EU Today Podcast 12 Transcript

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[Intro music in theme of piano playing Ode to Joy]

Katie Lindner: Hello, and welcome to EU Today, a podcast from the Center for European studies, a Jean Monnet Center of Excellence at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
Thank you to the Erasmus+ program of the European Commission, the EU Delegation to the U.S., and the U.S. Department of Education for supporting our center and its programs. On this podcast, we sit down with scholars and policy leaders to discuss pressing issues facing the EU. We hope you enjoy it.

On this podcast, we will be interviewing professors Jennifer Fitzgerald and Marc Helbling. They visited UNC-Chapel Hill to participate in a panel entitled "The Political Divides that are Transforming the EU" on March 20, 2019. The panel was organized by, and also featured, UNC Professor Rahsaan Maxwell, a Jean Monnet Center of Excellence key faculty member. Jennifer Fitzgerald is Associate Professor of political science at the University of Colorado- Boulder. A specialist in comparative political behavior, much of Fitzgerald's work examines the ways in which social context shapes political attitudes and vote choice in advanced democratic societies. Marc Helbling is Full Professor in political sociology at the department of political science at the University of Bamberg and a research fellow at the WZB, the Berlin Social Science Center. He works on immigration and citizenship policies, nationalism, national identities, xenophobia and islamophobia, and right-wing populism. Interviewing professors Fitzgerald and Helbling, is Stephanie Shady, a PhD candidate here at UNC in political science.

[Ode to Joy fades back in and plays for appx. 4 measures]

Banu Gökarıksel: My name is Banu Gökarıksel and I'm one of the organizers of the "Encountering Difference, Embodying Boundaries, and Unsettling Borders: Middle Eastern Refugees and Immigrants in the European Union" conference. This conference took place completely virtually over 5 weeks in the fall of 2020. In this podcast, I will chat with other conference organizers about the five conference sessions.

All of the conference organizers were feminist geographers with connections to the Department of Geography at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the

United States. I am Professor of Geography and have been at UNC since 2005. My scholarship primarily focuses on politics of bodies and everyday life in Turkey. Dr. Nathan Swanson and Dr. Devran Koray Öcal received their PhDs at UNC Geography; Lily Herbert, Suad Jabr, and Betül Aykaç are currently working towards their doctoral degrees in UNC Geography.

The main conference sponsor was the Center for European Studies, a Jean Monnet Center of Excellence. We would also like thank UNC Global Research Institute (especially Peter Coclanis), the College of Arts Sciences, particularly Senior Associate Dean for Social Sciences and Global Programs Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld, UNC Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies, Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies, and UNC Department of Geography.

Unsettling Borders was an interdisciplinary and international conference. Our goal was to explore how refugee experiences provide insights into the production of difference, boundaries, and borders by unsettling established understandings of identity, statehood, and territory. With this conference, we aimed to respond to the political context in which prolonged wars, political destabilization, the climate crisis, and economic downturn in the Middle East have caused unprecedented levels of displacement of people internally and to neighboring countries. Syrians, Iraqis, Palestinians, Iranians, and Afghanis have been displaced in especially large numbers. Many of the displaced have been seeking asylum in European Union member states, leading to what has been labeled a "refugee crisis" in popular media and political discourses over the past decade. This language of crisis has animated racist, anti-refugee, xenophobic, and Islamophobic policies and discourses that target Middle East-origin asylum-seekers and refugees and that construct a "Europe" under threat of (and in need of protection from) an "invasion" of Europe's political, cultural, and racial Others. Rising right-wing political movements have capitalized on and fueled these deeply rooted sentiments across Europe. The EU has adopted policies that seek to limit the number of asylum seekers by increasing surveillance and policing of its borders, leading to "fortress Europe" and turning the Mediterranean Sea into a deathscape. At the same time, EU countries have continued to build bureaucracies for "weeding out" those "deserving" refugees from those who are judged unworthy of this status, and governments have started to implement increasingly stringent requirements to qualify for settlement and integration programs. In a 2016 agreement between the EU and Turkey, Turkey was to receive funding to keep Syrians in the country and to prevent them from going into the EU, thereby extending to West Asia the sorts of processes that have externalized the EU border into North Africa. Taken together, these practices are actively remaking boundaries and redefining the borders of Europe.

