



Human Smugglers | Workshop Abstracts - Part 2

written by Allegra
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The workshop “[Critical approaches to irregular migration facilitation: dismantling the human smuggler narrative](#)” is fast approaching! Unique in its genre, the workshop aims to problematise the figure of the smugglers beyond overly simplistic generalisations and representations.

There is a growing corpus of empirical and critical work on the facilitation or brokerage of irregular migration within migration regimes, which deserves to be



fostered and strengthened. The workshop proposes critical and empirical engagements on the topic of the facilitation and brokerage of irregular migration as witnessed regionally and comparatively by its participants.

Only for its aficionados, Allegra will publish the full list of abstracts. Here's part two. Enjoy!

Indigenous Migration Merchants: Coyoterismo and Indigenous Mobility in the Migration Industry

[Victoria Stone-Cadena](#), City University of New York

International migration from southern highland Ecuador is not new but the dynamics have changed significantly since its early inception in the late 1960s. Following the demise of the regionally based Panama hat export industry in the mid-1960s, middle class merchants and their children migrated to the United States, following the “Panama Hat Trail” (Miller 1986), connections made through the trade industry. The global petroleum crisis during the 1980s prompted another rise in migration, however this wave consisted mostly of young men from rural areas in the southern highland region. In late 1999 and early 2000, Ecuador again underwent a significant economic crisis. Migration to Spain, Italy, and, to a lesser extent, Germany and Russia, surpassed migration to the United States. Most, if not all, of this migration flow involved migration facilitators, in formal and informal venues, ranging from traditional coyotes to travel agencies. Migration brokers (coyotes) are continually cast as entrepreneurial perpetrators, discursively framed as coldhearted and profit-driven, offsetting critical analysis of the role of nation-states in the global uneven development that underpins labor migration. However, as this paper will show, not all of those involved in the smuggling market engage in extreme exploitation and the economic practices of entrepreneurial middle-men have deep historical roots in the region. Prior to 2008, most migrant brokers in the region were part of the merchant mestizo families who had cornered the market for the past twenty years, which in effect reproduced the socio-economic class structures from agro-artisan economies.



However over the past decade, indigenous coyotes have taken the stage in the local migration economy. Based on long-term ethnographic research in southern highland Ecuador, this paper will contextualize the informal economic practices among rural communities and examine the role of ethnic identity as a strategic variable in migration market activity.

Decency adrift at sea

[Claudia Tazreiter](#), University of North South Wales

This paper focuses on the dissonance between official (governmental) and unofficial (migrant) narratives of ‘irregular’ migration journeys and the role of human smugglers in these journeys. The paper explores the planning of boat journeys by asylum seekers between Indonesia and Australia facilitated by human smugglers and the interventions of the Australian government. Refugee politics in the Asia-Pacific region has a long history of contradictions and tough approaches to asylum seekers and refugee populations. Perhaps surprisingly from the vantage point of North America and Europe, Australia has led the charge in punitive policies toward asylum seeker arrivals, accompanied by official narratives of fear, risk, invasion and contagion and a frenzied rhetoric of human smugglers as ‘the scum of the earth’. Indeed, Australia is alone among the nations who have signed and ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention in the detention of asylum seekers including children without time limits and without access to judicial review; a system of off-shore detention and processing centres; and the refusal to resettle asylum seekers once their protection claim has been substantiated. With this backdrop in mind, the paper draws on 150 interviews with Afghani and Iranian asylum seekers in Indonesia seeking to make onward journeys. The interviews were conducted in in 2014 in various locations around the Indonesian archipelago and designed to better understand and illuminate the decision-making of asylum seekers in relation to their migration journeys. The research identifies narratives of risk, security and protection seeking undertaken by individuals and families. Counter to the assumption of governments of the utility of official campaigns of



deterrence in countries of origin and countries of transit such as Indonesia, this research finds that migrant decision-making is mostly informed through familial, community and ethnic group networks that also include those who assist in facilitating irregular migration journeys – the human smuggler.

