



# Crossing Borders: Enhancing Ethnographic Approaches in Research on Migration and Diversity

Thursday June 4<sup>th</sup> at the Erasmus University Rotterdam

**Venue: Institute of Social Studies (Aula B) – Kortenaerkade 12 The Hague**



Migration and diversity are multifaceted phenomena that traverse political, legal, social, economic, and cultural borders. Ethnographic approaches have long provided insight into these lived complexities, capturing how migration is experienced, governed, and narrated from the ground up. Its usefulness for a wide range of scholarly approaches. To bridge these different contexts, we organize this one-day event dedicated to rethinking and connecting ethnographic approaches to migration and diversity. This event builds on the Ethnography Incubator@EUR and aims to create a shared space for reflection, collaboration, and future-oriented exchange.

# Program

9:15-9:30 Arrival with coffee and tea



9:30-9:45 **Welcome and opening**  
Mieke Kox, Malika Ouacha Thomas Swerts and Nanneke Winters

9:45-11:00 **KEYNOTE**



## *Who Needs Migration Studies?*

Prof. **Shahram Khosravi** (Stockholm University), author of 'Illegal Traveller' and 'Seeing like a Smuggler'

11:00-11:15 Coffee/tea break



11:15-12:15 **ROUND 1**

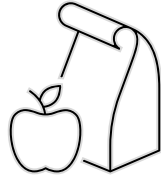
**a. Round table: Bringing ethnography to law (and vice versa)**

Jordan Dez, Greta Albertari, Irma Lammers and Masja Zweers

**b. Dialogue session: Positionality, performance and academic fragmentation**

- Questioning (Fluid) Positionalities in Ethnographic Research in the Context of De-Migrantization Debates - Tulya Su Guven and Iris Egea
- On Ethnographic Backstages, Fragmentation and Academia's Domestic Violence - Joris Schapendonk
- Embedded in the Field: Reflexivity in Ethnographic Mosque Research - Yasemin Okay

12.15-13:30 Lunch break (ISS Atrium, 1st floor)



13:30–15:00 **ROUND 2**

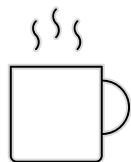
**c. Panel session 1: Ethical loyalty, accountability and afterlives of ethnography**

- Ethical Loyalties in Migration Ethnography: Researcher Responsibility, Silence, and Long-Term Engagement - Youri Lou Vertongen
- Ethnographies of (Im)Migration - Why and For Whom? Revisiting Questions of Representation and Methodological Crevices in Migration Research - Mausumi Moran Chetia, Zeynep Kaşlı and Nanneke Winters
- Researching Belonging Across Borders: Reflexive Notes on Ancestry-Based Citizenship Research - Marhabo Saparova and Zeynep Kaşlı

**d. Panel session 2: Positionality revisited: surveillance, access and knowledge production**

- Insider outsider experiences of conducting ethnographic research in fragile and conflict-affected situations - Gordon Ogutu
- Interviewing the Interviewer: Producing Knowledge under Bordering Regimes - Minke Hajer and Gülce Özdemir
- Navigating place resentment: Insider-outsider positionalities and asymmetrical power relations in a right-wing institutional ethnography - Anke De Malsche
- Navigating Transnational Borders: Ethnographic Insights into Customary Law and Identity in Milan's Egyptian Diaspora - Abdallah Rashdan

15:00–15:15 Coffee/tea break



**15:15-16:45 ROUND 3**

**e. Workshop: An Introduction to Sonic Ethnography in Migration Research-** Soline Ballet and Miriam Matthiesse

**f. Panel session 3: Ethnography as embodied practice**

- Mapping Diversity. Multi-sensory, multi-lingual and superdiverse landscapes - Karolina Bielenin-Lenczowska and Helena Patzer
- Writing from the Border: Autoethnography, Racialized Mobility, and Everyday Bordering in Canada – Aashay Dalvi
- Ethnographic research, rapport, and the fandango: Afro-Inclusive Latine Histories Mapped onto Detroit” - Adaiah Hudgins-Lopez

**16:45-17:00 Coffee/tea break**



**17:00-18:00 ROUND 4**

**g. Panel session 4: (Creative) Representation & Voice**

- Verses of Homeland Crossings: Digital Ethnography, Participatory Poetry, and the Transnational Making of Diasporic Knowledge - Nikola Lero
- Multiple institutional settings and the uneven conditions of migrant voice in Belgium’s voluntary return landscape - Laure Deschuyteneer
- Alternative Migration Narratives and Ethnographic Journalism: Contesting Politicized Representations of Migration - Kezban Karagoz

