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Conclusion: Blurring Boundaries as an Invitation to Self-Reflection. A Roundtable Discussion[1]

Dorothee Beck, Adriano José Habed, Annette Henninger, Hanna Mühlenhoff, Koen Slootmaeckers

What emerges from the contributions to this volume for the conceptualization of what the editors have named *blurring boundaries*? Instead of drawing single-headed conclusions, two of the editors of this volume—Dorothee Beck and Adriano José Habed—invited Hanna Mühlenhoff, Koen Slootmaeckers, and their co-editor Annette Henninger to a roundtable debate. The aim was to test how the concept of *blurring boundaries* resonates with colleagues who are familiar with the fields of research tackled here, but were not involved in the editing process—and thus to start a discussion that we hope will continue after finishing.

ADRIANO JOSÉ HABED: What do you think of our assessment about the blurring boundaries between anti-gender and feminist/queer discourses, or between the right and the left, when it comes to sexual and gender politics today? How do you read this phenomenon?

KOEN SLOOTMAECKERS: I think there is another question to ask, namely: Is this blurring of the boundaries something new or is it something that has always been happening? I often wonder whether the predominant substantialist ontology leads to us being surprised by these events. Through such an ontology, we are so used to seeing the world through substantive narratives of what things 'are', rather than starting from their relational nature or their underlying processes and principles. I see these blurring boundaries as a process in which the 'content' of these narratives is increasingly overlapping, but I wonder whether the underlying relational structure or political processes of these phenomena have always been similar. For example, discussing Trump voters and the progressive liberals, Nancy Fraser has argued that both are seeking for recognition (Fraser 2023). Whilst the type of recognition they seek may differ, the underlying political principles and processes have a shared structure, a shared relationship to the political system and/or society. If this is the case, I

1 The discussants—Hanna Mühlenhoff, Koen Slootmaeckers and Annette Henninger—met online on June 19, 2023. Adriano José Habed moderated the roundtable; Dorothee Beck edited the written text.

wonder whether the process of blurring boundaries is just a recent iteration—or expression—of the politics that underpin the left or the right, anti-gender or feminist movements. Most politics, both on the left and the right, seem to be driven by some kind of anti-politics—they are driven by a politics that is fighting *against* something rather than *for* something. If you think about anti-gender or anti-LGBTIQ+[2] movements, they are against the progressive social change and social transformation. Feminist and queer movements, on the other hand, fight the current state of the social system and the structures of oppression within it. So, when I think about blurring boundaries, I think about what is actually structuring all these movements? Looking beyond what is said, I see a sense of insecurity that is foundational to how these movements work. In other words, both 'progressive' and 'regressive' movements are trying to get a sense of stability, security, or safety. However, how they define stability, safety, and security is very different. Perhaps, what has been described as blurring boundaries (in the sense of overlapping content) goes much deeper and requires us to reconsider our ontological positions when we analyze these politics. For the content to be able to overlap, there must be an overlapping mode of politics in terms of its relational structure and process.

HANNA MÜHLENHOFF: I like the idea of blurring boundaries because it assumes on the one hand that there are some boundaries or differences and on the other hand that these differences are not as oppositional as we assumed. This concept is useful for emphasizing similarities and continuities between different movements instead of understanding them through binaries.

I work on international feminist politics, and I can see how the concept of blurring boundaries would be relevant here as well. In many places, there is some sort of consensus on some of the issues, when it comes to gender equality and/or LGBTIQ+ rights, amongst different political parties and actors, such as left-progressive parties and conservative and even right-wing parties. However, we need to question their understanding of gender and LGBTIQ+ equality and its consequences. States with a gender-equality and LGBTIQ+ friendly identity usually understand their role in the world against the background of racialized *Others* which are to be 'taught' or 'civilized' when it comes to gender and sexuality, or even kept out. Hence, the consensus on gender and LGBTIQ+ equality is built on exclusionary ideas and legitimizes exclusionary politics, such as anti-migrant policies. These are also the dangers that I see with the rise of Feminist Foreign Policy in different countries. The concept of blurring boundaries is useful here to unpack the similarities and differences of gender and sexuality politics amongst different actors.

