

BRINGING INTIMACIES INTO THE DISCUSSION: ON THE RELEVANCE OF
ADDRESSING INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS IN A MIGRATION CONTEXT

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Bringing Intimacies into the Discussion: On the Relevance of Addressing Intimate Relationships in a Migration Context

Abstract

Topics such as gender, sexualities, and intimacies, recently experienced processes of instrumentalization and culturalization in European public and political discourses on migration matters. Culturalization is particularly the case when it comes to questions of 'integration' where the cultural Other is contrasted to 'European values' to legitimate political objectives. Romantic love as a marker of living a morally 'right' intimate relationship is in this regard implicitly used to illustrate an incompatibility of Muslim migrants to 'European' ideals of intimacy. Based on conceptual thinking and literature review, this theoretical paper highlights the relevance of addressing intimacies, practices, and intimate ideas within current migration debates in Europe and Austria in particular. It is illustrated that there is a need to link the rising research stream on mobile intimacies to recent Anti-Muslim developments in European discourses. With the concept of belonging, the paper provides a possible approach to understand processes of exclusion and inclusion based on intimate ideas and shows their negotiable character. Further, this paper emphasizes the importance of thinking about Euro-Centric precategorizations and encourages micro-sociological inductive research to grasp the diverse understandings and practices of intimacies.

“The customs and rules of Islamic life are incompatible with those in Austria, and those living with us must change their behavior and comply with the rules and laws that apply here,”¹ Norbert Hofer of the right-wing populist *FPÖ* (Freedom Party Austria)² recently said. With this statement, the politician reacted to a recently published quantitative study on young people with Muslim backgrounds in Vienna.³ Hofer’s quote is part of an online article of the newspaper *Heute*, which picked up the study and produced an even more generalized and culturalized picture than the survey itself. This generalization, based on culture, specifically focused on the particular group of Afghans, as apparent within the title of the article “Half of the Afghans in Vienna Want a Theocracy.”⁴ However, the study is concerned with migrants from various origins. The author argues that ‘migrants with Muslim backgrounds’ do not fit into Austrian society according to their attitudes and values, underlined by scientific studies on the one hand and implemented by politics on the other hand.

The endangerment of ‘European values’ of gender equality and sexual autonomy is illustrated by European nationalist parties to be a recent problem induced by Muslim migrants.⁵ After what happened on New Year’s Eve in Cologne in 2015, media re-

ports and political discussions implied that there is no gender-related violence or discrimination in the EU without migrants.⁶ The topic of gender became not only connected directly to issues of ‘integration’ but more broadly entangled with various other problems,⁷ for example, forced marriage, working conditions, domestic violence, or even everyday interactions. In the line of reasoning from an ‘integration’ perspective, a gender-related perceived incompatibility to ‘European values’ has an impact on Muslim migrants’ presence in many areas. References to differences in gender relations appear to be a knockout argument in current public migration discourses. Although the mentioned newspaper article only touches on topics of intimacy, in its reference to family values and gender roles, it exemplarily shows how current media reports produce the Otherness of Muslim migrants. Other media reports referring to “the Sex-Afghan,”⁸ forced marriage, rape, or sexual assault, directly try to depict the incompatibility of Muslim values regarding sexualities and intimacies in comparison to ‘European values.’ In this case, questions of intimacy and sexuality are instrumentalized to create “imagined communities”⁹ and a sense of *togetherness* or *Otherness* with the desired result of creating inclusion and exclusion.¹⁰ Practicing sexual Othering to legitimate political objectives is not a new phenomenon as it has been practiced by colonizing nations to separate the ‘colonizers’ from the ‘colonized’ to control sexuality and intimate relations on both sides.¹¹ Recently, romantic love as a marker of living a morally ‘right’ intimate relationship is in this regard implicitly used by politicians and public discourses to illustrate an incompatibility of Muslim migrants who are — with a heteronormative-racist lens — portrayed as having mostly arranged marriages that follow strategic reasons. On the contrary, ‘Western’ or ‘European’ intimate relationships are (since the rise of the idea of romantic love in the 19th century) ideally based on love and equality.¹² It appears that the “racialized subjects may only know love through sexual instincts and actions. Therefore the universality of love does not apply to racialized subjects [...]”¹³

