

SEEING

Ethnographic

LIKE

Ethical

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&

Material Perspectives

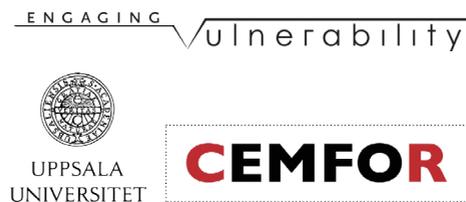
SMUGGLER

25 October, Uppsala University  
Universitetshuset, Sal VIII

[criticalborderstudies.com/  
smuggling](http://criticalborderstudies.com/smuggling)

In a world with an increasing asymmetrical access to freedom of movement in particular and to unequal access to labour, health care and education in general, those who find themselves in vulnerable conditions, rely on irregular services of accessing these rights. Whether for those migrants and refugees whose possibilities to claim asylum and residence have been drastically shrunk since early 1990s, or for border porters who carry heavy package of goods on their back across borders to earn an income, smuggling has been a social, political and economic endeavour that grows alongside the state and its border politics.

While it is seen as a criminal, exploitative and sometimes in the words of authorities a purely evil activity, smuggling in practice is not necessarily a destructive force. Smuggling emerges from certain ways of knowing states, markets and the borders regulating them. At the same time, smuggling generates specific knowledge about these seemingly solid and permanent entities. In this sense, smuggling is a specific practice that is conducted through a series



of concrete acts, strategies, techniques and planning. Consequently, smuggling might teach us about the state and its discursive and material politics of bordering.

This interdisciplinary symposium aims to discuss, examine and share ideas that move beyond the common understanding of smuggling as a criminal and mafia controlled enterprise through posing complex but necessary questions such as:

- How does a smuggler see states, borders and economy beyond the ways in which the state wishes us to see and recognise them?
- What is the liminal spaces appearing between formal and informal economies in the context of smuggling?
- How does smuggling rely on the vulnerability of the material and technological infrastructures by producing shadow temporary infrastructures?
- What does smuggling teach us about states, borders and mobility beyond the dominant legal frameworks?

Part of **Critical Border Studies**, this event is co-sponsored by **Engaging Vulnerability Research Programme (EV)** and the **Centre for Multidisciplinary Studies on Racism (CEMFOR)** both at Uppsala University.

**9.00 - 9.15**

**Introduction**

**Mahmoud Keshavarz & Shahram Khosravi, Uppsala University**

**9.15 - 9.50**

**A Partial Offering: Seeing through Smuggling**

**Simon Harvey, Torndheim Academy of Fine Art (NTNU), Norway**

Smuggling is given to us as something hidden, under-reported, or else it is overly-evident – transparent – news cameras waiting for migrants on the beaches of southern Europe. But do these simplistic images of a diverse and changeable circulation like smuggling really offer us a sensible approach to the subject? What is actually offered up to us? This paper will consider the shortcomings of transparency as a socio-political ideal and, in particular, smuggling's relation to it. Turning this around, the semi-secrecy inherent in it, and partial offerings out of it, might provide us with new subjectivities and critical positionalities that totalizing transparency precludes. What might it show for itself and, by implication, if we see as a smuggler, how are we thereby empowered? I shall work through these issues with some historic and contemporary examples of on-the-ground smuggling before considering how they can offer an alternative track for interdisciplinary research, exchange of ideas and new knowledge production.

**9.50 - 10.25**

**Inside Perspectives into the World of Smuggling: How Ethnography Helps Us Understand Complex Global Phenomena**

**Ilse van Liempt, Utrecht University, the Netherlands**

Human smuggling is a sensitive and secret phenomena with many hidden aspects to research. In this paper I argue that there are benefits but also ethical considerations involved in ethnographic research into the world of human smuggling. A clear benefit is

that this methodological approach is not bound by administrative systems or legal contexts which can limit researchers' scope. As such it allows 'less official' stories to become part of the process of knowledge production as well. It allows researchers to move beyond common understandings by studying the way people involved talk about human smuggling amongst themselves. This is often very different from the official discourse around human smuggling. The desire to re-embodiment the effects of frequently disembodied policy rationales and discourses around human smuggling however also potentially implies harming participants and requires an ethical sound approach.

