

# Creating Europe from the Margins

Mobilities and Racism in  
Postcolonial Europe

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4's *Smuggled* (2019)

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### Playing with Migrant Experiences and Borderveillant Spectatorship in Channel 4's *Smuggled* (2019)

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#### Introduction

Headline-grabbing as reality TV might be, there has hardly been a more controversial broadcast in recent British television history than Channel 4's *Smuggled* (2019). A show about migration, national security and border crossing, *Smuggled* was in a way destined, if not deliberately designed, for public outcry. As straightforward as it was audacious in its concept, the programme attempted to capitalize on the contemporary migration debate and impending Brexit by way of a two-episode-spanning social experiment to "test the UK's borders." Eight 'ordinary' British citizens who served as contestants were transported to France or the Netherlands and asked to hand over their passports before returning clandestinely through a series of acknowledged migration routes. By re-enacting these hazardous journeys, *Smuggled* promised to give an in-depth investigation of "how easy it is to break into Britain." Its reception was mostly defined by the harrowing events of 23 October 2019, when – several days before the show's initial broadcast – 39 Vietnamese citizens attempting to enter the UK were found dead in a refrigerated lorry in Essex. To fend off criticism, Channel 4 postponed the programme's release to the following week and added an opening title card that acknowledged and regretted these events. Despite Channel 4's best efforts to distance themselves from this tragedy, the makers were criticized for potentially motivating undesirable migrants to make the crossing (Quinn 2019). However, some took an oppositional stance and considered the programme to be pertinently more relevant after the smuggling tragedy, because it emphasized the problem of Britain's porous borders. Mark Lawson even stated that "the reality show isn't 'irresponsible'. It's a wake-up call" (Quinn 2019).

Much of the public debate on *Smuggled* seemed to depart from a pre-set notion that Britain should tighten its borders in order to avert such tragedies, instead of questioning whether the further securitization of state borders and criminalization of migration might not be at the root of the problem. Our chapter aims to offer an intervention in popular readings of *Smuggled* by discussing how the series ventriloquizes migrant experiences through its practices of re-enactment. In the last few years, the simulation and appropriation of migrant suffering through the prism of popular modes of entertainment, such as the game show, the hide-and-seek

programme and the docudrama, have become common. While *Smuggled* might not be the first reality TV show that gamifies migration, it is unique in the tensions it generates with respect to migrants in terms of empathic involvement and moral outcry. Although in the past, the re-enactment of migrant lived experiences has been commonly used with the aim of humanitarian sensibilization, *Smuggled* counterintuitively co-opts the simulation of the stress and anxiety of migration efforts for a project of border securitization. As such, actual migrant testimonies are not only being silenced but also appropriated and remodelled into harmful hegemonic discourses that reaffirm exclusionary regimes of citizenship. How exactly *Smuggled* reconsolidates such voices from the margins into the vernacular of homeland and security discourses is therefore the focal point of our chapter. Through a textual analysis of *Smuggled*'s two episodes, we discuss the series as a form of borderveillant media (Fojas 2021) that enlists its viewers in a process of co-policing the border. Such ways of looking are amplified through a type of border poetics (Schimanski 2006) which generates anxiety around border (in)security. While the engagement with the programme's contestants could potentially open a space for the contextualization of contemporary migration, the narrative and aesthetic practices complicate such efforts by negotiating who belongs to the body of the nation and who does not. Drawing on genre theory and migration studies, we will outline how, through its discursive, narrative and formal characteristics, *Smuggled* instrumentalizes migrant identification as a practice of symbolic bordering.

### **Reality TV, Migration and Citizenship**

Before discussing *Smuggled* in detail, it is worth paying attention to the entanglement of reality TV and themes of migration, as well as delineating different modes of play and participation that these programmes engage with in gamifying the experiences of migrants. Throughout the past decade, the theme of migration has been intimately interwoven with the likes of the reality TV genre. Whether it has been the inclusion of refugee contestants in game shows such as *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* or the advent of satirical shock television like *Weg van Nederland* (2011), the genre has become a space through which discourses on migration, national security and citizenship are negotiated. The attraction of reality TV producers to the theme is not surprising. As Hill (2014) attests, reality TV is greatly drawn to matters of public debate and societal contestation. Often claiming to represent a societal forum through its choice of contestants, reality TV easily latches on to what are understood as newsworthy issues to let contestants represent and articulate different sides of a topic. In light of reality TV's tendency to foreground class relationships, the inclusion of migrants allows for a new set of interpersonal dynamics which reality TV makers can easily explore. Nikunen (2016) even demonstrates that migrant TV has become a commodity which is now bought, sold and successfully adapted to international contexts.

