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Gendered and Racialised Border Security: Displaced People and the Politics of Fear

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Abstract

This article examines the dynamics of constructing current migration from the so-called Global South in 'risk', 'crisis' and 'fear' terms that translate into xenophobic, racialised and gendered processes of 'othering' people who are displaced. This is done within the framework of a 'coloniality of power' (Quijano 2000b) perspective, understood as the 'colonial power matrix' (Grosfoguel 2011). This is how the location from which the current racialised and gendered politics of fear is being constructed. The notion of racialised security leads to racialised masculinity of the 'Other', while stigmatising migrant men. These colonial narratives that have created 'knowledge' about other masculinities have been invoked and re-articulated within the current racialised processes of securitisation of migration. They have supported construction of the sexual assault of 'our' women as the public security concern. Consequently, *racially marked rape* becomes an important part of State security, linked to national territory and border control.

Keywords

Coloniality of power; gendering fear; securitisation of migration; rape as racialised marker.

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Introduction

When Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi referred to the hotly debated ‘need’ for a wall for protection from migrants along the Mexican border with the United States (US), as the ‘manhood’ issue (DeBonis 2018) she pointed to the border implications of highly gendered and racialised politics of State security that characterise twenty-first century migration and related security debates. Displaced people who are pushed to migrate by war and drastic human rights violations are persistently described as ‘irregular’ migrants we must fear. According to US President Donald Trump, in his bid to secure support to build the Mexican border wall, this is not only because migrants are arriving in huge numbers to ‘our shores’, but also because they are supposedly ‘dangerous’ people carrying disease and engaging in criminal behaviour. Similar concerns prompted politicians in Britain to refer to the arrival of migrants as a ‘tidal wave’, while in France their entrance is depicted as a ‘barbarian invasion’ (Bigo 2002: 69). Some in the German media even call migrants ‘moles that are coming’ (Melnyk 2017: 41). This type of political rhetoric about ‘national security’ justifies moves to curtail the right of forced migrants to protection, as well as the introduction of policies to curb migration (Korac 2017). It is linked to approaches to security that echo Agamben’s (2005) conceptualisation of the ‘permanent state of exception’, the mode of governmentality that characterises our times.

In this article, I examine the dynamics involved in constructing current migration from the so-called Global South in ‘risk’, ‘crisis’ and ‘fear’ terms, which translate into xenophobic, racialised and gendered processes of ‘othering’ people who are displaced. This is done so within the framework of a ‘coloniality of power’ (Quijano 2000b) perspective, understood as the ‘colonial power matrix’ that affects all dimensions of social existence and continues to structure the world (Grosfoguel 2011; Quijano 2000b). I argue that this is how the location from which the current racialised and gendered politics of fear is being constructed, and further contend that the notion of racialised security leads to racialised masculinity of the ‘Other’, while stigmatising migrant men. I specifically consider how these racialised and gendered processes of securitisation of migration operate in national settlement contexts, using the 2015 New Year’s Eve events in Cologne, Germany, as a case study. By analysing some of the reports and media coverage, predominantly from Germany, I show how the construction of migrant (Muslim) men as misogynistic and violent towards women, shaped by gendered interpretation of cultural and religious differences, help to enforce external and create internal borders. In turn, this racialised ‘politics of fear’ (Ahmed 2004) shaped by the coloniality of power has produced a powerful social script of victimisation of the besieged that is central to racialised and gendered processes of securitisation of migration in the Global North.

Global Processes and Racialised Constructions of Refugees as ‘Threat’

‘Global coloniality’, as Grosfoguel (2011) reminds us, has been imposed by the international financial institutions keeping the Global South in a colonial situation, despite colonial administrations having been long removed. Indeed, as Sassen (2014) shows, over 20 years of restructuring programs imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank from the late 1980s onwards have produced a far greater burden of debt than before international financial intervention was introduced. One key feature of this neoliberal model of development is that many governments of the Global South currently pay more to their international lenders than they invest in basic components of development, such as education and health (Sassen 2014). Unsurprisingly, these gross injustices created by the sharp rise in inequality are challenged by affected populations, often by violent means, leading to a proliferation in armed conflict. According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2020) data, forced displacement has almost doubled since 2010, 41 million then vs 79.5 million now.

