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Article

EU Border Officials and Critical Complicity: The Politics of Location and Ethnographic Knowledge as Additions

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Abstract

Based on research conducted among EU border enforcement officials, this article embarks on a discussion about complicity and critical analysis within border and migration studies. The study of borders and migration in the context of the EU is a highly politicized issue, and several scholars have pointed out that critical research easily comes to serve into a "knowledge loop" (Hess, 2010), or play part in the proliferation of a "migration business" (Andersson, 2014). In this article, I will argue that in order to not reproduce the vocabulary or object-making of that which we study, we need to study processes of scale-making (Tsing, 2000) and emphasise the multiplicity of borders (Andersen & Sandberg, 2012). In the article, I therefore present three strategies for critical analysis: First, I suggest critically assessing the locations of fieldwork, and the ways in which these either mirror or distort dominant narratives about the borders of Europe. Secondly, I probe into the differences and similarities between the interlocutors' and researchers' objects of inquiry. Finally, I discuss the purpose of 'being there', in the field, in relation to ethnographic knowledge production. I ask whether we might leave behind the idea of ethnography as evidence or revelations, and rather focus on ethnography as additions. In conclusion, I argue that instead of critical distance, we as scholars should nurture the capacity of critical complicity.

Keywords

border and migration studies; border officials; critical analysis; ethnographic knowledge; EU border enforcement

1. Introduction

When I carried out research among border officials in the EU between 2015 and 2017, I experienced how I was at times recognized by gatekeepers and interlocutors as a knowledge producer who could feed into the "knowledge loop," as ethnologist Sabine Hess (2010) has called it. Drawing on her research in a European migration control organisation, Hess argues that she was granted research access because the organisation expected her to provide insights that could make the organisation more self-aware and efficient (Hess, 2010, p. 112). In my research, I also had the impression that my status as a potential knowledge provider granted me access to interviews with border officials and access to border-control premises. Did this precondition, however, mean that my research and analysis was bound to be absorbed into a 'knowledge loop,' bound to be rendered part of an efficiency strategy—and in which ways would that be a problem?

Based on such field research experiences, and on the questions arising from them, I will engage in a discussion about complicity and reproduction within critical border and migration. Over the past two decades, the enforcement of European borders has been emblematic of discussions about Europe's role in the world, of the dire consequences of economic globalisation and the pitfalls of neo-liberal democracy. By consequence, border and migration studies is a very politicised field, in which scholars must consider how their data, insights, and

conclusions circulate. Critical scholars have pointed to the study of illegalised migrants as "epistemic violence" (De Genova, 2002, p. 422), in that such study reproduces the categorisations of state actors. Also, migration scholar Franck Duvëll have warned against the conflation of political jargon, technical terms, and scholarly language (Düvell, 2009, pp. 339–340). In the book *Illegality Inc.*, anthropologist Ruben Andersson (2014) discusses these issues in terms of "complicity." In his ethnography of the European border regime, he describes illegalised migration to Europe as a business that constantly adds fuel to its own engine; a business which, beyond state actors and migrants, involves many other actors, for instance academics, journalists, activists, populations, and private companies. Andersson argues that migration research often becomes part of a migration business which endlessly produces new problems with new solutions, which create new problems and so forth.

The notion of a migrant engine that feeds itself is very intriguing and sets an important critical agenda point for border and migration research, in that it reminds us to be cautious not to tie ourselves to the system. However, when critical research tries to remove itself from blindly feeding the machine to critiquing the system, where does that locate the researcher? Do we move from a place deep within the machinery to a place outside of it?

In this article, I suggest a pathway that aspires to frame critical research beyond such a dichotomy of either being tied to the system or being able to critique from a distance. Rather, I suggest that we acknowledge complicity as a condition for any ethnography, in as much as we add to this world, when we describe and define. Acknowledging our complicity urges us to continually and critically assess the inherent assumptions of our research designs. Therefore, in the following, I will discuss three analytical strategies that can add to the conversation on the future of critical border and migration studies.

