

# Migrant Justice Political Graphics

No One Is Illegal - Toronto  
(2003-2009)

WGS435H1  
Art and Social Movements  
Dr. Rachel Gorman

By Ryan Hayes



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Above: Poster by Punchclock Print Studio  
([www. http://punchclock.org](http://punchclock.org)), c. 2004

Previous Page: Thumbnails from “NOII Graphics” Flickr set,  
90 images, 2003-2009

# Introduction

My initial motivation to collect graphics from No One Is Illegal - Toronto, a migrant justice group that I organize with, started with some concerns I had around design process. For one thing, good process is constantly in tension with activists' sense of urgency towards political realities that require immediate attention. This results in last minute requests, a lack of clarity and consensus, last minute changes, and often, feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction on the part of designers and/or members of the wider group who they collaborate with.

I have experienced this in my own work as an occasional designer and have heard it echoed many times by others who do design work. Beyond the sense of urgency, collaborative processes are always demanding, and I think the design process presents its own unique challenges. With design you have limited time, space on the page, and financial resources to produce materials that are both visually stimulating and expressive of your politics. Additionally, within the collaborative process you have to mediate differing visions, aesthetic values, and political principles. If the wider group insists on including article-length text on an event flyer, this limits the scope of possibilities for the designer to produce an aesthetically pleasing design.

With these issues in mind, I felt a desire to make a visual case for better process -- to gather previous graphics to find evidence that good process produces better results. However, it quickly became apparent to me that a collection of graphics could be a useful tool in itself for facilitating better design processes. I began to think about the potential utility of the project in three ways: as a historical archive that tells stories about organizing, as a design resource for current organizing work, and as a tool for analyzing design-related issues such as process, language and representation, the evolution of political imagery and connections with other social movement struggles for justice.

To put this collection together I scoured through my hard drive, combed the depths of my email account, and swept through websites and event pages on social networking sites. I scanned a few older posters that I found in the OPIRG-Toronto office and I issued an appeal for help to some friends who kindly responded. Eventually I collected about 120 digital images, which I narrowed down to 90 unique images, and posted them online to Flickr with tags that organized the images according to date and format. The images range in date from 2003 to 2009 and in format from posters to flyers, logos, graphics, buttons, stickers, and t-shirt designs -- representing the work of at least 15 designers with varying levels of experience from the self-taught with basic skills (like myself) to those with formal training in art and design.

This is not an exhaustive collection of everything produced by No One Is Illegal - Toronto from 2003 to 2009, but I feel confident enough to say that this collection is broadly representative of the organizing work I have been involved in. I hope that it will continue to grow and exist as a historical archive, design resource and analytical tool well into the future.

Ryan Hayes  
February 2010

# Why collect social movement graphics?

## + Historical archive

*Telling stories about the past*

## + Design resource

*Supporting ongoing work*

## + Tool for analysis

*Deepening knowledge about dynamics  
in social movement organizing*

# + Historical archive

/ Tags / 2003



Earlier images in this collection from groups such as the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) and Project Threadbare represent influential migrant justice organizing that predated and coincided with the formation of No One Is Illegal - Toronto (NOII) in 2003.

/ Tags / 2004

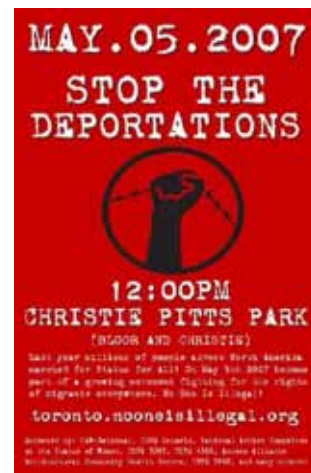
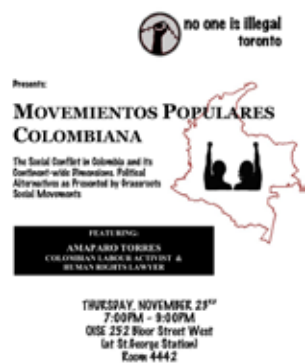


