THE CRIMINALISATION OF PEOPLE SMUGGLING
IMMOBILISING ASYLUM SEEKERS IN INDONESIA-AUSTRALIA

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This talk offers an ethnographically-informed critique of the hyper-politicized debate on the facilitation of irregular migration for asylum seekers (‘people smuggling’) between Indonesia and Australia. Drawing on court verdicts and interviews with convicted smugglers and law enforcement officials in Indonesia, I hope to provide an overview of the causes, conditions, procedures and intricacies surrounding the facilitation of irregular maritime journeys across borders. Retracing the evolution of people smuggling networks, their operational and place-specific characteristics then allows me to problematise the consequences of the criminalisation of people smuggling not only for asylum seekers and refugees, but also for convicted facilitators. By embedding the analysis into the wider debates on externalised border protection and the fortification of destination countries to prevent access by asylum seekers, I contribute to scrutinising Australian deterrence policies, which might prevent deaths at sea, but ignore the lack of durable protection for asylum seekers and refugees in transit countries and offshore detention.

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