First, I discuss the politics of choosing fieldwork locations. Secondly, I discuss the politics of the research object, suggesting the importance of not mirroring that of our interlocutors. Finally, to address the discussion about how critical research is received beyond the academy, I discuss fieldwork as additions rather than revelations. In theoretical terms, I suggest that critical analysis foregrounds the multiple, ongoing processes of object-making. By doing so, we might be able to avoid the reproduction of the vocabulary, scales, or connections of that which we study, and we might be able to reposition our complicity.

2. The Critical Promise of Studying the State and Its Institutions

This article builds on research carried out among border officials at three border enforcement sites in the realm of the EU between 2015 and 2017. The research was based on qualitatively informed fieldwork conducted amongst officials who police borders within the

Schengen Area and the EU. These three sites were the Danish–German land border, the airport in Copenhagen, and the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM). The fieldwork material consists of interviews with border officials as well as participant observations during working situations. With this material I have explored how concerns and discussions regarding expectations, quality, and professionalism came to matter in the everyday practice of border enforcement (Kristensen, 2019, 2020a, 2020b).

Over the past years, there has been a growing interest in ethnographically informed studies of border enforcement and migration control (Aas & Gundhus, 2015; Borrelli & Lindberg, 2018; Côté-Boucher, Infantino, & Salter, 2014; Follis, 2012; Hall, 2012; Schwell, 2008). Broadly speaking, these studies are interested in understanding the rationales, the sense-making, and the tasks and routines of border and migration officials. Ethnographic enquiries into state authorities and bureaucracies have also shown how mundane everyday practices (Navaro-Yashin, 2002) and emotional investments (Laszczkowski & Reeves, 2017) hold the potential to highlight the state's sociality and materiality. Taking the state and its actors as the object of study emphasises the processes through which the state comes to appear as an entity that stands "above" society (Navaro-Yashin, 2002), able to fixate the border and make territory "stick" (Reeves, 2011). In that regard, the study of state practices sometimes comes to promise a somewhat emancipatory outcome. In a review article of what they call the "hope boom," anthropologists Nauja Kleist and Stef Jansen (2016) observe that recent trends within anthropological studies seem to build on an implicit 'hope against all odds,' which by emphasising uncertainties and contingencies try to counter dystopian descriptions of corrupted and all-encompassing systems. These kinds of analyses of uncertainties seem to imply a different and better future (Kleist & Jansen, 2016, pp. 378–379). In a similar sense, the study of the state and its practice can be understood as being engaged in a critical project, which builds on a (more or less) conscious hope for a future that can bring *other ways* of doing things.

The study of state practices also allows for a critical scrutiny of politics disguised as technicalities. According to anthropologist Karolina S. Follis (2012), the study of infrastructures and institutions can serve as a reminder and a warning. In her studies, Follis shows how the migration-management industry—with its "sanitization of language pertaining to repressive practices (for example, 'capacity building,' 'migration management,' 'best practices')" (Follis, 2012, p. 208)—renders the political implications of these practices invisible and thus also less accountable. Follis argues that, by studying the state's border enforcement practices, ethnographers can bring forth the political and ethical consequences, which are effaced in the language used by the state.

A critical scholarship, then, must be cautious not to reproduce the vocabulary of state actors, but instead to

keep a critical distance. The question, of course, is what sort of critical distance? In the following, I present a theoretical framework which I suggest can pave the way for not only critical distance, but critical complicity.

3. Theoretical Framework

In the article "The Global Situation," written at the culmination of economic, political, and scholarly fascination with globalisation, anthropologist Anna Tsing proposes a way to study "the global" without getting lost in what she refers to as its "charisma" (Tsing, 2000, p. 328). Scholars of globalisation should avoid being carried away by the promises of globalisation in a way that would remove the critical eye for the sizes, scales, and worlds that globalisation rhetoric produces, she argues. Globalisation might make scholars aware of interconnectedness, but it also draws them inside its rhetoric, making them blind to its internal assumptions. Tsing argues that the problem is that "we describe the landscape imagined within [globalisation] rather than the politics and cultures of scale making" (Tsing, 2000, p. 330). She therefore proposes an analytical approach that maintains an interest in the interconnectedness of practices while at the same time remaining attentive to globalist wishes and fantasies. According to Tsing, the task for critical analysis will be to locate and specify globalist projects and dreams—"with their contradictory as well as charismatic logics and their messy as well as effective encounters and translations" (Tsing, 2002, p. 330).