ANNETTE HENNINGER: As one of the co-editors of the volume, obviously I have to say here that I find the concept of blurring boundaries very intriguing.

2 As explained in the introduction, the editors use the acronym LGBTIQ+ to signify the galaxy of progressive sexual politics.

Joking aside: I think it enables us to reflect upon problematic tendencies within a political camp that I would term as 'politically left'. What I mean is that the protagonists of this camp basically strive for a critique of intersectional power structures and the abolition of social relations of domination in favor of a democratization of society. They strive for social justice and for a liberalization and denormalization of gender relations. Anti-feminism is the opposing ideological position. It seeks to secure the social supremacy of hegemonic forms of gender relations, including the structures of privilege contained therein, by recourse to nature, tradition, or religious values. Thus, anti-feminism also represents an attempt to withdraw the negotiation of the shaping of social gender relations from democratic discourse. But in practice, protagonists of the left often fall short of achieving their goals. It is in this fuzziness of social practice where the concept of blurring boundaries becomes a helpful analytical instrument.

ADRIANO JOSÉ HABED: With what critical and conceptual tools can we analyze the blurring boundaries under scrutiny? Are such signifiers as 'right', 'left', 'emancipation', 'populism', 'authoritarianism' or the polarization of feminism and anti-feminism useful to frame the discussion?

HANNA MÜHLENHOFF: Let me take up one of the signifiers that you mention: 'left'. I wonder how we define this political spectrum called left. Is it leftist to be for lesbian rights? If so, this would assume that all LGBTIQ+ and feminist politics is left-wing automatically. In the end, I think that any anti-gender, anti-trans or anti-LGBTIQ+ movement is exclusionary, aiming to restrict the rights of people who face violence. So, they are not leftist in the sense that I would see it. That is why, in the context of this book, I wonder whether this dichotomy makes sense in analytical terms. Of course, perhaps some anti-trans movements identify with the left, yet from an analytical perspective I would contest this. In any case, in the book, left-wing anti-feminism also does not feature very strongly.

ANNETTE HENNINGER: In contrast to Hanna, I think that left and right still make sense as categories. What I understand as left are ideologies that aim at further democratizing liberal democracies by expanding social and political rights and participation. While in contrast right-wing ideologies build on a naturalization of inequalities and strategies of communitization via fixed identities and exclusion. Yet, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. What I mean is that left-wing actors can of course be exclusionary or racist in spite of their broader ideological orientation. We should thus stay critical against anti-gender or anti-feminist mobilizations not only by the political right, but also by the left. There

is a long history to this—an example would be the 'proletarian anti-feminism'[3] of the German workers movement in the 19th century. But there is much more research about right-wing and orthodox Christian anti-genderism/anti-feminism, than research of these phenomena on the left as broadly understood. Perhaps left-leaning academics are blinded by a process of othering: their *Others* are reactionary, conservative, right-wing actors, who allegedly have a backward understanding of gender and feminism, while the 'we' is imagined as standing on the good side of history. I think the idea of blurring boundaries is also an invitation for self-reflection for left-leaning academics: where are our own blind spots in these debates? This question is still quite rarely dealt with. Like Hanna mentioned, even the contributions in our book tend to focus on groups that are considered to be part of the problematic side of feminist or LGBTIQ+ movements. I am sure that there are other examples that hit closer to home—that are part of the 'left', where we could expand our knowledge on blurring boundaries. Yet, I still think that concepts like feminism and anti-feminism are helpful also for academic analysis. However, we have to define these concepts as analytical concepts. Out in the field everyone can claim 'I am a feminist!'—I remember, for instance, Ivanka Trump making such statements at the World Women's Forum in 2017. We need to differentiate the meaning of these terms in the field and in our own analytical understanding. Nevertheless, I think it makes sense to use feminism and anti-feminism as analytical terms.

