Knowledge of practice: A multi-sited event ethnography of border security fairs in Europe and North America

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Abstract

This article takes the reader inside four border security fairs in Europe and North America to examine the knowledge practices of border security professionals. Building on the border security as practice research agenda, the analysis focuses on the production, circulation, and consumption of scarce forms of knowledge. To explore situated knowledge of border security practices, I develop an approach to multi-sited event ethnography to observe and interpret knowledge that may be hard to access at the security fairs. The analysis focuses on mechanisms for disseminating and distributing scarce forms of knowledge, technological materializations of situated knowledge, expressions of transversal knowledge of security problems, how masculinities structure knowledge in gendered ways, and how unease is expressed through imagined futures in order to anticipate emergent solutions to proposed security problems. The article concludes by reflecting on the contradictions at play at fairs and how to address such contradictions through alternative knowledges and practices.

Introduction

Border security scholars have not said very much about the industrial fair or expo (see Feldman, 2012). The 'security fair', according to Stockmarr, is a trade show or 'showroom': 'open-access fora where lethal and non-lethal technology for military operations, surveillance and population control are showcased to a broader audience' (Stockmarr, 2016: 187, 192). While much research has been carried out on the border security industry and the neoliberalization and privatization of border management, very little has been written about border security fairs or has theorized border security via its main commercial events, in part because such events are difficult to access and

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there is little previous research indicating how to gain insight from them (Andersson, 2016a,b; Bigo, 2014b; Bloom, 2015; Côté-Boucher et al., 2014; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen, 2013; Hayes, 2009; Hayes and Vermeulen, 2012; Jeandesboz, 2016a; Lemberg-Pedersen, 2013; Prokkola, 2013). Yet the fair serves as an important site for the circulation and consumption of border security products and services, and the accompanying conferences serve as central fora where ideas and discourses are shared among border security professionals (Stockmarr, 2016). Very little work has gone into understanding the fair as a specific site where security practices and knowledges can be actively observed and theorized, and we lack an account of border security that details the rationalities and practices of the major 'power-brokers' present at the industrial fair (Côté-Boucher et al., 2014). As Frowd (2014: 230) has pointed out, 'there is very little work explicitly theorizing tacit or overt knowledges of border control'. To address these concerns, in this article I join a multi-sited ethnography of the fair with a reading of the literature on border security as practice to explore the various expressions of knowledge of practice that emerge at border security fairs (Côté-Boucher et al., 2014; Marcus, 1995, 1999). In parallel to work that demonstrates that knowledge about migration is produced in conferences or fairs and circulated within an unbounded 'apparatus' (Feldman, 2012), and work that engages with transmissions and adaptations of border knowledges in national contexts (Frowd, 2014), I seek here to uncover the knowledges of security practice that arise in the context of the fair.

One of the defining features of recent scholarship on border security has been a 'turn' to practice (Balzacq et al., 2010; Côté-Boucher et al., 2014; Leander, 2010; Salter, 2013b). Practices are

> a routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, "things" and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding and know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. (Reckwitz, 2002: 249)

Such a focus calls for creative new approaches to (re)constructing theories of border security, focusing on diverse discretions, interactions, classifications, discourses, rationalities, and knowledges (Côté-Boucher et al., 2014: 198, 202). By combining a practical focus with an ethnographic focus on knowledge production, we can explore (in)security professionals' knowledge of practice in situated contexts, contributing to the problematization of border security by uncovering dominant logics, rationalities, and norms.

'Knowledge', as I use the term here, refers to the routinized rationalities, logics, and norms practiced while working as an (in)security professional (Côté-Boucher et al., 2014: 198; see also Hills, 2012).[1] Knowledge is a form of 'doing' and, applied to (in)security professionals, is an expression of constructed cultures of border security (Zaiotti, 2011). A practice approach to knowledge thus provides tools to understand the 'episteme' of border security (Bigo, 2014a: 202). It allows us to understand how (in)security professionals conceive of and inhabit knowledges of practice through their participation in commercial events: knowledge is produced through specific practices that can be observed and theorized at the fair. In other words, fairs could be thought of as sites of practical and epistemic integration, whereby mutually constitutive expressions of border security knowledge of and about practice can be observed and explored theoretically: the fair is a space of 'know-ticing'. However, it must be emphasized that knowledge of practice is neither easily accessible nor absolute, nor can we as researchers record it accurately. Knowledge, in this sense, is 'scarce'.

Synthesizing and building on these interdisciplinary understandings of knowledge of practice, and contributing to a critical understanding of how security practices manifest in situated contexts (such as fairs), this article expands our understanding of the border security industry through a multi-sited ethnography of border security fairs in Europe and North America (Côté-Boucher et al.,

2014; Goldstein, 2010; Maguire et al., 2014). It will show how and which forms of (scarce) knowledge are formulated through particular practices of a transnational field of security professionals. Instead of treating 'border security' as a function of material state power or as a constructed category of discourse (c.a.s.e. collective, 2006; Karyotis, 2012: 392), I see 'border security' as embodied through rare forms of knowledge that are produced, shaped, circulated, and consumed in and through practice.

The article begins by outlining my approach to multi-sited event ethnography, highlighting its promises and pitfalls. We are then invited to our first fair and discuss the broader context of the border security industry in Europe and the United States. Following this contextual introduction, I then turn to the analysis – knowledge of practice – in a section providing an epistemic portrait of the fairs attended through some key, but partial, themes. The article then concludes by reflecting on the contradictions at play at fairs and how to address such contradictions through alternative knowledges and practices.

Event ethnographies

Analyzing security fairs raises some important methodological questions. Methodologically, questions arise about how we can apply ethnographic methods to short-term events to understand a transnational industry involving distinct practices and knowledges that are hard to access. *Multi-sited event ethnography* is an appropriate tool for understanding how knowledge of practice emerges, allowing the researcher to identify and record knowledge practices within and across particular events. This article contributes, then, to 'a broader comparative ethnography of security', especially a comparative ethnography of 'elite' security professionals and 'authorized speakers' participating in the border security industry (Goldstein, 2010: 488, 492).