Approaching reality TV as a meta-genre (Biltreyst and Soberon 2016) that consists of different subgenres, yet is united by specific conventions and mentalities, helps us cluster the ways in which migration comes to the foreground as

both subject matter and commodity. Murray and Ouellette (2004) identify several established subgenres, such as the gamedoc, dating programme, makeover show, docusoap, talent contest, court programme and reality sitcom, and specify how the hybridization and integration of elements (such as celebrity culture) allow for endless variation. In the high-concept world of reality TV programming, interacting with themes of migration can hence give a spin to stale formulas. *UK Border Force* (2008–2009), for example, incorporates the docudrama conventions of real responder series into the world of airport customs. Similarly, the BBC's *Nick and Margaret: Too Many Immigrants?* (2014) can be best described as the-apprentice-goes-border-control. Another financially successful example is the American channel TLC's *90 Day Fiancé* (2014), a dating show in which migrants compete for citizenship by being selected as a marriage partner. It is appropriate to point out that the British broadcaster Channel 4 has been particularly adept in using migration as a spin-off to such concepts, as its *Benefits Street* (2014) led to a (prematurely cancelled) spin-off *Immigration Street* (2015), and the *British Tribe Next Door* (2019–) was a border-crossing play on the home swapping genre. In a way, *Smuggled* even echoes Channel 4's own *Hunted* (2015), in which contestants have to elude a set of state agents that use modern-day surveillance technology to track them down. Docuseries such as *Make Bradford British* (2012) and *My Millionaire Migrant Boss* (2018) further drive home the point that Channel 4 has routinely relied on migration-related controversies and the evaluation of British identity as programming strategies.

Taking this logic of genre variation and format creation as our point of departure allows us to collect a series of shows on migration and border crossing and identify the generic scripts *Smuggled* engages with and to what ends. Particularly important to our argument are the tensions between humanitarian television (Nikunen 2016), which focuses on human experiences of migration and integration, and what Andrejevic (2011) terms “securitainment,” which is interested in reporting and reproducing the work of various border institutions. While humanitarian television is concerned with incorporating migrant testimonies, or voicing migrant experiences, to raise awareness about the nation's treatment of migrants, securitainment shows have been likened to a “subterranean tool of impression management” (Walsh 2015, 14) of those same states. Often made in cooperation with the organizations they portray, securitainment programmes such as *UK Border Force* (2008–2009), *Border Wars* (2010–present) and *Border Security: Australia's Frontline* (2014–present) are set on normalizing hostile practices of securitization to deter migrants. Among others, Kavka (2012) elaborates on how conventions of the docudrama and the crime and emergency show work to involve the viewer in the procedural processes of these institutions. Such generic conventions are thus operationalized by state powers to make a mass-mediated spectacle of border deterrence. Humanitarian reality TV, on the other hand, often brands itself as a form of “social experiment” (Kilborn 2003) that helps to bridge social divides. One particularly popular format is that of the “reverse-refugee journey” (van der Waal and Böhling, 2021). In the Australian programme *Go Back to Where You Came From* (2011–2018), for example, participants intolerant of migration are confronted with

their prejudices by undergoing parts of migrants' journeys. The format was initially co-funded by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and has been sold to nine countries.

While the two categories are different in their political aims and generic affordances, they are united in Ouellette and Hay's (2008, 223) understanding of reality TV as a "technology of citizenship." As part of the neoliberal dispersal of political struggles towards cultural arenas such as media and television, reality TV has increasingly taken up a responsabilization of its audience. In particular, Ouellette notices a "market for virtue" (2010, 70) in which programmes peddle hopeful messages about re-inventions and restoration built on normative understandings of citizenship. Reality TV thus contributes to the self-governing of neoliberal subjects, since the responsabilization of the viewer is in a way always directed at reproducing some type of social order (Couldry and Littler 2011). Nevertheless, as McCarthy (2007, 37) notes, despite these overt dimensions of mediated interpellation and social control, the social arena that reality TV demarcates has the possibility to represent and re-politicize the lived experiences and everyday trauma of marginalized groups. In Couldry's terms, reality TV has the possibility to "make populations appear" (2011, 194). This inclusive potential aside, since reality TV is still a product which needs to score ratings and appease advertisers, it is equally possible that these intimate experiences are exploited in a way that undermines the inclusivity of the very identities they seek to represent (Deery 2012). In the contemporary media-literate field of migration aid, humanitarian organizations are increasingly pushed towards forms of individualization and marketization. The affectively loaded and tightly narrativized structure of reality TV has helped such organizations to develop a rhetorical language through which a cynical neoliberal audience could potentially be moved and motivated to care.