Rohingya by Any Other Name is Not the Same: Smuggling in Southeast Asia and the Politics of Terminology

[Sarnata Reynolds](#), Refugees International

There was (and continues to be) much debate about whether the Rohingya were trafficked or smuggled onto the boats stranded at sea in the Indian Ocean in May and June 2015. Part of this debate stems from the complexity of boat movements in the region, and particularly from Myanmar, and the lucrative nature of shipping destitute and desperate people across the sea. When RI spoke to Rohingya in Myanmar IDP camps in 2014 and in Malaysia in 2015, they described their initial experience as one of smuggling – they agreed to board boats under the condition that they and their families would pay for or work off their passage at a later point. They were not necessarily aware that they would be detained in Thai jungle camps until payment of their passage was completed, and at the same time, this smuggling passage was not new. If the terms of their passage changed during flight, then what may have started out as smuggling could have become a situation of trafficking before it ended. Either way, the decision to enter into this passage demonstrates the desperate persecution of the Rohingya in Myanmar. At the same time, the vast majority of the media, many advocates, and governments characterized the Rohingya experience as one of trafficking only, which permitted Myanmar to immediately deny that the Rohingya were fleeing persecution, and argue that this was a law enforcement issue that Myanmar was willing to participate in ending. Six months later, regional governments have worked extensively (although likely selectively) to crack down on smuggling and trafficking rings, and the Rohingya continue to be persecuted in Myanmar and jailed in all neighboring countries. Terminology matters, and this paper will pull



apart the different types of operations at work in the region to move people from one location to another, and perhaps more importantly, document the real consequences when journalists, researchers, and advocates misuse terms that trigger entirely different responsibilities and consequences.

Smuggling as a social negotiation in transit spaces: Pathways of Central Americans migrants in Mexico's southern border

[Yaatsil Guevara](#), University of Bielefeld

Since August 2014, the Programa Frontera Sur (Southern Border Program) has been implemented within Mexico's southern States, as part of the binational border reinforcement actions between U.S. and Mexico. This 'lengthening of U.S. Southern border' has result in a reshaping of flows and crossing dynamics of migrants because of the increased control and repression by the Mexican State. These conditions are leading human smugglers and clandestine networks to reshape their facilitation strategies in order to offer "improved" and/or "good quality service" to their clients. Smugglers, unable to guarantee crossings tend to create "packages" that bill their clients for alternative services that may support their journeys. Building new networks through alliances and social actors for the creation of new markets are one of the challenges faced by smuggling facilitators at a time of border management and hunting policies. Relying on participant observation conducted at the migrant shelter known as "La 72" in Tenosique, Tabasco (an understudied point of transit for irregular migration processes) the present work addresses migrants' understandings of mobility and temporality within transitional migratory processes. Theoretically, I bring into the debate the notion of a third space (Bhabha, 1990) arising from these processes of migration, in-between trade and transit spaces. How migrants experience their negotiations with smugglers? Which kind of in-between communities emerge during irregular migration trajectories? Which kind of symbolic borders are built through migrants, local population of transit spaces and smuggling networks?



Humanitarian Smuggling in a time of crises: Examples from Europe

[Ilse Van Liempt](#), Utrecht University

Since the mid-1990s human smuggling has been increasingly associated with the profiteering and violent nature of smugglers, and linked to organized crime. The literature on human smuggling as a result is dominated by a business way of thinking about the relationship between the smuggler and the migrant and generally lacks the voice of the migrant. A remarkable finding from studies that take migrants' perspectives on human smuggling into account is for example that there is often very little stigma attached to the smuggling business from migrants' point of view. Migrants who have used the services of smugglers often describe them as "helpers", as people who "save lives", or as a "necessary alternative" in a world with many restrictions on mobility (Liempt 2007). Moreover, smugglers can be familiar people, usually friends of friends, but sometimes also family members.

In the current 'state of the world' with many people fleeing their country and in need of a smuggler the picture is changing. New people have entered the scene that either profit from people's need to cross borders (and some are very violent), or those who want to help out. This paper will focus on what has been called 'humanitarian smugglers', citizens who from a humanitarian point of view help immigrants in their border crossing process. These could be religious organizations, charities, NGOs like for example the Dutch *Vluchtkonvooi*, a group of students who recently went with a mini-van to the Hungarian/Austrian border to help people with their crossing, or even millionaires with private initiatives. Christopher Catrambone, an American entrepreneur who runs a company that provides insurances in conflict zones, but in the summer of 2013 decided to set up his own search and rescue operation in the Mediterranean. All of these border crossing acts would legally fit into the definition of human smuggling, but are these humanitarian smugglers prosecuted and if so, how are these prosecutions legitimized and understood?