Multi-sited event ethnography is a composite approach to studying local environments and events that have distinct transnational elements at play. In the context of this study, it involves juxtaposing and relating fieldwork materials from two or more events in order to reflexively understand knowledge of practice of (in)security professionals. The researcher can produce ethnographic material that has relevance beyond the single event, shedding light on connections, categories, and practices that demarcate a transversal social field of domination and struggle that is 'magnetic' (c.a.s.e. collective, 2006: 458). The approach draws inspiration from critical ethnographies of security, collaborative event ethnographies, and multi-sited ethnographies (Buscher, 2014; Campbell et al., 2014; Duffy, 2014; Feldman, 2012; Goldstein, 2010; Marcus, 1995, 1999).

Events and fairs are ideal social settings where professionals perform for peers, convey information, tell stories, and 'embody their professional identities' (Monahan and Fisher, 2015: 714).[2] Ethnography allows us to study the multiple meanings of discursive and non-discursive features of (semi)public events, including symbols, relations, spaces, and objects, across the multiple talks and exhibits present at a certain event (Davies et al., 2015). Multi-sited ethnography follows practices and knowledges across sites without actually tracing specific flows from one point to another in space, but allows for comparison of transversals and commonalities across spaces and scales (Marcus, 1995, 1999). The researcher can follow 'issues and themes of interest' within and between sites in order to overcome some of the logistical constraints of attending multiple large conferences, as an individual researcher cannot be at multiple events at once but can attend multiple events over time (see Brosius and Campbell, 2010: 247). In seeking to go beyond a 'selective' and 'instrumental' understanding of ethnography and attend to the 'political ambiguities' emerging from ethnographic work (Vrasti, 2008: 283, 294), multi-sited event ethnography offers insights into the pluralities of knowledges at play within a social field, via the field's major consocial events.

A number of issues arise when one is working on border security fairs. The researcher must grapple with *access* to the event. Events are often expensive to attend and are sometimes confined to particular professional categories, such as governmental or business organizations only. My research budget permitted my attendance at only a limited number of fairs. The costs of attending each conference almost entirely cleared my fieldwork funds associated with my project grant (see Acknowledgements), involving registration fees, transport, and accommodation. This was an important lesson – border security fairs are expensive, since: (a) they are designed to be exclusive and limit admission to organizations with sufficient financial capital (the multiple forms of scarce knowledge in circulation can be commodified – you must pay for access, there are special invite-only sessions and receptions, as well as closed workshops for particular agencies, and they are held at high-priced hotel and conference venues); (b) they are important sites for capital circulation and accumulation – temporary fairs allow suppliers to interface with consumers for security devices to be bought and sold among capital-rich organizations; and (c) they are sites where knowledge of practice can be shaped under strict conditions set by access categories – I was not able to enter some conferences owing to the cost of attendance and the fact that I am employed by a university, not by a government or a firm, which requires me to contact the organizers to negotiate special access or prices as a university researcher. Even in the face of these constrained avenues of access, I was able to attend and compare a small set of border security fairs.

Some events required regular identification and verification checks throughout the process of registration and attendance. The 'guarded organizations' that attend events are not always visible to the public attendees at the conference (Ortner, 2010) – many of the scheduled assemblies of organizations occur behind closed doors in 'workshops' or 'special sessions' reserved for specific actors. This requires 'interfacing' with (in)security professionals in 'halfway' spaces, in the 'border areas where the closed community or organization or institution interfaces with the public' (Ortner, 2010: 213), meaning I capitalized on regular attendance in the exhibit halls, lunch buffets, and scheduled networking events to have conversations, conduct impromptu interviews and observe discourses and practices. More in-depth interviews can be scheduled on the sidelines in more secluded areas of the event, but I did not conduct such in-depth interviews for this project.

Fieldnotes of observations and experiences, photos, video, audio recordings, conference literature and presentations, advertisements, exhibition items, and other 'found materials' form the primary data across the events. I would leave each event with an event bag full of new materials, including stacks of glossy advertisements, leaving me with a wealth of material to sort and compare. Collection of these materials is 'anything but neat and coherent', and the analysis of materials is variegated, yet comprehensible, making them 'knowable' (Salter, 2013a: 52). This empirical messiness makes it possible to compare complex data from multiple events, allowing us to track knowledges and practices across multiple spaces. All material was transcribed into fieldnotes and is cited as such (see Annex). Fieldnotes were sorted, digitized, and imported into MaxQDA 2007,[3] where they were coded and analyzed abductively to generate sensitizing categories. Analysis consisted of re-readings, thematizations, identification of key words, recalling events and interactions, interpretations, and (re)writing.

The names of organizations and individuals are anonymized or removed in the analysis for reasons of research ethics. Only the names of the conferences and dates are kept for public interest reasons. None of the research was covert – I always presented myself as a researcher working on the border security industry. Respondents for impromptu personal interviews, when these were conducted, were informed about the nature of the research, how the data would be used, and that they would be given strict confidentiality and anonymity in the final presentation of results, where participants voluntarily agreed to participate through oral informed consent. Much of the discursive material in the analysis comes from conference presentations of key actors. These

presentations are public and accessible to all members attending the fair. Presentations at events are public displays where presenters are aware that people are observing and may be recording their actions. Some events were closed to the public and I was not able to attend, meaning some knowledges are scarcer than others. In addition, I was always open about my role at the conference, my position as a researcher, and my research topic and object, and used this openness as an opportunity to initiate conversations and gain the respect and trust of respondents. Furthermore, I was able to draw attention to myself and my work by actively participating in conference question-and-answer sessions both by raising my own questions and by providing supplementary answers to audience questions that may have been unsatisfactorily answered.