**10.25 - 10.45**  
**Break**

**10.45 - 11.20**  
**Seeing the State and the Border Like a Smuggler at the**  
**Mexico-Guatemala Border**  
**Rebecca Galemba, University of Denver, USA**

In the context of neoliberal economic reforms that decimated farmers' livelihoods, in addition to restrictions embedded in official Free Trade Agreements, peasants at the Mexico-Guatemala border justify the cross-border smuggling of basic daily goods as a legitimate and critical business to their survival. This presentation explores how petty border smugglers see, reconceptualize, and reify the border and the state in relation to their cross-border economic practices, daily social lives, and kinship relations. Drawing from James Scott's "Seeing Like a State", I examine the ways in which smuggling critically and conceptually questions how states naturalize particular forms of belonging, social order, and legitimacy even as they may benefit from illegal practices. Smugglers may be seen as embodying "metis" (Scott 1998) through their deft improvisational abilities to adapt to changing patterns of state surveillance, economic fluctuations, and community sanction. However, even as they evade state controls, smugglers depend on state agents, as well as the existence of the border itself, to enable them to work. In the

process of seeing, and engaging with, the state, smugglers often inadvertently recreate the unitary image and hegemonic idea of the state (Abrams 1988), as well as state effects from unexpected loci (Trouillot 2001). The presentation uses Trouillot's (2001) work as a framework to examine the ways that seeing like a smuggler critically comments on, yet also produces, state effects (an isolation effect, an identification effect, a legibility effect, and a spatialization effect). Smuggling provides an analytical vantage point for widening how we conceptualize state processes and dynamics of power.

**11.20 - 11.55**  
**Illicit Design Thinking: The Micro-Geographies of Drug**  
**Smuggling**  
**Craig Martin, The University of Edinburgh. Scotland**

At first glance a table full of packages containing liquid gel inserts for bras could simply be some form of retail display. We take such things for granted; they are almost invisible in their normality. However, two uniformed officers in the background peak our curiosity. The image in question depicts consumer goods seized by the Australian Border Force. These everyday consumer items were used by drug smugglers based in China to traffic 1.26 billion Australian dollars worth of methylamphetamine into Australia by disguising the liquid form of the drug as silicon bra inserts. This case highlights one of the central arguments developed in this paper: that the tactics used by smugglers to conceal illegal narcotics in legally sanctioned consumer goods exhibits a form of illicit design thinking and innovation. The paper explicitly addresses the direct relationship between deviant design methods and criminality. It explores illicit and non-expert 'designerly' approaches to objects and spaces through the use and adaptation of already existing consumer items. To reflect the globalized nature of drug trafficking the paper employs a range of case studies primarily from the USA, as well as Europe, Australasia and Asia. These will include: the adaptation of consumer goods seen above, both as tourist luggage and in larger-scale freight shipments; the disguise of drugs as other perceivably normal, legal artefacts; the use of hidden compartments in imported

automobiles. Building on these examples a primary focus of the paper will be the micro-geographies of these practices—this is the awareness of the illicit potential of everyday consumer goods to smugglers, who possess an intimate knowledge and understanding of the materiality of these artefacts.

**11.55 - 12.30**

**When ‘Smugglers’ Are Indeed the Problem: What Official Data, Case Law, and the Experiences of Smuggling Facilitators Tell Us About Smuggling’s Criminalization**  
**Gabriella Sanchez, European University Institute, Italy**

