



# WORKSHOP

Intimate geographies of migration:  
(Countering) postcolonial violence  
in the urban everyday

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## When?

9th and 10th of October 2024

## Organizers

Dr. Elisabeth Kirndörfer  
Lea Haack

## Where?

9th of October:

Forum Internationale Wissenschaft (FIW) | Heussallee 18-24

10th of October:

Geographical Institute, University of Bonn | Meckenheimer  
Allee 166

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# PROGRAM

WED. 09/10/2024

**14:00-18:00 Public Workshop: Intimate geographies of migration: (Countering) postcolonial violence in the urban everyday**

**FIW, Heussallee 18-24**

This panel aims to connect scholars, their works and perspectives across Europe and beyond around their reflections and creative methodologies at the intersection of critical migration studies and geography. The different research projects that are discussed deal with spaces where people affected by racialization and migrantization come together on an everyday basis to imagine and negotiate the city differently. The contributions discuss subtle micro-practices, aesthetics and embodied acts of self-empowerment, including small and 'silent' acts of (dis)articulation and withdrawal, as well as affective and creative practices of care, joy and self-assertion.

**14:00 Welcome and introduction**

**14:15-15:30 Intimate geographies of migration I**

- **Prof. Dr. Claske Dijkeema (Bern):** Chained hopes. Perspectives on peace as an everyday experience for migrant women
- **Assoc. Prof. Laavanya Kathiravelu (Singapore):** Convivial minorities: shared precarity of ethnic Malays and immigrants in Singapore
- **Manuel Insberg (Bern):** Exploring the (im)possibilities of solidarity and care within refugee-to-refugee relationships
- **Sylvana Jahre (Berlin):** The ambivalences of care in urban politics of refugee arrival

**15:30-15:45 Questions and discussion I**

15 minute break

**16:00-17:15 Intimate geographies of migration II**

- **Lea Haack (Bonn):** "I'd rather just make my own system": Re-imagining the relations of arrival through textile art, fabric work and narration of women in London
- **Dr. Isabel Meier (Newcastle):** Acts of disengagement in border struggles: Fugitivities and refusals
- **Dr. Elisabeth Kirndörfer (Bonn):** Silence, space and power: Affective politics of emergence and denial within urban spaces of (post)colonial encounter
- **Johanna Bastian (Berlin):** What makes a friendly space in young migrants lives? Friendship formation and the influence on translocational belongings

**17:15-17:30 Questions and discussions round II**

**17:45 Closings and thank you**

**20:00 Dinner**

**Mr and Mrs Humus, Kaiser-Karl-Ring 27**

# THU. 10/10/2024

**10:30**      **Public open panel talk: “Critical engagements with postcolonial power relations in our research fields and at the University”**

**Department of Geography (ÜIII), Meckenheimer Allee 166**

In this open panel, opened by Dr. Angela Last, we wish to collect impulses from the panel’s round of scholars for the ‘decolonization process’ that the Geographical Institute at the University of Bonn is actively engaged in since autumn 2023.

**12:30**      **Lunch**

**Esskallation, Clemens-August-Str. 7a**

**14:00**      **End of program and goodbye**

# SUMMARIES

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**Prof. Dr. Claske Dijkeema, Bern University of Applied Sciences | [claske.dijkema@bfh.ch](mailto:claske.dijkema@bfh.ch)**  
**Chained Hopes. Perspectives on peace as an everyday experience for migrant women**

Peace is still predominantly thought within the context of nation-states. This approach does not integrate all those who physically extract themselves from (different forms of) violence. What does peace mean to people who are on the move and who stay shorter or longer periods of time in transit and destination countries? What does peace mean in a transnational context? An exploratory research project at the University of Basel posed this question to women coming from different countries (Nigeria, Cameroun and Afghanistan), and who are at different stages in the asylum process, but have in common that they applied for asylum in Germany. The methods used are photo elicitation and feminist Relief Maps. This research builds theoretically on important contributions from feminist scholarship that challenge the idea of the nation-state as the dominant concept or context in which to think about security. It helps to understand peace as an everyday experience, and a process in time and space, building on the temporal turn in geography.

**Assoc. Prof. Laavanya Kathiravelu, School of Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University Singapore | [LaavanyaK@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:LaavanyaK@ntu.edu.sg)**