/ Tags / 2005

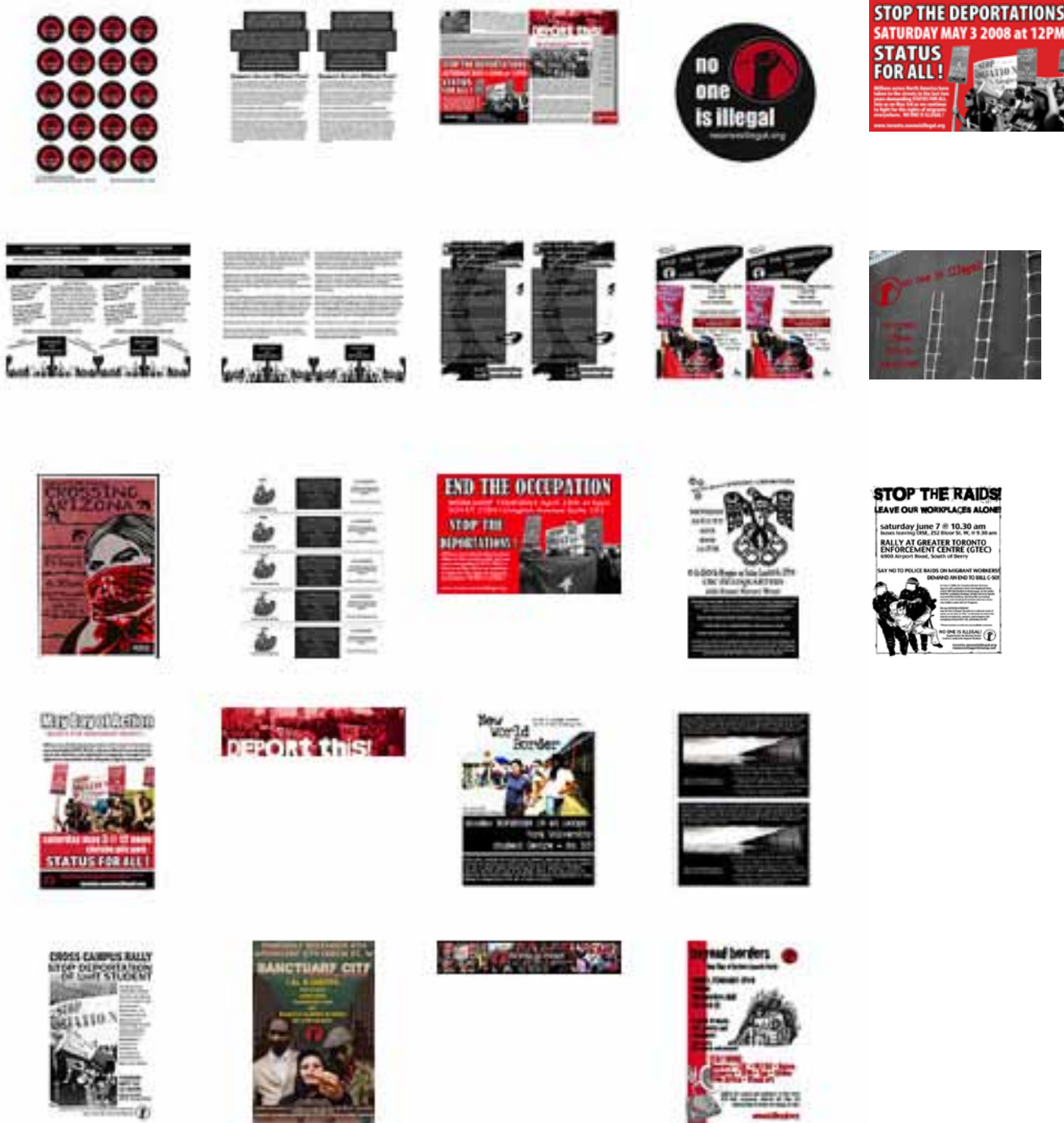


Illustrations by Palestinian artist Nidal El Khairy have figured prominently in NOII materials, such as this 2005 poster for the "March to Ottawa" (above) organized by Montreal activists and supported with solidarity actions in Toronto, as well as the first May Day of Action organized by NOII in 2006 (next page).