### **Border Games**

Considering reality TV's social functions, it is no surprise that both humanitarian television and securitainment shows alike are often judged in terms of their societal relevance – albeit in entirely different ways. In the case of *Smuggled*, for example, much of the moral panic derived from a reception that problematized the unnecessary risk it could potentially bring to migrants as well as the British border infrastructure. As if it were a national security themed reimagining of *Breaking the Magician's Code* (1997), commentators were worried that revealing border surveillance strategies might render them ineffective in dealing with new migrant crossers. Within this logic, we can discern an expectation about the social responsibilities these programmes have for the well-being of the nation and a disappointment when these demands are not met. In a similar sense, securitainment shows frame themselves as being driven by a concern for the nation's security and validate their existence by the function they have for the imagined community. The responsabilization programme makers here seek to align with state agendas such as national security. Walsh (2015) recognizes these programmes as instruments of governmentality that mobilize support by engaging viewers in an identification with border guards and

their racialized practices of investigation and repression. Interested in the visual regimes such representations produce, Fojas (2021) considers programmes such as National Geographic's *Border Wars* as a form of borderveillant media. This brand of national-security entertainment transforms the border into a dramatic stage where border patrol agents and migrant border crossers engage in an embedded game of evade-and-capture that viscerally engages its audiences.

In American borderveillant media, border control is a narrative formula with a specific set of characters and scenarios. Inspired by the dramatis personae of the cowboy hero, for example, the border patrolmen play the part of the heroic vanguard that protects the nation's weak spot. Since the viewer's sympathy is mostly built on the border patrolmen's victimization at the hands of drug smugglers and desperate migrants, these shows rely on efforts to dramatize the dangers the border patrolmen face. Jones (2014) notes that fast-paced editing, pedagogic voice-overs and a tense musical score all serve to compensate for a lack of visible – if not actual – dangers. To further intensify the viewing experience, Fojas (2021) notes that borderveillant media activates the audience to partake in the investigative process. Not only does the viewer grow accustomed to a broad series of surveillance technologies, but these optics also become part of a hostile way of seeing that trains the onlooker in how to scout for suspicious elements and how to behave within border-scapes. As Fojas explains, “seeing from the perspective of the border presupposes a division of apprehension; it means discerning between those who are deserving of the entitlements of belonging and those who are not” (2021, 3). Such practices of symbolic bordering (Chouliaraki 2017) distribute affective commitments and moral evaluation along racialized lines of belonging. But even more pertinent is that borderveillant spectatorship becomes a game of sorts. Fojas notes that border policing has a “ritual effect akin to a spectator sport” (2021, 42). By being involved in the procedurals of border policing, the audience plays along in a game of oversight and threat assessment and learns to derive pleasure from state-sanctioned ways of looking. To Walsh this results in audiences that are trained as “watchful citizens” (2015, 237) – willing and able to detect specific individuals and activities.

While the reference to border security as a ‘game’ is here used in a metaphorical sense, it is a frame that warrants general concern and has ideological complications. As Andreas (2003) makes clear, the understanding of border policing as a game is not uncommon in political discourse and media reporting. The struggle of border security forces to find and capture undesirable migrants is often likened to that of a cat-and-mouse game. Apart from the obvious dehumanizing connotation of this frame, Fojas (2021) notes how it helps to render banal the structural violence which takes place at the border. The game is here used as a script through which border security is depoliticized into a series of efforts of enforcement and evasion between different factions. Moreover, from an organizational psychology approach, Andersen recognizes that “play represents a technology for self-management” (2009, 10), which is increasingly taken up in the unfolding power of institutions. Playing games in an institutional setting is hence often equated to playing along with the demands that institutions set for their subjects. But it also applies more literally since border security has been integrated into popular entertainment

industries like video gaming, social media and – of course – reality TV. As Brenton and Cohen (2003) note, reality TV essentially presents game worlds that use controlled space as a type of sandbox in which to play around with the social dynamics of contestants and the scenarios that specific sets of rules create. Much of the imaginative work done by reality TV audiences is to immerse themselves by thinking about how they would act in these situations. In borderveillant reality TV, it is the rules of the security state that create the setting within which the audience is asked to think, root and play along to participate in the thrill of the hunt. Such rigidly defined universes of control and coercion help to exclude, if not exploit, the precarity of those who are pitted against the security state’s watchful eyes. In the next section, we will detail the games *Smuggled* plays and examine how its narrative, formal and ideological framework invites its audience to join in.

