

Book Reviews

***Sensible Politics: Visualizing International Relations.* By William A. Callahan. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020, xvi + 303pp. ISBN: 978-0-19-007174-5**

International politics are influenced by a lot of factors that constantly change along with the evolution of the society. In this post-literate age, media plays an important role in delivering international affairs to us. Even more with the widespread of social media usage, it is relatively easier for us to shape our view of the world through videos and images that we see. We are affected by visuals more than we ever anticipated. Thus, it is important to dig deeper on how visuals can have an important role in shaping a better understanding of the dynamic in international relations.

William A. Callahan, in his new book *Sensible Politics*, attempts to develop our understanding of international politics through visuals. This book focuses on what the visual can do in helping us to understand the complexity of social theory and world orders. Callahan argues 'visual international politics is important and different' (p.1). It is important because visuals play an important role in this digital era, and it is different as visuals can viscerally move people in terms of how it can make them feel which then resulting in "affective communities of sense" (p.2). Callahan also explains in this book that the visuals he discusses is not limited to only painting or photography, but it also includes other form of visuals such as film, video, and even walls and gardens.

There are a total of 11 chapters in this book that Callahan divides into 3 parts: a framework for analysis, visual images, and visual artifacts and sensory spaces. There are two things that

make this book intriguing and worth to read for students or researchers of IR. First is the fact that visual IR remains an under-studied field (p.6). Second is how this book explores visual images and artifacts that come from non-Western countries. In addition to that, it is worth noting that this book highlights the value of comparative approach to provide an alternative explanation of some recent international affairs such as the Islamic State's utopian Caliphate, the tension that always arises between Japan and China whenever public figures visit Yasukuni Shrine, and even about participatory surveillance on the World Wide Web.

One thing that Callahan keeps mentioning in this book is how visuality can provoke new social relations in a form of affective communities of sense. On chapter 1, Callahan mentions that this affective communities of sense 'complicate what can (and cannot) be seen, said, thought, and done' (p.44). In addition to that, he also mentions on chapter 2 that aside from the importance of thinking visually, there is also the need for us to understand the feeling visually in international politics. It is important to keep in mind that both are equally important to understand how images can create a strong positive or negative effect within a community where a certain image is being presented to.

For many IR students, IR tends to highlight classical and traditional issues of IR through the lenses of realism. However, as the world orders have gone through changes, IR approach also needs to evolve along with that. Thus, Callahan through *Sensible Politics* provides a new approach to understand modern security, order, and war through visualization. This can be seen from chapter 5 where he elaborates how the visible is essential for thinking about war and waging it in the twenty-first century and what can

visuals tell us about security, social-ordering, and world ordering (p.90). He provides the explanation by exploring the examples of the feature film *The Interview* (2014) that provoked the North Korea-US national security event and the use of images on media by the Islamic State's (p.90). Such examples open a new perspective that can be used by students of IR to explore security, social-ordering, and world ordering.

Another thing that is discussed in this book is the role Maps, Space, and Power that are always essential in IR. Many conflicts occurred among world orders often time are affected by maps, space, and power relations in the area. Chapter 7 in this book talks about the need 'to understand maps as active interventions that can shape global politics' (p.149). Intriguing arguments are presented through the examination of Chinese maps that contain a U-shaped line that digs deep into the South China Sea abutting the littoral states of maritime Southeast Asia (p.149). In this chapter, there are explanations regarding how maps play a key role in the South China Sea disputes and why Beijing is pushed to "rejuvenate China" by recovering "lost territories" (p.149).

As a Professor of International Relations that studies visual IR, Callahan invites students or scholars of IR to shift the understanding of social theory and international politics by expanding IR's comparative scope. First, the scope is broadened to incorporate not only spoken words but also visual elements and visual senses. Second, moving the focus beyond Eurocentric examinations of visual IR by considering Asia and the Middle East. Finally, emphasizing shifts from critical IR's concentration on dividing concepts such as inside/outside and self/other, to view politics in terms of innovate mechanism for organizing societies and shaping global order.

Reading this book will evoke wider questions regarding the influence of visual artifacts on world politics. *Sensible Politics* applies critical thinking to analyze what visuals can do and the result is shown by Callahan through visual examples he provides in all chapters in this book. This book also sets the groundwork for future developments in theories of world order, shaping the direction of future thinking on the subject.

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