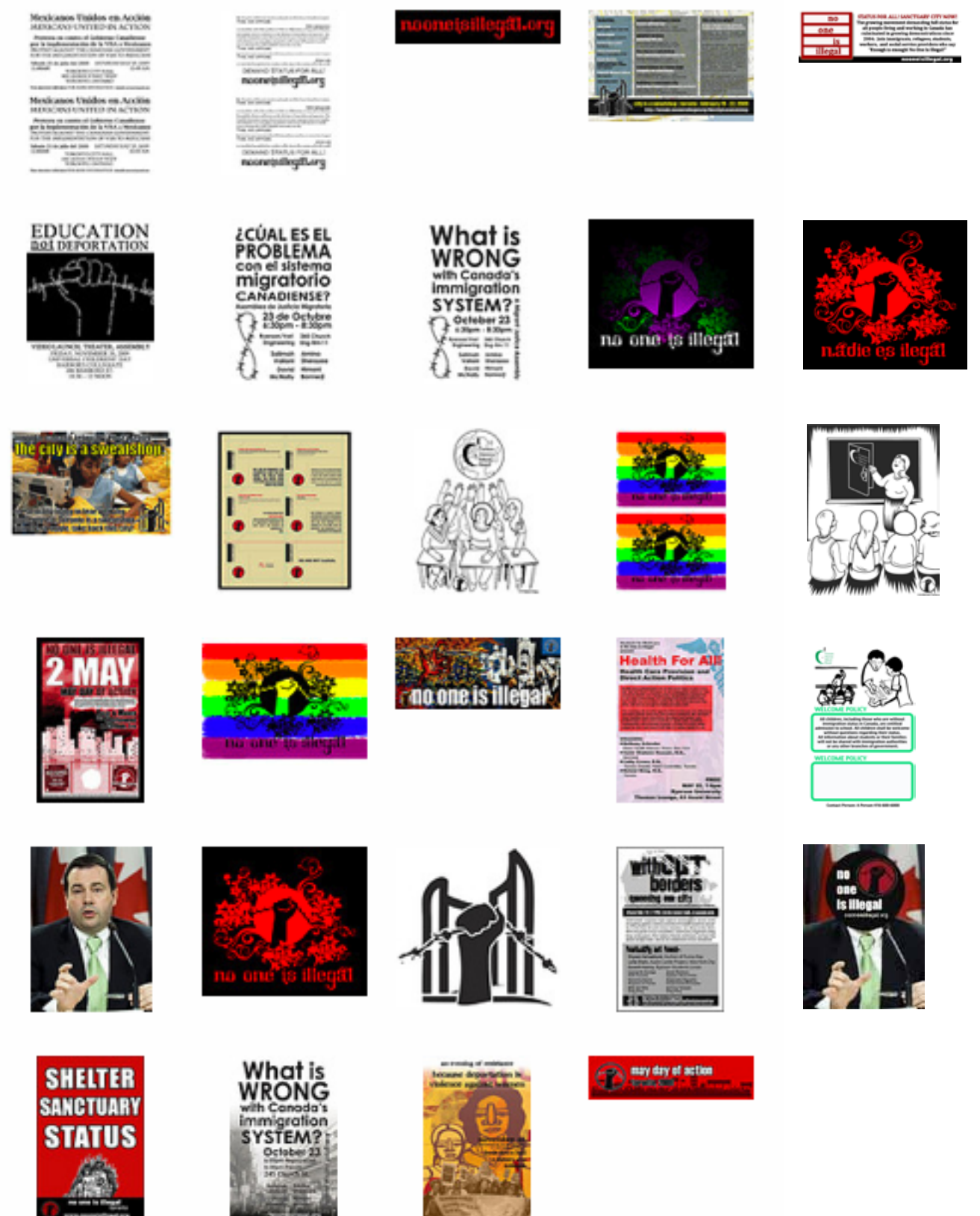
Moreover, we can see roots of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) campaign for access to services regardless of immigration status in the logo on the opposite page, the poster for the Detainee Art event with Mayworks (above), and Free Wendy Maxwell graphic (above). NOII organizers learned about non-status people being turned over to immigration enforcement in the course of attempting to access services from their work as art therapists at the Heritage Inn Detention Centre. The apprehension of Wendy Maxwell at an International Women's Day fair at Ryerson University in 2005 by police who turned her over to immigration became a major flashpoint for organizing to make the police adopt a full DADT policy.



