



Xenophobia

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... Writing from the UK:
Retreat to the island. Pull up the drawbridge. Close the portcullis. Patrol the moat. We are safe, at last. The changes to Britain's borders stemming from finally and fully exiting the European Union on 1st January 2021, and subsequent travel restrictions enacted since March 2020 as efforts to manage COVID-19, operationalise the fortification of an island. Our borders, once stretching, encompassing, and fluid through dual acts of violence and diplomacy, are solidifying in retreat in response to the threat of foreign dangers. These dangers include a new and unfamiliar coronavirus, and a trope so familiar to the national psyche that he even has a name, Johnny. Imagining a post-pandemic future is to imagine the dismantling of defensive infrastructure when the 'foreign danger' is perpetual and omnipresent, but also nebulous, amorphous and intangible. For 'foreignness' is continuously made and remade, resting on unbounded concepts such as culture, race, ethnicity and language.

The processes of othering that make the 'foreign' foreign and render the 'unknown' as unknowable, are deeply entrenched and demand conscious effort to see, unpack and rework. From the vantage point of development studies, a discipline with its own protracted entanglements with processes of othering, come a series of critical lenses – postcolonial and decolonial, among others – attuned to recognising the making of unknown subjects in lands faraway and near. Such lenses offer our community a way to see and frame the 'unknown' in ways supportive of a lively reimagining of our post-pandemic futures, where paths of openness, plurality and xenophilia can cut through castle walls.

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