Finally, ethnographic knowledge of the fair is constrained. The idea that knowledge is an infinite resource that can be shared without end is not an idea that is explicitly held at security fairs.[4] The tacit assumption is that knowledge has a function to 'increase security' and 'reduce threats' while 'facilitating' commerce or mobility, and that border security practices are sensitive and should have limited circulation in order to maintain this shared vision of security. This assumption led to limits to the visibility and interpretability of knowledge at the fair. Thus, the following analysis is a 'partial' rendering of border security, both 'committed and incomplete' (Clifford, 1986: 7).

An invitation to the border security fair

Border security practices have been actively commercialized and marketized, leading to high profits for a number of non-state actors (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen, 2013; Guiraudon and Lahav, 2000; Leander, 2010). Since 2008, defense funding in Europe has decreased (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), n.d.), and budget constraints have shifted the market for security technologies towards 'dual use' devices used for both civilian and military purposes. The global market for border security devices was worth approximately US$29.3 billion in 2012, and is expected to grow as civil–military relations blur, 'dual use' devices become more prominent, and new markets for civil security devices arise in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia (Frost and Sullivan, 2014). These new devices have spread through multiple commercial circuits to reach 'end-users', catalyzing new social relations among a diverse group of state and non-state actors (Andersson, 2016b). The border security industry is composed of communities of actors engaged in the production, circulation, consumption, and use of technologies used for national and supranational border control and surveillance (Baird, 2016). Those who attend border security fairs come primarily from two types of organizations – companies selling technologies, and purchasers of these technologies in government – with other actors attending on behalf of airlines, airports, consultancies, applied and academic research organizations, intergovernmental organizations, and EU institutions, among others.

While North America remains the premier market for border security technologies, the EU Commission also considers these technologies to be profitable and politically neutral, and is actively expanding the market. EU border control policymaking is unfolding against a backdrop of rising levels of asylum-seekers, increasingly xenophobic public opinion, high youth unemployment, and heightened fears over terrorism. This has led to the continued 'emergence' of the market in Europe (Hoijtink, 2014). The Commission, in step with key industrial actors, has promoted harmonization of an EU border security market: regular funding is secured for research and development projects and pre-commercial procurement, leading to public tenders for the purchase of border security technologies (Bigo et al., 2014; European Commission, 2012; European Organisation for Security, 2010).

Border security fairs, in this context, are key sites for the promotion, circulation, sale, and consumption of scarce border security technologies and associated knowledges and practices (Stockmarr, 2016: 187, 194). Security fairs are 'field configuring events': 'temporary social

organizations, such as tradeshows, that encapsulate and shape the development of professions, technologies, markets, and industries' (Stockmarr, 2016: 189). Fairs are one of the key sites through which border security professionals articulate what they know and show off what they practice to their colleagues. In other words, they are field-configuring via the processes of practical diffusion, circulation, consumption, and rearticulation of knowledge.

After registering my interest online for one particular border security fair, I began to receive regular emails listing the 'benefits of attending', inviting me to 'register soon' or 'book now for a special discount!'. Regular mass invitations appeared as personal emails from the conference chairs, assuring that the meeting 'is supported by senior policymakers and decision makers', with a long list of high-level government officials sure to attend: 'this is where decision makers convene'. 'Given your position within the industry', one email declared, 'I thought you might be interested.' Promotional emails were often followed by phone calls from enthusiastic sales representatives assuring that 'if you booked now we can guarantee a spot'. The promotional materials often stressed that the 'leaders' of public organizations would gather alongside companies, and that there would be ample opportunities to 'connect', 'benefit from networking breaks', and liaise across public/private boundaries either to 'test equipment' or 'share ideas with agency leaders'. I was regularly assured that if I had a product to sell, the organizers could help it be seen by customers, or if I wanted to buy, I was sure to find the product I needed by attending. Lists of top sellers would be provided, letting me know that 'these companies understand the importance of exhibiting', encouraging me to ensure that my organization was on the list: 'To secure your space and sponsorship, call or email me today!'

I entered my first border security fair in December 2014 in Budapest, Hungary. This was the '3rd World Borderpol Congress', and I was required to obtain a lanyard and an identification badge with a barcode upon registration. In order for me to enter the conference hall, my badge had to be checked by one of the conference organizers using a small portable hand-scanner. With a small beep as confirmation from the hand-scanner, I was allowed to enter. The company that produced the scanners was likely one co-sponsor among many at the event, and was advertising its technology through implementation in practice. The badge and lanyard also included decals from other firms sponsoring the fair. This experience led to my first lesson: that the boundary between 'private' promotion and 'public' consumption at border security fairs was thin, sometimes indistinguishable: almost every event, talk, networking session, coffee break, lunch, or piece of material I came across was available for sponsorship, which often left me questioning who was being paid to promote and who was not. Fairs involve a range of overlapping events – expos and exhibitions, conference talks, special workshops, networking events, lunches and dinners, and other planned occasions.

After my first experience in Budapest, I attended three other fairs across Europe and North America – SMi's 8th Annual Conference on Border Security in Rome, Italy, in February 2015, Eagle Eye Exposition's 9th Annual Border Security Expo in Phoenix, Arizona, in April 2015, and *International Airport Review*'s Airport Security event in Barcelona, Spain, in November 2015. Perhaps the most impressive in terms of scale was the Border Security Expo in the United States.

Since 2006, the Border Security Expo has held the title of being the largest border security fair in North America, with attendees coming from across the world to see hundreds of companies showcasing their border security and surveillance products.[5] The event boasts a conference schedule with special events, ceremonies, networking events, catered lunches, and a massive expo hall, attracting new opportunities to 'increase revenue and expand market exposure'.[6] Spread out across an expansive floor plan, the booths of over 150 companies range from 10 to 55 square meters, with attendees mingling among the marketing spaces, evoking a feeling of energy and momentum. Welcome to Border Security Expo.

