

## Introduction

### Reflecting on the Interplay between Race, Ethnicity and Migration

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Recent events such as the Windrush scandal and the Black Lives Matter movement have sparked a global conversation on racial inequality and systemic violence. There is an urgent need to critically reflect on issues of race, racialization and ethnicity as embedded in, shaping and transforming diverse contexts of migration and mobility across the world. This *dossier* builds upon this momentum and draws on some of the contribution from the seminar series on ‘Race, Ethnicity and Migration’ organized by COMPAS at the University of Oxford to reflect on these issues through the prism of Hispanism.

As such, the current context of a “migration crisis” in Europe lends itself well to the exercise. Since April 2015, when over 800 migrants perished in a shipwreck while crossing the Mediterranean sea, the European Union has acknowledged that there was, indeed, a migration crisis (Panbianco, 2016). This state centric language of ‘crisis’ however portrays the refugees and asylum seekers from Africa and the Middle East who attempt to reach Europe as being the problem (Georgi, 2019). It also diminishes the historical and structural role played by increasingly restrictive European border policies that leave migrants with few safe and legal routes to migrate (Jeandesboz & Polly Pallister-Wilkins, 2016) and the macabre spectacles of policing and violent deaths that have marked the maritime border of the Mediterranean Sea.

Border deaths embody the violence that underpins these restrictive policies that aim to control peoples’ movements and prevent certain groups of foreigners – who are predominately non-white – from reaching European borders (Pécoud, 2019). In this respect, migration regimes in the Mediterranean and the European Union at large epitomize how issue of race, racism and racialization have become intertwined with broader issues of migration and mobility. It is no coincidence that it is primarily the mobility of people from former colonized countries in the Global South that are restricted by being preemptively illegalized (De Genova, 2018).

The putative ‘migrant crisis’ has been characterized by large scale border deaths, virulent policing practices, acceleration of border regimes and have simultaneously been accompanied by the intensification of political polarization in Europe, both within and across states, marked by a rise of welfare chauvinism combined with fierce nationalism (Georgi, 2019). Populist rhetoric ostensibly focuses on the legality of border crossing and authorized residence to construct ‘illegal’ migrants as particularly predisposed to immoral personhood, simultaneously fueling paranoid discourses of economic competition, welfare dependency and imaginaries of cultural disharmony. However, scholarship has amply demonstrated how immigration politics extends well beyond the border and questions of legality into the very heart and chassis of modern nation states. As Anderson (2013, 2) argues, “modern states portray themselves not as arbitrary collections of people hung together by a common legal status but as a *community of value*”, such that renders unstable the very construct of categories such as ‘citizen’ and ‘migrant’ as gauged along ethnic, religious, cultural and indeed raced values. Even if the dominant discourse on migration by European States systematically dissimulates race, due to what De Genova considers Europe’s “sanctimonious desires to renounce race as a residually race-ist article of faith” (De Genova, 2018, p.1769), it remains that the vast majority of those who perish on their journey to European shores are non-white migrants. In the same vein, it is non-white citizens who are reminded time and again to ‘prove’ their credentials of belonging, beyond that of legal status, by consistently and

explicitly articulating and performing their distinction from those hyper visibilised as the raced Othered.

Across the European Union, the racialization of migrants has also coincided with their “islamization” and rising levels of islamophobia, demonstrating how notions of race intersect with identities of religion, ethnicity, class, colour, gender, language to produce differentiated and mutable experiences of domination and suppression. In this sense, “pure racism” is giving way to “intersectional racism, intertwined with and formed by the dynamic interdependence with other relations of oppression (Georgi, 2019, p.101). Additionally, racism has itself taken on a new proxy, that of ‘nationalism’. Its tenets rest on the idea that there is a strong bond between certain groups of people (linked by a sort of social contract), that does not exist with certain migrants who seem too ‘different’ to ever be able to co-exist. Worse, these migrants are often seen as changing the social fabric of their host country, thereby prompting the resurgence of nationalist feelings advocating for exclusion of bodies racialized as foreign.

That identities such as race and ethnicity are relational, relative, and socially constructed has been remarked upon by several scholars. Yet, the reification of such identities in state and popular registers have real and consequential effects for migrants that include profiling, policing, exclusion, xenophobia, violence and even death. The Mediterranean Sea has become the nucleus of such conflicts and tensions, “where precarious movements are both the result of restrictive migration policies and forces of defiance” (Schwarz and Stierl 2019, 668), for the sea has also become synonymous with resistance, immense political struggle, and humanitarian intervention. As such, the Mediterranean migration ‘crisis’ highlights fundamental issues faced not only by Southern European countries but also reflected elsewhere primarily due to the historically charged structural conditions of inequality and their impact upon the unfolding dynamics of race and migration pulsating across the globe. To be sure, such frictions are not limited to the border, in a context where borders are being simultaneously multiplied, externalized and internalized in public debate, as core liberal principles of ‘rights’, ‘equality’, ‘freedom’ itself are reassessed (Anderson 2013). Whilst Euro-American contexts have direct histories of slavery and colonialism that manifest in contemporary migration policies and border regimes, hegemonic representations of race intersect with localized histories of difference to produce racialized postcolonial spaces across nonwhite contexts such as Africa and South Asia (Pierre 2013, Gill 2019) as well. In the dossier presented here, scholars from across geographical location, institutional affiliation and disciplinary training engage with the analytical optic and lived reality of race and ethnicity to better understand the present and indeed future of the contestations over human mobility.

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