

RESEARCH

"It's To Protect the Country!": The Everyday Performance of Border Security in Sweden

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In 2015, Sweden introduced inner border control. Five years later, the 'temporary' controls remain. Their increasing permanence raises urgent questions about the logics that undergird the exercise of biopolitical border security and the relationship between intent and practices on the ground. Drawing on in-depth interviews with Swedish border guards and fieldwork conducted at Hyllie Station—the first station en route from Denmark—this article contributes original ethnographic research on the sparsely researched Swedish border control and the work routines of Swedish border professionals. The central theoretical contribution of the article is the consideration of how discretion and a range of mundane factors complicate the realisation of biopolitics. The article further contributes to the scholarship on everyday bordering practices with methodological reflections on the importance of studying the 'unspectacular' border sites and a firm reminder that not all borders have turned into semi-automated, smart data borders. Overall, the article argues that the border control at Hyllie functions according to a 'leaky' (Marr 2012: 84) biopolitics; not a monolithic performance of overarching state objectives, but one assembled *ad hoc*, constrained by resource availability and shaped by the discretion exercised by border officers.

Keywords: Sweden; Borders; Border security; Biopolitics; Foucault

Introduction

In 2015, approximately 163,000 individuals sought asylum in Sweden, most of them fleeing the war in Syria (Barker 2018). On September 6, Prime Minister Stefan Löfven declared that '[m]y Europe takes in people fleeing from war, my Europe does not build walls' (Crouch 2016). Merely two months later, on November 12, Sweden introduced temporary inner border controls at Helsingborg, Larnacken and Hyllie in Skåne along with partial controls at other sites (Regeringskansliet 2015). In April 2016, the country 'totalised' its border controls (Secher 2017) and the border police hired and trained 72 civilian border guards. Sweden recently extended its border controls until November 2020. Swedish border control was presented as an exceptional short-term instrument to handle incoming asylum seekers in 2015 and 2016. Five years later, Sweden has effectively paved the way for permanent control with

continuous extensions (Regeringskansliet 2020) and tighter migration and asylum policies (Borevi & Shakra 2019). These developments signal a shift in Swedish policy, hitherto characterised by a relative openness (Brännström 2015; Kobierecka 2018).

The present study explores Swedish border control through the case of Hyllie Station. Hyllie is the first train station en route from Denmark, located in the southern region Skåne. Following an initial period of disorganised and time-consuming ID control in 2015 (Klatt 2020), Hyllie settled into a routine, which made the border crossing appear almost as smooth as before. Crucially, though, this smoothness does not extend to those deemed suspicious, 'undesirable' or 'alien'. As Tazzioli (2019: 1–2) argues, a politics of mobility is inevitably intertwined with a specific biopolitics of migration, 'that is with a series of technologies, knowledges and policies apt at regulating and acting upon life'. Yet, the biopolitics of contemporary migration control do not necessarily 'make live' or 'let die' (Aradau & Tazzioli 2020: 201). In a bid to move beyond this binary, Aradau and Tazzioli propose two modes of biopolitical governing, *extraction* and *subtraction*, to highlight how value is extracted from migrants at the same time as they are deprived of 'spaces of livability and infrastructures of support' (Aradau & Tazzioli 2020: 202). In this article, however, I wish to focus on a different aspect of biopolitical border security, namely on the border officers who implement it. In this I heed the calls to pay attention to the everyday worlds of security professionals (Bigo 2014; Côté-Boucher 2020; Vega 2019) to better understand how mobility control is implemented in practice.

While anthropological border scholarship has paid considerable attention to the violence at the southern borders of Europe and North America, less attention has been paid to 'seemingly uncontroversial' (Côté-Boucher 2020: 190) borders (e.g., in Scandinavian countries). Ethnographically, this study offers an empirically-grounded exploration of how border officers understand and perform their security work 'on the ground' (Häkli 2015: 99) at a seemingly unspectacular and 'uncontroversial' (Côté-Boucher 2020: 190) border site. Theoretically, it challenges more rigid understandings of biopolitical bordering practices as totalising systems made 'of processes, power relations, technologies, categorizations and judgements' (Côté-Boucher 2020: 6). Rather, it proposes an understanding of border security as a performance of 'leaky' biopolitics (Marr 2012: 84), which is assembled *ad hoc* and shaped by ambiguous discretionary powers, decisions, inherent tensions, everyday practicalities (Bourne et al. 2015) and functional 'glitches' (Côté-Boucher 2020: 12).