What makes a good smuggler? Customer satisfaction among Undocumented Migrants

[Daniel Martinez](#) (George Washington University) and [Jeremy Slack](#) (University of Texas at El Paso)

This article presents evidence from the Migrant Border Crossing Survey (MBCS) a unique data set consisting of over 1,000 post-deportation surveys. In particular we focus on a series of questions with deportees about their experiences with coyotes, regarding their satisfaction with services that were provided and whether or not they would be willing to put friends and family in touch with their most recent smuggler. While recent scholarship has challenged the straw-man argument that *coyotes* are always villainous and abusive, this article will add another layer of nuance to understandings of a fully articulate human smuggler subject. No one has previously evaluated which qualities migrants expect and desire from human smugglers. We explore the points where migrant's desires, needs and expectations rupture with the needs of coyotes as a way to better understand the dynamics of clandestine migration. What causes situations of abuse and mistreatment? What are legitimate expectations for treatment among people engaging in clandestine migration? This new data sheds light on important data about this understudied aspect of the migrant experience.

Casual Encounters? Changing Market Conditions and Organizational Response among Smugglers of Migrants and Drugs

[Gabriella Sanchez](#) (University of Texas at El Paso) and [Sheldon Zhang](#) (San Diego State University)

While reports on the alleged domination of drug trafficking organizations over human smuggling groups are widespread in media to the extent they have permeated the academic circles, empirical data on the practice is scant. Recent fieldwork among migrants who have relied on human smugglers to cross the US



Mexico border suggests the existence of a complex web of interactions between individuals involved in multiple illicit markets along the borders, drug trafficking being one of them. In this paper, we explore the theoretical and practical implications of the alleged contacts, relying on empirical data. By exploring the specifics in both markets' environments, we attempt to better understand how different criminalized groups adapt and respond to market constraints while maintaining a Profit.

Recent evolutions in the organisation of crossings of the Mediterranean sea

[Paola Monzini](#), Independent Scholar

The progressive tightening of migration policies has increased in the last 15 years the number of would-be migrants recurring to irregular means to overcome the restrictions imposed by states (on exit and entry) all-over the Mediterranean region. Currently the three main crossings of the Mediterranean sea, with origin in Turkey, Libya and Egypt are run in different ways, and in these countries the growing demand of mobility due to increasing instability especially in 2011 and after 2013 has fuelled the organisation of smuggling activities, by sea and land. Patrolling activities have progressively reduced the part of migration having access to the EU shores without being detected by the authorities and almost all migrants coming by sea are currently apprehended and their cases are processed by national agencies according to the established legal procedures.

The paper presents the main evolutions in the organisations of these routes in last five years, with a view of formulating key questions to further explore the current functioning and recent evolutions of the smuggling and irregular migration systems through the Mediterranean area, and to identify under-explored areas of research. The paper takes into account the current grey and academic international literature on smuggling of migrants with a transnational and comparative approach, with a focus on the organisation of migrant smuggling involving Middle East and African migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea. The



empirical research, based on semi-structured interviews hold in Milan and Rome with Syrian and Eritrean migrants, is completed with interviews with stakeholders and the analysis of judicial proceedings in Italy.

Is There a Mutually Reinforcing Cycle Between Increased Attention and Power of State Enforcement and Dynamic Organization of Human “Smuggling”/Trafficking?

[Josiah Heyman](#) and Simon Sam (University of Texas at El Paso)

A plausible argument (Heyman 1999) is that strengthened state law enforcement, specifically at borders, results in adaptive changes in the organization and capacities of illegal actors/facilitators, such as “smugglers.” On the U.S.-Mexico border, we know that the post-1993 law enforcement build-up resulted in increased rate of use and cost of smuggling; other effects, such as changes in coercion, organization, relations to criminal groups, etc., are not as well understood. Hence, adaptive changes by illegal actors/facilitators deserve greater study and specification. Conversely, newly adaptive smuggling patterns may result in public or internal bureaucratic justifications for increasing state resources and rigorous methods. A key proposition is that the result is a mutually reinforcing cycle (or dialectic). This proposition needs considerably more exploration; the cycle itself seems plausible but we do not know if and how it works in specific cases. Other intervening components can include the actions of migrants, media reporting, the politics of sending, transit, and receiving societies, and the advocacy of NGOs. We provide initial information on the growth of anti-smuggling/trafficking branches of the U.S. state, partially in the context of the escalatory cycle of U.S.-Mexico border crossing and enforcement that started in late 1993 (and may be slowing now) and expansion of Mexico-based transnational criminal organizations/networks in the last three decades.