## / Tags / 2008



## / Tags / 2009



The growing output of images from year-to-year reflects the increased availability of more recent material, but also signals new and expanded areas of work such as community organizing initiatives, days of action, anti-war mobilizations, case support, indigenous solidarity, film screenings, public events, access to education campaigns, fundraisers, and campaigns rooted in the health and anti-violence against women sectors.

# + Design resource

## /Tags / logo



## /Tags / button



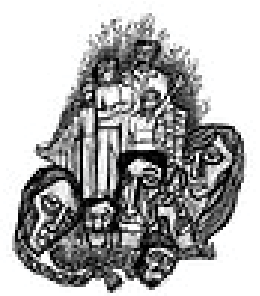
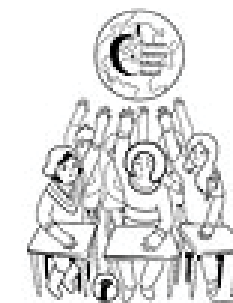
## /Tags / sticker



Organizing images by format instead of by date shifts gears from timeline to toolbox. Materials are reusable, ready to reproduce new batches of stickers and buttons or to instill a degree of consistency with the placement of a logo, but they are also remixable, awaiting new ideas and new contexts.

Aside from the repetition of the barbed wire logo and indebtedness to Nidal El Khairy's illustrations, the most prominent theme in this collection of graphics is variety, as reflected in the range of designers, styles, and imagery. This variety is quite different from some left organizations who are known for their standardized fonts and layouts. I think this distinction follows from a fundamental difference in methods of organizing. The lack of formal hierarchical structures and roles within groups like NOII means that tasks such as design work are distributed across a wider group of people. In my experience this means more freedom and creativity, yet also less guidance and support, particularly in the absence of a sense of what has been done before and access to these materials. Hopefully this design resource can help address these challenges.

## /Tags / graphic

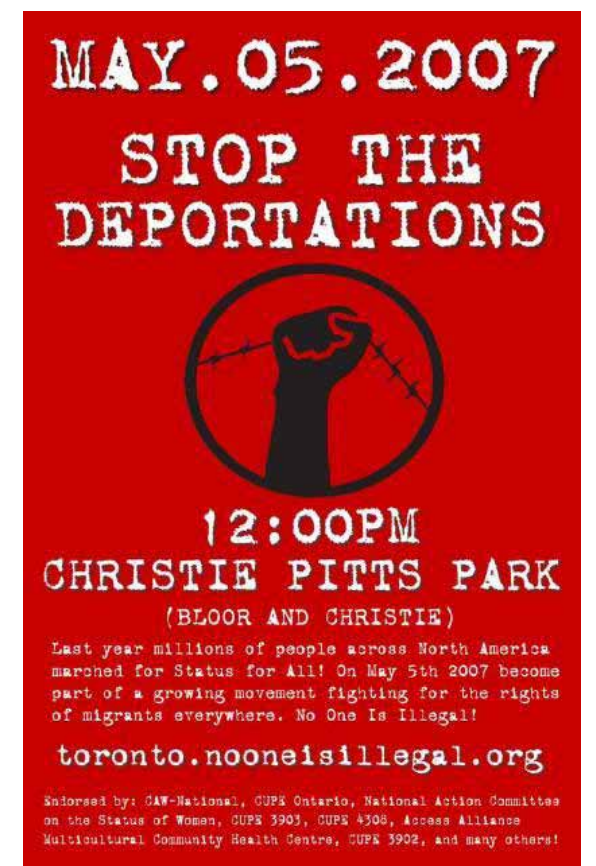


Another advantage to posting this material online is that it becomes accessible to a wider audience, extending NOII's web presence while offering itself as a resource to others interested in organizing for migrant justice. Although Flickr is one of the better free services, Flickr is a for-profit company that limits free accounts to 200 images and its parent company, Yahoo, has a poor track record with respect to the privacy rights of internet users in China and the Chinese government. While linkages with the Flickr photo-sharing "community" would be lost, it is desirable to post this type of content on personal or organizational web servers rather than being dependent on large corporations such as Yahoo.

