

# Emotions and Bureaucracy at the Border: Seeking Asylum at Migrationsverket's Service Centre

Department of Social Anthropology

Master Thesis 30 HE Credits

Spring term 2019

Supervisor: Renita Thedvall



Stockholms  
universitet

**Abstract**

*Migrationsverket's* National Service Centre in Sundbyberg is a borderscape displaced from the outer contours of the nation. This borderscape of the interior, perform bordering and difference-making functions in its deciding of who gets to become a citizen, who is to be considered a legitimate refugee and in a sense *who you are*.

Asylum-seekers visiting the Service Centre attempt to make sense of the maze-like bureaucratic organisation they find themselves caught up in. This thesis engages with the materialization and realization of the border, narratives about emotions in the asylum process, and the sensebreaking qualities of the bureaucratic organization of *Migrationsverket* as a Kafkaesque institution through participatory, narrative and engaged ethnographic methodologies.

**Keywords**

Anthropology of emotions, Bureaucracy, Borderscape

# Acknowledgments

I would like to take the opportunity here to in a few words humbly thank the people who have made this thesis possible through their valuable time, advice and patience. First, I want to thank my supervisor Renita Thedvall for her engaged readings and guidance through the writing process. I also want to express my deep gratitude to Parvaneh\*, Zana\*, Bahar\*, Hakim and Adnan for generously giving their time and thoughtfully answering my questions and letting me accompany them in their interactions with *Migrationsverket*. Furthermore, I am greatly indebted to Azadah\*, Setareh\* and Hameed\* whom have provided me with their thought-provoking drawings and volunteered reflective comments about what it is like for them to be in the asylum process. Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to my mother and my partner who have both been there for me, to bounce my ideas off on, and whom have provided thoughts and reflections that I deeply value.

\* All the interlocutors have been provided with pseudonyms

# Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Abstract .....</b>  | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>Acknowledgments .....</b>   | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>List of figures .....</b>   | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Introduction .....</b>  | <b>5</b>  |
| Aims and research questions.....   | 6         |
| Outline of the thesis .....  | 7         |
| <b>Background .....</b>  | <b>9</b>  |
| Methodological approach and ethical considerations .....                                       | 9         |
| Theoretical framework .....  | 15        |
| Background to the field .....  | 19        |
| <b>Chapter 1 The National Service Centre as Border .....</b>                                   | <b>24</b> |
| <b>Chapter 2 Emotions at Work: Boredom, Powerlessness, Humour and Hate at the Border .....</b> | <b>36</b> |
| <b>Chapter 3 Entanglements with Kafkaesque Bureaucracy at the Border .....</b>                 | <b>52</b> |
| <b>Findings and Concluding Remarks .....</b>   | <b>61</b> |
| <b>References.....</b>   | <b>65</b> |

# List of figures

|   |                          |    |
|---|--------------------------|----|
| <b>Figure 1</b> View through exterior glass-wall, from the sidewalk .....                   | Photo: By the author     | 24 |
| <b>Figure 2</b> View through interior glass-wall, from the waiting area .....               | Photo: By the author     | 25 |
| <b>Figure 3</b> Cracked glass screen in the reception .....                                 | Photo: By the author     | 27 |
| <b>Figure 4</b> Tweet about the design of investigation rooms at Migrationsverket .....     | Source: Twitter          | 30 |
| <b>Figure 5</b> Check-in area, overview .....   | Photo: By the author     | 31 |
| <b>Figure 6</b> Check-in-computer, closeup .....  | Photo: By the author     | 31 |
| <b>Figure 7</b> Digital screen showing queue-numbers and booking-codes .....                | Photo: By the author     | 32 |
| <b>Figure 8</b> Sign reading “Grön zon/Green Zone” in waiting area .....                    | Photo: By the author     | 33 |
| <b>Figure 9</b> Example image of a temporary LMA-card .....                                 | Source: Migrationsverket | 34 |
| <b>Figure 10</b> Drawing of waiting area and reception at the Service Centre .....          | Artist: Setareh          | 36 |
| <b>Figure 11</b> Comment to Migrationsverket about time-booking and answer .....            | Source: Facebook         | 38 |
| <b>Figure 11</b> Drawing of waiting area and reception at the Service Centre .....          | Artist: Azadah           | 39 |
| <b>Figure 12</b> Crying baby, detail from drawing .....                                     | Artist: Setareh          | 39 |
| <b>Figure 13</b> Crying baby, detail from drawing .....                                     | Artist: Azadah           | 39 |
| <b>Figure 14</b> Drawing of a person waiting for his turn and dying before he gets it ..... | Artist: Hameed           | 40 |
| <b>Figure 15</b> Crying person exiting the Service Centre, detail from drawing .....        | Artist: Setareh          | 44 |
| <b>Figure 16</b> Update from Migrationsverket, technical issues with the phonenumber ....   | Source: Facebook         | 46 |
| <b>Figure 17</b> Update from Migrationsverket and comment by user .....                     | Source: Facebook         | 48 |
| <b>Figure 18</b> Finger-print scanning device .....   | Source: Migrationsverket | 54 |
| <b>Figure 19</b> ID-photography station .....   | Source: Migartionsverket | 54 |

# Introduction

1) *A woman was tapping her index finger on one of the glass sliding-doors to attract the attention of a clerk on the inside. Eventually the doors slid open. Two children aged 3 or 4 were tapping intensely on another pair of doors, one of the children was crying out for his mother, who was talking to a clerk inside the reception, on the other side of the glass.*

*During the hours I spent overseeing the waiting hall that day I saw many people appearing confused by the sliding-doors. The doors looked similar to the ones you would go through entering a store, that are opened automatically, when a sensor overhead register a body moving underneath. These doors were however operated by remote controls in the hands of the reception clerks, not by sensors overhead. This was not clear to people approaching the reception. They expected the doors to open automatically as they approached. When the expectation was not fulfilled the visitor would take a step back and look up towards the presumed sensor. Oftentimes the person would then turn away and start walking towards the next pair of doors with the understanding that the pair they had first tried must have malfunctioned or been broken in some way. If an employee or security-guard was nearby, when the doors failed to open, visitors to the reception would sometimes ask if the doors were broken and be informed that this was not the case. Sometimes the guards would volunteer information about how the doors functioned to the frustrated visitors who then would nod slowly in understanding.*

2) *Adnan, the person I had accompanied to his asylum interview that day, had just left for the interview with his case-officer, lawyer and translator. They had disappeared from my view, through a locked door and into a corridor leading to investigation rooms and rooms for photographing and biometric registration. Before he was summoned by the case-officer, he had told me that he was not feeling well, his legs had restlessly been shaking while he repeatedly mumbled that he felt stressed and “not fine”.*

3) *A female employee held a thick pile of orange files as she called out names, standing just outside the glass wall. Papers slid out of the files repeatedly and singled down to the floor. An applicant whom she was talking to helped her pick them up. She thanked him. The contents of the files were different kinds of identity and travel documents. The breach of*

*confidentiality occurring when the acts were repeatedly dropped on the floor and picked up by a person who formally should not have access to them was not addressed.*

*4) A woman, whose name was called by the employee with the files, asked if she could also collect her husband's passport as he had been forced to leave for work before his name was called. The employee told her that this was not possible because of the secrecy rules. The husband would have to come and retrieve his passport in person another day, after receiving a new summon by post. The wife frustratedly complained that it was impossible for a working person to wait for hours on end without knowing when the passport would be given out. She asked if it wasn't possible to book a time. The employee told her it was not and proceeded to comment that she had called out the names several times earlier on and this was the very last call, so the wait would not have been so long if they were really there and had really paid attention. I wondered why the employee did not inform the woman of the possibility to retrieve her husband's passport with a signed power of attorney, but I decided it was best not to interfere and remained silent in my seat.*

This study is situated inside the Swedish asylum procedure, specifically in the affective landscape (Berberich, et al., 2013) of the Service Centre and the asylum process. As can be discerned from the vignettes above salient themes are boundaries and b/ordering, bureaucracy, and emotions produced in relation to all of the above.

The seeming arbitrariness of when and for whom the boundary between the waiting area and the reception area would open, described in the first vignette, is illustrative of the opaqueness that is characteristic for many experiences in the asylum application process. The opaqueness of the process and the mysterious workings of the sliding doors is contrasted by the physical transparency of the reception office. The clients, but also the frontline clerks are all on, more or less constant, display during the opening hours of the Service Centre. Everyone can see each other in and from the reception and waiting area, and people on the sidewalk and street outside can see, and be seen from, the inside. While the clerks can indeed be seen, like the clients, the sight is partially blocked by the desk and their computer screens and the clerks can also withdraw to the interior of the building, closed off for visitors' gazes. Schimanski (2017) analyzes glass walls appearing in fictional and non-fictional works of literature. The glass walls appear as symbolic indicators of partial access without true participation, as audiovisual border blocking sound and/or vision and hindering meaningful communication across the divide (Schimanski, 2017). Remember the woman tapping on the glass in the first

vignette, she had no way of knowing whether her tap could be heard from the other side, or if she, as seemed to be the case, had to wait until she was eventually seen.

Adnan's shaking leg in the second vignette and his comment about how he was feeling together with the frustrated wife in the fourth vignette speaks to some of the affects produced in waiting, in the asylum process in general and at the Service Centre in particular. One of my other interlocutors, Bahar, explained to me that there is a "special kind of stress" that one feels while waiting at *Migrationsverket*, distinct from what she experienced in other waiting rooms. These and other affects in the asylum process will be discussed in chapter 2.

The different ways that client confidentiality was observed or breached in vignette three and four speaks to the most mundane perpetuations of power differentiations between asylum seekers and the personnel at the Service Centre and of what Clegg (2016) calls *organizational carelessness*. The employee's questioning of the wife's statement, that she and her husband had been waiting for a long time, and the questioning of whether they had really paid attention, is also significant of the same organizational carelessness and a disregard of the asylum seekers time that will be further discussed in chapter 3.

I will consider *Migrationsverket* (the Swedish Migration Agency) as borderscape in the sense of a duality of practice and experience, derived from the term landscape as both noun and verb (dell'Agnese, 2015). *Migrationsverket*, thus, can be understood as a borderscape and as *borderscaping*, in other words, as both a spatial entity and as a transformative activity producing categories and making difference.

### **Aims and research questions**

The purpose of this thesis is to bring forward the workings of emotions at the border. I examine emotions at the border in the process of seeking asylum at Swedish Migration Agency service- and reception centre. By applying the lens of *borderscape* to the service centre, perspectival, interactional and relational aspects of this instantiation of the national border, as a difference-producing zone, are opened up. The work that borders do, in making difference and creating insiders and outsiders, differentiating between citizens and non-citizens, becomes visible, as it emanates from border-artefacts and border practises in the process and at the centre, from the vantage points of the waiting room and reception.

