The double duality of migrant smugglers:
an analytical framework

Jørgen Carling

I. Introduction

Migrant smugglers play central roles in shaping migration. In this chapter, I develop a new framework for understanding migrant smuggling and counter-smuggling measures. Its core is what I call the double duality of migrant smugglers. For states and migrants alike, smugglers embody a typological duality: on the one hand, they are a threat, or a problem, but on the other hand, they are a resource, or a solution. Expressed in these abstract terms, the dualities that migrants and states experience are parallel. Hence the notion of a double duality. This Janus-faced feature is essential to the roles that smugglers have come to play.

A key to new insights lies in reaching across academic grounds. Here I draw connections between the technicalities of migration management, the politics of immigration, and the development of narratives. The latter point is anchored in the field of narratology—a rich source of analytical perspectives beyond the widespread but often casual references to ‘narratives’ in migration studies. In the context of this book, narratology offers valuable insights on the creative use of agency to make the most of limited operating space. I show how the dominant narrative on smuggling has changed in response to shifting dynamics of migration and altered geopolitical contexts. The clients of smugglers are increasingly likely to need international protection as refugees, and consequently, migration management and border control have become much more politically fraught than when counter-smuggling measures were a matter of stopping ‘illegal immigration’. When states are cornered by irreconcilable demands, well-crafted narratives can provide a sense of closure and maintain authority. A messy reality of dilemmas and doubt is recast as a compelling plot of victims (migrants), villains (smugglers) and heroes (states). In the process, core realities of the smuggling experience are lost. Most strikingly, the
vulnerability of smuggled migrants is often twisted to become a question of the smugglers’ character.

The analytical contributions of this chapter are relevant across regional contexts. However, the discussion draws primarily on European experiences with migration across the Mediterranean. Consequently, I focus on smuggling by boat. This form of smuggling is not only numerically important but has also been symbolically and politically prominent and serves as an illuminating focal point for discussions that concern migrant smuggling more broadly.

My analyses can be summarized by the following core argument: disparate aspects of migrant smuggling are all connected, but the connections can be tenderly disentangled. The migrant–smuggler relationship is connected to the state–smuggler relationship; smuggling is connected to other parts of the migration management system, and the management system is connected to the narrative system. In the next section of the chapter, I preface this disentangling of connections with a birds-eye view of the striking combination of continuities and changes in migrant smuggling across the Mediterranean over the past two decades. Thereafter, I lay out the notion of a double duality in greater detail and proceed to discuss, first, the migrant–smuggler relationship and then the state–smuggler relationship. The penultimate section brings the two together with a focus on the narrative aspect of migration policy. Finally, the conclusion recaps the connections that merit attention in order to understand migrant smuggling and responses to it.

The power of narrative, which I return to, is closely related to terminology. The terms migrant smuggling, human smuggling and people smuggling coexist as virtual synonyms in the academic and policy literature. I deliberately use ‘migrant smuggling’ because it is smuggling facilitating international migration that is of interest. People are smuggled across borders in other contexts too, for instance to conduct covert intelligence operations or to escape law enforcement, but those are separate concerns. The case for using ‘migrant smuggling’ is intimately linked to the definition of migrants. International migrants are people who cross borders with the intention of changing their usual place of residence, regardless of their motivations or legal status (IOM 2004). In other words, asylum seekers and refugees are specific categories of migrants. This is particularly important in the context of smuggling since migrants who are smuggled may or may
not be fleeing a well-founded fear of persecution and have the right to international protection.

When they are being smuggled, not even the migrants themselves know who will eventually be given refugee status. This ambiguity is a case for using ‘migrants’ in an inclusive manner, encompassing asylum seekers and refugees as well as other people on the move. But this approach is regrettably being thwarted by inter-agency turf battles in the UN system. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) sees this traditional definition of migrants as a threat to the agency’s exclusive ownership of refugee issues and has fiercely campaigned against it (Carling 2017c). Their preferred understanding of ‘migrant’ is a person who, by definition, has no right to refugee status. Partly due to UNHCR’s campaign, ‘migrant smuggling’ is often addressed without recognizing the role that smugglers plan in bringing refugees to safety.

