

Introduction

Natasha Carver, Brid Brennan and Holly Rooke

Anderson argues that we need ‘to look *at and from* the border’ (Anderson, [this volume](#)) and through doing so interrogate the vocabulary of bordering, including categories like ‘citizen’ and ‘migrant’. How are these categories defined and represented, and by whom? And what impact do such articulations have? In Part 4 of the book, we attend to these challenges from different but complementary perspectives. In [Chapter 11](#), Holly Rooke and Natasha Carver analyse the role played by the discourse of political elites (and the state) in the continual project of (re)producing national borders, through a critical discourse analysis of speeches on migration delivered by recent prime ministers and home secretaries in the UK. Brid Brennan’s focus in [Chapter 12](#) is on the work of the Transnational Migrant Platform – Europe and the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal. She explores the power of bottom-up, grassroots approaches in (re)claiming, contesting and going beyond the discourse on migration of governing elites. She considers how new narratives are articulated and co-generated within different collective framings which seek fundamental change through linking migrant and refugee people, social movements and engaged academe. These chapters amplify Anderson’s argument that border crossing is never a singular, one-off event and that the border itself is far more than a geographical entity.

Contrary to what might be expected, neither ethno-national belonging nor the ‘national order of things’ (Malkki, 1995) are naturalized in either of these contexts. Politicians explicitly reassert the territorial sovereign nation state system as the only viable system – albeit whilst claiming it is currently unfit for purpose – and dismiss humanitarian challenges to their borderwork as the position of naive ‘no borders’ fantasists (for example, [Johnson, 2022](#)). Migrant and refugee campaign groups, on the other hand, argue that politicians are running roughshod over the flawed but essential architecture which underpins this nation state system: the national order of things is, after all, embedded within United Nations conventions, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1990 Migrant Workers Convention. These instruments enshrine the power of nation states to label individuals,

and thus call people into being in law as citizens/migrants/refugees as well as designate their belonging to a particular nation (Hacking, 1999; Carver, 2019). For many migrants, national identity only comes into significance as a category of belonging when the border is crossed. The extent to which migrants and allied citizens challenge this framing or reproduce it is raised in Brennan's interview. While politicians and many campaign groups present themselves as doing necessary and moral repair work to uphold the global nation state system on behalf of 'The People' they claim to represent, some abolitionist campaign groups attempt to resist and reject the system itself. This is a complex space of struggle and protagonism which migrant and refugee people inhabit together with other national and international social justice movements.

The nationalism produced in both contexts is often, seemingly, of the 'banal' (Billig, 1995) kind. Rooke and Carver highlight the use of references to 'national characteristics', like the British disposition for queuing, for example. Yet in the context of migration discourse, banal nationalism always has a sting in its tail in the work it does to naturalize the national order of things, whether utilized by elite politicians to justify divisive borderwork or by campaign groups to assert and claim rights. Ultimately, it is the system which produces 'migrants' and 'migration', not the movement of people. There is nothing intrinsic to the individual that makes them a migrant. Nor is there anything intrinsic to the movement of people that makes their journey a 'migration', inter-nation-al or otherwise. Migrants and citizens, 'illegal' and 'legal', refugees and workers, are all constructed externally with reference to national and often supranational legislation, which is itself underpinned by a global consensus and reliance on politically defined, territorially sovereign nation states (Carver, 2019).