Data on global displacement demonstrate the existence of the ‘global apartheid order’ (Hage 2016: 43) between the so-called Global North and the Global South, structured by race and class, ‘dividing the world into two realities’ (43–44). This directly links the existing global structures of power to human security and determines ‘who enjoys the entitlement to security and who does not’ (Thomas 2001: 160). In 2019, countries of the Global South hosted 85% of the world’s refugees, or eight or every 10 refugees, while the least developed countries provided asylum to as much as 27% of the total number of displaced globally

(UNHCR 2020). Moreover, 80% of the world's displaced people are in countries or territories affected by acute food insecurity and malnutrition – many of them countries facing climate and other disaster risk (UNHCR 2020). Additionally, and central to the argument here, data for 2019 show that as many as 43.5 million out of 79.5 million displaced people in the world are internally displaced by conflict, violence and environmental disasters. This means that nearly 60% of the world's displaced populations remain in their countries as de facto although not de jure refugees (UNHCR 2020). Clearly, this global neoliberal restructuring is characterised by 'expulsion' as its key dynamic, to use Sassen's (2014) term, which is structured by the global coloniality of power. The Global North's response to these developments was to ensure the security of its (national) borders by imposing new 'technologies of control' (Nyers 2003), often resulting in humanitarian crises in border zones.

Racialised Security

Migration constructed as a threat has been central to immigration policies in the European Union (EU) since the 1990s, increasingly turning (forced) migration into a 'border security' issue. Since 2001, and the events of September 11 in the US, followed by the 'War on Terror', (forced) migration has become fundamentally linked to the concept of securitisation, because of the construction of security threats linking (forced) migrants to terrorism. They have become the securitised group threatening our nation-states constructed as vulnerable. This process mirrors 'orientalist' binaries of 'civilized "West"' versus 'barbaric "East"' (Khalid 2014a: 2), inducing images of Arabs and Muslims as backward yet strong enough to pose a threat to 'us', juxtaposed to the notion of 'our' superiority that legitimises the need to police them. The racialised process of securitisation has also led to more arbitrary decision-making processes, justified by the notion of a permanent state of exception. This is because racialised securitisation issues or groups tend to be placed outside democratic procedures of public political debate and decision-making processes in the name of 'State security'.

Recent militarised border security actions in the Global North help construct racialised fear from being besieged and encircled. The fear is reinforced by government actions, such as the Hungarian barbed-wire wall along its border with the non-EU world, or the much talked about US wall along its militarised border with Mexico. Hage (2016: 39) reminds us that these fears have a long history linked to colonialism and related 'narratives of reversed colonization', which represent the 'civilised' world as on the verge of being overrun by 'primitive' forces. Indeed, this narrative operates at the symbolic level to reach political consensus mobilised around fear of 'the Other', covering the functionality of border restriction for value extraction and labour exploitation along colonial racial, class and gender lines.

Framed as a State security matter, migrants are perceived as a racialised 'public enemy' (Bigo 2002), feeding into the siege mentality. In turn, this justifies legally, ethically and politically emphasis on combating irregular migration over protecting the lives of people who have been smuggled illegally (Spijkerboer 2017). Here, Spijkerboer (2017) shows that the right of States to exclude aliens from their territories leads to exclusion of illegal passengers and/or migrants from their main positive obligations under the right to life. Consequently, States do not have any system to report deaths of people who attempt to cross borders illegally, and act as if they do not have any responsibility for these casualties because they rely on non-State actors (i.e., smugglers) and die outside their territory (Spijkerboer 2017). This type of border security approach to people labelled as illegal travellers constructs them as subaltern beings who do not have the right to life.

