

# “No Borders, No Nations” or “Fortress Europe”? How European Citizens Remake European Borders

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## 1 Introduction: The Borders of Europe?

Étienne Balibar famously claimed that the borders of Europe constituted an ‘unresolved political problem’.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, no matter which lens – geographical, cultural, or political – applied to the notion of Europe, its external borders remain a highly inconsistent, ambiguous and contradictory matter. Since the signing of the Schengen Agreement in 1985 and its incorporation into the European Union (EU) legal framework in 1997, public discourse usually conflates the European external borders with the borders of the growing Schengen area. While Schengen shifted the responsibility to manage the European external borders to the most peripheral EU member states, the EU also got increasingly involved. The establishment of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, commonly known as Frontex, in Warsaw in 2004, is the most visible expression of the EU’s fledgling border regime.

While enabling the free movement of people across former national borders, it nevertheless seems that Schengen has put in place new borders and boundaries. The EU’s external border policies have become increasingly restrictive over time. Indeed, the establishment of Frontex primarily indicates the tightening of the EU’s

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<sup>1</sup> Étienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, trans. J. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 2, emphasis in original.

border regime.<sup>2</sup> These major changes in European border management have not gone unnoticed by European citizens. In fact, Europeans are today more active in the issue of the European space and its borders, challenging the current state of borders and control practices. Such engagement with the European space and its borders occurs across the political spectrum: Western European far right groups set up a human chain along the Franco-Italian border in the Alps; others send ships to the Mediterranean to push refugee boats back to the shores of North Africa. Meanwhile, left-wing activists advertise the construction of a bridge over the Mediterranean and stage public funerals for refugees who have died on their journey to Europe.

Such novel forms of contentious political protest action and performance clearly demand new theoretical lenses in European studies, moving from the study of EU institutions and decision-making processes to the impact of European integration on EU citizens. This shift of focus is demonstrated by Master's programmes such as Euroculture, which contribute important insights into the close entanglement of politics, society and culture in contemporary Europe. Echoing the disciplinary development of European studies over the past twenty years, this chapter discards conventional institutionalist approaches to borders and citizenship in favour of recent critical perspectives. I argue that analytical lenses drawn from the fledgling disciplines of critical border and critical citizenship studies provide a useful toolkit to effectively grasp the complexity of European citizens' involvement in the symbolic and material making and remaking of the European space and its borders. In particular, this chapter examines the processes of borderwork performed by European citizens. Aiming to further our knowledge and understanding of borderwork, it analyses two case studies of contemporary transnational protest movements: the offspring of the anarchist *No Borders* network based in Warsaw and the xenophobic alliance *Festung Europa* mainly based in Dresden and Prague. Both movements, associated with the far left and far right of the political spectrum, respectively, are conceptualised as *protest movements* in an attempt to stay politically neutral towards the activists' beliefs and claims which resonate in their performances. The discussion contrasts the performance of the European physical and imaginary space by these two movements, analysed through the lens of acts of citizenship. This contribution reveals some of the many ways in which European citizens constitute themselves and others as political – that is rights-claiming – subjects, in relation to contested political authority.

## 2 No Borders Network & Festung Europa

The No Borders network (also: No Border network and Noborders network) was created by pro-migrant activist groups from Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany,

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew W. Neal, "Securitisation and Risk at the EU Border: The Origins of FRONTEX," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 47, no. 2 (2009): 348.

Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and Ukraine between 1999 and 2000. Imagining ‘a democratised mobility that encompasses autonomous movements of flight, circulation, settlement, and unsettlement’, the network constituted itself as a direct response to the fledgling EU migration and asylum policies.<sup>3</sup> Besides the general pro-migrant and pro-freedom of movement stance, political orientations of the different participating groups include anti-capitalist, anarchist, feminist and green positions. The movement became publicly known for its creative forms of political protest in the public space, in particular protest camps erected in several European cities to raise awareness for – and demand change with regard to – the issue of migration and asylum.

In line with the information provided on the group’s website and page on the online networking platform Facebook, the Warsaw branch of the No Borders network was created in the early 2000s. No Borders Warszawa identifies as an ‘anarchist/anti-capitalist collective [...] whose actions, in various forms, centre on resistance towards the EU border regime and building solidarity and mutual empowerment in the migrant movement’.<sup>4</sup> In 2012, it became known to the public due to its involvement in protest action drawing attention to the situation of migrants living in Polish detention camps. Today, No Borders Warszawa is a small group of political activists that meets weekly in an informal manner in a squat in the city centre of Warsaw.

