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LOCALISING SMUGGLING

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Where would you go if you wanted to study smuggling?

The different answers scholars give to that question structure the emerging academic field of studies on smuggling. On the one side, scholars in security studies or international relations often look upon smuggling networks as global or at least regional phenomena that are not associated with specific sites as much as with a flow of goods and a counter-flow of money. These scholars study smuggling from a bird's eye perspective, using all available data to understand the direction, amounts and consequences, of illegal trade flows. Very often, they do not “go” to any specific research site.

On the other side are those (often academically at home in anthropology, geography, history or the more qualitative brands of sociology or political sciences) who study smuggling as the illegal transport of goods across a national boundary – a site-specific activity mostly happening in borderlands, where smuggling networks turn into local realities and can be understood in their consequences.

This handbook brings together scholars from both perspectives. My own outlook on smuggling to a great extent has been shaped by the second approach. I came to the field with a primary interest not in smuggling, but in borderlands. When I started doing fieldwork in a border region, I found smugglers at work, so I had to become interested in smuggling. Similar things apply to some of my closest colleagues, many of them loosely organised in the African Borderlands Research Network (ABORNE). Our fascination with the borderlands has given rise to a huge and very useful corpus of empirically nuanced, theoretically sophisticated studies on smuggling that have collectively changed our understanding of borders and their consequences for societies. These studies have allowed us to understand better how states and societies forcefully interact in borderlands, how practical norms are renegotiated in border situations, and how money is being made and boom towns are emerging, only to decline again a few years later. Borderlands are places where things happen. Since often enough, these ‘things’ are shaped by smuggling, borderlands research has also become a catalyst for new perspectives on smuggling.

Such studies in borderlands typically *localise* smuggling in a double sense. On the positive side, they are uniquely placed to understand the consequences smuggling has for the people who engage in it and for the societies and governance processes shaped by it. They make smuggling visible as a real-life practice of human beings, a practice in which different societal

fields intersect to generate unforeseen consequences, and they show both smuggling's wide variety and its embeddedness into local social, political, economic, and cultural contexts.

There is a downside to localising approaches, as well. Borderland studies are rarely able to capture the complex, globe-spanning smuggling networks into which local activities on the border are embedded, and they are not well suited to addressing smuggling that does not happen on the border, but is organised from corporate offices in the world's capitals. Focusing on the consequences smuggling has for a local society may make us overlook a bigger picture – and may lead policy practitioners to understand smuggling as a problem that can be addressed by policing the borderlands.

Both on the positive and on the negative sides, the methodological decision to localise smuggling in the borderlands has consequences for what we see (see also the Introduction to this volume). In this article, I first lay out what I see as major strengths of a localising approach. In a second step, I analyse some shortcomings and potential blind spots of studying smuggling from a borderlands perspective. Finally, I suggest ways of expanding the reach of borderland studies without losing the advantages of localised research, and of combining localised with more systemic approaches. Since my own expertise is in the borderlands, the entire paper rather sums up my experiences with localised research than offering advice on how to use systemic approaches. Analysing where systemic approaches find their sites of research and suggesting ways to improve them would need a second, corresponding article – written by somebody much more grounded in that perspective than I am.

Understanding smuggling: the strengths of a localised perspective

I can best illustrate the strengths of a localising approach to smuggling by using examples from my own research on the borderlands between Namibia and Angola (Dobler 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2014, 2017). Localised research, I will argue, allows us to gain a real-world perspective on smuggling. It helps us to understand the intricacies of moving goods across a border – intricacies that have hidden consequences for wider networks, as well – and to analyse the ways smuggling is embedded into other activities and into the surrounding society. Without such a real-world understanding of smuggling, we run the danger of isolating smuggling from its social environment and to misunderstand it as a class of activity set apart by its nature, where often enough the only thing that sets it apart from other trade activities is the state's (or the researcher's) gaze.

