

## Borders, race, and global mediascapes: deconstructing violence in politics and representations

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This special focus aims to critically examine violence in politics and media representations of migrants, refugees, and so-called “internal Others” (racialized citizens) in Italy, Portugal, the United Kingdom, India, the United States, and Australia, while mapping out their interconnections with particular narratives in the field of crime and security. The focus addresses how they (re)produce narratives of moral panic and securitization through specific constructions of Otherness which articulate representations of gender, race, age, and religion; and how these constructions provide the symbolic material for the legitimization of institutional as well as epistemic violence against these groups.

The time span we consider goes from 2001 to the present, which is marked prevalently in the areas under scrutiny by the reorganization of international security facing the new phases of what was initially called the “War on Terror,” the global restructuring of border regimes that depended on the latter and more decidedly on the internal political, social, and environmental phenomena and dynamics, the financial crisis with its political and socioeconomic consequences across Europe and the West, the Arab Spring, and the so-called ‘migrant crises’ across the Mediterranean, which were triggered by increased repression in the Horn of Africa (2007-), the Tunisian internal conflict (2011), and the Syrian exodus (2015-2016). This choice is based on a resignification of the term *crisis*, which in Gaia Giuliani’s view “does not correspond directly to the material crises [...] that have hit the economic and social space of Europe, the West and their global dimensions,” but “to the crises of self-representation that are both engendered by and reproduce the material crisis” (Giuliani 2017, 68). As such, “the symbolic and the material are conceived not just as interconnected and mutually interacting (following Stuart Hall) [...] but they] actually produce each other within a complex camp of individual and super-individual forces” (Giuliani 2017, 68).

In the mainstream Western discourse on security, the war against terrorism, as well as the financial and migration crises, have been transformed into factors of a condition of permanent crisis which determines and is said to be determined by an alleged ‘persistent risk’ engendered by old and new migrants (see Bhatia 2018, 2021). As a result, they are read as ‘risky bodies’, dichotomized as victims (*bodies at risk*) and/or potential criminals and threats to

Western societies (*risky bodies*) (Aradau 2004; Giuliani 2017, 2018, 2019). This double (gendered) iconography is confirmed by securitization studies (see Wæver et al. 1993; Bigo 2002; Huysmans 2006), which have shown how migration can be turned into a security issue and how humanitarian rhetoric can help sustain it as an essential element of governmentality, particularly regarding the regulation of human mobility (Bigo 2002; Agier 2008; also see Mehta 2018). These same discourse and iconography are sustained by ‘figures of race’ (Giuliani 2017) – that is, figures sedimented across centuries, empires and postcolonial situations through which racialized bodies have been constructed – that constitute the lenses through which today migrants and refugees are read intersectionally, and that are the core of a study that aims to semiotically connect the making and the use of a text and the operation of the border.

The aim of this Special focus is to analyse the making of the *risky body* media discourse and iconography along with the making of migrants and refugees into bio/necro-political objects. Starting from shared reflections on the tightening of the EU and Italian political directions about migrant and refugee arrivals, and combining anthropological and cultural studies approaches, Gaia Giuliani and Barbara Pinelli look at the ways in which Italy’s Southern borders filter and control migration, as well as their semiotic implications. Rita Santos and Sofia José Santos provide a detailed and nuanced examination of the different gendered and racialised tropes present in the Portuguese media coverage of people of African descent and its intersections with wider national and international meta-narratives of progress, wealth, and security/ization. Through a critical examination of media representations of the Bangladeshi and Internal ‘Other’ in the Indian press, in particular images of the three well-publicised cases of Felani Khatun, Zohra Bibi and ‘woman in red sari’, Monish Bhatia and Rimple Mehta discuss cruelty, ‘madness’ and criminality while reflecting on the complexity of citizenship and belonging in the Indian context and the role media plays. Nicholas De Genova analyses the lethal effects of the border between the United States and Mexico, as it contributes systematically to the production of Mexican and other Latina/o lives as disposable. Drawing on Latino Studies scholarship, and research in border and migration studies, in particular, De Genova sizes the centrality of anti-Mexican/anti-Latinx racism in the United States contemporary immigration debate. Drawing on the findings of the Deathscapes project, Suvendrini Perera and Joseph Pugliese reflect on refugee and migrant bodies as they die in their myriad ways across the deathscape, from the desert borders of the United States to the waters of the Mediterranean and offshore detention sites in Australia. Finally, Angelica Pesarini and Carla Panico analyse the media reception in Southern and Northern Europe of the Black Lives Matter protests generated by the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020.

The work presented here finds its origins in, and is a relevant output of, research undertaken by the team of the FCT-funded project “(De)Othering: Deconstructing Risk and Otherness: hegemonic scripts and counter-narratives on migrants/refugees and ‘internal

Others' in Portuguese and European mediascapes" (2018-2021), where Gaia Giuliani and Sofia José Santos figure respectively as principal investigator and researcher, and Monish Bhatia as one of its international consultants.<sup>1</sup> We decided on a framing of Europe-focused research in a broader social, geographical and analytical context also involving India, the United States and Australia and their correspondent borderscapes with Latin America and Asia. We felt it necessary for both epistemological and methodological reasons: given the ocean-crossing interrelation between borderscapes, border regimes, securitization practices, and critical approaches to these in the West, we wished to highlight how, in the West, border biopolitics and necropolitics are mutually influencing and create at the same time images of the West which are racialised and gendered. Secondly, much of the critical literature built on by "(De)Othering" is cross-disciplinary and cross-continental in its theoretical framework, analytical tools, and results.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> "(De)Othering: Deconstructing Risk and Otherness: hegemonic scripts and counter-narratives on migrants/refugees and 'internal Others' in Portuguese and European mediascapes" (Reference: POCI-01-0145- FEDER-029997), was funded by FEDER and POCI.

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