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Agents of change? (Hi)stories, perspectives, and everyday practices of Polish border guards

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Propositions

accompanying the doctoral dissertation:

“Agents of Change? (Hi)stories, Perspectives, and Everyday Practices of Polish Border Guards.”

by Maryla Klajn

1. Intra-Schengen borders persist not despite the abolition of systematic border checks, but because discretionary street-level practices actively reconstitute the border in everyday enforcement.
2. The discretionary authority of Polish Border Guard officers functions as a central mechanism through which crimmigration is enacted at the Polish–German border.
3. Historical narratives of occupation, sovereignty loss, and national vulnerability are not merely contextual but actively shape contemporary border enforcement practices.
4. Emotional labour is constitutive of border control work and structures how discretion is exercised, justified, and morally sustained by border officials.
5. Crimmigration should be conceptualized not only as a legal convergence of criminal and immigration law, but also as an affective and cultural regime of governance.
6. Discretion in border policing is best understood as a multi-scalar process in which macro-level politics, meso-level organizational norms, and micro-level emotions are mutually reinforcing.
7. Ethnographic research in securitized institutions demonstrates that secrecy operates as a productive organizational practice rather than solely as an impediment to transparency.
8. Analyses of migration governance that exclude the emotional experiences of enforcement agents risk misdiagnosing the causes of punitive practices by attributing them solely to legal frameworks or policy design.
9. Border security policies that focus exclusively on rules, procedures, and surveillance technologies, without addressing the moral and emotional pressures faced by frontline officers, are unlikely to reduce unequal or arbitrary enforcement in practice.
10. Public and political narratives portraying internal EU borders as ‘borderless’ obscure the lived realities of exclusion experienced by those subjected to discretionary controls.
11. National identity narratives that frame migration primarily as a security threat contribute to the normalization of exceptional and punitive border practices.
12. Border governance happens at ground level. Like dachshunds, border officers navigate tight, messy spaces where intuition, instinct, and embodied skill matter — and which my dissertation shows is exactly where borders are made.