HANNA MÜHLENHOFF: In the past years, I was interested in how the protests in the context of the pandemic brought a lot of unexpected actors together, in Germany as well as in the Netherlands. My colleague Luiza Bialasiewicz and I (2020) were asking the question of why these people came together in these protests. Why do Nazis walk with alternative, esoteric, New Age circles? Of course, there are differences between these groups, but there are also continuities and similarities which we maybe don't see on the surface. There is a long history of proximity between Nazi ideology and the anthroposophist movement. Anthroposophy refers to an occultist and esoteric worldview which was developed by Rudolf Steiner in the early 20th century and gained particular prominence in the German-speaking world. In Germany, the anthroposophist movement, which is despite Steiner's close ideological overlaps with the ideology of the Nazis usually considered to be alternative and leftist, was strongly represented in the anti-lockdown protests—marching together with fascists. We need to pay attention to such contingencies. Moreover, the protests in the pandemic have strengthened right-wing movements and allowed them to form new alliances which are relevant until today. Yet, we also ought to think about

3 This term was coined by the German historian Werner Thönnessen in his analysis of the politics of a faction of the German worker's movement led by Ferdinand Lassalle which called for an exclusion of women from the (industrial) workforce (Thönnessen 1976).

the neoliberal context they emerge from and are acting in. In the book there is the great contribution by Christopher Fritzsche about neoliberal affective governmentality, borrowing the concept from Birgit Sauer. Luiza Bialasiewicz and I have also drawn on this to understand what unites these different actors within the pandemic protests, arguing that it is the internalization of the individual, self-responsible self and a focus on 'personal sovereignty' and 'bodily autonomy'. The concept of neoliberal affective governmentality helps us to understand how the structures in which we live have contributed to the ideas and the materialization of anti-democratic, anti-gender and anti-LGBTIQ+ movements, by focusing on the self and turning away from the state, collectives and relationships.

That being said, we must also recognize that 'neoliberal' contexts also differ. I am thinking about the case of Turkey, about which Funda Hülagü has written a chapter in the book. This case study is very interesting. In her chapter, a feminist woman describes how she and other feminist women are not turning to the state but instead try to improve themselves. Turkey presents a bit of a different neoliberal context than the one we have been talking about so far. It is an authoritarian neoliberalism, as Cemal Burak Tansel (2018 has described it. What are the options for transformation or resistance in such a context? What do we count as resistance in it? It is obviously very difficult to turn towards an authoritarian state which has been cracking down on civil society and human rights defenders. I am saying this because it also is important that we define what we mean by neoliberalism and take into account that the contexts we are studying vary.

KOEN SLOOTMAECKERS: All of these concepts are really important. But, as I said before, I think we also need an ontological shift. We are so focused on things that are seemingly contradictory, like homophilia (as it materializes in such phenomena as homonationalism and homonormativity) and homophobia can never co-exist. But homophobia and homophilia can happen at the same time. I see this in my own research in Serbia (Slootmaeckers 2023), where during a press conference, the president announces his intention to ban the 2022 EuroPride and, in the same breath, he reappoints an openly lesbian Prime Minister. Focusing on the substance of these actions, many would wonder how a homophobic act of banning EuroPride and the homophilic act of re-appoint-ing a lesbian Prime Minister could co-exist. Yet, when we consider a more relational ontology, we start seeing the process of instrumentalization of LGBTIQ+ issues/politics for geo-political concerns. Similarly, I have outlined in my own work how homophobia and homophilia within nationalist politics are actually based on the similar othering practices (Slootmaeckers 2019). The process is underpinned by a boundary making that is actually very much the same: both sides are instrumentalizing homophobia as a normative othering tool. Whereas 'heteronationalism' uses homophobia to discredit those who are

against the own nation (e.g. Russia's usage of 'Gayropa', homonationalism uses homophobia as a characteristic of the *Other* that makes 'them' lesser than 'us' (e.g. the way in which Eastern Europe is deemed not European enough because they are 'homophobic'. So, to me, when thinking about the concept of blurring boundaries, like Hanna, I believe its strength lies in the fact that it makes us challenge our own assumptions. This is really important. One of the assumptions we need to question, I think, is related to the centrality of identity politics. Part of the problem with identity politics is that everything becomes crystallized around identities in one way or another. This shapes how we look at things, even within feminist works, and it is making us blind to underlying processes and politics.