To my mind, Tsing's twenty-year old warning about falling prey to the logics of globalisation is a very fruitful reminder for border and migration studies today, too. In a field where very powerful definitions of the logics, connections, and workings of the EU border system are circulated, critical scholars must stay attuned to not reproduce the landscape imagined *within* the EU border system itself, but rather describe the politics and cultures of *making* such a landscape, to paraphrase Tsing.

In their studies of European borderlands, ethnologists Marie Sandberg and Dorte Andersen opt for performativity and multiplicity as analytical strategies to approach such scale-making. Andersen and Sandberg build on the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS), which approaches objects as performed through heterogeneous and socio-material networks (Andersen, 2012; Sandberg, 2009). Whereas the focus on performativity is widely used in critical border and migration studies (Parker & Vaughan-Williams, 2009; Salter, 2012), multiplicity and simultaneity are often given less attention. Building on STS scholar Annemarie Mol's book *The Body Multiple* (Mol, 2002), Andersen and Sandberg propose studying the borders of Europe through the lens of multiplicity, which "refers not simply to diversity but points to the fact that the different ways any given object or phenomenon is handled also enact specific versions of it; slightly different versions, a multiple reality" (Sandberg & Andersen, 2012, p. 7). The multiplicity approach shows how different—and at times contradictory—versions of the border coexist: The border is not *either* present *or* absent, *either* territorial *or* ideological; it can be both/and, and the analytical interest is in studying under which conditions the border does what, and how the different versions of border coexist, collide, or align with each other (Sandberg, 2009). In this regard, different versions of borders are not conflated into aspects of the same border regime; instead, the differences, tensions, and incompatibilities are kept foregrounded throughout the analyses.

Departing from this brief theoretical framework, I will in the following discuss three ways in which I have tried to bring such processes to the fore in my own research design. First, I discuss the politics of the location of fieldwork, arguing to take out the pace, drama, and urgency characterising the rhetoric of border and migration studies as an analytical strategy, to rethink how we can provide critical food for thought. Secondly, I discuss the gains from probing into the similarities and differences between the objects of study that we and our interlocutors point to. Finally, I discuss the character of the knowledge we as researchers produce about border enforcement in the EU, suggesting that we focus on additions rather than revelations. Finally, I suggest that complicity is a condition for every ethnography, and that researchers will have to continually revisit the scales, objects, and connections that we make in our analyses.

4. The Politics of Location

A feat of critical border and migration studies has been to show the reproductive pitfalls in pointing out migrants, asylum seekers, or undocumented travellers as objects of research; and studies have called for reflexivity in the conceptualization of researcher–researched interactions (e.g., Aparna & Schapendonk, 2018). The lesson learnt is that we as researchers must be acutely aware of the structures of the stories we choose to tell based on someone else's words and experiences. In the following, I will argue that the location of, and interaction with, our field sites can be critically examined in a similar vein.

In a blog post, which discusses the ethics of field research in border-enforcement facilities, anthropologist Katerina Rozakou (2017) urges researchers to critically assess *why* they seek to enter certain places. Rozakou discusses her attempts to gain access to a notorious migrant camp on the Greek island of Lesbos, which with its location just 30 kilometres from the Turkish coast has been a central location in the struggles over European borders and migration for more than two decades. Attempting to gain access to the camp, she was met with the accusation that her presence was only adding to the commotion in the camp. At the entrance of the camp, she was met by a guard who stated:

> People come and say, 'I am writing an article.' They just appear on the front gate and they demand to

enter. Everybody uses the same excuses: I want to see how the space has changed; I am not like the others [researchers, journalists]; I have a different approach; I am not visiting the zoo. (Rozakou, 2017)