Turning to the other side of the political spectrum, Festung Europa/Fortress Europe is an alliance of anti-Islam and anti-immigrant groups and parties from several European countries. It was founded in Prague in January 2016. According to Festung Europa’s Facebook page, the alliance is a ‘pan-European civil movement which campaigns for freedom, sovereignty and a European identity’. It was initiated by the German PEGIDA group (full name: ‘Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident’), Germany’s first significant far right populist social movement since the end of the Second World War.<sup>5</sup> Founded in the city of Dresden in the east of Germany in October 2014, PEGIDA gathered tens of thousands of participants in its weekly demonstrations against an alleged “Islamisation of the Occident” and the German and European political establishment. As rapidly as it became a highly mediated phenomenon in German and European discourse, it declined due to internal conflicts and external pressure in early 2015. Nevertheless, a core PEGIDA group has survived until today. PEGIDA continues to represent one of the most controversial phenomena of German politics and it is the focus of extensive empirical research.<sup>6</sup> Aiming to transcend regional and na-

<sup>3</sup> William Walters, “No Border: Games With(out) Frontiers,” *Social Justice* 33, no. 1 (2006): 21.

<sup>4</sup> No Border Warszawa, “Noborders Warszawa: Who We Are and What We Do,” *Migracja.noblogs.org*, <https://migracja.noblogs.org/no-border-group-warsaw/>.

<sup>5</sup> Jörg Michael Dostal, “The Pegida Movement and German Political Culture: Is Right-Wing Populism Here to Stay?,” *The Political Quarterly* 86, no. 4 (2015): 523-531.

<sup>6</sup> See for instance Hans Vorländer, Maik Herold, and Steven Schäller, *PEGIDA Entwicklung, Zusammensetzung und Deutung einer Empörungsbewegung* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2016).

tional boundaries from the very inception of its existence, the founding of Festung Europa can be regarded as the culmination of the transnationalisation process occurring within PEGIDA's internal structures.

### 3 Theorising and Studying Borders and Borderwork

Before diving into the analysis of both movements' political protest action, I would like to focus on the theory of borders and borderwork. Echoing the seeming impossibility to pin down the borders of Europe, scholars face difficulties when trying to theorise and study borders. The ambiguity and contentiousness of borders have led to a revolution in Border Studies over the past couple of years. Scholars invested in the nascent academic discipline of Critical Border Studies increasingly challenge the conventional territorial conceptualisation of borders as solid, static and normatively legitimate entities. Reacting to the call for a more complex theory of the border,<sup>7</sup> Chiara Brambilla has suggested one of the most convincing concepts in order to grasp the complexity of borders: the notion of borderscapes.<sup>8</sup> Building upon the literature on bordering practices, the most important features of the borderscapes concept are: firstly, the recognition of the spatial fluidity of borders, secondly, the highlighting of practices and performances in the material and symbolic making and remaking of borders, i.e. the involvement of people, and thirdly, the sensitivity to new forms of political belonging resulting from such practices. Moreover, this reading of borders reveals that borders are not neutral demarcations between sovereign states, but exclusionary and to some extent discriminatory social constructs. Border systems define membership through the exclusion of non-members, creating an "inside" and "outside", an "us" and "them", citizens and non-citizens. Borderscapes, in turn, 'call into question every predetermined social and political order, showing the urgency to rethink the modern categorisations of political belonging by revealing their fluid and contextual character'.<sup>9</sup> Following Brambilla, such claims to political belonging construct either hegemonic borderscapes or counter-hegemonic borderscapes. Whereas hegemonic borderscapes reaffirm the conventional view of (nation-)state borders as normative entities, counter-hegemonic borderscapes challenge their legitimacy by conceptualising them as historically constructed and surpassable boundaries.

Chris Rumford's notion of borderwork is useful to explain how practices and performances by individuals concretely contribute to the symbolic and material making and remaking of borders. Borderwork refers to the activities by 'citizens (and indeed, non-citizens) in envisioning, constructing, maintaining and erasing

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<sup>7</sup> Noel Parker and Nick Vaughan-Williams, "Lines in the Sand? Towards an Agenda for Critical Border Studies," *Geopolitics* 14, no. 3 (2009): 582-587.