In the first section, I argue for the importance of studying unspectacular border sites and outline the study's methodology. Next, I discuss the relations between discretion and biopolitics in border security. I then place the ethnographic material into dialogue with the theory, interrogating how biopolitics are both mobilised and obscured by the everyday practices of border security and discretion. Lastly, I unfold a discussion of the 'leaky' biopolitics exercised at Hyllie. Here, I highlight the ambiguous nature of the functionality of border security, noting that in/efficiency and dys/functionality hinge on perspective (Ferguson 2005).

Studying Everyday Bordering

The present study broadly follows a tradition of critical border studies that enables 'critique of the implications of inhabiting worlds in which limits are constantly produced, managed, and redefined' (Sánchez-Querubín & Rogers 2018: 2–3). Where earlier border research reinforced a static and tautological relationship between borders, sovereignty and territory (Amilhat Szary & Giraut 2015: 3), contemporary border studies increasingly conceptualise borders as delocalised, cultural and productive. Border scholars now discuss 'mobile borders' (Lambert & Clochard 2015), 'networked borders' (Walther & Retailié 2015), 'embodied borders' (Popescu 2015), 'cooperative "21st century borders"' (Longo 2016), 'borderescapes' (Lemberg-Pedersen 2013) and the 'border *multiple*' (Klatt et al. 2012).

The bulk of critical border research concentrates on the structural, the policy-based and the spectacular—border hotspots, deportation regimes or the outsourcing of EU bordering practices—or on the migrants, the activists or locals residing in ‘borderlands’ (see e.g. Lambert & Clochard 2015; Lemberg-Pedersen 2018; Özdemir & Ayata 2018; Vaughan-Williams 2015b). While it remains crucial to study these cases, anthropological border scholarship has increasingly challenged the tendency to privilege spectacular events and crisis over the equally exclusionary and significant, but ‘less dramatic erosion of the everyday’ (Kublitz 2016: 230). This growing body of work offers promising insights into the ethics (Schwell 2017), performances (Kristensen 2019), professional work routines (Bigo 2014), discretionary practices (Côté-Boucher 2016; Hall 2017), social encounters (Dzenovska 2014) and gendered and technological dimensions (Côté-Boucher 2020) that shape current practices of everyday professional borderwork.

Noticeably, however, only a small handful of studies explore the Swedish and Danish borders. Klatt (2020) investigates Euroscepticism and rebordering trends in the ‘Danish-German borderlands’. Through an account of the everyday bordering practices of EU border officials in Moldova, Ukraine and at the Danish-German border, Kristensen (2019) offers an excellent analysis of the contradictory objectives that make up the European borders. Borevi and Shakra’s (2019) working paper presents an extensive account of the legal and policy framework of Swedish border management and migration control, while Peterson (2020) effectively accentuates the tension between Sweden’s humanitarian commitments and securitization in her account of the border-making practices of non-state actors, i.e. humanitarian volunteers. I enter this sparsely populated space, not only to fill a research gap but also to highlight the specificity of the Swedish case, which Peterson (2020) labels ‘the death of the most generous country on earth’.

Since 2015, Sweden has introduced limitations in the granting of residence to asylum seekers and territorial border reinforcement (Peterson 2020). The control site at Hyllie entails the literal policing, hierarchised categorisation and exclusion of certain population groups. It reinforces the criminalisation of immigration (Barker 2018) and cultivates a ‘state of permanent suspicion’ (Popescu 2015: 115). The securitisation of Sweden’s borders is particular in the context of the particular governmentalities of the welfare state and the nation’s historically liberal ‘humanitarian’ immigration policies, such as the affordance of permanent residency for asylum seekers and bills that ensure rights for undocumented migrants and humanitarian protection grounds for children (Borevi & Shakra 2019).

At the same time, Swedish bordering practices are shaped by the ‘multiplicity of forces that define and vie for position in late-modern moment’ (Chalfin 2007: 1626): liberal ideas of free movement, humanitarianism and securitization. Sweden’s ‘uneasy alliance’ between the logics of care and control (Walters, cited in Andersson 2018: 416) speaks to broader trends of the rebordering and securitisation of national borders in Europe and the US (Côté-Boucher et al. 2014) as well as a widespread reworking of border control towards law enforcement (Côté-Boucher 2020).

I argue that these developments raise important questions about the everyday implementation of border control and the discretionary powers held by border guards (Häkli 2015), which turn the moment of ID verification into a personal and subjective assessment.

