Conceptualizing and Identifying Modern Regimes of Detention

Alison MOUNTZ, Kate CODDINGTON, R. Tina CATANIA, and Jenna LOYD. (2013). "Conceptualizing detention: Mobility, containment, bordering, and exclusion." Progress in Human Geography 37(4): 520 – 539.

The four authors of this article use a geographic lens to attempt to make sense of the multi-sited, multi-purposed, and multi-scalar practices of detention. Mountz, Coddington, Catania, and Loyd are interested in how detention plays out in acts, issues, and meanings of entrapment, isolation, identity formation, state power, extra-legal and extra-territorial control, and security. They are fundamentally interested in the paradox of detention, mobility, and containment: "Detention requires both containing the individual and making mobile the collective threat that the individual represents." (8) To meet this ambitious research agenda, the authors survey and interrogate the logics, discourses, and regulatory functions of detention in Australia, the United States, and the European Union, in particular. As this précis suggests, the article is magisterial in its ambition and provides an impressive overview of the complexity inherent to ascertaining what, exactly, is being referred to as "detention."

Mountz, Coddington, Catania, and Loyd introduce the geography of detention by noting its key influences of privatization and capital, prisons, institutional fixing of identities, and the work already done by feminist analyses in bringing mobility, bordering, and exclusion to academic attention. They astutely note the tautology of criminalizing migrants through detention: "migrants *might* be criminals, necessitating detention; migrants *must* be criminals, because they are detained." (6) The authors argue that "the geography of detention shapes how its paradoxical underpinnings take form and reveals the need for more research on detention processes and practices." (9) Detention is intricately related to the "racialized entrapment" of imprisonment that, together "rely on commonsense binaries between the innocent citizen and violent, criminal, or guilty person." (13) Mountz, Coddington, Catania, and Loyd conclude that detention cannot fulfill its promise of security and safety but only begets "containment, borders, and exclusion" and more detention. (16)

Further reading:

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