“‘We are all migrants’ holds a kernel of truth (if we go back far enough); one of our editorial board members remarked in our discussions in the run up to this special issue. Perhaps this explains why the call for our previous issue on Gendered Fortress Europe, a topic closely intertwined with the issue of migration, hit home with so many. We received highly topical and interesting abstracts from around the world – too many for one journal issue. This edition of the Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies can, therefore, be seen as a continuation of our previous issue on Fortress Europe, yet here we shift the attention to ‘crossing borders’, a topic that struck a chord with the members of the editorial board. Many of us have embodied experiences of crossing (gendered) borders, which lead to lively discussions during our preparations. Two central themes emerged from our chat and e-mail sessions: the instability of categories such as ‘autochtonous’, ‘allochtonous’, ‘migrant’, and ‘native’; and the way in which privileges shape our border crossings. Since these themes run through the entire issue, we thought it worthwhile to share with you some of our reflections and personal stories regarding crossing (gendered) borders, before introducing this issue’s articles.

**Embodied experiences**

*Sara*: How would you say do ‘crossing gendered borders’ resonate with your own embodied experiences?

*Sanne*: Like many academics, I have lived in different countries in pursuit of educational and research opportunities, yet my earliest and most intimate
connection to the theme is via my mother, who moved from South Africa to the Netherlands two years before I was born. I grew up with stories about an elsewhere that I only knew through biannual visits to my family. While officially a ‘second generation non-western “allochtonous” Dutch citizen’, my last name (from my Dutch father) and the fact that I am white means that I do not share many of the experiences of others with a migration background: I look and sound like a ‘Dutch native’ and I enjoy most of the privileges that come with it. Yet, I also share the experience of many second-generation migrants of feeling a strong, familial connection to another part of the world, while being reminded that you do not belong ‘there’ whenever you visit.

I grew up speaking Afrikaans, and with a very strong bond with my grandparents. Hanging around the kitchen while my grandmother baked, watching my grandfather fastening the cufflinks on his church shirt – that was ‘home’. But I also felt clumsy and out of place there: my cousins were amused by my ineptitude at the most basic things like shooting slingshots and driving the farm buggy, and my awkward attempts at acting ‘normal’ around the domestic workers belied my difficulties with navigating the social order of apartheid South Africa.

When I began taking gender studies courses, most notably Gloria Wekker’s course on intersectionality, I began to connect my family history and my experiences to the complicated politics of global migration, the resonances of colonialism and global racial divides. It helps that my mother was, and remains, a political person. In South Africa, she opposed apartheid, but when she moved to the Netherlands, some of her new colleagues refused to sit with her in the cafeteria. This was the late seventies, so the boycott of South Africa was in full swing. There was no way for her to explain her complex feelings about and connection to South Africa. She fought against the hideously oppressive system of apartheid, but her relationship with South Africa was much too complex to be reduced to a matter of ‘being on the right side of history’: the red dirt under the soles of her school shoes; knickers sewn from cotton sugar sacks that were bleached with Sunlight soap; the unmistakable and unshakable Afrikaner twang in her English.

Sarah: I’ve been struck by the power of personal experiences and biographies to unravel hegemonic notions such as ‘allochtonous’ and ‘autochtonous’ – if we let them. To me, those terms, which operate in powerful and exclusive ways both in Belgium and the Netherlands, proved to be cracks to break open dominant frames. My maternal grandfather emigrated from Switzerland: the land of his peasant family was too small to be divided
among the children, if the farm were to remain more or less economically viable. And so the eldest son inherited the land, while other siblings had the options of working on the eldest brother’s farm, marrying into better circumstances, or finding another way to make a living. This was the 1920s, and my grandfather embarked on a train journey to Belgium, in response to advertisements recruiting workers for the textile industry in Ghent. He crossed borders of various kinds, including a crossing from rural to industrial labour. He settled in Ghent, and married a Flemish woman. Yet, he remained profoundly attached to his Switzerland, which towards the end of his more than 80 years old life acquired mythical qualities: my grandparental house was plastered with images of the Matterhorn and high mountain ranges, my Germanophone grandfather never really learned to speak Flemish, and, perhaps most strikingly, until the day he died, he was profoundly concerned with Switzerland’s poverty as he had experienced it in his youth. It drove my grandmother nuts, as she salvaged from his hands the food packages the Swiss government sent to its nationals abroad during the Second World War, and which he was bent on sending back to Switzerland, convinced that his people ‘over there’ needed them more.