Like Ruben Andersson, who warned scholars not to add fuel to the "business" of illegal migration, Rozakou points to the pitfalls of a critical scholarship that repeats the same narratives or draws the same crisis map by choosing to single out the same places as locations of interest for critical research. Rozakou emphasises the importance of gaining access to politically and ethically controversial places, but nevertheless warns against flocking to the same over-researched places. She laments the fact that researchers, journalists, and others who seek entry to such places too often only manage to offer accounts that could just as well have been written based on already accessible information (Rozakou, 2017). The problem with singling out the same places as objects of research is that it can lead to research fatigue among gatekeepers and potential informants, and that the preoccupation with the same kind of place and interlocutors can create a distorted image of the situation. In other words, the singling out of the same places, risks mirroring the topography of crisis as defined by authorities, politicians, and journalists. With her text, Rozakou therefore raises the important question of where and why we locate our fieldwork, and she reminds us to ask: Who benefits from our 'being there,' and even more importantly, who does not?

In my research, I have engaged with what we might call the politics of location by trying to combine unlikely border enforcement locations within and beyond the EU. I studied border-procedure modernisation projects carried out by EU border officials at the Moldovan–Ukrainian border and I combined these fieldwork insights with material from the police department in the airport of Copenhagen, Denmark, which serves both international and domestic flights, controlling both travel within the Schengen Area and into the Schengen Area. Finally, I countered these two locations with fieldwork centred on the Danish–German land border. In other words, my fieldwork took place both outside EU/Schengen areas, at the external borders of the Schengen Area, and on the internal borders in a supposedly frictionless 'borderless Europe.'

While the European border and asylum policies crisis was unfolding in yet another European country each week, in October 2015 I was visiting the offices of EUBAM in Odessa, Ukraine. I had travelled there to study how EU border enforcement was presented in terms of 'smooth and efficient border management' and how it was designed to replace the perceived militaristic, slow, and inefficient border procedures of previous times and regimes. The self-understanding of the border procedures that were promoted was indeed that they would replace an old-fashioned and outdated form of border enforcement.

My position outside of the EU, away from the hotspots of the 'refugee crisis,' came to serve as a sort of inverted telescope (Andersen, Kramsch, & Sandberg, 2015) that made the EU border enforcement system stand out in two ways. First, the 2014 war on Crimea, which resulted in some border officials being sent to war at the Eastern borders of Ukraine, had repositioned the EU border enforcement standards: In times of war, the EU standards and border procedures could eventually get you nowhere. Further, with a crisis unfolding within the EU and Schengen countries, in which fences were now being erected, the concept of border as expansion and cooperation was relativised further, losing its universalising self-understanding by the hour. From my position at the Moldovan–Ukrainian border, the ordering of past, present, and future embedded in the border enforcement regimes of the EU stood out as exactly that: an ordering, rather than a teleological or necessary development. Further, the juxtaposition between EUBAM and EU proper relativized the understanding of EU border procedures, which presented itself as an efficient, modern, and universal approach to borders (see Kristensen, 2019).

Six months later, in Spring 2016, I was granted access to study the Danish police and their border enforcement along the Danish–German land border, at a time when temporary border controls had been introduced by the Danish government, with the aim of bringing refugee movements through Europe to a halt. After months of infrastructural chaos at borders and main travel hubs, such as railway stations, all over Europe, when I arrived at the border in early Spring, there was no longer chaos, no longer commotion, and most interestingly: There were no longer any refugees. This peculiar emptiness, in the midst of a deep and unsolved crisis of border and asylum policy, was intriguing to study, and prompted me to consider: What kind of emptiness and calmness has been installed at the Danish-German borders, and on what grounds did such emptiness and calmness rely? The absence of the crises from that North-European corner was haunting in as much as the crises had not ended, and the analysis of this peculiar emptiness and calmness raised questions regarding the moral implications of such emptiness and calmness.

