
Book Review: Salessa King

Before this course, I believed illegal immigration was just a collection of policies, that aimed to render people unable to enter certain countries. *Illegality, Inc. Clandestine Migration and the Business of Bordering Europe* by Ruben Andersson helped me to realize the complex and racialized issue of illegality in a larger form. Through an ethnographic study on the pursuit from Senegal and Mali to the Spanish enclaves (such as Ceuta, Africa), Andersson argues that Europe’s intensified structural enforcement regarding illegal immigration across the southern Europe border, continues to promote the growth of illegality in clandestine migrants, while also commodifying the structural process through the increase in surveillance and other tactics. Andersson’s argument is examined throughout the book as an author on his journey within the three different timelines within his journey, each of which contains case studies from interviews Andersson conducts during the clandestine migration. He uses these interviews to establish his argument in connection with the different sources involved in the illegality industry. These interviews include migrants, development aid organizations, and border patrol workers that inform the experience of migration, and the construct of the industry. This book is valuable in the study of immigration because, unlike other research, Andersson gives a detailed account of the construction of illegality from the perspectives of individuals and systems during the attempt to cross the Euro-African border.

To argue that Europe’s intensified structural enforcement inherently promotes the illegality of clandestine migrants, Andersson examined several case studies and found evidence to support this conclusion. This evidence was based on primary interviews he conducted himself, as a journalist and anthropologist, with clandestine migrants who he followed during their journey to southern borders during Europe’s continual commodified promotion of illegality. The heightened enforcement was executed in different ways, by different actors, and at many different stages of the migration. They included the entrapment of migrants at the Ceuta camp, the racialized spectacle on the sea water border in the Canary Islands, and the replacement of sea water routes with deadlier Saharan desert routes that “[…] gave rise to ever stranger, and more dangerous, entry methods” (274), that clandestine migrants had to pursue ‘illegally’. All of these methods are seen as evidence that the structural enforcement surrounding illegality continues to inform the growth of illegality as a label applied to clandestine migrants in their border pursuits that become increasingly strained.

The evidence used by Andersson in this book stems from diverse actors, all of whom, according to Andersson, foster the heightened enforcement regarding illegality within Euro-African migration, that informs the growing number of ‘illegal’ clandestine migrants. These diverse actors include NGO’s, journalists and, in the final chapter of the book, European activists on route to Dakar. However, his claims that activists foster the promotion of illegality is met with counterarguments, that activists who have been able to come together to spread the awareness.
about the violence that clandestine migrants have faced, are doing beneficial work. I believe Andersson successfully addressed these arguments, by stating that framing their grievances about this violence through their protests showcase, “[…] the irregular migrant and the border [as] the twin rallying points for a cosmopolitan or anarchist project” (247), which therefore, does not improve the violence that occurs at borders, it only continues to legitimate and contribute to the growth of narratives in the illegality of migration.

Andersson chose an analytical framework to focus on within his ethnographic study, while also creating a narrative that had story-telling traits. He used the analytical framework by beginning the book with more personal accounts of how this industry affects migrant actors, and then transitioned to broader systemic actors that gave the reader the ability to understand the direction of facilitation for the next chapters to come. The narrative he chose to focus on then led to the discussion of the government-based camps, that provided insight from both migrant and systemic ideas of illegality. One weakness to this book, was that it was hard to continuously follow the locations and sheer amount of information that Andersson provided. However, this could be purposeful due to the confusion and, in contrast, the lack of information given to clandestine migrants who are also involved in this process.

Andersson’s book contributes to the broader context of migration research and has further informed his work on Euro-African migration. Scholars that have reviewed Andersson’s book such as Veit Schwab from the University of Warwick and Elena Popa from Indiana University Bloomington, have indicated that Andersson’s contribution to the analysis of migration has been, in part, because of his ability to integrate two different writing styles; both analytical and narrative, into one book that creates an accurate depiction of illegality as a European industry. Andersson’s online version of the book has been cited over five hundred times for different migration-based articles, this also indicates the importance and relevance that the book has had within the study of migration. This is relevant, as it indicates why Andersons study continues to contribute to more general discussions on migration and the ways in which it is a profitable business. Andersson has also referred back to this book in his newer project, looking at the partial withdrawal of international actors involved in the potential ‘risk’ of migration in 2019 at the Oxford Department of International Development.

To conclude, I believe that presently and in the future Ruben Andersson’s, Illegality Inc. Clandestine Migration and the business of Bordering Europe, will effectively inform historians, anthropologist’s, and anyone who has interest in migration or the inequalities that certain racialized identities have to face to cross the European border. The book will particularly be of interest to historians that research Europe’s past with border exclusion and the effect their promotion of illegality has had in perpetuating continuous growth of the illegality industry, and illegality within clandestine migrants.

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References

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