

Book Review: Racial Criminalization of Migrants in the 21st Century by Salvatore Palidda

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Crit Sociol 2012 38: 333
DOI: 10.1177/0896920511435762

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Book Reviews

Critical Sociology
38(2) 333–338
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DOI: 10.1177/0896920511435762
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Racial Criminalization of Migrants in the 21st Century. By Salvatore Palidda (ed.). Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate, 2010. Pp. 308. \$134.95 (cloth). ISBN: 9781409407492.

Delivering the 2009 annual *British Journal of Sociology* lecture at LSE, Loïc Wacquant (2009) stated his intention to ‘put the penal state – i.e. the police, the court, the prison and their extensions entrusted with the lawful enforcement of the socio-moral order – squarely on the agenda of sociology.’ The French sociologist was stemming from the disjuncture between the stunningly exponential increase of incarceration rates and the almost stagnant crime rates from 1975 to nowadays.

Salvatore Palidda’s edited volume too treats the penal state as a milestone of contemporary societies, stemming from the disjuncture pointed out by Wacquant. The topic of the work edited by the Italian sociologist, however, is not the penal state only. It explores local, national and supranational contexts, practices, experiences and discourses that inform contemporary racial criminalization of migrants in Europe and the USA. As such, its contribution to the existing literature on penal apparatuses is outstanding.

By ‘criminalization of migrants’ the author means ‘all the discourses, facts and practices made by the police, judicial authorities, but also local governments, media and a part of the population that hold immigrants/aliens responsible for a large share of criminal offences.’ (p. 23) The twofold aim of the work is ‘to make an appraisal of the state of knowledge existing in this area [i.e. the contemporary racial criminalization of migrants] and suggest avenues for further research’ (p. 23). The book is divided into three parts. The first part, entitled ‘General overview’ is comprised of the first nine chapters. The second part presents four case studies in as many chapters; the two final chapters constitute the third part, focusing on particular state practices of control.

In Chapters 1 and 2, Salvatore Palidda outlines the longitudinal and cross-national framework of the work, underlining the emergence of racial profiling among European police forces in charge of controlling migrations in the early 1990s. In Chapter 3, Alessandro dal Lago conceptualizes cultural difference in the framework of contemporary migrations. Basing his argument on a rigorous criticism of Huntington’s (1996) *The Clash of Civilizations*, the author proposes to dismiss the mainstream, rather rigid concept of ‘culture’ for defining migrants. As Dal Lago argues, this would allow seeing ‘the migrant as an eminently fluid (i.e. marine) type’ (p. 60), who is able to confute the rigid territorial, chthonic notion of culture. In Chapter 4, Fabienne Brion carries out an investigation into the notions of ‘cultural defence’ and ‘cultural offence’, by looking at effects of these interrelated political and academic discourses. The author unmasks the fact that they become authoritative devices of justification for political and scientific interests as well as for hegemonic moralities concerning gender and cultural difference.

Marcello Maneri examines in Chapter 5 the news media’s construction of migrants in Italy in the 2000s, putting forward a threefold model of the media’s ‘frontlines for treating and controlling migration’ (p. 85). The first front is the definition of immigration as problem; the second front is the typification of tropes such as *clandestino*, reifying in one expression several different forms of international

mobility; the third is the internal front of urban security which makes a large use of the language of war with expressions such as ‘invasion’, ‘blitz’ and ‘campaign’. In Chapter 6, after a theoretical discussion on the role of maps and the changing functions of borders, Federico Rahola sketches an imaginary but plausible trip of a Sudanese person who is persecuted in her own country and tries to reach Italy. She would constantly transit in temporary places such as administrative detention centres before being forcibly sent back to her home country. This condition of permanent ephemerality is the effect of what the author calls the ‘detention machine’ (p. 101), shedding light on its role in producing ‘clandestinity’.

In Chapter 7, Jerome Vaully discusses the historical changes in asylum politics in France as the result of an increasing unbalance between ideologies on asylum and ideologies on immigration. Having transited from the technocratic management of asylum (in the 1960s and 1970s) to the securitarian neoliberal shift towards national border controls (in the 1980s and 1990s), we are currently facing a new turn, namely the Europeanization of public policies (in the 2000s), such as the ‘externalization of asylum’ (p. 115), which imposes a securitarian agenda at the expense of humanitarian ideologies on asylum. This securitarian turn in the 2000s is one of the main *files rouges* of the entire book, and can be defined as an increase in radicalization of institutional practices and in the rhetoric of security that is cross-national and characterizes both left- and right-wing parties.