Methodology

I agree with Côté-Boucher’s (2020: 6) assertion that ‘we need to populate’ border control in order to better understand current transformations in global regimes of mobility control (Bigo 2014; Côté-Boucher 2016). Field research allowed me to do this by embodying the experience of being ‘a traveller’ at Hyllie Station and observing how encounters between border guards and passengers (including myself) unfolded. As Cohen puts it, I was ‘using myself to study others’ (in Povrzanovic Frykman 2004: 84).

The study's ethnographic material consists of eight semi-structured in-depth interviews with border officers, informal conversations with border crossers and fieldwork conducted on the train between Copenhagen and Hylle and at Hylle station between March 6 and May 15, 2018. I passed through the control 25 times and logged an additional 14 hours of observation at the station. To supplement this, I searched the large southern Swedish newspaper *Sydsvenskan* and the official websites of the Swedish government, parliament and police on a weekly basis using the keywords 'gräns' [border] and 'gränskontroll' [border control].

I gained access to participants by contacting the Swedish Police Region South. Contact to participants was facilitated by the Deputy Head of Division, who wrote to a large group of previous or current border officers and returned with a list of potential interviewees. I contacted each of them, ending up with eight between the ages of early 30 and 60; one female, seven male, one of which was a supervisor. Every participant signed an interview consent form and were granted two weeks to withdraw permission. All interviews were conducted in a mix of English, Danish and Swedish and lasted about an hour. For confidentiality purposes, the data is stripped of identifiers and participants are simply assigned a letter—*P* for police, *B* for civilian border guard—and a number.

Occasionally, I would strike up conversations with other passengers on the train or station, informing them that I was a researcher. Quite often, though, casual conversations happened organically, as people asked me for directions or enquired about what I was doing. This became an unexpected source of data, illustrating the benefits of allowing for open-endedness and serendipitous moments in ethnographic research (Povrzanovic Frykman 2004). It is important to note that I write from a privileged position as an educated, Danish woman. This undoubtedly shaped my border crossing experiences and granted me a level of goodwill with participants, which would not necessarily be available to someone who looks or acts differently, such as those deemed suspicious at the border.

The Biopolitics of Border Security

The developments in Swedish border policies illuminate a global shift in thinking about security in terms of risk management, the securitization of everyday life (Bigo 2002; Popescu 2015) and more recently the 'humanitarian' border (Walters 2010). Seemingly guided by 'rational' rules and risk calculations, security routines are ripe with assumptions and values: '[T]he apparent routine character, the neutral technicalities and smoothness of passport checking, effectively conceal the politics embedded in the power-laden institutional framing of border control' (Häkli 2015: 96).

The conceptual lens of biopolitics (Foucault 2003, 2007) has proven fruitful in the analysis of the regulation, management and government of mobilities (see e.g. Aradau & Tazzioli 2020; Schindel 2016; Vaughan-Williams 2015a). Biopolitics essentially work to increase the power, security and productivity of the state by preventing 'infiltration' through governing. Foucault (2003: 83) linked biopolitics inextricably to the emergence of 19th century State racism, which became 'the administrative prose of a State that defends itself in the name of a social heritage that has to be kept pure'. As Marr (2012: 84 *my italics*) notes, '[o]ne of the primary purposes of biopolitics is to *categorise* populations within a given territory in order to better *manage, regulate* or *govern* the body politic'.

The biopolitical analytics, however, risk generating an understanding of power as frictionless and omnipotent (Bigo & Guild 2005), when in praxis it is porous, haphazard and shaped by individual agency and discretion. Hence, the idea of a 'leaky' biopolitics (Marr 2012) proves instructive, highlighting the tension between *ideas* and *practices* of border control. According to Marr (2012: 85), the dissonance between 'what actually happens and what is supposed to happen' arises from an ambiguity in the everyday 'street level' categorisation of populations

and the uneven, sometimes performative deployment of police power, which poses an obstacle to the omnipotent implementation of biopolitics.

At Hyllie, 'what is (officially) supposed to happen' is total, indiscriminate and efficient control, which is imagined to secure the nation against the penetration of criminals and terrorists. However, 'what actually happens' is an imperfect and incomplete enactment of control, impeded by shut-downs, a lack of sufficient resources and personnel and subtle expressions of discrimination, which the border guards are not always aware of exercising. I suggest that the dissonance between ideas and practice at Hyllie stems partially from the discretion exercised by border officers—that is, the tensions between rules and judgement—and partially from within the system itself.