'Who counts as a migrant?' is thus a never-answerable question, because 'migrant', like 'race' before it, is a floating signifier (Hall, 1996), which is not to say that the effects of migrancy are not real and often harmful, even deadly. The epistemology which held humans to be biologically distinguishable according to a hierarchical set of 'races' became mainstreamed through the slave trade and colonization. It is now widely understood that the notion of 'race' was a tool of exploitation, and thus a political rather than a biological construct (Quijano and Ennis, 2000). Nonetheless, the legal identities that colonial regimes generated on the basis of this epistemology – which designated the extent of one's social and physical (im)mobility – have proved long-lasting, not least because they continue to be politically useful for those in power. Following the disproving of scientific racism, in the West 'nationality' and/or 'ethnicity'/'ethnic minority' are now typically employed to do the heavy lifting required to legitimize and naturalize hierarchies of citizenship which render some people vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation. Adébişi argues that 'the increasing contemporary desire to

replace “race” with “ethnicity” [or, in this case, national identity], attempts to disappear the unjust social production of racial categories, by among other things, diluting the reasons for studying race – injustice’ (2023, p 70). The fact that the national order of things has become so established that it is taken for granted is testament to colonialism’s longevity (Sharma, 2020).

While such identification is presented as being obvious, as with categorizations of ‘race’ in colonial contexts, it is never definitive. Racialized citizens continue to be at risk of misrecognition as migrants, sometimes with devastating consequences, as has been seen in the Windrush scandal (Bhattacharya et al, 2021). Meanwhile, migrants themselves continue to attempt to hide in plain sight, relying when they can on racist norms (Fox and Mogilnicka, 2019). The ambiguous position of former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and former Home Secretary Suella Braverman as racialized/post-racial citizens of the UK, Rooke and Carver argue, impacts their articulations on migration, including the delineation of ‘migrant’ into ‘il/legal migrant’. The hitherto classed and racialized subtext of *who we really mean* when we talk about ‘who is a migrant’ (Anderson, this volume) is, as a consequence, fast becoming explicitly labelled and categorized. Sharma (2020) is right to assert that defining citizens from migrants is work of existential significance to nation states: they *must* make ‘migrants’ if they are to be a nation state. They need not, however, make ‘illegal migrants’.

What the complementary categories of migrant/citizen, il/legal migrant, refugee/worker serve to maintain is power relations within and between nation states: the national order of things. The global migration regime takes over from where colonialism left off (Sharma, 2020). But in producing and fetishizing these categories of ‘citizens’ and ‘migrants’, ‘il/legal migrants’, refugees and workers, the system also produces its own workload, for it now needs to know who belongs and who doesn’t, and how they belong, in order to manage and control who is allowed to cross the border as well as the behaviour of ‘migrants’ within the territory. Such a workload is never-ending and insurmountable, and, measured against its own goals, resoundingly ineffective. Every year, more and more is spent on border surveillance and protection, passport control, extended monitoring of applicants both pre and post entry, and so on. This is also the model of ‘Fortress Europe’, imposed by the European Union on other states, including in the Maghreb, as described by Brennan in this volume. Huge spending on the most advanced technical security and military equipment is meant to ensure the implementation of both Europe’s internal border policy and its externalization of borders to ‘third’ countries to prevent the entry of migrants and refugees (Akkerman et al, 2022; Council of the European Union, 2023). Yet with each added ‘protection’, the border’s permeability and arbitrary sociopolitical construction becomes more apparent.

Reiman observed that ‘criminology, alone among recognized social sciences, bears the burden of having the object of its study determined by the state’ and has, therefore, a special responsibility to ‘either declare its independence of the state or serve as an arm of the state’ (2006, p 362). The shift within criminology to ‘zemiology’, or the study of social harm, was introduced to overcome this and thus allow for a more expansive academic critique of power, structure and definition (Canning and Tombs, 2021). As noted by Anderson in this volume, criminology is not actually alone in this; ‘migration studies’ has faced, and continues to face, a similar struggle, beholden to state definition and struggling to free itself from the methodological nationalism that has plagued analyses. As academics abandon the lens of the state and apply their critical gaze to denationalizing (El Miri, 2023) or ‘demigrantizing’ migration studies (Anderson, this volume), and instead analyse ‘border harms’ (Canning and Tombs, 2021), governments in the Global North increasingly entrench their policies in discourses of (il)legality, discourses which are gradually being realized in legislation and thereby creating new – criminal – legal identities (Rooke and Carver, this volume).

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