**h. Authors meet critics-session: Precarious Agency and the Political Hermeneutics of Citizenship: Ethnographic Reflections from Citizen X**

- Mieke Kox (Erasmus University Rotterdam): chair
- Thomas Swerts (Erasmus University Rotterdam): book author and presenter
- Shahram Khosravi (Stockholm University): discussant
- Joris Schapendonk (Radboud University): discussant

**18:00-18:15 Closing reflections**

**18:15-19:15 Informal Drinks & Networking**

# Practicalities

## Contact

For more information, please contact: Mieke Kox at [Kox@law.eur.nl](mailto:Kox@law.eur.nl)

## Registration

Please register by the 27th of May using this link: [Conference Crossing Borders: Enhancing Ethnographic Approaches in Research on Migration and Diversity | Erasmus School of Law | Erasmus University Rotterdam](#).... Please register early, as spaces for the different sessions are filling up quickly/are limited.

## Please note

lunch is included for all presenters and discussants. For our other guests, please consider joining us for lunch for a small fee of €5,- (please add to the form that you will be joining us for lunch).

*This event is sponsored by the LDE centre Governance of Migration and Diversity Seed Fund and the Ethnographic Incubator@EUR.*

## Discount code

Exclusive offer for conference participants who might be interested in Citizen X (see *Authors meet critics session*)



**Citizen X**  
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Thomas Swerts, Erasmus University Rotterdam

April 2026 | Paperback | 9780197844007 | 264 pages

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# Book of Abstracts

## Round 1

### a. Round table: Bringing ethnography to law (and vice versa) - Jordan Dez, Greta Albertari, Irma Lammers and Masja Zweers

Coinciding with an increased interest for empirical legal scholarship in the Netherlands, the VU Amsterdam Centre for Migration and Refugee Law (ACMRL) has seen in the past five years an increase in the use of ethnography in the study of migration law. In this panel, this first generation of legal ethnographers from the VU ACMRL will share the diverse ways they use ethnography in their studies of migration law. In this co-reflective session, the participants will focus on both the problems and potential for conducting legal ethnographic research that aims to yield legal conclusions. The discussion will especially focus on the distinctive nature of ethnographic research when used to address legal questions, and on how it can be combined with more traditional legal methodologies. The panelists have varied academic backgrounds and are at different stages of their research projects. They will reflect on navigating the complexities of this type of interdisciplinary inquiry and hope to engage in a discussion with the larger community of ethnographers of migration that are working outside of the law.

### b. Dialogue session: Positionality, performance and academic fragmentation

#### **Questioning (Fluid) Positionalities in Ethnographic Research in the Context of De-Migranticization Debates - Tulya Su Guven and Iris Egea**

This presentation originates from two interrelated questions concerning ethnographic practice, positionality, and the conceptual framing of migration. As migrants deliberately or inadvertently move to settle and establish new “homes” (even if temporarily), we, as migration researchers and ethnographers, follow their pathways in relation to questions of homemaking, emplacement, (continuous) displacement, and conviviality – processes also shared by non-migrant members. In doing so, we wonder: How can practices of ethnography at home inform ethnography in migration, and vice versa? This question inevitably expands into the recent calls to de-migranticize the field. Therefore, our first driving question concerns what it could mean for research to move from ethnography at home to ethnography in migration. Through this inquiry, we seek to explore the analytical and empirical differences between the two fields and the implications of this shift for ethnographic research and migration studies. We ask what it means to practice ethnography in migration when experiences of mobility, homemaking, and exclusion transcend migrant categories and boundaries and constitute shared conditions of contemporary social life, while ‘the migrant’ remains an unavoidable category through which lives are regulated and constrained. Second, we bring this debate to reflect on our own experiences of crossing and engaging with boundaries as researchers and the methodological implications of shifting positionalities. How does conducting ethnography at “home” as an “insider” differ from conducting ethnography “abroad” as a migrant researcher? What are the lived consequences of this

positional shift? Is it misleading to assume that these experiences are fundamentally different, or (how) do they rather exist on a continuum shaped by context, power, and relationality? We therefore propose a roundtable session that centers on these questions by focusing on the experiences ethnographers, particularly those with fluid positionalities, across disciplines. Building on two driving questions, this roundtable reflects on researcher's positionality, collaboration, ethics, and relationality. Rather than seeking fixed answers, we aim to collectively think about our potential impact on normalizing mobility in times of polarization.

