

THE (IN)VISIBILITY OF RACIALIZED BORDER VIOLENCE? A UKRAINIAN KILLED IN LISBON AIRPORT

Júlia Garraio, Olga Solovova and Sofia José Santos

Abstract: On March 12, 2020, the Ukrainian citizen Ihor Homenyuk died, having been abused and tortured while in the custody of the Foreigners and Borders Office in Lisbon airport. This crime exposed what several NGOs and institutional reports had long denounced: the climate of impunity that enabled the denial of basic human rights to immigrants in closed spaces at the Portuguese border. Understanding the media as a pivotal place of both reflection and production of social meaning, this article examines the media coverage of this case and identifies the narratives that the case fuelled and the agendas by which it was co-opted. It explores how the public invisibility of violence at Portugal's borders, Portuguese imaginaries regarding Eastern European immigrants, and current understandings of racism helped frame the case as one of police brutality rather than as a racist crime. We aim to highlight the role of the Schengen border in the reconfiguration of racialized vulnerability and the (re)production of global hierarchies.

Keywords: borders; Eastern European immigrants; Portugal; Schengen; state violence

Introduction

On 12 March 2020, Ihor Homenyuk, a Ukrainian citizen, died following abuse and torture while in the custody of the Foreigners and Borders Office (SEF) in Lisbon airport. The event contrasts harshly with the pervasive national stereotype that the Portuguese are exceptionally welcoming towards foreigners because of the nation's long history of emigration. Indeed, Portugal had rarely witnessed similar reports of violence by state representatives since the country became a democracy in 1974.¹ However, no public outcry followed Homenyuk's death.

Stemming from the assumptions that (in)security narratives are guided by a "colonial power matrix" (Quijano 2000), and that racialization does not require a

Júlia Garraio, Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra

Olga Solovova, CEIS20-Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Coimbra

Sofia José Santos, Assistant Professor and Researcher, Faculty of Economics and Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra

difference in phenotype (Fox et al. 2012), we argue that the lack of reaction to this episode showcases the precarious integration of Eastern European immigrants in the Portuguese imagined community (Anderson 1983) and the hierarchical logic promoted by the Schengen border.

Violence towards migrants by the law enforcement authorities at the borders is not uncommon (Bhatia 2021; Grewcock 2010; Slack et al. 2016). The border tends to be perceived as the frontline protection of the authenticity and security of the national imagined community against (homogeneous and hierarchized) “others.” Amidst the pervasive global “colonial power matrix,” immigration status and ethnicity become conflated, so migrant groups are racialized and dehumanized. Racializing performs a key role in establishing a hierarchy that often renders migrants subaltern, threatening and negated. González (2000) points out racial profiling at the border as a “valid element for reasonable suspicion,” one of the hallmarks of police forces in border management practices. Thus, the border embodies a de-territorialized and imagined reality where the “border spectacle” of illegality is staged (De Genova 2013). This reassessment of immigration status, ethnicity and gender in light of the securitization of the national border and imagined community legitimizes a culture of violence that facilitates the abuse of immigrants (Bhatia 2020a, 2020b; Gutierrez 2021). The media plays a significant role in the (re)production of moral panic about “their” customs, and the racialization of crime and activation of elements within the vast repertoire of colonial/racist thinking assists in the production of external and internal others as a threat (Bhatia et al. 2018).

Portugal has often been proclaimed as practically free from racism because of the belief in a “national historical vocation for interculturality” (Aráujo 2013: 27). In popular discourse, racism is usually reduced to a hierarchical dichotomy between white and black. However, racialization as a social construction does not require a difference in phenotype, but is rather the essentialization of differences that reflects and reproduces structural inequalities. The construction of the (Western) “free world” in opposition to the “Eastern Bloc,” which pervaded Western European imaginaries in the twentieth century during the Cold War, was also promoted by popular culture. The creation and consolidation of the Schengen Area² that reframed identities and vulnerabilities, alongside the influx of immigrants since the 1990s from the former Soviet influenced zone, contributed to the creation of a new stereotype of immigrant in Portugal: the Eastern European immigrant.

The analysis of the reaction in the Portuguese media to Homenyuk’s death offers a valuable case study of the common attitudes towards Eastern European immigrants and national imaginaries about nation, migration and race. After the first section, which provides a description of the crime, we divide our analysis into three parts. First, we provide a diachronic overview of how Eastern European immigrants have been perceived in Portugal, while shedding light on their

apparent absence from debates about racism. Second, we explore the purpose and mission of the SEF, showcasing the way the security branch of the Portuguese state has been criticized for its practices of the abuse of immigrants in closed spaces. These two sections provide the broader context of our argument. Finally, we turn to the media, which indicate the processes of reflection and production of social meaning and that helped frame the crime. Our analysis identifies the prevailing patterns of media representations of the crime and the narratives fuelled by the case. It includes, first, news stories, opinion articles and editorials in *Público* covering Homenyuk's death between March 2020 (the crime) and July 2021 (when this article was written). Due to the large number of media articles, we chose to focus on *Público*'s coverage to identify main trends. The reasons for choosing *Público* are twofold. First, *Público* is one of the national newspapers which devoted most attention and resources to the case. Second, it is a centre-left broadsheet newspaper known for its extensive exposure of racism and the legacies of colonialism in Portuguese society while including a broad spectrum of columnists ranging from the conservative and Catholic sectors to politicians from the far-left. In addition to *Público*, as opinion editorials in other newspapers were also key to understanding pervasive imaginaries and how public opinion was informed, our analysis also includes editorials and op-eds published in the six most influential Portuguese newspapers.