II. Continuity and change in migrant smuggling to Europe

Any analytical framework seeks to aid our understanding of a dynamic empirical reality. Thus, a review of both continuity and change since the first edition of this volume was published in 2001 is in order before introducing the conceptual framework. Indeed, European experiences with migrant smuggling have shifted in ways that provide an illustrative window on the mix of continuity and change.

The first obvious continuity is simply that smuggler-assisted irregular migration has been a constant feature at Europe’s external borders. Routes have shifted and numbers have fluctuated, but the phenomenon itself—migrants using the services of smugglers to enter Europe in contravention of immigration regulation—has persisted.

Second, anti-smuggling rhetoric has been a consistent part of the government response. By anti-smuggling rhetoric I mean portrayals of smugglers that emphasise negative characteristics in an essentializing, generalised in often unsubstantiated way. For instance, the Spanish government has since the 1990s referred to migrant smugglers in Morocco as ‘las mafias’, ignoring the actual variation in organizational forms and the sometimes-blurred line between the smugglers and the smuggled.

The third constant has been that governments have responded to irregular migration with anti-smuggling measures. The exact measures have changed, but that should not distract from the continuity in attempts to curb
migrant smuggling. So when the European Union announced the intention to use military action against smuggling vessels in early 2015, the prospect of ‘bom[ing the boats’ represented newness in terms of its dramatic effect, but would simply have been another mode of a well-established line of policy: targeting smugglers in order to make unauthorized entry as difficult as possible. In the end, bombing was not part of the plan, but that the objective was nevertheless to ‘identify, capture and destroy’ smuggler’s vessels.

A fourth continuity has been that smuggling practices have kept adapting in response to the anti-smuggling measures. As with the other continuities, there is constant change at the superficial level of actual practices. However, there is steadfast stability at the fundamental level of adaptation itself.

But some things have also changed. The first obvious change is the remarkable increase in the number of irregular arrivals in 2014–2015. There have been fluctuations before, but the scale of this increase makes it qualitatively different. Second, the political dimension changed in the sense that irregular migration and migrant smuggling achieved unprecedented prominence on the crowded European policy agenda. Third, there has been a remarkable shift in the composition of the irregular migration flow across Europe’s external borders. When such migration first became a concern in the 1990s—and well into the 2000s—only a small proportion of the migrants sought asylum in Europe. This shift has implications for both the management system and the narrative system, to which I return in later sections.

III. The double duality of migrant smugglers

The double duality of migrant smugglers refers to their simultaneous roles as (1) a threat, or a problem, and (2) a resource, or a solution, played vis-à-vis both migrants and states. As I will show, the two dualities are also closely intertwined.

Table 1 lays out the basics of the double duality. From the perspective of migrants, smugglers are first and foremost a resource, in the sense that they provide migration opportunities that would otherwise by unavailable. At the same time, smugglers are a threat because of the power they wield in the context of irregular migration, and the concomitant potential for exploitation and abuse. I expand on the relationship between migrants and smugglers in the next section of the chapter.
Table 1. The double duality of the migrant smuggler

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threat or problem</th>
<th>Resource or solution</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For migrants</td>
<td>For states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agents of deception and exploitation</td>
<td>Menace to (direct) control of migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providers of migration opportunities</td>
<td>Sources of moral capital for anti-migrant measures</td>
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For states, the obvious role of smugglers, as they tend to view them regardless of their situational motivations, is to undermine state authority and control over migration. "Smugglers," as such, can therefore easily be perceived as an unequivocal menace. Yet, they have come to represent a moral resource for states that seek to contain migration. Liberal states are caught in a bind between their international humanitarian commitments and domestic political pressures to minimize immigration. On the one hand, they endorse the institution of asylum, but on the other hand, they want as few asylum seekers as possible given the sharp rise in domestic populist and nationalist movements. These conflicting aims are reconciled by making it a difficult as possible for potential asylum seekers to cross borders and present their claims. Anti-smuggling measures are central to these efforts, even as they result in people seeking shelter from persecution, or imminent danger, being prevented from even arriving to claim asylum at the destination. In this context, smugglers become a source of moral capital for states: by referencing the brutality of the smugglers, the very measures that prevent migrants from seeking safety are recast as protective measures for the migrants’ own good.