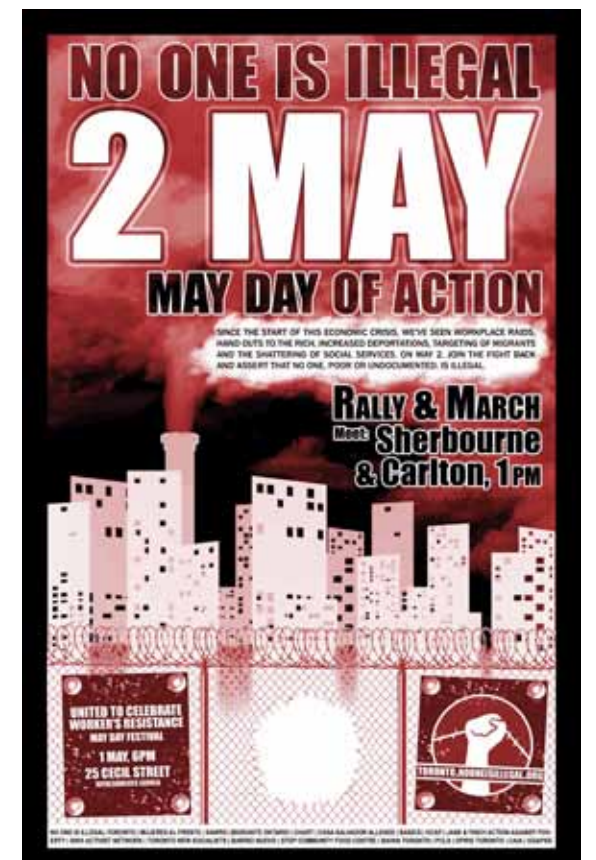
**/ Tags / flyer**



## / Tags / poster



## / Tags / postcard



Opposite Page: Clockwise from top left, NOII May Day of Action posters for 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009

# + Tool for analysis

The point of producing political material is to spark engagement. It is meant to be noticed or distributed and accompanied by one-on-one discussions. No longer just physical -- printed and pasted -- part of the visual economy of the street, graphics produced by social movements also become part of the visual economy of some people's everyday online experience through email circulation and social networking sites like Facebook with ubiquitous profile pictures.



When we try to analyze this material, we can do more than ask questions about its effect on its intended or unintended audiences, we can also consider the process and conditions of production, and what these processes say about social movement organizing.



## Aesthetics, Politics, and Process

On the next page are four poster designs for the same event series, the top two for a forum held downtown and the bottom two for a subsequent forum held in the Davenport community. The first design, on the top left, was the first draft produced for a black and white photocopy run of street posters. The second design, on the top right, is the version that was actually printed. The background rally photo was added to represent people organizing and fighting back and because the original was deemed to be too plain. While the rally photo adds to the political messaging by bringing political organizing into focus, on an aesthetic level it reduces the clarity of the design, particularly as a poster meant to be visible and legible from afar.

As the date for the Davenport forum neared, the poster was modified and additional information was added, as seen in the third poster on the bottom left. When co-organizers of the forum asked that even more information be added to the poster -- additional co-organizers and the logos of each organization -- the necessary outcome to make space and preverse legibility on the already crowded poster was to revert back to the original design, bringing the design process full circle.