The Mediterranean 'liquid' border is one devastating example of the racialised politics of insecurity as a frame for approaching displacement from the Global South. Analyses highlight (e.g., see Fargues 2015) that security measures implemented in response to the sharp increase of illegal crossings since 2014 have not solved the border problem. Rather, more controls in one area push people towards riskier crossings (Fargues 2015; Spijkerboer 2017), increasing *human insecurity* of migrants. This well-documented consequence of restrictive immigration policies is embedded in the fact that agency 'is central to forcible displacement' (Korac 2009: 45). Hence, forced migrants, as people who have agency, 'search actively for

options' to their predicament (45). In doing so, many opt for dangerous opportunities—decisions that are hard, if not impossible, to understand without reading 'the world through "illegal" eyes' (Khosravi 2010: 6). This can help us to understand how and why the Mediterranean has become the most lethal 'liquid' border crossing of the twenty-first century.

Figures show that between 2000 and 2015, every time an 'illegal migrant' decided to pay a smuggler to cross the Mediterranean he or she was also risking a 2% probability of death (Fargues 2015). Since 2015, the number of people crossing has increased. In 2018, the UNHCR reported that the death toll for the Western Mediterranean nearly quadrupled from 202 in 2017 to 777 (UNHCR 2018). Further, UHNCR (2019) data show that the overall figure is even higher, recording six deaths each day crossing the Mediterranean. Thus, this so-called strategic security transformation that targets (illegal) migrants as a threat to State security, accompanied by the proliferation of walls, military presence and action is not a 'by-product of impersonal global processes', as Spijkerboer (2017: 27–28) suggests. Rather, it is based on the bifurcated view of the global order and the right to life, within which some are perceived as 'masters' and others as 'slaves' (Hage 2016). These racialised processes of securitisation of migration that create the 'global apartheid regime' of migration are shaped by the processes of gendering fear of (forced) migrants. This becomes a potent tool for furthering the securitisation mode of governmentality, and further affects settlement in national contexts.

Racialised Masculinity of the 'Other'

Migrants, refugees and migration have always been seen through the lens of the nation and the State, a link that has proven useful for the politicisation of migration when constructed as endangering the idealised notion of homogeneity of the state. Metaphors of the 'state as a body endangered by migrants' (Bigo 2002: 68–69) depict nations and State territories as vulnerable female bodies in danger and in need of protection. Indeed, gender is a potent tool in politicisation and group mobilisation. Links between gender, nation, nationalism, militarisation and war have been well documented and theorised in (feminist) scholarship over past decades (e.g., Brah 1993; Enloe 1989/2014; Moghadam 1994; Walby 1992). While acknowledging very different types of nationalism linked to specific geographic locations and their specific histories, these and other studies have shown similarities in their construction of the nation as female (Pettman 1996). Depiction of the nation-state as spatial, embodied femaleness is linked to the notion of 'nature as female' and is readily transformed into metaphors linked to the land's fertility—upon which the nation and its people depend (Peterson 1996). As such, it must be protected by defending the nation's boundaries against the invasion of foreign males (Peterson 1996). Such constructions help stereotype migrants in terms of racialised, aggressive masculinity that calls upon strong, protective, muscular, male bodies for protection. Militarised masculinities, as Khalid (2014b) points out, need 'Other' masculinities linked to 'subordinate' identities against which the superior masculine 'self' can be constructed. In this sense, she argues, race and gender are mutually constructed and, hence, contingent on each other (Khalid 2014b).