Discretion at the Border

Discretion generally refers to 'a decision about the (non-)application of a rule in contexts of public power' (Hall 2017: 489), granting persons of authority the space to make decisions more or less autonomously. A high degree of discretion may prove problematic in the sense that (conscious or unconscious) prejudices and stereotyped assumptions held by security professionals may influence decisions to allow or refuse entry to individuals (Côté-Boucher 2016). Border researchers recount how assessments of risk at the border may cast individuals into groups, such as potential security threats, victims or 'privileged travellers whose mobility should be further enhanced' (Côté-Boucher 2016: 50). Likewise, I found that this study's participants categorised travellers according to 'typology', using their experience and intuition.

In my understanding of discretion, I draw especially on Hall's (2017) account in her study of a European smart border targeting centre. Hall (2017) helpfully offers an understanding of discretion as 'a profoundly visual practice, a kind of discernment, a matter of seeing what is there' (496) and of 'distinguishing the particular and the general' (500). She aptly demonstrates that debates about the role of automated security systems are merely new incarnations of the enduring tensions between *rule* and *judgement*, *certainty* and *uncertainty*, asserting that 'each configuration of rule and *discretion* produces different discerning subjects' (Hall 2017: 501). These tensions manifest in border officers as an 'ambivalent view of their decisionmaking' (Hall 2017: 491). Côté-Boucher (2020: 34) similarly notes that she experienced Canadian security professionals as 'contradictory social actors', rather than eager, coercive state agents, whose border security work and ambiguous discretionary powers presented them with ethical dilemmas and frustrations.

As we move into the analytical section of this article, it is important to keep these tensions and the realities of borderwork in mind; while border officers hold discretionary power, they are simultaneously caught within the order of shifting political agendas and 'bounded organizationally in a series of hierarchical structures' (Ericson 1982: 202).

Border Security at Hyllie

Hyllie is a futuristic-looking underground railway station through which an estimated 17,000 passengers pass through every day (Hyllie.com n.d.). Trains from Copenhagen usually arrive on Track 4, where exiting passengers are subjected to ID control before exiting through an opening in the fence that separates the 'control area' from the rest of the station. The site has been continuously upgraded since 2015. Initially, guards only had a camper van in which to gather in between trains and conduct second-line checks of travellers. Similarly, the 'fence' consisted of a makeshift line of gates, which had been stapled together with bike locks and string. Following continued calls from the officers, the van was replaced by a blue container shed. And in May 2018, a solid fence was fused into the ground—a concrete testament to the control's increasing permanence (Field notes, 2018).

Rules and Discretion

When this study was conducted, 74 police officers and 161 civilian border guards worked at the controls at Hyllie, Larnacken and Helsingborg under the management of the Swedish Police in Region South (Interviews; Magnusson 2018). Police officers underwent a two-day 'crash course' followed by 'a learning period' and typically worked at the border for three to nine months (Interview P2). Civilian passport controllers underwent 2.5 weeks of training,¹ learning about EU, Schengen and Swedish laws, documents and 'general' police work (Interviews B1; B2; B3). According to the Swedish police, they controlled more than 10 million passengers at Hyllie, Larnacken and Helsingborg in 2017, refusing entry to approximately 5,000 persons (Interview P5).

Border guards emphasised that decisions are made 'higher up' (Interview P2) by 'decision-makers'. B1 explained that 'when it comes to these borderline situations, I mean, you still have to understand that *personally*, as border guards, we're not the ones making the decision itself'. It was clear, however, that guards in practice continuously engage their discretion, intuition and 'the long experience of control that only practice can give' (Bigo 2014: 214) to discern between certainty and uncertainty (Hall 2017):

P5: I think the most important work is speaking to the person, having that human contact ... Lots of the work here is done by asking the person: 'What are you doing here, how long are you staying, where do you live back home, who are you visiting in Sweden?'—those questions. And having the experience and the ability to read between the lines and determine whether this person is telling me the truth now, or is he just pulling my leg, trying to get into Sweden illegally.

Civilian controllers and police officers wear almost identical blue uniforms and green vests, lending them a similar air of authority and visibility (Chalfin 2007), but only police have the right to use coercive means [*tvångsmedel*] (i.e., arresting or detaining individuals). B1 explained that 'internal guidelines' prescribe that two police officers must escort people without proper ID onto the train back to Denmark. Yet, a civilian guard at Hyllie confided that 'if it's a 70-year-old grandma, we [civilian controllers] might do it even though it's a grey zone'.