ANNETTE HENNINGER: Identity politics has been a powerful tool for political mobilization for women's movements as well as for queer movements. But meanwhile this has come to a dead end. Even if we, in Feminist and Queer Studies, have learnt from Spivak and others that essentialism also can be employed 'strategically' by social movements, such collective identities tend to develop their own dynamics and may end up in the idea of fixed identities. And the political right is doing the same: they are also doing identity politics for the purpose of collective mobilization, but they have no problem with fixed identities. So, they have a strategic advantage when it comes to this.

KOEN SLOOTMAECKERS: In my ontological perspective, everything is relational (e.g., cf. Emirbayer 1997). When we challenge our boundaries and assumptions, I wonder why we are so violently in opposition against each other? Rather than focusing on the content of the conflict, I am keen to understand the relationships and processes that drive the violence between groups: What is it that drives the current populist narratives around, e.g., cancel culture, and 'wokeism'? I believe we need to understand what fuels their politics for us to respond. One of the issues I see that may drive the right-wing politics against cancel culture and 'wokeism' is the shrinking space for mistakes. When people make a mistake or make a statement that does not align with political correct-ness, does not align with leftist identity politics, social media is often quick to brand people for their statements, they are being identified through what they have said. They are essentialized as racist or TERF. Such processes create a kind of escalation and conflict; people entrench in their position and the possi-bility for dialogue becomes erased. To me, the idea of blurring boundaries shows that behind the opposition everybody is looking for something similar. One way to understand the heated conflict that we currently observe could be that both groups are looking to be heard, are looking for their own vulnerabil-ities to be recognized. If people feel their grievances are not heard, they tend to lash out, come to see offense as their best tactic for defense. Is it not so that all people want to feel heard in their own different grievances?

That is why I suggested that a shared feature of these politics relates to insecurities. There is something in common underneath this politics: everybody is screwed by the political, economic, and social system, especially under neoliberalism. Yet the blame of why people are worse off is laid somewhere else. The concept of blurring boundaries is really helpful because it pushes and challenges our conventional thinking. It forces us to try and see if we can think these different politics from different angles, e.g., perhaps rather than focusing on what drives us apart (anti-politics we can conceptualize our relationships differently by looking at what brings us together. Perhaps we are looking for lost connections. The concept of blurring boundaries allows us to challenge our own assumptions and ask the tough questions; it allows us to unexpected connections.

ANNETTE HENNINGER: I am struggling with the term 'grievances'. To a certain extent I can follow your argument, Koen. Of course, everybody has grievances and talking about this helps to build bridges. But the problem is that some people try to resolve their grievances at the cost of others. That is exactly where we are with anti-feminism and anti-genderism (and also with racism. There is also political conflict out there, for example when it comes to giving up former privileges or to redistribution. How can we enter this conflict in a more constructive way? This is the big issue we are struggling with.

KOEN SLOOTMAECKERS: I agree, Annette. I always struggle to find the right words when making this argument. Perhaps, what I am trying to argue for is 'empathy'. It is not about grievance itself. It is about generating empathy. I can see how talking about 'grievances' is too laden as a word, it is too focused on divisions, backwards looking, and perhaps too much like the anti-politics we discussed earlier. As we said, there is a need to stop the anti-politics in favor of more constructive modes of politics. Empathy, as a search for connection, is perhaps better suited, it may be more future focused. It makes me think of Judith Butler's comments in her lecture at the University of Cambridge, where she suggested that we should focus our attention more at building a politics that presents an alternative future, a future that everybody wants to be part of, a future that is inclusive (Butler 2023, 1:17:32–1:18:05.

ADRIANO JOSÉ HABED: In feminist, queer, and left-wing discourses, what are the factors and processes that pave the way for their co-optation and, appropriation by—or simply alignment and convergence with—their political (anti-feminist, anti-gender, right-wing) counterparts? In other words, what are the blind spots and dangers of feminist, queer, and left-wing discourses and politics?