Oshikango is a Namibian town on the border to Angola that experienced massive trade-led growth after the end of the Angolan civil war. The town is situated at the point where regional transport corridors from the Southern African harbours of Walvis Bay and Durban cross the Angolan border. During the 2000s, the lack of infrastructure in war-torn Angola coupled with currency regulations and differently structured trade networks in both countries turned Oshikango into a necessary nodal point between two segment of international trade networks: the segment in which goods produced in different parts of the world reached Southern Africa, and the second, separate segment in which Angolan-based traders organised the cross-border movement of goods into Angola. A large percentage of all goods consumed in the southern regions of Angola not only had to pass through Oshikango, but were offloaded here and stored into bonded warehouses. From these warehouses, Angolan trades acquired them and imported them into Angola, paying cash in US dollars even for huge truckloads of whisky worth a hundred thousand dollars or more.

As a consequence, Oshikango was more than just a border post through which goods were exported. It was the meeting point between trade networks and the place in which the transfer

between two national realms of regulation could be negotiated. If you had enough local knowledge here, you could circumvent taxes and import duties and multiply your profits. Smuggling networks did not only pass through the town; they were organised here.

For me, this turned the town into an ideal place to understand both the technicalities of smuggling and the consequences of smuggling for society in a borderland. For both aims, I needed quite a lot of local embeddedness and a long presence in everyday life. For some time, I compiled the daily account statements in a liquor warehouse; I worked with UNCTAD's Asycuda software used for processing export papers, sat around in offices and spent the evenings hanging out with warehouse owners, clearing agents, or local politicians. In this, my approach was very typical of localising studies. Like many colleagues, I found that I could acquire in-depth local knowledge that would not have been accessible in any other place and by any other method. It allowed me to develop a real-world understanding of smuggling, and to identify structures that were important far beyond the local level. Let me only mention three points as examples.

First, I learned to understand that nothing about cross-border trade in Oshikango was straightforward. I realised how many difficult decisions had to be taken when filling in a customs form in Asycuda. I understood how customs officials could, in all legality, make life difficult for traders by taking slightly longer than necessary to process papers – in particular where warehouses had to have bank guarantees for road bonds, so that a new shipment could only be made after the papers of an earlier one had come back from the border and the road bond had been cleared. This, in turn, made good relations between warehouse owners and local state agents crucial; being there allowed me to witness how such relations were kept up in everyday practice. I began to see how Chinese traders could, through fake invoices in a cross-border business conducted in US dollars, get their hands on unregistered hard currency very useful at home, or how customs officials had to use a fine judgment to evaluate invoices – not necessarily to separate real values from fake ones, but to maximise their own profits without being exposed to sanctions from their superiors. I understood why Angolan importers often chose the long detour to the next border post some 300 km east, where import duties on the Angolan side more easily could be avoided.

Through each of these examples, I began to understand how extensive the grey zone between outright smuggling and completely legal cross-border transactions was. In Oshikango, very few goods crossed the border in completely illegal and unregistered ways. On the side of petty smuggling, local residents carried goods for everyday consumption or for village trade across the border; at the other end of the spectrum, cocaine and stolen diamonds were brought in from Angola clandestinely. Most money, however, was made in the huge zone between these extremes – the zone in which people needed the right stamps on the right paperwork in order to bring goods across the border. Goods were officially registered as exports on the Namibian and as imports on the Angolan side, and cross-border profit was hidden in the interstices of both sets of paperwork.

Was this smuggling? Was it legal trade? What in a bird's eye view might look like two different sets of practice done by two different sets of people ('traders' and 'smugglers') became visible on the ground as positions on a sliding scale which the same actors occupied in different situations. "Clear distinctions between the good and the bad," as Thomas Hüsken put it referring to Paul Nugent's study on the Ghana-Togo frontier (Nugent 2002), "are often misleading or part of self-legitimizing narratives" (Hüsken 2019, p. 166).