In this theoretical paper, I argue, based on literature review and conceptual thinking, for the relevance of addressing intimate relationships in the context of migration in social sciences with a particular focus on the mobility of people *and* ideas. This paper highlights the importance of taking the intersectionality of intimacies, gender, sexualities, and migration into account and shows a way of thinking it with the concept of *belonging*. Although topics of love and sexuality have always been of interest

in social sciences, and even though there is a current rise of research on intimacy in the context of migration, there is still a research gap concerning the mobility of intimate ideas, which refers for example to perceptions, experiences, or values regarding intimacies. In showing the relevance of love and intimacies as a topic of public and scholarly interest, this paper firstly provides an overview of the current state of the art. The two following sections, firstly, focus on *feelings of belonging* and the interconnectedness of intimacies, belonging, and migration. Secondly, they illustrate the instrumentalization and *politics of belonging* concerning gender topics and their relation to sexualities and intimacies within the migration debate in Europe and specifically in Austria. This article will show that addressing intimacies in the described context allows us to understand mechanisms of exclusion, integration debates, processes of culturalization, and essentialisation towards (mostly Muslim) migrants in European societies. Finally, drawing upon my ongoing PhD research project, concerned with Afghan migrants and negotiations of belonging regarding intimate relationships, I encourage the micro-sociological perspective and a look at migration's impact on individuals' intimate lives.

1_ Intersecting Intimacies, Gender, and Sexualities in a Migration Context

The following literature overview takes two perspectives: research on intimacy within a specific cultural context and on intimacy with a focus on migration and mobility. Both fields contribute to establishing a more comprehensive approach to mobile intimacies. Overall, it is inevitable to reflect on one's own, in this case, European-shaped views on intimacy, to avoid a Euro-centric manner that applies those ideas as normative onto other social and cultural contexts. In this regard, not questioning the Euro-centric perspective would inevitably create separation and hierarchies,¹⁴ which has a long colonial history in matters of intimacies and sexualities.¹⁵ The following section provides an overview of relevant work done around the three overlapping areas of research on intimacy, gender, and sexualities in the context of migration. First of all, it is necessary to mention that this article refers to intimate relationships as a relation between, mostly but not only, two people that includes, for example, romantic love, sexual attraction, emotional closeness, or marriage.¹⁶ The necessity is to recognize romantic love as a possible part of intimate relationships and at the same time not to assume romantic love normatively as a key feature of 'morally correct' relationships

such as couple relationships or marriages. Other reasons related to family building, economic security, or the ability to live in a safe environment can also lead to intimate relationships. The most important and encompassing feature is that intimate relationships are “a type of personal relationships that are subjectively experienced and may also be socially recognized as close.”¹⁷

Questions of intimate relationships and sexuality have been of interest in social sciences from various angles since its beginnings. Anthropologists such as Malinowski or Mead conducted fieldwork in societies they perceived as explicitly different and geographically distant, and were interested in topics such as sexual behavior, coming of age, marriage, or family formations embedded in rituals, morals, and social structures.¹⁸ Early sociologists, for example, Simmel or Goode, on the contrary, were more interested in their ‘own’ society. However, neither of them could ignore the phenomenon of love and intimate relations within societal systems and the relevance of its social embeddedness.¹⁹ Later, still focusing on western societies in sociology, topics such as the role of love in a differentiated society,²⁰ sexuality, and power relations,²¹ or the individualization of love,²² have been of interest. Nevertheless, sociological research perceived topics of intimacy and love mostly as inapproachable and neglected a comprehensive analysis of intimate relations within societies for an extended period. Only since the 1990s, is there an observable rise of sociological literature in this field of research.

Research on a specific cultural and mostly also geographical context is probably the field with the longest tradition in the context of understanding various interpretations of love and intimacy, mainly with an anthropological approach. For a long time, social scientists either exoticized non-western intimacies or tried to show that the latter is not that different²³ and were searching for universalities, for example, whether romantic love is a universal category.²⁴ Current research, mostly based on case studies, explores intimacies from different points of view, e.g., with a focus on its economic facets, political frameworks, or social impacts.²⁵ It further demonstrates affective ideals of specific contexts, their historical change, and diverse influences that shape normative perceptions of intimacies.²⁶ Studies within this field also consider practical realization of intimacies, questions of inequalities, gender, and power relations.²⁷ Although these studies often focus on people within a fixed geographical entity, they are highly relevant in showing the significance of the social, political, reli-

gious, and cultural embeddedness of intimate relations, their perceptions, and practices.