KOEN SLOOTMAECKERS: I like the idea of blind spots. They are blind precisely because people don't see them. The metaphor of a truck comes to mind. Trucks have massive blind spots in traffic, and what drivers do is to build a system of mirrors to try and see as much as they can into them. These mirrors represent a way of building in processes to overcome blind spots, a series of tools to look into and prevent the unintended consequences of actions. The question is, what are our tools to try and look into our blind spots? Besides stepping away from identity politics, there is a need to question our own assumptions. The progressive movements are fighting for a better world, and they can often only see the good they are doing. But, as Annette said, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. We need to build in structures, processes, and tools for people to see the unintended consequences of their plans and actions. We need to build our metaphorical mirrors, so that we cannot claim ignorance, so that we know the unknowns we should know about.

One of the things we should consider, is the communication strategy of progressive movements. The messaging of 'you are doing all of these things wrong', the way in which we individualize blame, and the language of privilege, in my opinion, generate a barrier and stop communication. The language of privilege is a useful analytical concept, but as a political tool I find it problematic. For me, privilege is an analytical concept on how groups of people systematically benefit from a system, but when you mobilize it to tell a person that they are privileged, it erases their own personal struggles in society (often based on other systems of oppression. By individualizing privilege, you leave people with the feeling that their own problems are unheard. This creates barriers in communication because once you feel that your own needs are not recognized, you become defensive. The political usage of privilege feeds antagonism and reinforces the division that drives today's anti-politics. So, I have been thinking that we need to think of tactics that are focused on building bridges. Some of the chapters in the book do this, but they do it in a negative sense. With that I mean that they are talking about how we can create common understandings so that we shift attention to the 'common enemy', which is the system. It is 'negative' in the sense that such a focus on the common enemy is still fighting against something, rather than a positive politics that would be focused on fighting for something. So, as Butler (2023 suggested, we need tactics that bring us together by focusing on a positive future that we all want to be part of rather than the 'divide and conquer' logic that neoliberalism pushes upon us.

ANNETTE HENNINGER: The current constellation of anti-gender/anti-feminist politics is basically an outcome of the limited success of women's and LGBTIQ+ movements. Nowadays we have gender mainstreaming, gender equality policies, lesbian and gay rights in many Western countries. However, this is a limited success, as these policies mostly refer to binary understandings

of gender. Also, they often reinforce intersectional inequalities. They became integrated in a neoliberal context, as Hanna mentioned. This is very problematic, because many people got the impression that 'we' in the West already have achieved gender and sexual equality. Also, many people think that debates that question the gender binary and want to denaturalize gender as a category take place in an academic bubble, whereas 'normal' people cannot understand what all this is about. According to Paula-Irene Villa (2017, however, it is exactly this post-essentialist concept of gender that is contested in current mobilizations. Villa argues that the critics of the concept of 'gender' have correctly grasped the (deconstructivist thrust of Gender Studies and defended themselves against this unsettling attack on their everyday beliefs. I would argue that the political right understands perfectly well that a deconstruction of 'gender' undermines their own essentialist ideas of gender and the family; thus, it is logical that they mobilize against it. But many other people are open to this discourse, too. They do not understand what these academic gender and queer people are talking about. And there is the feeling of insecurity that Koen mentioned before: one that could be phrased like, 'if they take away my gender, what is left of my female identity, or my masculinity?' Also, I think that there is quite a number of actors across the political spectrum who feel that they have something to lose when the seemingly natural gender binary is questioned. So, we do not only have to talk about identities, but also about privileges, which are questioned.

HANNA MÜHLENHOFF: I agree with Annette that the rise of anti-gender/anti-feminist politics is linked to a failure of gender policies to go beyond binary as well as neoliberal approaches to gender equality. Similarly, LGBTIQ+ rights have become integrated into neoliberal states. Both have not led to broader transformations and intersectional justice. In my experience, when confronted with this criticism, policymakers say: 'But we need to be strategic. This is all we can do'. Even if this is a sincere answer, it remains an open question whether these small steps are the right strategy in the long term. I believe that, if we let go of thinking more transformatively, more intersectionally, if we think only about gender , then we run the risk of doing more harm. Is it really better to have some change towards gender equality in these ways, when along the way we exclude more people and make it even more difficult to transform the system more broadly?

