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CSLS SPEAKER SERIES

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Monday, November 16, 2020

REBECCA HAMLIN

Associate Professor of Legal Studies and Political Science
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Crossing: How We Label and React to People on the Move

([Stanford University Press, 2021](#))

Hamlin will be presenting on her forthcoming book, *Crossing: How We Label and React to People on the Move* (Stanford University Press, 2021). Today, the concept of ‘the refugee’ as distinct from other migrants looms large. Immigration laws have developed to reinforce a dichotomy between those viewed as voluntary, often economically motivated, migrants who can be legitimately excluded by potential host states, and those viewed as forced, often politically motivated, refugees who should be let in. In *Crossing*, Hamlin explains that everything we know about people who decide to move suggests that border crossing is far more complicated than any binary, or even a continuum, can encompass. Drawing on cases of various ‘border crises’ across Europe, North America, South America, and the Middle East, Hamlin outlines major inconsistencies and faulty assumptions on which the binary relies. The migrant/refugee binary is not just an innocuous shorthand – indeed, its power stems from the way in which it is painted as apolitical. Hamlin thus argues that the binary is a dangerous legal fiction, politically constructed with the ultimate goal of making harsh border control measures more ethically palatable to the public. In this presentation, in addition to explaining the basic argument of the book, Hamlin will go into detail on one of her case studies: the role of the United Nations High Commissioner (UNHCR) in perpetuating the migrant/refugee binary. Hamlin shows how UNHCR’s positivist and essentialist legal conceptions of ‘the refugee’ manifests in its public relations and social media campaigns.

Chapter four of *Crossing* is [linked here](#) and on our website.

PLACE [Please register here for the Zoom link.](#)
TIME 12:45 – 2:00pm.
INFO <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/research/CSLS/>
EMAIL csls@law.berkeley.edu

If you require an accommodation for effective communication (ASL interpreting/CART captioning, alternative media formats, etc.) to fully participate in this event, please contact csls@law.berkeley.edu with as much advance notice as possible and at least 7-10 days in advance of the event.

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