By focusing on pervasive gendered imaginaries about Eastern European immigrants, SEF's closed spaces border control practices and media representations of Homenyuk's death, the aim of this article is to show how the crime relates to border imaginaries. Such imaginaries are linked not only to a colonial rationale but also to a "gendered characterization of racism" (Korac 2020: 82) that fed the dehumanization of Homenyuk at the hands of the SEF and the threat that his Eastern European masculinity had been perceived to embody. This case study contributes to the under-researched area of the public perceptions of Eastern European immigrants in Portugal, and their implications for the conceptualizations of nation, race and racism.

A Violent Crime That Did Not Shock the Country

Ihor Homenyuk's death was registered at 6.40 pm on March 12, 2020, by the SEF in Lisbon airport. With a biometric passport and a valid work permit for Belgium, he had travelled from Ukraine via Istanbul and arrived in Portugal two days earlier. Having been stopped, searched and refused entry by the border control officers, he refused to take a flight back.

Since 2014, Ukraine and Portugal (via the EU) had been developing new bilateral agreements, which culminated in June 11, 2017, in the implementation of the Schengen Area Agreement, whereby Ukrainians with biometric passports became

entitled to travel to Schengen Area countries visa-free for stays not exceeding 90 days in a period of 180 days. Jobseekers still needed a visa to enter the member state where they intended to seek employment.

Although Homenyuk had the necessary documents to continue his journey to Belgium, he was escorted to a medical room on March 12, 2020, at 8 am, where no surveillance cameras were available. The border control officers later claimed that Homenyuk had an epileptic seizure, a statement contested by the representative of the Institute of Forensic Medicine who reported severe thorax injuries and signs of suffocation to Homenyuk's body, who had been likely bound, gagged and clubbed to death. Both the director and the deputy director of the SEF in Lisbon had to resign (March 20). After being held for questioning, the three SEF inspectors responsible were indicted for murder (September 30). A more detailed report released by the Inspection of Internal Administration in October 2020 also implicates other SEF inspectors, security and medical staff for neglect and for providing neither help nor medication (Henriques 2020).

The Embassy of Ukraine dispatched a verbal note to the Portuguese authorities describing the event as “a case of blatant violation of human rights” and “abuse of power.” Apart from this and the statement from the president of the Association of Ukrainians in Portugal, Pavlo Sadokha, there was little reaction across the Ukrainian-speaking media. As the events unfolded, they appeared to refrain from giving any analysis of the case, as they reported only factual information.

On December 4, Ylva Johansson, the European commissioner for home affairs, in a meeting with Eduardo Cabrita, then the Portuguese minister of internal affairs, inquired about the conditions of detention centres at Portuguese airports and Homenyuk's death. Portugal took this as a European appeal for accountability regarding not only the crime but also the SEF's practices. In five days, Cristina Gatões, the national director of the SEF, resigned, while the minister, perceived as one of the strongest allies of the Portuguese prime minister, survived amidst increased calls from the opposition for his resignation.³ The reform of the SEF was then discussed as a pressing issue.

The trial of the three officers (February 2 through May 10, 2021) revealed that the abuse and torture of Ihor Homenyuk at the SEF facilities had been witnessed, making his death preventable had someone assisted him. It also unveiled the attempts to cover up the crime by picturing Homenyuk in the media/reports as prone to epileptic seizures and as an alcoholic. According to the evidence, unregistered weapons had been used by the SEF officers. The Ukrainian-speaking Homenyuk had not been provided with a proper translator and was questioned by a Russian-speaking inspector. The three perpetrators were sentenced to seven to nine years in jail for a serious offence to physical integrity leading to death. The judge also ordered an inquest into those who had not assisted Homenyuk (Henriques 2021).