What grabs your attention when you first enter the fair is the presence of eye-catching lights. My eyes would flicker from booth to booth, landing on various promotional items or flickering

technologies on display. Vibrant colors contrasted with dulled or camouflaged colors of stealthy hand-held technologies for use under cover of darkness. Speaking with my respondents always took place under vibrant light, where facial expressions and intentions could be laid bare. Following the light, I noticed the filtered noise of the event. Aside from the conference hall speeches and general chatter in between talks, the fairs are infused with a dull hum – a mix of vocal advertisements, sales pitches, introductions, conversations – occasionally punctuated with laughter, an electronic ring, or audible awe at the features of a new device, and rarely music. The human dependence on vision is well displayed at the fair, with colorful and camouflaged setups. The lesser dependence on olfaction is also present, with a sterile and septic smell permeating the expo hall, only punctuated by the smells of coffee and food during food breaks. Between talks and time for browsing the booths, food was fully catered at the events. The tastes of the fair are delectable, with wide buffets providing the nutrition and caffeine to continue business. The dress code fit the light and the sound – crisp and business-like, a room full of suits ranging from well to poorly tailored. The suits contrasted with the expo hall, which felt more like a controlled playroom for new toys rather than an arena for showcasing technologies used to surveil and detect people on the move.

At its most visible, the border security fair is an exhibition for state-of-the-art security technologies, a spectacle of functional devices: it is a site for selling technology for profit. Firms present their devices in separate stalls, and the experience is not unlike attending a shopping mall inside an airport, a supermodern experience of moving to and making relations with each non-place we encounter (Auge, 1995). Such a supermodern security fair is a staged performance, choreographed in particular conference and exhibit spaces as well as ceremonies. One event was a memorial ceremony for border agents killed while working, involving decorum, standing at attention, salutes to flags, music, and the reading of names of dead officers, invoking memories and mythologies (note that this event was particular to the American Expo and not the European fairs). There are also strong elements of improvisation, where one can play laboratory assistant, toying with and experimenting with the devices on display (Amicelle et al., 2015: 298–300). Just as the laboratory is constitutive of the border, with the border present in the laboratory, the fair is a staged representation of the border, with the border in the theater of the expo hall (Bourne et al., 2015). Each exhibit is a built scene, using visuals to enhance the experience of the expo while conveying a particular marketable 'mood'.

The companies presenting at the Expo, as with other fairs, were numerous, ranging from large 'systems integrators' to 'small and medium enterprises',[7] each selling a range of sensors, scanners, and detectors (video/visual, x-ray, acoustic, thermal, kinetic); radars (land-based, sea-based, and space-based); mobile biometric devices (such as fingerprint and facial scanners); heartbeat and CO_2 detection equipment; unmanned aerial vehicles (drones); fences and fence-mounted devices; integrated IT solutions (data storage, analysis, and networking); solar power; and a range of other devices designed for integrated use for border and infrastructure protection. The presentation of the technologies takes place in booths and stalls that range in sophistication: while some exhibitors installed a clean, open, airy, and bright stall with sleek and silent biometric technologies and promotional material flashed across LCD displays and logos backlit with calming lighting, other booths were simple, drab desks with some uninspiring leaflets, with the highest technology being the salesperson's portable computer. These booths are the visages of the market, lying between a fluid futurism and antiquated attempts to sell.

Firms invest in exhibition spaces in order to gain privileged access to clients. Wealthier organizations can afford to buy exhibit space, and there are limited 'shells' available for rent. Such exhibit spaces provide novel opportunities to speak candidly with industry actors, as they are there to advertise products and are often open to frank discussion. Nevertheless, as one respondent from a medium-sized firm remarked, the fair for him was 'not a place for selling: just advertising and pre-selling, setting up future deals'.[8] These transitory opportunities to talk and forge partnerships are

indicative of the field – signaling whether you are a potential client can reap important rewards through the transfer of information about products and the sharing of scarce knowledges. Firms have dedicated marketing managers and marketing departments that specialize in dealing with public audiences, and trained sales teams enact rehearsed pitches on the spot in order to gain your attention as a potential client. In these brief moments of interaction, relations are forged that may partially dictate how negotiations between supplier and customer may proceed (e.g. prices are rarely if ever mentioned in formal presentations or in the exhibit hall; they must be negotiated through serious discussion on the sidelines or in other locations).

Exhibit halls are vital for expanding customer bases: 'Imagine a room full of the highest level decision-makers from your target market,' writes one organizer on its website. 'SMi offer sponsorship, advertising and branding packages, uniquely tailored to complement your company's marketing strategy. Prime networking opportunities exist to entertain, enhance and expand your client base within the context of an independent discussion specific to your industry.'[9] Profit, although not discussed here (the word itself is almost never invoked, an open taboo), is an important driver of the exhibition, as security fairs help companies know more about their customers in order to market and sell security and surveillance devices. The fair is, at its core, a prime site for reproducing processes of capital accumulation, a space obtaining 'a fundamental unity between security and capital' (Neocleous, 2007: 340).

While the fairs I attended did share some similarities, there were some important differences. It is important to note that in spite of these differences I recorded similar themes, narratives, and actors across the events. Each event was sponsored by different groups, likely impacting the size and composition of events. For example, while the SMi conference was held in the 'Fori Imperiali' of a major hotel chain located on the outskirts of Rome, involving few security checks and little control of attendees,[10] the Borderpol conference was held at a large centrally located luxury hotel in Budapest, involving tighter controls on entry. While many actors overlapped across events, there were representatives from a wide range of institutions, or in the words of one biotechnology firm employee, 'multiple different stakeholders with conflicting sets of requirements'.[11] These differences are a focus of both epistemic struggle and continuity, suggesting that the border is imagined and operationalized in multiple ways. For example, according to the keynote of the Borderpol event, 'borders should protect the interests of sovereign states', but must be 'safer and smarter', based on 'respect, integrity, and fraternity', with Singapore providing the 'benchmark';[12] according to one border guard representative of an EU member-state, there are 'three pillars of border security: (1) research and development of technology and use of technology; (2) efficient and practical cooperation and information-sharing; (3) sharing of knowledge and experiences';[13] in the eyes of a Nigerian minister, controlled borders lead to targeted foreign direct investment, tourists, and high-skilled labor;[14] and in the words of another representative from Borderpol, there are 'seven elements for a secure border: law, money, personnel, infrastructure, technology, policy, leadership'.[15] The Airport Security event was exclusively focused on air borders, while the others were focused primarily on land and sea. The air border was imagined as quick, efficient, and facilitative. What distinguishes these events from other technology fairs is the insistence on the practice of 'getting after the bad guys' and 'the folks masterminding these bad things', such as undocumented migration.[16] The juxtaposition of attendees as legitimate security professionals versus illegitimate criminals pervaded the events, providing coherence in the midst of sometimes contradictory border imaginaries. This juxtaposition is also representative of the epistemic borders between 'us' and 'them'/'secure' and 'insecure' that form in the minds of border security professionals, who see themselves as an 'integral player in creating a safer world'.[17]