In that way, the Danish–German border and the Moldovan–Ukrainian border distorts mediatized definitions of places of relevance in relation to the EU's border and asylum policies. Furthermore, the two sites work to distort one another: The contours of the EUBAM-led border management, that positions efficiency tools and cooperation initiatives on the border between Moldova and Ukraine as the future of border enforcement, is altered when juxtaposed with the reintroduction of border control at the Danish border. The image of a 'modern' border enforcement—and the associated terms of efficiency and security—is deeply shattered in this juxtaposition, in which a border at the centre of the EU (a Danish–German border) chooses border barriers and soldiers,

instead of efficiency measures and cooperation, in order to cope with an unforeseen situation. In that sense, the juxtaposition shatters the universalist self-narrative of expansion as a security strategy.

Showing the presence of the EU in such 'unlikely' places, these borders are posited as just as controversial, important, and constitutive for the bordering of Europe—for its effects, failures, shortcomings, and successes—as other, more visibly dramatic or controversial borders. Showing these unlikely places, in other words, provides the opportunity to engage in a project of unsettling the "imagined geography" of Europe (Massey, 2005). The stories I was able to generate in these sites were not classical hotspot stories; they were not stories of explicit drama, tragedy, or urgency. They were perhaps, at times, quite uneventful. It was, however, my clear ambition to slow down the tempo of studies of border enforcement as a means by which to avoid reproducing the language, speed, and urgency embedded in the crisis narratives created by border enforcement actors in the EU. Therefore, the ethnographic material and the analytical claims do not have validity in so far as they are measured by a yardstick of topicality or revelations. Rather, such an asynchronous and unlikely tour through the EU border system provides the possibility of bringing other stories to the fore, with attention paid to other kinds of connections. By not pointing to the same places, the same speed, and the same dramas, a *not-being there* can be used productively, so to speak. By attending to the seemingly mundane, rather than the overtly dramatic, we are given the chance to contemplate what makes the violent or chaotic appear and disappear from certain vantage points. Instead of locating and documenting a centre of the drama, we can engage in working with patterns of absence and presence (Sandberg, 2009, pp. 114–115), and thereby discuss how border practices and the subsequent topography of drama are distributed between places. Such approaches allow us to engage in the study of the production of the landscape of the border system in Europe, rather than mirroring the system's own topography.

5. The Politics of the Research Object

As my fieldwork developed, I realized the difference between (not only my interlocutors' and my own approaches or preoccupations, but also) our *objects* of inquiry. During my research among border officials, I experienced how the combination of gaining access to premises and interlocutors, while also insisting on telling other stories, was challenging. Like the border officials I studied, I was preoccupied with the bordering of Europe. However, the object they put together as 'the borders of Europe' differed from my own.

In Hess' study of 'knowledge loops' within border and migration management, she describes how the supposed congruence between her scientific work and the outcome that her migration management interlocutors were expecting, sometimes got her into trouble because her knowledge project was in fact not always compatible with theirs (Hess, 2010). In my case, being recognised as a knowledge producer was also a double-edged sword. For professionally trained border officials, the borders of Europe involved laws, regulations, legislation, and a Frontex-vocabulary. For me, it involved modes of cooperation and transformation, expectations and responsibilities, everyday speculations, and work anecdotes. When I, as a researcher from a university, did not seem to know all of the regulations, laws, or policies or terms, my position as a knowledge producer was sometimes questioned.

This discrepancy between objects of inquiry was especially clear in my attempts to study the Danish borders with Germany. Early in my fieldwork endeavours, I talked on the phone with an instructor from the Danish Police Academy. Pondering how to help me establish contacts, he asked: "Can you even study the borders there?" He went on to explain how the actual control of the borderline between the two Schengen member countries, Denmark and Germany, had transitioned into immigration control. Within Schengen legislation, border control was only conducted at first entry into the Schengen area, whereas the crossing of borders within the area was no longer an act subjected to control within the Schengen area. Instead, the immigration control (the control of residency permits and visas) within the Schengen area (in cities, asylum centres, and workplaces) was strengthened. This is the process that much scholarship refers to as the 're-bordering' of space (Andreas, 2000, p. 3).