### **Casting: A Game of Dressing Up**

*Smuggled* occupies a peculiar place amongst contemporary migration-themed reality TV. On the one hand, its preoccupation with testing the thoroughness of Britain’s border infrastructure clearly denotes that the programme has ideological aims aligning with borderveillant media. After all, *Smuggled* argues that border security inadequacies are a serious threat to national security and the well-being of British citizens. At the beginning of every episode, the dramatic voice-over narration explicitly states the programme’s ambition to test “the effectiveness” of Britain’s borders. However, instead of adopting the perspectives of the border agents, as is the case in several other shows, it takes migrant experiences as a focal point through which the issue of border security is explored. Akin to shows such as *Go Back to Your Own Country*, *Smuggled* builds its educational project on participants who re-enact experiences of border crossing rather than taking the point of view of the border security apparatus itself. However, in contrast to humanitarian shows, *Smuggled* uses these narrative structures and formatting methodologies not to foster empathy for migrant crossers, but rather as instruments to inspire fear and strengthen discourses of surveillance and control. This duality between migrant identification and migrant deterrence leads to tensions, which can be explored through a close reading of the programme. Since projects of border securitization often work hard to omit any reference to migrant experiences (Fojas 2021), building on migrants’ hardships in illegally crossing the border has the potential to open a critical space to relate to the structural violence that such state-sponsored methods of exclusion constitute. Yet *Smuggled* engages alternately with post-humanitarian and state security logics in an effort to recover the very experiences it builds on for borderveillant ends.

To understand how *Smuggled*’s instrumentalizes migrant experiences and to what ends, it is necessary to take a closer look at the concept and its contestants. The programme uses eight British citizens to serve as proxy migrants who attempt to enter the country through well-known routes. Each participant gets their fair time of talking-head style interviews in which they detail their personal background, expectations about the experiment and stance towards UK migration. By securing

Table 12.1 *Smuggled* contestants overview

<i>Name</i>	<i>Occupations</i>	<i>Route</i>	<i>Motivation</i>
David and Carolyn Asher	Pensioners Independent	Caen (FR) to Portsmouth (UK) by mobile home Cherbourg (FR) to Weymouth (UK) by dinghy boat	Want to make Britain's borders more secure. Wants to better understand migrants.
Kherrem	Journalist	Amsterdam (NL) to Newcastle (UK) by car with a fake passport	Professional curiosity in how criminal networks operate.
Alim and Tony	Hip-hop artist and lorry driver	Lorry stowaway from Calais (FR) to Dover (UK)	Alim wants to join out of sympathy for migrants. Tony wants to protect Britain's borders.
George	Adventurer	Crosses the English Channel by kayak from France to the UK	Considers this a sport challenge and great thrill.
Rob and Tahir	Retired police officer and unspecified	Private yacht stowaway from Boulogne (FR) to Dover (UK)	Rob wants to secure Britain's borders to keep out international crime. Tahir is curious about migrants' experiences.
Kyle and Nathan	Ex-military and driver	Car stowaway from Rotterdam (NL) to Harwich (UK)	Want to secure the British border and unmask border security incompetence.
Fumni and Christy	Academic and unspecified	Cherbourg (FR) to Northern Ireland (UK) by car	Want to debunk the myth that border crossing is easy, because of sympathy for migrants.

a degree of diversity in the casting, the programme makers provide a range of backgrounds, opinions, routes and motivations. Table 12.1 gives an overview of all contestants and their personal biographies as provided in the show.

Ranging from David and Carolyn, a conservative elderly couple attempting to get from Caen to Portsmouth by mobile home, to Christy and Fumni, two left-leaning Afro-European women who enter through the UK's 'Irish backdoor,' *Smuggled* makes sure to tick off different elements of a political debate in its contestant introduction sequences. A hard-line stance on migration is, for example, represented by ex-military recruit Kyle, who draws from 'first-hand experiences' to conclude that Britain's borders are not safe from criminals. Such positions are countered by participants like hip-hop artist Alim, who, partly because of his childhood in Sierra Leone and experiences with deportation in his family, takes a negative stance towards UK border enforcement. While at first, the show seems eager to place participants on a spectrum of attitudes to migrants, it sidesteps tackling the debate by also including participants without a migration-related motivation in the programme. For example, although expressing fears about migrant criminality, journalist Kherrem is driven by professional curiosity rather than a political stance.



Along similar lines, adventurer George further depoliticizes the programme's objectives by considering crossing the English Channel by kayak simply to be an extreme sports challenge. In this sense, *Smuggled* seems to evoke debates around migration to provide its characters with some colourful background rather than actively engaging with the topic and letting these opinions clash in a democratic space. In one of the segments, Alim, who is sympathetic to migrants, is coupled with truck driver Tony, who believes Britain simply cannot house more people. While such a coupling warrants a debate between different viewpoints, the show does not delve further into details on how both participants react towards each other, even when confronted with tragic scenes in Calais' refugee camps. *Smuggled* might set the scene for heated discussions, but these conversations remain off-screen throughout the show. As such, the programme clips the wings of any border security critical discourse.