In terms of space, place, and scale, the fairs are held in metropolitan hubs like Budapest, Rome, Phoenix, or Barcelona. While these urban hubs are (not) proximate to the (extra)territorial border,

they do serve as borderized and borderizing sites. The fairs themselves are enclosed, guarded spaces that reproduce micro-practices of bordering. Through the market for technologies, the fair becomes a space where bordering practices can be rehearsed, tested, and (re)structured according to commercial needs of the buyers and sellers. It serves as a site where security professionals can participate in bordering practices according to the exigencies of commercial strategies of firms. In other words, fairs are sites for the social reproduction of privatized border security: microcosmic systems of domination that appear disconnected from the material/symbolic territorial border but that in practice are not institutionally distinct from the border 'out there' – the fair is an extension, reassertion, reaffirmation, and transformation of the border as securitized space.

Knowledge of practice at the fairs

While chatting over tea in Rome, I asked an engineer from a medium-sized enterprise why such conferences happen. His answer provided a good summary of the admixture of practices and relations that unfold at the fair: to 'crawl into the minds of border guards', balancing sharing of knowledge and collaboration in order to 'be part of the system for product development'.[18] Soon after, when I asked one of the co-organizers what the point of these conferences was, he said succinctly: 'Information-sharing, advertising products, and finding out the latest trends for R&D [research and development].'[19] There is 'an imperative need for shared experiences', said one minister.[20] A representative of a large US-based agency said that conferences were a way 'to make sure our needs are well known by the commercial space'.[21] Their main message was that the communication of needs as well as market knowledge is a 'challenge'. Speaking from their experience managing border surveillance systems, a large national aerospace firm based in Europe noted that 'we gained from know-how', leading to further contracts.[22] Information was deemed useful for allying with other organizations and improving 'interagency cooperation' (a common buzzword) to eliminate 'silos' (another buzzword meaning roughly fragmentation and disconnection within cellular confines – that is, being 'warehoused').[23] Thus, knowledge is sought and desirable at the fair. Calls for sharing information, practices, and experiences among the main actors, ranging from commercial to governmental agents, were frequent. This transversal 'need' to share knowledge across fields is indicative of how border security has been privatized in the USA and the EU (Bigo, 2008).

Presentations and conference events

The primary vehicle for sharing knowledge at the fairs was through conference presentations, an activity that dominated most of the events. Sometimes banal, dry, or boring, presentations involving industry jargon signaled important pathways for disseminating knowledge. Presentations about recent policy changes, assessments and investigations of control practices, summaries of evaluations of technologies, relayed emails from governments, and 'lessons learned' provided multiple pathways for 'best practices' to circulate and be shaped, and were important indicators of how normative (i.e. policy) knowledge circulates.

From industry jargon to metaphors, various discourses were important elements of knowledge diffusion. Words like 'challenge' and 'threat' appeared throughout talks, reoccurring and reiterated, a kind of mantra, a discursive ritual that symbolizes the defensive posture of border security professionals, signifying a shared practical universe in which border security professionals symbolize 'certainty', 'safety', and 'agreement'. The 'main goals' of border security are 'safety, security, and peace', as 'global peace and security are non-negotiable'.[24] These discourses assumed a shared, uncontested vision of what constitutes 'security', 'peace', and 'safety', without actually elaborating on them in detail.

Special events, ceremonies, and networking breaks were common episodes punctuating the time between conference speeches. Many of these episodes were meant to foster 'idea-sharing': 'We hope you will join us for a glass of wine and an opportunity to network with fellow colleagues.'[25] During one presentation, a speaker joked that the networking reception provided an 'opportunity to take a drink off a multinational corporation', a clear reference to the fact that these events are sponsored, marketed, and run by private firms in the industry.[26] The events serve the goals and aims of capital accumulation as knowledge transfer – networking events are opportunities for actors to share knowledge, negotiate over commercial practice, and market their devices face to face.[27]

Provoking the panel or the audience about particular topics, different organizations would ask investigative questions seeking detailed answers as a means to validate predictions or speculations and to ensure that critical information could be communicated between 'industry' and 'government'. Discussion, inquisitive probing of curious actors, and being introduced to previously unfamiliar logics, practices, and materials assist in transversal knowledge-sharing. 'We need to share as a whole', said the chairman of one conference, 'with all the professionals in this room', in order to avoid 'compartmentalization' of information.[28] Information was referenced to previous years of the fair, suggesting year-to-year knowledge circulation and reproduction, with previous conclusions transferred and redistributed over time as the same or similar speakers spoke across multiple events.

In addition, information in presentations varied as to detail, with some organizations sharing more or less according to perceived need or desire to prime the audience for particular questions. While some presentations were freely shared online with all participants following the conference, others referenced information that was 'not for distribution', confined to 'in-house' or 'limited' uses, setting limits on which knowledge was abundant and which was scarce. There were closed agency sessions (for security purposes), and these presentations (which I was unable to attend) were not freely available, accessible only to a few key actors, making certain forms of information more 'secret' than others.