Such family stories enabled me to unpack ‘allochtonous’ as it became a central notion, from the 1980s onwards, in the making of Flanders’ contemporary racial politics. ‘Allochtonous’ is part of a process of racialisation that disavows its racial politics. It claims to signify ‘those who do not come from here’, and connects belonging to where grandparents were born. Yet, as a white person, with Flemish as my mother tongue (albeit that my mother spoke French with her father), I am not interpellated as ‘allochtonous’, while Belgians with a brown skin colour, whose grandparents might be born in Belgium (as we are gradually moving into the fourth generation of descendants from Turkish and Moroccan labour migrants to Belgium), continue to be interpellated as such. The operative but disavowed distinction here is whiteness.

The entanglement of questions of migration and questions of ethnicity and ‘race’, and the particular manners in which these questions get enmeshed in Flanders, is central to the construction of a white and homogeneous understanding of Flemish identity. As Sanne pointed to, the racial apartheid in South Africa was explicit, while the racial politics and logics that are currently in place in the Low Lands are most often disavowed. We need various kinds of political and intellectual strategies to unpack these contemporary racial politics. One of these strategies might insist on how that part of the social fabric – in my grandfather’s spirit, I use a weaving metaphor – which the national powers of the day claim as ‘truly national’,
is profoundly constituted by migrations of various kinds. That ‘we’ should fear and oppose those who come from other places in search of a livelihood, because ‘they’ found no work where they lived, is a narrative that, in an embodied way, never made sense to me.

Stories of migration settle themselves into family histories in striking and profound ways. One of the things it does, I believe, is make it more easily imaginable to migrate. In our family, patterns of migration, and by now firmly middle-class migration, have simply become part of what family is and how it operates. And so it happens that I currently find myself working and living in the US, with a child who is precisely my sister’s age when my parents lived and worked in the US.

Privileges?

Sara: You touch upon on important themes, such as the categorisation of ‘allochtonous’ and ‘autochtonous’, issues that are key considerations when we think about crossing gendered borders as well as the notion of privileged status in relation to borders. In regards to the examples you provide we might make a connection between Sanne’s ‘passing’ as ‘native Dutch’ and passing/crossing borders. Also, how crossing or not crossing (or with what status and in what ways) is linked to categories such as gender, sexuality, class, and ‘race’.

Sanne: Well, it is a history that only makes sense through an intersectional framework. Had my mother not been the first in her working-class family to attend university, she would not have gotten a job as a computer programmer at Nixdorff, she would probably not have become immersed in an international environment, she wouldn’t have met my father and wouldn’t have moved to the Netherlands. So, she first had to cross class borders that provided her with a specific (limited) kind of mobility that working class Afrikaners at the time were deprived of. But, it’s also the traditional heterosexual narrative of (usually) women migrating for marriage. The racial aspects are far more complex. I imagine it was much easier for her to cross the border between South Africa and the Netherlands through marriage than it would have been to cross the Apartheid divide. My entire family in South Africa is white. To my knowledge, nobody has married or has been in a relationship with someone who is not white. Then again, the same is true for my family in the Netherlands. Not to diminish the gruesome history of apartheid, but the racial borders within the Netherlands seem to be firmly established socially and culturally.
It's tempting to think that, because my mother opposed apartheid and because I never grew up under apartheid, that I can claim some kind of ‘innocent’ white Africanness. But how and why would I claim ‘Africanness’ as someone who has only experienced South Africa on visits with my white family? I have benefitted from all kinds of privileges (ranging from educational opportunities to social safety nets and global mobility) that my working-class family never had, and that the native domestic workers who worked for my working-class family certainly never had access to. Antjie Krog has written powerfully about the difficulty of constructing a white Afrikaans identity without conveniently forgetting the colonial and Apartheid legacies that continue to leave their mark on South African society and culture.

I read Country of my Skull in a Genderstudies class, and only then realised fully why my mother never considered moving ‘back’ after my parents’ divorce. As much as I did not belong ‘there’, neither was her belonging ‘there’ self-evident anymore. Perhaps it never was, I would have to ask her. In any case, I think our bond has been cemented, in part, in our mutual sense of not-belonging in a place we both continue to think of as ‘home’.

Sarah: The question of privileges is a crucial one. ‘We are all migrants’ can do some necessary political work, but it can also very easily reproduce hegemonic power relations. The theoretical and political affirmation of the ‘autonomy of migration’ gives us crucial tools to unpack the modern construct of nationalism, and the various exclusions upon which it is based, and to imagine other kinds of political communities, but it is also crucial to relate those insights to, let’s say, the autonomy of power relations of class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, to name but a powerful few. Autonomy, in other words, becomes relative autonomy, which is another way to approach the question of intersectionality and its emphasis on the entangled and co-constituted character of how different relations of power operate.