<sup>8</sup> Chiara Brambilla, "Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes Concept," *Geopolitics* 20, no. 1 (2015): 14-34.

<sup>9</sup> Brambilla, "Exploring the Critical Potential," 28.

borders’.<sup>10</sup> The concept emphasises two important aspects. On the one hand, it highlights, like borderscapes, the spatial complexity of borders: borderwork does not only take place at state borders, but at any physical or social space of society.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the concept pays attention to the “ordinary” actions, carried out by “ordinary” people, which contribute to the making of borders.

The theory of *acts of citizenship*<sup>12</sup> is particularly insightful for the systematic study of borderwork as it sheds light on the meaning of borderwork for our understanding of both borders and citizenship. Against the background of increasing crossborder mobility in a globalised world, acts of citizenship scholarship examines how citizens challenge institutionalised forms of citizenship by claiming new or different rights. Going beyond traditional conceptions of citizenship as legal status, it understands citizenship as a dynamic process that is constituted in and through political action. Following Isin, an act of citizenship is a deed or performance which ‘exercises either a right that does not exist or a right that exists but which is enacted by a political subject who does not exist in the eyes of the law’.<sup>13</sup> The defining feature of an act of citizenship is the element of rupture which distinguishes an “act” from other forms of political action or practice.<sup>14</sup> This means that, since individuals performing acts of citizenship claim new rights that are not in line with the law, they question or even break current laws and right systems. By breaking with the “normal”, an act can introduce a new set of norms.

A particular strength of the acts of citizenship literature is its associated systematised methodology. Isin suggests events, sites, scales and durability as analytical categories.<sup>15</sup> Events, the starting point of the analysis, are understood as ‘actions that become recognizable (visible, articulable) only when the site, scale and duration of these actions produce a rupture in the given order’.<sup>16</sup> Sites then refer to the spatial aspect of events. They are not mere places or locations, but must be studied by taking into account a place’s strategic value. The third analytical category, scales, shifts the focus to the scope of an event. Scales describe which kinds of audiences events reach. These can be local, national or transnational audiences, but also social groups beyond these merely geographical dimensions such as a community of followers on the internet. The final category, durability, refers to the duration of an event itself and, additionally, the time of its subsequent description and interpretation by the audience(s). Building upon this scheme, Lewicki proposes a fifth category for the analysis of acts of citizenship, which she terms modali-

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<sup>10</sup> Chris Rumford, “Introduction: Citizens and Borderwork in Europe,” in *Citizens and Borderwork in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Chris Rumford (London: Routledge, 2009), 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Engin F. Isin and Greg Nielsen (eds), *Acts of Citizenship* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Engin F. Isin, *Citizens Without Frontiers* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 13.

<sup>14</sup> Engin F. Isin, “Theorizing Acts of Citizenship,” in *Acts of Citizenship*, ed. Engin F. Isin and Greg Nielsen (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), 38.

<sup>15</sup> Isin, *Citizens Without Frontiers*, 131-135.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

ties of enactment.<sup>17</sup> The category describes the manner in which acts are performed and relates to the aesthetic quality of events.

The methodology associated with acts of citizenship draws upon performative and aesthetic approaches to politics. As it is argued that all social action has a performative dimension,<sup>18</sup> such approaches are increasingly recognised as fruitful complement to more conventional forms of political analysis.<sup>19</sup> For instance, discourse scholars complement the study of language with the analysis of performance and aesthetics.<sup>20</sup> Arguably, performative and aesthetic approaches to politics are particularly relevant for understanding contentious politics and hence very useful for the purpose of this study. Indeed, Eyerman points to the crucial importance of “drama” and symbolism for social movements in the quest for attention and recognition.<sup>21</sup> In a similar vein, Della Porta describes how visual products serve identity building purposes amongst movements’ supporters, capture public attention and grant a certain recognition factor.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4 Far Left and Far Right Borderwork

Having discussed the concept of acts of citizenship, this section applies the associated methodology to the two identified contemporary transnational protest movements. A contextualised discourse analysis of the cases compares the material and symbolic making, remaking and imagination of the European external borders through the activist citizens’ performances and discourse. The main sources were the groups’ pages on the social media platform Facebook, websites, and the video sharing platform YouTube. This method of corpus collection seemed adequate since both networks are rather marginal protest movements with regard to participation numbers, but accord a lot of importance to their online self-presentation. On their webpages, they publish innumerable written messages, images, videos,

<sup>17</sup> Aleksandra Lewicki, “The Dead Are Coming?: Acts of Citizenship at Europe’s Borders,” *Citizenship Studies* 21, no. 3 (2017): 280.