These competing forms of masculinity are likened to 'muscular thinking' of 'manly security experts' involved in 'national security thinking' (Enloe 2007: 40) of the nation-state. It is embodied in law enforcement, masculinist procedures of migration controls, including use of military force. Unsurprisingly, such gender constructions are often linked to militarised language and warrior attitudes found in the media,¹ feeding into security-oriented, racialised behaviour towards foreigners. Militarised attitudes towards immigrants and migration are becoming dominant in many receiving States, such as the 2017 call of the Austrian Government to deploy army forces on the Italian border to halt any 'irregular' migrants crossing over. These and other restrictive measures against migrants in Austria, as Scheibelhofer (2017: 97) shows, were justified by Austrian politicians invoking the problematic notion of migrants' masculinity, that is 'uncivilised', 'asocial' and 'diseased'. In doing so, they engaged in the process of 'othering', facilitating social exclusion, discrimination and violence against them (Scheibelhofer 2017).

As Santos, Roque and Santos (2018: 459) emphasise, racialised (young) men associated with the so-called Global South are frequently represented in the media, policy and political discourse as inherently problematic and associated with the threat to urban, national and international security. This gendered racialisation of migrant men is based on the construction of masculinities of migrants as violent and 'prone to uncontrollable actions', as opposed to 'the use of violence as *legitimate protection*' (Santos, Roque and Santos 2018: 459, emphasis added). This is key to the current type of public discourse towards immigrants, because at the symbolic level most of our ideas about fear, vulnerability and aggression are bound with how we learn compulsory social norms of gender and sexuality. The notion of immigrants as racialised male invaders carries a symbolic, gendered message that is central to the viral spread of intolerance and racist prejudice over large groups of people and entire cultures.

Studies show that in Europe and other immigrant-receiving countries of the Global North, dominant discourses of fear and security are modelled on racist and white masculinist constructions of fear of crime and street criminality (e.g., Stable and Reutschler 2005). Hence, according to Schrock and Schwalbe (2009), the presence of migrant men in public urban spaces is perceived as threatening and is associated with gendered deviant behaviours because they tend to be represented as backward in terms of gender roles and power relations. Migrant men (and particularly Muslims), who are portrayed in the media as misogynistic and violent towards women, have become 'hyper-visible' groups (Ehrkamp 2008) whose presence in public spaces is often viewed as deviant. Unsurprisingly, they are increasingly targeted by anti-immigration actors across Europe (Wodak 2015). These processes, shaped by gendered colonial interpretations of cultural and religious differences (Purwar 2004), have supported further the growing association of migration with 'law, order and security' in political debates.

Consequently, the introduction of restrictive immigration policies in many European States is justified by portraying Africans, and specifically Muslim migrant men, as threatening the security of 'our' women and nation (Woodcock 2010).² Studies show that the restrictive immigration policies create a cycle of stigmatisation (e.g., Charsley and Wray 2015; Griffiths 2015). Commonly resulting in prolonged asylum procedures, this forces (male) immigrants into poverty, idleness and dependency on State handouts. If refused, they are pushed into destitution and illegal work. All this is associated with the reinforcement of existing negative and often gendered public perceptions of migrants and migrant men, in particular.

In the intersection with contemporary processes of the politicisation of migration, these racialised and gendered processes have helped construct particularly dehumanised depictions of male migrants from North Africa and the Middle East. This is also why sexual violence, including rape, committed by some immigrants on the streets of some European cities (notably in Germany and Sweden) has become *religious and racial markers*, enabling immigrants to be framed as 'racialised predators'.

This type of gendered discourse produces fear and hatred, as depicted on the cover of Polish magazine *wSieci* (The Network), featuring a screaming white woman being grabbed and torn apart by black or coloured male arms and hands, with the headline, 'Islamic Rape of Europe' (Sherwood 2016). The following section focuses on the processes that construct sexual assaults and rape as racial markers by briefly examining some of the political and public responses to the events in Cologne, Germany, in 2015 on New Year's Eve. It examines how the politics of fear of immigrants and migration becomes both gendered and racialised.

