Title: Rising crime rates of illegal immigrants in the Netherlands and the ironies of migration control

Key words: immigration control; criminalisation; crimmigration; policing

Brief description of presentation goals, theoretical framework, methodology, main conclusions, and bibliographical references.

Over the past decades the Netherlands has developed into a culture of control in which criminals and immigrants are mainly seen as ‘dangerous others’. Tying in with this emergence of the culture of control (Garland 2011) is the development of a more preventive criminal justice system (Van der Leun and Van der Woude 2011). Preventive powers have been expanded and the criminal justice system is more and more aimed at detecting risky (groups of) persons as soon as possible. Police officers are granted a great deal of discretionary power, bearing the risk that such powers may be carried out (in part) on the basis of generalisations relating to race, ethnicity, religion or nationality instead of on the basis of individual behaviour and/or objective evidence. The development of a discourse in which immigrant groups are increasingly seen and addressed as ‘dangerous others’, comparable to criminals, is part of a broader process of crimmigration, the merging of migration policy and crime control, in the Netherlands (cf. Stumpf 2006).

This presentation aims to look at the development and the (unintended) consequences of these changes in practice. Where Avalon Leupen will zoom in on perceptions of young migrants of the police, I will focus at the consequences for illegal immigrants. Empirical studies on the aliens police and the immigration control task of the general police carried out in the 1990s demonstrated that the police at that time were very reluctant to stop and question allegedly illegally residing immigrants. This had to do with preventing discrimination but also with maintaining good community relations within neighbourhoods (Van der Leun 2003). At the moment it is not clear if or to what extent recent anti-immigration sentiments in the Netherlands have changed this attitude. It is clear however, that policies have become much more strict. Fighting criminal involvement of illegal immigrants has often been cited as one of the main policy aims. Police figures, however, show that registered crime among irregular migrants rose significantly over the years. In the same period, the Dutch state increasingly attempted to exclude irregular immigrants from the formal labour market and public provisions. (Leerkes, Van der Leun and Engbersen 2012). The 'marginalisation thesis' asserts that a larger number of migrants have become involved in crime in response to a decrease in conventional life chances. Analyses demonstrate that at least about one third of this crime rise has to be ascribed to policy changes, which accentuates the need for a more thorough discussion on the intended and unintended consequences of border control for immigrant crime. Paraphrasing Gary Marx (1981), the developments in the Netherlands signify the ironies of immigration control (cf. Welch 2003). Not only in the sense of making the position of migrants more vulnerable, but even in sense that the situation with respect to very phenomenon that is addressed through policy (immigrant crime) appears to be worsened.