<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance Between Ritual and Strategy,” in *Social Performance, Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, and Jason L. Mast (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 29-90.

<sup>19</sup> Shirin M. Rai, “Political Performance: A Framework for Analysing Democratic Politics,” *Political Studies* 63, no. 5 (2014): 2; David E. Apter, “Politics as Theatre: An Alternative View of the Rationalities of Power,” in *Social Performance, Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, and Jason L. Mast (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 218-256.

<sup>20</sup> Kristin Haltinner, “Minutewomen, Victims, and Parasites: The Discursive and Performative Construction of Women by The Minuteman Civil Defense Corps,” *Sociological Inquiry* 86, no. 4 (2016): 599.

<sup>21</sup> Ron Eyerman, “Performing Opposition Or, How Social Movements Move,” in *Social Performance, Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, and Jason L. Mast (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 207.

<sup>22</sup> Donatella Della Porta, “What We Can Do with Visual Analysis in Social Movement Studies: Some (Self) Reflections,” in *Advances in the Visual Analysis of Social Movement Studies*, ed. Nicole Doerr, Alice Mattoni, and Simon Teune (Bingley: Emerald Group, 2013), 71.

links to events, other Facebook pages, websites and newspaper articles. In particular, I gathered information about the events, their sites, scales and durability, as well as some modalities of enactment from the groups’ online self-presentation. Because the digital presence of both networks is relatively recent, the online pages were entirely considered. The corpus was assembled in spring 2018.

The empirical material was analysed in line with the categories suggested in the acts of citizenship literature, i.e. events (what kind of performance?), sites (where?), scales (in front of whom? reaching whom?), durability (how long?), modalities of enactment (how is the event enacted? what does the event look like?). The final category embraces aesthetic and linguistic elements, shedding light on the characteristics and qualities of an act as well as the claims it communicates.

#### 4.1 No Borders Warszawa

##### *Anti-Frontex Days*

Protest action against EU migratory policies and Frontex in particular is at the core of the No Borders network’s political activity. Organised more or less annually since 2008, the so-called Anti-Frontex Days are the most large-scale and long-term form of protest action by the No Borders movement. Over the years, the Anti-Frontex Days have comprised protest marches and demonstrations, joint conferences with other non-governmental organisations (NGOs), press conferences, film screenings and photography exhibitions. In addition, No Borders Warszawa staged performances in which activists pretended to be dead migrants. In 2015, a particularly large event was organised due to Frontex’ tenth anniversary. The programme included a conference for refugees and migrant support networks, which addressed the legal framework concerning migrants in Europe, developed suggestions for a revised legal framework, and prepared a memorandum to the legal authorities of Poland and the EU. Simultaneously, No Border groups from all over Europe set up solidarity events.

The choice of highly symbolic settings and disruptive elements contributes to the scientific interest in analysing the Anti-Frontex Days through the lens of acts of citizenship. The main sites of the Anti-Frontex Days were prominent public places such as the Frontex headquarters in the city centre of Warsaw, the Polish Presidential Palace, as well as the exit of the Eurostar tunnel in London. In 2013 activists lay on the pavement in front of the Frontex building, hidden under large plastic rubbish bags, which only allowed their legs and feet to be seen. Next to each bag-covered body lay a piece of paper with a name, country, age, and short description of the person’s legal status and trajectory. The mise-en-scène suggested that the activists were people who had died on their journey to Europe. Behind the bodies, activists had erected a large banner saying ‘entrance only for EU citizens’ (‘wstęp tylko dla obywateli unii europejskiej’). In a similarly setting, in 2015, activ-

ists lay on the pavement covered in white bed sheets. Next to each activist stood a characteristic red graveyard candle. Two activists carried a black makeshift coffin past the bodies. A person of colour who was not covered lay on the bare pavement next to the feet of a row of policemen.