IV. Smugglers and migrants

To what extent can smugglers be blamed for the dangers and hardships that smuggled migrants experience? This question is met with disparate answers—some of which reflect the complicated relationship between

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1 Table 1 and my arguments so far simply refer to ‘states’. By this I mean destination-country governments at the national and supranational level, such as the European Union. Clearly, disagreements and power games between and within these states also play key roles in migration management and in efforts to contain smuggling. Others have examined these dimensions, and I leave them aside for now to let the chapter concentrate on the relationship between destination states and other actors.
smugglers and states. But this question also reflects the real duality of the human smuggler as encountered by migrants. On the one hand, the smuggler can fulfil the prospective migrants’ wish of arrival; on the other hand, the smuggler embodies potential abuse and exploitation.

The extent of smugglers’ blame is an empirical issue, bound to vary across contexts and individuals (see e.g. Bredeloup 2012, Laacher 2009, Lucht 2011, Schapendonk 2011, van Liempt 2004, van Liempt and Sersli 2013). However, it is striking that in-depth ethnographic accounts repeatedly describe a more complex and ambiguous relationship than government portrayals of smugglers. A good example of government rhetoric was offered by the Norwegian government on the occasion of proposing new legislation in response to the European Union’s Directive 2002/90/EC. ‘Migrant smuggling is cynical exploitation of people in distress’ was the heading of the press release, a quotation attributed to the minister in charge, who later became prime minister (KRD 2004). Many smugglers are cynical and exploitative but presenting these characteristics as inherent to migrant smuggling is obviously misleading. If we reject this sweeping characterization, how can we make sense of the variable relationship between migrants and smugglers, and the associated risks of being smuggled?

**Foundations of vulnerability**

A first analytical approach lies in examining what exactly exposes migrants to danger when they are being smuggled. When smuggling involves transportation, as opposed to provision of documents that enable migrants to travel independently, the following foundations of vulnerability are common:

- **Physical isolation:** Smuggling typically takes place in isolated areas, be it at sea, in deserts, forests or mountains. Whatever emergency arises, assistance is often unavailable.
- **Concealment:** The need to travel undiscovered often comes at the cost of safety. This concerns not only the choice of route, but also modes of travel such as being hidden in trucks or containers.
- **Strategic exposure:** Smuggling at sea has sometimes adopted a modus operandi that depends on being rescued; consequently, unseaworthy vessels, and other conditions that underpin the need for rescue have at times has strategic purpose.
• **Overcrowding:** Boats and trucks are often filled with a number of migrants that jeopardizes safety. There is an obvious economic incentive for smugglers to do this, since costs only increase slightly with the number of passengers while income increases proportionally.

• **Absence of legal protection:** The clandestine nature of smuggling means that migrants who are smuggled have little or no recourse to protection by law enforcement officials.

• **Operational failures:** Smuggling can be quite a challenging operation that is vulnerable to equipment failure and navigation problems. Many of the deaths in deserts and seas can be attributed to such issues.

• **Psychological duress:** The dangers of being smuggled can be exacerbated through vicious circles in which stress, fear, and other psychological reactions play a role.

On the whole, none of these sources of vulnerability result directly from smugglers’ ill will. But their impact on migrants are mediated by smugglers’ actions and priorities. Smugglers can take steps to minimize the risks, for instance by not overcrowding vehicles, and by safeguarding against equipment failure. At the same time, the vulnerability inherent in the smuggling context creates opportunities for exploitation that smugglers can abuse. The choices smugglers make are partly a matter of conscience but can also be interpreted with respect to the incentive structures that smugglers navigate.

**Incentive structures**

Across different settings, migrant smugglers are influenced by two overarching incentives: (1) to not get caught and prosecuted, and (2) to secure, or maximize, their profits. Empirical research has shown how smugglers operate with other motivations too – including altruism (Achilli 2018, Mohammadi et al. 2019) – but these two incentives stand out as reasonable elements of a general analytical framework. The question is how they are likely to affect the safety of migrants.