Sexual Assault and Rape as Racial Marker: The Case of Cologne

According to Brenner and Ohlendorf (2016),³ several dozen young men, many of North African origin, were suspected of sexually assaulting and robbing hundreds of women during the 2015 New Year's Eve street celebrations in Cologne. The crimes were made possible by the crowded conditions in and around Cologne's main train station, further facilitated by poor coordination among the different police forces responsible for responding to the situation (Brenner and Ohlendorf 2016). Public prosecutor Ulrich

Bremer endorsed this interpretation of events and added that the full truth will likely never come to light, despite the authorities' best efforts, owing to a lack of evidence (Brenner and Ohlendorf 2016). This description mirrors the first official statements by German federal police. They had identified 32 people who were suspected of taking part in the violent New Year's Eve attacks, 22 of whom were in the process of seeking asylum in Germany. Of the 32 suspects, nine were Algerian, eight Moroccan, five Iranian and four Syrian. Three German citizens, an Iraqi, a Serbian and a US citizen were also identified. The federal police documented 76 criminal acts, most of them involving some form of theft, and seven linked to sexual molestation (Barkin and Carrel 2016).

However, this official account was accompanied by other claims made by officials and politicians. One such statement was made on 4 January 2016, when Cologne police chief Wolfgang Alberts announced that crimes of 'a completely new dimension' had taken place in the city on New Year's Eve, and that the suspected perpetrators appeared to be Arab or North African.⁴ This was followed by a statement from German Justice Minister Heiko Maas who told the *Bild* newspaper, 'if such a *horde* gathers in order to commit crimes, that appears in some form to be planned', 'nobody can tell me that this was not co-ordinated or prepared' (BBC 2016a: para. 12, emphasis added).⁵ Although his press representative, Stephanie Krüger, later said that the minister did not mean organised crime 'in the classical sense of the word' (Brenner and Ohlendorf 2016: para. 63), this type of official statement created fruitful ground for some to qualify these events as being with 'no doubt ... a planned and deliberately organized action' (Melnyk 2017: 41) by immigrant men in German cities and across Europe. They also helped transform sexual violence against women into a potent tool in gendering the notion of vulnerability of 'our nation', 'our State', 'our culture' and 'our values'. These, and similar political narratives, frame sexual violence against 'our' women as a racialised or ethnicised attack on the sovereignty of the State, as women's bodies come to be constructed as vulnerable territories in need of protection.⁶

By constructing this type of political and public discourse about the events in Cologne, some officials and politicians helped to boost the process of manipulating data. This is often linked to conspiracy theories and sensationalism in reporting on the instances of sexual violence against women in Germany and beyond (e.g., Melnyk 2017). In doing so, this type of official declaration and much of the media coverage have contributed to the construction of fear of the so-called 'racialised and ethnicised male immigrant enemy'. The study by Holzberg, Kolbe and Zaborowski (2018), in particular, shows how gendering specific racial categories of men in the German media has created a discourse that constructs a figure of undeserving refugee. In turn, this led to public demands for a radical change in the nation's immigration policies.

While some German politicians were conscious of the importance of emphasising the dangers of linking these events with immigration policies, others did exactly that. For example, Steffen Bilger, a member of parliament for Merkel's Christian Democratic Union, stated that the reports of sexual assaults and other violent crimes committed by foreign nationals—specifically those who were admitted in the country to seek protection as refugees—demonstrated the urgent need for Germany to reduce its migrant intake, secure its borders, intensify deportations and uphold 'consistent justice' (Shubert, Hume and Jordan 2016).

Indeed, upholding consistent justice is an important element of any democratic and just society. However, the question is why reoccurring instances of sexual assaults—including the rape of women during Oktoberfest, as an example (Stöckle and Wegscheider 2016)—have not been viewed as an 'intolerable' crime committed by *hordes* of German men, and have not sparked national and international political and public debates about the seriousness of sexual violence against women in Europe. Indeed, why was there no mention of these sexual assaults that, according to reports, are so widespread that sanctuaries for women had to be set-up (Connolly 2003)?