More recently, there is a growing number of studies on intimate relations and sexualities in the context of globalization and mobilities.²⁸ Evoked by the mobility turn in social science,²⁹ there is a recent development from looking only at migrated people to including other facets of mobility (e.g., ideas, money, or practices).³⁰ Transnational marriages,³¹ matchmaking,³² and cross-cultural relationships³³ have been the perfect examples of globalization's impact on intimacies for a long time and still are. Others focusing on discourses, narratives, and media, show the transformative potential of intimate ideas and normativities in this regard.³⁴ At the same time, migration may offer the possibility for a new expression of intimacy described as *Dritter Raum*³⁵ or *Out-of-the-way places*.³⁶ Both concepts, *Dritter Raum*³⁷ and *Out-of-the-way places*³⁸ in general, describe a space, different from the usual living context, that gives individuals the opportunity of expressing and living intimate relations in their way. When looking at different forms and practices of intimate relations such as the often-used dichotomy of arranged marriage and love marriage, it becomes clear that these are tightly bound to questions of identity, religion, and ethnic belonging.³⁹ Furthermore, the public debate on arranged marriage as not compatible with 'European values' calls for research on the interconnectedness of gender and sexuality with ideas and practices of intimate relationships. Groes and Fernandez⁴⁰ edited one of the most recent and innovative works in the field of mobile intimacies. The volume offers a wide range of topics from marriage migration and matchmaking⁴¹ to sex work⁴² or the negotiation of intimacy in the context of tourism.⁴³

As the overview of research on intimacies in migration contexts shows, there are observable tendencies in social sciences, on the one side, to consider intimate relations as cause or possibility for migration (e.g., transnational marriage), and, on the other side, to see intimacies as a place of new options, negotiation, adaption or struggle due to mobility and migration. Nevertheless, there are some aspects where a comprehensive understanding of intimate relations in migratory contexts is still less developed. Noticeably, there still is a focus on heterosexual marital relationships, especially when it comes to research referring to people with Muslim backgrounds. This constricted perspective is counteracted in a recently growing field of queer studies concerned with the interconnectedness of diverse intimacies, sexualities, and migra-

tion.⁴⁴ As different forms of intimacies are ascribed to Muslim migrants (heterosexual, patriarchal) and Europeans (any kind, gender-equal), it is essential to include the perspective of queer Muslims, as indicated in queer studies.⁴⁵

So far, there is a main pre categorization referring to what kind of intimate relationship is at the center of research, for example, either heterosexual or queer relationships. Researching ideas and perceptions on intimate relationships, however, calls for an inductive research design that focuses on the negotiation processes which are initiated by migration and life experiences. Not only because sexualities may also have an impact on taking the risk of a flight, but a new approach about intimacies in a migration context should also avoid deductive pre categorizations of intimacies to be able to gain comprehensive understandings of complex living realities. The need for gaining more in-depth knowledge is especially the case when it comes to the micro-sociological perspective and research on different influences and experiences shaping individuals' perceptions and practical realization of intimate relationships. Mainly evoked by the current developments within public debates on migration and 'integration,' there is a demand for ethnographical research to understand life experiences, conditions, and negotiations. As shown in the literature review, there is a growing interest in considering the mobility of people, concepts, and ideas, instead of separating those thematic approaches. However, the interlinkage between ideas and practices of intimacies with processes of Othering, exclusion, and questions of belonging is rarely addressed and must be considered to understand migration and 'integration' debates in Europe.

2_Intimacies in the Context of Belonging

As mentioned in the introduction, questions of gender, intimacies, and sexualities are, in a colonial manner, used to establish culturalized borders between 'us' and 'them,' between 'modern' and 'backward' societies,⁴⁶ between the 'appropriate' kind of sexuality and 'wrong' sexuality, between Europeans who have intimate relationships out of love and those 'Others' who have not. These categorizations of Otherness are currently of great importance when it comes to *politics of (non) belonging*, discussions about restrictive migration policies, to justify and legitimize deportations to protect 'European values' and to establish 'integration' laws and measurements — as introduced at the beginning of this paper. In what follows, these discussions are collective-

ly described under the term *current migration debates*. Nevertheless, intimate relationships are not only instrumentalized by external actors, but the question arises in how far intimacies, ideas, and concepts of how they should and could be lived, affect individuals' *feelings of belonging*? Further, in which way is a desire to belong (or non-belong) affecting intimacies? The following section addresses the interconnectedness of *belonging* and intimate ideas and its relevance in *current migration debates*.