Our approach has been informed by feminist political geography and feminist geopolitics that foreground how boundaries, borders, and territories are made through differentiated bodies and embodied practices. We also engage critical

migration and refugee studies and critical race theory combined with feminist theory to think through the production of racialized, gendered, and sexual difference and the coloniality of global migration regimes.

The conference explored questions about who refugees are and how they position themselves (or find themselves positioned) within systems of power operating at multiple scales and across a variety of spaces. We centered the embodied Middle Eastern refugee experiences to understand and theorize subjects, political spaces, and technologies of governance along and within the borders of the EU.

Rather than treating queerness and racialization as marginal or exceptional, this conference positioned them as starting points for analysis. We questioned the formulation of a "refugee crisis" and instead locate problems within nation-building and state-making practices that create hierarchies among people and define enemies and undesirables. Our aim in this approach was to acknowledge the full humanity of refugees and to explore refugee lives and subjectivities that exceed their designation as a refugee and that cannot be reduced to this status. This meant pushing beyond understanding refugees only through the lens of displacement, violence, trauma, loss of home, and waiting in uncertainty. These are certainly crucial parts of the refugee experience. But refugees also experience love, build intimacy, form spaces of belonging, make new homes, navigate complex, multiscale systems of refugee governance, and build lives, even in hostile environments. They encounter state officials, NGO workers, neighbors, and other refugees and immigrants, and they build valuable knowledge. Their subject positions are shaped by the interactions between these experiences and their gendered, ethnic, sexual, racial, classed, age-based, religious, and political differences. Interactions with refugees also transform those who come into contact with them, just as they transform the spaces that they travel through and that they inhabit.

We explored these topics in five events. The first panel was about Queer Refugees/Queering Refugee Studies (October 9, 2020). The second was about the documentary film Midnight Traveler. The third panel focused on Racialization of Refugees in the EU (October 23, 2020). Fourth aimed to rethink Border Regimes and State Technologies/Mechanisms in the EU (October 30, 2020). The conference's last session was a roundtable that brought scholars, activists, and refugee organizations together to discuss Learning, Teaching, and Community-Building with Refugees. (November 6, 2020).

Over the five weeks that the conference took place, over 260 people participated, and our speakers and participants were from many disciplines (geography, anthropology, women's and gender studies, film studies, German studies, Asian studies, sociology) and were located in different countries.

Our first panel of the conference was "Queering Refugee Studies." Suad Jabr presented in the first panel and played a key role in its organization as well. Could you introduce yourself, Suad?

Suad Jabr: Certainly! My name is Suad Jabr, and I'm a second-year student in Geography here at UNC Chapel Hill. My research focuses on queer Middle Eastern refugees, as well as the narratives and self-fashionings that they take up to strategically navigate political systems of asylum and immigration.

Banu Gökarıksel: Could you share a little bit about the goals of the panel, "Queering Refugee Studies?"

Suad Jabr: Certainly, so a big impetus for this panel was to really place queer refugee experiences and queer refugee studies at the forefront of much larger conversations about political asylum global or transnational perceptions of queerness and also overlapping systems of governance. So rather than treating queer refugees as exceptional or marginal to refugee studies, we really wanted to explore how queerness is central to the formation of refugee subjects, border regimes and state technologies.

Banu Gökarıksel: Could you tell us a little bit about the presenters?

Suad Jabr: For this panel we were joined by Elif Sarı, Dr. Sima Shaksari, Fadi Saleh, Dr. Begüm Başdaş, and myself, Suad Jabr, and you can learn more about them via our twitter or by looking more at our website (https://jmce.unc.edu/unsettling-borders/).

Banu Gökarıksel: What were the main ideas you are taking away from this panel? What were the questions you found interesting? I remember this was a very lively discussion.