### **On Ethnographic Backstages, Fragmentation and Academia's Domestic Violence - Joris Schapendonk**

While ethnography is full of performative reflexivity regarding researcher positionalities, this conversation session invites us to work on, and (un)learn from, our own academic backstages in relation to the methods we employ. As put forward by Aparna et al. 2020 (pp. 110-111), academic backstages are spaces of self-inquiry from where we articulate some of the invisible labour, hidden choices of location, objects of inquiry, scales, alongside ambivalences and shifts behind our academic positions and performances as migration, mobility and border researchers (see Escorza-Merlin 2025) that are so evidently situated in a wider socio-political climate (Khosravi 2025). In this session, the connecting of backstages as method seeks to contribute to the re-invention of politics of knowledge production (Amelung and Scheel 2024) in this time where collective spaces for doubt, discomfort and fatigue of all kinds (Wajsberg 2020) are shrinking. It is therefore less about enhancing our methods of data collections (e.g. what we can do more or better) or what we can (or cannot) call 'the field', but it is more about how ethnography speaks to questions of temporal and social fragmentation of our daily practices and to academia's domestic violence that are related to these fragmentations (varying from burnouts, internal competitions and racialized exclusions). From sharing personal reflections, this session seeks to explore to what extent ethnographic scholarship can help us to create academic practices (beyond 'data collection') that deviate from the cultivated academic norms.

### **Embedded in the Field: Reflexivity in Ethnographic Mosque Research - Yasemin Okay**

In ethnographic research, reflexivity entails critically examining one's social location, assumptions and interactions that shape the research process and through which knowledge is produced. The epistemic 'humility' this demands challenges claims of objectivity that obscure power relations and epistemic hierarchies, foregrounding how ethnographers may participate in, reproduce, or contest these structures. Drawing on six months of ethnographic fieldwork with the female congregation in a large urban Turkish-German DITIB mosque in Germany, the paper weaves together theoretical reflection with ethnographic vignettes to examine reflexivity in practice. It approaches reflexivity as an ongoing attempt to decenter the ethnographer's categories of meaning-making and interpretative authority. The paper explores how the ethnographer's positionality shapes how they are perceived and situated by interlocutors, while emphasizing that positionality is neither fixed nor singular but dynamically produced through encounters, relations and negotiations in the field. These shifting configurations, in turn, shape the process of knowledge production by mediating interactions, expectations, and the narratives that interlocutors choose to share. In a political climate in which Muslim communities are frequently framed by suspicion and securitization, knowledge production cannot be disentangled from the researcher's social position, the moral dynamics of the field, or the epistemic hierarchies that structure academic research. By attending to these dynamics, the paper foregrounds reflexivity not only as a methodological but also as a political and ethical practice. In the

broader structural and political context in Europe today, reflexivity takes on added significance as a tool for examining the epistemic legacies of Orientalism, as well as migrantizing and problematizing narratives that continue to haunt both scholarship and the everyday lives of Muslims in Europe. Reflexive ethnographic practice enables the production of ethically accountable, contextually grounded, and situated knowledge that prioritizes partiality and epistemological complexities over abstract explanations or totalizing generalizations.

## Round 2

### c. Panel session 1: Ethical loyalty, accountability and afterlives of ethnography

#### **Ethical Loyalties in Migration Ethnography: Researcher Responsibility, Silence, and Long-Term Engagement - Yuri Lou Vertongen**

This paper proposes to shift the analysis of loyalty in migration research toward a dimension that remains insufficiently examined: the ethical loyalty of the researcher toward their field, and more specifically toward migrant actors whose lives are shaped by administrative precarity, political exposure, and social vulnerability. Drawing on long-term ethnographic research on migrant struggles and undocumented mobilisations, the contribution interrogates the specific responsibilities that weigh on researchers when producing, circulating, and reusing knowledge about populations who may face concrete risks as a result of scholarly visibility. Ethnographic fieldwork in migration contexts confronts researchers with recurring ethical dilemmas that go beyond standard methodological safeguards: what can be said, and what must be withheld? What becomes of collected narratives once they circulate beyond their original context of enunciation? To what extent can researchers be held responsible for the foreseeable and unforeseeable effects of their analyses, particularly when academic outputs may contribute—indirectly—to exposing, weakening, or endangering research participants? Rather than treating these issues as individual ethical precautions, this paper conceptualises them as expressions of an enduring form of loyalty, enacted through narrative restraint, deliberate silences, and long-term accountability. Adopting a reflexive perspective, it argues that researchers' ethical obligations do not end with leaving the field or completing a project. They extend into the temporalities of writing, publication, public engagement, and the afterlives of ethnographic materials as they circulate across academic, activist, and institutional spaces. By framing loyalty as an ethical and political commitment embedded in ethnographic practice, the paper aligns closely with the objectives of the event by fostering interdisciplinary dialogue on positionality, ethics, and the boundaries between research, activism, and responsibility in migration and diversity studies.