The concept of belonging describes a dynamic process that is multiple, negotiable, and constructed.⁴⁷ An intersectional approach discloses the varieties of belonging's facets, for example, class, gender, race, sexuality, religion.⁴⁸ Although only separated for analytical reasons, Yuval-Davis stresses the difference between *belonging* and *politics of belonging*, which helps to understand the multidimensionality of the concept. Whereas belonging refers to "an emotional (or even ontological) attachment, about feeling 'at home,'" ⁴⁹ politics of belonging, refer to the discussion of belonging concerning different interests, for example, when it comes to questions about citizenship. As the next section deals with migration policies of exclusion and therefore located in the area of *politics of belonging*, the *feeling* of belonging is at the focus now. In using (feelings of) belonging as an analytical tool, Yuval-Davis suggests looking at belonging from three different perspectives:

The first facet concerns social locations; the second relates to people's identification and emotional attachments to various collectivities and groupings; and the third relates to ethical and political value systems with which people judge their own and others' belonging. These different facets are interrelated, but cannot be reduced to each other.⁵⁰

When taking Yuval-Davis' facets of belonging, I identify, based on literature and preliminary insights into my ongoing research project, the interconnectedness of belonging and ideas about intimate relationships as follows. The first facet, social location, is defined by ethnicity, gender, or educational aspects that influence, for example, perceptions, roles, and power relations regarding intimate relations. The second facet could relate to a specific group, for example, a sports club of queer young people or a religious group. Discourses, ideas of these groups, and what individuals experience have an impact on a feeling of belonging to specific groups and shape individual's ideas of what an intimate relationship can be. The last perspective relates to value systems someone is embedded in or associated with, and is highly interconnected with the two previous facets of belonging. In an understanding of moral discourses as

a source of information for social and cultural norms, values, and guidelines for possibilities of lived intimated relations, it becomes clear that there is a complex interplay between feelings of belonging and morality. Just like belonging, morality has exclusive and inclusive characteristics, it is not fixed and static, but can be renegotiated in specific settings and constellations.⁵¹ Therefore, when researching intimacies and sexualities in a migration context, it is never about comparing two different cultures, which are characterized by fixed moral discourses and values. However, it is about comparing various discourses shaped by various groups within societies. When looking at mobile people, negotiation of different moral discourses appears crucial in their sense of belonging to different social groups and settings. To belong somewhere is also a question of consciously or unconsciously negotiating moral discourses you are confronted with or even to distance yourself explicitly. In this regard, the mobility of people *and* ideas, because of its fundamental characteristic of evoking new encounters, demands the negotiation of moral points of view and feelings of belonging. The consideration of the resulting multidimensionality of belonging makes it possible to understand belonging as much more than only referring to origin and authenticity: belonging is a concept that includes developments over time as well as various social and cultural realities.⁵² Therefore, a negotiation of belonging does not inevitably result in a substitution of one belonging in the favor for another, but may result in complementation and the creation of new forms of belonging. Taking the negotiable and constructed character of belonging and its dynamic and multi-located aspects into consideration leads to the need to think about an understanding of culture as a negotiable category of belonging. In this regard, Thielen, for example, suggests using the concept of *transculture*, that emphasizes processes of hybridization and mixing instead of a narrow understanding of closed separable units.⁵³

In their study on marriage practices and negotiations of belonging among Afghan returnees, van Houte and Davids show the relevance of the concept of belonging when researching intimate relations.⁵⁴ Their study illustrates returnees' challenges of the multifaceted constitution of belonging, e.g., belonging to different places (in this case, Europe and Afghanistan), social groups, or discourses. Experiences with varying practices of marriage due to mobility led to the necessity to negotiate their position concerning "who belongs, who wants to belong and who is able to belong."⁵⁵ How to be a 'proper' Afghan and how to identify with an imagined community consisting of

groups, transnational networks, or family ties is not only relevant for Afghan returnees but migrants around the world. The interconnectedness of self-identification, external categories, and social ties must be considered when looking at negotiations of intimate relationships and sexualities in the context of belonging. A multi-perspective approach is inevitable because:

[...] there is no direct causal relationship between the situatedness of people's gaze and their cognitive, emotional and moral perspectives on life. People born into the same families and/or the same time and social environment can have different identifications and political views.⁵⁶

With this quote, van Houte and Davids exemplify what was already mentioned before. Various discourses people are situated in shape their ideas, perspective, and moral evaluations on intimacies and cannot be reduced to a single category, for example, shared country of origin or similar living experiences. They show that there is an interrelatedness of belonging and the way intimate relations are envisioned ideally.