## What is WRONG with Canada's immigration SYSTEM?

**October 23**  
6:30pm - 8:30pm  
Ryerson/Vari Engineering 245 Church Eng-Rm 11  
Salimah Valiani Amina Sherazee  
David McNally Himani Bannerji  
A Migrant Justice Assembly  
nooneisillegal.org

## What is WRONG with Canada's immigration SYSTEM?

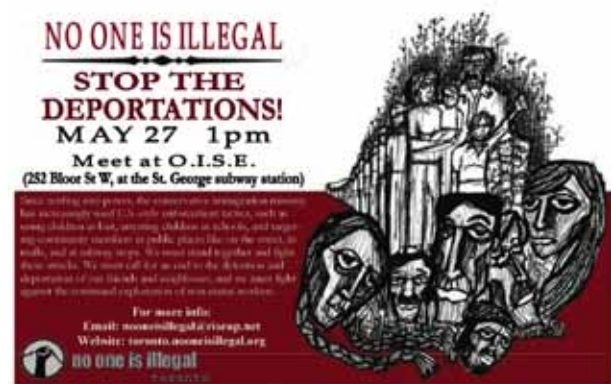
**October 23**  
6:00pm-Registration  
6:30pm-Forum  
245 Church St.  
Salimah Valiani Amina Sherazee  
David McNally Himani Bannerji  
nooneisillegal.org  
A Migrant Justice Assembly

## What is WRONG with Canada's immigration SYSTEM?

**January 20-6:30pm**  
Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre (1900 Davenport Rd.)  
Presented by: Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre, FCJ Refugee Centre & No One Is Illegal  
Spanish & Portuguese interpretation Refreshments will be provided  
Call Marcelo (416.656.8025) to book childcare  
Call Nadia (416.652.7867 x.239) for more information  
nooneisillegal.org  
A Davenport Community Meeting

## What is WRONG with Canada's immigration SYSTEM?

**Wed. Jan. 20 6:30pm**  
Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre 1900 Davenport Road  
Spanish & Portuguese interpretation Refreshments will be provided  
Call Marcelo (416.656.8025) to book childcare  
Call Nadia (416.652.7867 x.239) for more information  
Presented by: Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre, The Stop Community Food Centre, Bread and Bricks Davenport-West Social Justice Group, FCJ Refugee Centre & No One Is Illegal  
www.nooneisillegal.org  
A Davenport Community Forum



## Language and Exclusion

The images above are examples of material produced in both English and Spanish, while the image on the bottom right provides space for translation into another language. Language is an incredibly important signifier of an intended audience, of who is actually being invited by “call-outs” for actions and events and addressed in the materials that we produce. This is an issue of exclusion that requires vigilance.

The discussion of language and exclusion in visual material brings to mind the assumption that everyone shares the same sightedness. It is important to overcome these assumptions, use varied methods of outreach, and work closely with members of the disability movement. NOII has worked with groups like DAMN 2025, particularly to do case support where issues of immigration status and disability intersect, such as with blind refugee claimant and community activist Abdelkader Belaoui.

**WELCOME POLICY**

All children, including those who are without immigration status in Canada, are entitled admission to school. All children shall be welcome without questions regarding their status. All information about students or their families will not be shared with immigration authorities or any other branches of government.

**WELCOME POLICY**

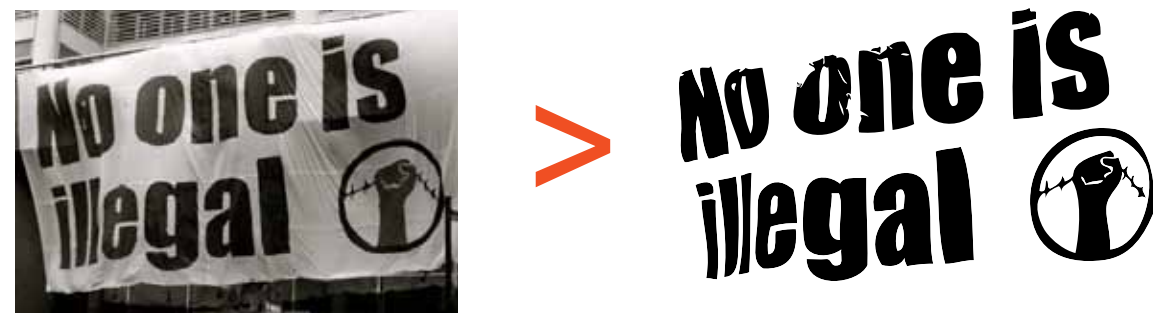
Contact Person: A Person 416-600-6000



## Representation

The top-most banner image is the current banner on the NOII website, while the middle image is a proposed replacement and the final image is the current banner on the NOII-Vancouver website. Banner images are important sites for representation -- seen by all those who visit the website -- that attempt to represent the aspirations and activities of the group. The first banner image, I think, does a good job of this. It is composed of photos of people participating in the 2007 May Day of Action -- both powerful and festive. The proposed update attempts to continue this representation with photos of a sit-down during the 2009 May Day of Action and of a demonstration held at the immigration detention centre following large workplace raids in 2009.