Race, Racism and Perceptions of Eastern European Immigrants in Portugal

Colonialism has shaped Portugal's migration processes, racial governmentalities and contemporary debates on racism (Araújo and Maeso 2015). The colonial project attracted many Portuguese as settlers, state representatives and military personnel. Enslaved Black people were trafficked on a large scale to Portugal to supply cheap labour. The decades after the 1974 revolution and independence of the former colonies in Africa were marked by immigration from these countries. Government social programmes invested in housing Black people alongside Roma people in suburban areas, especially on the outskirts of Lisbon, areas which gradually became associated with precarity, poverty and crime. The population of these neighbourhoods (especially the racialized youth), being constructed as a social threat, has been the target of securitizing discourse and discriminating institutional practices. Hence, Portuguese anti-racist discourses tend to focus on specific groups—Black people and Roma people—and on the problems which affect them most, for example, the lack of access to better housing, citizenship and protection from police violence. These issues are seen as expressions of structural racism, understood as different from discrimination and xenophobia. It is entangled in the persistence of segregation and exclusion of Roma families, alongside the legacies of colonialism and its objectivation, devaluation and brutalization of Black bodies (Maeso 2021). So, race and racism, despite being recognized as socially constructed processes of exclusion and (re)production of hierarchies, are currently associated in Portuguese society with particular phenotypes entangled in a history of discrimination.

More recently there have been massive migratory flows to Portugal. Migration from the states of the ex-USSR has had a significant impact on national legislation and discourse about language, citizenship and identity, leading some scholars to describe the period between 2001 and 2012 as the Slavic period of the state's policies (Pinto 2008). It had been brought on by a series of geopolitical and economic events such as the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the establishment of the Schengen Area, the financial crises in the newly independent states and the need for cheap labour for the great construction sites of EXPO-1998 and Euro-2004. Whereas before 2000, over 70 per cent of immigrants came to Portugal from one of the many Portuguese-speaking former colonies (Baganha et al. 2004: 95), by 2004, Ukrainian nationals had become the second most widely represented group of migrants (Baganha et al. 2004: 98). Despite the recent decrease in the number of post-Soviet immigrants, they still constitute over 16 per cent of the population of immigrant origin in Portugal, where Ukrainians are the fifth largest group, accounting for over 4 per cent of the foreign population in 2020 (RIFA 2020: 2). The new groups of immigrants, most of whom “had never heard of Portugal” (Mendes 2010: 379; Baganha et al. 2010: 61), came from home countries with “no particular

economic, historic or cultural links to Portugal” (Santos et al. 2009). The Portuguese also had little idea about them. Until the very end of the 1990s, Eastern Europeans in Portugal were still grouped as “*soviéticos*” [the Soviets]. Yet with their steady influx in the period 2000–2015, they became designated “*imigrantes de leste (europeu)*” [immigrants from the east (of Europe)].⁴ This coinage reflected the popular concern about the enlargement of the EU to the east and helped distinguish the new immigrants from immigrant groups from Brazil and African countries. Based on the unclear geographical and/or geopolitical criteria, this designation is a controversial term, applied both to immigrants from post-Soviet states (including Asian ones) and sometimes to those from the former Warsaw Pact countries. Further EU advancement to the east has made the term lose its descriptive and comparative value. Several studies in Portugal have found it problematic, and, accordingly, immigrants themselves have rejected it (Baganha et al. 2010; Mendes 2010).

The main tropes within the new stereotype in the making of Eastern Europe in general and Ukraine specifically were that they are a potential market for Portuguese goods and services; that they bring violence and crime; are a threat to national employment; are used in precarious and exploited work; and occupy a space of cultural distance (including in religion and values) and emotional reserve (Solovova 2004). The media played a key role in the (re)production of these tropes, adopting a range of accounts from linking them stereotypically to “*mafias de Leste*” [Eastern European mafias] to reporting fleeting intercultural contact. Solovova’s analysis of the media representations of Eastern Europeans using the systemic functional framework (Halliday 1978; Rhea 1998; Fowler 1999) has identified four main features: passivity; powerlessness towards the Portuguese authorities, employers and the mafia; precarity; emotional reserve and cultural distance (2004: 213). The stereotypical representations of “*imigrantes de Leste*” in Portugal have been gradually consolidated into “a Ukrainian, formerly illegal and doing menial jobs, a good worker yet heavy drinker.” These tropes appear to punctuate the SEF officers’ reports from Homenyuk’s case.

Since 2007 and until the latest Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) measurements in 2019, Portugal has been invariably placed among the top ten countries in the ranking of best policies of integration. The country has been praised for its citizenship model and security for migrants. This fact should nevertheless be held in a critical light against the research evidence of the institutional discrimination of immigrants in Portugal (Santos et al. 2009; Mendes 2010; Baganha et al. 2010), of the practices of negative stereotyping of immigrants in the Portuguese media (Silveirinha and Cristo 2004; Solovova 2004), and of the progressive loss of their professional qualifications in Portuguese society (Baganha et al. 2010). The case of Ihor Homenyuk also testifies to a less secure scenario than that which the MIPEX-2019 claims regarding Portugal.