### **Ethnographies of (Im)Migration - Why and For Whom? Revisiting Questions of Representation and Methodological Crevices in Migration Research - Mausumi Moran Chetia, Zeynep Kaşlı and Nanneke Winters**

Researching migrant and once-displaced communities in postcolonial border regions often leads to complex ethical dilemmas. An often encountered dilemma is determining whose voices matter most in the research process—the researcher’s or the interlocutors’ or both and to what extent? This question becomes especially urgent when working with communities and their descendants who have experienced multiple displacements and/or stigma. This paper explores these ethical challenges in conducting ethnography, drawing from an intercontinental study conducted across Europe, the Middle East, Central America, and Southeast Asia. The methodology was primarily ethnographic, while our research process was marked by moments of ‘researcher’s block’ and questions of representation, when we struggled with how to (not) represent the interlocutors and yet do justice to the research process. A key issue that emerged was interlocutors’ reluctance to be named or made visible, not just through pseudonyms, but through the act of omission of their experiences from the research itself. This then led us to reflect on appropriate, culturally sensitive methods for researching migration, given the often exploitative media coverage, risks of reliving painful histories, and volatile socio-political contexts surrounding (im)migration. In this paper, we reflect not only on the issues of the communities we engaged with, but on ourselves as researchers by seeking to raise two central questions: First, are we missing critical methodological approaches for researching the lives of those affected by past trauma? Second, who decides the boundaries of visibility and invisibility in migration research, and how can we navigate those decisions ethically?

### **Researching Belonging Across Borders: Reflexive Notes on Ancestry-Based Citizenship Research - Marhabo Saparova and Zeynep Kaşlı**

This short reflexive paper asks how ethnographers can work in identity-politicized contexts, where state’s relations with its (past, present and future) citizens are shaped by ethnic violence, without reproducing nationalist narratives or falling into an ethnic preservation logic. The question emerges from our fieldwork for the Ancestral Citizenship in Europe project, which examines the growing popularity of ancestry-based citizenship pathways to Europe at the intersection of mobility regimes, intergenerational aspirations, and an expanding intermediary industry. We draw on ethnographic research in multiple locations in Turkey and Bulgaria focused on claims to Bulgarian ancestral citizenship among two groups: Bessarabian/ethnic Bulgarians from Ukraine and Moldova, and Turks of Bulgarian descent. Despite distinct migration histories and socio-legal positions, we found that claim-making often converges around similar narratives of ancestry, authenticity, and ethnic/national belonging – narratives that are themselves entangled with histories of displacement, dispossession, and violence. This short piece foregrounds the methodological and ethical tensions that arise when such histories are articulated through ethnonational frames, including the expectations or “pressures” placed on researchers to shed light on and advance/advocate for (coherent) identity narratives. We ask how we, as engaged scholars, can navigate the tension between our goals for a critical analysis of ancestry and citizenship without minimizing the force of past and present ethnic and colonial violence, and which ethnographic practices allow researchers to remain accountable (to interlocutors who experienced violence and displacement) while resisting the nationalist trap/ ethnic essentialism.