Problems and solutions

Presentations were also vehicles for sharing information about past, current, and upcoming government policy practices and/or advertising technological 'solutions' for current 'challenges'. A familiar logic that repeated itself across presentations was to present a 'problem', demonstrate how the problem was unresolvable without a certain product, and then provide a solution using the particular product of the firm: We are 'helping the customer set understand their problems and their solutions sets', says a representative of a large North American aerospace firm, 'and that helps us as a business'.[29] A related logic was to present a problem, go to the open market to find a solution, fail to find a particular solution, then commission a particular firm to solve the problem through a tender process. To paraphrase a border agent from North America speaking on risk analysis: 'We look twice to find weaknesses where a policy can fail, then find a solution to fix the weaknesses.'[30] Other comments from airport security professionals were not as positive in assessing solutions of industry: 'IT is not the solution' but 'a car on the train.' In other words, technology is only one component in the broader 'problem' and is appropriate for alleviating 'symptoms', as problems are not simply solved 'by giving x'. The goal was to 'identify the main issue' by asking 'what is the problem to begin with', sending a message to industry to 'work to solve problems, not to get a sale'.[31] 'It's not about selling the widget' but about 'solving the problem', imploring government to share with industry, as 'they [businesses] need to know what your [governments'] needs are'.[32] One panelist described the conference as a 'seed' for change in the industry.[33]

There was continual discussion of 'perceived requirements', 'best practices', 'most effective ways of dealing', 'common approaches', and 'best course' actions. Numerous examples of what was considered 'right' and what 'ought to be done' could be heard across presentations. Rigorous 'training' of employees, for example, was considered an important practice to instill norms and discipline labor into accepting the shared categories and taken-for-granted discourses of security professionals.[34] 'Trainings and cooperation', states one representative from a large international organization, can 'improve detection, enhance knowledge, and improve cooperation'.[35]

In order to assert the legitimacy of proposed solutions, information flowed from 'leading authorities', people with 'expertise' and 'experience' that other 'leaders' could utilize. Much of the knowledge is presented as 'expert' knowledge – the introductions of speakers frequently referred to their authority, experience, or 'insider' status, frequently invoking that they were 'in the know' as 'experts' and not amateurs or 'academics' (see Berndtsson, 2012). At one panel introduction, the chair noted that the panelists were 'all proven leaders', that 'all have practical experience', and the audience was 'thankfully not dealing with academics', which elicited a hearty laugh from the crowd. 'If you are private sector, pay attention to what they have to say,' he concluded.[36]

During various talks, government actors would describe how they implemented or tested a particular piece of technology, taking it 'for a test drive', giving a 'critical assessment' of how the technology is 'field tested and mission proved'.[37] While these talks were distanced from official promotions ('we are not advertising for any particular company'),[38] it was evident that the boundaries between 'industry' (business) and government are not so clear. I noticed that having governmental or intergovernmental organizations showcase industry products was a common tactic to increase awareness about security products. Thus, knowledge of practices easily circulated between governmental and industry actors, indeed were actively shared and shaped at the fairs through these two key actors, acting as sources of transversal knowledge (see Bigo, 2008).

Reference to other knowledge external to the border security industry was common – especially regarding 'public knowledge', emphasizing the need for 'community engagement'. The 'law enforcement community' was often contrasted with other groups ('passengers') to highlight the in-group status of individuals at the fair, or in other words delineate the field of (in)security professionals (including governmental and industrial actors) with reference to other social fields. In practice, this means that different government agencies and industrial firms are encouraged to work together in sharing knowledges and practices. The border fair is thus a key site at which governmental and industrial actors liaise and align their knowledge to conform to the co-constructed solutions presented at the fair. In other words, fairs serve as prime sites where security interests converge as sites of institutional socialization (see Bearce and Bondanella, 2007).

Devices

According to the commercialized cosmology of border security fairs, a security device is not only a means to profit, or a display of for-profit technology, but a method for distributing knowledge of norms: devices are both 'practice and ideology' (Guittet and Jeandesboz, 2010: 238). Devices can be sold for profit (forming a means–end circuit), displayed in order to 'transfer know-how', and also act at as a set piece for sharing new practical norms. In the exhibit halls and during conference presentations, devices were regularly discussed, debated, and experimented with in relation to laws and policy (usually tagged with the buzzword 'regulation'), which suggests that fairs are performative sites for the design and negotiation of sociotechnical systems of border surveillance and control (Amicelle et al., 2015: 298). In a candid presentation of the struggle over how norms are imbued through devices, a large communications and information technology firm stressed that its work involved 'matching conflicting priorities into a technological solution'.[39] The representative

of another medium-sized company declared that 'you can string a lot of technology together', 'as long as the regulator allows you to do it'.[40]

'Everyone has a white paper,' said one exhibitor as I browsed his collection of pamphlets and publications.[41] White papers are marketing tools that contain policy prescriptions, as they promote technologies at the same time as they promote normative knowledge. Businesses are continually scanning legislation and policy at multiple scales (from local to international), sometimes designing research projects that analyze normative developments in 'the regulatory environment'. The promotional pamphlet, as device, expresses the technological fix symbolically and structures what practitioners 'ought' or 'should' know about a particular technology and its use, leaving less room for interpretation about how it should be used, while signaling its worth (see Guittet and Jeandesboz, 2010).

A number of reservations were voiced about devices across the events. General reservations that 'technology will not solve the problem' were coupled with more specific arguments against technological development. For example, money spent in developing security technology 'did not stop illegal immigration', according to one presenter from an international organization.[42] 'Money gets wasted' on technology and 'we get criticized', according to another presenter from a border agency.[43] While in some instances the 'technology sells itself', in others there is a 'lack of legislative support for this technology'.[44]

Furthermore, 'human' knowledge was frequently contrasted with 'technological' knowledge. The terms 'human operator', 'human factor', 'human intelligence', 'human element', 'human component', 'human solutions', and 'human considerations' featured prominently as a foil to 'technology'. Human knowledge was contrasted with the imagined forms of detached technological knowledge circulating in the border security field. It was repeatedly emphasized that the 'human factor' should not be 'replaced by technology'. In other words, technophilic and technophobic reactions were evidence for how devices produce new 'cooperations' and 'contradictions' (see Andersson, 2016a,b).