I aim, firstly, to gain insights into emotions put to work and worked on in the process of seeking asylum and to the space of the service centre. The second aim of the study is to shed light on the bureaucratic aspects of this border and how, what I understand as the Kafkaesque



aspects of this bureaucracy, affect asylum-seekers. I have done this through interpretation and analysis of data collected during fieldwork at the National Service Centre in Sundbyberg, combined with online observations and semi-structured interviews with asylum-seekers.

The central research questions that this thesis aim to answer are:

1. How does *Migrationsverket* in general and the Service Centre in particular, function as a constructing part of the National Border?
2. What emotions arise from and are at work in the process, of seeking asylum in Sweden, considering the process' bureaucratic, socio- material and interactional aspects?
3. How does the bureaucratic organization make visitors feel and act?

My core interest lay in exploring the Swedish border in regard to asylum seekers' emotions and activities in the asylum application process. This interest derives in equal parts from an academic interest in critical border studies and anthropology of emotion, anthropology of bureaucracy and a personal involvement in migrant-rights work. I aim to contribute to the anthropological fields of *border, emotion and bureaucracy*. My contribution lay in adding to the existing body of research on Kafkaesque bureaucracy in migration processes by among others (Sutton & Vigneswaran, 2011) and to research on emotion work performed in relation to sensebreaking organisations (Clegg, et al., 2016). Methodologically this thesis places itself within the textual genre of "ethnographies of the particular" (Abu-Lughod, 1991) focusing closely on the lived experiences of particular individuals at particular places during a particular time.

### **Outline of the thesis**

In the following background I outline methodological and ethical considerations that has guided the research process. Thereafter I lay out the theoretical framework of the thesis. Finally, I provide a brief background to the field where I sketch out the bureaucratic organisation of the Swedish asylum process and situate *Migrationsverket* in a historical context.

Chapter 1: The National Service Centre as Border, focus on borderscaping processes taking place at the National Service Centre. In this chapter I look at the power relations implicated in the uneven distribution of (hyper)visibility at the centre and at the day to day interactions between applicants and employees taking place at the centre.

Chapter 2: Emotions at Work: Boredom, Powerlessness, Humour and Hate at the Border, is situated in the affective landscapes of the asylum process and the centre. Here applicants' narratives of boredom, powerlessness and of anger and frustrations as well as their use of jokes and humour are related and discussed.

Chapter 3: Entanglements with Kafkaesque Bureaucracy, in this chapter I immerse myself in the bureaucratic world of the process and the applicants sensemaking strategies in the face of a procedure perceived as opaque, overly complicated and at times punishing.

In the conclusion I recapitulate the main insights from the three chapters and relate these to the research questions. Here I discuss the findings and tie them together. In my final remarks I offer some personal reflections on the field.

## Background

### Methodological approach and ethical considerations

#### *Engagement and reflexivity*

To start this section of I feel it necessary to declare my own position in the field, how I came to do research about seeking asylum and how my standpoint bears on the data and analysis. Following up on this I will introduce the values of collaboration and advocacy from engaged anthropology (Low & Merry, 2010) embraced in this thesis. I want to heed Davies (2002) encouragement to ethnographers to examine as honestly and carefully as possible our personal reasons for undertaking certain research and our feelings about it.

I entered the field with certain experiences and traits that influenced how I was received and what I experienced. I am a young woman inhabiting a body that is, depending on the context, sometimes read as first and foremost the body of a natural citizen and sometimes first as a body with a migratory history. While I myself have not migrated across any nation-state- or even county borders, my family history is one of migrations across international borders as well as from rural to urban areas. I am the child of one parent born in Sweden, who in her turn has one parent born here and one who has migrated here as an adult. My other parent has migrated to Sweden as a refugee from southern Kurdistan during the Iran/Iraq war in the late 80s. I am the grandchild of a grandmother who migrated to Sweden from west Germany after

the end of the second world war, to work as a maid which was the only employment that the Swedish migration law allowed her to take for the first two years of residence, at that time (Strollo, 2013) and a grandfather who moved from a country-home in the forests of Småland to the centre of Stockholm. This history is inscribed in and on my body in the form of social structures of racialization (Fassin, 2011). My own positionality has likely led me to emotionally align with and form stronger relations and report with the interlocutors that share certain traits with me. Both Zana and Parvaneh, who became my key-interlocutors, are women from lower middle-class backgrounds, with higher education, who have lived in urban neighbourhoods. Furthermore, they are both single mothers, struggling to secure their children's futures which is, in some respects, relatable for me, as the daughter of a single mother.

Social location and experiences of race may influence our very experience of perception and thus my own situatedness in the research context must be considered (Ramos-Zayas, 2011). The way my body is read has influenced my in-field relations, officials at the Migration Agency has tended to read me as a fellow asylum seeker and family member of the persons I have accompanied rather than for example a friend or support person. It has also meant that my interlocutors take some shared experiences for granted and others not, starting some accounts about experiences of race or gender with 'you know' and about *refugeeness* with 'you don't know this, but...' or 'you can never understand this, because you are not a refugee'. Fassin (2011) means that historical experiences of race correspond to the way we, individually and collectively, make sense of events and situations through which we are racialized and racialize others.

I have a background as an activist in the no-border movement and as an advocate for undocumented migrants' rights. Being an activist has opened doors for me when it came to find asylum-seeking interlocutors as I have an already established reputation locally as a person who can be trusted with sensitive information, but also as a person who 'helps refugees' which has meant that I have had to manage expectations and take good care to try to define and articulate in-field-relations. I have made clear to my interlocutors what I can and cannot help them with and that while they are free to contact me and ask for advice and information about where to turn for different services I cannot provide economical or legal support.

It is possible that my position has also closed doors when it came to finding someone from the Migration Agency willing to let themselves be interviewed by me or let me access the

interior spaces of the Service Centre. To the best of my knowledge this has however not been the case and my background has not been addressed in my contacts with the Migration Agency. Regardless of the above, my research interest and the focus of this thesis lay first and foremost with the experiences of the asylum-seekers.

My political stance and activist background have likely influenced and hopefully enriched the data I have gotten in interviews and conversations with asylum-seekers as well as my analysis. Shannon Speed (2008) argues that direct political engagement with the communities she worked in made the complexities and contradictions in her participants situations clear and led her away from easy assertions and I hold a similar view. She furthermore suggests that an activist engagement “while full of challenges, also entail insights that might not be gleaned from simple observation” (Speed, 2008, pp. 185-186).

### *Participants and participatory methods*

Reflexive practice combined with collaborative and participatory methods can, according to Block, et al.(2013) help to alleviate the risk of doing harm through misrepresentation of members of often relatively dis-empowered groups such as asylum-seekers. To the extent possible within the setting and time-frame of this study I have tried to privilege participatory methods over non-participatory ones.

Three of my interlocutors are children between the ages of 7 and 11 years of age. Doing research with children, in particular, children in socially vulnerable living situations such as asylum-seeking children, require careful ethical considerations.

There is a risk that the distance created by the power differential between researcher and the people we do research with is amplified by the power differential between adults and children. The choice of research method can mitigate or increase this distance. Whalström Smith and Ascher (2016) suggest a methodological approach that is co-created with the participants as co-researchers when doing research with children. I have not done any formal interviews with those of my interlocutors who are children. They have expressed that the interview-form is both boring and stressful for them. We have thus chosen other ways of eliciting data about their experiences. I have asked them questions about their take on different aspects of the asylum-process in informal settings and used their spontaneous comments from the field.

Through the participatory visual method of solicited drawings (Vince & Samantha, 2012 ), (Packard, 2008) the children actively engaged in the epistemic and empirical analysis of the site. They have drawn and written their experiences from the Service Centre using pencil and different coloured felt-tip pens on paper. Reproductions of the drawings are presented in the main chapters. Through the drawings the interlocutors contributed both to the ethnographic material and the analytical framework through their visual and textual commentary on the affective landscape.

Going into the field I already had a trustful relationship with Parvaneh and her children through my role as an activist and from previous fieldwork over the years. Parvaneh has generously contributed with her own time and thoughts. She has also given me expressed permission to use her children's drawings and quotes.

To build a trustful enough relationship with the children, over the short field period, for them to participate in the form that they now have done would probably not have been possible. The fact that we know each other since before has also meant that there has not been the usual need to plan for my exit from the field and what kind, if any, relation we will have after the research period. It has been clear from the beginning to all of us that we will continue to hang out on occasion after the thesis is done albeit less intensely than during the fieldwork-period.

### *Participant Observation*

Participant observation (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011) has been one of the main methods for gathering data for this thesis and during the fieldwork I have oscillated between the observatory and participatory poles of the continuum. Most of the time I spent in the field I was accompanying interlocutors whom I knew or had at least met with before. After I had expressed my interest to accompany them or other asylum seekers they knew who would let me *shadow* them (Czarniawska, 2007). I was invited to tag along for appointments and planned drop-in visits to the service centre during the field period. The only day I arrived alone to the field was to attend and observe a demonstration held on the pavement outside the Service Centre.

Depending on the nature of the meeting the person I accompanied had I would either write fieldnotes on my smartphone while at the site or just take headnotes and write in the evening when I got home. When the person I accompanied had an interview or registration session in the interior of the building which I could not access I would stay in the waiting hall. Sitting

back and waiting, I had plenty of time to take notes and observe what was going on in the waiting room and the reception area. On days when the interlocutors only had errands in the reception I would come with them into the reception and listen to the interaction between them and the clerks. For the most time I had a purely observative role in the reception area but on a few occasions the person I was accompanying would turn to me for clarification or confirmation of something or simply seek eye contact for reassurance that everything was okay. In the waiting room I was sometimes co-waiting with the people I was there with for several hours and, depending on what kind of relation we had and what mood they were in, we would spend the time talking or investigating the waiting room together. Sometimes there would only be small talk about things not directly touching upon the field or my research, sometimes the talks would take the shape of informal interviews and at other times more of pep-talks when the person was looking for reassurance before their registration or asylum investigation. During the demonstration I snapped photographs and took up recordings of both audio and video to be used as audio-visual fieldnotes, complementing the written notes I took on my way home.