Avoiding arrest and prosecution has become a growing concern for smugglers in different parts of the world as states have increased penalties and devoted greater operational resources to counter-smuggling measures. Luigi Achilli (2018:91) recounts the assessment of a young Syrian smuggler's assistant in Turkey: ‘Look, it’s a dangerous job, if the Turkish or
Greek police catch you, you can spend up to 10–15 years in prison’. One consequence of such risks is that smugglers avoid accompanying migrants further than necessary. In the early 2000s, smugglers in the Mediterranean typically brought migrants near the coast, ordered them overboard and told them to swim ashore, and then returned with the boat (Carling 2007a). In recent years, migrants have more often made the entire journey by boat on their own (Mandić and Simpson 2017). Along the US–Mexico border, too, migrants are often endangered by abandonment when smugglers sense a risk of being intercepted and flee (Slack and Martínez 2018). As Mandić and Simpson (2017) point out, counter-smuggling measures create risks that are shifted onto migrants as smugglers seek to minimize their own exposure.

The second overarching incentive – profit – translates into strategies for maximizing income and minimizing costs. Smugglers often push the number of paying clients on a single journey to the limits, with dire consequences for migrants’ safety. An obvious example is the overcrowding of boats, which has contributed to large numbers of migrant deaths in the Mediterranean (Last and Spijkerboer 2014). Similarly, smugglers can cut costs by minimizing precautionary spending on reserve fuel, water and life-saving equipment, for instance. Within this logic of short-term income maximization, the profits that smugglers make increases with the risks that migrants endure.

But smugglers also take a longer-term perspective on their own business and the reputation that they build. (Bilger et al. 2006, Biner 2018). A smuggler in Northern Ethiopia summarized this business aspect of protecting migrants en route: ‘You think about their wellbeing because you need a good reputation. It affects the business if we don’t treat them well’ (Breines et al. 2015:28). Indeed, most migrants who are smuggled across the Mediterranean or the US-Mexico border found their smuggler through referrals (Crawley et al. 2016, Slack and Martínez 2018). Moreover, smugglers commonly receive the full payment only after the migrant has reached the destination, in a deliberate arrangement to change incentives.

These observations show that, while migrants are in an unequal power relationship with smugglers, they potentially enjoy some protection from their consumer power. However, such protection requires a well-functioning market in which migrants can choose between smugglers based on other migrants’ past experiences. Counter-smuggling measures can result in fragmented journeys and smuggler monopolies that erode migrants’ opportunities for making informed choices.
Facilitation and exploitation

So far, I have related to the straightforward notion of ‘the smugglers’ that dominate discussions about migrant smuggling. However, this image has been undermined by field research and evolving empirical developments, in two ways. First, the distinction between smugglers and their clients is often blurred. Migrants work in smuggling on their way, they take on smuggling responsibilities (such as piloting a boat) against a discount, and they engage in self-smuggling. Second migrants engage with a range of people on their way and it is not always clear who is a smuggler and who is not. Taking a step back from the empirical specifics of different routes and experiences, it is useful to distinguish between two forms of interaction with migrants: facilitation and exploitation.

*Facilitation* occurs when migrants are helped to proceed on their journey, assisted across bureaucratic or geographical obstacles. *Exploitation* takes place when migrants are deprived of their resources or physical integrity for someone else’s gain, be it through violence, coercion, or deceit. Facilitation and exploitation are both questions of degree, and they can occur in combination. Figure 1 illustrates this relationship and identifies different roles that people who interact with migrants can play.

![Figure 1. Other individuals’ interactions with migrants who are being smuggled](image)
By definition, smuggling entails facilitation. Smugglers therefore always occupy the upper part of the figure. But the smuggling may or may not also be exploitative. Point X represents a smuggler who simply provides a service for a price, in a reasonable transaction: facilitation without exploitation. Point Y, by contrast, represents a smuggler who facilitates mobility, but also exploits or abuses his clients. The area between X and Y invites discussions about the exploitative elements of smuggling. For instance, what is reasonable compensation for the smugglers’ risk and expenses and what is exploitative overcharging? And when does under-communication of the dangers amount to exploitation?

When migrants are clearly exploited, the exploiters are not necessarily smugglers. Long and fragmented journeys expose migrants to risks of exploitation and abuse from a range of individuals including officials, criminals, militias, and other migrants. Point Z represents actors who take advantage of the smuggling context to exploit migrants, without facilitating their journey. An example of growing concern is the kidnapping of migrants for ransom. Eritreans being smuggled through Egypt and Latin Americans transiting through Mexico have been victims of such crimes on a substantial scale (Breines et al. 2015, Leutert and Yates 2019). In some cases, the smugglers are involved, directly or indirectly; in other cases, the exploiters are completely detached from the smuggling activity. Often, the role of smugglers remains unknown and contested (Slack and Martínez 2018). This diversity of roles also challenges the notion of ‘the smuggler’ as an unequivocal figure. Figure 1 thus invites an alternative perspective focused on the actions rather than the categorical identities of the people who interact with migrants who are being smuggled.