Masculinities

The fairs were populated primarily by male attendees. While I was not able to make an accurate gender distribution of attendees, my notes included observations on gender distributions that emphasized a male-dominated field. The distribution of speakers at the events was also skewed towards males: for example, out of the 30 or so speakers at the Airport Security conference, I counted only three women; out of the 25 or so speakers at the SMi Border Security conference, only three were women; of the 20 or so speakers at the Border Security Expo, there were only four females; and at World Borderpol Congress, of around 40 speakers, only seven were women. The advisory board for the Airport Security conference was composed of 13 members and included only one female,[45] and the advisory board of the Border Security Expo, composed of 11 members, also included only one female. When browsing the exhibit halls, I noted that the majority of sales representatives were men, with the occasional exception. At 'closed workshops', I counted no women. Keynote speeches were almost entirely by men.

Materials advertising border security equipment also displayed representations of predominantly men in key positions. In the materials I collected, pictures of men would sit alongside key phrases, associating imagery of masculinity with 'cost-efficiency', 'innovation', 'solution', 'management', 'next level', 'made different', 'investment for the future', 'moving business forward', 'intelligence', 'verification', 'trusted partner', 'tactical', or 'experts'. Images of 'passengers' were typically male, found alongside phrases such as 'assets' and 'infrastructure'. Masculine imagery was typically in motion or activity, associated with 'hardware', where feminine imagery

was typically fixed and stationary, associated with 'software'. Images of family were rare in my collection of materials. In addition, gender neutrality was given expression through blurred or obscured imagery, or through digital representations of the body (stylized simulations of the body, x-rayed bodies, synthetic or cybernetic bodies, or digitized asexual bodies).

As such, border security fairs are important sites for the (re)production of masculinist 'romanticisms' and the subordination of feminist norms (Johnston and Kilty, 2015; Prokkola and Ridanpaa, 2015). The marginalization of women at border security fairs is exemplified by the distribution of speakers and advisors, and is embraced and reproduced by conference materials and marketing devices, signaling 'how women are excluded from acting as knowing subjects, while at the same time strengthening the notion that there are different capabilities and duties for men and women' in the field of border security (Prokkola and Ridanpaa, 2015: 1382). The dominance of masculinities has important implications for knowledge – 'hegemonic masculinities' are 'plural and hierarchically positioned' in the border security field (Stachowitsch, 2015: 366), structuring and shaping who practices security knowledge, what is known, and how security knowledge is embodied. These findings suggest that the skewed ratio of men to women may have important effects, raising questions about how gender differences translate into outcomes of border security practices – for example, how do masculinist hierarchies reproduce or reduce harms against vulnerable migrants?

Futures

A memorable video involved a simulation of a weaponized drone, and the speaker implored the audience to recognize the 'rising threat' of this 'weapon of the future' as some audience members gasped.[46] I encountered regular reference to 'emerging threats', 'future challenges', and 'understanding risks', with multiple panels devoted to 'planning for the future' and anticipating 'upcoming challenges', producing a palpable unease among those in the audience (Bigo, 2002). Various presentations would present imagined dystopian futures, motivating border security professionals to act, to set principles, to devise new categories, and to advocate for new policies and technologies. Violent visions of the future, displayed in simulated videos, or even representations of disastrous pasts, were meant to spur normative change. Future possibilities and possible risks were supplied by the industry in anticipation that policies and practices would change in a direction that business could anticipate. This 'directed anticipation', as I would call it, plays on threat imaginaries and the 'management of unease' in order to sell devices (Bigo, 2002). 'To make a profit, the security industry must *sell* security,' says Neocleous (2007: 350, emphasis in original). 'And to sell security, it must first help generate insecurities.' In other words, business supplies imagined futures alongside its products, and normative shifts (and policy changes) are spurred in particular directions by the anticipatory futures generated by actors at the fairs.

Conclusion: Leaving the fair

How is knowledge of security practice produced, conveyed, circulated, consumed, and re-produced in situated contexts? Partial answers to these questions can be found at the security fair: the dissemination and distribution of scarce forms of knowledge are regularly sustained through the fairs' events; technological materializations of situated knowledge appear on display in the expo halls, as expressions of transversal knowledge of security problems in novel pieces of hardware and software ready for purchase; masculinities structure knowledge in gendered ways at the fair, as practices are known primarily by male security professionals; and unease is expressed through imagined futures in order to anticipate emergent solutions to proposed security problems refashioned into new technologies. The security fair reveals how knowledge of practice is commercialized and marketized,

made multiple through the various events that link the performances of the fair. Border security practices are thus derived not only from culture or pedagogy (see Frowd, 2014; Zaiotti, 2011), but also from epistemic frames that emphasize the marketability and profitability of knowledge and practice (see Leander, 2010).

These insights provide us new material to reflect upon the link between border security and knowledge. The border security fair is not a fixed infrastructure like the fence or post, but is simultaneously positioned and portable – the fair is held in different locations year to year but is structured through circulating knowledges of practice. The situated context of the fair means that security professionals come into contact at certain events, and in that sense both fairs and professionals can be located in both bounded and unbounded locales – knowledge of security practice is mobile, mutable as well as fixed and rooted in situated contexts (see Feldman, 2012; Frowd, 2014). The simultaneity of the fair as fixed and mobile suggests that border security consists of contradictory practices and knowledges that, rather than being resisted, are reproduced through commercialized events (Côté-Boucher et al., 2014: 196). The primacy of contradiction at the fair highlights that borders are constituted in contradictory and conflicting ways, raising the issue of how such contradictory practices and knowledges may be justified under contemporary conditions of controversy at the border (see Jeandesboz, 2016b).