In the NOII-Vancouver example, the banner image is about the act of migration, with two photos from clearly different geographic contexts unified visually by the image of people migrating through barbed wire and echoed in the NOII logo itself, super-imposed over a fence. These images are very powerful and inform many people's first impressions of what these groups are about.



## Evolution of Imagery

Images such as the barbed wire and fist logo, originally created by a member of NOII-Vancouver, evolve and appear in new contexts beyond their original applications. In the top-most image on this page we see how the NOII logo was combined with the corporate logo for the City of Toronto to produce a logo for a series of events entitled "The City is a Sweatshop". In the following image, a designer took an image of a NOII sticker and digitally stamped it onto the face of the current Minister of Immigration Jason Kenney.

On the opposite page we see how a new version of the NOII logo in English, developed for a t-shirt design, was reproduced in Spanish, and adapted to produce a flyer on queer migrants for Pride Week.

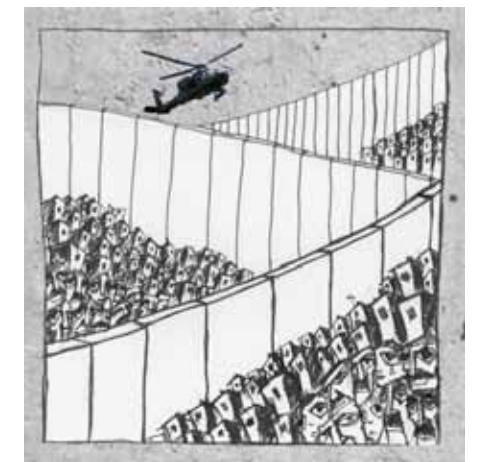
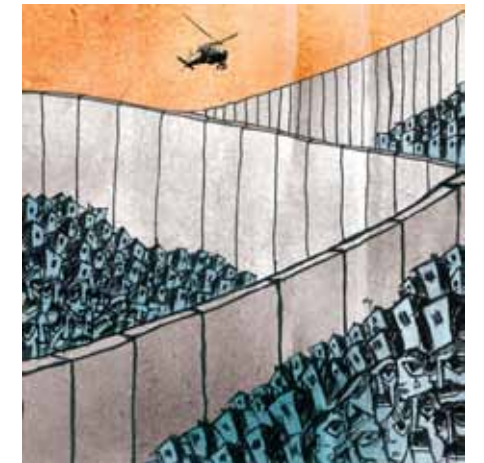
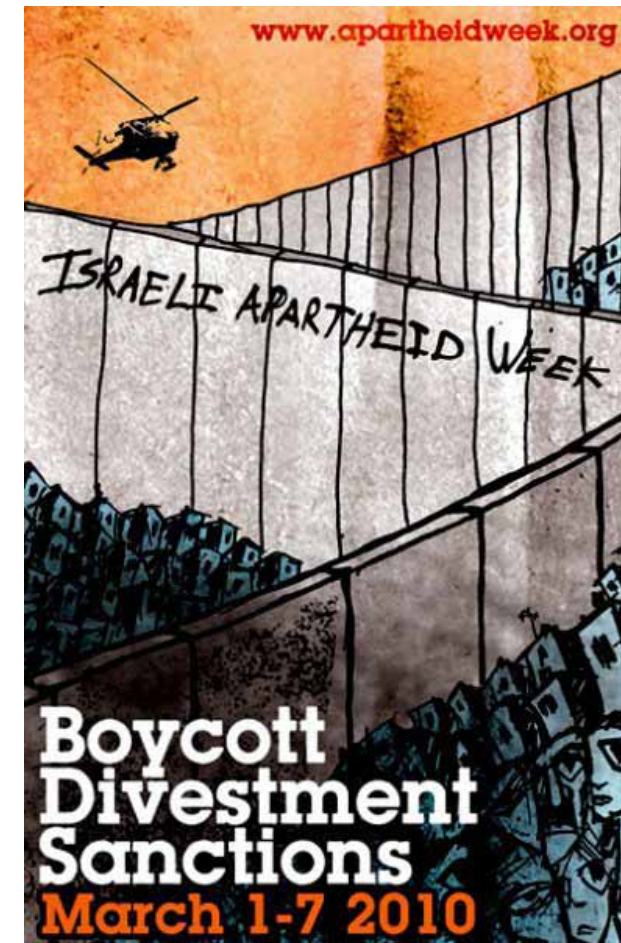