Therefore, what brings 'a totally new dimension' to the sexual assaults that took place on New Year's Eve in Cologne, and what characterises them as 'organised crime' as opposed to those regularly committed during Oktoberfest—or, indeed, in women's homes? According to a study commissioned by the Federal

Ministry of Family Affairs, one in seven women in Germany experiences sexual violence. One in four women—irrespective of education level or socio-economic status—is exposed to domestic violence. The perpetrators are almost always men, among whom there is no significant distinction based on religion, background, educational level or social status (Stöckle and Wegscheider 2016). What makes these attacks on women seem an ‘ordinary event’ (Melnyk 2017: 42) as opposed to those in Cologne?

According to some, ‘ethnicity of the criminals’ matters (Melnyk 2017: 41), leading to notions that ‘rape culture’ and sexism are associated with specific societies and parts of the ‘backward’ and ‘uncivilised’ world. Jaunait, Le Renard and Marteu (2013: vii) in their analysis of sexual nationalisms highlight attempts ‘to expel’ sexism and homophobia from European nation-states and turn them into ‘defining characteristics of ‘Muslim countries’. In other words, progressive attitudes towards gender questions and sexuality are supposedly marking the division between modern, advanced, Western democracies and other traditional and backward geopolitical locations (Farris 2017). Unsurprisingly, then, some politicians and mainstream media in Germany declared that the Cologne events of 2015 were an attack on German gender norms (Dietze 2016 cited in Boulila and Carri 2017: 286). Conveniently, they ‘forget’ the levels of white-to-white sexual violence against women in Germany or the still inadequate laws governing sexual offences, mentioned in this article.

Indeed, focus on the race and ethnicity of perpetrators and their culture is situated within the gendered and sexualised character of racism (Mohanty 2003) and its colonial imaginary about masculinity of ‘the Other’ (otherwise linked to the uncivilised violence of ‘primitive’ men/species). As Quijano (2000a: 343–344 cited in Lugones 2008: 4) explains, this qualification of the racialised ‘Other’ is linked to a conception of humanity that is differentiated in two groups: primitive and civilised, superior and inferior, rational and irrational, traditional and modern. In this sense, as Lugones (2008: 11) points out, the production of knowledge—the very conception of reality at every level—is both gendered and racialised. These gendered and sexualised colonial narratives that have created ‘knowledge’ about other masculinities have been invoked and re-articulated within the current racialised processes of securitisation of migration. They have supported the construction of the sexual assault of ‘our’ women as the public security concern. As such, *racially marked rape* becomes an important part of the State security agenda linked to national territory and border controls.

In such a political climate, it is not surprising that any attempt to communicate the issue of sexual and other violence against women in non-racialised terms, and to bring it onto the public agenda, is not problem free. Such attempts are perceived as acts of ‘political correctness’ or as unpatriotic, or ‘dangerous for the nation’ (Boulila and Carri 2017: 286).⁷ Voices of the assaulted women, as interviews with some demonstrate (see Richards 2016), were mirroring calls to refocus the debate from one on racialised State security to one about the security of women, in which the race and culture of perpetrators are not central points of concern. Their voices also echoed a 2013 World Health Organization (WHO) report on global and regional estimates of violence against women, which shows that one in three women globally suffers violence by an intimate partner. In the Eastern Mediterranean, this rate totals 36.4%, compared to 32.7% in high-income countries and 27.2% in Europe. This study also shows that 7% of women globally report having been sexually assaulted by someone other than a partner, with 12.6% being in wealthy countries compared to 11.9% in Africa. In other words, the WHO report and numerous other local or national reports demonstrate the worrying scope of violence against women embedded in their intimate relationships, which are, in many countries, permitted by law. For example, in Germany sexual assault in marriage was lawful until as recently as 1997 (Deutsche Welle 2013). Moreover, German women who were sexually assaulted are still required by law *to prove that they resisted the violence* to convict the perpetrator (Lohaus and Wizorek 2016).