It was rural poverty that pushed my grandfather to migrate, but his journey of migration was facilitated by the way he was racialised as white, as he travelled through colonial Europe and settled in colonial Belgium, and gendered as male. Also, there are ways in which the ‘border-crossings’ of my paternal family, all rooted very much in Ghent, were more drastic than my Swiss grandfather who moved from one country to the other. The dramatic crossings here are those of class: from urban dwellers who remained undisciplined by labour in the generation of my grandparents – the appropriate Marxist term would be lumpenproletariat – to the first generation of university graduates in the family through my father.
Social mobility, whether it occurs with migration or not – and of course often it does – is a particularly intense form of border crossing, which perhaps has not received the same kind of critical attention in terms of processes of subjectification and becoming as migration. And then there is of course the question of gender and sexuality, and how inhabiting non-normative genders and sexualities is so intimately linked with crossing borders, with moving, with not-belonging. Queerness so often unfolds itself around not feeling at home, which is culturally constructed as heteronormative. This also raises many questions about what it means to search for queer homes. In general, if we want to speak of the ethics of border-crossings, and I think we should, Adorno’s words come to mind: ‘it is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home.’

**Deadly borders**

*Sara:* I wonder about the paradox that the experience of crossing borders, which should show the permeability of borders, also makes us all too conscious of borders. And also the moment we pronounce that we cross borders, we are also in the process of fixing borders, right? One could say that, in feminist theory, the notion of crossing borders has a positive connotation, crossing gender borders in transgender or queer, crossing disciplinary borders... How do you see this transcending or fixing of borders through the notion of crossing borders and how do you relate that to your own experiences?

*Sanne:* It depends on how you want to talk about crossing borders: feminist poststructuralism has created awareness that symbolic or metaphorical borders are as powerful and even more ubiquitous than administrative, political, and physical borders in shaping our experiences, relationships, and ways of thinking. Rosi Braidotti formulated the figure of the ‘nomadic subject’ to think about the border-crossings that shape feminist thought. The nomad doesn’t belong anywhere, and therefore moves in-between. This might be a source of inspiration and joy, but also of longing, alienation, and a sense of rootlessness. This is an interesting figuration, because it doesn't take the in-between as a kind of fixed point, but focuses on movement. At the same time, it’s interesting to also look at concrete movings in time and space.

My mother’s moving away from South Africa happened concretely when she boarded the plane, and again when, years later, she gave up her
dual citizenship. Those movements coincide and overlap with different points in her shifting relationship to both South Africa and the Netherlands. In a way, since she moved, she has always lived in and thought from an ‘elsewhere’ – whether she was here or there. I think that, because I grew up with a migrant mother, feminist metaphors, concepts, and figurations of border-crossing and perspective-shifting never appeared as abstract to me. The strength of feminist thought and feminist modes of being lies exactly in the ability to become alienated from the norms that surround you, to look at ‘the way things are’ and to realise that they could very well be different. Essentially what all feminist thought and action has in common is that it is rooted in the profound belief that things should be different. That takes a kind of perspectival ‘border crossing’, an ability and willingness to look at the world from outside the normative framework. It’s odd to me to think of that kind of border-crossing as a decadent, armchair-intellectual hobby, as some right-wing conservatives seem to think. For my mother, that outside is where she lives. I grew up there. It’s not some kind of mythical or metaphorical place. It’s where you find yourself when you find that you no longer belong – whether by choice or by circumstances – fully here nor ‘there’.

Sarah: I agree; feminist have developed a positive imaginary of crossing borders, in many productive ways – indeed Braidotti’s ‘nomadic subject’, and also Gloria Anzaldua’s figure of the ‘mestiza’, and Donna Haraway’s ‘cyborg’. I also think of the work of Audre Lorde and her investment in affirming difference and in the formation of communities without erasing difference. All these intellectual and political efforts occur in relation to an incredibly violent genealogy of dealing with difference in the West. This genealogy still needs to be investigated and unpacked, also taking into account late capitalism’s celebration of a defanged understanding of difference.