#### *Formal interviews*

I have conducted semi-structured interviews in private settings with some of my informants. The interviews have been conducted in Swedish or English and in one case with the aid of a translator between Dari and Swedish. I have recorded sound from the interviews with my interlocutors' consent and transcribed them in full length. The length of the interview sessions ranged from 30 minutes to 90 minutes. For each interview I prepared a small set of open-ended questions and informed the interlocutors that they at any point could terminate the interview, decline to answer a question or steer away from a subject they did not feel comfortable with.

Through the interviews my interlocutors took on the role of both narrators and co-researchers. I deliberately made sure there was time and space for them to steer towards subjects and queries within the scope of the research that they wanted to analyse, allowing for silences and thought pauses. Both Zana and Parvaneh would bring up experiences they found important to the context of the thesis, saying "you should write about this" or even "you *have to* write about this!". Though my questions and prompts were emotionally neutral I allowed myself to engage with the emotions displayed by my interlocutors and be moved by their narratives. In this I was following Åsa Wettergren's (2015) cue to participate emotionally in ethnographic

settings. “Emotional participation is a necessary tool of the ethnographer generally, but even more so when the purpose is to analyze emotional processes (Wettergren, 2015, p. 121)”.

In the interview where a translator was employed some of the data unfortunately had to be disregarded as unreliable due to problems with the quality of the translation. The interlocutor chose her brother as her translator as she felt safe to talk freely about her experiences around him. In retrospect it turned out that the brother did not consequently translate questions and answers in full and that he sometimes added information to the answers that had not been there in the original statement. I suspected this was happening already during the interview but did not know to what extent before I got a second opinion from an independent listener who is competent in both languages. This second ‘translation of the translation’ helped me to sift out the data that could still be used from the bits of the interview that had been correctly translated.

### *Online data*

As a compliment to participant observations and formal interviews I have done online observations, best categorized as *lurking* (Strickland & Schlesinger, 1969) at *Migrationsverket*’s facebook-page and browsing conversations at Twitter and Instagram mentioning *Migrationsverket*. In this I attempt to heed Hallet and Barber’s (2013) call for ethnographers to respond, adapt, and reflect on the shifts that has taken place in society, rendering computer mediated communication an important facet of people’s experiences of social life. *Migrationsverket*’s presence online is part of their service functions and I understand their Facebook-page as a room that share a lot of properties with the Service Centre’s waiting hall but caters to a wider public. Asylum seekers can interact with each other and other interested members of the public as well as pose questions to representants of *Migrationsverket* and access information posted at the page, in this room.

### *Visual materials*

In this thesis visual data in the form of photographs, screenshots and drawings are interspersed with the text. The drawings, rather than being merely illustrations supporting the written content, constitute independent narratives with analytical points in and of them self. Rather than simply describing the drawings I attempt to go into dialogue with them by

placing them in relation to theoretical and prosaic works as well as other interlocutors' narratives. The usage of children's own pictures as ethnographic method is inspired by the methods used by Ascher and Wahlström in their study with children living in an undocumented situation (Ascher & Wahlström, 2016).

In contrast to how the drawings are employed to do analytical work I have employed screenshots simply to illustrate described events, taking place in *Migrationsverket's* online channels.

My own photographs from the field are snapshots taken with the camera of my smartphone. The photographs were taken with both realist and critical ambition. In the interest of recreating the observable material reality (Walz, et al., 2016) of the Service Centre I captured the overview shots photographed through the glass-walls. The close-up pictures, showing details cut from their surrounding context, reflect my own gaze and which details I purposefully want to bring the viewers' attention.

## **Theoretical framework**

### *Border*

Border and boundary studies is a vast and expanding field. There is an ongoing discussion of how to define borders and what kind of things borders are. Borders have no a priori natural existence, like all boundaries separating humans they are made and continuously being defined by someone (Popescu, 2012). "Border making is a power strategy that uses difference to assert control over space by inscribing difference in space" (Popescu, 2012, p. 10).

State borders both give meaning to and are giving meaning by what they enclose and have simultaneously territorial and symbolic qualities to them. Popescu (2012) means that borders of today are losing some of their linear qualities and are taking on more regional and network-like qualities. Still borders have linear as well as spatial and other qualities depending on the local and historical contexts and on who is looking. The idea of border as line can be understood as a *non-indexical* concept of border since the line is an abstraction and takes up no actual space (Green, 2016). Indexicality is a linguistic term denoting a pointing relationship between the word and something tangible in the world, in the case of border, a place. A non-indexical term conversely, is a sort of empty signifier, it points to nothing that can be experienced through the senses. This non-indexical idea of the line can



however be turned into tangible reality by being represented in material form such as walls and bureaucratic border paraphilia such as visas, passports and the process of seeking asylum. All these manifestations of the border may be seen as part of the process of turning a non-indexical concept into some kind of reality (Green, 2016). In everyday life “borders are always, in one way or another, indexical places (Green, 2016, p. 586)”. The personalized “smart border” inscribed in the body through biometrics is the logical endpoint to the linear idea of border where indexical and non-indexical concepts meet. When asylum seekers are required to submit their fingerprints for registration the border is consequently, in a sense, redrawn through or around their bodies.

Another take on borders is the lens of *borderscapes* which allows us to conceive of borders as generative dialectical processes making multiple borderland spaces not all of which are necessarily located in proximity to official international boundaries (Brambilla, Laine, Scott, & Bocchi, 2015). Borderscapes are “[c]onstructed spaces that, far from being fixed in space and time, are constantly evolving” (Brambilla, 2015a, p. 23). Alluding to Appadurai's five - *scapes* the suffix -scape offer the possibility to express the fluidity and unevenness in form of the scapes in question. The borderscapes concept “brings the vitality of borders to our attention, revealing that the border is by no means a static line, but a mobile and relational space. The border is a ‘perspectival’ construction” (Brambilla, 2015a, p. 22). Analysing *Migrationsverket* and its offices within the frame of borderscape let us tease out perspectival and generative aspects of its *borderness* (Green, 2016).

Green (2016) points out the strong association between borders and stopping things from happening, stalling and generating endless waiting. Balibar (2011) goes so far as to say that for the poor person from a poor country whom repeatedly run up against the border, pass an repass it, the border eventually becomes the place where he resides. “Almost a home – a home in which to live a life which is a waiting-to-live, a non-life” (Balibar, 2011, p. 83). This resonates with van Houtum's (2010) reading of Kafka's parable or *countermyth* (Munro & Huber, 2012) about the man from the country, waiting before the law. “By internalizing and believing in the fantasy of the Law he has found a pseudo-home, an in-the-meantime-home at the gate” (van Houtum, 2010, p. 291).

Waiting is a salient aspect of my interlocutors' experiences with *Migrationsverket* as border and organisation. Waiting is a suspension and bracketing of activities where the “natural flow of life will resume only when the period of waiting is over” (Benedixen & Eriksen, 2018, pp. 92-93) Waiting may be seen as an activity or indeed as the passing of ‘dead’ time, bracketing activities. Here I will understand waiting both as a ‘thing’ of bureaucracy and a product of

bordering. I analyse waiting as both a by-product of the procedures that make up the asylum process and as a technology of power. Khosravi (2014) in analysing waiting in migration notes that keeping people in wait, without ruining their hope, is an exercise of power over those people's time. Repeatedly making the applicants 'come back tomorrow', demanding that they answer the same questions over and over again, and "the bureaucrat's professed inability to predict outcome and duration: all these elements, the components of indifference, conduce to the squelching of even a semblance of personal temporality" (Herzfeld, 1993, p. 163).

Waiting occurs in an array of instances in the asylum process, asylum seekers wait for summons to appointments, for decisions and documents to be sent, they wait for lawyers to call and, perhaps the most tangible instance, they wait in lines and waiting halls at the reception centres for personal service or appointments. A function of the waiting room and the queueing in line is to make it evident that this burden of waiting is shared by others and thus elicit compliance by means of social pressure exerted by the collective i.e. if I have had to wait for my turn, so should you (Lipsky, 2010). The long term waiting, so to say, before the border, for a final decision in the asylum case has indeed become a state of being and the border a kind of residence in itself, for some of the asylum seekers I have talked to during the writing this thesis.

### *Bureaucracy*

In this section I will introduce theoretical perspectives on bureaucracy and bureaucratic practices relevant for this thesis. I understand bureaucracy as an institution of modernity made up by public things such as "offices, documents, technocratic procedures and infrastructures that seek to provide the foundation for social relationships with the state" (Bear & Mathur, 2015, p. 19). I understand *Migrationsverket* within the analytical frame of the Kafkaesque Organization (Clegg, et al., 2016) with a bureaucracy perceived by clients as overly complex and opaque. The concept of Kafkaesque bureaucracy comes from organisational theory and is developed in works by, among others (Clegg, et al., 2016), (Warner, 2007) and (Munro & Huber, 2012). The theory is derived from concepts mainly developed in the novels *The Trial* (Kafka, 1925), *The Castle* (Kafka, 1926) and *America* (Kafka, 1927). The novel that I have found relevant to look to for insights in this thesis is *The Trial* (Kafka, 1925). In contrast to the Weberian ideal type reading of bureaucracy as crafted from rationality the Kafkaesque bureaucracy is "cast from irony, in which the expectation of

rationality is confounded at every turn by the experience of being in organizations” (Clegg, et al., 2016, p. 158). In the Weberian bureaucratic organisation dispassionate bureaucrats are guided by solid principles and handle all clients and cases equally, with systematic efficiency. The Kafkaesque institution’s bureaucratic organisation is rife with arbitrariness and pettiness, it blocks sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and may even take on *sensebreaking* aspects engendering feelings of powerlessness and futility among its clients. Sensebreaking is here understood as blocking of meaning, where sensemaking strategies render no understanding and the asylum-seeker is left confused (Clegg, et al., 2016). This view of bureaucracy aligns with Herzfeld’s (1993) notion of bureaucratic systems as built on ritualistic acts more than rationality. With Douglas (1966) concept of dirt as “matter out of place” Herzfeld argues that through bureaucratic procedure such as that of assigning immigration status, the fate, of those cast as outsiders to the ‘national family’ and ‘truly out of place’ by state officials, becomes “a matter of indifference to those who have the good fortune (for such is the cosmology of luck) to find themselves already among the elect” (Herzfeld, 1993, p. 167).

Tuckett (2015), in line with a Kafka-inspired reading of bureaucracy, sees bureaucratic encounters as affective, far from Weber’s disinterested ideal. Bureaucracies and bureaucratic encounters “produce and are produced by emotion, self-interest, social networks and much more” (Tuckett, 2015, p. 114).