Secondly, the difficulty in telling traders apart from smugglers shaped local perceptions and the local embeddedness of cross-border actors. Nobody I spoke to in Oshikango had a clear moral view on 'smuggling.' Oshikango's smuggling networks did not operate in a shady

underworld, and they were not set apart from the world of upright citizens by the illegality of their actions. The boundary between right and wrong was just as difficult to draw as the boundary between smuggling and trading. People did make moral judgments about variants of trade, but their criteria differed from the legal judgments by state authorities.

Much has been written on the difference between ‘illegality’ and ‘illicitness’ (Roitman 2008), and often, scholars have identified local ‘practical norms’ that define the borders of licit behavior and govern the interaction between state authorities and traders (Titeca and Herdt 2010; de Sardan 2013; Meagher 2014; Heitz-Tokpa 2019; Gallien 2020a; Tazebew and Kefale 2021). In Oshikango, there were indeed a certain number of practical norms that a researcher could have codified at any given moment. Few of them, however, applied to transactions in any abstract sense. Everybody might know what honest trade should look like, but deviations from that model were judged concretely and in relation to the parties involved, not merely in relation to rules. Defrauding individuals was worse than defrauding institutions, and defrauding people or institutions close to oneself was worse than defrauding distant others. Nobody cared much about tax avoidance in China, and few people cared deeply about tax avoidance in Namibia. Even when traders were known to sell defective goods to an anonymous buyer, this affected their reputation and undermined trust in them, but it did not usually generate a strong moral judgment. If a trader defrauded a close business partner, however, the treachery this involved made the transaction reprehensible in the eyes of most.

As a consequence of this relational character of moral evaluations, a researcher needs deep knowledge about the local context even to begin understanding what constitutes a licit or an illicit transaction. This, in turn, complicates our understanding of smuggling. Each individual cross-border transaction has consequences on the local level; it affirms or changes rules of acceptable behavior, affects social ties among the people involved, re-draws social boundaries and generally contributes to the reproduction of society. The outcome of this process is not predictable without understanding how that particular transaction links to the everyday life of people in the borderland.

Thirdly, research in Oshikango made me understand that smugglers and state institutions are not in any naturally antagonistic relation. Both need each other and cooperate with each other. “In practice,” as Hüsken sums up his findings about smuggling between Egypt and Libya, “smugglers, soldiers, customs officers, policemen and the ordinary citizen are very much intertwined actors for whom smuggling is a field of economic cooperation, social arrangements and political strategies” (Hüsken 2019, p. 166). Most ethnographies of cross-border situations come to similar conclusions (Egg and Herrera 1998; Raeymaekers 2009; Titeca 2012; Ng’askie 2019; Gallien 2020b; Weigand 2020; Gallien and Weigand 2021). Smugglers do not by-pass the state; they use it selectively. State agents, in turn, do not fight smuggling as such. They rarely care much about the legality of transactions on the other side of the boundary, and if they insist on legal practices on their own side, this is often a means to increase demand for their own co-operation.

These three examples should illustrate how much a localised perspective on smuggling can add to our understanding of smuggling and its consequences for society. I could multiply the examples, both from my own work and from that of many colleagues. The question I am concerned with here, however, is not whether localised studies allow us to understand the borderland, but in how far they help us to understand global smuggling networks. Why should we care how a concrete load of goods crosses the border, what paperwork is involved, and what different people living in the borderlands think about that transaction – as long as the goods, in the end, pass to the other side, evading state scrutiny and regulation and often enough causing a

lot of harm to people in the receiving society? What, in short, can localising perspectives teach us about smuggling networks?

I will address this larger question in two steps. First, I want to take a step back and show what elements of smuggling might remain hidden from a localising perspective. An entirely localised perspective, I will argue, indeed creates the dangers of overlooking important aspects of smuggling and ultimately of romanticising smuggling as a local practice.