## d. Panel session 2: Positionality revisited: surveillance, access and knowledge production

### **Insider outsider experiences of conducting ethnographic research in fragile and conflict-affected situations - Gordon Ogutu**

Conducting ethnographic research in migration contexts requires ongoing reflection on positionality, ethics, and audience. The processes of obtaining approval and access often expose how academic research becomes entangled with broader systems of governance and surveillance that generally classify migrants as “problematic groups” (Goodman, Sirriyeh, & McMahon, 2017, p. 108; Staples, 2019). In addition, governmental control over spaces inhabited by migrant populations also shapes who is recognised as an acceptable or “permissible” researcher, influencing how knowledge about these settings is produced and shared. Fieldwork in such environments frequently presents ethically complex situations that demand responsiveness to context. Researchers who possess cultural familiarity, professional experience, or local networks may find it easier to secure permissions and build trust. Yet these advantages also reveal the exclusionary dimensions of research access, where individuals without comparable linguistic, cultural, or social capital, particularly those from outside the research area, may struggle to gain entry or face heightened scrutiny. Such dynamics inevitably shape which and whose perspectives are included in academic narratives and which and whose opinions are marginalised. As Krause (2017) observes, the intricate systems of approval and oversight in humanitarian contexts, for example, profoundly influence both the narratives produced and those authorised to construct them. Drawing on Christina Clark-Kazak’s concept of a “radical feminist ethics of care,” (Clark-Kazak, 2023), this roundtable will reflect on how researchers can navigate the ethical and relational complexities that accompany fieldwork in migration contexts, focusing on aspects such as power, privilege, and care in the ethnographic encounters.

### **Interviewing the Interviewer: Producing Knowledge under Bordering Regimes - Minke Hajer and Gülcce Özdemir**

Ethnographic research on illegalized migrants often treats positionality, access, and ethics procedural concerns, leaving underexamined how bordering regimes actively shape the conditions of knowledge production. We conceptualize the research encounter as a bordered space, where scholars navigate institutional gatekeeping, participant safety, and ethical dilemmas mediate methodological choices. Drawing on 20 in-depth interviews with researchers working with illegalized migrants, this article investigates the opportunities and constraints imposed by social, legal, and institutional frameworks, how researchers reflect on their methodological choices and research contributions, and how this is influenced by their positionality. Our findings show that ethnographic knowledge about illegalized migrants emerges through constrained, affectively charged practices embedded within bordering regimes, characterised by a constant negotiation of access, risks, and knowledge production. We elaborate on the methodological strategies and reflections that shape fieldwork choices, and argue that migration scholarship should be seen as a practice inseparable from infrastructures of control and the labor of care and caution. With this paper presentation we aim to provide input and further reflections on the discussion on the methodological and theoretical challenges and diversity ethnographers face during fieldwork.

### **Navigating place resentment: Insider-outsider positionalities and asymmetrical power relations in a right-wing institutional ethnography - Anke De Malsche**

This paper analyses how the strategic navigation of feelings of place resentment among research participants informs the researchers' positionality during institutional ethnographic research that focuses on the local governance of migration in right-wing spaces. Place resentment is understood as the feeling that one's area of living does not matter or is not being taken serious by outsiders, fueling anti-migration sentiments (Huijsmans, 2022). Navigating place resentment leads the researcher to occupy an ambivalent insider-outsider status, as the usage of the ethnographer's (in)visible demographic characteristics is a relational practice with constantly shifting positionalities. This is especially the case when attempts are made to overcome the hierarchical structures of the institutional context under study. This paper contributes to debates about intersectional positionalities in ethnography: approaching positionality as a practice that draws from researchers' (in)visible social position, instead of essentializing identity markers of researchers and participants (Dahinden & Pott, 2026). Empirically, this paper draws from ongoing institutional ethnography: combining field notes taken at a local immigration desk and informal conversations with civil servants and newly arrived (racialized) households. The immigration desk is in the Denderregion, a region in Flanders with a strong local identity in the Brussels' metropolitan periphery that has seen a large influx of people with migration background, leading to a rise in right-wing sentiments (Schuyvens et al., 2024). To set up field research at an immigration desk that is governed by locally implemented right-wing policies and gain trust from civil servants, I strategically utilized both my socio-demographic traits, as well as my intimate knowledge of sensitivities surrounding place resentment from my formative years in the region. This positioning foreground ethnography as a practice where the researcher constantly oscillates between insider-outsider status, as well as a practice that poses questions on asymmetrical power relations.