### *Emotions*

In this thesis I let episodes, wherein my interlocutors brush up against the sharp edges of the bureaucratic process of seeking asylum, take up a lot of space. This is not merely a stylistic choice but a methodological one. Narratives allow us to understand how events and emotions are linked together in longer chains than can be mediated by snapshots. In the recent volume *Emotional Worlds -Beyond an Anthropology of Emotion*, Beatty (2019) argues for a narrative model for writing and analysing emotions. The narrative is important in the *construction, understanding, and reporting* of emotions according to Beatty. “Every emotion tells a story. Which is why a latecomer stumbling on rage or laughter hastens to find the cause” (Beatty, 2019, p. 109). In the context of the fieldwork I was the latecomer, stumbling on emotions related to chains of earlier encounters and events that had played out before my entrance into the field. Beatty further suggest that it is vital to acquire “a feel for narrative context and how it is channelled in emotion” or else we might miss or misunderstand much of what matters to the people we are living among during fieldwork.

an awareness of emotion in narrative context brings to light the contradictions and conflicts that people experience as social beings, their not fitting, their resistance or unwilling capitulation to social pressures (or their happy conformity), their abrasions with reality, their struggles for meaning. For the same reason, narrative works against a relativism that would encompass emotion within culture – depersonalizing it – as if nothing escapes the cultural embrace. A narrative approach leaves opaque what resists social analysis; it acknowledges the irreducible; it does not force an answer (Beatty, 2019, p. 184).

I conceive of the Service Centre as an affective landscape (Berberich, et al., 2013) in which emotions are managed and/or put to work. In doing participant observations at the centre I have tried to stay attentive to the emotions circulating in there and understood these as constructive of the centre as a “social-emotional world” (Pérez, 2015, pp. 148-149)

Emotion work (not to be confused with the under-category *emotion labour*, which is the use of emotion work for wage) refers to “the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling” (Hochschild, 1979, p. 561). This kind of management of feelings is emergent in my interlocutors’ confrontation with the bureaucratic processes taking place at the Service Centre. Hochschild identifies two types of emotion work, evocative and suppressive. The suppressive type is the most salient one in my material, pertaining to emotion work in the reception and waiting areas of the Service Centre.

## **Background to the field**

In this section I will provide a short introduction to how the asylum process is organized in Sweden, to set the context for this thesis. Furthermore, I will provide some background on *Migrationsverket* as organization and the Service Centre. First, I will outline the different parts of the process and then I will say something of the laws and conventions regulating the Swedish asylum process.

### *Migrationsverket*

“Migrationsverket”, formerly “Statens Invandrarverk” (year 1969-2000), operates under regulations adopted in 2007 (2007:996) and adjusted in 2018 (2018:404). The authority’s function is to manage, in accordance with national laws, matters of residence permit, work

permit, visa, reception of asylum seekers, referral of newly arrived migrants to municipalities, return, citizenship and repatriation (2007:996 §1). *Migrationsverket* is headed by a general director and derive its authority and mission from the government in the form of appropriation directions and spending authorisations issued on a yearly basis.

The Service Centre building is located in central Sundbyberg, a municipality in the Stockholm region. The locale used to contain a department store and a betting-shop before it was repurposed to host Migrationsverket. The storefront's display-windows have been furnished with the "Migrationsverket" logotype and a few other decals but otherwise remains intact, while the interior has been completely remodelled.

### *Seeking Asylum in Sweden*

In this section I will very briefly introduce the formal steps asylum seekers go through in claiming asylum. The steps are listed in chronological order as presented by *Migrationsverket*. I have made the methodological choice to present the information that is usually most readily available for the first-time asylum seekers and add only brief additional comments. The following or even less information about the asylum process represent what the first-time applicants I have met know about the process before entering into it. Asylum seekers who have friends or family that have already been through parts of, or a complete asylum process can sometimes also tap into their experiences. With that additional information they may be better equipped to navigate the asylum process than their counterparts.

The text in bold paragraphs below is the information about the asylum process that *Migrationsverket* provide at their website. The sentences following each bolded paragraph are additional reflections based on my experiences in the field that I have added to flesh out the sparse information about the steps described by *Migrationsverket*.

**"You must fill in forms with questions about things like your name, citizenship and family, for example"** (Migrationsverket, 2017).

Arriving at a Service or reception-centre asylum applicants are required to provide certain biographical information. Usually the questions are answered orally, and a clerk fill out the form digitally. Aside from the data mentioned in the above paragraph, the asylum seeker is asked about their birthplace, last place of residence in their homeland, their route to Sweden and current health status.

**“You must hand in your passport or other identity documents to show who you are”** (Migrationsverket, 2017).

If the applicant carries no identity documents on them upon arrival to the centre they are instructed to obtain and hand in such documents on a later occasion. Failing to do so may have consequences pertaining both to the outcome of the process and the possibility to take up regular employment during the asylum process.

**“The Swedish Migration Agency will photograph you and take your fingerprints. The fingerprints are used to see whether you have applied for asylum in any other country in Europe, or if you have permission or prohibition to stay in any other country in Europe”** (Migrationsverket, 2017).

As a party to the Dublin-regulation Sweden utilizes the Eurodac-system. “The Eurodac project was proposed in 1997 and went live in 2003 as a response to the problem of determining applicants’ prior stay in other Member States” (Ajana, 2013, p. 49). The asylum-seeker’s fingerprints are run through an EU-wide database that contains the digitalized fingerprints of every person over the age of 14 who is claiming asylum in one of the EU countries. (Ajana, 2013).

**“With the help of an interpreter, you must tell more about who you are, why you have left your home country and how you have travelled to Sweden”** (Migrationsverket, 2017).

This part of the registration constitutes a kind of pre-interview during which a case-officer will ask less detailed questions than during the formal “asylum-interview”. During this first interview the applicant has no legal representation assigned. The details provided during this first interview play a decisive role in whether the applicant will later be provided with a legal representative or not. In cases where the outcome is considered to be given from the start, a lawyer may not be assigned.

**“If you do not have any money, you can apply for financial support. You will receive a bank card and information about daily allowance and special benefits”** (Migrationsverket, 2017).

The procedure to apply for daily allowance usually includes a short interview with a case officer where the applicant is asked about their financial situation including income from wage or capital and owned property or chattel. The case officer fills out and file a form with the applicant’s answers to the questions. The applicant is told that they are obliged to answer truthfully.

**“You will get information about the asylum process, the next steps and what you must do. You will also get information about practical issues, such as your right to housing, medical care and schooling for your children”** (Migrationsverket, 2017).

The different steps of the registration-process outlined above are administered by different employees and the completion of the registration may take anything from a few hours to a few days in demand.

**“There are long queues at the Migration Agency, and you may have to wait for a long time for an asylum investigation. The waiting period can also vary from person to person”** (Migrationsverket, 2017).

If the applicant’s fingerprints are detected in Eurodac they may be subject to expulsion to another European country in accordance with the Dublin-regulation. In such cases the application process is halted and deferred to the state responsible according to the regulation. If no matches are found in the database, the asylum-seeker is referred to the reception-system while awaiting the investigation.

**“When it is your turn for asylum investigation, you will get an appointment letter by post. The letter states when and where you will see an investigator. It is important that you tell the Migration Agency if you move, so that we have your address when we send the letter to you”** (Migrationsverket, 2017).

Sometimes the applicant will have one or multiple meetings with their legal representation before the interview, while other applicants meet their lawyer for the first time in the investigation room. There is no way of knowing when the summon letter will come and many asylum seekers anxiously examine their post-boxes every day or, if they receive their post at another address than the one they live on, ask the person that empty the box if they have any letters from *Migrationsverket*.

**“The investigator will start by telling you what the interview is about and what rights and obligations you have. For example, you are obliged to tell the truth and not to hide anything. The investigator and the interpreter have a professional duty of confidentiality”** (Migrationsverket, 2017).

The interview may vary considerably in length and can under certain circumstances also be interrupted and postponed to a later date for example if the applicant and the interpreter have trouble understanding each other.

**“The investigator keeps minutes of what is said. If you have a public counsel, the counsel shall approve the minutes, which are then filed together with all the documents you have handed in”** (Migrationsverket, 2017).

After the interview the applicant will usually have an opportunity to go through and adjust the minutes from the interview. Depending on the circumstances during the interview, how well the translation works, how close attention the investigator has paid and if there have been ambiguities in the questions or answers the adjustments necessary are sometimes extensive and the applicant is to a large dependent of an engaged counsellor.

**“The decision is based on your account and the documents you have handed in to support what you have told about your identity and your reasons for asylum, and the Migration Agency’s knowledge about the situation in your homeland”** (Migrationsverket, 2017).

The agency’s knowledge about the applicant’s homeland, referred to in the paragraph above points mainly to reports and articles available in Migrationsverket’s own country information database called LIFOS.

**“After the decision, you will have an interview at the Migration Agency where an administrator tells you whether your application has been approved or refused, whether you have been given any particular status and what happens next”** (Migrationsverket, 2017).

**“The decision is written in Swedish, but you will receive oral information about the decision from an interpreter. You will be told about the decision the Migration Agency has made and why we found that decision was the right one in your case”** (Migrationsverket, 2017).

If *Migrationsverket’s* decision is to reject the application the applicant will be informed on how to appeal the decision to *Migrationsdomstolen*, the Migration Court. Provided that the applicant had a public counsel during the investigation they have the right to get help in the appeal process by the same public counsel.



# Chapter 1

## The National Service Centre as Border



Figure 1

I will in this chapter focus on material and organizational aspects of the Service Centre as a site where parts of the asylum-process take place. I look at the Service Centre's waiting area and reception as lived space (Wasserman & Frenkel, 2015) through the lens of borderscape and draw parallels to Kafka's (1925) milieu. In this chapter I also look at material aspects of the border as devices for categorizing people and making the border real.

The waiting area with its straight rows of chairs, broad gangways and sterile atmosphere bears resemblance to an airport- or hospital waiting hall, in all events it has an air of transience and limbo.

The waiting room is inhabited by asylum-seekers who are there "in order for agents of the state to decide that they are who they say they are, that their stories add up, that their identities might prove essential enough to guarantee their entry" (Seitz, 2017, p. 443). The hypervisibility of the waiting subjects enforces a sense of being under constant scrutiny.

The window and the feeling of being on involuntary, public display during one's process is also a theme in Kafka's (1925) novel *The Trial*. During his detention procedure Josef K is observed through different windows by his curious neighbours from across the street. K is disturbed by the spectators, tries to get them to go away and exclaims that they are such intrusive and ruthless people (Kafka, 1925).