In a second step, I then try to show that ignoring the borderlands and their localised dynamics to focus on the big picture instead is no solution either. Smuggling networks are crucially shaped by the local contexts in which they are embedded, and small changes on the ground may lead to their re-organization or even abandonment. Just as a perspective solely grounded in the local cannot fully grasp the entire network, a systemic analysis alone cannot make us understand these links between local and global dynamics of smuggling; by necessity, it remains ignorant of far too many defining features of smuggling networks.

Understanding smuggling: blind spots of a localising perspective

Localising perspectives could distort our image of smuggling in two ways. First, they could tempt us to over-emphasise elements which are crucial on the local level, even if they have few consequences for the entire smuggling network.

To take just one example, borderlands scholars have placed a huge emphasis on local power structures. How does state power interact and intersect with the power of formal or informal non-state actors? What role do smuggling networks, violent gangs, private security firms, or local youth associations play in maintaining public order in borderlands? What kinds of governance emerges at the margins of the state, and how can we conceptualise it? Such questions are crucial for describing and understanding border situations in general; the more volatile and dynamic situations tend to focus the attention of border scholars in particular. They have become the focus of a wide array of fascinating studies and have enriched our empirical knowledge and theoretical understanding of border situations. These qualities might, however, tempt us to overestimate their importance for understanding smuggling: borderland studies have such interesting things to tell us that we might assume that the borderland indeed is where the only relevant action is.

Even for the goods that shape local networks of power, though, the borderland often is only *one* segment in a wider network of trade. If weapons smuggled across a border fuel a local conflict or change power relations between the state and a local militia, this is very pertinent for the local society. Is it also a defining feature of the entire arms smuggling network, or just the random local consequence of larger structures? The power that youth gangs acquire by smuggling petrol across a border may change local governance structures, but does that tell us anything about the entire trade network between refineries and consumers? A localised perspective on smuggling might tempt us to overlook other, more mundane aspects of wider smuggling networks. Smuggling tends to become visible and have observable societal consequences in borderlands, but that should not make us assume that what becomes visible in borderlands is a defining feature of the entire smuggling network, or even that the variants of smuggling important for the borderlands are important for countries at large.

This brings me to the second way in which a localising perspective could distort our image of smuggling. Important variants of smuggling never touch the borderland at all, or simply pass through it unhindered, invisible, and without generating changes on the local level. I see four main variants of smuggling which cannot (or can only with huge difficulties) be observed in the borderlands and might disappear from view in a localised perspective: high-stakes smuggling in

illegal goods; goods by-passing border situations by air, sea, or in pipelines; illegal trade in legal goods; and virtual transactions.

The first variant, high-stakes smuggling in illegal goods, is simply very difficult to access with the means of localised social research. Researchers usually find it relatively easy to obtain information about the smuggling of legal goods – goods that can be legally traded within a country and that, as soon as they have crossed a border illegally and successfully entered a different regulatory realm, once again become indistinguishable from non-smuggled goods. Accessing smuggling networks that focus on goods whose possession and trade are illegal in themselves is much harder. Smuggling hard drugs, military weapons, or counterfeit currency are cases in point, as is illegal trade in ivory, rhino horn, or other material protected by international conventions and national laws (Hübschle 2014, 2016; Minnaar 2015; McCurdy and Kaduri 2016; Haysom 2020). Their very existence has to remain hidden, and by definition successful traders manage to keep them secret – from their social environment as well as from researchers. Reliable information on their trade can be obtained much more easily by investigative work covering the entire market, than by localised fieldwork in a cross-border situation.

The second variant of smuggling that can escape a localised perspective concerns goods that are either too small to be visible on the border, or that travel on different routes bypassing border posts. In mid-2000s Oshikango, rumors about diamond smuggling from Angola abounded, and many people suspected local warehouse owners of buying illegal stones. If such trade indeed happened, however, nobody but those directly involved in it had reliable information about it. Diamonds could be concealed much too easily, and the proceeds from diamond smuggling hidden among other large cash transactions. From the neighboring country Zambia, gold (a by-product of industrial copper mines) is flown to South Africa for refinement in company helicopters; if some of that gold escapes registration (as it routinely did until 2010), that variant of smuggling remains completely invisible from the borderlands (personal communication from field data by Rita Kesselring). On a rather different scale, oil or gas pipelines often pass through border regions, but no borderland actors are involved in selling or buying the commodities transported through them. If we want to know whether oil or gas is appropriately taxed and registered, the borderlands are not the best places to start.

