

## **Review of the Summer School “Doing Research Otherwise: Politics and Possibilities in Gender Studies” 2021**

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In the Summer School which ran from September 6 to 9, 2021 at the University of Basel, the Inter-university Doctoral Program Gender Studies CH dealt with the topic of Doing Research Otherwise in the field of gender studies. For four days, PhD students from Basel, Bern and Zurich discussed the challenges that are brought about by the feminist call to rethink knowledge production in theory and in praxis. Reflections on epistemologies, collaboration practices and politics involved were discussed throughout the whole program and within the different thematic workshops, panels, roundtable discussion and guided art exhibition.

The **workshop on Design Politics** with Maya Ober and Nina Paim (Futuress) allowed us to reflect on the role that design plays in our research practice such as when we engage in oral history, do archival research, or use ethnographic methods. As doctoral researchers in the humanities and social sciences, it is not always self-evident to ask critical questions about the genealogies of the tools with which we record interviews, the chairs our interlocutors sit on, and the repositories in which our material is stored, physically and virtually. What fragmentary knowledges and assumptions about the world played a part in the construction of these objects, and how do they co-produce our own situated knowledge production? The feminist design activists Maya Ober and Nina Paim invited the participants of our summer school to reflect on questions of design-politics, joint by a hyphen as suggested by design scholar Mahmoud Keshavarz, hinting at the two spheres’ inseparability. The two-part workshop resulted in discussions of the material elements that shape our research contexts, creating a truly interdisciplinary moment in which we bridged rooftops in Palestine with shipping containers on Zurich’s land reserves, or the façades of Tanzania’s public health with the domestic objects repurposed to protest for women’s suffrage in Liechtenstein. Repeatedly asking whose bodies these objects were built for, and how they shape social identities, the lens of design-politics helped us participants find commonalities across “disciplinary silos”, as Maya and Nina dubbed the often clearly bordered canons within which our work develops. Interspersing these unaccustomed framings of our PhD projects with a genealogical look at how the two designers’ biographies informed their critical scholarly and activist practice, we collectively got a chance to learn more about design as an approach to critically engage with our surroundings otherwise.

The **panel on Right-Wing Populism and Gender** allowed us to reflect on right-wing populism and its recent resurgence. While many explanations have been proposed for the rise of right populist movements around the world, we ask what does gender have to do with it? What role do masculinities and femininities play in right-wing populist movements, how might affects and shifting expectations of masculinities and femininities play a role in the rise of these movements, and what impact does neoliberalism have on these processes? These are

the questions that motivated this panel, where we explored the changes to bourgeois hegemonic masculinity (concerning fields as broad as desire, sexuality, weaponized “humor,” control and fear of loss of control), alienation, “tradwives,” figureheads of male supremacist movements, and what might motivate individuals to engage in conspiratorial thinking and right-wing populism. A mixed media workshop format was used to explore these questions and elements, with talks given by Gabriele Dietze and Andrea Maihofer and a presentation from PhD candidate Rahel Wehrlin from the University of Bern on their ongoing research project. Moreover, we used videos, both real and fictionalized portrayals of people engaging in right-wing populism and conspiratorial thinking, to interrogate the affective elements utilized by right-wing populist and conspiratorial movements. Additionally, in our mixed media workshop, we discussed, for example, what impact emancipatory movements have in these complex developments of persistence and change. On one side of current processes of polarization, feminist movements have been pushing progressive and inclusive developments. On the other side, feminist movements enabled women to be leaders of right-wing groups who now try to limit women’s rights. In this regard, it was crucial to understand how emancipation fatigue or lack of self-realization may motivate some women to join right-wing movements. The way in which we do research plays an important role for attempts to counter current processes of polarization and to enable dialogue. Which questions do we have to raise to allow for conversations about the issues at hand in current conflicts? How can we generalize emancipatory values even among those who oppose them?

During the **workshop on decoloniality** with Manuela Boatcă and Gabriele Dietze we delved deeper into the imperative and implications of ‘doing research otherwise.’ We started by pointing yet again to the colonial roots and power dynamics of ‘doing research’, of objectivizing and de-humanizing the other. By employing a historical lens and tracing colonial continuities, as well as the intricate relations between Eurocentrism, colonialism, racism and heteronormativity, we then opened a space for critical discussions around the many facets of the present-day coloniality of power and the need for different knowledge productions. How did the construction of Europe mirror the enslaved colonies in South America? Why do we need to render visible the process and elements at play in the construction of the ‘human being’, the so-called ‘human rights’ and International Law? What would it mean to challenge such foundational epistemologies, as well as the systemic inequalities and the power structures that maintain them? And what are the liberatory potentialities that a pluriversal knowledge production would enable? What are the connections between political feminism and decolonial thought? These are just some of the questions we attempted to answer and further problematize. In addition to the presentations given by Manuela Boatcă and Gabriele Dietze, we were also provided with insights into two ongoing research projects. Sarah Farag, a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Zürich, shared her research on feminist critique, women’s rights activism and alternative masculinities in contemporary Egypt. A PhD candidate in Urban Studies at the University of Basel, Andreea Midvighi emphasized the importance of employing a decolonial approach when discussing the ongoing occupation of Palestine, urbicide in Yarmouk Camp in Damascus, or Palestinian double-refugees now living in Sweden. The extremely productive conversations stayed with us over the following days we spent together.

The **workshop on Transnational Feminist Activist Scholarship** with Margo Okazawa-Rey made us reflect about our own positioning as researchers as well as human beings. As we found ourselves in neoliberal and capitalist university structures, we asked about our space for action and our core principles. This raised critical questions for us such as: To whom am I accountable? Who are my people? Why do I do the work I do? What is important to me? This is not only about our own work and our own position, but about understanding and critiquing power. In doing so, we opened the space for exchange of thoughts and discussions. Reflecting on how power structures operate is not only relevant to ourselves, the way we live and work, but also has implications for how we want to create and hold spaces otherwise. As researchers, we work together with other people and therefore we want to ask ourselves which principles should guide us in these collaborations. As teachers, we ask ourselves how we can use this powerful position and how we can teach otherwise. In our workshop, we addressed these personal and moving questions both individually and in plenary, shared challenges and designed possibilities for action. We asked: How do we activate the knowledge we produce? What are the contradictions we embody - as activist researchers committed to social and environmental justice? And where are our personal red lines? This workshop had a transformative effect on us. We had an honest and emotional exchange with each other, something which had been missing during difficult (Covid) times and created a unique community to hold onto. In this respect, this workshop still seems to be having an impact.

Furthermore, the cooperation with *The Art of Intervention* brought us to the Museum für Gegenwartskunst. Guided by Dominique Grisard, the **exhibition by Kara Walker** provoked us to engage into collective self-images as well as Walker's own identity and led us to critically engage with her work, which focuses on racism, gender, sexuality, and violence in American history. The **roundtable on 'How to do transnational feminist collaboration'** with Bettina Dennerlein, Margo Okazawa-Rey and Patricia Purtschert allowed us to critically rethink and re-evaluate possibilities for and constraints of transnational collaborations from a decolonial, feminist perspective. It allowed us to explore the following questions: How do we develop research in solidarity, cooperation, and collaboration in light of institutional, intellectual and material inequalities and hierarchies between the Global Norths and the Global Souths? What are new ways of and visions for establishing transnational collaborations, which pose possible alternatives to these challenges? Moderated by Sarah Farag, this roundtable brought together researchers in intersectional feminist and gender studies who situated and discussed their vast experiences in collaborating transnationally both within academia and beyond.

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