The glass walls, simultaneously separating and connecting the waiting area and reception, may have the same disciplining effect as the security guards, rendering the visitors to manage their emotions carefully, or they could upset them and engender the sense of public humiliation that Josef K gave expression to.



*Figure 2*

### **Glass Walls as See-through Border**

A striking material aspect of the Service Centre is its glass walls. These walls signal different messages depending on who is looking and from where. They let both light and gazes through while blocking the free passage of bodies and air. While the clerks in the reception area are partially concealed behind their desk, the visitors are exposed to gazes from both the street and the reception area. The only places where the visitor can temporarily escape being seen is the toilets and nursing room.

the windows suggest a sense of always being observed. They are, in a way, the visual correlate of the constraining power of networks and the constant monitoring they permit. They also communicate a sense of the ideological functioning of the contemporary order, the way barriers and boundaries seem to have disappeared but are still present (O'Shaughnessy, 2011).

Sometime in November, a few months after the centre opened, grey-beige curtains were installed on the inside of the long glass-wall between the reception and waiting hall, to make it possible to close off the view. During my visits I have never seen the curtains closed, but they nonetheless signal the possibility and potential need to, at some point, do so.

The glass-wall of the reception is interspersed with three pairs of sliding-doors which are opened from the inside by Migrationsverket's clerks sitting behind a wave-formed continuous desk with 30 counters.

Sometimes I saw a guard positioned by the sliding doors between the waiting hall and the reception. The guard kept people, who had not come in turn yet, from entering when the door opened and patiently explained to confused applicants that the doors were not broken, they were just not opened by a sensor activated when someone approached them, but by remote controls, operated by the clerks behind the desks. Sometimes the doors were really broken though, and handwritten or printed notes would be taped on the glass, announcing that they were out of order.

The glass-walls and their sliding doors that make people wait to be let in to the reception constitute a kind of border inside the border, dividing those who are still waiting from those who have come in turn. This border inside the border both close out and close in as the doors only open at the press on the button of a clerk behind the desk. Glass lends particular material and symbolic properties to the border. The surface is hard and sleek, cold to the touch most of the time but can also be warmed up when exposed to sunlight. The glass wall is transparent, almost invisible but can also become reflexive under certain light conditions. Glass is a dense material and blocks the passage of bodies and even air pressing up on it. During the course of a day the surface goes from being almost completely invisible to becoming more and more tangible as it gets stained by faces and hands pressed to the surface, to finally becoming more reflexive than transparent as the sun sets outside and the light conditions change. The glass at the Service Centre, although tempered, is also fragile, it can shatter, crack and brake when exposed to certain forms of force. The image below depicts the cracked glass screen, separating hatch 22 and 22 at the reception desk, held together with tape.



Figure 3

Talking about the reception-desks inside of the glass wall Parvaneh said "just a small piece of glass in between them, one can hear, everyone inside do hear each other's problems". The sounds of other people's problems resonate inside the enclosed reception area along the 30 seats long desk that are divided by glass plates. The room for privacy and secrecy is limited in many of the world's border zones and the Service Centre is no exception. The glass blocks the passage of sound between the two areas, mouths and bodies are seen moving on the other side of the glass but the audio that goes along with the movements only escapes for the brief moments when the sliding doors open.

Hakim had a more positive take on the reception desks than Parvaneh. He said that the reception desks felt more welcoming here than in the old Reception Center in Solna since there was no window glass separating the clerk and applicant here. Hakim explained that that piece of glass had made him feel as though the people working there thought that the applicants were dangerous or diseased people that they needed to protect themselves from. Without the glass he felt more like a human.

Bahar, who had not experienced any of the old reception centers, said that she thought the architecture of center was normal and modern.

The fact that applicants were granted little privacy at the reception desks was nothing new, the situation had been pretty much the same, although in smaller scale since the number of desks

had been smaller at the other centers. In fact, the glass wall separating the waiting hall from the reception can be seen as a small improvement in this context. The breakdown of the glass boundary between the clerk and asylum seeker at the desk came simultaneously with the raising of the significantly more voluminous boundary in the form of the glass wall dividing the locale. As the waiting area and reception area had been integrated in Hallonbergen and Solna, not only could everyone in the reception hear everything you and the clerk you were speaking to said to each other but many of those sitting and waiting could also hear you. At the same time, in the other centers, visitors had not been visible from the street. The old centers had also been slightly more secluded, not located on busy shopping streets but still close to commuter stops.

### **Glass Cages**

The theme of glass walls at the Service Centre has been publicly addressed in terms of lack of privacy and violation of client's integrity by the lawyer Karin Gyllenring. In November Gyllenring wrote on the social-media outlet Twitter, "Come on Migrationsverket, what are you waiting for!? This is what one of the investigation rooms looked like when I was going to attend an investigation with a trafficked woman." In consecutive posts addressing Migrationsverket directly she writes "Do you think this as a suitable environment to conduct confidential errands in??", "Do you need suggestions for solutions?" and "An interesting parenthesis is that Migrationsverket in Sundberg has coated all glass from where one can see their employees, such as the expedition, the stairways etc." In December her critique was picked up by TV-4 news and after that it was decided that there would be trials with frosted glass to the investigation rooms. Karin Gyllenring had, when I asked her about it, not yet seen whether or not these trials had started yet. When I asked her if I could print her tweets in my essay or describe the contents I offered her anonymity, she declined and said that Migrationsverket already knew about her criticism and who she was.

The first tweet Karin posted on the subject was illustrated with a genre image of a glass cubicle overlaid with the text "Welcome to Migrationsverket! Come into the cage and tell us about the first time you had sex with a man". The tweet read "An asylum-seeker has got traumatic, embarrassing, sensitive situations to tell. To sit in a glass-cage with a bunch of people outside is not a safe environment to talk in. What are you thinking?". Journalists, newspapers' debate offices and the migration minister were tagged together with *Migrationsverket* in the post. The

image of the “glass cage” is analogous to the image of the aquarium in Schimanski’s reading of Maria Amelie’s (2014) book “Taak”. From the different sides of the glass wall of the aquarium lips and bodies can be seen moving but no sense is transmitted. The one inside the aquarium or cage is furthermore implicitly trapped and prevented from fleeing the spectator’s gazes from the outside. The response from *Migrationsverket* was to declare that the genre image was not depicting one of their investigation rooms but that they gladly received thoughts on how their locales could be improved.

Hello, the picture does not depict one of our investigation rooms. We do not have glass-cages. For safety reasons there are a few windows in the rooms, out towards corridors with limited access. We willingly receive thoughts about our investigation rooms, they should feel as safe as possible  
(Migrationsverket/Twitter).

Gyllenring answered that because of confidentiality strictures she could not photograph inside the premises, but, she claimed, the picture is illustrative of how the room appears. Furthermore, she added, to call the glass parts of the room “windows” was a gross understatement.

Six days after the first post, Karin posted a tweet containing a photograph of the actual room, the glass appeared to stretch from floor to roof on one side and from sitting height to roof on the other. In the last comment visible in the print-screen of the tweet below Gyllenring writes “An interesting parenthesis is that the @migrationsverk in Sundbyberg has frosted all glass surfaces where one can see into the employees, such as their expedition, stairwell etc.” Gyllenring’s comment bring out an asymmetric relation of visibility at the center, enhanced by the technology of clear respective frosted glass (Brighenti, 2007). This differentiation is an example of borderscaping, the differential and difference-making design of the spaces meant for employees and asylum seekers respectively.



Asymmetries transform visibility into a site of strategy. As a matter of strategy, visibility exists in cones and truncated cones: seeing and being seen are always exercised in the form of ‘from/to few/many’ (Brighenti, 2007, p. 326).