Violence and discrimination against Eastern European immigrants tend to be perceived in Portugal as resulting from xenophobia exacerbated by anxieties associated with international crime and precarity, but are rarely articulated as racism. People of their phenotype (white, fair hair and fair eyes) can be stereotypically associated with privilege in Portugal—not only in the context of national beauty standards but also nurtured by experiences of discrimination of Portuguese immigrants in Northern Europe. However, research from other social contexts argues that shared whiteness does not exempt certain groups from discrimination and racism, since racialization does not “require putative phenotypical or biological difference” (Fox et al. 2012: 681). Instead, “race” is a “socially constructed contingent outcome of processes and practices of exclusion. It is the valorized language through which structured inequalities (measured in labour market position, differential access to scarce resources, legal status, and cultural stereotypes) are expressed, maintained, and reproduced” (Fox et al. 2012: 681). The immigration from Eastern Europe to Portugal from the 1990s onwards bears all the marks of these processes: a subaltern positioning in a social tissue of structured inequalities (institutionalized racism); and the essentialization of a diversity of people in specific cultural traits and practices (cultural racism). Moreover, due to the stereotyped links to the mafia—aggressive masculinity, prostitution, violence against women and alcoholism—Eastern Europeans were perceived as people who engage in practices that are damaging to the Portuguese social tissue.

The SEF: Foreigners, Borders and State Violence

In the aftermath of the dismantling and reorganization of security and police forces after the Portuguese Carnation Revolution (1974), the *Serviço de Estrangeiros* [Foreigners Office] was created in 1976 and was restructured in 1986 as the *Serviço para Estrangeiros e Fronteiras* (SEF) [Foreigners and Borders Office]. As a “security service” within the Ministry of Internal Administration and framed within an “internal security policy,” the SEF’s formal mission is

ensuring the control of people at the borders, foreigners in national territory, the prevention of and fight against crime related to illegal immigration and human trafficking, managing travel and identification documents for foreigners, and instructing asylum applications, safeguarding internal security and individual rights and freedoms.

(SEF 2021).

The SEF, thus, combines administrative and police services, framing its action through security and preserving the national identity/interest. Since the Spanish land border is not guarded, and sea border crossings are rare, the airport—as a

pivotal exit and entry space for the national Portuguese space—is the SEF front-line for securing the national borders.

Despite the overall compliance of the Portuguese legal framework with the international human rights laws, several NGOs and (inter)national institutions have reported the SEF's violence towards migrants, especially at airports. In 2018, for instance, *The Asylum Information Database*, coordinated by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, criticized the SEF for its detention of children and the lack of interpreters for migrants (Henriques 2018b). The Portuguese ombudswoman, who had observed the application of the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Degrading or Inhuman Treatment or Punishment, also directed criticism at the SEF. Her 2018 report denounced the temporary installation centres—Homenyuk died in one of those—as hyper-volatile and impenetrable places, like a contemporary no-man's land, where applicants do not have easy access to information and may find themselves in great isolation. The report also highlighted the lack of state means to monitor these spaces and prevent abuse there (Henriques 2018a). The airport border emerges as a *huís clos*—that is, the backstage of the “border spectacle” (De Genova 2013)—where, away from the public eye, SEF practices condoned abuse.

Homenyuk's death made the reports and calls for the reform of the SEF difficult to ignore. Maria Lúcia Amaral, the Portuguese ombudsman who coordinated the 2018 report, spoke on April 1, 2020, of the urgency of creating alternatives to the SEF. Five days later, the minister announced plans to reform the SEF and two days later his ministry announced the creation of pools of interpreters and the placement of video cameras in every room. The reform of the SEF was scheduled to start in January 2021. On April 14, the council of ministers approved the abolition of the SEF, voted in Parliament on July 9. However, due to the dissolution of Parliament and early elections in January 2022 amidst the Covid pandemic, the government postponed the abolition of the SEF for six months, leaving it to the next government to implement. At the time of writing, the abolition of the SEF remains uncertain and it is also unclear how the delegation of its functions to other police forces will end anti-migrant abuse by state representatives. In sum, Homenyuk's death appears to have boosted efforts to make Portuguese institutions comply with international legislation on torture and mistreatment of migrants in border spaces, rather than a discussion of Schengen and EU immigration policies, which means that the political moves are still informed by the urgency of border control via legal means.

The Media Coverage of Ihor Homenyuk's Death

A “catch-all” media model prevails in the Portuguese mediascape, where national newspapers' op-eds and editorials seek to include a diversity of ideological perspectives and political actors (Arons de Carvalho 2011). Nonetheless, newspapers

tend to be perceived as flying particular political colours, not only because they appear to include mostly opinions from certain political sectors, but also to highlight particular issues.

Concerning the case under analysis, it was one of the sensationalist, privately owned TV channels (TVI) that first reported the death of Ihor Homenyuk on March 29, 17 days later, following the dismissal of the SEF branch in Lisbon and the house arrest of three inspectors. The media coverage of this case is nevertheless associated with the investigative journalists working for two national centre-left newspapers, Joana Gorjão Henriques (*Público*), and Fernanda Câncio and Valentina Marcelino (*Diário de Notícias*). They critically examined official sources and questioned state institutions and political actors about the ongoing investigation and the implications of Homenyuk's death regarding the SEF's practices. Indeed, their in-depth engagement with the case made them stand apart in the Portuguese mediascape.