### *Frontex-monsters*

When studying the No Border network's online presence from which most of the empirical material is collected, the specific aesthetics and symbolism of visual elements stand out. The No Border activists use a plethora of visual and audio-visual material such as photographs, photomontages, drawings, cartoons and videos containing both filmed scenes of people and animated writing. The theme of EU migratory policies and Frontex is mainly taken up by the many drawings, pictograms and cartoons displayed on posters and flyers. They are visually represented with fences, barbed wire and walls, whereas Frontex is represented by monstrous creatures. Many drawings on posters and flyers represent Frontex as the main character of the popular Japanese video game Pac-Man, a circular shaped creature with a widely opened mouth, which, in the video game, must "eat" as many visually animated dots as possible. On the poster advertising the Anti-Frontex Days 2015, No Borders Warszawa adapts the original Pac-Man to its own vision of Frontex. The Frontex-Pac-Man has lips out of barbed wire, while cameras and searchlights serve as its limbs. The latter allude to the searching methods employed by the European border guards to detect people who cross European borders outside of the official border crossings. A row of small pictograms of rubber boats carrying several people is placed along the margins of the poster. Suggesting an anti-clockwise movement, one can observe how the people fall off the boats one after the other. Finally, the separated human bodies flow in a steady stream into the mouth of the Pac-Man monster. This image is visually echoed in the promotional video for the Anti-Frontex Days in 2015, which displays a written list of names of migrants that steadily flows towards the top of the screen, revealing yet more names flowing from the lower part of the screen.

## 4.2 Festung Europa/Fortress Europe

### *Re-erecting Borders*

Festung Europa carries out anti-EU borderwork mainly in the form of rallies or demonstrations, preferably held in several places at a time. The rallies of February 2016 took place in Dresden, Prague, Warsaw, Bratislava, Krakow, Copenhagen, Dublin, Graz, Tartu, Amsterdam, Birmingham, Montpellier and Bordeaux. Similar to the No Border network, Festung Europa carefully chooses the sites and modalities of enactment of the demonstrations, including some controversial aesthetics.

For instance, a rally at the occasion of the German Unity Day 2016 took place at a bridge over the river of Elbe. A group of activists gathered on a small rubber boat floating down the Elbe, alluding to refugees crossing the Mediterranean. Yet, the activists aimed to draw attention to their own, allegedly desperate, situation. The seven people involved wore life jackets mostly in the colours of the German flag. Also, German flags were arranged to wave in the air. A large banner set up in between the flags read: ‘And, who rescues us?’ (‘Und, wer rettet uns?’). Another rally, this time in Prague in June 2016, culminated in the joint drowning of a straw man representing the EU. The visual impression reminds of scenes showing the murder of alleged witches in the Middle Ages. The activists referred to the larger-than-life sized straw doll as the “evil witch Eurana” and covered it with the EU flag. Several activists lifted the straw doll up into the air and subsequently threw it over the balustrade into the water.

Two thought-provoking acts challenging the EU border regime aimed at both the physical and symbolic re-erecting of intra-European borders. The first media-tised act was the joint border blockade in April 2016. The event consisted of the physical blocking of parts of the Czech-German border through the set-up of a human chain. The concrete sites of this event were two former border-crossing points on motorways connecting the Czech Republic and Germany. During the event, around three hundred participants effectively blocked the border for about ten minutes, letting no car pass through. Visually the scene was dominated by German and Czech national flags.

The second, purely symbolic cluster of acts was staged during the leading activists’ travels across Europe in 2016 and 2017. Throughout their journey, they put stickers with Festung Europa’s logo on the street signs marking the borders between European countries. The concrete sites were, amongst others, the Italian, Danish and Serbian borders. These acts were of rather low scope as they only involved two or three activists, but no passersby who witnessed the acts. The stickers were small and probably not noticeable to people driving by in a car. Yet, the stickers are likely to have remained in place. The modalities of enactment are peculiar: videos posted online show how activist Tatjana Festerling puts stickers exactly in the centre of each of the twelve yellow stars that surround the names of EU Member States.