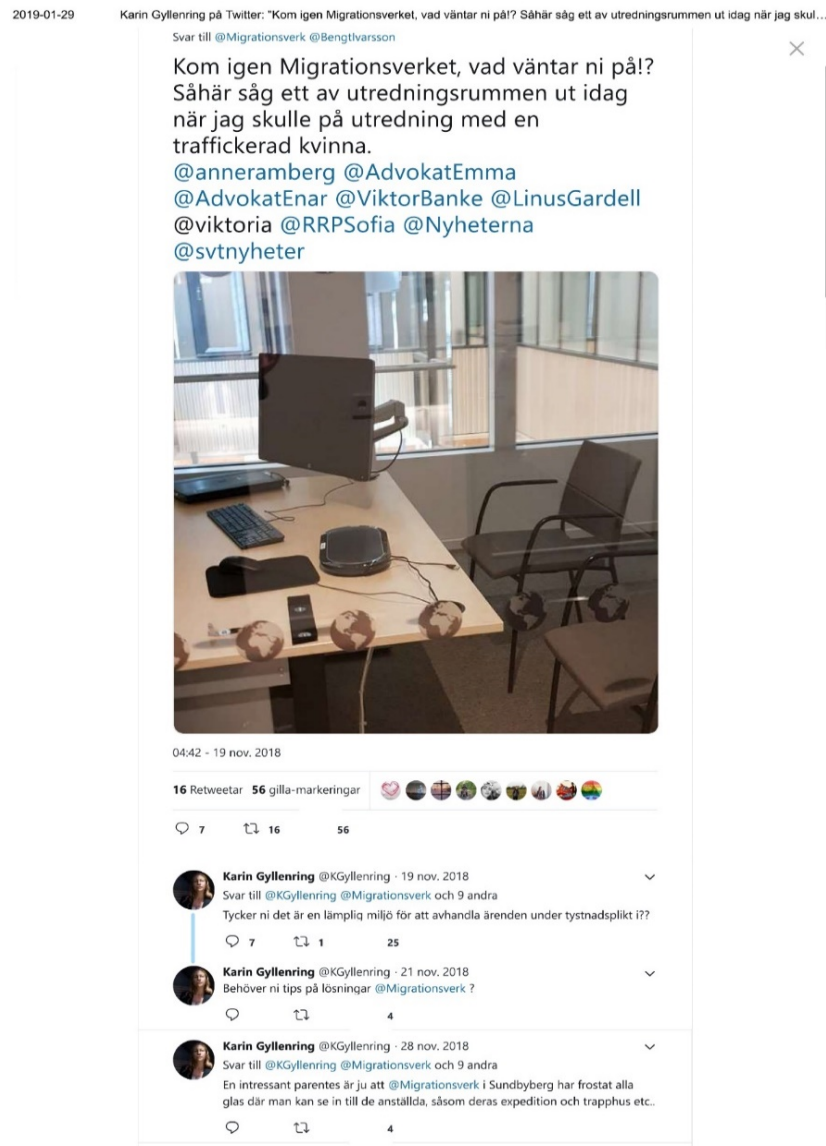


Figure 4

## Registration and categorisation for orderly waiting at the border



Figure 5

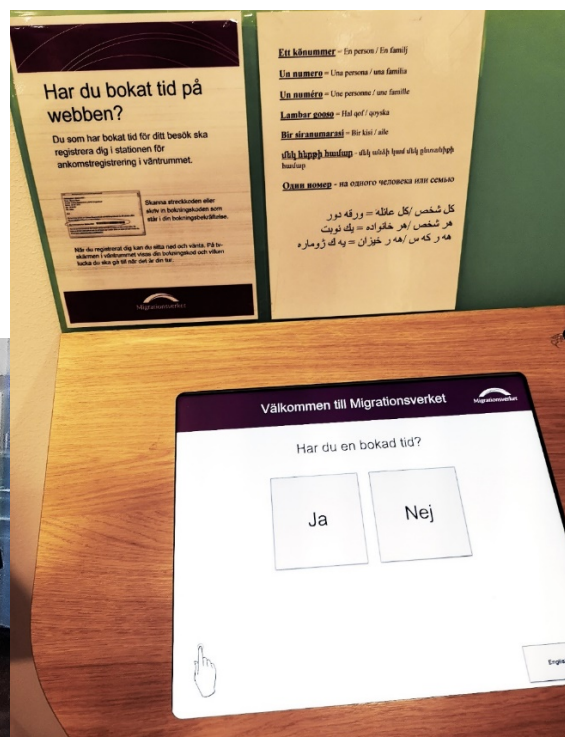


Figure 6

Upon arrival at the Service Centre the asylum seeker is supposed to register at a station as the one seen in the above photography. On the screen the question “Do you have a booked appointment” appear. If one chooses “Yes” the options of manually registering a booking code by selecting keys at a digital keypad or scanning a “QR-code” appear. If one chooses “No” a menu of options for the nature of the visit is presented and, in accordance with the option selected, a queue number is printed out. The booking codes and queue-numbers subsequently show up on screens such as the one depicted below. These screens are at the centre of many of the waiting room-inhabitants’ attention as missing one’s turn could result in prolonged waiting. The screen was also depicted in all three of my child-interlocutors drawings presented in the subsequent chapters.



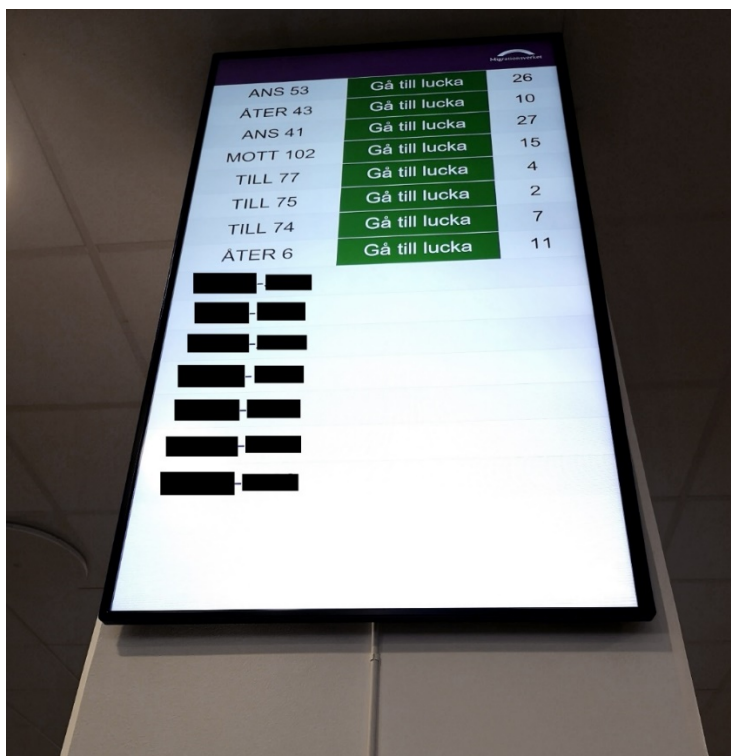


Figure 7

Many of those who got queue-numbers would keep nervous track of their number-tags, squeezing them in their hands for hours on end until they come in turn, or photographing or writing down the number to keep it safe even in the event of losing the tag. Once the tag has fulfilled its purpose it will be discarded, oftentimes in the reception, left on the desk or dropped on the floor.

A few months after the opening of the Service Centre different coloured lines and arrows were painted on the floors directing visitors to different zones in the waiting area according to their errand category. The area remains open and waiting people are still free to sit or stand in any part of the waiting hall, the markings on the floors and the signs marking out the different zones works as an affordance but no force to stay in the appropriate zone. The zones are located in proximity to the section of the reception handling the errand category assigned to that zone in the name of efficiency. Parvaneh and I admired the coloured lines and investigated the zone-system on my latest visit with her to the Service Centre. The colour coded navigation system is similar to those that can be found for example at hospitals and seemed to be helpful for visitors to the centre. Another reading is also possible however. The lines can be seen as lines of separation rather than lines of navigation, categorizing and separating visitors, delegating them to different zones of the border that entail varying durations of waiting and marking them for different stages of the process such as registration, reception, investigation

and ultimately citizenship or deportation. The lines, with this second reading, then becomes yet other borders within the border, even thinner than the glass-borders, placing applicants at different altitudes with different outlooks at the borderscape. Citizens-to-be on one side of the line and deportees-to-be on another, new arrivals boxed-in by lines of one colour and registered applicants in another. The lines on the floor visually turns the waiting area into a map, they demarcate the different zones without raising actual walls between them. We can also read the lines as something that was there from the very beginning, through the booking codes, number-tags and different sections in the reception. Through the painting of lines that take up actual space on the floor and the marking out of the zones through signs the border-lines goes from non-indexical to indexical and the border is made real (Green, 2016).



*Figure 8*

### **The temporary LMA-card – as border paraphernalia**

The LMA-card is a card provided to asylum-seekers in Sweden, the card is limited in its function as ID. It proves that the holder is an asylum-seeker and has the right to be in the country during the processing of their claim, as well as being entitled to a limited set of public services. The card does not however work for proving identity or age in society at large which has been addressed for example in relation to being able to enter and being served at clubs and bars (Karlsson, 2016). The LMA-card contain information about the applicant's name, height, language, date of birth and legal status. In contrast to the British Application Registration Card (ARC), and indeed the Swedish National ID-card, the LMA-card is not yet equipped with an electronic chip with the applicant's fingerprint (Ajana, 2013, p. 66) the dossier number printed

on the card is however searchable in some of Migrationsverket's databases and connected to archive entries with the persons fingerprint. What Ajana writes about the ARC is largely applicable also to the LMA-card.

The function of ARCs as a '(re)-attaching agent' is at once a function of 'attachment' as well as 'detachment', a function of 'inclusion' as well as 'exclusion': through his/her ARC, the asylum seeker is connected (precariously that is) to the order of civility only to be reminded that she/he does not belong to it, she/he is allowed to perform a certain form of inclusion only to endure another sense of exclusion (Ajana, 2013, pp. 66-67).

The LMA card provides some identification information on the plastic card itself, such as the person's name, height, birthdate, first language and assigned gender. The card also contains information about the holders' migration status and when applicable information that they have the right to work. Aside from this information the card also contains a dossier-number referring to *Migrationsverket's* collected files about the person, saved in *Migrationsverket's* database *Centrala Utlänningsdatabasen* (the Central foreigner database) CUD (Heuman, 2015). The card is also connected to another database called WILMA, through which it can be verified. Currently only *Migrationsverket* and *Rikspolisstyrelsen* (the National Police Agency) can access Wilma. An application that will grant police officers on patrol access to Wilma so as to be able to verify LMA-cards is under development (Ögren, 2019).



Figure 9

The fingerprints scanned, and photographs taken in the registration process are saved to digital, automatized registers by *Migrationsverket*. The information in the register is purged the day that the person it pertains to is granted Swedish citizenship, or 10 years after registration (Heuman, 2015).

Lyon (2009) elaborate on the genealogy of the use of fingerprints as a means of identification back to its early use for colonial control and police tracking of recidivists. He writes that it is “important to note that many identification systems were at first partial, designed to control specific segments of the population defined as ‘suspect’ and potentially beyond the reach of the state” (Lyon, 2009, p. 21). The temporary LMA-card connects to earlier identification regimes such as the Apartheid Pass Book and Reference Book (Boddy-Evans, 2018), in that, that they are carried by an underprivileged segment of the population, and carry with them a limited set of rights combined with restrictions on movement, employment etc..

The temporary LMA-card as a border artefact functions as an anchor of sorts, connecting the asylum-seeker with the border and preventing her from navigating towards the interior and functions of the state open exclusively to its recognized citizens.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed how border is made, and made real, at the Service Centre and in the asylum process. Glass walls and colour-lines materialize and mark the border or borders-within-the-border at the Service Centre, which in its entirety can be read as a borderscape, displaced from the outer contours of the Swedish nation-state. I have also analysed how booking -codes and number-tags temporarily binds the asylum-seekers to the Service Centre and to their place in the queue, forcing them to stay alert and attentive to the screens and in doing so, restricting their mobility. The temporary LMA-cards and the databases they are connected to are shown to be parts of the registration process that asylum-seekers are subjected to, that makes the border real by binding the holders to a sort of border-existence in the nation, partly included and at the same time largely excluded. The following chapter delves into asylum-seekers’ narratives about emotions connected to the phenomena discussed in this first chapter.

## Chapter 2 Emotions at work: Boredom, Powerlessness, Humour and Hate at the Border

The drawing below contains multiple human figures, all with speech-balloons hanging over their heads. Out of the 9 figures 3 are smiling out of which two represent reception clerks and 1 a visitor. The leftmost figure's speech-balloon reads "No one looks happy except for me – because I get to stay in Sweden". The smiling clerks, standing behind computer screens, are delivering decisions on work-permits to clients. The one on the left side tell its frowning client that s/he is not allowed to work, while the clerk on the right tell its client that s/he can work. The client that gets the positive decision says "Yes, thank you!" while the one with the negative decision exclaims "What, I have to get money!". A figure sitting in the row in front of the smiling client is drawn with a hard-set expression and its speech-balloon reads "I must be allowed to live in Sweden". In the row in front of the figure with the hard-set face, a woman is hushing her crying baby. Finally, at the rightmost side of the drawing a crying figure is exiting through the revolving door, saying "I want to live in Sweden – But I am not allowed to". The artist clearly has vivid memories both of the design of the space and of social interactions that she has witnessed, taken part in or imagined. The drawing captures an excision of the affective landscape of the service centre and some of the feelings this chapter will focus on.