The types of interaction represented by point Z is a serious threat to migrants, but, in policy debates, is usually overshadowed by concerns about smuggling. With a focus on protecting migrants, it is essential to acknowledge that the smuggling context creates vulnerabilities, but that the dangers do not necessarily come from smugglers.

VI. Smugglers and states

The relationship between smugglers and states – like that between smugglers and migrants – is an ambivalent one. Scholars have examined this relationship through various lenses, including the paradoxical interdependence of smugglers and law enforcement for their own existence (Andreas 2012, Keen and Andersson 2018) and the role of smuggling in the
securitization of migration (Ghezelbash et al. 2018, Moreno-Lax 2018). This chapter makes two original contributions to the field. First, it connects the smuggler–state relationship to the smuggler–migrant relationship through the notion of a double duality. The analytical value of doing so will become clear in the sections that follow. Second, the chapter shows how the smuggler–state relationship can be understood through the interaction of two systems: the management system and the narrative system. As will become clear, both are ‘systems’ in the sense that they are made up of parts that are interconnected may change through ripple effects. The analyses help specify what kind of problem smugglers represent to states, and also how they represent solutions.

The management system
Migrant smuggling is part of a wider system of pathways and obstacles to migration. Since this is the system that migrants encounter, I have referred to it elsewhere as ‘the immigration interface’ (Carling 2002, 2007a). From the state’s perspective, it constitutes a management system – a totality of physical, organizational and legal elements through which the state exercises migration management (Geiger and Pécoud 2010). The nature and significance of migrant smuggling – and hence the relationship between smugglers and states – depends on its shifting role within this system.

The European experience since the late 1990s illustrates a series of such shifts, illustrated in Figure 2. Initially, migrant smuggling was a direct pathway to illegal residence and work in the large unregulated sectors of Southern European labour markets (King et al. 2000). Many more migrants entered illegality through overstaying legal permits, so smuggling was of limited significance. But the role that smuggling played was nevertheless clear (Figure 2, Phase I).

Throughout the different phases, destination states have fought smuggling directly, through criminal prosecution. But in the strategic policy priorities vis-à-vis migrant smuggling have shifted. Initially, when smuggling offered access to illegal residence and work, an obvious priority was to intercept and apprehend migrants as they arrived. Spain, in particular, invested heavily in surveillance infrastructure. The so-called ‘integrated system of external vigilance’ (SIVE) incorporated systems for detecting vessels well before they approached shore, and dispatching patrols to intercept the passengers (Carling 2007b).
Figure 2. The shifting role of smuggling in the European migration management system.
In theory, migrants that were intercepted could be detained and returned to their countries of origin, ultimately erasing the demand for smuggling. But obstacles to readmission meant that thousands of boat migrants were simply issued with expulsion orders and released when the maximum duration of detention was reached (Carling 2007b). The growing policy concern was the pathway smuggling–interception–detention–release–illegality (Figure 2, phase II). As a result, policy efforts shifted to cooperation with countries of origin and transit in order to facilitate returns. The maximum detention periods were also extended.

More recent shifts in the composition of boat migration across the Mediterranean has added further complexity to the system (Figure 2, phase III). A large proportion of migrants now seek asylum upon arrival and thereby enter the asylum processing system. When applications are rejected, governments are tasked with ensuring return. This challenge is, to a certain extent, a continuation of past experience and depends on cooperation with countries of origin and transit. But in a larger proportion of cases, compared to previously, smuggled migrants seek asylum, have their applications approved, and are allowed to remain.

I would argue that, especially since the crisis of 2015, states’ greatest anxiety is the pathway smuggling–interception–asylum claim–processing–approval, which does not include situations of illegality. Rejected asylum claims may represent logistical challenges, financial costs, and substantial risks of illegality, but granted asylum applications represent something potentially worse: submission to unpopular and unwanted immigration (Carling 2011, Joppke 1998).