### **Navigating Transnational Borders: Ethnographic Insights into Customary Law and Identity in Milan's Egyptian Diaspora - Abdallah Rashdan**

This paper draws on multi-sited ethnographic research to explore how Egyptian diaspora communities in Milan navigate transnational borders through customary law and identity practices, bridging everyday lived experiences with policy implications. Based on qualitative fieldwork conducted for my M.A. thesis at the University of Padua (2024), I examine the functions and impacts of diaspora associations in fostering community initiatives, such as informal dispute resolution and cultural preservation, amid Italy's migration governance frameworks. Employing collaborative ethnography—through participant observation, in-depth interviews with 20+ diaspora members, and partnerships with local NGOs highlight the porous boundaries between formal policies (e.g., EU integration pathways) and informal transnational practices. For instance, customary law adaptations address gaps in legal recognition, influencing return-migration strategies and climate-mobility consultations, as seen in my work with IOM Egypt on Egypt's National Adaptation Plan (2024–2025). The research interrogates ethical dilemmas of positionality as a Middle Eastern researcher in EU contexts, emphasizing reflexive approaches to avoid essentializing identities while amplifying marginalized voices. It also blurs lines between academia, activism, and policy by proposing recommendations for diaspora-led pilots, informed by my EUDiF internship (2024) facilitating EU-AU dialogues on talent partnerships. This contribution connects ethnographic insights across sociology, international relations, and development studies, advocating for multi-disciplinary collaborations to

enhance migration research's relevance. I aim to spark discussions on audience engagement, such as translating findings into actionable tools for policymakers and NGOs.

## Round 3

### e. Workshop: An Introduction to Sonic Ethnography in Migration Research - Soline Ballet and Miriam Matthiesse

Ethnographic methods across various disciplines (including geography, sociology and anthropology) have long prioritized the visual over the sonic to produce knowledge. Yet, instead of focusing on a detached 'observing eye' scholars have summoned 'But what about the ethnographic ear?' (Clifford 1986: 12). Sonic methodologies can respond to the 'crisis of representation' (Fabian, 1983) which seems especially salient for ethnographic studies on migration in a context where contemporary debates revolving around the border spectacle imply a regime of both hypervisibility and invisibility. Sound and listening can open creative engagements with what falls between representational meaning, can find a place of narrativity that has not yet been claimed and foreclosed, and can push back on hegemonic modes of knowledge production in the academy. The sonic might hold the possibility of poeticizing migration research, amid larger debates on counter-poetics in diverse forms of Black music and art which are said to foster fugitivity and improvisation, opening up the space of living otherwise (McKittrick, 2016; Glissant, 1997). Hence, in this experimental session we aim to advance on the following questions: What does sound and listening afford in offering distinct ways of being and knowing in migration research, and how might these be developed through ethnographic methods? After a short introduction to sonic ethnography, and what it could mean for migration research, we will give a couple of examples including sound mapping, walks and diaries, and collaborative podcast and radio projects. Then we facilitate a workshop in small groups where we ask to create a soundscape of a particular environment from multiple directions and angles using DIY material (such as phones). The workshop concludes with a collective listening session.

### f. Panel session 3: Ethnography as embodied practice

#### **Mapping Diversity. Multi-sensory, multi-lingual and superdiverse landscapes - Karolina Bielenin-Lenczowska and Helena Patzer**

The paper will discuss the potentialities of using the concept of socio-linguistic landscape (Bielenin-Lenczowska 2024; Blommaert, Maly 2014) and the method of mapping as tools to explore migration and diversity in the city and other spaces. We propose a deep ethnographic multi-sensory engagement in the researched landscape (Wise 2010), accompanied by different methods of mapping (Bińka et al. 2021). Using concepts and inspirations from sociolinguistics and human geography, we propose a different look at the spaces we inhabit, especially spaces marked by (super)diversity and a multiplicity of ways of navigating the city. Mapping can also serve as a tool for exercising control over space, and thus we approach it with a critical eye. Thus, we include in our reflection the different approaches of mapping and counter-mapping (Hajdarowicz 2025), creating maps that cut across official discourses, and revealing spaces of exclusion

and violence through mental mapping (Nasritdinov 2016). We propose an ethnographic attentiveness to sights, sounds, smells, and touch to understand how and why spaces affect people in very different ways. Thus, we want to stress the importance of sharing an embodied experience of space with others, but also of discussing the ways in which affect and knowledge shape these experiences.