3_ Current Debates in an Austrian European Context

After a theoretical approximation to the topic of intimacies in a migration context, mainly referring to *feelings of belonging*, the following section is concerned with a concrete example of *politics of belonging* in Austria. The following focuses on outlining the current migration debates in Europe and especially in the Austrian case as an example, also in the light of their scholarly criticisms, to make the case that intimate relationships, its instrumentalization, discourses about it, and significance in individuals' lives, need to be taken in consideration when analyzing the recent debates on restricting migration. It will also show that *politics of belonging* have to be considered when analyzing processes of negotiating intimate ideas in a migration context.

Islam and Muslim traditions are currently highly discussed in the European public and political context regarding questions of Islamization, backwardness, extremism, and general questions of 'integration' and, in this regard, illustrated as incompatible to 'European values.'⁵⁷ Within these debates, Islam is mostly perceived as not being an integral part of Europe, but as being recently imported by refugees and migrants from Muslim regions of the world.⁵⁸ What is always present are topics of gender equality, may it be concerning access to work, everyday interactions in public life, or the situation of Muslim women. Integration courses, public pools, and work guidelines aim to teach gender rules and behavior patterns. Protect *our* women from foreign men, the

emancipation of migrant women from patriarchal family structures, and the liberation of their bodies appear to be fundamental aims of integration discourses. These discourses reflect the perspective of the European mainstream society and especially the governmental side⁵⁹ — also if the topic of liberation, e.g., with the case of veiling, is only used to justify regulations that are grounded in fear of Islamization. As Fatima El-Tayeb states, “the hijab in particular serves as the key symbol of Muslim difference, representing parallel societies that are shaped by ancient and primitive rather than modern, western structures.”⁶⁰ The *cultural construction* of gender roles, as Fischer and Dahinden point out, is instrumentalized in the politics of migration, as it is “fundamentally inscribed in ideologies, identities and institutionalized laws and regulations”⁶¹ to define boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ In an outdated understanding of culture as a fixed set of values and codes, gender, as super-problem gets culturalized, becomes a boundary marker and consequently creates inclusion and exclusion.⁶²

Discussions and representations of ‘foreign’ sexualities and intimacies are not new, and they are not a thing of the past. These representations include an Orientalist and essentialist picture of non-European, non-white man as an unpredictable sexual being who understands women as subordinate and himself takes what he wants to have. In consequence, Europe’s women need to be protected. The crucial point is that Muslim men are in a generalizing way presented as suppressors of all women (not only the European ones). Although some researchers see a revival of Neo-Orientalism and islamophobia after 9/11, followed by media discrimination and racial profiling,⁶³ it is relevant to stress that there is a “centuries-long tradition and culture in Europe of constructing Islam as foreign and threatening.”⁶⁴ Therefore, analyzing gender, sexualities, and intimacies in the context of migration in Europe and linked explicitly to Islam always has to consider Europe’s colonial past and Orientalist tradition.⁶⁵ The so-called *Cologne incidents* are probably one of the most known and illustrative examples in this regard. It refers to the mass sexual assaults that happened in Cologne, Germany, on New Year’s Eve in 2015/16, and its following debate on sexism and misogyny illustrated as imported to Europe.⁶⁶ As Tudor states, this led to a “discursive construction of brown men as Muslim migrants and therefore as both sexual perpetrators and ‘not-German’ or ‘not-European,’ resulting in calls for stopping (Extra-European) immigration to Europe.”⁶⁷ Not only have “white-nationalist gender and

sexual politics”⁶⁸ been encouraged but, as Boulila and Carri illustrate, what happened in Cologne is used to prove the incompatibility of migrants’ (especially asylum seekers’) values to Europe’s achievement of gender equality and women’s emancipation. Nevertheless, picturing the *foreign man*, the Muslim, black man, racialized and migratized,⁶⁹ displayed as a threat, is also practiced more unconsciously by several images in media reporting. In a recent article about sexual abuse, the teenage magazine *Bravo Girl* shows a white woman who gets touched by a black man from behind, seemingly against her will.⁷⁰ The report initially produced to raise awareness for sexual abuse, reinforces suspicions of the unknown black and, in line with Tudor’s concept of migratization,⁷¹ also of the migrant man. Referring to Fischer and Dahinden, there are observable processes of ethnicization and Islamization of sexism and misogyny.⁷²