The most salient policy priority is to curb smuggling at the outset. The catch phrase is ‘breaking the business model of the smugglers’, which has been applied quite loosely to diverse measures. Some measures, like cutting the supply of vessels, do not alter the management system. Others, like classifying transit states as safe third countries and returning all asylum applicants effectively undercuts the business model providing access to the asylum system by means of smuggling (European Commision 2016).

The contextual changes have altered the significance of smuggling for states. Interception is no longer the critical issue it once was, since migrants who intend to seek asylum have no incentive to enter undetected. But the challenge of containing unauthorized migration is also radically different when the migrants are, for the most part, seeking protection and can be
labelled refugees. ‘Illegal immigration’ may be a legitimate target for assertive political action, but ‘refugee flows’ are not. The repercussions of this dilemma play out through the narrative system.

The narrative system

The narrative system of migration is the sense-making structures through which a complex reality is interpreted and represented. The term ‘narrative’ is often used quite loosely and suggestively in migration research, including in work on smuggling. By contrast, it has particular meanings in research that incorporates narratological theory (Altman 2008, Bal 2009, Borins 2011, Franzosi 1998). In my approach to narratives of smuggling, I do not take specific texts as the starting point, but instead address the underlying levels through which smuggling is interpreted and represented by states.

The analysis of narratives connects with this volume’s cross-cutting themes of creativity and agency. Narratology has developed primarily from the study of creative work, such as literature and film, and provided tools that also contribute to social science. The agency expressed in shaping narratives about smuggling also has a creative component. It can be illuminating to recognize this dimension, but the value of doing so hinges on our understanding of creativity. Seeing creative accounts simply as contrasts to ‘truth’ is an analytical dead-end. Rather, creativity is required to construct sense-making stories about overly complex realities. Some accounts portray the realities of smuggling in more meaningful ways than others, but they are necessarily selective.

Narratological approaches vary in terminology, yet all distinguish between two or three analytical levels of narrative. One influential model denotes them text–story–fabula, with the latter denoting the series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors (Bal 2009). Within this approach, the term actants is used to describe classes of actors who have an identical relation to the principle of the fabula. In the story world of migration management and migrant smuggling, we might identify the key actants as (1) destination states that seek to control migration, (2) migrants, who seek to enter the destination

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2 The notion of actants, defined in relation to a fabula, as mutually constitutive, diverges from the social-scientific notion of ‘agency’, as it is used in this volume and elsewhere. It is this tension between the stylized actants in narrative representations and the bewildering actors in real life that opens analytical perspectives.
state and (3) smugglers, who enable migrants to enter. We can add (4) origin and transit states, who play important roles but have less clearly defined aspirations. Each of these four is a collection of different actors, but they are singular actants by virtue of their place in the fabula.

The analytical value of this perspective lies in examining how the same bare-facts fabula gives rise to divergent stories about migrant smuggling, which in turn are represented in specific texts, including policy documents, speeches, media coverage and academic works. I leave the last step – textual representations – aside in this chapter and instead address how the divergent stories are premised on assigning particular character roles to the actants. These roles are simultaneously shaped by the characteristics of each actant as well as by their relations to each other – hence my reference to a narrative ‘system’.

Figure 3 displays these four actants and the connecting relationships of greatest interest. The changes that have occurred in the migration management system since the 1990s are reflected in the nature of relations between actants, and in the character roles they are given by the dominant storyteller: destination states. In Phase I, when smuggling was primarily a pathway to illegal residence, European destination states portrayed their role in primarily terms of protecting the integrity and security of European societies. Transit states were accused of turning a blind eye to smugglers, or colluding with them, and the trans-Mediterranean relationship was a largely antagonistic one. The relationship with smuggled migrants, too, was fundamentally hostile, in the sense that the phenomenon they represented—illegal immigration—was a legitimate target in mainstream politics.