The fact that I was interested in studying the enforcement of borders at an internal border within the Schengen area, then, called for moments of misunderstandings. Midway through my fieldwork, I was called in for a meeting with a police superior, who I had not previously been in contact with. He had come to hear about me, a researcher, interviewing staff in the airport and at the Danish–German border. The purpose of the meeting was to teach me the difference between the EU's 'external' and 'internal' borders; to make me understand that my interest in conducting field research at the Danish–German border was a bit off, or misunderstood. Curiously, this meeting took place precisely when several EU member states were closing their borders due to a growing disbelief in the Schengen regulations' ability to solve growing problems via-à-vis the unfolding crises of the EU migration and asylum policies and refugee arrivals of Summer 2015. Still, in my email correspondence and in the meeting, my interlocutors maintained the worldview that they were put in place to manage. They insisted that there was no 'border-related work' to be studied at the Danish–German border. This was because 'border' in their view and vocabulary indicated an 'external border,' and thus equated to a completely different set of regulations, rules, problems, and solutions (even with the temporary reintroduction of border control). Instead, the work being done at the Danish border with Germany

had to be addressed in terms of cross-border activities, crime prevention, or immigration control.

The instructor who pondered the borderless border and the officers who lectured me on the different types of borders were, of course, correct. In EU/FRONTEX-vocabulary it was inaccurate to address the border between Denmark and Germany in terms of a 'border.' This was obvious to everyone working with these matters; border control had been relegated to external borders and, within the Schengen area, the police carried out immigration control. This distinction was printed all over every FRONTEX publication, taught in every border control master class, and also endlessly discussed in the scholarly literature that I had been reading for years. I knew that I was being imprecise when I insisted on seeing how 'the border' was enforced in a place where there was no border. At the same time, I was convinced that it was both fruitful and important to approach that borderline in terms of a border and border enforcement—there was indeed an international borderline, was there not?

To be sure, I was not disinterested in my interlocutors' configurations of the border, I was more than invested in studying that, too. However, I was cautious not to conflate *their* configurations with those of *my* research design, and I was guided by the idea that the object of study should not mirror that of the border system itself, but rather critically study the scale-making processes of such border system. The fact that an international border could be dislocated from the word 'enforcement' altogether is indicative of a powerful object and scale-making process, to follow Tsing (2000). Such a scale-making project can, however, be foregrounded and distorted when the researcher brings other scale-making projects to the field, so to speak. If we do so, we get the chance to study how these different objects relate to or differ from each other, and how and when they collide or co-exist. In other words, we can engage in a project of analysing the border multiple (Andersen & Sandberg, 2012). An analytical consequence of the emphasis on the multiplicity and simultaneity of borders is furthermore that we as critical scholars intervene in our fields by insisting on bringing to the fore other configurations of the object, and thereby we do not merely passively map, we actively add to.

6. Critical Analysis as Revelations or as Additions?

However, when critical analysis refrains from mirroring the language and objects of our interlocutors, we run the risk of not being understood, or heard. The discussion about how knowledge travels from academic journals and onwards to interlocutors, policy makers, or politicians is complicated, and could indeed be the starting point of a research article in itself. In the final part of this article, I will however touch upon this discussion. I will do so by arguing that yet another way to critically assess our research designs is by carefully examining

the consequences of our analytical processing of fieldwork data. Again, I will start the discussion in conversation with anthropologists Ruben Andersson and Katerina Rozakou, who through their respective studies of border enforcement measures in the EU have contributed to the furthering of critical analysis.

In a reflective article about the role of academics in politicized fields of study, anthropologist Ruben Andersson contemplates the difficulties of being a public voice (Andersson, 2018). He recounts that, in newspaper interviews and panel debates, journalists and discussion partners have boiled down his ethnography about the atrocities that illegalized migrants face, to an anecdote, or dismissed it as a point of view among others (Andersson, 2018). His accounts show that when ethnography is boiled down to anecdotal knowledge, the ethnography is posited as a non-generalizable experience; juxtaposed to generalized and/or statistical knowledge. Also, when ethnography is posited as a point of view, it can be dismissed as biased or politically motivated. Andersson shows how both pitfalls constitute major obstacles for ethnographically-informed border and migration research.