Suad Jabr: I was really surprised at how easily all the topics and presentations fit together, and I think all of the presenters were pushing for these interrelated interventions, and critiques of how we really consider and study or work with queer Middle Eastern refugees. And I think one of the framings that was really crucial was this question of "How do we advocate for queer refugees without also simultaneously making them targets?" When they're already living in precarious situations, what does it mean to bring attention when sometimes visibility also can result in a greater feeling of danger, danger in reality and in lived lives. And so, as we were framing that and thinking through this, I think all of the panelists really reflected on some important questions about how these conditions come to be int he first place. So in talking about how do queer Middle Eastern refugees have to narrate themselves after seeking asylum and resettlement, we were finding that several of our panelists talked

about instances where they have to prioritize homophobia and transphobia in their narratives, and that rather than speaking to geopolitical conditions such as the war in Syria, or political destabilization or economic sanctions in Iran, these really crucial elements of someone's story, of how someone is, have to instead get left out, are deemphasized, as well as different kinds of violences that happen en route, in their refugee journey, as well as how rupturing this displacement is, the focus gets placed on the displacement itself. So instead, in narrating their lives, the panelists spoke to how Middle Eastern refugees have to claim different kinds of narratives, such as one of true selfhood, or one that has to conform different orientalist stereotypes, in which the Middle East is seen as a an antiqueer, nonqueer place, and the West becomes the promised land of queer freedom. Or in other situations queer Middle Eastern refugees place themselves as survivors of torture, or other classifications in order to fit the narrow refugee categories that are existing. So, I think meanwhile, in the midst of having to fashion yourself as a queer refugee, there are all these national prioritizations that are happening, all these different levels in which so many refugees are being admitted over others. Several of our panelists including Elif and Fadi spoke to how these different prioritizations in different countries end up pitting different queer Middle Eastern refugees against each other, such as this golden case of the queer Iranian refugees in Canada, or de facto prioritization of Syrian refugees, and what this means for questions of solidarity when the structure itself is a competitive hierarchy of queer asylum. And this led to a really rich conversation of temporary transit and how that's turned to indefinite waiting. And how in that waiting there's still so much queer life happening. And Dr. Begüm Başdaş really spoke to how that queer life looks and feels in her experiences working with queer refugees in Greece, and several of our panelists spoke to relations of trust and safety that are often fragile in refugee camps. And to come to our earlier point of how to advocate for queer refugees without making them targets, when queer refugees can face homophobic and transphobic violence, what that then means for how they can navigate these different spaces, how they can build relations with each other, how they can work together, and also what kind of networks of care and solidarity they can build.

So that's a pretty big overview!

Banu Gökarıksel: No, I think that's wonderful, that gives our listeners a good sense of what the conversations were about. Thank you, think that's great!

So now I'll turn to Lily Herbert to talk about the second panel, which was based on the documentary film, called Midnight Traveler, and explored uncertain journeys to and through the EU.

Could you introduce yourself, Lily?

Lily Herbert: Hi, my name is Lily Herbert, and I am a PhD student in the Department of Geography at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. My research incorporates critical geography and critical race theory to spatially analyze US federal hate crime data, and the complexities of data collection. I'm really interested in research communication and connecting the public with educational opportunities, which is part of the reason why I was so interested in the film Midnight Traveler.

Banu Gökarıksel: Lily, you suggested that we include this documentary film and a discussion about it at our conference. Why did you think that this film would be productive to include in "Unsettling Borders"?

Lily Herbert: So, Midnight Traveler is a 2019 documentary filmed on cell phone cameras by a family of filmmakers, whose quest for political asylum takes them from Afghanistan to Europe. This documentary is a first-hand account of displacement and border crossing and provides insights into the cruelties of border regimes and systems of refugee governance across Eurasia, but especially in the EU.

And we chose this film because it was actually created by people seeking asylum in the EU — not by US or Europe-based journalists or academics, who have the ability to easily navigate EU border regimes while they're filming and interviewing people who don't have that privilege. The film was pieced together from cell phone footage shot by all four members of an Afghan family from Kabul — two parents, Fatima and Hassan, who are both acclaimed filmmakers, and their two daughters, Nargis and Zahra.