### *Migrant Hunting*

Other acts by Festung Europa activists explicitly deny rights to others. Such acts often include the psychological and physical harming of individuals, in particular individuals of migrant background and, specifically, Muslim and non-white migrants. For instance, Festung Europa participated in the activities of the Bulgarian groups Shipka Bulgarian National Movement and Bulgarian Military Veterans Union “Vasil Levski” from June 2016 onwards. Both groups send activists to stroll along the green border between Bulgaria and Turkey in order to find and stop

people who attempt to cross the border beyond regular border crossings. Journalists have referred to the groups' activities as 'paramilitary border patrols' and to the movement's leader as a 'migrant hunter'.<sup>23</sup> The mise-en-scène of the activities at the Bulgarian border did not leave much doubt about the intended image. The participants in the patrols wore military uniforms, masks and armlets, creating war-like aesthetics. In a similar fashion, in July 2017, the activists published photographs and videos of how they put pork lard on the fences and ground in the area of the border to "hold off" alleged Islamists.

Two more anti-Muslim or anti-Islam acts aimed to ridicule both Muslim traditions and contemporary German politics. Both reacted to widely politicised statements by German mainstream politicians. The first act was framed as a reaction to a statement by Thomas de Maizière, then national minister for the interior, in a popular German talk show. De Maizière had claimed that the call of the muezzin was acceptable in Germany as long as it would not exceed the duration of three minutes and the volume of sixty decibels.<sup>24</sup> A few days later, in May 2016, Festung Europa activists played the characteristic call of the muezzin via megaphone in front of de Maizière's office in Meißen, a middle-sized city in Saxony. Scope and durability of the act were rather limited. On the one hand, only around five activists were directly involved and the performance only lasted for a bit more than three minutes. According to a video of the performance available on Festerling's YouTube channel, only two passersby took notice of it. Most importantly, the intended audience, Thomas de Maizière, did not witness the performance at all. However, as the event took place during daytime in the centre of Meißen and was rather noisy, many people must have noticed it, even if they did not interact with the activists. Similarly, the scope of the event was enlarged by the media accounts published in the following days. With regard to the modalities of enactment, the mise-en-scène was rather simple. While the muezzin's song was played, an activist held up two posters criticising the singing as too loud: 'Sound becomes noise/hubbub' ('Aus Schall wird Lärm').

The second act aiming to ridicule German and European (im-)migration politics was set up in August 2016. The act was a reaction to a statement by Ralf Jäger, then minister for the interior of North Rhine-Westphalia, in which he rejected the controversially discussed burqa ban. Jäger had argued that a burqa ban would also need to entail the ban of Santa Claus costumes.<sup>25</sup> In reaction to that, a group of disguised Festung Europa activists, one of them wearing a black, face-covering

<sup>23</sup> See for example Mariya Cheresheva, "Bulgaria Puts Migrant 'Hunter' under House Arrest," *Balkan Insight*, 15 April 2016, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/bulgarian-migrant-hunter-sentenced-to-six-years-04-15-2016>.

<sup>24</sup> Benjamin Prüfer, "'Anne Will' Talk zur Integration – Eine Frage an Petry führte zum Eklat," *huffingtonpost.de*, 9 May 2016, [https://www.huffingtonpost.de/2016/05/08/anne-will-integration\\_n\\_9866442.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.de/2016/05/08/anne-will-integration_n_9866442.html).

<sup>25</sup> "Innenminister Jäger: Burka-Verbot müsste auch Verbot von Nikolaus-Verkleidung bedeuten," 18 August 2016, [https://www.focus.de/politik/videos/debatte-um-innere-sicherheit-innenminister-jaeger-burka-verbot-muesste-auch-verbot-von-nikolaus-verkleidung-bedeuten\\_id\\_5836763.html](https://www.focus.de/politik/videos/debatte-um-innere-sicherheit-innenminister-jaeger-burka-verbot-muesste-auch-verbot-von-nikolaus-verkleidung-bedeuten_id_5836763.html).

burqa, attempted to enter the Saxon state chancellery in Dresden. The others were disguised as Santa Claus or wearing witches' costumes. To the group's satisfaction, the activist wearing the burqa was denied access to the government building by the guards on the ground of security. Whereas the event itself lasted only for a few minutes, it reached large audiences on social media, attaining more than five thousand views on YouTube.