Several elements are up to the 'subjective assessment' of individual guards: judging whether an ID is authentic, evaluating the validity of a passenger's claims and deciding when to call the decision-maker. In stark contrast to the high-tech, biometric, data-driven border-scape discussed in many studies of the EU border regime and everyday bordering practices (Côté-Boucher 2016; Glouftsiou 2018; Hall 2017; Jacobsen 2017; Jeandesboz 2016; Latonero & Kift 2018; Tsianos & Kuster 2016), the border control at Hyllie is decidedly 'low-tech'. Thus, the implementation of border security comes down to a series of encounters between border guards and border crossers:

*B1: The airport obviously has all these scanners. But we on the outside border control, like physical borders, the only tool as such that we have is really the passport scanner that lets us scan the passport and then compares it to the Schengen international system [SIS] ... Our task is looking for *people*. And legit documents. We don't need no scanners to do that. We just need to make sure that the passport is valid and that the person standing in front of us is actually this person.*

¹ It takes nine weeks to become a border *controller*, which allows for work with border control in airports.

In these brief moments, border officers must visually discern and evaluate ‘what is really there’ (Hall 2017) as passengers strive to prove that they are who they claim to be and that they are entitled to enter Sweden. In the words of Nield (2006: 65): ‘As you move from one state to another, you “play” yourself, and hope you are convincing’.

Although the officers’ decision-making power is limited by rules and chains of command, they certainly hold a high degree of power and responsibility in these brief moments as they decide whether to pursue a claim further. It is interesting that the officers interviewed here seemed eager to downplay their discretionary powers while they stressed the value of experience and the importance of rules. I tentatively suggest that this indicates that the source of these officers’ professional identity is bound up with assurance of their experience, knowledge and rule compliance, rather than ‘broad discretion’ (Côté-Boucher 2016). Further investigations of the significance of this eagerness to tone down discretionary powers may serve as a fruitful point for future research.

Categorising Border Crossers

The main task at Hyllie is checking passenger IDs and categorising passengers into those that are allowed to pass, those not allowed to pass or those that warrant further investigation. The border officers broadly sorted passengers into six ‘categories’ of people: 1) EU/Nordic/Swedish citizens/residents, 2) ‘good’ asylum seekers, 3) ‘bad’ asylum seekers, 4) potential criminals, 5) illegal workers and 6) tourists. Illegal workers were viewed ambiguously as vulnerable to social dumping but also as threats to ‘fair competition’ (Interview B3). Tourists were described as harmless border crossers who were sometimes ‘accidentally’ trapped even though ‘they’re no risk for the nation’ (Interview P4).

Participants spoke movingly about encounters with those deemed deserving asylum seekers and their desire to help, illustrating the moral dilemmas of their work (Côté-Boucher 2016; Dzenovska 2014):

P5: I was sent to Hyllie station and Lernacken back in 2015. I was sent there just one or two days after the border control was introduced. So there were trains coming, I think, every 20 minutes with 3–400 persons just coming out from the trains, applying for asylum ... One man, who was old enough to be my dad, from Syria, I stood there talking to him and he spoke English and he told me that, ‘I mean, I’ve been coming all the way from Syria, escaping the war, and my goal is to go to Norway because that’s where my family is.’ ... And it was such a strong moment, my strongest moment, because he was standing there, as I said old enough to be my dad, crying in front of me. And he knowing, and I knowing, if he just was one or two days earlier, he’d be in Norway by this time. So that’s [a] *hard*, uhm, line between the job I’m doing and what I believe in, that this is right and this needs to be done, in reference to this man standing here and he’s just two days late.

The Swedish border officers, however, viewed those they perceived as ‘bad’ asylum seekers or suspected criminals quite differently:

P4: We shouldn’t really help everybody because some of them are not here for legal reasons, they’re here to take advantage of the Swedish society and make a mess and do criminal things ... I have a really tough time to handle that when they arrive here and just have like “We want, give me, give me, we want!” And I see other small children from like Syria or Afghanistan, they’re really happy to come here and they feel safe here, but with Morocco it’s like ‘Can I smoke, where’s the food, where’s the train to

Stockholm' ... I don't find them like 'true' asylum seekers, but I gladly help sad children and sad people that I really can feel I make a difference.

The differentiation of immigrants into categories suggests that the Swedish border officers work according to what Dzenovska (2018: 11) calls a 'logic of difference', which sorts migrants into hierarchised groups 'marked by tropes of civilization, development, maturity, and Europeaness'. Consequently, migrants are subjected to different standards (Foucault 1977) and ascribed varying levels of 'deservingness' (Jørgensen & Thomsen 2016) based on their perceived level of gratitude and humanitarian needs. 'Good' asylum seekers deserve humanitarian protection, while 'bad' asylum seekers, potential criminals and illegal immigrants are viewed as a risk to, or drain on, the Swedish welfare state (Barker 2018; Jørgensen & Thomsen 2016).