As hinted at by Rozakou, we might need to examine the conditions of knowledge production during the processes of fieldwork and analysis (Rozakou, 2019). In an article about the politics of gaining access to politicized field sites, Rozakou argues that the knowledge generated from limited access to a restricted field site will itself also be limited. Critical scholars must, therefore, be acutely aware of the nature of the access they gain, and how this specific access reflects the knowledge they produce (Rozakou, 2019, pp. 79–80). Rozakou thereby urges us to critically assess who opens the door, when, how, and why, and thus reminds us not to confuse fieldwork access with access to evidence. Following Rozakou's lead, we might even take this further and understand fieldwork, instead, as access into the manifold possibilities of analysis. Rather than approaching ethnographies as evidence, I suggest that we might gain something from positing ethnography as an *addition* to the stories that are normally told.

To elaborate this point, I will share a situation which took place during my fieldwork, as I joined two officers on a 'gate check' in the airport of Copenhagen. In the vocabulary of the airport's border enforcement officials, gate checks are randomized immigration controls of internal Schengen flights, e.g., flights that are not subject to border control as travellers come from another EU/Schengen destination. On the day of the field note shared below, the gate check was performed at a flight arrival. I described the gate check as follows:

> I am accompanying two police officers to a gate check. The gate check is performed at a flight arrival, which the police refer to as the 'Somali Express'—an EasyJet arrival from Milano. The plane lands, and the passenger control begins. I stand awkwardly in the

background. Officer 1 and Officer 2 let most passengers pass without showing passports. Only people of colour are asked to show their passports and asked about the purpose of their stay. I get quite uneasy seeing how bluntly consistent they are in their ethnic profiling. As they work, I am wondering how to approach this in my conversation with them. A family is pulled aside to have their papers looked through. They have two small children who are crying a little, and I have to really pull myself together to not start to cry, too. The family's papers are apparently in order; in any case, they can continue. After the check of passengers had ended, Officer 1 says to me, "So, you could say that we mostly take aside those that are a bit more tanned than the rest of us." Officer 1 brings up the topic himself, I haven't said anything. "But we cannot stop a lot of Danes just to make it look nice," Officer 2 inserts. That is an argument that I have met before among police officers. "We take a few Danes every once in a while," Officer 1 explains. Both, however, share the understanding that the reason they pick the people they do, is because all experience shows that these are the ones who violate the immigration law. I ask the two officers about the article in the Schengen Border Code that prohibits discrimination, and how they try to ensure the balance between profiling and discrimination. "Well," Officer 2 explains, "you have to be able to account for why you have stopped someone." In other words, and according to the regulations, you must be able to document the profiling that was the basis for the control. "But it's true, it really does not look good," I insist "to be stopping only people with another ethnicity than you." "No, but that is how it is. Where I live, it is also a certain group of people that causes all the trouble.," Officer 2 pondered. As we walked back from the gate-check and towards the lunchroom, our talk died out, leaving the questions of the discrepancies between ideals of non-discrimination and demands for border enforcement unsolved. (Author's field note, February 2015)

This field note points in many directions: The note portrays a situation in which people of colour are subject to discriminatory actions in the name of border enforcement security. The fieldnote also recounts a simultaneously tense and everyday situation in the airport, in which not only the passengers, but also me as a researcher and the police officers were emotionally embedded. The fieldnote also contains a range of explicitly racist ways of addressing ethnicity (e.g., "more tanned than us," "Danes" defined as white) as well as implicit boundary work that both the police officers and I, all three white, participated in by referring to the people in question as "other than us," as having "another ethnicity." The question I want to focus on in this context, however, is whether the situation recounted in my field notes reveals the EU border system as racist and discriminatory. Does it document it?