A third variant of smuggling bypasses borderland actors, as well: smuggling organised by actors elsewhere in goods that could be legal, and which pass through border regions without changing hands or being offloaded. In the Southern African border regions I am most familiar with, timber trade would be a case in point. Illegal logging frequently leads to the export of timber from protected forests, but borderlanders (or researchers with local knowledge in the borderland) usually are in no position to assess the legality of the truckloads of tree trunks they see passing (Lescuyer and Tal 2016; Lukumbuzya and Sianga 2017, see also Cerutti et al. 2018).

Finally, and most importantly, while borderlands are often helpful places to understand the movements of bulk goods, they are not the best places to learn about the ownership of goods in transit, or movements of capital. Smuggling comes in many guises. An ethnography of a border town in Southern Africa – say, Oshikango, Chirundu, Musina or Kasumbalesa – can teach us a lot about medium-scale traders who doctor invoices or use transit trade regulations for round-tripping of goods. From a local perspective, these variants of smuggling are important; they generate wealth and power, change statehood and governance and, by privileging certain economic activities, channel investment and growth into specific regions and sectors. Seen on the national scale or in a global perspective, their effects are dwarfed by other, less localised phenomena.

In Chirundu, for example, a border post between Zambia and Zimbabwe, most of the trucks passing through carry copper cathodes. Copper in various forms accounts for roughly 80% of

Zambia's exports. This trade certainly leaves traces in border towns; truck stops, motels and bars are just as important elements of the local economy as clearing agents and freight forwarders' offices. The commodity itself, however, just passes through once the load is cleared. Most copper loads that cross the border are owned by international trading firms, more often than not subsidiaries of the companies who own the mines (Dobler and Kesselring 2019). If smuggling happens here, it is not organised by a local strongman whose good relations with a particular customs officer on night shift allows him to bypass regulations. It is organised, with all paperwork in perfect order, in global corporate offices and facilitated by tax advisors and accounting firms. Its techniques are not visible in the borderland. They consist of intra-firm profit shifting, in tax-optimization strategies, in the gentle overpricing of supplies or the declaration of mining supplies as investment goods in order to make use of tax exemptions, to name but a few (Lundstol et al. 2013; Readhead 2016, 2017; Guj et al. 2017; Brugger and Engebretsen 2020). Researchers (and customs authorities) usually find it even more difficult to obtain reliable information on such practices than on, say, diamond or drug smuggling, and they leave few traces in the borderlands.

In an earlier paper (Dobler 2016), I developed a typology of cross-border trade that also applies to smuggling, differentiating between 'green,' 'grey,' and 'blue' trade. I call 'green' trade the local trade carried out on foot or on bicycle away from official border posts and under the radar of border authorities. 'Grey' trade is in goods transported in lorries on roads; it needs the border post and its paperwork, relies on local knowledge in the border region and thrives in the economically, politically, and socially dynamic sphere of the borderland. For 'blue' trade – trade across the oceans and through the air – borderlands are often a nuisance, and the ideal of crossing a border would be the frictionless transport corridor with paperless one-stop border posts.

Since 'green' and 'grey' trade are the domain of the borderland and of borderlanders, localised research in borderlands privileges them compared with 'blue' trade and smuggling. The dynamism of the borderland can make us forget what is invisible here, and lead us to reproduce a somewhat romantic image of the resilience of local practice in the face of global supply chains. This is not a problem of localised research as such. Ethnographies of commodity traders, tax advisers, or shipping companies could keep the strengths of localised research while providing access to different movements of goods. Gaining access and research authorization for such variants of localised research is usually far more difficult than localising one's perspective in the borderlands.

