



Brown Threat: Identification in the Security State

Kumarini Silva

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What is “brown” in—and beyond—the context of American identity politics? How has the concept changed since 9/11? In the most sustained examination of these questions to date, Kumarini Silva argues that “brown” is no longer conceived of solely as a cultural, ethnic, or political identity. Instead, after 9/11, the Patriot Act, and the wars in Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan, it has also become a concept and, indeed, a strategy of identification—one rooted in xenophobic, imperialistic, and racist ideologies to target those who do not neatly fit or subscribe to ideas of nationhood.

Interweaving personal narratives, ethnographic research, analyses of popular events like the Miss America pageant, and films and TV shows such as the Harold and Kumar franchise and *Black-ish*, Silva maps junctures where the ideological, political, and mediated terrain intersect, resulting in an appetite for all things “brown” (especially South Asian brown) by U.S. consumers, while political and nationalist discourses and legal structures (immigration, emigration, migration, outsourcing, incarceration) conspire to control brown bodies both within and outside the United States.

Silva explores this contradictory relationship between representation and reality, arguing that the representation mediates and manages the anxieties that come from contemporary global realities, in which brown spaces, like India, Pakistan, and the Middle East pose key economic, security, and political challenges to the United States. While racism is hardly new, what makes this iteration of brown new is that anyone or any group, at any time, can be branded as deviant, as a threat.



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