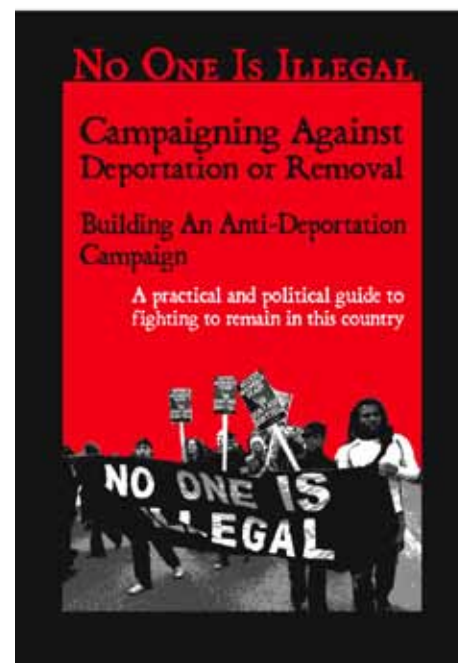


## Connections between Social Movements

While in Montreal, illustrator Nidal El Khairy worked with the Coalition Against the Deportation of Palestinian Refugees, one of many groups under the umbrella of Solidarity Across Borders. El Khairy draws Palestinians and his work is often used by the Palestine solidarity movement, as seen in the examples on the opposite page, which include the 2010 poster for Israeli Apartheid Week.

The intersections in El Khairy's activism between migrant justice and Palestine solidarity is itself an illustration of how these struggles are linked. Palestinian refugees are denied the ability to return to their homeland due to the backing Israel receives from members of the international community such as Canada, while Canada and other states deny Palestinians the ability to move in their pursuit of dignity and respect.





## Circulation of Imagery

As suggested by the image of the [www.nooneisillegal.org](http://www.nooneisillegal.org) front-page (opposite page), autonomous NOII groups share the same logo. There are also international design linkages in the struggle for migrant justice. Like the distinctive NOII-logo, emulations of the German "kein mensch ist illegal" motif have popped up elsewhere, including in the design work of NOII (see bookmark on this page).

The cover of an anti-deportation guide produced by a NOII group in the United Kingdom features an image of members of NOII-Toronto (opposite page). This perhaps raises questions about the make-up of the NOII UK group and why they would choose a picture from Toronto, but on the inside they connect the DADT campaign to their own "Defiance not Compliance" campaign.



# Source files

This page lists the address of the source files referenced in this document. This may be a useful resource for viewing low-resolution images in the highest possible quality. The reason for low-resolution images is that some layouts, particularly those with over a dozen images, are themselves images taken from Flickr thumbnail pages due to the time-consuming nature of placing and resizing so many images onto a single page.

## **Complete “NOII Graphics” Flickr set:**

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/31000504@N06/sets/72157623207207102/>

## **Historical archive, 2003-2009:**

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/31000504@N06/tags/2003/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/31000504@N06/tags/2004/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/31000504@N06/tags/2005/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/31000504@N06/tags/2006/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/31000504@N06/tags/2007/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/31000504@N06/tags/2008/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/31000504@N06/tags/2009/>

## **Design resource, logo-postcard:**

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/31000504@N06/tags/logo/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/31000504@N06/tags/button/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/31000504@N06/tags/sticker/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/31000504@N06/tags/graphic/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/31000504@N06/tags/flyer/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/31000504@N06/tags/poster/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/31000504@N06/tags/postcard/>