

Deterrence and ignorance: agnotology at the border

Rine Vieth, Independent scholar

Abstract

In the face of shifts towards migration datafication, there is a simultaneous, purposeful gap in data-collection: a deliberate unknowing that intensifies precarity. Drawing upon agnotology, the study of deliberate ignorance (Proctor and Schiebinger 2008), this presentation will argue that attending to the gaps in digital data-collection helps researchers better understand the contours of the asylum system. This approach brings critical analyses of states' gathering digital data (Metcalf and Dencik 2019) alongside past attempts to unsettle categories of data (Davis 2012; Merry 2016) and inquiries into the growing practice of seeking to quantify more and more (Ponzanesi and Leurs 2022; Shore and Wright 2015; Tazzioli 2020). What role does deliberate ignorance play in border management? How might we theorize the opposite of "seeing like a state" (Scott 1998)? What happens with the calculated gaps in the nets of digital border surveillance? Through a consideration of UK Home Office documentation, government watchdog reports, and research from doctoral work, the presentation argues that attention towards what data is collected—and what data is not—is vital in understanding contemporary border governance, particularly policies of deterrence. Further, attention to what is not quantified offers some insight into future policy interventions in a time of increasing migration datafication.

Biography

Rine Vieth recently completed their PhD in Anthropology at McGill University. Their doctoral project focused on how the UK's First-Tier Asylum and Immigration Tribunals assess cases of belief, particularly cases of conversion to Christianity. They are currently embarking on research projects around how state asylum-assessment data circulates transnationally; how states utilize evidence in assessing claims of belief or sexuality.