## 5 Discussion: Challenging EU Border and Citizenship Regimes

What do the empirical findings mean? I start with a comparison of No Border's and Festung Europa's performative acts that either contest or reproduce the borders of Europe. The comparison sheds light on the various ways in which European citizens constitute themselves as political subjects. The acts share more similarities with regard to performances, sites and modalities of enactment than one might expect given the groups' opposed political goals. For instance, both groups stage acts mostly in the centres of larger European cities, usually in proximity to major landmarks, use demonstrations to attract attention, and publicise their activities via the internet and social media. Yet, the use of the spatial aspect is slightly different. No Borders Warszawa chooses sites that permit access to the intended audience, who is usually in a position of power, such as the employees of Frontex or the Polish political leadership. In contrast, Festung Europa more often exploits aesthetically appealing architecture or nature as stages rather than choosing sites that would indeed allow for political deliberation or confrontation. Moreover, No Borders Warszawa's political action is more focused on the local and regional level, whereas Festung Europa activists are more mobile within Europe. In particular, Festung Europa stages many acts at European borders, both within and at the outer fringes of the EU.

With regard to scale and durability, No Borders and Festung Europa experience typical challenges which protest movements encounter in the attempt to attract public attention. Both movements opt for using the opportunities of the internet to enlarge the scales and increase durability of their acts. Whereas the physical acts are usually restricted to rather short periods of time such as a couple of hours, and confined to rather small scales due to low participation numbers and small audiences, both groups attempt to reach larger audiences through active websites and social media pages. Also, both groups use repetition of the same kind of event as a tool to enlarge the scope and prolong the durability of the acts. No Borders Warszawa does so more consistently and coherently than Festung Europa.

The parallels between some modalities of enactment are most interesting. Both groups develop creative settings such as theatrical performances and symbolic action for the messages they seek to communicate. Both interpret the theme of dying refugees in the Mediterranean, yet the interpretation of these events could

not differ more. Whereas No Border activists pretend to be dead refugees in order to demand the improvement of the latter's desperate situation, Festung Europa exploits a similar visual imaginary to strike a parallel with German citizens confronted with increased migratory flows to Europe.

### *Borders & Borderscapes*

Both No Borders Warszawa and Festung Europa engage in the material and symbolic (re)creation of European borderscapes, challenging the EU's and EU Member States' monopoly over the production of borders and bordering processes. The activists create borderscapes and symbolically enlarge them to countries such as Czech Republic, Germany or Poland by representing European borders within those countries. In particular, Festung Europa symbolically and materially reproduces national borders between Schengen Member States, claiming the reintroduction of intra-European borders. No Borders' performances, in turn, allude to European external borders by symbolically performing them within Europe, thus demanding change with regard to the EU border regime.

Both groups being protest movements, the borderscapes they create are, in Brambilla's words, counter-hegemonic. Yet, the particular interpretations of European borders and borderscapes differ to a great extent. To begin with, the issue of locating European borders is irrelevant for No Borders Warszawa. In fact, the concept of Europe itself as a geographical, cultural or political unity does not at all feature in No Borders' imagination. In line with Lewis' and Wigen's writings on the metageographical construction of continents, the activists question the concept of distinct continents demarcated by natural borders.<sup>26</sup> Hence, the group may regard the Mediterranean as the major site where borders are enacted, but does not perceive it as a natural border between Europe and its neighbourhood. Instead, the group constructs the Mediterranean as a space where global capitalism reveals its most dangerous consequences. Most importantly, the group seeks to break all borders apart. By claiming their elimination, No Borders creates a counter-hegemonic borderscape in which new forms of political belonging can be enacted. On the one hand, the creation of a European space without borders allows former non-members of the European political community to take part in the community, based on their humanness rather than citizenship status. In other words, No Borders' political action aims at migrants gaining the right to claim rights. On the other hand, Polish and other European activists claim the right to membership not only in their home political communities such as Poland or the EU, but in a broader world community. This political goal does not remain a mere claim, but is enacted at a lower level in the group's activities. Indeed, the organisation of events

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<sup>26</sup> Martin Lewis and Kären Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

that bring Polish citizens and migrants of all legal statuses together intend to break boundaries between individuals.

In contrast to No Borders, the idea of clear borders and boundaries is of utmost importance to Festung Europa. The activists' position regarding the borders of Europe is however ambiguous, revealing yet again the spatial fluidity and socially constructed character of European borders. The first ambiguity concerns the positioning of the European external borders. On the one hand, the activists articulate the borders of Europe at the borders of the Schengen zone. They understand the Schengen borders as the point of entry from which migrants can move freely between European countries, and (theoretically) without being subject to border and identity controls. On the other hand, Festung Europa constructs Europe as a cultural community whose frontiers do not coincide with the Schengen borders. Indeed, Festung Europa constructs a European cultural community by alluding, amongst others, to the 'thousand-year history of European civilisation' and 'the cultural accomplishments of our ancestors'. Although they do not specify where they locate the frontiers of this imagined cultural space, the elements they exclude from Europe, notably Islam and Muslims, allow us to draw some conclusions. Primarily, this construction of Europe seems to be a religious, namely Christian one.