While partial, this rendering of border security has important implications for how we respond ethically and morally to the contradictory effects of border controls and the border security industry. The contradictions and tensions inherent in knowledge about border security, and the associated normative dilemma of writing border security (Huysmans, 2002), open up new prospects for an alternative vision of human mobility that extends beyond the knowledge of practices circulating at fairs (see Andersson, 2016a). Scrutinizing professional fairs, by revealing and interpreting knowledges of practice, can lay the groundwork for developing alternative practices that reduce the harms produced by the 'counterproductive' border security industry (see Andersson, 2016a). The realities of the European external border, for example, are deadly (Spijkerboer, 2007), and the border security fair plays an important role in a process of producing security knowledge that reaffirms and possibly reproduces harmful practices at the external border. By revealing security knowledges in current circulation, we can then make use of these revelations through engaged critique of the role situated knowledge plays in (re)producing harm. It is incumbent upon us, partly through ethnographic practice, to inspire critique and exploration of alternative knowledges, alternative rationalities, and alternative discourses, giving space for exploring alternative futures that reduce the harms of the border security industry.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. This definition is inspired by the Bourdieusian distinction between practical sense (*le sens pratique*) and reflexivity.

2. The performative aspects of the security fair require some competence to pull off – approaching a potential client, gauging and securing their interest, deftly negotiating a potential deal, going off script, and selling devices are the competencies of professional marketing managers and sales representatives. These rehearsed and semi-improvised tasks are akin to the routinized tasks of the border guard: they require training, logistics, support, language skills, and the cultivation of a particular form of awareness of surroundings. If the performance receives a good review, then it is likely that a product can be sold.

3. MAXQDA, software for qualitative data analysis, 1989–2016, VERBI Software – Sozialforschung GmbH, Berlin, Germany.

4. According to Richa Kumar (personal communication), 'sharing' is against the notion of 'expertise', as participants at security fairs profit from their exclusive and 'licensed' knowledges of practice.

5. The Expo was considered to have diminished in size over the preceding years. According to one respondent, changes in government spending in the USA have led to smaller and smaller budgets, shrinking the size of the Expo year to year. In addition, the European market for border security technologies is smaller than that in the USA, meaning the fairs in Europe are typically smaller. According to the same respondent, in comparison with large defense fairs, all border security fairs were considered much smaller (Fieldnotes-3, 22 April 2015).

6. Quote from http://www.bordersecurityexpo.com/ (accessed 6 January 2017).

7. For a detailed overview of the border security market and the main actors in Europe, see Kumar (forthcoming).

8. Fieldnotes-2, 19 February 2015.

9. See http://www.smi-online.co.uk/security/europe/border-security (accessed 27 June 2016).

10. According to one speaker, the location of the conference was 'perfect', since Italy is on the 'frontline' of border control in Europe. Fieldnotes-2, 18 February 2015.

11. Fieldnotes-1, 9 December 2014.

12. Singapore received a placard of excellence in the field of integrated border management during this event. Fieldnotes-1, 9 December 2014.

13. Fieldnotes-1, 9 December 2014.

14. Fieldnotes-1, 9 December 2014.

15. Fieldnotes-1, 9 December 2014.

16. Fieldnotes-3, 22 April 2015.

17. Fieldnotes-1, 9 December 2014.

18. Fieldnotes-2, 19 February 2015.

19. Fieldnotes-2, 19 February 2015.

20. Fieldnotes-1, 9 December 2014.

21. Fieldnotes-3, 22 April 2015.

22. Fieldnotes-1, 10 December 2014.

23. In practice, information is communicated between government and industry for three main reasons. First, firms cooperate closely through research and development of technologies, with governmental 'end-users' actively co-constructing devices with industrial 'producers'. Second, IT firms run the main digital networks connecting governmental agencies, requiring frequent contact and negotiation through tendering. Third, at the level of EU policymaking, information from industry is actively sought by the Commission to enable the co-construction of border security policies.

24. Fieldnotes-1, 9 December 2014 and 11 December 2014.

25. Fieldnotes-2, 18 February 2015.

26. Fieldnotes-2, 18 February 2015.

27. Although one respondent jokingly said in Rome that there is 'no time to network, only time for engineering', revealing the side of fairs as sites for the modeling of devices and their sociotechnical futures.

28. Fieldnotes-4, 17 November 2015.

29. Fieldnotes-2, 18 February 2015.

30. Fieldnotes-2, 18 February 2015.

31. Fieldnotes-4, 18 November 2015.

32. Fieldnotes-4, 18 November 2015.

33.   Fieldnotes-4, 18 November 2015.
34.   Fieldnotes-4, 18 November 2015.
35.   Fieldnotes-1, 10 December 2014.
36.   Fieldnotes-3, 22 April 2015.
37.   Fieldnotes-1, 10 December 2014.
38.   Fieldnotes-1, 10 December 2014.
39.   Fieldnotes-1, 10 December 2014.
40.   Fieldnotes-4, 17 November 2015.
41.   Fieldnotes-3, 22 April 2015.
42.   Fieldnotes-1, 9 December 2014.
43.   Fieldnotes-1, 10 December 2014.
44.   Fieldnotes-1, 10 December 2014.
45.   See http://www.airportsecurityconference.com/advisory-board-2015/ (accessed 5 January 2017).
46.   Fieldnotes-1, 10 December 2014.

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Annex. Table of Fieldwork Codes.

Code	Event
Fieldnotes-1	3rd World Borderpol Congress, Budapest, Hungary, December 2014
Fieldnotes-2	SMi, 8th Annual Conference on Border Security, Rome, Italy, February 2015
Fieldnotes-3	Eagle Eye Exposition 9th Annual Border Security Expo, Phoenix, Arizona, April 2015
Fieldnotes-4	*International Airport Review*: Airport Security, Barcelona, November 2015

Note on Fieldwork Codes: All notes and materials were transcribed as fieldnotes (see 'Event ethnographies' section). All interviews were informal and anonymous, and were written into fieldnotes. Many quotes come from public presentations by speakers. I have not identified speakers or panels in order to preserve anonymity. Information about the fairs can be found online via the respective websites.