### **Writing from the Border: Auto-ethnography, Racialized Mobility, and Everyday Bordering in Canada - Aashay Dalvi**

Ethnographic research on illegalized migrants often treats positionality, access, and ethics procedural concerns, leaving underexamined how bordering regimes actively shape the conditions of knowledge production. We conceptualize the research encounter as a bordered space, where scholars navigate institutional gatekeeping, participant safety, and ethical dilemmas mediate methodological choices. Drawing on 20 in-depth interviews with researchers working with illegalized migrants, this article investigates the opportunities and constraints imposed by social, legal, and institutional frameworks, how researchers reflect on their methodological choices and research contributions, and how this is influenced by their positionality. Our findings show that ethnographic knowledge about illegalized migrants emerges through constrained, affectively charged practices embedded within bordering regimes, characterised by a constant negotiation of access, risks, and knowledge production. We elaborate on the methodological strategies and reflections that shape fieldwork choices, and argue that migration scholarship should be seen as a practice inseparable from infrastructures of control and the labor of care and caution. With this paper presentation we aim to provide input and further reflections on the discussion on the methodological and theoretical challenges and diversity ethnographers face during fieldwork.

### **Ethnographic research, rapport, and the fandango: Afro-Inclusive Latine Histories Mapped onto Detroit - Adaiyah Hudgins-Lopez**

In Latine Detroit, conceptions of time and ethnicity shift depending on with whom individuals are in conversation. While Detroit is majority Black, “Southwest Detroit” is a distinctly majority Latine community within the city. Amongst themselves, my interlocutors articulate their proximity to a sense of united Latinidad as it suits them. Separate, but related, is how racial “intimacies” within Latinidad mapped onto researcher-interlocutor rapport co-construction during my fieldwork. As an African American or Black researcher, my understanding of how individuals construct Latinidad and relate to it in Detroit has been informed through these moments of insider/outsider racialised sentiment as much as it was formed through ‘participant observation’ in spaces that were almost exclusively Latine. Moreover, when speaking with interlocutors, often conversations would steer towards discussion of Black ancestry or Black community influence in these almost exclusively Latine spaces. These explanations generated a new temporal explanation of our shared activities and spaces, which explained our ‘being together’, as researcher-interlocutor, across diasporic and racial/ethnic boundaries. These moments also coincided with my interlocutors’ ongoing efforts to enshrine their historical presence in Detroit, a city only recently grappling with its longstanding Latine foundational roots. This paper addresses these fieldwork moments as part of a larger anthropological and methodological concern about the co-construction of rapport in the field between researcher and interlocutor. These moments are framed within the language of the Mexican folklórico dance practice of the fandango from the state of Veracruz, where *llamada y respuesta* (call-and-response) in improvisatory dance mirror the improvisatory nature of identity proximation in Latine Detroit. I will outline how this rapport co-construction relied

on the creation of a new space-time and will conclude by addressing how this ‘movement’ or positioning of researcher-interlocutor reveals more about Latine space-time in post-industrial, aspirational Detroit.

## Round 4

### g. Panel session 4: (Creative) Representation & Voice

#### **Verses of Homeland Crossings: Digital Ethnography, Participatory Poetry, and the Transnational Making of Diasporic Knowledge - Nikola Lero**

This paper presents preliminary findings on diasporic visits to the homeland as an ambivalent practice within the migrant struggle for ontological security. Drawing on participatory, arts-based research with members of the UK Yugoslav-Serb diaspora, I conceptualise diasporic visiting as a form of ontological supplementation: a periodic, often routinised practice through which migrants seek sensory, social, and affective recalibration rather than permanent return. Empirically, the paper draws on Phase 2 fieldwork (August 2025–January 2026), including co-produced poetry workshops held before, during, and after participants’ diasporic visits, poems composed in transit, visual life maps, shared photographs, and online ethnographic conversations conducted while participants were abroad. This digitally mediated methodology captures visiting as an embodied practice unfolding across borders in real time. The cross-border digital ethnographic design, combining synchronous online workshops, asynchronous creative exchanges via messaging platforms, and collaborative annotation of visual artefacts, demonstrates how ethnographic practice can be sustained across geographical distance, repositioning the researcher–participant relationship as a transnational dialogue rather than a site-bound encounter. I argue that regular diasporic visits function simultaneously as practices of debordering and re-bordering. While visits offer temporary relief from everyday bordering, cultural restraint, and affective self-management experienced in London, they also generate new forms of estrangement shaped by political divergence, economic asymmetries, and post-socialist urban transformation in Serbia.