However, not all Muslim migrants are perceived and treated in the same way. It is about including and excluding, where different aspects, for example, political as well as cultural and monetary considerations, are relevant and manifest in many levels of being welcome or not. From a populist point of view, ‘fortress Europe’ should not only be protected against too many migrants but especially against the ‘wrong’ migrants, those who do not fit ‘European values.’ As noted in the newspaper article at the beginning of this paper, in Austria, Afghans are one of the main targets within public discourses regarding an assumed incompatibility to ‘Austrian and European values’ and lifestyles. Currently, one of the largest refugee groups in Austria, they face various challenges, from precarious residence permits and fear of deportation to Afghanistan to the societal stigmatization of being strongly religious, coming from a backward society, and having no education. Overall there is the desire to live an ordinary, safe life that comes with the challenge to meet the public and political demand to be as inconspicuous as possible.⁷³ Looking at the case of Afghans in Austria, it becomes evident that not only is religiosity homogenously ascribed to Afghan migrants, but furthermore are sexism, misogyny, and outdated gender roles culturalized and therefore the narrative of non-negotiability and consequently, no chance for ‘integrating’ them, is established. The *cultural Other* is opposed to the ‘European culture,’ characterized by equal rights for women and men. In this line, gender order is used for demarcation and stated as necessary to be protected.⁷⁴ This phenomenon can also be described as *politics of belonging*⁷⁵ or maybe better *non-belonging*.

To consider misogyny and sexism (and as Tudor argues homophobia and antisemitism) as extra-European import leads to a wide-spread anti-migration position and usage of this argument in anti-migration debates and justification of political actions,⁷⁶ for example, detention or deportation. Discourses picturing the Muslim migrant man as “hard to integrate” due to his “dangerous, patriarchal migrant masculinity”⁷⁷ are politically produced and instrumentalized by migration policies. Scheibelhofer illustrates that instrumentalizing sexuality to this extent and for political purpose is a current development in Austria. The politicization of intimacies recently appears since the topic of integration is widely assumed as increasingly relevant and is rooted in Europe’s policies primarily since 2006 when Austria had the EU presidency and drove issues such as the fight against forced marriage as imported problem forward.⁷⁸ In particular, at this point, the interconnectedness of gender topics with questions of intimate relationships becomes apparent. Forced marriage became, next to the notion of the ‘oppressed Muslim woman,’ associated with Muslims in general. These processes of generalizations lead to the assumption that the negative public image of intimate relations lived by people coming from a Muslim context to Europe and in specific to Austria, has an enormous impact on their perceptions of intimacy and on the way one has to present her or himself in society. More recently, the new government in Austria has forwarded an anti-Muslim migration policy masked in a language that positions itself as ‘protecting’ or ‘saving’ women. However, it is merely demonstrative of a practice of instrumentalizing feminist arguments focused on gender equality to justify restrictive migration policies and extensive integration measures. The newly established Ministry for Integration and Women, with Susanne Raab at its helm, shows in its mere existence the pursued combination of these two broad areas. In one of her first interviews in her newly achieved position as minister, Raab stated that she sees a threat for Austrian women if patriarchal cultures come to Austria in high numbers.⁷⁹ With such a statement, she renders migrant women not only as victims but also as invisible — the focus lies on the migrant patriarchal men. In reference to Sara Farris’ concept of femonationalism “[...] the attempts of European right-wing parties, among others, to co-opt feminist ideals into anti-immigrant and anti-Islam campaigns”⁸⁰ are apparent in Austria’s recent policy.

4_Conclusion

Within this paper, I argued for the relevance of addressing intimate relationships in the context of migration, besides transnational marriage practices or family reunion, and highlighted the necessity of taking the intersectionality of intimacies, gender, sexualities, and migration into account. The external instrumentalization and culturalization of intimacies by restrictive European migration policies and media discourses construct an ‘Oriental Other’ and contrast it to ‘European values.’ Romantic love, ‘appropriate’ sexualities, and gender-equality as essential characteristics of the ‘right’ kind of intimate relationship are, in this sense, opposed to the ‘wrong’ Muslim intimacies.