Focusing on *Público's* coverage, we examine the evolution of the media visibility of the case and the framing of the story by looking at the following categories: tags, actors in the story, photos and sources. This analysis is then complemented by a selection of editorials and op-eds published in the six most influential Portuguese newspapers which cover a broad spectrum of the Portuguese political mediascape, from left to right. The analysis of the editorials and op-eds explores the way in which Homenyuk's case informed and framed Portuguese political debates. We collected our data from the newspapers' websites by searching under the words "Ihor Homenyuk."

The fluctuating media visibility of Ihor Homenyuk's death and its implications

As can be inferred from Table 1, with the timeline of coverage of Ihor Homenyuk's death in the daily newspaper *Público*, the presence of the case in the Portuguese media fluctuated. It gained significant media visibility eight months after the public disclosure of the crime and in association with later developments:

Table 1 Media occurrences throughout March 2020–July 2021

	2020										2021						
	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July
<i>News</i>	2	6	1	2		1	3	1	4	32	8	14	7	6	3		1
<i>Interviews</i>			1							1			1				
<i>Editorials</i>								1		1							
<i>Op-eds</i>		1								5		1				1	
<i>Others</i>							1						1				
Total	2	7	2	2	0	1	4	2	4	39	8	14	8	8	3	1	1

The highest peak occurs in December 2020 in the context of intense political pressure on the minister of internal affairs to resign, following his meeting with the European commissioner for home affairs. The beginning of the trial of the three officers accounts for the second yet considerably lower peak in February 2021. The third peak has three points: January 2021 (the government decision to abolish the SEF and to pay compensation to the family), and March and April 2021 (the ongoing trial). Even if we were to consider the weeks following the crime as a single peak (March and April 2020), the public disclosure of the crime ranks only as the third peak. This indicates that the political repercussions of the crime (diplomacy and government) and the trial were granted significantly more public attention than the public exposure of the crime itself. It also suggests that the Homenyuk case started to feature in Portuguese national debates because of top-down pressure, that is, it took the meeting with a high-ranking EU official rather than a nationwide or grassroots condemnation to make the crime a political affair.

This lack of initial public and media engagement would be usually assumed to result from the intense coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Portuguese authorities declared a state of emergency on March 18, in the week prior to Homenyuk's death, and people turned to the media to be offered guidance to interpret and cope with this unprecedented, fearful and uncertain situation (Cardoso et al. 2020).

The initial scarcity of public attention to the crime opened way for a narrative that used Homenyuk's death for the "devaluation of other causes" (Guerreiro 2020), namely for a backlash against anti-racist activism. In her column for the conservative digital newspaper *Observador* on June 4, 2020, Zita Seabra frames an attack against the Portuguese left by contrasting the intensive media coverage and activist response to the torture of George Floyd with the indifference towards Homenyuk. She argues that the left normalized the death of Ukrainians: "Important are the victims who can be used for political goals, who are interesting for left-wing agendas. The others are erased" (Seabra 2020). Before Floyd's killing there had been several acts of racist police violence and hate crimes targeting Black people in Portugal which sparked media attention and demonstrations. Floyd's killing—which took place precisely when the lockdown restrictions were beginning to be lifted—fuelled a significant mobilization in Portugal and was widely covered. Portuguese anti-racism activists used it to advocate for a "translation" of the BLM struggles into the Portuguese context and to amplify existing contestations in the ongoing debates about the legacies of colonization (Garraio 2020).

Although Homenyuk's death did not trigger similar protests, it was the people known for their anti-racism activism and/or engagement with the legacies of colonialism who contributed most to the media visibility of the crime. The first op-ed about Homenyuk (*Público*, 2 April 2020) is by Mamadu Ba, a Senegal-born

Portuguese anti-racism activist who has been repeatedly the target of hate speech and death threats. His op-ed interprets the death of Homenyuk as resulting from the climate of abuse and xenophobia at SEF facilities and, more broadly, of the Portuguese state policies of immigration. *Público*'s prominence in the coverage of the case results mostly from the investigative journalism of Joana Gorjão Henriques, a Portuguese journalist known for her work on racism in Portugal and the legacies of colonialism. Henriques authored 66 out of *Público*'s 91 news items on the case and conducted the two interviews. Nineteen of the twenty pieces published in the newspaper before December, that is, in the months of indifference, were authored by her. Fernanda Cândia and Valentina Marcelina, from the *Diário de Notícias*, are the other journalists who contributed to the media visibility of the case. Cândia is known for her feminist and anti-racism engagement. She has devoted eight opinion texts to Homenyuk in her regular column at *Diário de Notícias*, two of them published in the days following the public announcement of the crime (April 4 and 11). Her texts revealed a critical reading of the official documents on the killing, resulting in questioning the state institutions and investigation procedures. She is also among the journalists who sought to provoke an empathetic response from readers through her vivid accounts of Homenyuk's ordeal with emotional depictions of his bewilderment, loneliness and panic (see Cândia 2020). She assumed that the initial general indifference to the case had resulted from the lack of public interest in police abuse and protection of human rights. When, following the meeting with the European commissioner, the crime gained visibility, it ended up being framed as a case of police violence and violation of human rights. In the following section, we propose examining the tags, actors, sources and photos used in *Público*'s coverage of Homenyuk's death in order to explore the framing of the crime as a case of police violence. This opened the way to scrutiny of the practices of the SEF and discussion of the political accountability of particular state representatives.