#### **Multiple institutional settings and the uneven conditions of migrant voice in Belgium’s voluntary return landscape - Laure Deschuyteneer**

How do migrants become heard in ethnographic research within return systems marked by a fragmented field of multiple institutional actors? In Belgium’s Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) program, migrants encounter institutions with different mandates and logics, ranging from welfare-oriented counselling to enforcement-based case management. Drawing on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork across these settings, this paper examines how these institutional environments shape migrants’ possibilities to speak and participate in my research. Although I obtained formal access to all institutions, migrants’ opportunities to engage in research were uneven. In enforcement settings, institutional reluctance and my own ethical concerns about approaching people in legally constrained situations limited direct recruitment. In welfare-oriented settings, participation was often encouraged, yet at times restricted by staff who considered certain migrants ‘too vulnerable’ to be approached. Migrants’ participation was therefore frequently mediated by institutional actors and shaped by the power dynamics of the setting in which encounters took place. At the same time, informal conversations and a small number of self-initiated contacts revealed that some migrants actively sought spaces to narrate their experiences beyond institutional spaces. These

moments complicate assumptions about vulnerability and agency, and highlight how voice emerges within, across and sometimes despite institutional structures. By centering migrants' differentiated conditions of participation to my research, this paper reflects on how ethnographic knowledge is shaped by the institutional contexts in which it is produced. It contributes to interdisciplinary dialogue on how multiple institutional contexts shape not only governance practices, but also the methodological possibilities of ethnographic research.

### **Alternative Migration Narratives and Ethnographic Journalism: Contesting Politicized Representations of Migration - Kezban Karagoz**

In the European political arena, migrant narratives are increasingly subjected to processes of objectification. In mainstream media ecosystems operating with hierarchical structures, migrants are often homogenized, and narratives that make diversity visible are blurred. Such representations tend to abstract migrants into subjective entities. In this context, the possibilities offered by digital media create alternative spaces where migrants can articulate their own narratives and challenge dominant discourses. This study examines migration narratives through the intersecting perspectives of political migrants, exiled journalists, official authorities, and activist networks. It interrogates how digital media platforms facilitate forms of self-representation that challenge the agenda-setting functions of traditional media institutions. Particular attention is paid to ethnographic journalism practices, journalistic reflexivity, and the potential of slow journalism and media activism in producing more nuanced accounts of forced migration. The empirical focus centers on 3 digital projects the experiences of political refugees who were compelled to leave Turkey during the past decade and resettle in host countries. These projects foreground individualized and human-centered narratives that monolithic portrayals of migration. In host-country contexts, Turkish political refugees are often framed within securitized or othering discourses; simultaneously, in their country of origin, they are subjected to processes of dehumanization. This article explores how self digital storytelling operates within this dual structure of marginalization, creating discursive spaces in which migrants can assert narrative agency. Furthermore, it discusses how ethnographic journalistic narratives contribute to a multi-layered and ethnographically grounded understanding of migration, The media narratives of the projects *Yoldayız* (We Are on Our Way), *Tutunanlar* (The Connected), and *Lifelines: The Remembered Grave in the Living Room*) are analyzed through a qualitative interpretive framework informed by critical media and migration studies.

## **h. Author meets critics session: Precarious Agency and the Political Hermeneutics of Citizenship: Ethnographic Reflections from Citizen X**

Author Meets Critics session dedicated to **Citizen X: Becoming Undocumented Activists on Both Sides of the Atlantic (Oxford University Press, 2026)**.

How do undocumented migrants become activists? How can we make sense of the fact that undocumented activists are powerful, resourceful, and hyper-visible yet vulnerable, precarious, and relatively invisible all at once? How do the personal and collective activist trajectories of undocumented migrants diverge and converge on both sides of the Atlantic? And why do the actions they organize from the

margins hit politics-as-usual in its very core? These are the complex and provocative questions that Thomas Swerts poses in *Citizen X*. Based on years of immersion as an ally in Chicago and Brussels, this transatlantic ethnography offers an unprecedented inside look into the birth, growth, and demise of undocumented-led organizations. In cities on opposite sides of the Atlantic, migrants struggled to create a space from where they could speak their own truth as lived experiences of illegality reinforced their feelings of powerlessness. But as Swerts reveals, under certain conditions, vulnerabilities can be developed into collective strengths. By openly sharing their stories, contesting restrictions on mobility, and publicly expressing their emotions, undocumented activists expose the hidden reality of 'Citizen X'. At a time when legal avenues for migration are becoming narrower and undocumented migrants are increasingly criminalized and stigmatized, *Citizen X* discloses the fundamental inequalities and social injustices that result from unevenly distributing legal status in the world while highlighting the renewed meaning that non-citizens are giving to citizenship from the ground up.

More information about the book can be found here: [Citizen X - Paperback - Thomas Swerts - Oxford University Press](#)