There is equally little meta-commentary on the dubious nature of the performance the contestants are asked to be involved in. *Smuggled* goes to great lengths to verify the authenticity of the journeys. Using infographics, every route is provided with context and statistical data, including estimations of how many illegal crossers this part of the border is faced with annually. The degree of realism this re-enactment vouches for is, however, exclusively based on migrant mobility. Omitting any identification with migrants apart from their border crossing, participants are asked to perform migrant-ness solely by way of their interaction with border security infrastructure. An unsettling consequence of this mobility-centred logic is that the migrant becomes an abstracted border crossing entity devoid of any specified class, gender or racial background. To *Smuggled*, the borderveillant gaze is simply not racialized. Within the programme's premise, White elderly people with an expensive motorhome or yacht have the same chance of being stopped in security checks as Black African or Middle Eastern diaspora. Even when Tahir shares his experiences with racial profiling in airport security, *Smuggled* sidesteps this issue by focusing on the joy of getting through undetected. Being smuggled on board of Rob's yacht, Tahir shares in Rob's White privilege for a moment. It is a scene that *Smuggled* utilizes for purposes of comic relief rather than moral concern. When race does factor into the programme, it is not done to problematize forms of discrimination in border policing, but rather as a type of multicultural make-up for this show that helps delineate who belongs and who does not. As such, the inclusion of non-White participants, and in particular the strong anti-migration stance of some participants, serves to de-racialize the issue. Rather than being part of a wider framework of dominant White British belonging, *Smuggled* reframes the issue as a matter of simple pre-determined citizenship.

The rules of the game are laid out as deceptively simple: some people just don't belong. Who these people are precisely and on what grounds this belonging is based is, however, not addressed. In another way, the empathic discourses of some contestants are hijacked to convey the opposite message to what the participant meant. In the programme, Alim's anti-border rhetoric that stresses the sheer desperation of refugees is reframed to highlight the threat of people with nothing left to lose. Alim's conclusion that you cannot stop people who have so little does not become

a plea for help, but rather an acknowledgement of the challenge that refugees pose to the border force. Moreover, *Smuggled*'s narrator extends the game logic to geopolitical migration flows in general. Although acknowledging that people actually have the right to cross borders if they seek refuge from war and other catastrophes, the narrator continues by specifying that it is the function of border security infrastructure to stop them from doing so. Border security thus becomes devoid of ethical and political implications and simply reduced to a contest between those seeking to enter and those tasked to stop them. These discursive knots are fastened through the legal inconsistencies and bureaucratic absurdities that are embedded in the attitude of the UK (as well as the contemporary West) to migration. Although in theory, every displaced individual is allowed to request asylum in the UK, the Home Office attempts to prevent such requests by a series of physical obstacles, bureaucratic barriers and other structures of state securitization.

There are some moments, however, in which the experiences of the participants are put within the context of what actual migrants go through. Several of the non-White participants are inspired to a greater sense of solidarity after being confronted with the harsh living conditions of migrants. Once in Calais, Alim is struck with a painful feeling, stating that "they looked like my cousins. They look like people I was around when I was young." Similarly, Asher's tour by boat leaves him to reflect on the precariousness that migrants face when making the crossing. Mostly, these reflections are superficial because they invite the participants to consummate a type of "migrant experience" based on a false notion of now having truly experienced what it must be like. Only Fummi makes the analysis that what they have just been re-enacting is only a fragment of a larger realm of suffering and precarity that actual migrants must live through. Nevertheless, despite Fummi's empathic plea, any hint of the unrepresentable nature of migrant experiences remains absent. Unlike the contestants in the show, migrants do not have the resources, or rescue boats, let alone a back-up plan when things go awry. Psychological pressure, emotional exertion and harsh physical conditions have been left out of the equation, limiting *Smuggled*'s understanding of migration to border crossing, inventive obstacles and a series of gameshow-like challenges. To underline our argumentation, we further point to the near-total absence of migrant lives in the show. Apart from some snippets in Calais and archival footage of people on boats, no migrant is made visible, nor are any migrants provided with the opportunity to speak. This prioritization of the British proxy-migrant experience above that of the actual, living, in-the-frame migrant reached a moment of perverse irony when, while shooting in Calais, the programme makers had to make sure no actual migrants climbed in so Alim could make the crossing as a legal make-believe migrant.