KOEN SLOOTMAECKERS: Annette, you mentioned the limited success of women's and LGBTIQ+ movements. Like Hanna suggested, I think there is something bigger happening about how we see progress. If we want to understand these blurring boundaries, perhaps we also have to take a step back and ask, what is the function of the idea of progress in all of these movements? As you said, Annette and Hanna, all these kinds of struggles have been co-opted

by neoliberalism. The way we argue for progress is very much situated within the system of neoliberalism. We are looking for equal rights. We are looking for an identity individual-based sense of progress; we are looking for correcting a system and creating rights and laws that protect identity-based characteristics. When we see laws like anti-discrimination laws and same-sex marriage as progress, then the idea of progress becomes actually a technology of power to make us blind of how this system is not changing at all. We are tinkering on the edges to make it seem more inclusive. Yes, there is a material change for some people in that they are folded into a violent system, but the moment you step outside the binaries or challenge the system, you remain exposed to the same systemic violence that has been maintaining society for decades if not centuries. That is the kind of contestation we currently see. Those who are trying to push beyond the binary, who are arguing for a transformative politics are at the epicenter of today's contestations. Yet, much of the mainstream progressive movements have been folded so much into the system, that they no longer fight the system. Therefore, the gay liberation ideas and the anti-system critique have completely vanished within the first ten to fifteen years of the modern movement to become a gay rights movement. And now, right-wing groups like *queer majority* on Twitter write that left-wing post-modernism has hijacked the movement. There is something there about how we have been folded so much into the structure that we are actually perpetuating the structure. So, I would say that some segments of the gay-rights movements and the liberal feminist movements are aligned with the conservatives because they are all fighting to maintain the system, albeit with some corrections. They want to be part of the system with some slight variations about how we define the margins allowing for the inclusion of some previously excluded people.

ANNETTE HENNINGER: I am skeptical of the concept of progress. I rather get the impression that history is moving around in circles and that things get reactualized time and again under changed circumstances. Social movements are in an ongoing contestation with political systems that always include social power structures and structures of privileges. Of course, movements have to think strategically and adapt their strategies to a certain degree to their respective context—however, there are more adaptive and more radical strategies. Thus, I do not consider our debate as lecturing the women's movement or the LGBTIQ+ movement of being a complete failure. The intention is rather to say, wait a second, there are dangers here and there where you get co-opted and where your success and your strategies are limited. I think that based on our book and on our debate, we can give some recommendations. Intersectional analysis is one of them. For me, intersectional analysis always includes an analysis of intersecting power structures on a meso-level, including inside social movements, as well as on the macro and structural level of the organization of society.

DOROTHEE BECK: Earlier in our conversation, Koen mentioned the idea of shifting attention to the common enemy. Yet, is there something like an understanding of the common enemy?

HANNA MÜHLENHOFF: At the moment, we do not really see an identification of the common enemy. I think this is also a problem in other political struggles or struggles where groups have been divided. However, what is needed is a stronger and more widespread understanding of what is to gain for everyone from change. I am always struck by this common sense understanding of gender and sexuality rights as a zero-sum game, meaning that someone is taking away something from me instead of thinking, 'I can also gain from this'. We see it happening in anti-feminist discourses although of course men can also benefit from feminism and a changed notion of gender. This zero-sum thinking of neoliberalism has unfortunately been internalized by European societies more widely.

KOEN SLOOTMAECKERS: What this conversation has nicely done—and what I think is the power of this kind of blurred boundaries—is to show the need to move away from a kind of anti-politics that does not go anywhere. So, rather than asking what the common enemy is, we should ask what the common future is: a future that we can all agree to. There is a lack of future, of futurities or a future utopia. An alternative idea of a future has vanished from the way we are thinking. Hanna, as you said, there is resistance that is actually happening. Currently, we are so used to turning to the state as the salvation for our struggles. Perhaps that is not where solution lies. Perhaps we need a different way of imagining. What does a just society look like? I don't have an answer to that. But, for me, this conversation shows the power of the concept of blurring boundaries. With that I mean, just be trying to think through the concept and what it means for how we conceive the current political climate, it has pushed us to question our own assumptions. It has made us reflect on what we want or need to talk about, and how we talk about it. It pushed us to think to move away from anti-politics and to focus on how everyone stands to gain, toward a future-focused politics.