Questioning the SEF's practices in the enforcement of law

The tags created by the *Público*'s journalists throughout their coverage show how the case was initially reported as a crime and then steadily evolved into a political debate on the practices of the SEF, as Table 2 highlights.

The analysis of the actors in *Público*'s coverage corroborates this framing of the story as a case to discuss the (mal)functioning of particular Portuguese institutions. Taking into account the active versus passive stance of different actors in the reported incident, we have identified five categories of actors involved in the case as it was covered by *Público*: victims, perpetrators, bystanders, justice seekers and the politically accountable. Homenyuk is explicitly represented as a victim: someone who was beaten and tortured to death and who was denied basic rights

Table 2 Tags used by the *Publico* in March 2020–July 2021

	2020												2021												Total
	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July								
<i>Crime</i>	2	4	1			1	1	1	2									15							
<i>SEF</i>		2					2	1	1	25	5	12	4	3	3		1	58							
<i>Ombudsman</i>				1														1							
<i>Human Rights</i>				2						1								3							
<i>Airport</i>									1									1							
<i>Justice</i>										1				2				3							
<i>MAI</i>										2								2							
<i>New Director</i>										1								1							
<i>Ihor Homenyuk</i>										1	1			1		1		4							
<i>Diplomacy</i>										1								1							
<i>Ukraine</i>											1							1							
<i>Immigration</i>											1							1							
<i>Parliament</i>												1	1					2							

(translator, medical assistance). His family also emerges as a victim of the crime, not only due to the distress of the loss and the lies spread by SEF officials, but also of the economic implications (Homenyuk was the breadwinner for his wife and two children back in Ukraine). Some news items contain references to official reports that denounce the climate of abuse at SEF facilities towards a broader category of victims, that is, immigrants arriving at Lisbon airport, thus reinforcing the idea that Homenyuk’s death resulted from entrenched bad practices at the border control. Nonetheless, the construction of the victim category does not lead to the articulation of the experiences of Eastern European immigrants or Ukrainians in Portugal nor does it address them as political subjects.

The “perpetrator” category includes not only the three officers indicted for the crime, but may also include other officers and security staff. The “bystander” category, encompassing those who witnessed the crime without attempting to prevent it and/or those who helped cover it up, is fluid as it intersects with the disputed identification of those responsible for the crime. It includes officers who were on duty, and those who issued and validated the documents reporting his death. The “justice seeker” category includes the doctor who prepared the autopsy, registering signs of violence and thus triggering the police investigation, an author of an anonymous tip to the authorities, and the Public Prosecutor’s Service. External actors like the European commissioner, the Ukrainian ambassador and the lawyer representing the family are seen as seeking justice. The “politically accountable”

Table 3 Register of photographs used to illustrate the news items

	SEF (facilities, badges, airport)	SEF (Director)	SEF (defendants during trial)	Legal Medicine	Ombudsman	Minister Eduardo Cabrita	Prime-Minister António Costa	President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa	Parliament and other politicians	European Commissioner	Ihor Homenyuk	Lawyer representing the family	Books alluding to immigration	
	23	7	18	1	3	16	2	3	2	1	19	1	1	News
	1	1				1								Interviews
			1											Other
	24	8	19	1	3	17	2	3	2	1	19	1	1	Total

category was one of the main grounds of dispute in the political repercussions of the case: it includes the directorate of the SEF in Lisbon and the national director, who resigned over the case, as well as the minister, who did not.

In sum, the actors emerging from the media coverage are mostly state officials and representatives. Apart from Homenyuk's family, who were represented by a Portuguese lawyer, the voices of the migrant/external Other were almost absent. The photos reproduced in *Público's* coverage further evidence this trend, as Table 3 highlights.

If we were to group the categories in three main areas: SEF (51), (Portuguese) political representatives (24) and the victim/those who represent his family (20), we would conclude that Homenyuk, the protagonist of this story, is the least visually represented. Photos of other Eastern European immigrants are simply absent from the coverage.