### *Scripting: A Game of Hide-and-Seek*

The orchestration of *Smuggled*'s contestants leads to a de-politicization and de-racialization of issues of border security and migration. While the contestants do pantomime key moments of border crossing, what the viewer is ultimately left with are bodies isolated in their position of gameshow contestants rather than individuals

who help denote the harshness of migrant life and make a plea for empathy. So what function do these participants' narratives and personal journeys help fulfil then? Through the narrative scripting of *Smuggled's* sub-plots, the eight contestants take up the sousveillant and surveillant border technologies that simultaneously help identify potential migrant travellers and show the workings of national security infrastructure. This is made clear by *Smuggled's* formal component. *Smuggled* relies here on generic conventions of the Hollywood thriller and other forms of suspense-driven entertainment. Specifically, the heist film's preoccupation with preparatory professionalism and the spy film with its themes of deceit and forgery come to mind. Every participant's journey runs along the same three-act structure of preparation/execution/resolution on the way past the border. The contestants, as well as *Smuggled's* voice-over narration, first engage in detailing the specific plan and setting certain expectations on how they could (and in the logic of the programme: should) get caught. From that point on, each journey is narrativized along various checkpoints on the way to the border – mostly in the shape of the different border security posts. After each crossing, a debriefing takes place in which the contestants evaluate their trip according to their prior expectations.

Building on this structure allows *Smuggled* to operationalize two affective forces: suspense and relief. Suspense carries through the first and second acts, while relief is the note on which all but one encounter end. Every participant's journey is built on the spectacle of the border crossing process and the risks of being caught. Similar to crime dramas such as the heist film, the narrative takes place by planning an elaborate crime-to-be, consisting of several steps. Indeed, most of *Smuggled's* viewing pleasure seems to arise from the preparatory phase. The contestants run through different scenarios and contingency plans or stress about the chances of being caught. Attempting to enter the country with a false passport, Kherrem dyes his beard, before his friends decide he should also shave the hair on his head to be a more convincing doppelganger. Carolyn's attempts at hiding in her camper are shot in grainy night cam footage that captures her every reaction, and George comments on all the different weather conditions before finally making his crossing. Like kids at a costume party, these are moments in which the participants gleefully try on the roles they have been given. The anxiety of the contestants is contagious because *Smuggled* invites the viewer to ponder how they would react in this situation. "What would you do? Where would you hide?" it seems to ask. The situational suspense that arises is enhanced through the show's use of suspense-attuned editing, dramatic scoring and hidden camera cinematography. The narration needs to compulsively stress how slim the chances are that the contestants will elude capture, while bombastic music heightens the emotional stakes. Similarly, the "active style dialogue" (Hill 2014, 22) that reality TV often relies on ensures that the tense emotional states of the participants are being communicated at the same time as the unfolding events.

Considering the lack of risk any of the participants run, *Smuggled's* reliance on dramatic tropes sometimes borders on the hyperbolic. This is most evident in the segment of Kyle and Nathan's journey where both men scan the perimeter with binoculars as if on a top-secret military mission. Not unlike an assignment in a

warzone, Nathan even gives his fiancée a last-minute phone call before starting his journey – in case something happens. After this build-up, the journey proceeds through a domino of border control acts. Every step of the way is layered with risky obstacles. When approaching a border patrol point, the voice-over points out that “normally” the border agent should get a hi-res image on his screen of Kherrem’s false passport, therefore blowing his cover. Similarly, before their arrival, the programme preps its viewers by repeatedly informing us that port authorities at Bristol will surely check Rob’s cabin and reveal stowaway Tarik. In each of these instances, the voice-over dictates a set of fatalist expectations, before ending on a cliffhanger. Border encounters are the sensational moments around which the show’s viewing experience is built. However, these tightly wound suspense arcs are ultimately there to mislead the viewer since in every one of these instances the border patrol agents do not capture the contestants, and everyone except George manages to end up on British soil. The narrative line thusly builds tension around what should happen – yet does not. Since *Smuggled*’s complicated scenarios of identification let the viewer at the same time vicariously relate to the participants while also rooting for their capture, the relief which we are meant to feel quickly turns sour and is supplanted by disappointment. While the show’s engagement with the participants as proxy migrants is situational and suspense-laden, its sympathies for the bordering institution are what ultimately remain.