And although watching footage isn't a substitute for being in a situation, the film gives a more equitable representation of their journey — as our panelists pointed out, the family's daily lives and joyful moments are given as much, if not more, screen time than the moments in which they experience fear and suffering, and the film conveys their humanity past just showing them as victims or one-dimensional actors, as coverage of people in vulnerable situations often does. But it also shows this visceral experience with border crossing that is really impactful, in part because it's being presented by the people living it.

Banu Gökarıksel: Who were the panelists that spoke about the film?

Lily Herbert: We were lucky to be joined for the panel by Emelie Mahdavian, producer, writer, and editor of Midnight Traveler — as well as Dr. Nadia Yaqub, a film scholar and Professor of Asian Studies at UNC; and Christian Wilhelm, Program Manager of International Masters Programs in the Department of Social Sciences at Humboldt University in Berlin.

Banu Gökarıksel: What interesting aspects of the film did the conversation highlight?

Lily Herbert: Since the panel was virtual, we took a different approach to format than we probably would have, were we able to show the film in person. The film distributor kindly provided a link for attendees to watch ahead of time. And then for the actual panel on Zoom, we had panelists choose about 3 to 5 minutes of footage from the film that they wanted to show and talk about. And it was interesting because all four panelists had some overlap in the scenes that they wanted to show, so we had a dialogue about these scenes that naturally grew out of the commentary that followed them.

One of my favorite parts of the discussion was the context given by Emelie Mahdavian, the film's producer, writer, and editor. She was the one receiving cell phone footage from Fatima and Hassan's family, and she pieced it together while listening to their wishes, as well as considering issues with representation of people from Afghanistan in the US and Europe. She was the only member of the film production team who spoke both Persian and English, and so played a large part in advocating for what Fatima and Hassan wanted in the final film.

So we got to hear from her about how the production tried to unsettle stereotypes about people from Muslim-majority areas, but also tried to upend a range of power dynamics, from monolithic ideas about refugees, to what Emelie pointed out as the gendered, and often patriarchal, gaze of the camera and of filmmakers — for example, it's really important to highlight that this film was shot by three women and one man, and several women behind the scenes also played key roles in its production — instead of framing it as just a work by a filmmaker and his family. So that multidimensional analysis and context was really valuable to hear.

And I hope that the film continues to be shown in a broad range of contexts including classrooms and community events, because it is such a beautiful work of art as well as a story that provokes discussion about what representation is, and why it matters, especially in the context of minorities and refugees and asylum seekers in the EU.

Banu Gökarıksel: Yes, agreed, thank you so much, Lily.

Now I'll turn to Dr. Nathan Swanson to talk about our third panel which focused on racialization of refugees. Dr. Nathan Swanson presented his research as part of this panel, as did another organizer, Betül Aykaç.

Nathan, could you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Nathan Swanson: Sure, thanks, Banu. I'm a postdoctoral fellow in the honors college in international programs at Purdue University having done my PhD in Geography at UNC Chapel Hill. I'm a political and cultural geographer whose research focuses in three areas: geopolitics of everyday life, public space and power, and critical cartography and countermapping, which I do as a member of the Countercartographies Collective. I've previously on research in the Middle East, and now I'm focusing on Middle Eastern communities in Sweden.

Banu Gökarıksel: Thank you so much, and we're going to meet Betül in a few minutes. Could you tell us a little bit about the other panelists? Who were the other presenters, and what were some of the highlights from the presentations?

Nathan Swanson: Sure, the first panelist was one of the co-organizers of the conference series, Betül Aykaç, who is a PhD student in Geography at UNC Chapel Hill. Betül focused on anti-Arab racism in Turkey through a couple of images, including the removal of Arabic signs in Turkey, and an image of Syrians celebrating New Year's which went viral and caused a backlash in Turkey. And Betül talked about these not only as xenophobic moments but put them into this much longer discourse in Turkey about Turkishness and the meaning of the modern Turkish state and Turkish identity. So, in that sense it was this long position of Arabs as the ultimate other of the Turkish state, representing the past, representing the East, and not the West, toward which the modern state tries to focus itself. So, he talked about the way this carries out in the everyday of lives of Syrian migrants, especially as they become increasingly visible.

