



Public Lecture Series

Thursday 5 June 2025

**From the Border Spectacle to the Pornography of Border Violence:
The Visual Politics of a Contemporary State Ritual?**

Lorenzo Gabrielli, GRITIM-Universitat Pompeu Fabra

Discussant: Christin Achermann, University of Neuchâtel

18:00 – 19:30 CET

University of Neuchâtel (room to be announced) and on [WEBEX](#)

Abstract

Borders and border crossings seem to become increasingly central in political life in Europe and the global North as a threat to security or, alternatively, as a humanitarian issue. However, how does a social phenomenon that has accompanied humanity since its first steps become so central and so problematised? Among scholars' analyses of this change, a growing body of literature is exploring the issue of narratives and their effects on collective representations. In this frame, I will explore here the issue of visual narratives and representations of borders and border crossings at the Euro-African border. This reflection constitutes a work in progress arising from large previous research on the 'border spectacle' (i.e., De Genova, Cuttitta), namely the overvisibilization and the theatricalization of some migration flows at the Euro-African junction (lisière).

My overarching goal here is to relate the representations of migrations and border crossings to the larger reflection about the political spectacle and the representation of the state power (Balandier, Edelman, Debors). Firstly, I will take a departure from the analysis of the theatricalisation of some specific episodes and typologies of border crossings that made visible the phenomenon of 'irregular immigration', also allowing the representation of the state reaction. In particular, I will focus on the othering/racialisation dimension of this spectacle, namely how the figure of the racialised 'other' and outsider are presented, re-actualising historically built categories more or less subconsciously persistent, and framing then in a very specific way the contemporary racialisation process in Europe.

Secondly, I will focus more specifically on the visual representation of violence and death at the border through the prism of the "pornecropolitics" concept (Varela-Huertas), that is the pornography of necropolitics, the voyeurism of violence and death administered by political institutions at borders. The goal here is understanding the role of violence and death in migration and border policies as well as in border spectacle. Are violence and death a collateral effect, or a structural part of policies, supposedly dissuading potential migrants, or a strategically cruel act of state to reaffirm its power? This spectacularization of death and violence is constructing a "gore" pornography and playing a role to normalise, justify, and legitimise exceptionality by state apparatus and policies.

Thirdly, I will enlarge the discussion to encompass the broader frame of the 'political spectacle' and the 'theatrical representation of power' to frame the issue of violence and death towards racialised migrants and refugees at European borders. This effort will push further the study of the connections of migration and border policies with rituals, adding to the ritualistic dimension of 'hunting' (Anderson; Mendiola). I will interpret this representation of the state power at borders as a constitutive element of a cruel and sadistic contemporary state ritual, sanctioning racialised outsiders for defying the state power, as well as reaffirming his power towards insiders.

Bio

Lorenzo Gabrielli Ph.D. (with honours) in Political Science from LAM-Science Po Bordeaux, is a senior researcher at GRITIM-Universitat Pompeu Fabra, and an associate researcher at GEA (Group of African Studies)-Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. Actually, he is also a professor at Universitat Pompeu Fabra and at Universita Oberta de Catalunya. He is actively engaged in three research projects: PI in the project "Defend the Earth: articulating youth struggles in "Catalonia, the Mediterranean, and Abya Yala for global climate justice", the Horizon Europe project "UNDETERRED - Unintentional discrimination detected and racism reveal and Deactivate", the Marie Curie "EuroMedMig PhD Network".

His research interests may be summarised under the conceptual umbrella of borders and bordering processes, both at international and internal levels, including, among others, the geopolitics of human mobility in the Mediterranean and the Euro-African space, the external dimension of European immigration policies, the phenomenon of racism, racialization and othering, and the border spectacle and its evolution.

Selected Publications

Gabrielli, L. and Garcés Mascareñas, B. 2025. "The framing of migration as a hybrid military threat. Insights from the Ceuta's 2021 'crisis'". *Migration Studies* Volume 13, Issue 1, March 2025, mna007, <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnaf007>

Gabrielli L. and Varela-Huerta, A. 2024. "The Border Spectacle during the Pandemic: A Bottom-up Political Economy of Media within the American Border Regime", *Environment & Planning C: Politics & Space*. Online first <https://doi.org/10.1177/23996544241264920>

Ferrer-Gallardo, X. and Gabrielli L. 2022, "The Ceuta Border Peripeteia: Tasting the Externalities of EU Border Externalization", *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 37:3, 645-655, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2022.2048680>

Hellgren, Z. and L. Gabrielli, 2021, "Racialization and Aporophobia: Intersecting Discriminations in the Experiences of Non-Western Migrants and Spanish Roma", *Social Sciences*, 10(5), 163, <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10050163>

Gabrielli, L., 2021, "El espectáculo fronterizo en las representaciones fotográficas contemporáneas de la frontera de Melilla. Un sesgo de género" [The border spectacle in contemporary photographic representations of the Melilla border. A gender bias] in A. Varela-Huerta and M. Binimelis-Adell (eds.) 'Espectáculo de frontera' y contranarrativas audiovisuales', pp. 21-44. Peter Lang, <https://doi.org/10.3726/b16808>

Gabrielli, L. 2015, "Récurrence de la crise frontalière: l'exception permanente en Espagne", *Cultures & Conflits*, 99-100, pp. 75-98. <https://doi.org/10.4000/conflits.19091>