As the first part of this paper illustrated, there is a growing field of research on the mobility of intimacies and sexualities. Nevertheless, the overview of existing studies also shows that there is a need to encourage qualitative, ethnographic studies on the interconnectedness of intimate ideas, mobility, and mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion, and set it in the context of the *current migration debates* in Europe. Although used by politics to illustrate differences, for example, with the culturalization of marriage practices, the changing perceptions of intimacies in the light of various discourses, life events, and multiple belongings of individuals and groups, mostly stay unconsidered in research. To study intimate relations in the context of migration demands the researcher’s reflection of their point of view and categories of intimacies. Euro-centric perspectives on ideals of intimacies, for example, romantic love as the fundamental basis of a relationship, lead to separation, hierarchies, and missing out on the diverse understandings and practices of intimate relationships. Approaches applied by queer studies are exemplary for the possible ways of opening research on intimacies.

Within the second part of the paper, I showed a possible way of thinking intimate ideas with the concepts of *feelings of belonging* and *politics of belonging* and their mutual interplay. The discussion of the current public and political atmosphere towards Muslim migrants in Austria and a broader European context made processes of essentialisation, generalization, and culturalization based on gender questions visible. The cultural Other is produced by contrasting ‘European values’ of gender equality with a ‘backward’ understanding of masculine superiority. The *cultural construction*⁸¹ of gender-related topics puts intimate relations and sexualities in the perspective of

migration debates as well as individual lives in a new setting. Further, as shown in media reports, the colonial picture of a ‘foreign sexuality’ ascribed to male migrants from a Muslim context contributes to the representation of the male suppressor and the female victim. However, not only has this paper shown the *politics of belonging* due to questions of gender, sexualities, and intimacies, but it has also discussed the possibility of individual negotiations of intimate ideas and its interconnectedness with *feelings of belonging* and moral discourses. Intimate relationships are a field of study, revealing and debating various fields of sociological interest such as gender roles, power relations, questions of belonging, and questions about the negotiation of social and cultural norms. Focusing on intimacies in a migration context further provides the opportunity to gain an understanding of processes such as inclusion and exclusion, culturalization, and the essentialisation of specific minorities.

In my ongoing PhD research on the negotiation of intimate ideas, concerned with Afghan migrants, these ideas are put in practice. The project takes a qualitative inductive approach, which includes ethnographic methods such as participant observations and biographical narrative interviews as well as an open understanding of intimate relationships. The biographical approach appears to be useful in grasping the complexity of life experiences, discourses, changing situatedness, and multiple forms of belonging to understand negotiations of intimate ideas.

In addition to the conceptual and theoretical approximation to the research of intimacies, this paper demonstrates the responsibility of social science to show complex living realities. As shown in the introduction of this paper, quantitative studies concerned with ‘integration’ topics, often play into the hands of Anti-Muslim racism performed in media reporting and political statements. The decontextualization and instrumentalization of quantitative data for political purposes insistently shows that it is not only relevant to encourage ethnographic studies in this research field but to think about new ways to present these findings to a broader audience.

Endnotes

- ¹ Original: “Die Sitten und Regeln des islamischen Lebens sind mit jenen in Österreich nicht kompatibel. Wer bei uns lebt, muss seine Verhaltensweisen ändern und die hier geltenden Regeln und Gesetze einhalten.” Hofer cited in Jochen Dobnik, “Hälfte Der Afghanen Wiens Wünscht Sich Gottesstaat,” accessed December 05, 2019, <<https://www.heute.at/s/studie-halfte-der->

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- 2 Cited in Dobnik, “Hälfte der Afghanen Wiens wünscht sich Gottesstaat.”
- 3 Kenan Güngör et al., *ÖIF Forschungsbericht: Junge Menschen Mit Muslimischer Prägung in Wien: Zugehörigkeiten, Einstellungen Und Abwertungen* (Wien: Österreichischer Integrationsfonds, 2019).
- 4 Dobnik, “Hälfte der Afghanen Wiens wünscht sich Gottesstaat.”
- 5 Sara R. Farris, “Femotionalism and the ‘Regular’ Army of Labor Called Migrant Women,” in *History of the Present* 2.2 (2012), 184–199.
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