I would argue that rather than a documentation (an end station), a field note like the above can be the starting point for a discussion and further exploration. Why do the officers address their choice of passengers themselves: What about me, what about them, what about the situation makes them bring it up? Do they feel uneasy about their actions, which stand out clearer to themselves, because of my presence? Do they assume that I have certain prejudices about how they work? Which modes of explanation do they bring to the fore: Why wouldn't it 'look good' to take (white) Danes aside for control; to whom, and why? Also, what are the structural and historical conditions that tie together with racist slurs such as the 'Somali Express' (e.g., because of colonial ties, Italy is one of the few EU member countries which recognizes Somali passports as legitimate travel documents)? Why do I feel like crying when the family is taken aside (do I assume that they feel humiliated? Do I feel embarrassed that I might probably never be subjected to ethnic profiling, as I am white?). This is to mention but a few of the questions that this field note raises.

As we unfold this fieldnote, the situations thicken; more questions arise, and by questioning perhaps we start thinking the borders in terms of different connections, conditions, places, and times. In that sense, the fieldnote is posited in terms of additions (for further questioning and conversation), rather than revelations (that document or label). Arguing so, I am inspired by anthropologists Natalia Brichet and Frida Hastrup, who in a dismissal of critique as the unveiling of hidden information about dubious agendas write that "critique…is not a matter of distance or demolition, but rather attention towards possibilities of thinking beyond the stereotypes" (Brichet & Hastrup, 2014, p. 78). In that regard, the unveiling of hidden information or dubious agendas would assume an already established understanding of the object and its contexts. Brichet and Hastrup, therefore, underline the importance of providing room for letting *other* configurations of the object emerge in fieldwork encounters and written analyses.

Indeed, we need evidence of violations such as racism and violence, and many scholars forcefully provide these, alongside journalists, international rapporteurs, and activists. However, a crucial role of critical scholarship can also be to show the *otherwise*, to add to our understanding of how the border becomes productive in everyday border enforcement. By doing so, we might nurture the capacity of being able to see 'beyond the stereotypes,' to not singularise the objects we deal with, and we will be able to contribute the capacity to see multiplicities instead of singularities, complexities instead of simplicities.

7. Conclusion

In the beginning of the article, I suggested that the study of state practices, such as border enforcement, relies on a sort of hope of other ways of doing things. A hope

that these other ways of portraying and telling the story can push for change by making the opposition against a system seem open-ended, instead of stuck in a 'loop' or 'business.' Through the article I have proposed that such change might come about if we as critical scholars nurture the capacity to bring together unlikely locations, objects, and questions, thereby moulding our objects of research in ways that connect differently from what we are normally presented with. The strategies for pushing such *otherwise* that I presented, was inspired by an understanding of the border as multiple (Andersen & Sandberg, 2012), and by Tsing's call to study the landscape of object- and scale-making (Tsing, 2000). More specifically, I discussed the engagement in a politics of location, the possibility of critically assessing the relationship between the objects that our interlocutors point to and the objects we as researchers describe, and, finally, the careful examination of the sort of knowledge we can contribute.

In the introduction, I also asked whether we, as critical researchers, are deemed to add to the "knowledge loop" (Hess, 2010), and whether we thereby are tied to the system. Based on the above reflections, I argue that we have the possibility of making additions that not only add fuel to the engine of the migration business machine, so to speak, but which open up other ways of conceiving the objects of inquiry. The knowledge we can contribute as critical scholars will be more than evidence and revelations (which can be disputed as anecdotal or politically motivated) if we attune ourselves to the making of objects in the multitude, to how things, places, and practices are separated and connected and how everyday practices seek to singularize. In other words, the attention to scale-making processes and multiplicity of borders implies recognizing that we are not merely involved in a passive practice of mapping multiplicities and scale-making processes (at a critical distance); rather, we are actively involved in drawing connections, asking questions, and carving out objects (critically complicit). And herein lies the critical potential: to help nurture the skill of being critically complicit by adding other connections.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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