Figure 10

## Boredom in waiting

As discussed in the background section, waiting is a salient aspect of the border and my interlocutors did experience protracted waiting at many different junctures in their asylum processes. In some instances, they attempted to fill these gaps of ‘dead time’ (Khosravi, 2014) with meaningful activities or at least momentary distractions, on other occasions time seemed to simply flow around them while they remained stuck in the middle. In the quote below Zana deliberate on how she handled waiting in the long *durée*, avoiding boredom but also fear.

During 6 months I was trying to distract myself. I learned to bicycle with my daughter, I dated a guy (laughter) so, every day when I wake up, you can’t imagine, like worst days in my whole life, because I was um, every day I was fearing that... I don’t know, that they would send me a letter or that they (the border police) would come suddenly (Zana)

Parvaneh too, often talk about trying to fill her days with activities and distractions so as not to “sit and just think bad thoughts”. 9 months have passed by since she and her children registered as asylum seekers and the investigation part of the process has yet to start. All in all, the family has been in limbo for about 6 years which has meant many days to fill. Parvaneh has taken language classes and occupational training, joined creative projects and attended social empowerment groups for women. Most of the time she spends at home however, occupying herself with cooking and housework, reading and listening to the radio.

### *Waiting to get an appointment*

During our interview Parvaneh brought up the difficulty of finding bookable times in *Migrationsverket*’s booking system.

Now it is also really hard to book an appointment! One month beforehand, you must book the time. My LMA-card had expired last month, but I thought that when it was one week left until it expired I would book a time. But it was impossible. I wondered, why can’t I book a time? And I kept browsing forward until I finally found a date. Oh, it has gotten harder (Parvaneh).

“Why?” Parvaneh asked me, they have a lot of personnel so why? I told her I did not know exactly but that I wasn’t sure there was more personnel now than before as the Migration Agency had closed three offices down before opening this new center.





Figure 11

On a later occasion I asked an employee about the waiting-times in the center and about the difficulties booking appointments. She looked at me in disbelief and said that I had probably misunderstood, they had no unusual delays. Sometimes the drop-in has a long queue, but the booked times are usually on schedule. The day before I had met Hakim at the service center, he and his family had a booked time which was 40 minutes delayed. Hakim said it was not too bad, they had been made to wait longer at other times. I related Hakim's experience to the employee and asked about the difficulty to book appointments that Parvaneh had experienced. She answered me that she really did not know many details about the situation on the ground floor at the service center, as she worked in an office upstairs. About the lack of bookable appointments she commented that the system had been overflowed by people applying for residency cards since many had been granted residence permits on account of a new law, popularly referred to as "nya gymnasielagen" ("Lag (2017:353) om uppehållstillstånd för studerande på gymnasial nivå Svensk författningssamling 2017:2017:353 t.o.m. SFS 2018:755 - Riksdagen," n.d.).

### *Waiting at the Service Centre*

When the family registered for asylum, Parvaneh, the children and I sat down together, facing one of the large monitors where the numbers in turn would show together with the number of the desk where the errand would be processed. The children took turns choosing YouTube-videos to watch on my phone while we were waiting. A WIFI-network named *Migrationsverket-Guest* showed up under the network-menu on the phone. In hopes of being able to use the family's own phone too and not having to wait for the girls to finish watching their videos, one of the children, Hameed, approached an employee to ask for the password. He came back and disappointedly declared that the employee had no information about the password and had not even known about the existence of the guest network.

As lunchtime approached I told Parvaneh and the children that there was a McDonalds restaurant nearby and that I would go and buy Happy-Meals for the children and bring the food back so that they could eat without worrying that they would miss their names being called.



Many people would pace back and forth just outside the glass-wall between the hall and the reception, waiting for their names to be called, or their numbers to show on the monitors. A toddler was crawling in the corridor occasionally stopping and staring at something or someone. Another child was crying angrily. In the beginning of the day most children in the waiting hall had been roaming around the premises happily, discovering the different spaces. As time dragged on and adults and children alike started to become more bored, hungry, tired and irritated from the long wait more and more children started to whine, cry and scream. I heard a guard ask another, referring to one of the crying children "Why don't the parents just put her in the play room?". But toddlers too, get bored and there were only so many corners of the play-room to discover. Eventually the children that had been parked in the play-room since early morning wanted to explore other parts of the waiting area.



Figure 12

Figure 13



After roughly three hours Parvaneh's number appeared on the monitor. We had been sitting in the rightmost part of the hall and suddenly had to hurry to the right pair of sliding doors in the middle.

Hameed's drawing, below, is a comic book style picture divided into three consecutive numbered frames. In the first frame a waiting person with a frowning face is depicted, looking toward what looks like the screen from the waiting area featuring the queue numbers. In the second frame captioned "1 hour later" the figure speaks and ask, "when is it my turn?". In the third and final frame, captioned "500 years later" the figure, now a skeleton, is told by a smiling figure "your turn" and exclaims "finally, my turn!". In a part of the drawing not numbered or framed the grim reaper appears and the main character's head appears in three phases of decay, turning into a cranium.

During visits to the center Hameed would repeatedly look at the wall-clock and ask, "when is it our turn?". Sometimes Parvaneh or I would give an estimation or, if they had a pre-booked appointment, inform him how many minutes delayed it currently was and add that, it should soon be our turn. Sometimes we would simply shrug, and sigh and Hameed would rhetorically answer his own question with some exaggerated time unit such as "in 57 billion hours maybe" or as in the picture 500 years.

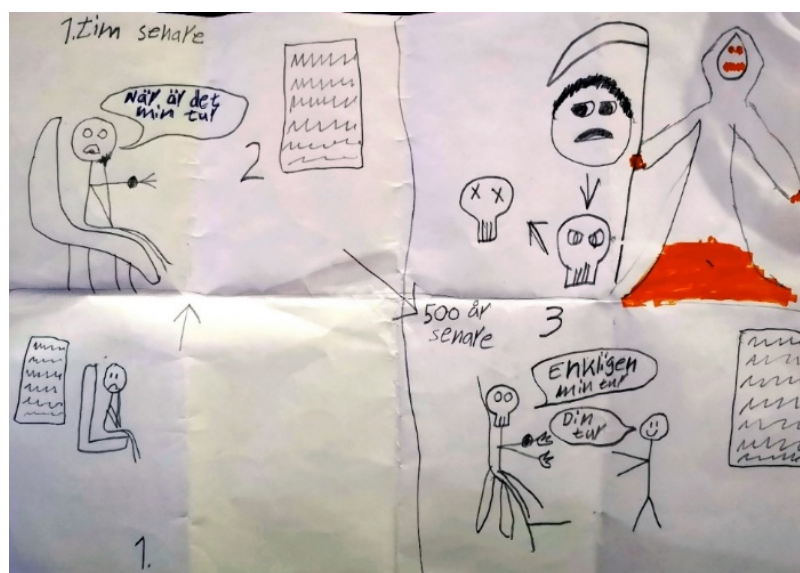


Figure 14

Hameed's drawing echoes Kafka's parable "waiting before the law" where a poor man from the country arrive before the gate of the law, but is told that he may not enter at that time. The

man spends the rest of his life waiting to enter and in his dying moments he sees the gate being closed before him and is told by the gatekeeper that that gate was meant only for him (Kafka, 2009 [1925]). The gatekeeper has at *Migrationsverket* been replaced with the number-tag-system and screens showing queue-numbers and booking-codes. Unlike the peasant, the person in Hameed's drawing gets his turn in the end, but then again, he appears to already be dead and thus may have no use for it anymore.

At one visit to the Service Center, during the winter, I saw children sleep on a pile of their family's bags and coats, just inside the reception's glass-walls while their parents talked to a clerk over the desk. They had apparently been in there for some time already and were still there when I and the person I was accompanying left. I could not tell if the children laid down and fell asleep from exhaustion or boredom, but the image stayed with me as a snap-shot of the atmosphere at the Service Centre during late afternoons. The family were most likely newly arrived and waiting to be appointed to accommodation, a process which can take the whole day to arrange. On another day an elderly man silently slept in his wheelchair while a relative kept track of the queue-numbers at the screens. Even when a person had a booked appointment they could not expect to be received at that specific time, but nonetheless had to make sure to be there 'on the dot', preferably a few minutes earlier. When I saw sleeping asylum-seekers at the Service Centre I inevitably came to think about Mr. Block, the poor merchant in *The Trial*, who spends his days and sleep most nights in the servant's room in his lawyer's home, in order to always be available when the lawyer deigns to see him (Kafka, 2009 [1925]). One day I spotted a family in the waiting area that appeared to be veterans in the sport of waiting. They had set up a travelling crib for their youngest child and mounted a tablet over the head-end of the crib so the toddler could watch cartoons. The family had spread a blanket over the floor and two older children were playing with toy building blocks, beside them they had cookies and juiceboxes. Prepared for a whole day of waiting they had turned the patch of uneventful time into picknick-time.

### **Powerlessness**

We were doing this interview. In front of my daughter they said that if Czech Republic reply and say that they will try your case, you have to cooperate, otherwise the police will deal with you. This made her, she was, everyone could see she was crying, and her face was, you could see that she was depressed. I didn't feel that they care about what to say in front of my daughter and what not to say

and they can see that... I mean sometimes they ask her alone but even my daughter, they didn't um for example she didn't have the chance to talk about her experience, they were asking her 'do you like physics, what subject do you like in school?' Things that has nothing to do with the... It is like they want to see her intelligence or something, I don't know (laughter). But they didn't ask her 'what have you been through?' Um, at the same time they used to say things that they shouldn't say in front of her. And when they saw her, looking depressed and... They didn't seem to care. Maybe they are used to that, probably they see many cases like that and they think maybe that refugees are used to this (Zana).

A sense of being helpless in relation to Migrationsverket as an organisation and its employees is reflected in the statement. Zana's quote can be read both as a sensemaking strategy and emotional reaction in the face of what Clegg (2016) has called *organizational carelessness*. Organizational carelessness, according to Clegg (2016) convey upon the client a sense of individual abandonment that renders further attempts of action futile and thus engenders passivity. Parvaneh too expressed the perception that *Migrationsverket* had this ominous power on multiple occasions. She once told me that *Migrationsverket* must be the most powerful organisation in Sweden. Below follows Zana's experience of being silenced and disempowered in the interview situation at *Migrationsverket*.