The sources used in the coverage reinforce the framing of the case as a story about Portuguese institutions: these are mostly declarations by state representatives (government, justice, police) and official documents by state institutions: General Inspection of Internal Administration, Ministry of the Interior, Public Prosecutor's Office, Justice Ombudsman, National Prevention Mechanism, Legal Medicine. All of them were scrutinized by journalists not only to denounce the brutality of the crime but also to frame it not as an unexpected accident but as the outcome of impunity that made room for the abuse of migrants at the border, previously denounced in several reports by NGOs and authorities. Apart from the lawyer representing the family and a few Portuguese representatives of organizations defending immigrants, verbal sources presenting an immigrant perspective were scarce. When quoted, they functioned as testimonies to shed light on the crime (e.g. the Ukrainian friend who recounted what had brought Homenyuk to Portugal) and the practices at the SEF's airport facilities (from immigrants who had been there). This turns the coverage into a scrutiny of SEF practices contributing to opening a long-overdue public debate sought by the many associations working with migrants. This also led to the discussion on border violence in closed spaces and the urgency of the reform of the SEF, but not to a reflection on broader immigration experiences, on ongoing stereotyping and racialization processes towards Eastern European immigrants.

A pretext to topple a powerful minister of the socialist government?

In order to identify the political uses made of Homenyuk's death, we broadened the scope of our analysis to the editorials and op-eds published in the six most influential Portuguese newspapers:

- *Diário de Notícias* (DN), a centre-left print newspaper with an online edition;
- *Público*, a centre-left daily print newspaper with an online edition;
- *Expresso*, a centre-right weekly print newspaper with an online edition;

- *Observador*, a right-wing digital native medium and the only medium in Portugal that has an openly defined political trend;
- *Jornal de Notícias* (JN), a daily print newspaper with an online edition;
- *Correio de Manhã* (CM), a daily sensationalist tabloid with an online edition.

We can observe that Homenyuk's case was discussed within very specific debates on national politics, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Main themes of the editorials and op-eds published across Portuguese newspapers

	Público	Observador	CM	JN	DN	Expresso	Total
<i>SEF</i>	5		2		5	1	13
<i>Political pressure on the minister or other politicians</i>	1	10	2	5		4	22
<i>Legal issues</i>					1	1	2
<i>Racism, xenophobia, immigration</i>	1	1					2
<i>Indifference to the crime</i>		1			1		2
<i>SEF and police violence</i>	3		1		2		6
<i>Other</i>		1	1			1	3

Twenty-two out of a sample of fifty items express criticism of state representatives. The majority were published in the conservative *Observador* and in *JN*. Only 13 use Homenyuk's death to discuss the SEF's practices and policies, while six open a broader discussion of police violence in Portugal. The majority are from the centre-left newspapers *Público* and *DN*. Opinions expressed by more left-oriented columnists signal an effort to prevent the case being reduced to an attack on a socialist government heavyweight (e.g. Tavares 2000). Hence, the majority of editorials and op-eds framed Homenyuk's death in debates targeting specific sectors involving the Portuguese state (the SEF and/or Government), while only a few broadened the discussion to larger social practices and the situation of immigrants in Portugal. One of the exceptions is the sole op-ed authored by a Ukrainian, Pavlo Sadokha (2020), writing for *Observador* as president of the Association of the Ukrainians in Portugal. He called on the Portuguese society and political establishment to reform the immigration law and to rethink social attitudes towards immigrants in order to spare hard-working and law-abiding migrants like Homenyuk from state violence, exploitation and criminal networks. Sadokha capitalizes on the positive stereotyping of Ukrainians as diligent workers and people who rarely question the authorities, while avoiding any reference to the negative

ones. Paradoxically, his narrative appears to recycle the same tropes that helped create the “imigrante de leste” stereotype. None of the other columnists who discuss immigration addressed the stereotyping either. A few refer to racism and xenophobia as attitudes framing the practices of the SEF and police violence in Portugal, and only Loff’s op-ed (2020) explicitly defines the crime as deriving from xenophobia, while Ba’s second op-ed (2021)—which is about the pervasiveness of racism—refers briefly to Homenyuk’s death as one of several racially motivated crimes in Portugal.

The possible link between the killing of Homenyuk and broader Portuguese society is established in the six texts which discuss the SEF’s practices in the context of police violence. Among them, one that stands out is “Addressing the roots: more social policies, less police violence” (Coletivo Associações Anti-Racistas 2020), an op-ed by 26 collectives (including anti-racism associations) and over 100 activists, scholars and artists. It declares that Homenyuk’s case and situations of police violence targeting Black people “*are provoking an important but belated public debate on the relationship of police forces with the immigrant, racialized and poor communities.*” The text does not assume that the killing of Homenyuk was motivated by racism, but rather by state policies which result in police violence which affects three categories most: immigrants, racialized people and the economically disadvantaged. By opposing a hierarchization of victims, it establishes a common ground among those who are subjected to structural discrimination and police violence.