The next panelist was Dr. Priscilla Layne, who is an Associate Professor in German at UNC Chapel Hill, and Priscilla talked about the history of race as a concept in Germany, especially in the past century or so, and thinking about this contradiction between his long understanding of German identity being a white identity, but also German society inherently rejecting the idea that racism exists, either because everyone has decided to reject the idea of race, as a biological concept, and therefore saying, "Well, removing the word removes racism," or charging xenophobia rather than racism when talking about racialized experiences. Soo Priscilla talked about this in a historical context, and then thinking about how this is applied to more recent immigrants, how this has come into political discourse, and most importantly in the context of denying race as an issue in Germany, some popular scholarly and political attempts now to push the conversation to confront racism in German society.

The third piece of this panel was presented by Dalia Abdelhady who is an associate professor in sociology in the Center for Middle Eastern studies at Lund University in Sweden, and Dalia was focused on wanting to understand how cultural dimensions and discourses in mass media create justification for how Syrian refugees are treated. She's focused this study in a number of EU countries, as well as in the Middle East and

the United States, and in this talk she focused on Swedish newspapers during the 2015 refugee crisis. And she found that the majority of these were written from a human-interest perspective—you learned the names of refugees, you heard their stories, you were driven to empathize with them. But as soon as she introduced "Islam" into the search query, the results radically changed. Suddenly about a 2/3 majority of the stories were framed by conflict, through dangers presented by refugees, and the dehumanized mass of refugees coming into Sweden. And she concluded this very powerfully, by saying that based on this discourse, a refugee cannot be a refugee, human being, and Muslim at the same time.

The final piece to this panel was my paper, which was looking at a short film called "This Year's Average Swede," and this was a short film made by a Syrian refugee, called Omar, who was in Sweden since 2015. And in the film, he is on a reality show as a contestant trying to showcase his talent as the "Best Refugee." So, he gives his whole case based on expectations of what a refugee, or a well-integrated immigrant in should be: eating Swedish foods, doing Swedish things, holidays, all these things. And so, he wins the contest, and goes out to celebrate with some Arab friends, at which point they find that they're not allowed into the club. And as they're on their way to the celebration, they look up and see this sign about Sweden having "No-go" zones, which has been a long Islamophobic discourse in Europe about invading Muslims. And so, they find that the club in fact is a no-go zone for them, and Omar lists all these other no-go zones he's found in life, like housing discrimination, workplace discrimination, and so on. And so, I argue that he's inverting that discourse—that when you look into the perspective of everyday life, you begin to see the discourse of the no-go zone really break down, and you can understand the everyday experiences of refugees, the way that these discourses spread without any kind of accountability—they're done by rising right wing political forces, by media—with really no sort of consequence.

Banu Gökarıksel: That sounds really interesting. What did you find the most striking in these discussions? In the points that these different presenters brought up, especially in these different contexts—Syria, Sweden, Germany—the different parts of Europe and the Middle East?

Nathan Swanson: For me, I kept hearing in my mind this phrase from an interview with Edward Said, who talked about "the astonishing persistence of orientalism"; the way much orientalism has in so many ways been revived, reinvented. Orientalist ideas are drug out or adapted to the current moment, are circulated, and keep having these different lives in these different places. And all these papers showed this happening in different ways, whether it was through political discourses, through media discourses. Just highlighting the longevity of these racist narratives—the way that they're so easily picked up, remade, and reused throughout this wide geographic area at different times and different places.

Banu Gökarıksel: Right, and the centrality of race, racial difference to Orientalism.

Our fourth panel examined refugees and the crisis of states, rethinking border regimes and states technologies in the EU. Dr. Devran Öcal, Betül Aykaç, and I presented a joint paper at this panel, and I will speak now to Devran Öcal about this panel.

Could you introduce yourself, Devran?