In Bert Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*, the villain Mack the Knife rhetorically asks: "What is a picklock to a bank share?" Just as qualitative social scientists often find access to criminal subcultures easier than to corporate elites, borderland scholars find it easier to focus on people involved in 'grey' smuggling networks, whose trucks, forged invoices, and bribes are more akin to picklocks than to bank shares, than on those organising blue trade across the globe. The real money, and the real harm, is not in smuggling Chinese sneakers or barrels of petrol across an African border; it may not even be in the illegal supply of small arms to a local militia. It is in the respectable smuggling networks of the corporate world that are all but invisible from the borderland.

How to remain localised without being restricted to the local

This brings me back to my initial question: where would you go to study smuggling?

My own choice has been to study smuggling in the borderland, using the method I am most familiar with and most competent in: long-term participation in other people's everyday life. I

find I can best understand what life means in any given place by living in that place and sharing the everyday interests of the people who are constantly busy remaking this place.

Since I remain convinced by the strengths of this approach, I have started this article by outlining some of them. I also have come to realise limitations of this approach for understanding smuggling, and enumerate some of them in this paper. For me, the practical consequence of acknowledging these limitations should not be to give up on localising smuggling. Rather, research on smuggling should move beyond the alternative of *either* localising *or* adopting a systemic, bird's eye approach (for similar arguments, see Malik and Gallien 2020; Walther 2018 and the Introduction to this handbook).

Some important aspects of smuggling can be understood only through localised research. The consequences of smuggling for governance and the workings of state institutions, for example, cannot be deduced from above. The technicalities of smuggling, the everyday organization of smuggling networks, the large grey zone between legal and illegal trading practices and the links between them – all these themes need careful, empirically open research on the ground. If the aim of such research is not only to understand one particular borderland, but to analyze the organizational and social consequences of smuggling, we cannot do without information that remains invisible for a localised perspective anchored in a borderland.

Seen from the other end of the spectrum, systemic perspectives can teach us a lot about smuggling routes, about the overall extent of smuggling, about the integration of states into the global economy and about the links between legal and illegal segments of global commodity chains. Without grounding and testing such knowledge in real-life perspectives gained through localised research, however, our ideas about the consequences of such systemic aspects in a local context will remain mere conjectures.

More importantly still, the local embeddedness of smuggling can have consequences for smuggling networks that reach far beyond the local arena. Global networks of 'blue' trade might be antagonistic to borderlands dynamics and try to replace them by more frictionless structures, but they still pass through the borderlands and interact with state institutions as they are. As long as these institutions and their governance effects are shaped by the localised practices of 'grey' traders and other borderland actors, they also influence practices of global trade flows. One last Southern African example can illustrate this point: copper mined in the DRC is usually transported to the Southern African harbors in two segments. The first segment runs from the mines to offshore warehouses in the Zambian Copperbelt. It uses different trucking companies and different truck drivers than the second segment, which links the warehouses to the harbors in Durban or Walvis Bay – simply because navigating each different local state and each different border situation needs a distinct set of skills, of local knowledge and of local political connections. The difference between both segments is not so much shaped by the 'blue' trade networks as by borderland interactions among more local actors, but all traders and smugglers have to deal with the resulting structures. 'Grey' and 'blue' trade interlink and influence each other. To understand the global trajectories of goods, we also need an understanding of their local pathways, the comparative advantages of different transport routes and their structuring effects on global networks.

It is of course easy to argue for a combination of localised and systemic perspectives, but how can we achieve the combination in practice? No individual research project can do everything at once. Researchers have to decide what methodology to adopt, how to use their limited resources, and how to write in accordance with the preferences of their own field. IR specialists are not going to turn into anthropologists. How can we broaden our perspectives?

For each individual project, the salient point is of course that the method fits the research question. Both localising and systemic approaches have to be self-critical in this regard.