These heightened scripts of expectation and evasion are designed to help solidify the viewer’s engagement with the contestants whilst installing moral concern for Britain’s well-being. Tied to the overall suspense arc of *Smuggled*’s border crossing sequences is an element of border pedagogy that informs the audience how undesirable migrants operate and how they can be stopped. Similar to the art of war dictum “to know your enemy, you must become your enemy,” *Smuggled* instrumentalizes the migration re-enactment in order to replay the popular routes of migrants and understand how such acts of illegal border crossing can take place. Since the detailed account which is offered throughout eight different scenarios is meant to alert and sensitize viewers, *Smuggled*’s migrant sympathies are overridden by a hegemonic state security discourse. In hindsight, this makes the participants not loci that replay migrant experiences, but rather invasive forces as well as improvised border-security guards. Both roles serve the same aim of engaging the viewer in state security scripts of migrant surveillance and apprehension. At times, *Smuggled* does seem to introduce new aesthetic regimes. The images of water hitting the tiny boat Asher is steering towards the UK and the threat of George’s kayak colliding with a freight ship are alarming and open up a space for viewers to reflect on the horrific scenarios migrants find themselves in. However, in contrast to Rossipal’s (2021) opinion on new documentary forms and migration experiences, these haptic images are effective to different ends because they are aligned with the borderveillant gaze. The fierce sea raging against the small boat is here a site of spectacle rather than concern. Through the play-pretend of migrant experiences, *Smuggled* has thus succeeded in working not against, but rather beyond classic forms of empathic engagement with migrants, as well as neutralizing the political potency of some of the images and scenarios it seeks to reference.

***Framing: A Game of Tag***

After detailing how *Smuggled* uses its participants' migrant performance to fit borderveillant projects of control and exclusion, we would like to further elaborate how these projects are underlined by way of the border climate the show helps to construct. As Schimanski (2006) specifies, borders are symbolically loaded material entities that can be employed by producers to steer the meaning making processes of their viewers. The border is in this sense never simply a place, but a narrative trope or aesthetic form through which something is told or communicated. *Smuggled's* borderlands are utilized in a way common for borderveillant media: as a battleground. The tense voice-over narration repeatedly sets a tone of terror by stressing what is at stake. The British border points are the country's last line of defence against a series of abstractly defined threats. After all, drug dealers, sex traffickers and potential terrorists enter the country through these routes and will continue to do so unless the border is well protected. In line with border security discourse, *Smuggled* constructs a climate of all-enduring risk. The infographic maps the show likes to flaunt present an image of Britain under siege from all angles. They also help to further gamify the border as it makes crossing the channel in small vessels look like a game of battleship. What sustains this insecurity is that migrant crossers are framed as a ubiquitously absent entity (Pötzsch 2010), hard to detect and ready to strike at any given time. While such feelings of fear are primarily operationalized towards enemy threats to the nation, or "criminal gangs and clandestine travellers" as they are referred to, *Smuggled's* abstraction of this threat leads to the vilification of all undesirable migrants. This criminalization of migration is supported by visual and rhetoric techniques that minimize the humanity of migrants. Terms such as 'refugee', 'migrant' and 'criminal' are conflated and seem to point to one singular threat.

As part of this populist address, *Smuggled* is rich with nationalist sentiments. These mostly take shape through the comparisons between different border forces and their inadequacies. It is repeatedly pointed out that France "doesn't care who comes in" and is not engaging in any efforts to secure its borders. To a lesser extent, this attitude applies to the border patrol of the Netherlands and Ireland. Once arriving on the British side, the contestants and voice-over narration remark how there is distinctly more personnel at the British border. Each episode also ends with an epilogue in which the programme makers asked for reactions from the different border agencies. While the Home Office gives a lengthy reply, the words "No one from France would comment" linger over the final shots of the screen. Although both sides of the border security have flaws, at least the UK is the least flawed. *Smuggled's* cinematography further underlines such nationalist projects. Shots of idyllic English landscapes and Britain's natural borders are used as plug-ins to stress the glory of the homeland. Although none of the contestants actually passes them, *Smuggled* continuously uses the tall white cliffs of Dover as a metonym for both national pride and the natural strength of Britain's sea border. The pristine white cliffs are here turned into a border beyond reprieve, its age-old splendour and stone strength in stark contrast with the porous man-made borders of seaports.

*Smuggled*'s night-time overhead shots of harbours function as a counterpoint since they are represented as places seething with the potential of migrant intruders. Ireland is also mentioned as a new potential threat with the advent of Brexit. Although some context is given on the complexity of an Irish hard border because of the conflict in Northern Ireland, this episode concludes by emphasizing that a soft border will leave additional holes in Britain's security.

As Masco (2014) notes, nationalism is often cemented by sustaining a sense of insecurity, yet the aura of precarity which permeates in *Smuggled* can also be considered a common feature of reality TV and part of its ideological underpinnings. Bignell (2012, 135), for example, notes that in reality TV "[r]isk, unpredictability and danger are represented as endemic to society, and institutions are represented as impossibly distant and too preoccupied with administrative and bureaucratic issues to deal with these problems." *Smuggled* excels in this DIY attitude to border security by promising to best the British and other nations' governments in their experiment to test migrant deterrence. Although the Home Office was not involved in the production, in contrast to *Border Force UK*, and even condemned the programme's concept, the show does perform the state's function to monitor and protect the British border. The citizen responsabilization (Ouellette 2010) that *Smuggled* engages in can therefore be best described as the cultivation of moral indignation amongst its British viewing audience. Since its social experiment shows that the UK's border security is an 'illusion,' *Smuggled* asks its viewers to demand more of their government. It is therefore no wonder that both episodes of the show end with a plea addressed to the viewing public to hold their governments accountable for what is framed as a failure of international border institutions. The viewer too is asked to join in this project to keep the borders safe. Having become well-versed in how migrants elude border control, audiences are given a subject position in which they are complicit in processes of border securitization. As such, the spectator ready to empathize with migrant suffering is converted into the suspicious spectator – ready to search and report.