Devran Öcal: Sure, I'm a political and cultural geographer. Broadly speaking I'm interested in political geography and geopolitics diaspora studies and international migration. I obtained my PhD degree in Geography from UNC Chapel Hill in May 2020. My dissertation research engaged state formations and geopolitics with a focus on Turkish Sunni Mosque communities in Germany. And my new research project focuses on Kurdish border towns in Eastern Turkey through the concepts of domestic geopolitics and legal geographies. Currently I work as a job lecturer for the Center for the Middle East and Islamic Studies at UNC Chapel Hill. Also, currently I am the guest editor of the journal "Relfektif" which is based in Istanbul Bilgi University.

Banu Gökarıksel: Great, I don't think I knew about that last bit—congratulations! Could you tell us a little bit about the panelists and the main questions that were posed at this panel?

Devran Öcal: Sure, there were four presentations given at this panel. The first was given by Karen Culcasi, from West Virginia University, and she talked about the German state's response to the recent Syrian refugee crisis.

Then, we listened to Martina Tazzioli from Goldsmith University of London. Martina's focus was on the Italian state's refugee policy in the context of the covid-19 pandemic. Using the concept of hygienic borders, Martina told us how the Italian state used covid 19 precautions as an excuse to confine refugees.

After this talk, Kirsi P Kallio, Jouni Häkli from Tampere University discussed the asylum system in Europe by focusing on the embodied encounters between asylum seekers and government officers.

Finally, we concluded this panel with Banu Gökarıksel, Betül Aykaç, and my joint presentation on the Turkish state's strategies of governing refugees through deliberate inaction.

Banu Gökarıksel: Great thank you. So, what were the main points, or insights that were really striking to you?

Devran Öcal: If you look at these presentations together, there were few common themes that we can take away. First, I guess the presentations given in this panel fit perfectly with our panel title, which was "Refugees and the Crisis of States." The panel is focused on different geographies such as Turkey, Italy and Jordan, but all the talks underlined how the recent refugee movements have put states across the Middle East and Europe into an unprecedented governmental crisis/ We usually talk about a refugee crisis in the mainstream media of our academies. Yet this panel shows that this is indeed a crisis for the border regimes and territorial governance tools. In the face of the massive migration streams from North Africa to northern Europe have entered into a border regime crisis. And in this period, we even witness how the political borders of Europe have been extended to Turkey and North Africa.

So, our panelists underlined how states have developed unique technologies to help take this crisis under control. I guess the most striking point here is that governments have not mainly applied violence when the massive refugee migration challenged their borders. Instead, as three of our panelists directly focused on, a humanitarian discourse went side-by-side with border security technologies and unique ways of governing. For example, Karen Culcasi's talk, depicts very well to how humanitarianism and territorial security discourse co-existed in Jordan. The camps hosting Syrian refugees in Jordan are humanitarian centers with lots of primary healthcare, education facilities, and job training centers. Yet they are also the confined areas that function as a detention center and limit refugees' movement within Jordan. In this talk, Karen also mentioned the Kafala system in Jordan, according to which refugees need sponsorship from Jordanians to get out of refugee camps. The state uses the Kafala system to get rid of responsibility for refugees, because the Jordanian sponsors take responsibility for the refugees' livelihood.

Similarly, when we look at Martina Tazzioli's talk, this talk also revealed how humanitarian discourse of protecting the refugees from the virus infection is used to confine refugees in certain areas. The hygienic sanitary border regime keeps refugees inside Italy, but simultaneously confines them in locations outside the broader Italian society, and obscures ways of applying for asylum. Just like the Kafala system, here, hygiene is used as a government technology to confine refugees.

There is also similarity between these arguments and our presentation, which was about the state invisibility. We did not specifically mention Turkey's border regimes, but we also highlighted Turkey's so called "Welcoming Open" border regime. But our focus on the invisibility of state similarly highlighted an unwillingness to help refugees by not paying attention to their problems and needs. Our talk basically argued that turkey's various state mechanisms form local government systems to judiciary and law enforcement, trivialize or ignore discrimination exclusion and exploitation cases against refugees. For instance, many refugee women are exploited by the second wife

system—they are not protected by the state even though this system is illegal in turkey. So here we see another state technology governing this crisis.