Two subsequent shifts in the migration management system have incited a new narrative. Figure 3 displays the resulting narrative system, labelled Phase III because it overlaps with the third phase of the migration management system illustrated in Figure 2. The early years of the new Millennium saw the adoption of Europe’s ‘Global Approach to Migration and Mobility’, widespread externalization of European migration control, and the rise of ‘migration management’ as the favoured designation of the policy field (Collyer 2012, Geiger and Pécout 2010). Cooperation with origin and transit states was needed to manage migration—not least to facilitate returns (Figure 2). In the migration narrative system, origin and transit states were consequently given a new character role as ‘partners’, symbolically and formally reinforced through ‘migration partnerships’.
This policy-driven shift was followed by a shift in external events, with further repercussions for the narrative system. As mentioned above, a growing proportion of boat migrants in the Mediterranean were seeking asylum in Europe. When Syrians became the largest nationality in 2013, it not only boosted this trend in numerical terms, but also shaped the *image* of smuggled migrants and hence their possible character role in the narrative. The salient refugeeness of Syrians strengthened the perceived legitimacy of boat migration, and the simultaneous surge in the number of migrant deaths demonstrated the vulnerability of smuggled migrants (Kallio *et al.*). In combination, these changes complicated destination states’ relationship with smuggled migrants, who no longer represented unequivocally undesirable ‘illegal immigration’. This shift in the character role of migrants in the mainstream destination-state narrative is vital, even as populist anti-migration narratives have simultaneously flourished and gained foothold, also in national governments.
When destination states’ relationships with migrants and with transit states are softened, political leaders are also deprived of potential targets for assertive action. The relationship with smugglers thus gains importance partly because of its residual position. In other words, when destination-country leaders are under mounting pressure to ‘do something’ in a forceful manner, they have nowhere else to turn. Such pressure grew with the number of arrivals and fatalities, and so did the need for a good enemy.

A systemic analysis reveals how the triangular relationship between destination states, migrants and smugglers evolved in this situation (Figure 3). Smugglers and migrants are to a lesser extent portrayed as teaming up to undermine the integrity of destination states. Rather, the relation between them is portrayed in villain–victim terms. When the relationship is imbued with this moral dimension—virtuous refugees being exploited by cynical criminals—and destination states assertively target smugglers, states assume a heroic character role. So, while the sympathy for migrants directly challenges states’ scope for containment, it indirectly bolsters the legitimacy and virtuousness of counter-smuggling action. In other words, the good–evil representation of the migrant–smuggler relationship generates moral capital that is appropriated by destination states—even as they successfully seek to limit or deny the ability to even claim asylum.

Going back to the question of facilitation and exploitation of migrants (Figure 1) it is striking that the destination-state narrative only accommodates agents who both facilitate migration and exploit migrants (point Y in the figure). In other words, smugglers are seen as inherently exploitative, and the exploitation of migrants is attributed to smugglers. There is no room for smugglers who simply deliver a service as agreed (X), and there is little attention to other agents of exploitation and abuse (Z) (Carling 2017a, Carling 2017b). This fixation on exploitative smugglers is rhetorically reinforced by the recurrent conflation of smuggling and trafficking.

The appropriation of moral capital has proved particularly powerful because of how smuggling is covered in the media (cf Sanchez 2013). The good–evil representation of the migrant–smuggler relationship has immediate journalistic appeal, easily overshadowing the complexity of the relationship. Even the International Organization for Migration’s Head of Media and Communications has called the use of migrant smugglers ‘foolhardy’ because migrants ‘walk into the hands of smugglers who have nothing but cynicism in their hearts’ (Nebehay 2014). The more ruthless the
smugglers, the more noble the cause of fighting them – even as it prevents migrants from accessing the asylum system. This humanitarian narrative of protection has become increasingly central paradoxically to the migration management mode of addressing migration smuggling.

VII. Closure and contestation

The idea that smugglers represent both a resource and a problem for migrants and states alike – the idea of a double duality – points to the fundamental paradoxes and diverging interests in migration management and refugee protection (Andreas, this volume; FitzGerald 2019). Migration remains a demanding policy field with daunting challenges that, for a range of operational, ethical, and political reasons, cannot be ‘solved’. This makes the narrative realm even more important. Narratives can provide a sense of closure when policy outcomes cannot. With the rising urgency and higher stakes of migration management in Europe since around 2013, we have perhaps witnessed not only an evolution of narratives, but also a strengthened narrativity of policy-making. In the context of narratives about migrant smuggling, closure does not require a resolution of the conflict between the actants, as much as a resolution of the ethical and operational dilemmas of policy-making.

The simple scheme of narrative phases does not do proper justice to the coexistence of different narratives over time, especially the longer history of the protection narrative and the persistent importance of the integrity and security narratives (Boswell et al. 2011, Carling and Hernández-Carretero 2011). But the simplification makes salient the connection between the operational and narrative spheres, the internal logic of each narrative, and the specific nature of contention. Table 2 provides a schematic overview of the earlier and later destination-state narratives and contrasts them with the dominant counter-narrative.