Final Remarks

Immigration from Eastern European countries to Portugal has led to the homogenized perception of these immigrants, sustained by gendered stereotypes with positive and negative traits: on one hand, they were perceived as diligent albeit exploited workers; on the other, they were associated with mafias, alcoholism, violence and sexual trafficking. The abuse and torture that Ihor Homenyuk suffered at the SEF’s facilities suggests that the crime might have been framed by his racialization as an Eastern European immigrant: his precarious legal status created the conditions for the denial of his basic rights (translator, medical care, enforcement of EU agreements with Ukraine); it also signals the activation of certain cultural tropes that meant he was perceived as dangerous, while the alleged tough Eastern European masculinity led to him being obliged to comply through violence. However, these possible connections between the violence at the airport and the way Eastern European immigrant masculinities are imagined in Portugal were not articulated in the debates triggered by the case, and not even by those columnists who perceived his death as being framed by xenophobia and racism.

In our view, this kind of media treatment rests on a set of contradictory discursive traits in the stereotypical portrayal of Eastern Europeans in Portugal. First, prior to the case of Homenyuk, there had been several mediatized cases of violence against Black people, but very few—if any—mediatized episodes of violence towards Eastern European immigrants in the Portuguese public sphere. Furthermore, their stereotypical phenotype (blue eyes and fair hair) is associated with racial privilege. This contributed to the idea that no prior prejudice is linked to these immigrants in Portugal. Second and paradoxically, this stereotype positions Eastern Europeans on *both* sides of violence: as perpetrators and as being exploited and subjected to violence. Finally, the media neglect concerning Eastern Europeans in Portugal as political subjects—and particularly until the aftermath of this case and before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022—also contributed to their invisibility as a (racialized) category in Portugal.

The coverage of Homenyuk's death by *Público*—a newspaper that is known for its attention to issues related to human rights, police violence, racism and colonialism—should be understood against this background. The focus of the coverage of the events and the identification of responsibilities, framed by the discussion of the practices of the SEF, contributed to a debate on policies and the political accountability of the hierarchies. It also prevented any form of voyeurism and sensationalism that is often present in coverage of crimes characterized by such gruesome details; instead, the crime became a political case with the potential of triggering political change. However, this angle did not allow for the experiences of Eastern European (and Ukrainian) migrants as a specific category to be discussed. Rather the case was framed as a crime derived from the malfunctioning/malpractice of institutions and the vulnerabilities of immigrants on the border, but not necessarily in connection with their racialization. Nor did it lead to viewing immigrants as political subjects in Portuguese contemporary multicultural society. The abuse suffered at the border and its relation to the legal status of Eastern European (or Ukrainian) immigrants in Portugal and Portuguese social attitudes towards them were not questioned. Thus, we argue, the coverage of Homenyuk's death contributed to the debate being geared towards the need to implement good practices at the border (i.e. practices compliant with European norms) and to condemn those accountable for abuse.

Even though the Portuguese debates on Homenyuk's death did not articulate him as a racialized person, his killing was perceived by anti-racism journalists, activists and scholars as resulting from institutional structures/practices which affect racialized people in Portugal. Given the prior denouncement of police violence and abuse carried out by the SEF by different official organs and NGOs, the case highlighted the urgency of the reform and opened ways for political measures to end the climate of impunity in the SEF's closed-off spaces.

However, the nature of the Schengen border as an institution of violence was barely articulated in the debate. Unlike the widely disseminated suffering and violence endured by border-crossing migrants in the Balkan route and in the Mediterranean region, the particular political geography of Portugal kept the potential sites of violence and exclusion on the border hidden from the public eye (the closed-off spaces in airports) or simply not perceptible as such. Despite the abuse denounced by NGOs and state institutions, the media condoned the idea that it could be easily solved through accountability and surveillance of closed-off spaces. The debates generated by Homenyuk's death reinforced this narrative, without being able to trigger a wider discussion of the experience of Eastern European (or Ukrainian) immigrants in Portugal, nor of Portuguese policies of immigration and the performative role of borders in the creation of global hierarchies. In sum, it has been a debate about "us," or rather about how to improve "our" institutions and scrutinize "our" representatives. It was not a debate about the Other, namely about the immigrant who is not perceived as truly belonging to the imagined community nor about the legal framework which determines who can freely cross "our" borders and enter "our" territory.

Notes

1. There have been cases, however, the most violent one being a decapitation at a police station in Sacavém in 1994. For a detailed examination of racist police violence in Portugal see Maeso (2021) and Fernandes (2021).
2. The border-free Schengen Area guarantees free movement to more than 400 million EU citizens. See: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/schengen-borders-and-visa/schengen-area_en.
3. The Minister's resignation came in December 2021, after a deadly highway speeding charge incident.
4. The expression "*imigrante de leste (europeu)*" is a direct Portuguese translation of "Eastern (European) immigrant." Immigrants from the Middle and Far East are called in Portugal "*imigrante dos países do Médio Oriente*" and "*imigrante oriental*," thus "*leste*" being reserved for Eastern Europeans.

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