ANNETTE HENNINGER: Thanks to Koen to pointing to the future. My answer is, we do not need common enemies but common goals. Where do we want to go? Maybe here, once again, history has moved around in circles, and we are in this situation now partly because the Marxist political left buried the idea of Utopia. But it seems we need Utopia again. We need more concrete imaginaries of a future that we would wish to create jointly.

ADRIANO JOSÉ HABED: Where can we find a common ground to form alliances and joint strategies in response to a common threat to gender equality and sexual freedom? What are the questions/conflicts/differences that need to be addressed to face this threat, and how should we address them?

KOEN SLOOTMAECKERS: Coming to the question about how we should respond to the current political climate, I read our current reaction as one of resistance. We are pushing back to how we are being portrayed. But I believe there is a need to listen to why we are positioned in certain ways and create a space of self-reflection and learn something about how our strategies are not working. I would take the idea of blurring boundaries as an invitation to look at why we are perceived the way we are by our opponents. We need to understand what drives our divisions to come to a strategy that neutralizes those divisions, so that we can move forward. What would our politics look like if we highlight people's stories? Like I said before, I think we need strategies that are focused on empathy and the recognition of everyone's struggles. There is a power of stories, of empathy and of communalities. There is a power of creating connection. Maybe we need to bring forward shared struggles. How can we start from lived experiences and start to build bridges rather than starting from fighting other positions? Everybody is struggling. That could be a commonality.

HANNA MÜHLENHOFF: Similarly, I would also like to emphasize the importance of speaking to each other and creating relations. Thinking about a common ground, something we haven't mentioned yet is the question of how all these 'crises' such as climate change, the pandemic, or the supposed 'crisis of migration' create insecurities and how they could be used for thinking about a common future. The crises play a role in the creation of insecurities and the individualized experience of anxiety which are contributing to these polarized discourses. A common view of the future within this context would be a good starting point for connections and for collective change. What stands out is that a lot of these anti-gender or anti-LGBTIQ+ discourses often also build on a thinking of the *Other* as the racialized migrant who is a threat to 'our' gender equality. This is indicative of the exclusionary dynamics of most contemporary crisis discourses in Europe. We need to develop strategies to move beyond these discourses of threatening others and think more about imagining a common future in the face of 'crisis'.

ANNETTE HENNINGER: The concept of blurring boundaries is really inspiring, as our discussion right now has shown. However, it is not an analytical concept yet. I wonder if we should try to elaborate this into a more analytical concept or whether it makes more sense to leave it as it is, a metaphor, which inspires reflection.

HANNA MÜHLENHOFF: I like the openness of the concept very much. We have discussed some of the factors and processes that underlie this blurring of boundaries. The questions were: which boundaries are we talking about and were they there before? I like this open nature of blurring boundaries because it points to similarities and contingencies. But this is always very context specific. I am very skeptical about pinning down very clear pathways. What I want to highlight more, perhaps, is the transnational and geo-political nature of these discourses and movements and how they are being mobilized. Some chapters of the book refer to that, as well as to the role of Europe. For instance, in parts of the book the question arises of how nationalism interacts with the polarization or overlapping of discourses. Maryna Shevtsova's chapter on Ukraine is interesting in this context. Going beyond the chapter, there is the question of how war and militarization impact these movements and how, for instance, LGBTIQ+ movements may align with a national(ist) cause and what its consequences may be.

KOEN SLOOTMAECKERS: If I think about the concept of blurring boundaries, like Hanna, I would not advice to try and pin it down. I don't think that is where its power lies. To me, it is an invitation to reflect. Rather than taking it as a concept of analysis, perhaps it could be developed as a methodology. How do we approach some of the questions we are looking at? Blurring boundaries is becoming a methodology in a way that is different and perhaps queer, because it is really asking the tough questions: What are the boundaries? How are they created? What are the distinctions? What are the similarities? What are the assumptions about these boundaries? Those are the questions that the concept of blurring boundaries evokes to me, and that is where I see its contribution and analytical benefit. I found the concept and engaging with the different chapters extremely thought provoking. They forced me to reflect on a lot of things.

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