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### Images of Illegalized Immigration. Towards a Critical Iconology of Politics

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## Review

Bischoff, C., Falk, F. and Kafehsy, S. (eds), **Images of Illegalized Immigration. Towards a Critical Iconology of Politics**  
Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2010, 178 pp., € 25.80  
pb. (ISBN 978-3-8376-1537-1)

This publication, which follows a conference held at the University of Basel in August and September 2009, aims to enable the development of new and innovative perspectives on illegalised immigration. Visual and verbal images currently shape illegalised immigration to the point where the issue has become iconic. It is therefore relevant to focus on the mechanisms structuring public perceptions of illegal communities and to map out the iconography of illegalised immigrants, especially as illegalised immigration is increasingly attracting public attention.

The volume underlines the importance of deconstructing the visual evidence surrounding 'illegal immigration' and identifies the active role of governments which, through political and juridical strategies, are responsible for the process of 'illegalisation'. Images seem to stand at the crossroads of various questions. Who are the creators of these images, where do they circulate and what kind of relationship do they have to political and legal discourses? How do social movements appropriate them? These are just a few of the issues raised by the articles in this volume.

A wide variety of articles are gathered here, each marked by a different approach. Nevertheless, as the editors point out, all are by authors belonging to the 'global North', none of whom has experienced the curtailing of his/her legal and free movement throughout the world.

Three perspectives stand out among the more interesting contributions: the variety of imagery of borders, the political impact of images of illegalised immigrants and, finally, the potential and threats of the image as an aesthetic tool. In general, the authors' concern is the link between symbolic meanings and their material forms.

Visual images, like linguistic metaphors, not only transmit different points of view but also produce and modify the consciousness of civil society. Images can shed a critical light on government responsibility or, conversely, may lead to new forms of oppression.

The first article, 'Migration, Law, and the Image: Beyond the Veil of Ignorance', by W. J. T. Mitchell, presents some general aspects of the relationship between images, law and migration. Focusing on Palestine, Mitchell emphasises images' double role: they modify, on the one hand, the way immigrants are seen by others and, on the other, the image immigrants have of themselves.

Relying on articles and images from *Der Spiegel*, J. H. Friederichs, in his 'Milieu of Illegality: Representation of Guest Workers, Refugees and Spaces of Migration in *Der Spiegel* 1973–1980', argues that the German system of representation is dominated by the visual idea of the 'ghetto'. Class membership and ethnicity are obscured by the transformation of a social issue into an urban–spatial one.

In 'The Making of "Illegality": Strategies of Illegalizing Social Outsiders', Bischoff explores the practices of social exclusion perpetuated by the media through stereotyped visualisation. Focusing on the Swiss case, The author presents the example of 'speed maniacs with Balkan background', a stereotype created in order to influence the outcome of a vote on a bill concerned with the naturalisation of second- and third-generation immigrants.

In 'Images of Victims in Trafficking in Women in Switzerland', Kafehsy explores the media's attempts to raise awareness of the trafficking of women. Kafehsy focuses on the video advertisement shown in a Swiss stadium during the 2008 European soccer championship and argues that the images' emotional power was based on an implicit model of female victimhood.

Falk writes about 'Invasion, Infection, Invisibility: An Iconology of Illegalized Immigration',

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grounding her observations in the example of boat people. Perceptions of immigration as invasion may be reinforced by a photograph representing a group; alternatively, an image may draw on Christian victim iconography in depicting an individual refugee. Falk underlines how these two approaches are based on a shared fear of 'infection'.

Berg and Schwenken discuss the difficulties and political impact of presenting undocumented immigrants in films. In 'Masking, Blurring, Replacing: Can the Undocumented Migrant Have a Face in Film?', the authors describe various strategies of visual representation that protect the immigrant. Alternative visualisations legitimise the subjectivities of illegalised immigrants, and prevent the classic de-humanising effect, which in turn reinforces policies hostile towards immigrants.

In 'The Image versus the Map: the Ceuta Border', Schoonderbeek discusses the importance

of openness in every mapping operation. The article underlines the complexity of borders, which are not fixed lines or zones, but rather sequences of fluid divisions in space and time.

While a great deal of work has been produced on illegal immigration, this publication focuses on two important and original dimensions. Imagery of immigrants structures public perceptions and political debates through its symbolic and material dimensions. Secondly, it is important to deconstruct the 'illegalising visual process' generated by stereotypes. This dynamic between 'moving images' and migration enables the emergence of new scholarly perspectives, and thus a more critical and complex understanding of the issue.

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