Precarious waters: fishermen, people-smuggling and limited choice for



earning money in Eastern Indonesia

[Antje Missbach](#), Monash University

Based on a survey of 90 verdicts from people smuggling trials in Indonesia between 2011 and 2015, it was found that a disproportionate number of offenders sentenced to jail for their involvement in people smuggling originate from Eastern Indonesia, usually considered the poorest part of Indonesia. This paper investigates the socio-economic backgrounds of the offenders, first and foremost low-skilled fishermen, in light of their generally low success rates to earn a decent living in Eastern Indonesia. Due to a variety of problems, ranging from overfishing, climate change, pollution, underdeveloped local fishing industries and mismanagement of distribution chains, fishermen face massive problems making a living for their families. Many fishermen are indebted and they have few chances to repay their debts in the short to mid-term. High-risk voyages to transport asylum seekers to the Australian Ashmore Reef and Christmas Island have for years offered a 'fast buck'. However, these risky voyages entail very high social costs for the fishermen, such as arrest and imprisonment. Although not every transporter is arrested, prosecuted and imprisoned, many transporters have spent several years in Australian prisons, away from their families and isolated from community support. With the criminalisation of people smuggling in Indonesia, more and more transporters involved in transporting asylum seekers are imprisoned in Indonesia, which has even more severe consequences for the fishermen and their role as main income-providers for their families.

Next to the survey data, this paper is based on two fieldtrips to Rote Island (geographically the closest Indonesian island to Australia) in 2012 and 2014, in which a number of fishermen, convicted for people smuggling, have been interviewed both while serving their sentences in jail and after release. With the help of the narrative of the fishermen and the court documents the paper reconstructs decision-making and risk-taking strategies of fishermen who have been involved in the transport of asylum seekers to Australia. Understanding the local conditions for fishermen in Eastern Indonesia, and particularly in Rote, thus helps to draw firmer conclusions on how transnational people-smuggling



networks operate and how they exploit local conditions of precarity in Eastern Indonesia.

Mapping Borderlands: Drawing Things Together

[Nora Akawi](#), [Nina V. Kolowratnik](#), and Jason Danforth

The Echoing Borders initiative, led by Nora Akawi and Nina V. Kolowratnik, is developed at Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP) through courses and field research. The project situates itself at the tension between the rising density and rate of forced migration across borders on the one hand, and the static definitions of contemporary citizenship and human rights on the other. Considering that frontiers are physically manifested through fences and trenches, but also through international networks of border patrol, technologies of body identification, access to shelter, jobs, and healthcare, and fluctuating policies and regulations, the projects developed through Echoing Borders attempt to redraw contemporary borders with a focus on elements of movement and time - challenging the static representations of what are in fact mobile and fluctuating conditions. Mappings developed focus on the spatial manifestations of forced migration of refugees, and on questions on mobility, citizenship, and access in contemporary borderland conditions. Jason Danforth (GSAPP M.ARCH 2016), will present his project "Means and Ends", part of the Echoing Borders initiative from Fall 2015. As both a research paper and cartographic exercise, "Means and Ends" seeks to problematize the image of the smuggler as a singular, monolithic figure by identifying the many roles and individuals which comprise the sprawling web of smuggling networks. Operating under the model of Bruno Latour, this project is an attempt to "draw things together," and represent the complex cultural, economic, and territorial figure(s) of the smuggler and their relationship to the current migration crisis spanning the Middle East and Europe.



