already shown in your book, these discourses are also used by conservatives to create some essentialized vision of »Polishness,« and references to an older nationalist discourse are meant to secure the PiS's political legitimacy. However, I think they already failed in that—as Baer shows in the special issue (2020; see also, Mizielińska 2020). People found a way to live alongside or without these essentializations or exclusions. So »gender« and »sexuality« are used to determine the criteria of belonging to »Polishness,« but such notions today are also social and cultural markers—they ascribe belonging to certain social strata and denote ideological belongings, which are also connected to Europe—as you already remarked in your book.

**Anika:** I am not sure if I can see a difference here with the first decade of the new century. Back then, political parties as well as actors such as nongovernmental organizations and informal networks had partially different understandings of what democracy *means* or *entails*. Is it, for example, the protection of minorities or is it majority rule? That was a debate that

came up again and again. Just remember here former Polish president Lech Wałęsa, who stated that democracy is the rule of the majority when he denounced the Parada Równości (Equality Parade) in 2005. In these debates, we can clearly see that the pluralism accompanying democracy (and after or »post« socialism) was an issue. And how could it not be?

Gender politics and sexuality were essential ingredients in that struggle (and obviously still are). »Polishness« in the conservative vision back then meant being heterosexual, white, Catholic. It was also defined against »Others«—European Others and internal Others—since those who were not heterosexual, white, or Catholic were considered not only not Polish but anti-Poland. In fact, it was about national identity and what it means to be a good Polish citizen—hence cultural citizenship. It is these debates and processes I observed between 2004 and 2006, as described and analyzed in my book. In the past few years, however, I have increasingly come to wonder whether gender and sexual issues are so readily used because they are directly connected to morality; the latter has been an issue ever since the elections of June 1989, both with and without regard to gendered debates and sexual politics. From 2004 to 2006, PiS tried to stir a moral panic. They were talking about the Fourth Republic and about *moralność publiczna* (»public morality«). Morality became an issue both connected to gender and not. It almost functioned as an empty signifier. Morality (as the buzzword »public morality« introduced by PiS and the League of Polish Families party shows) was code in political discourse for a connection to (good) »Polishness,« to pureness (as opposed to so-called immoral homosexuals, feminists, leftists, or Western Europeans; in brief, »Others«). It was both linked to the past (»immoral communists«) and to an envisioned future (Christian Poland). What does moral superiority entail today?

**Paweł:** I think you are already answering here in part the question of what the difference is in the meaning of »gender« in Poland between 2004 and 2006 and now. Back then, it was a marker of belonging to »Polishness« and »Europe.« But the early years of the new millennium were also the time when it started to become so strongly connected to morality. »Gender« in Poland has been redefined according to conservative and historical scripts, but what is specific now is the more pronounced presence of Catholic morality as well as of an undertone of moral superiority vis-à-vis the West.

According to these narratives, the East—particularly Russia—is »less civilized« particularly in moral terms. What is different now is also how these discourses overlap with racist dynamics that divide the world into areas of worthiness and dignity, positioning the people coming from these regions accordingly. These divisions and markings were reinvigorated by Europeanization and migration to and from Poland. The country, despite the claims of politicians, within a quite short space of time became woven into global migration movements. Racist scripts build on past narratives about the fight against enemies—something that is so present in these resolutions on LGBT-free zones, where the enemy is »gender ideology.« These narratives are also a response to said migration (of Ukrainians into Poland and Poles to the West) and to the demographic crisis, both of which are more present now than back then. But again, I think they have an unmarked racist genealogy within that was always present—albeit undiscussed.

**Anika:** I am thinking now of Hannah Arendt, who said that the present decides how the past will continue to be meaningful. The question being then: What knowledge about the past is desired, wanted, permissible? Which pasts? Who and what is involved in the debates today—which actors, which discourses, which practices (as potentially differing from the first decade of the new century, particularly regarding global movements and actors)? Which

ideas of morality are expressed in what language? Which fears are articulated, and which are played with? We certainly cannot answer these questions, but it was really fun discussing the issues at stake here. I think a lot of these questions are also addressed by critical race theory scholarship.

**Paweł:** Yes, it is fascinating how new approaches can shed further light on current and past issues, and how they enable us to better understand the present.

## Notes

- 1 <https://intersections.tk.hu/index.php/intersections/issue/view/24>
- 2 <https://troubling-gender.eu>
- 3 Forthcoming as »Racist and imperial genealogies in LGBT-free zones and struggles over Europe in Poland« in: K. Loftsdottir, S. Ponzanesi, B. Hipfl (eds), *Creating Europe from the Margins: Mobilities and Racism in Postcolonial Europe*.
- 4 Cf. <https://troubling-gender.eu/events/struggles-over-europe-postcolonial-east-west-dynamics-of-race-gender-and-sexuality/>.

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