In Chapter 8, Nando Sigona and Nidhi Trehan cast the history of the Europeanization of the ‘Roma issue’ within the post-1989 framework of increasing poverty rates and racism affecting Roma. The authors conclude by lucidly assessing the emerging Romani politics as unfortunately still unable to ‘etch out an adequate political role for itself’ (p. 132). Of particular interest in this chapter is a theoretical discussion on the arbitrariness of the concept of ethnicity, which the authors deconstruct by referring to Brubaker and colleagues’ (2006) seminal ethnographic study of nationalism in Transylvania. Such discussion, although brief, is directly linked to Dal Lago’s suggestion in Chapter 3 of treating ‘culture’ as something to be deconstructed and explained rather than as a tool for explanation, echoing in this way Brubaker’s (2004) alerting call to social scientists not to fall into ‘groupism’, namely treating groups, and ‘ethnic groups’ in particular, as ontological constitutive elements of the social world.

Alessandro de Giorgi in Chapter 9 empirically discusses the US penal system and its function as a ‘laboratory’ for European states. The author underlines three main issues: the prison as social policy, functioning as a device of social control; the lack of correlation between criminality rates and incarceration rates; and, finally, the ‘productive’ capacity of the penal state in shaping not only the market but more subtly the ways language defines social phenomena.

The volume’s second part is comprised of the case studies of France (Chapter 10, by Laurent Mucchielli and Sophie Nevanen); Germany (Chapter 11, by Hans-Jorge Albrecht); Spain (Chapter 12, by José Angel Brandariz Garcia and Cristina Fernandez Bessa), and Italy (Chapter 13, by Salvatore Palidda). They all examine mechanisms and state devices through which migrants are increasingly constructed as criminals, such as prohibitionist legislation; everyday police practices; and the continuum between administrative and penal measures. Among the four cases, Italy appears to be the most similar to the neoconservative USA for two interrelated reasons. First, the possibility of becoming a so-called ‘irregular migrant’ in Italy is greater than in other European countries, due to the uncertainty of the law and the consequent arbitrariness of its implementation. Second, discriminatory practices against migrants and minorities by Italian police officers remain almost always unpunished.

The last two chapters of the volume investigate the role of racial profiling at the US-Mexican border (Chapter 14, by Bernard E Harcourt), and of different UK policies restricting individual freedom, such as anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) and the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (ATCSA) (Chapter 15, by Yasha Maccanico).

This book is one of the first appraisals of the post-9/11 securitarian turn, that discusses in depth what Wacquant (2009) called 'the carceral catastrophe', adding that '[it] is already upon us, and so we'd better face it if we want to stop or reverse it'. All chapters are rich contributions to this end. In fact, the main value of this work is the presence of a broad and comprehensive framework within which different aspects of contemporary criminalization of migrants and minorities are enlightened. Related to that is its multidisciplinary character. Besides providing fine-tuned contributions in legal studies and criminology, the volume allows the reader to step into the sociology of culture (Dal Lago's chapter), media studies (Maneri's chapter), and postcolonial studies (Rahola's chapter), constantly enriching the picture of the phenomenon at hand.

Beside such a broad spectrum of contributions, the book has two major limitations. Race and racialization are core concepts for the understanding of the entire discussion. However, they seem to be left unexplained. How can race be conceptualized in the context of controlling contemporary migration? A brief discussion on this issue is proposed only in relation to precise domains (e.g. in Maneri's media analysis and in the chapter by Brion) and case studies (e.g. in Harcourt's analysis of trials regarding controls at the US-Mexican border), but it lacks systematic conceptualization. The second limitation consists in the fact that while the first aim of the work, i.e. 'to make an appraisal of the state of knowledge existing in this area', is fully met, the second one, i.e. 'to suggest venues for further research' (p. 23) seems far from being achieved, as no such suggestion is put forward.

This rich volume does not only expand the existing scholarship on criminalization and on migration. It is also an outstanding contribution to the sociology of the state, of inequality, and of neoliberalism in the 21st century.

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Hobos, Hustlers and Backsliders: Homeless in San Francisco. By Teresa Gowan. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. Pp. 368. \$24.95 (paper). ISBN: 9780816669677.

Various economic and social problems have come and gone throughout American history, but one has remained present across the country and throughout the years: homelessness. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was relatively common for people to migrate, constantly looking for work. This situation only increased with the Great Depression. Homelessness diminished for a few decades, but resurfaced in the 1970s. Sociologist Peter Rossi argued in 1989 that there had been a 224 percent increase in homelessness since 1975. Since the 1970s, numbers of homeless people have been increasing steadily.

While the problem of homelessness remains ever-present, its treatment and even definition is constantly changing. In *Hobos, Hustlers and Backsliders: Homeless in San Francisco*, Teresa Gowan explores how society views homelessness, as well as how the homeless view themselves. She argues