At the same time, your point about the ironic reproduction of borders through exploring border crossings holds true as well. But, let’s look at it like this: taking the abolition or transcendence of borders for granted, even if out of a utopian desire, remains limited. ‘No borders, no nation’, which I will continue to chant at political demonstrations, does not necessarily help us to understand what borders, whether material or symbolic, do. At its worst, it feeds hegemonic imaginaries of a post-racial, post-feminist, pan-sexual universe that we are supposedly moving into. In other words, while crossing might indeed be a way of reproducing borders, it is also of way of mapping them, of experiencing and understanding what borders do, and do differentially. We can’t take this lightly: crossing borders has, and
continues to be, extremely deadly. UNITED for Intercultural Action has documented more than 17,300 refugee deaths at the borders of Fortress Europe. Crossing the borders of gender is known to be fatal, lest the high incidence of homicide for transgendered people be forgotten.

Yet, it is precisely the crossing of borders that makes borders visible, and produces knowledge about borders. Such experiences and knowledges are a better starting point to begin unpacking borders than a declaration – however well-intended and infused with a utopian desire that is tangible to me – that we are beyond borders. This is a familiar debate: in response to Virginia Woolf’s ‘As a woman, I have no country’, Adrienne Rich insists we need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history, in other words, how delineated the places we embody and speak from are. Situated knowledges, in other words, might provide us with a more promising way to unpack borders.

Situated knowledges and unpacking borders

This is what the articles of this edition of the Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies intend to do: making borders visible and interrogating the dynamics of border drawings on the basis of the experiences and knowledge produced through border crossings. The articles focus on the embodied experiences of emigrants from Russia and other former Soviet republics in Germany; undocumented migrants in the Netherlands; and (non-European) women in Cameroon who hope to better their lives and the lives of their relatives by marrying a European citizen.

Oxana Krasilnikova, in her article ‘I’ve learned to fight for every opportunity tooth and nail’, A gender approach to adaptation strategies of Russian-speaking migrants in Germany’, focuses on new settlers from Russia and the former Soviet republics in Germany. These citizens have a right to settle in Germany when they meet certain criteria, but there is also an influx of workers in certain occupations and of spouses of German citizens. Women are overrepresented among them. Men and women came to Germany roughly for the same reasons: to better their own lives and the lives of their children. Krasilnikova shows, however, that men and women, and married and single emigrants, differ markedly in their responses to the opportunities and the constraints that their new country offers.

Mari Pitkänen draws attention to the framing of undocumented migrants in the Netherlands. The welfare state is the main dividing line, increasingly drawing an invisible border between the undocumented mi-
grants in the Netherlands; the latter trying to survive in cities with the help of nongovernmental organisations and other networks. Pitkänen points to the importance of not only gender, but also other power relations in the negotiating of everyday life. Female migrants, she contends, have shown considerable abilities to reach the shores of Fortress Europe, but once arrived, there is but one frame open to them if they want to receive help: that of the vulnerable victim, devoid of agency.

In ‘Female spouses at the doors of Fortress Europe, Marriage and Security at Consulate Offices in Cameroon’, Maybritt Jill Alpes contends that the borders of Europe are increasingly found in other countries across the world. She was based at the French embassy in Cameroon for research into communication between migration officers and women who want to migrate to marry a French citizen. Both parties turn out to be driven by a desire for ‘security’, but this term has a different meaning for them. Where the women hope to better their lives and the lives of their relatives by marrying a citizen of a European country, the migration officers are worried about the security risks that these migrants might pose for their new homeland.

These articles are complemented by visual stories from a participatory photography project with migrant sex workers in South Africa resulting from a partnership between the African Centre for Migration & Society, University of the Witwatersrand, the Sisonke Sex Worker Movement, and the Market Photo Workshop. The captions by the migrant sex workers, accompanying the four photos, speak strongly to the theme of ‘Crossing gendered borders’. The photos also engage in a dialogue across borders with two other visual self-portraits by sex workers in Amsterdam, who participated in the ‘A Day in Her Life’ project (VOW Media).

Besides these topical articles, you will find a piece by Bernhard Weicht who met with philosopher Joan Tronto when she received an honorary degree at the Humanist University in Utrecht in January 2014. “As long as care is attached to gender there is no justice’, An interview with Joan C. Tronto’, records their thought-provoking conversation. Joan Tronto explains how, where, and why she developed her now famous work on the ethics of care and pays ample tribute to her intellectual foremothers and -sisters. The interview also discusses the political implications of a more honest concern with care: how about the ethics of citizenship? And, speaking to the theme of this issue, under what conditions should a caregiver be entitled to citizenship in the country where her care work is welcome, but she often is not?