**Convivial Minorities: shared precarity of ethnic Malays and immigrants in Singapore**

Singapore's liberal immigration policies have elicited growing anxiety, if not, xenophobia, even towards non-locals assumed to share similar ethnoracial identities. None of this work however, has focused on Malays in Singapore, whose own ethnic and raced positions are not seen as threatened by the influx of immigrants. Constitutionally recognised as indigenous, the minority group's 'Singaporean authenticity' is relatively secure. And yet, the Malay community's socio-economic marginality persists. This paper interrogates the ways in which Malays' longstanding socio-economic marginality shapes their outlook and relationships with immigrants. Both groups, importantly, face racialized exclusions within the city-state, due to ethnic or immigration status differences. Drawing on 31 in-depth interviews of Malay individuals conducted between January 2021 and May 2022, possibilities of conviviality between locals and foreigners were observed to emerge, especially when there was a common sense of marginality and precarity. This paper explores how a shared sense of marginality can present possibilities of conviviality between "locals" and "foreigners" in Singapore, undermining wider anti-immigrant discourse. In doing so, it offers an alternative inquiry into relations between locals and (im)migrants that avoids foreclosing inclusive and convivial relations. This may indicate emergent collective alliances responding to racialized and institutionalized urban borders. This paper's framework departs from statist perspectives that draw on the citizen-migrant binary. Instead, in seeing conviviality and solidarity as starting points, we can move beyond the hegemonic and oppositional scaffolds that underpin much of the research on contemporary migration and belonging.

**Manuel Insberg, Bern University of Applied Sciences | [manuel.insberg@bfh.ch](mailto:manuel.insberg@bfh.ch)**

**Exploring the (im)possibilities of solidarity and care within refugee-to-refugee relationships**

Forced migration is characterized by the disruption of personal bonds, the destabilization of informal support networks, and the loss of caring environments. The re-making of social relationships and community becomes a central aspect of everyday life for individuals after receiving asylum and settling in their new destination contexts. Academic literature primarily emphasizes the re-creation of relationships with those "left behind" in transnational contexts, with individuals from the so-called majority population, or with members of their ostensible ethno-national diaspora. In this contribution, I aim to shift the focus to a less-examined form of social relationships by specifically exploring the connections that refugees establish and the interactions they have with one another. Drawing on findings from my ethnographic fieldwork with individuals who have been granted asylum in Norway and reside as recognized refugees within Oslo's urban fabric, I delve into the meanings and ambivalences of their relationships with other refugees. I am interested in how their personal experiences of persecution and war, border violence, and the often precarious condition of "being a refugee" in supposedly safe Norway contribute to an understanding of shared vulnerability, provide possibilities for new social relations and enable everyday acts of solidarity and care. Conversely, I also investigate how the demands of a neoliberal, performance-driven society, combined with the paradigm of integration into a post-multicultural context, compel individuals to distance themselves and withdraw from those who embody the discursive figure of the "unwilling, non-integrating refugee." In doing so, my contribution aims to illuminate the (im)possibilities of everyday practices of solidarity and care within refugee-to-refugee relationships.

**Sylvana Jahre, Humboldt University of Berlin | [sylvana.jahre@geo.hu-berlin.de](mailto:sylvana.jahre@geo.hu-berlin.de)**

**The ambivalences of care in urban politics of refugee arrival**

My work delves into an examination of the ethics and practices of care, combining both theoretical underpinnings and empirical insights, with a specific focus on the arrival of refugees. Cities and infrastructures are deeply hostile for refugees not only in Germany but across Europe and beyond. However, there has been a notable shift in discourse towards values such as solidarity. Within this context, a distinctive program in Berlin has emerged, specifically addressing the reception of refugees. This program is guided by the politics of encounter, with a primary objective of fostering meaningful connections between refugees residing in shelters and the broader community in respective neighborhoods. The anticipated outcome is the empowerment of refugees and a greater level of tolerance within the neighborhood through these encounters. Taking a perspective of care, my focus is on understanding the nuanced ambivalences inherent in the intentions and actions of this program. The provision of infrastructures for local neighborhood participation, including events, courses, and designated meeting places, can be seen as a form of caregiving. These initiatives serve to build relationships not only between program facilitators and inhabitants but also among neighbors themselves. Importantly, the program serves as a conduit for resident's needs, channeling them into the administrative apparatus. Drawing on Toronto's conceptualization, the program's actions align with maintenance, continuation, and reparation of the inhospitable asylum apparatus. My work explores the ambivalences of how closely caring and uncaring elements coexist within such initiatives. Furthermore, it explores the conceptualization of care as a relational dynamic between need and ability as it effectively delineates urban society into care-takers and care-givers. Therefore, I advocate for a comprehensive examination of urban politics of migration. This implies a more nuanced and deliberate consideration of justice within the realm of caregiving, recognizing the implications for social hierarchies and power dynamics within urban spaces shaped by migration.