However, calls to focus on violence against women in non-racialised terms in the aftermath of New Year’s Eve were dismissed in much of the media and among far-right groups as a ‘cover-up’ and an attempt to present the problem as ‘the issue of men’ and masculinity, *not* that of a ‘particular culture’ (e.g., Arpi 2016). Anti-immigrant groups have been particularly active in adopting sexualised and racialised discourse

created around immigrants in general and especially recent arrivals from the Middle East. Their security concerns have expressed dismay at letting in ‘millions of male sexually starved, asocial illegals from the Middle East and Africa to come to Germany’ (Spiegel 2016: para. 42). By constructing refugees as a threat to the fabric of German society, the media discourse of sexual violence in Cologne was reconfirming the nation’s self-image as free of sexual abuse and gender inequality (Holzberg, Kolbe and Zaborowski 2018: 545–547).

The assault of German women by ‘sexually starved foreigners’, encoded as Middle Eastern and North African Muslims, helps to remind German men of their role as protectors of ‘their’ women, nation and the State. In doing so, they reclaim elements of warrior-like masculinity, linked to violence against ‘the enemy’. Unsurprisingly, in the aftermath of the events in Cologne, Germany and other European countries have become dangerous places for refugees, given the subsequent rise in violent attacks against them. According to Federal Criminal Police Office reports, there were in 2016 970 recorded attacks on asylum accommodation centres and 2,396 crimes against refugees outside of these residences (Deutsche Welle 2017a). During the first quarter of the same year, about 460 attacks were recorded on homes of people seeking asylum, later decreasing in the last three months of 2016. Nonetheless, there were still on average roughly four attacks every day, or 116 in total (Deutsche Welle 2017a).

Despite this violence against refugees, the discourse frames white/German men as protectors—linked to colonial imaginary about the masculinity of ‘the Other’, as Spivak (1988/1994) reminds us—who also save refugee women from the uncivilised violence of ‘their’ men. The media coverage, as Holzberg, Kolbe and Zaborowski (2018: 545) reveal, has contributed to this racialised framing of the debate, by emphasising Germans’ responsibility to protect refugee women and children who suffer similar kinds of violence. In doing so, the media feed into colonial imaginary linked to the gendered and sexualised characterisation of racism.

Concluding Remarks

This paper highlighted the coloniality of power causing the North–South migration divide, structured by race, gender and class. It showed how this divide leads to suffering, violence and death in border zones, including how it is linked to a racialised and gendered notion of ‘border security’, ‘national security’, securitisation of migration, and related politics of fear, which produce racialised and gendered cultures of ‘othering’ the displaced.

Despite the increase in violent crimes against those who seek protection in receiving States (e.g., as in Germany, as well as immigrants in general), many governments have been constructing a discourse within which citizens are threatened by rising levels of violence committed by immigrants and particularly refugees (Deutsche Welle 2017b).⁸ As shown, sexualisation of their crimes is central to these processes. It helps to create a notion of ‘the nation under threat’ and further mobilise a ‘natural’ protector who acts for ‘the good’ of the protected and is, therefore, ‘manly’. This implies both rationality and responsibility for the security of ‘women and children’ (Enloe 2007: 61).

Further, discussion of the events in Cologne and their aftermath shows that the construction of those who seek protection under the 1954 Geneva Convention as (potential) terrorists and ‘racialised predators’ is integral to the ongoing process of politicisation and racialisation of migration. As such, it has been central to the type of security response to current systemic global crises, which has produced disturbing levels of structural violence as well as related forms of direct violence, particularly in the Global South. This has effectively created the ‘global apartheid order’, at the centre of which is the construction of refugee as the racialised and gendered ‘Other’.