When we bring these three talks together, it appears that a type of small violence is used against refugees as a governmentality and disabling tool.

And finally speaking of disabling refugees, Kirsi and Jouni's study is also interesting because it focuses on the asylum system in general through the embodied encounter between state officers and asylum seekers. Here at this talk, Jouni and kris focused on two concepts—objectification and subjectification. These two concepts reveal how governmentality puts a barrier between officers and the asylum seekers to prevent any personal relationship and intimacy. So, the asylum system became very mechanic and robotic, and refugees' agency to articulate themselves and act like a human being with full capacity is taken away from them.

In conclusion, the presentations in this panel summarized very well the current government situation across the Middle East and Europe. Usually, the refugee crisis is depicted as a crisis of refugees. In reality, we see how it has been a crisis of the borders and territorial regimes of modern nation states in Africa the Middle East, and Europe. I can say that these talks also urge us to consider other state technologies concerning this crisis. Thank you for listening.

Banu Gökarıksel: Thank you, that was a really good discussion of the panel.

We concluded the conference Unsettling Borders with a roundtable discussion that brought together scholars, activists, and community organizations from North Carolina. Betül Aykaç is going to share with us the discussion at this roundtable, but first Betül could you introduce yourself.

Betül Aykaç: Thanks Banu, sure. I am a PhD student in geography at UNC Chapel Hill and I have a background in sociology and political science. My MA study focused on the racialization of Syrian refugees in Turkey through a historical and feminist geopolitical framework. Along with refugee studies my research interests also include geographies of resistance and autonomy and also alternative economies.

Banu Gökarıksel: So, could you tell us a little bit about the roundtable and the participants at the roundtable and maybe share what we aim to do with this round table for our listeners.

Betül Aykaç: Sure. Our goal in this roundtable "Learning, Teaching and Community Building with Refugees" was to bring scholars activists an NGO volunteers together, see practical interventions that seek to address refugees' problems, and also discuss the ways of ethical engagement with refugees. We had five amazing panelists in our panel,

each of whom explained to us their wonderful works they engaged with. I will try to briefly touch upon their work and do my best to introduce their efforts.

Our first panelist was Christian Wilhelm, who was also with us in our second panel on the documentary midnight traveler. As Lily already mentioned, he is the manager of the international master's program in Humboldt-University in Berlin. In our roundtable, Christian shared his and his colleagues' efforts to make it easier for refugees to access higher education in Germany by taking advantage of his department's international nature. Their efforts provided solutions to two main problems that refugees encounter: the first is the German-language fluency requirement even for the programs taught in English, and the second is the difficulty of refugees in obtaining documents and certificates from previous institutions. With their efforts, they started a new MA track for refugees. In this track, refugees do not have to prove German language skills and start studying directly in a regular study program. They also provided flexibility in providing documentation like certificates and diplomas.

Our second panelist was Diya Abdo. She is the Director of UNC Greensboro's Center for New North Carolinians. She talked about their initiative, Every Campus a Refuge in Gilford College, which aims at supporting refugees through housing and integration on the college campus. She defines their group as a group of volunteers coming together to represent the idea of radical hospitality. Diya Abdo asked us to reimagine our use of space and our resources, and especially the campuses. In this initiative, they have housing opportunities for refugees within the college, and since 2016, they have hosted 60 refugees on the campus. Their initiative also helps refugees when they are ready to move off the campus after they found employment. The initiative pays the first month's rent and utilities. So, it is an excellent opportunity for refugees to ease their problems.

Our third panelist was David Sandy Marshall, who is an Assistant Professor of Geography at Elon University. In his discussion, Sandy Marshall emphasized that the relationships with the refugees tended to reinforce stereotypes and uneven power dynamics rather than truly support refugees. And he explained how he attempted to seek commonalities between different community groups through an undergrad class named urban geography. Throughout the semester he worked with an organization that was built upon refugees' agricultural knowledge. This initiative created several community gardens and farm food items that could be sold to the local community. Sandy Marshall brought his students to work with them, to work with refugees on the farms. On the farms, the students helped refugees produce farm food items and learn about the history of those foods and traditions from their home countries.