The category of non-immigrants (EU/Schengen citizens or residents) proved problematic for the officers. During one train ride, I observed a border guard questioning a Danish-speaking woman who did not have her ID. He let her continue with a reminder: 'I can hear that you're Danish but next time you *must* bring [your] driver's license or passport'. Enquiring about observations of this sort, participants explained to me that if you 'look' and sound 'Nordic' (Interview B2; B3), it usually does not constitute a problem to cross without ID. Guards can check up on Swedish citizens by questioning them and cross-checking information on their smartphones, and Danish citizens can be checked through questioning or by calling the Danish police. But as P2 confided, 'It's said that we have to check them but if it's obvious that it's a Danish citizen—if they talk Danish on the kind of level that I don't understand, then it's a Dane'.

Passengers who do not 'look' Nordic may face challenges when crossing the border, with or without proper ID. Especially one rule placed border guards in a difficult position, which they felt pushed them to challenge non-discrimination laws, namely the long-standing agreement between Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Finland and the Faroe Islands that Nordic citizens can use their driver's license as ID:

B2: We don't think it's a good rule anymore. Because, you know, the Nordic countries don't just have citizens that are named Sven or Preben anymore. So we have many people from the Middle East who is a citizen in some Nordic country. But if they come and show us a Swedish driver's license, we don't know if they're a Swedish or Danish or another Nordic citizen. Then if we're uncertain, we have to check that up. And they get very angry because they've been told, 'I can show just my driver's license'. And that's right, you can show just that. But if we are not certain that they're a citizen in a Nordic country, we have to check it up. And that can make some conflicts, and they get very angry. And feel like they've been discriminated. So I don't think it's a good agreement anymore, not in these days. Because of course they get angry ... But we have to follow the rules, it's just that.

On another occasion, I happened to sit next to a middle-aged Syrian couple on the train. After quickly checking my driver's license at Hyllie, the young border guard turned to the couple next to me, who handed him passports and Swedish ID cards. The guard tilted the passports up and down, looking from the passport to the couple, back to the passport. The process took several minutes; whereas, the officer had barely glanced at my Danish ID. I asked them if their ID check always took this long. The husband laughed mildly and nodded. The scene was undramatic, and the guard simply did his job. Still, a stark contrast was established between us: my presence, as a Danish citizen, was accepted instantaneously, while the Syrian couple's documents necessitated thorough scrutiny (Field notes, May 2018).

Officers remained firm in their conviction that controls are 'colour-blind' and that they do not 'profile people based on looks' (Interview P3). Yet, the differentiation described above restricts individual choice and agency choices on the basis of extraneous traits (e.g., skin colour or gender) (Moreau 2010) and could obviously be considered discriminatory even if the officer is 'just following the rules' and does not intend to harm.

Keeping in mind Kristensen's (2019: 70) warning not to use ethnographic vignettes as 'documentation of misconduct', I will not use these observations to make sweeping claims that the Swedish border control is inherently racist or discriminatory. As Holmberg (2000) argues in an ethnographic study of Danish police work, it may be *impossible* to avoid some degree of 'typology-based' policing, which is discriminatory in nature, as officers work on the basis of limited information with limited resources and a limited window of time. Rather, I suggest that these vignettes show how the relations between rules, discretion and differentiation are fraught with tension and sometimes contradictions, calling for nuanced investigations into the factors that guide seemingly discriminatory practices.

Protection Through Filtering

When I asked participants why they thought Sweden maintained the control, they employed an ambiguous biopolitical discourse (Aradau & Tazzioli 2020; Vaughan-Williams 2015a) in which they simultaneously help 'true asylum seekers' in need of care and 'protect the country' (Foucault 2003) through technologies of control and filtering. Participants emphasised the control's function of 'gaining knowledge' about those that enter Sweden and strengthening 'inner security'. P1 replied that 'it's to protect the country!', and P2 suggested that it is 'because of all the inner security, the terrorists'. B2 suggested that 'Sweden is more naïve than Denmark', adding that they do not believe calls to restrict immigration are 'about racism at all'. Rather, it is about safety and staying in control: 'Because all the terrorists, the terror thing that happened in Sweden, it will come more if we don't restrain the borders because that's where they come in'.