The concept of ‘smuggler’ in contemporary, mainstream discourses of migration is far from neutral or apolitical. It conveys clearly gendered, racialized (even racist) and geographic messages concerning those behind the facilitation of clandestine journeys, despite the scant availability of empirical data. Many academics have also been responsible for the reinscription and replication of these dominant discourses, reproducing in their attempts to showcase the abundant instances of abuse and victimization migrants often face in their journeys, the very official narratives of smuggling facilitation as the work of inherently violent transnational male criminals whose actions must be contained. While critical perspectives do exist, their reliance on qualitative analysis, small sample sizes or individual case studies, often leads to their dismissal as anecdotal or isolated instances when brought forward in conversations with policy makers and law enforcement. How can we counter these practices and reactions? Drawing from data compiled by the United Nations on 100 migrant smuggling cases involving women in Europe and the US and supplemented by personal statements and testimonies contained in the legal record, this presentation identifies ways in which state-generated data can be used to retell and challenge the dominant narratives on smuggling and its actors, in the process identifying obscured criminalization processes, patterns and their targets.

**12.30 - 13.30**

**Lunch (on your own)**

**13.30 - 14.05**

**People Smuggling is Morally Permissible and Sometimes Required**

**Javier Hidalgo, University of Richmond, USA**

People smugglers assist migrants in crossing international borders without official authorization and in return for compensation. People smuggling is widely condemned. But, in this paper, I argue that people smuggling is often morally permissible and can be morally required. My argument proceeds as follows. I first show that people smuggling is morally permissible insofar as it is consensual and avoids violating the rights of others. I contend that these conditions are frequently satisfied in the actual world. Next I argue that people smuggling is morally obligatory if the aid of smugglers is necessary to protect the urgent interests of migrants and the costs of this aid are reasonable. Finally, I respond to a range of different objections to people smuggling and show that they are unsound.

**14.05 - 14.40**

**‘Ghost Passports’: The Logics of Illegibility in the Negotiation of Undocumented Movement across South Africa’s Border with Zimbabwe**

**Xolani Tshabalala, Linköping University, Sweden**

‘Ghost passports’ are passports whose holders enlist the services of third parties, such as individual cross-border transport operators and regular bus drivers, who take the passports to various ports of entry (or border posts) to get them ‘stamped’ on their behalf. Low- and semi-skilled Zimbabwean migrants seeking work and other opportunities in South Africa must contend with a migration regime that robustly restricts their movement into the country. Nevertheless, they can find opportunities for precarious, often undocumented, work within the country’s mining, agriculture, hospitality, domestic and informal sectors, among others. For those without long term work permits, a nagging feature of their continued stay and work in South Africa is to regularly travel to the country’s border posts, such

as Beitbridge on the border with Zimbabwe, to negotiate more residence days on their passports. Without adequate financial resources or time to do this, many Zimbabweans who seek such extensions turn to the services of brokers and other facilitators, who cajole immigration officers for extension stamps on 'ghost' (or holder-less) passports for a fee. The phenomenon of ghost passports inverts the lens often associated with undocumented travel. In this case, documents get to travel without their holders. By focusing on the tactics and techniques of facilitation, this paper will explore the role of documents both as commodities that move around, as well as a currency of irregular movement in their own right. Using the broker as the unit of analysis, the paper will examine the links between the facilitation of undocumented movement and the social politics of illegibility as characteristic of the transformative friction (after Bhabha, 1994) that shapes borders in neo-colonial, neoliberal Southern Africa. At a time when the boundaries between state and market are becoming blurred, this analysis revisits the role of state borders not just as spaces for the performance of categories, but as those of social transition that extend the state into the informal sphere on one hand, while engendering novel forms of subject formation on the other.

**14.40 - 15.15**

**State-sanctioned Smuggling of Asylum Seekers Back to Indonesia, Or: Why Australia Gets Away with Violating its Own Laws**

