

Garbage

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Perceptions of unwanted migrants are often based on narratives about pollution and garbage (Petričević 2022: 110) and associated with fears of health threats (Župarić Iljić and Gregurović 2013). These narratives range from those stating that large numbers of migrants are “uncultured” and leave garbage in local environments, to extremely xenophobic remarks that label migrants as “garbage” that contaminates the community.

Ideas about pollution and dirt are based on material, as well as symbolic foundations. Mary Douglas (1966) introduced the most influential conceptualization of the impure as dangerous, where pollution is linked to the cultural cosmology of a particular social order. To define something as dirty requires classifying the phenomenon, its borders and margins. Dirt disturbs the balance and order, people marked as dirty are considered dangerous and immoral, and often create the need for ritual purification of the social structure after certain boundaries are transgressed. Such classifications most often follow individuals and groups that are structurally ambivalent, perceived as anomalies in the social order, or between different social statuses. In his analysis of rites of passage, Victor Turner (1969) developed the concept of liminality (from Latin *limen*) and emphasized that liminal individuals are marked as polluting, and consequently dangerous.

Liisa Malkki (1995: 4) argues that, in the national order of things, refugeehood is an aberration of categories and a zone of pollution. According to John Scanlan (2005: 182), each act of differentiation produces garbage, something that does not fit into the imagined structure and order. Mass migrations, refugeehood and other types of population movements intensify anxieties related to pollution and the construction of physical and cultural borders (Dürr and Jaffe 2010: 6). Bridget Anderson (2017: 6) emphasizes that discourses regarding asylum seekers often contain metaphors of vermin and invasion, associated with waste, large numbers and representing a threat to our home. Metaphors play an important role because they mediate between logical categories and emotions. Anderson reminds us that foreigners and other marginal subjects have been associated with animals, parasites and non-vital life forms throughout history. In line with these metaphors, perceptions of infestation can lead to real extermination practices. Anderson also notes that the etymological origin of the English word “exterminate” is “to put beyond the boundary.”

The material and symbolic dimension of garbage also contains a strong affective component, and garbage, as well as those labeled as “garbage,” is often accompanied by feelings of disgust. While analyzing cultural politics of emotions, Sara Ahmed (2004:86) notes that “[t]o be disgusted is after all *to be affected by what one has rejected*”. Through disgust, “bodies ‘recoil’” from their proximity (Ahmed 2004:80).. Disgust is a feeling that combines a physical experience with emotional strength and moral judgment, and as such maintains the boundaries of the self and marks boundaries, or creates them, in the material and social world (Durham 2011: 135). Furthermore, disgust is often directed towards lower classes in the social hierarchy (Durham 2011: 32). A similar way of thinking is also present in the concept of “emic places” by Zygmunt Bauman, who argues that such places often “vomit” those that are considered strange and foreign (Bauman 2000: 101). Sociocultural boundaries are strengthened by external influences, which can disrupt established social relations and hierarchies, being considered invasive threats that will contaminate the “pure” ethnonational entity (Dürr and Jaffe 2010: 6). Consequently, the desire to remove “foreign” dangerous elements can also lead to “ethnic cleansing” aimed at restoring the supposed state of peace and homogeneity of the community present before the arrival of Others.

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