“This is Jihad”: piety and morality among Syrian smugglers

[Luigi Achilli](#), European University Institute

Despite embodying the popular depiction of the immoral and deceitful villain who does not hesitate to toss human beings into the sea, human smugglers' services in the Mediterranean Sea seem to be in higher demand than ever. Of course, smugglers often constitute the only available travel option for those individuals who flee a situation of immediate danger and distress. However, the desperate need of finding a refuge and the difficulty to access legal channels of mobility alone on the part of migrants and asylum seekers' are not sufficient to explain the resilience and strength of the bonds between them and the smugglers. While the reasons of migrants and asylum seekers to rely on smuggling services are often described in the migration literature, little is known about how human smugglers depict themselves and the relationships between them and their “customers”. A truly effective answer to human smuggling requires a better understanding of the phenomenon from its actors. With that goal, this paper problematizes the common wisdom about one of the most discussed characters of our time and shifts the attention toward an exploration of smuggling's political economy. It builds on empirical research largely based on interviews and participant observation with Syrian refugees and smugglers themselves held in Turkey and Greece. An inside view reveals how human smuggling acquires social and moral significance for my both smugglers and their clients. It also highlights how smugglers negotiate long-held notions of morality and religious duties (one being that of jihad – understood as the Islamic duty of assisting others, a term without militaristic connotations) with the realities of being involved into what is popularly perceived as a criminal activity. In conversations, smugglers represent themselves as honest service-providers and pious persons who satisfy a need that people cannot fulfill through legal paths. Remarkably, accounts about the piety of smugglers were also often confirmed by many of their costumers. What my findings suggest is that the relationship between smugglers and migrant is far more complex than media and popular accounts would suggest. In so doing, I argue that human smuggling



practices are in line with frameworks of morality and piety shared by smugglers and their clients.

The Struggle of Mobility: Organizing High-risk Migration from the Horn of Africa to Scandinavia Tekalign Ayalew Mengiste

Depictions on how migrants and refugees from the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia and Eritrea) exit their homelands have been the subject of narrow portrayals of violence, victimization and suffering, burying the processes of how those in transit travel across the land and settle in European destinations. Based on work collected in the UK, Sweden, Italy, Sudan and Ethiopia, this presentation reflects on the interactions among diasporic transnational actors (migrants, their families, co-ethnics and co-nationals in origin, transnational and diasporic spaces) and how they engage in and organize multi-scale, multi-purpose mobility processes -the result of the entanglement of cross border social and smuggling networks, the emergence of migration routes and the settlement of former migrants *en route* and permanent locations in Sweden.

Taking up the intersection of notions of diasporic transnationalism, brokering practices, borders and irregular migration as points of departure, I explore how migrants and refugees generate resources and organize high risk journeys (over vast deserts and the high seas) as well as across multiple transnational spaces and destination communities. Smugglers play multiple roles in different stages of the migrant trails-exit from the homelands, transits across Africa and secondary mobility after Italy until migrants arrive at Sweden. They arrange particular transport services to cross borders, deserts, and seas; informal money transfer systems for migrants from families in diasporic spaces; timing travel routes with knowledgeable guides and appropriate hiding spaces. Former migrants settled along the route and in destination locations provide necessary information for prospective migrants about routes, smugglers, decisions pertaining to when to move, how to behave during interactions with smugglers, how to hide money, which clothes, medicine and food to carry, finding shelter and temporary jobs in



transit lands.

Through the formation of what I refer to as a community of mobility, smugglers and migrants try to minimize the risk of violence due to kidnappings for ransom, robbery, rape, interception, detentions and deportation or imprisonment, injury and death as they cross the Sahara desert, move across Libya, cross the Mediterranean and move within Europe. Ethnographic data show the facilitation of irregular transits creates, feeds and sustains what I refer to as a collective system of migratory knowledge that links migrants from the Horn of Africa to transnational spaces and destinations in fashions that improve the likelihood of a successful journey. I argue that the collective experience in irregular migrations constitutes a diasporic system of knowledge that challenges immobility regimes and impediments to transit and find economic and protection niches in European or similar other destinations.

The Buddhist people smuggler: challenging contemporary stereotypes of exploitation and vulnerability through the Tibetan migration experience

[Bodean Hedwards](#)

As the human rights situation in Tibet makes migration increasingly complex, Tibetans are forced to engage in irregular migration channels in an effort to navigate both the physical and political barriers associated with the Sino-Nepal border. The irregular migration experience of Tibetans is placed against the backdrop of decades of attempted cultural and political naturalisation policies that have sought to contain dissent inside the borders of the Tibetan plateau. In response to these policies, Tibetans are turning to a network of *guides* to facilitate their journey into exiled communities in India, and around the globe. Grounded in research undertaken in exiled Tibetan communities in Northern India, this presentation engages the Tibetan experience to challenge contemporary stereotypes of exploitative people smugglers who profit off the backs of vulnerable refugees and irregular migrants. By following the experiences of irregular Tibetan migrants into India, it will highlight the significance of the



intricate socio-political and geographical factors that established the need for a network of guides in this context, and what lessons can be taken from the Tibetan experience for research and policy relating to people smuggling globally.

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