**Lea Haack, Geographical Institute, University of Bonn | [leahaack@uni-bonn.de](mailto:leahaack@uni-bonn.de)**

**“I’d rather just make my own system”: Re-imagining the relations of arrival through textile art, fabric work and narration of women in London**

What spaces are imagined and emerge in the engagement with the complex structures, practices and intimacies that “weave together” urban arrival spaces? In this contribution I will talk about my research to explore the experiences and perspectives of women upon their arrival in London, as they become tangible and visible through artistic objects, materiality, creative practices, and narrating. From a critical migration perspective, I reflect on my observations from the creative workshop ‘Weaving Stories of Arrival’, which I hosted together with a London and Meghalaya based artist, as well as a subsequent textile course in a migrant-led grassroots organisation. Moreover, the research comprises stories derived from textile-based interviews with women textile practitioners. Conceptually, the work draws on sensuous geographies, while viewing artistic sensing in the context of the politics and relations of aesthetics. Overall, I foreground the (re-)workings within and beyond socio-cultural and creative urban arrival infrastructure. The results emphasise two points. Firstly, I counter ideas of arrival that privilege singularity, linearity, and novelty, reflecting on how the women negotiate their subjectivities and positioning within the “threads” of in fact long-standing power imbued relations, bodies of knowledge, existing structures and histories. Art practice produces points of contact or allows the latter to be amplified, (re)invented, and rejected. How do people “feel their way” through pre-formed spaces of arrival? How do they position themselves in them, perpetuate and interrupt them? Secondly, I propose a bottom-up understanding of urban arrival which accommodates variety in terms of feeling, time and space, and foregrounds autonomy, particularly with respect to the bodies and experiences of migrant and Indigenous women.

**Dr. Isabel Meier, Geography and Environmental Sciences, Northumbria University, Newcastle | [isabel.meier@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:isabel.meier@northumbria.ac.uk)**

**Acts of disengagement in border struggles: fugitivities and refusals**

This paper explores people’s acts of disengagement from activist campaign and group spaces in the context of border struggle activism in Germany and the UK as fugitive practices of refusal. These acts of disengagement took the form of remaining silent or intentionally distracted, sleeping during activist meetings, distancing oneself from activist groups during conversations, or completely withdrawing from these spaces. The paper approaches these acts, first, as practices of refusal that expose notions of the political rooted in liberal struggles over power and freedom as not only risky but also inherently self-defeating and, second, as radically optimistic and vitalising practices of recovery and care that insist on alternative modes of thinking, practising, and experiencing sociality and the political that can inspire us to consider political agency in relation to wider abolitionist projects.

**Dr. Elisabeth Kirndörfer, Geographical Institute, University of Bonn**

[Elisabeth.kirndoerfer@uni-bonn.de](mailto:Elisabeth.kirndoerfer@uni-bonn.de)

**Silence, space and power: Affective politics of emergence and denial within urban spaces of (post)colonial encounter**

In this contribution, I explore silence as a political act in the context of race and migration. I set out from the stories and experiences of refugees in the East German city of Leipzig and demonstrate that silence is not an absence, or a void, but an action. This action can reproduce the violence of colonial encounter and racialising difference, or undermine and rupture with it. The research questions I follow are: (1) In what way can silence be considered a political act? (2) What is the relationship between silence and coloniality, race/racism, resistance, affect and power? (3) How does this interconnection display in the particular case study located in the East German city of Leipzig? I argue that silence reveals, firstly, the extent of violence that lies within very mundane and transitory urban encounters between white, longer-term residents in the city and people racialised as Black, or Muslim, or Arabic. Secondly, silence can easily be overlooked as a practice that is grounded within knowledge, reflexive of migration society's power dynamics and, hence, resistant and transformative. The empirical data my contribution builds on was collected within two different research projects both of which investigated, with different foci and methodological designs, how racialised people negotiate spaces of in- and exclusion in the city.

**Johanna Bastian, German Centre for Integration- and Migration Research/HU Berlin**

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**What makes a friendly space in young migrants lives? Friendship formation and the influence on translocational belongings**

In this workshop I present my ongoing PhD project which centers around the interplay of new and old friendships as relations of care/ing and spatial configurations in the lives of young migrants. In my explorative designed project, I understand the perspective on friendships as an opportunity to broaden the view to intimate relations that move beyond the much researched family relations of migrantized young adults (Robertson, 2016: 2). I argue that the how, where and who of friendship formation and maintenance can provide new insights into arrival experiences, mundane forms of care/ing and experiences of in/exclusion.

My research is structured along the following questions 1) How do friendship relations influence young migrants experience of migration and arrival? 2) What makes "friendly spaces" (Bowlby 2011, 607) for encounter that allow young migrants to forge new and old friendships on (trans)local scales? And finally, 3) which role does care play as a relational ethic in young migrants' friendships?

Through biographical interviews and story-mapping workshops, I seek to gain insights into friendships as relations of care and intimacy and the spatialities that are created thereby. In so doing, the micro-geographies of bodies and the everyday are at the center of my research. While being interested in the potential of friendships as care/ing relations, I remain sensitized to their embeddedness in social power structures which they equally reproduce.

In this workshop, I would like to discuss friendships as possible relations of care/ing in young migrants' lives, introduce my theoretical framework and invite you to reflect with me on the added value of examining the role of friendships in migration and arrival experiences.