The second ambiguity in Festung Europa's attitude to European borders relates to the borders within Europe. Festung Europa seeks to both eliminate and re-erect boundaries. The movement's manifesto symbolically eliminates borders by inclusively calling upon the 'European patriots' to show 'solidarity' and associate with each other. Furthermore, the foundation of the group itself, as well as its transnational events organised in many European cities at the same time, are the best example of the elimination of national boundaries. On the other hand, Festung Europa campaigns for the physical re-erection of national borders and border controls. For instance, the group congratulates countries which have re-introduced border controls, and thus highlights concepts such as individuality, sovereignty and identity in its discourse, and both physically and symbolically engages in border blocking. Within these counter-hegemonic European borderscapes, activists themselves assume new forms of political belonging. Indeed, their discourse imagines an alternative political community that allegedly exists in parallel to the EU structures. Festung Europa activists claim not only the right to membership, but also ownership of this imagined political community of sovereign states.

### *Citizenship & Political Belonging*

Both activist groups constitute themselves as right-claiming subjects through their creative and disruptive forms of political activism. The theoretical lens of critical citizenship studies employed in this research allows light to be shed on the concrete right-claiming processes and stakeholders. Firstly, as protest movements,

both groups claim rights for themselves or others that do not (yet) exist, or claim the full realisation of rights that cannot (yet) be enacted. No Border's claims to rights are twofold. On the one hand, the activists claim civil rights for migrants who do not have the right to claim rights due to their legal status. These rights relate to free movement and settlement as well as to asylum. On the other hand, No Borders also claims rights for the activists themselves. This is the right to be part of a universal world community without borders or states and in which citizenship in the classical sense does not exist. Festung Europa's claims to rights, in turn, are at least threefold. Firstly, the activists claim to deny rights to migrants, in particular the right to free movement, settlement and asylum. Secondly, the group claims the right to full territorial sovereignty over an imagined European space in which only European patriots are entitled to enjoy civil, economic and social rights. Thirdly, Festung Europa claims the fulfilment of allegedly failed responsibilities from the EU and its Member States. Alluding to the duty of states to provide security to their citizens as part of the mutual citizenship compact, the group claims the stricter protection of European external borders and, allegedly, the protection of Europe and its culture.

This leads to a second observation concerned with the communities of political belonging that the groups evoke and claim rights from. Interestingly, both groups claim rights from various political communities and authorities. Indeed, they appeal to local, regional, national and transnational communities, revealing the complexity of political belonging in an increasingly transnational EU space and globalised world. For instance, No Borders appeals to local and regional authorities and communities when organising solidarity action for migrants who are detained in local centres. Then, the activists appeal to the national level when setting up protest marches in front of national political institutions. Finally, they claim rights from transnational entities when rallying in front of the Frontex headquarters. Also, their call for 'no borders, no nations' appeals to a universal community. Festung Europa similarly claims rights from different levels of authorities and entities of political belonging. The activists appeal to the local and regional levels when organising protest marches in Dresden. The transnational level is evoked via the physical blocking of the Czech-German border, hunt of migrants in the Bulgarian-Turkish borderlands, or through their discourse on European patriots.

## 6 Concluding Remarks

A couple of conclusions can be drawn from the foregoing. The analysis has revealed some creative and disrupting ways in which citizens of contemporary Europe engage in material and symbolic border making. Far from accepting the institutionalised EU border regime, the protest movements continuously challenge the political definition of borders through contentious action. We can thus conclude that the activists' creative and disruptive political action undoubtedly contributes

to the multiple contestations and potential democratisation of European borders that Balibar and others have called for. Through the studied acts, members of both the No Borders and Festung Europa movements attempt to make the European borders an object of their sovereignty. As predicted by Rumford, both groups acknowledge the power of transnational networks for citizen-driven making and remaking of borders, and therefore successfully connect with like-minded groups all over Europe to challenge the EU border regime.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Rumford, “Introduction: Citizens and Borderwork in Europe,” 7.

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