

The state of the art of the theory of images in international politics.

What we achieved and what are we missing?

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Abstract

This paper takes stock of the past twenty years of work in the field of Visual International Relations (IR) asking what the main achievements have been and what the main challenges are. The paper argues in favor of a theorization of images as socially and performatively constituted as this enables a foregrounding of the politics of images, including the specific policies that images are claimed to warrant or support. The paper draws particular attention to the significance of emotions for visual politics. Drawing on the examples of the photographs of Alan Kurdi and the mass graves dug at Hart Island in New York City during the covid-19 pandemic, the paper introduces a performative theorization of emotions as constituted through discourses and inter-visual mobilization of iconic imagery. The paper concludes with a discussion of the epistemological and methodological challenges that come with studying the politics of images from an international – potentially global – perspective. This discussion is exemplified by a critical account of the methodologies brought to the study of migration in visual IR and their potentials.

Biography

Lene Hansen is Professor in the Department of Political Science, University of Copenhagen. She is author of *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (Routledge, 2006) and co-author (with Barry Buzan) of *The Evolution of International Security Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 2009; translated into Korean, Chinese, Brazilian-Portuguese and Spanish). Her main areas of current research are visual international politics, gender and security, critical security studies, discourse analysis and foreign policy, and critical methodologies and world politics. She has published on these and other issues in journals such as *International Studies Quarterly*, *European Journal of International Relations*, *Review of International Studies*, *Millennium*, *Security Dialogue*, and *Cooperation and Conflict*. Lene Hansen is the Principal Investigator of *Bodies as Battleground: Gender, Images and International Security*, funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark, 2018-2024. She is currently working on a book manuscript tentatively titled *Images and International Security: Theory, Methods, Cases*.