The destination-state narratives of integrity and protection both provide closure: each populates the story world in a way that gives destination states a virtuous character role with a clear sense of purpose. They are also broadly compatible. The contrasts between their portrayal of actants, evident in Table 2, can be resolved. Migrants are increasingly described as ‘migrants and refugees’ with an understanding that migrants, by definition, do not have a well-founded fear of persecution (Carling 2017c). And states of origin and transit are, in practice regarded both as partners and with suspicion, even if the partnership aspect dominates the public discourse.
Table 2. Portrayal of key actants in contrasting narratives about migrant smuggling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actants</th>
<th>Destination-state narrative of integrity</th>
<th>Destination state narrative of protection</th>
<th>Counternarrative of containment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Destination states</strong></td>
<td>Guardians of law and order who act to ensure territorial and administrative integrity</td>
<td>Champions of refugees who act to undermine smugglers’ business model</td>
<td>Hypocritical states that seek to minimize protection responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Origin and transit states</strong></td>
<td>Corrupt and irresponsible bystanders or accomplices</td>
<td>Partners in the fight against smuggling</td>
<td>Opportunistic states who use migration politics to their advantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Migrants</strong></td>
<td>Illegal entrants who are motivated by material aspirations</td>
<td>Naive and vulnerable victims of exploitation</td>
<td>Rational actors with a legitimate need for protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Smugglers</strong></td>
<td>Organized criminals who run a low-risk, high-reward business</td>
<td>Cynical profiteers who prey on migrants</td>
<td>Service providers of varying quality who provide access to the asylum system</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The problem with the destination-state narratives, of course, is that they can be challenged by facts. A growing body of research on migrant smuggling presents a counternarrative that emphasizes what is left out of destination-state narratives. In particular, it is evident that smugglers are, in most cases, a necessity for accessing the asylum system, and that destination states use counter-smuggling measures to minimize their protection obligations. This counter-narrative is, in other words, a story about the containment of unwanted migration. The actants and their basic functions are the same, but their characteristics and motivations differ, with moral implications. Taken to the extreme, the character roles are even reversed, with smugglers as heroes who ensure protection for migrants, while destination-state villains seek to contain migrant victims in places of danger and hardship (Achilli 2018, Aloyo and Cusumano 2018, Mohammadi et al. 2019). The emergence of a state-led narrative and a counter-narrative illustrate not only the importance of narratology, but also the multiple layers of agency—not only playing out along borders, on smuggling routes and in detention centres on the ground, but also in organizing on-the-ground agency into sense-making stories.
VIII. Conclusion

This chapter set out by presenting the double duality of smugglers – the notion that they represent a resource and a threat for states for states and migrants. I conclude by recasting the argument as a call for making four types of connections.

The first is between the two dualities, that is, between the smuggler–state relation on the one hand and the smuggler–migrant relation on the other. These are not just parallel in their ambivalence, but functionally connected: the resource that smugglers represent to migrants is a threat for destination states, and the threat that they represent for migrants is a resource for destination states. The danger that smugglers represent vis-à-vis migrants is useful to states not only because danger can deter migration, but also, because it serves as a source of moral justification for counter-smuggling measures.

Second, we must be attentive to the connection between migrant smuggling and the other parts of the migration management system, through which the meaning and significance of smuggling is defined. This connection has determined the shifting policy priorities in Europe. Two decades ago, the greatest concern was the undetected arrival of migrants seeking work on the black market; today it is the arrival of asylum seekers with legitimate needs for protection.

The third connection is between the management system and the narrative system. The deepening paradoxes of the management system have been mollified by a sense of closure in the protection narrative. This narrative, centred on states protecting migrant-victims against smuggler-villains manages to mobilize moral capital from the vulnerability of migrants to lessen the vulnerability of states.

Finally, there are the connections between the actants of the narrative system. Stories about migration management are defined by the character roles given to destination states, migrants, smugglers and origin and transit states, and these roles are essentially relational. In this system, the role of smugglers is increasingly shaped by the lack of other targets for liberal states' assertive action in the field of immigration policy. Smugglers are the only remaining good enemy.
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