Evidently, media plays an important role in these processes by partaking in the cultural reproduction of images of ‘dangerous men’. Particularly stigmatised by the coverage of committed crimes are male-dominated immigrant communities originating from Muslim countries (Gallo and Scrinzi 2019). This feeds

the association with growing political debates about ‘law and order’, as well as the rise of populist movements in Europe (Gallo and Scrinzi 2019). Highlighted here, these processes are tied to fantasies of sexist violence linked to masculinist aggression, depicting idealised victims as those who are feminised and feel fear. Hence, the process of gendering fear in the contemporary racialised security climate helps to create an idealised ‘fearing subject’—that is, the nation-state and its territory, the people and their values. In turn, the ‘threatened’ nation-state must be protected by the militarised masculinities of European States, whose ‘superior’ identities are always constructed in relation to ‘Other’ subordinate masculine identities. These include those associated with the Global South and Muslim countries, in particular.

Such processes produce a powerful social script of victimisation of the besieged that constructs racialised and gendered cultures of fear. In turn, this leads to walled- or fenced-off militarised borders that create the ‘global apartheid order’ (Hage 2016). Increasingly, this is presented as a security ‘solution’ to protect the norms and values characterising ‘our culture’ and ‘our way of life’. By the same token, the process helps to marginalise economic, social and political sources of insecurity, and the articulation of related collective experiences of fear that can directly challenge dominant neoliberal economic policies, as well as the related rule of law.

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¹ Infowars News (2017) coverage on migration-related issues in Europe is one of many examples of immigration reportage in the United States (US). This was made in relation to and in support of the no restriction on possessing weapons campaign in the US.

² I acknowledge that ‘othered’ masculinities are constructed differently. For example, anti-black stereotypes and anti-Muslim stereotypes of men are linked to their hyper-eroticisation, but are quite different in terms of cultural genealogy and historical context. However, that discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. For more on the masculine stereotype of ‘the Negro’, see Fanon (1986). For the longstanding, anti-Muslim, racist stereotypical image of and knowledge about the North African masculine subject, see Jazmati and Studer (2017). For analysis of Chinese masculine identity, see Eng (2001).

³ The authors note that this report is based on the analysis of (1) hundreds of media reports, comprising all major regional, national and international news about the events in Cologne, published from New Year’s Eve to the second week of April 2016; (2) 20 reports and other official documents; (3) interviews of 13 representatives of the authorities; (4) interviews of 14 witnesses; (5) interviews of six victims; and (6) interviews of 24 additional sources, including experts on refugees and immigration law, asylum seekers themselves, members of the media, and representatives of refugee organisations.

⁴ Alberts was widely quoted in the national and international press. Notably, see the BBC News (2016b) article, ‘Germany shocked by Cologne New Year gang assaults on women’.

⁵ Maas was widely quoted in the national and international press. Notably, see the BBC News (2016a) article, ‘Cologne attacks: New Year’s Eve crime cases top 500’.

⁶ The metaphor of sexually assaulted and victimised women has long been used in wartime, as feminist scholars have argued, to stress the intolerable violation of the country and the nation-state (e.g., Brownmiller 2013). As numerous studies show, this is a potent tool in mobilising internal and national support for fighting wars, as well as for attracting international attention, often by manipulating data and misusing victimised women (e.g., Korac 1998).

⁷ Post-Cologne attacks on anti-racist German feminism mirrored the situation of anti-nationalist and anti-war feminists active during Yugoslav wars of succession (for more see Benderly 1997). These similarities of political and public discourse surrounding the nexus among women–nation–race/ethnicity linkages support the argument that gender is a potent tool in politicisation and group mobilisation, as discussed in this article.

⁸ The rise in terrorist threats in Europe and globally is undeniable. Its increase in the past few years is pushing up the crime rates committed by foreigners in many States, including Germany. As terrorist violence in the Global North targets specifically the majority, non-Muslim, populations, it has serious negative consequences for minority-majority relations in the receiving societies. However, German Federal Criminal Police Office data demonstrate, for example, that much of the violence committed by foreigners in Germany is targeting so-called minority communities, such as clashes between Turks and Kurds or among Turks themselves—particularly in the aftermath of recent political developments in Turkey (Deutsche Welle 2017b).

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