The officers generally agreed that 'much good work' (Interview B1) was achieved through border control, wherefore it should be extended:

P4: I see we make a difference ... Actually not for the asylum but for the security of our nation. I have controlled many people that might be involved in terrorism and that is [known through] surveillance, the hidden surveillance in the SIS, Schengen Information System. We check them in that, *oops*, there we have a [hit]—we must be a bit careful, see what cars they go with, who they travel with, and almost every week we have cases like that.

Fears of terrorism and crime coupled with worries about Sweden's future were sometimes channelled into a perception of immigration as a near-existential threat to Sweden:

P4: It makes me really angry with the police who say 'oh, everyone that are right now seeking asylum, we should just do approve, approve, approve'. But they don't see in the future, like in 10 years, what problems we do have, with schools and everything ... I like this freedom of movement but of course not for the cost of terrorism and, or the Swedish or European societies going down because of it.

All eight participants told me that they viewed the border control as necessary because of security threats, poor integration of immigrants, the potential drain on the welfare system, non-working external Schengen borders as well as the perception of large masses of people

wanting to 'build a new life' in Europe (Interview P5). Prime Minister Löfven employed a similar rationale in a speech given in 2017, calling the border control 'a necessary evil for now' (Regeringskansliet 2017).

Security 'Leaks'

Although the border officers viewed the control as necessary, they did not necessarily view it as fully efficient. Frustratedly, they told of 'glitches' and structural and bureaucratic constraints that obstruct the performance of border control. Decisions need to be made in a sometimes very hectic environment with insufficient human resources. During rush hour, the number of passengers necessitate faster ID checks. A full train allows guards just over two seconds to check each passenger if they are to stay within the six-minute guideline.² As B3 said, when it is busy 'you control more people and then you have to do it faster and you maybe miss something'. Speed is seen as something that guards learn with practice, yet it is 'unavoidable' that this affects the quality 'a little bit' (Interview B3). Some trains are *too* full to control.

Another challenge is the legal requirement that two police officers must be present in order to perform border control. The police officers at the border control may be called away for a number of reasons, during which the civilian guards are not allowed to work and the entire control shuts down (Interview P2). For instance, if the officers are called in as back-up to manage situations in or around Hyllie or Malmö. Or if a rejected asylum seeker attempts to cross the border, two police officers are required to take them into custody in the centre of Malmö. According to P2, the demand for officers at the border controls exasperated a general issue of understaffing in the Swedish police organisation. Other officers echoed this concern: 'There is not one part of the organisation that doesn't need more police officers ... It's really hard, so we do our best' (Interview P5).

Several participants mentioned 'smugglers' and 'mules', presumably sent to cause a shut-down:

P4: I have examples of the real smugglers that put people on the train in Denmark and say, 'you have to go to Malmö Central and there this man will pick you up and do that and do that' ... Also they send like a 'mule' first and then we have a case, then we have to work, we have to close down the border, and then they have, of course, people here at Hyllie: 'Now we can put them on the train'.

During my nine field visits, I experienced four shut-downs, enduring from one to almost three hours. According to participants, they happened several times a week, usually lasting at least an hour. Participants explained that they often see false IDs, especially from Italy, which results in shut-downs, and described how individuals can enter Sweden illegally through the entry points that are only sporadically or strategically controlled.

Clearly, none of the officers I interviewed harboured illusions of '100% control' being possible. They nonetheless expressed faith in its necessity and usefulness. They navigated this sometimes contradictory relationship by mobilising a dual discourse of securitization and pragmatism (Bourne et al. 2015). To me, this suggests that border officers are both aware and accepting of the dissonance between the *stated aims* of total security and the *reality* of a glitchy and leaky border control. Even though they spoke of national security, they knew very

² This calculation is based on the interview with P2, who said that a fully packed three-car train would hold up to 800 passengers between 10 guards, and the guideline dictating that border control should ideally take maximum six minutes.

well that this work, in practice, amounts to the less glamorous task of 'doing the best they can' with the resources they have.

'Leaky' Biopolitics

Although the overarching logics that drive the desire for bordering and regulation are biopolitical in nature, the everyday implementation of border security at Hyllie was much more pragmatic. This work is shaped by the countless decisions made by individual border officers, the number of guards and police officers on the spot, working conditions, access (or lack thereof) to identification and biometric technologies, imperfect knowledge and bureaucratic hoops, which the border guards must jump through to patch security glitches. These dynamics leave border guards in a tricky position. Sometimes they need to make snap decisions on the spot. Sometimes they miss a few IDs or let a Scandinavian citizen pass without ID. Sometimes contradictory rules prevent them from performing their jobs.