Our fourth panelist was Meagan Clawar, the program manager of Refugee Community Partnership. In her discussion, Meagan highlighted that refugee communities are resettled in apartment complexes, with poor public transportation and a language

barrier that perpetuates their isolation. So, Refugee Community Partnership is an initiative to build unique and holistic community infrastructure for those rebuilding home in North Carolina. The organization is working alongside the community members and serving as a hub for any innovation, idea, or program that could advance refugees' conditions in the community.

Our last panelist was Lizzie Russler. She is an undergrad at UNC-Chapel Hill. Lizzie's interest in migration flourished when she was an exchange student in Switzerland. While she was there, she saw how climate change was creating vulnerability, and moreover, the people least contributing to the problem were actually the ones who were most impacted. This fact led her to engage more with refugee communities. She is now working with UNC Center for European Studies' Working Group on Refugees, Europe, and Service Learning, and through this working group, they are bringing different integration approaches into the conversation and seek out to learn about the experiences of refugees. They also build community partnerships and provide refugee assistance programs. Along with this, Lizzie is also working with urban refugees through a nonprofit called Hope of Children and Women, run by refugees for refugees in Kampala, Uganda.

I know this is a very brief introduction, of course, and I feel like I am not doing justice by explaining them one by one. So, I highly recommend our listeners learning more about these fantastic initiatives and collaborations. But thanks, Banu, for giving me the chance to talk about these initiatives.

Banu Gökarıksel: Thank you, I think that was a really nice summary of the discussions and all the amazing work that our roundtable participants are doing. What were the points that you found the most interesting in this conversation, Betül?

Betül Aykaç: Honestly, it was very inspiring to see all of the great works that the panelists engage in. I particularly found very important most of our panelists' emphasis on stereotypes and the "refugee" label. For instance, Christian told us in his presentation that while they named their MA program as "refugee track" first, the refugees were uncomfortable with the title, and therefore the university changed it to "Berlin track". Such examples led us to a great discussion on when one stops being a refugee and how the title itself can be an obstacle or psychological barrier in integration for the refugees. I think that was the most striking point for me in the panel. It was also great to see our students' activist works and how universities and campuses are filled with opportunities that might be utilized for the refugees. One last thing that I keep remembering is the emphasis of all of our panelists that the motivation was not pity but rather an understanding of fairness. This is definitely worth acknowledging, and I consider it one of the very first points of ethical engagement with refugees. Thanks!

Banu Gökarıksel: Thank you so much. Thanks, Betül, Suad, Lily, Devran, and Nathan as well. Those were really great discussions by my co-organizers of this conference. The conference was very generative, very productive, enabled us to get exposed to the most cutting-edge research, and really think about all of the categories that we use, and the kind of research that we engage with concerning migrants and refugees and asylum seekers. The Conference was also for us a first step towards building connections between scholars and communities interested in questions about borders, boundaries, and migration. We are interested in building a collaborative research platform hosted at our conference website, which is www.unsettlingborders.com. At this website, you can learn more about the panelists, the discussions in these panels, and also turn to this research platform to look at some new material that we are going to be generating. We plan to future interviews with scholars and activists who work in this area, compile a syllabus and a bibliography for teaching about these issues, and publish blog posts that respond to current events or theories concerning refugees and border regimes, not only in the EU or the Middle East, but really, we are interested in opening up to anywhere in the world. If our listeners, if you are interested in joining us, please visit this website where you can find more information and our next steps. You can also follow us on Twitter, @unsettleborders. Thank you so much for listening.

[Ode to joy plays in the background]

Katie Lindner: Please note that any opinions expressed in the EU today podcast are solely those of our guests and our hosts, and not of the UNC Center for European studies, which takes no institutional positions. Be sure to tune in for more episodes, and subscribe to *EU Today* wherever you listen to podcasts.

[Ode to Joy fades out]