This is further enhanced by an underlying discourse that border security is not a material problem, but an issue of willpower. Incompetence and a lack of vigilance on the part of border agents are leading to weak spots in an otherwise well-designed security system. It is therefore no wonder that the material dimension of the border is taken as a privileged focus point. *Smuggled*'s exposition often results in a form of technological fetishization in which the various tools the Home Office has at its disposal are exhibited. Summing up the different technological trinkets further drives home the point that the problem lies with human error. Similarly, a lacklustre attitude by policymakers in allowing international waters to be unprotected or refusing to go the extra mile in border security is lamented. When editing together discussion on the matter, *Smuggled* often leaves the last word to the more hard-line side of the debate. At one point, Asher states that a more scrutinizing form of border security would lead to massive transport delays. The show then cuts back to Catherine who emphasizes that she would happily wait an hour more if it meant keeping the border safe. Unusually for securitainment programmes, *Smuggled* supports nationalist agendas of securitization not through a spectacle of enforcement,

but by presenting the border as a site of infrastructural impotence. The problem is similar to that of shows like *Border Wars*, except that here insecurity is favoured over reassurance. Nevertheless, such emotive scripts do perform many of the same functions, since *Smuggled* presents itself as an instigator of change and a precursor to reform.

## Conclusion

As Hill (2018) points out, reality TV is often more talked about than watched. A programme's success is often measured by the controversies it triggers and the media attention it captures. In this sense, the controversy following *Smuggled*'s release is potentially what helped strengthen its appeal to audiences. Although *Smuggled*'s promotional discourse made it seem as if the social experiment has subversive qualities in the context of Britain's migration debate, the programme does little more than rearticulate hegemonic discourses of border security and nationalist exclusion. Reading *Smuggled* as borderveillant media helps us understand how the gamified dynamics of migrant re-enactment operate to naturalize existing power structures. In its casting, narrative structure, generic tools and ideological articulation, the show schools its audience in migrant border crossing practices in order to be able to think as a border patrol agent. The conventions of reality TV, together with other genre tropes, foster a feeling of emergency and concern in relation to the failing infrastructure of Europe's and Britain's borders. This is supported by border poetics that imbue these ill-prepared spaces of risk with a sense of national superiority and ubiquitous threat. As such, the migrant-ness *Smuggled* performs is misconstrued and ill-designed as rooted in nothing more than the migrant's drive for mobility. Within the show's logic, migrants are defined as bodies reduced to actions of evasion and elusion. There are no acknowledged motivations, no emotional traumas, no hardships and duress, and no hope for what lies beyond the border. Equally absent is the inclusion of the sick, the youngest and the weary in *Smuggled*'s sandbox of simulated suffering. Such reductionism of what constitutes illegal border crossing both trivializes and sensationalizes the suffering to which migrants on these routes are structurally subjected. Out of the confines of its TV play-pretend, a game-over at the border means certain death, imprisonment or being cast back into a life of risk. There is no rescue boat to take the crosser out of the water, no producer to provide the necessary documentation and no crew to open the trunk which has been sealed shut. Moreover, after the border crossing the challenge has supposedly stopped. The migrant has 'won' the game – following the discursive logic of the show. However, as Wemyss (2015) details, what awaits the migrant who successfully crosses into British territory is not leisure or a life of comfort, but a continuation of Britain's pervasive borderscapes. The harsh persecution of migrants in Britain makes their existence a dire one indeed. Once having successfully entered the country, the border games that *Smuggled* maps out are replaced by a daily struggle and persistent precariousness. Similarly, the surveillance of migrants does not end at the border but becomes part of an everyday landscape of control and coercion (Yuval-Davis et al. 2019). This makes *Smuggled* not so much

a simulation, but rather a taxidermy of migrant experiences. The game-like set-up has removed any truthfulness or meaning from migrants' suffering in exchange for a security-centred logic that seals Britain's bordering institutions and reality TV viewing audience into a relationship of complicity. In line with reality TV's civic functions, *Smuggled* invites the viewer to help strengthen the border, one look at a time.

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