The slightly improvisational organisation of the control and the *ad hoc* decision-making exercised by individual guards point to a less all-encompassing exercise of security than that implied by the framework of biopolitics. Many of these decisions and practices seemingly have deeper roots in concerns about pragmatism, efficiency, discretion and (dys)functionality than 'an overarching goal of protecting borders from palpable threats' (Bourne et al. 2015: 313). While the implementation of control has successfully logged suspected criminals, denied entrance to 'illegals' and is believed to have halted the flow of asylum seekers, the biopolitical 'fantasy of total security' (Bourne et al. 2015: 313) is simply not financially or practically viable. The dissonance between intent and practices on the ground manifests as a 'leaky' biopolitics (Marr 2012: 84); a porous and inefficient performance of biopower.

But as Ferguson (2005) reminds us, 'functionality' and 'efficiency' are multifaceted concepts that hinge on perspective. From the viewpoint of those attempting to cross the border without the right papers or status (e.g., Danish citizens who have forgotten their ID), irregularised migrants or potential criminals, security leaks represent windows of opportunity. From the viewpoint of the border guards on site, shut-downs represent a dysfunctional performance of control. In turn, their successes (e.g., when they 'get a hit' or stop an 'illegal' traveller) can make them view the control as necessary and more efficient. From the perspective of the Swedish state, these misalignments do not necessarily equal dysfunction either. Perhaps the symbolic and possibly preventative effects of performing border control in itself carries more significance than the exact *degree* of control. Moreover, the meaning of functionality changes over time; the rule that Nordic citizens can use driver's licenses as ID was implemented to increase the efficiency of traveling. Today, that rule complicates the work for border guards, simultaneously earning them an unwelcome reputation as racist and discriminatory. It is therefore important to ask *for* whom and *by* whom and at which point is a 'thing' (control, security, regulation) functional and efficient, always bearing in mind its complex and unstable nature.

It is also important to point out that even though the performance of border control is not fully 'efficient', it still has very real consequences for those who are deemed undesirable and excluded. The exercise of power is *productive* in that 'it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse' (Foucault 1980: 118). Thereby the categorisation of people constitutes them as intervenable subjects (Jacobsen 2017), facilitating exclusionary intervention into their lives.

Conclusion

This study presented an empirically grounded account of the everyday performance of biopolitics and border security at Hyllie Station. Its central theoretical contribution is the consideration of how the realisation of biopolitics in practice is complicated both by expressions

of discretion and a range of seemingly mundane factors. Additionally, this article serves as a firm reminder that borderwork at some sites still consists primarily of face-to-face encounters between border officers and travellers. Consequently, it becomes imperative to examine the nature of these encounters. I have done this on a small scale here, building on the growing body of work that investigates everyday bordering (see e.g. Bigo 2014; Borevi & Shakra 2019; Côté-Boucher 2016, 2020; Dzenovska 2014; Hall 2017; Klatt 2020; Kristensen 2019; Peterson 2020; Schwell 2017).

Through a discussion of the border officers' narratives and field observations, I identified a distinct misalignment between 'what is supposed to happen' and 'what actually happens' at the control; a dissonance that I conceptualise as a 'leaky' biopolitics (Marr 2012). Thus, the performance of biopolitical security at Hyllie is undermined by the occasional glitches of security, structural obstacles and the decisions made by individual officers. The defective exercise of biopolitical technologies indicates that control is sometimes 'strategic and symbolic' rather than comprehensive (Chalfin 2007: 1618). Marr (2012: 104) suggests that the aim of policing territory might be more about demonstrating state power than offering a 'solution' to the arrival of unwanted foreigners. At times, however, the performance of security at Hyllie appears neither strategic nor symbolic, but improvisational and outright dysfunctional with guards scrambling to do 'the best they can' with insufficient tools. It follows that the Foucauldian notion of biopolitics exists only as an idea(l), never a fully implementable practice. Although this point may seem obvious, it is sometimes glossed over in studies that focus on the unacceptable violence or datafication exercised at other, more spectacular border sites.

This brings me to the final and most important aim of this study. The seemingly uncontroversial, unspectacular and 'smooth' character of Swedish border control disguises its human implications and the traces of spectacle and humanitarian crisis that inspired its introduction in the first place. The control's progressive normalisation only heightens the importance of sustaining a destabilising critique of the exclusionary, biopolitical logics of border control, which are based on (often obscure) calculations of probabilities and risks. It is thus critical that border scholars continuously shine light on these exclusionary, institutionally embedded structures, even as the dust of the spectacle settles. As Fassin (2013: 229) writes, 'It is never too late to begin to notice that things could have turned out differently – and hence that they still could.'

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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