Localising studies in borderlands are excellent for some purposes, but they cannot answer all questions. Generally better suited to understanding a local society than to assessing the extent of global networks, they might distort our image of what smuggling is if we do not move beyond them.

To some degree, we can avoid such distortions without leaving a particular borderland. By broadening localised research designs, we can avoid letting the field alone structure what we find. To people living in a borderland, for example, trucks with copper passing through might remain irrelevant, since their presence does not affect local society directly. Their social invisibility must not prevent us from including them in our analysis.

Often, simple hand-made statistics can offer a first corrective to local perspectives and allow us to control for our own biases. What goods are passing through? What do we know about their trade? Who owns the trucks passing through, and who owns the loads? Who is involved in their trade, and what do we know about the larger networks to which that trade is linked? How well can we understand these networks from the local perspective? Such simple questions often have allowed me to perceive blind spots in my own outlook.

A second corrective is offered by a broader view on the economy of a country and a region. What goods *should* pass through a border? Are some invisible, and why? Who would know about their trade, and where would they cross the border? If we know that cocaine is consumed in the capital, we can start asking how it reaches the country; if we know that gold is transported to be refined in a different country, we can ask how it gets there. We still might not be able to get in-depth information about these variants of trade from the borderlands, but integrating them into our overall analysis will give us a better assessment of the border situation.

A third corrective is provided by a question I find much more difficult to answer in practice: Where do profits from cross-border trade end up? How much actually stays in the borderland, how much flows elsewhere? Here, as well, the borderlands will not provide all answers we may seek, but asking these questions will change how we perceive the borderlands and their integration into wider commodity chains.

Taken together, such correctives allow us to link our in-depth knowledge about a specific border post or a specific cross-border situation with other perspectives generated through different methods. Ultimately, however, we can only understand smuggling networks *collectively* – through co-operation among different researchers using a wide variety of methods in many different places. Smuggling networks link specific places and regions; in each place, they engender different forms of social change. Studies that concentrate on the structure of the networks alone will not be able to grasp their local embeddedness and the changes they bring to local societies, and will fail to explain how the network's structures are influenced by localised dynamics. Studies that concentrate on the local alone will struggle to see the full extent of the network and to evaluate how important those interesting developments in the borderland are for the bigger picture. Taken together, however, both perspectives can link up and illuminate each other. Just like smuggling, research on smuggling needs teamwork that links up people with different specializations.

Such teamwork comes with its own challenges. Localising and systemic perspectives on smuggling are usually pursued by different disciplines, each of which naturally sees the others' methodological choices as misplaced and its results as largely irrelevant to the questions that *really* matter. We peddle in different goods and often see each other as competitors rather than as partners. With this, we ignore a lesson smugglers could teach us: that a certain degree of trust in the other, cooperation, and a healthy division of labor according to expertise and positionality increase each party's benefits.

The most stimulating research on smuggling has, to my mind, emerged from networks which have managed to overcome such antagonistic tendencies and have brought the different approaches into a real dialogue. I think here of the collaborative work done by ABORNE, or of *Valueworks*, a collaborative research project on copper's value chain organised by Rita Kesselring and funded by the Swiss Network for International Studies. Although it was not focused primarily on smuggling, *Valueworks* could serve as a model for smuggling studies, as well. It combined localised studies in Zambia, Switzerland and China with cross-cutting perspectives on global production networks, financialization or tax regimes – and brought both into dialogue with civil society groups and activists. The cooperation has been eye-opening for everybody involved, and has brought fascinating results (see Kesselring 2019 for an overview).

Cooperation needs patience, tolerance, and curiosity (and sometimes the right funders), but in my experience, the outcome justifies the additional effort. Cooperation enables us to describe more accurately what smuggling is and what consequences it has, and it helps us to theorise smuggling in more accurate and more helpful ways. This handbook is in itself a vivid testimony to the potential of a collaborative approach to the study of smuggling, and it shows what we could gain by constructively linking localising and systemic research perspectives.

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