**Antje Missbach, Monash University, Australia**

As in combatting other forms of transnational crime, for anti-people-smuggling law to be effective it ideally needs to be enforced in countries of destination as well as in countries of transit and origin. The decline in the smuggling of people from Indonesia to Australia since late 2013 is, however, primarily attributable to unilateral deterrence policies under Australia's Operation Sovereign Borders, including tow-backs and turn-backs of asylum seekers boats to Indonesia (and to Sri Lanka and Vietnam), rather than to bilateral or multilateral cooperation in enforcing anti-people smuggling laws in the region. Despite

the Australian government's draconian policies, more than 20 boats have departed from Indonesia since 2013. One particular case stands out because of the media attention it attracted and, more importantly, because the Australian government has been criticised for engaging in a form of "state-sanctioned" or "state-commissioned" reversed people smuggling. In May 2015, members of the Australian Navy and Border Force intercepted an Indonesian boat with 65 asylum seekers on board and allegedly paid the crew US\$32,000 to take the asylum seekers back to Indonesia. In this paper, I reconstruct what happened at sea in this case and the consequences for the Indonesian boat crew, who were arrested, charged and sentenced to five years imprisonment and heavily fined for people smuggling in Indonesia. Moreover, I analyse this event within the larger context of Australia's anti-people-smuggling policies to explain the absence of any meaningful legal scrutiny of the alleged bribery and corruption perpetrated by Australian government officials.

**15.15 - 15.30**

**Break**

**15.30 - 16.00**

**Concluding Remarks**

**Madina Tlostanova, Linköping University, Sweden**

**16.00 - 16.15**

**Next Steps**

– CONTRIBUTORS –

**Rebecca Galemba** is Assistant Professor of International Development at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver. Her book, "Contraband Corridor-Making a Living at the Mexico-Guatemala Border", was published in December of 2017 by Stanford University Press.

**Simon Harvey** is Associate Professor at the Art Academy, University of Trondheim (NTNU). He is the author of "Smuggling: Seven Centuries of Contraband" (Reaktion Books), published in March 2016.

**Javier Hidalgo** is an Associate Professor of Leadership Studies at the University of Richmond. His work has appeared in venues such as The Journal of Political Philosophy, The Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy and The Journal of Moral Philosophy.

**Mahmoud Keshavarz** is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Engaging Vulnerability Research Program at Uppsala University. He is the author of "The Design Politics of the Passport: Materiality, Immobility and Dissent" (Bloomsbury 2018).

**Shahram Khosravi** is Professor of Social Anthropology at Stockholm University and Research Fellow at CEMFOR, Uppsala University. His most recent works include "Precarious Lives: Waiting and Hope in Iran", University of Pennsylvania Press (2017), and "After Deportation: Ethnographic Perspectives, Palgrave (2017, edited volume).

**Craig Martin** is a Reader in Design Cultures at the University of Edinburgh. His most recent book is "Shipping Container", part of the Object Lessons series by Bloomsbury Academic. He is currently completing his next book, also for Bloomsbury Academic, entitled "Deviant Design: The Ad Hoc, the Illicit, the Controversial".

**Antje Missbach** is a senior research fellow and lecturer at the School of Social Sciences at Monash University in Melbourne. She is the author of "Troubled Transit: Asylum seekers stuck in Indonesia" (Singapore: ISEAS, 2015) and co-editor, with Jemma Purdey, of "Linking people: Connections and encounters between Australians and Indonesians" (Berlin: Regiospectra, 2015).

**Gabriella Sanchez** is the head of the Migrant Smuggling Observatory at the Migration Policy Center. She is the author of "Human Smuggling and Border Crossings" (Routledge 2016) and co-editor of the 2018 Special Issue on "Migrant Smuggling" of the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences.

**Madina Tlostanova** is professor of postcolonial feminisms at the Department of Thematic Studies (Gender studies) at Linköping University (Sweden). Her most recent works include "Postcolonialism and Postsocialism in Fiction and Art: Resistance and Re-existence" (Palgrave, 2017) and "What Does it Mean to be Post-Soviet? Decolonial Art from the Ruins of the Soviet Empire" (Duke University Press, 2018).

**Xolani Tshabalala** is a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Research on Migration, Ethnicity and Society, Linköping University. His work focus on transnational informal livelihood practices across the South Africa - Zimbabwe border.

**Ilse van Liempt** is an Assistant Professor in Human Geography and Qualitative Research Methods at the University of Utrecht. She has been a Marie Curie Research Fellow at the Sussex Centre for Migration Research. Her current research focuses on processes of in and exclusion on the global as well as the local level.

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