Maybe I should have told them I want someone to translate maybe directly from English because she wasn't really... Maybe it wasn't her first language I don't know but she doesn't really know how to explain well what I was saying, and you cannot talk English because they give you someone to translate. Because you are Arab, so they expect you to want someone who can speak Arabic. And um I didn't feel like I said everything. But they didn't let me. I mean when I talked about my case they used to tell me 'this is Dublin, you have just to talk about why you get this visa. Your case you get to tell to the country that is responsible for your case, not here' So I couldn't say everything, whenever I tried to say everything about my case they said 'no we don't have to try that which has to do with your story (Zana).

I and Parvaneh, during our wait in the sitting area, heard a male applicant argue with an employee after the number-tag dispenser had been shut down for the day. He had travelled from another city as this was his closest reception office. He explained to the clerk that there was no train he could have taken that would have gotten him to the office earlier in the day and asked for them to make an exception and let him have a number-tag and have his errand

processed. The employee in her turn explained that there were no exceptions and that he would have to come back the next day and be on time to have his errand processed. The man said that his problem with the train would be the same if he tried tomorrow and the only way to get around it would be to stay overnight, which, he said, was not possible. The conversation went on in the same way for some time until the man eventually gave up and exited the building.

This vignette exemplifies parallel processes of what Herzfeld (1993) recognise as part of the social reproduction of indifference in bureaucratic encounters, and a sort of taught helplessness instilled in asylum seekers through organizational carelessness (Clegg, et al., 2016). While the employee told the man that there was nothing she could do, what she actually communicated, and taught him, and anyone else listening, was that ‘there is nothing that *you* can do’. It may have been in her power to grant the man an exception and allow him to talk to a clerk in the reception but that would have signalled flexibility and negotiability of the rules and indicated, not only to him, but everyone within earshot, that there was a point to stick around and argue.

When the Service Centre started operating on ordinary opening hours, noon-time visitors could register and get number-tags by themselves and the employees in yellow vests, who were posted nearby were simply available for questions but did usually not interfere unless addressed. So if the man from the vignette above would have come a few weeks later he would not have encountered the particular problem of not getting a number-tag and not being able to access the services.

Bahar, the younger sister of an old friend of mine, had recently arrived in Sweden when I accompanied her to the Service Centre. She went there to ask if her application to be granted permission to work during the time she was applying for asylum and to ask about the possibility to get help funding dental care as she had lost multiple teeth. The clerk receiving Bahar asked if she preferred Swedish or English. When Bahar requested a Dari or Farsi interpreter she was bluntly told that there were no Farsi interpreters that day. It seemed to be the case that the language competences among the clerks and case-officers was the main source they relied on for translation in the reception and external interpreters were brought in only for booked appointments. The woman behind the desk told Bahar that she was welcome to call a friend to translate for her if she wished, otherwise they could only help her in Swedish or English. The woman's tone was short, and she moved about in a hurried manner. Bahar called her brother and put him on loudspeaker as he translated the main points of what

Bahar and the clerk said. Bahar's request for funding of dental care was quickly brushed away as Migrationsverket only fund emergency dental care. Bahar had been granted permission to work however and was told she could come back in two weeks and retrieve her new LMA-card. As we left Bahar was frustrated, she was disappointed about not getting help with repairing her teeth, but she was also annoyed by the clerk's demeanor which she perceived to be rude.

### Emotional reactions



Figure 15

The figure in the drawing above is seen exiting the revolving doors of the Service Centre, with a tearful face, saying or thinking “I want to stay in Sweden, but I am not allowed”. Though the figure in the drawing is crying, tears are not a common sight in the waiting area or reception at the Service Centre, at least not coming from adults. Parvaneh described people crying during and after an incident with a boy who was wrestled to the floor by guards in the waiting area, but other than that I have not seen or heard about anyone crying there. Aside from the occasional outbursts of frustration and nervous shakes or pacing, emotions tend to be tightly managed and stay unexpressed in the waiting hall and reception.

During mornings and noon, the first few weeks following the centre’s opening, the queue was separated from the rest of the waiting hall by black belts stretched out between 1-meter high poles. The queue-separators did effectively split the waiting hall into one queueing area and one sitting area. During these first weeks after the opening, the opening hours was shorter than they would later be. It was in one of those first few weeks that Parvaneh witnessed a young asylum-seeker being expelled from the centre by force.

People were standing in a circle, queuing, and it was a strange thing that eh, the guards threw a, um what's the word? Wrestled, a boy to the floor and one guard sat on each of his limbs. But he did not say anything, he just said he wanted to ask something. And they just said "Go! Stand in line!" But he only said, 'I just want to ask a question' and they all (makes a gesture to show that the boy was wrestled to the floor). And then he cried out "I am calm, I am calm, let me go, let me go" Then they took him and went outside. I don't know what happened outside. and some people cried a lot, Swedish people cried! Cried and looked... It was horrible (Parvaneh).

I read the crying in Parvaneh's narrative as an emotional reaction in the face of perceived futility of resistance and protest, as well as fear. Display of anger and voiced protest or physical intervention could have landed the people crying in the same situation as the boy. Crying was relatively safe and yet a reaction that could signal disagreement with the measures taken against the young queue-evader.

Zana's narration of an episode that made her feel angry and frustrated below illustrates how feelings of frustration are held back to prevent friction in the process.

I told him I need them (LMA-cards) because I want to apply for my daughters' school, he said 'Why? You are going to Czech Republic anyways'. I told him, can't you see, because I had sent him the reports from the doctors, I said can't you see what we are going through. He said um, just tell the police 'I want to go now, to the Czech Republic'. So, I, at that time I did not want to make it big, because I just wanted to take the LMA cards and apply for her school. I took them, and we waited for 6 months.

By and large emotions would be managed through suppressive emotion work (Hochschild, 1979) at the Service Centre, and emotional reactions such as displays of anger and sadness would be deferred until the applicant was either alone or among friends and family. In the following quote Zana describe how she channelled her anger through the act of spitting out her gum on the floor. An action that was subsequently challenged by her daughter, who Zana said was "trying to convince herself that this is our country". She would tell Zana not to "dirty her country" if she did not pick up her litter.

I never throw out anything on the floor or something. So, I was so mad, and I was chewing gum, so um I just decided to spit the gum on the floor, and you know I felt so guilty (laughter) I've never done this before, but I wanted to do something that expressed that anger (Zana).

When I asked Parvaneh if she was angry about a reoccurring problem she was having with collecting her and her children's LMA-cards she confided that she was "cursing on the inside". She would smile and not let on how annoyed she was to the clerk handling her errand, but at the same time she would fantasize about swearing and cursing at them for not getting it right. "Maybe next time I will ask to talk to their boss, if they fail again" she concluded, after all they had failed three or four times now and that could not be normal.

### *Humour at the border*

On the 28th of January *Migrationsverket's* telephone switch had been hijacked and people who called heard a resentful voice saying "Jävla *Migrationsverket*" (Fucking Migration Agency). Broadcast news reported on the incident and *Migrationsverket* commented on it on their page on Facebook. In news articles and TV-news the voice was described as threatening, mysterious and hissing. Later an investigation, conducted by the teleoperator company hired by *Migrationsverket*, showed that the message had been recorded by an external caller who had been able to record a message on their IVR (TT, 2019). The message on the answering machine lacks a declared sender and it is unclear why the person who recorded the message is upset with *Migrationsverket*. It can be understood as a form of aggressive laughter at the mighty (Speier, 1998) where *Migrationsverket* are made to deliver judgment on itself, answering the phone not as *Migrationsverket*, but as *Jävla Migrationsverket* and in the process appearing incompetent for not being in control of their own IVR.



Figure 16

Right now, we are experiencing technical problems with our telephone. This makes it hard to reach Migrationsverket's contact centre. We are working on the

issue with the highest priority and are sorry for the inconvenience this may cause (Migrationsverket/Facebook).

In the comments under the post many users made light of the issue writing "are you having a coffee break or what?" or complained of the general service level at the contact centre "you always have technical problems, shame". One comment reads "No worries, people are used to this, oftentimes one calls 50 times to finally wait for 1 hour in queue" and several comments are on the same theme. The comments cast light on another instance of waiting, waiting on the phone. Some of the comments indicate deep frustration and even resentment over being put on hold or not ever getting through the queue and get to speak to someone at the contact centre. From reading the comments I came to understand that there was a limited number of callers who would be placed in the telephone queue at any one time and if the queue was already full the call would simply be disconnected after a message that all lines were currently busy. *Migrationsverket* answered to one person, asking on a later date if they were having technical troubles again, that they had no such trouble, but they were aware that it could be difficult to get through and that one could get in touch with them via mail or e-mail too. On another occasion, when *Migrationsverket's* Contact centre had been unreachable during a morning after an electrical power-loss overnight, a user commented that he had once fallen asleep while waiting in their telephone queue and woken up to discover he was still on hold.

Joking about the neglect and laughing together at the authority's perceived incompetence amounts to Speier's (1998) category *laughter of the powerless* but also the category of the *healing joke*. When the powerless joke at the expense of the mighty they take a risk, especially if they do so in their presence. Posting jokes on *Migrationsverket's* Facebook-page is a borderline case of this, *Migrationsverket* are there, but the joker is presumably out of the reach of their power in this particular arena. The jokes of the powerless caricature the powerful and invert all their most praised qualities. The institution priding itself in efficiency and legal certainty is painted out as a tardy organisation full of clerks who rather drink coffee than answer the phones and never deliver decisions, and if it does the decisions are faulty and their grounds incomprehensible.

The healing joke according to Speier (1998) is a nonpartisan, reflective joke, it observes and retells things, revealing absurdities and narrating surprising turns of events without trying to alter them. The healing joke soothes and liberates those who share the predicament and partake in the laughter, it makes the unalterable a little easier to bear. I read the comment



about falling asleep in the telephone queue and waking up, still on hold, as a healing joke. The poster comment upon an issue that many of the readers recognize and add a surprising twist without explicitly passing judgement.



Figure 17

Sharing these jokes on the Facebook-page connect the users, who share their experiences among one another, to each other and may alleviate the sense of abandon and loneliness that the organizational carelessness of *Migrationsverket* engender. The jokes can be read as coping strategies as well as collective or individual forms of resistance.

### Anger, disappointment and hate at the border

The episode with the hijacked answering machine above can be understood as a form of aggressive joking as seen in the previous section, but it can also be read as an expression of hatred. The qualifying *jävla* (fucking) strongly indicate anger towards *Migrationsverket*. Not knowing the person whose hissing voice uttered the phrase, I will not speculate in the reasons for their anger. In my interview with Zana she is explicit with her emotions and the situations from which these affects have arisen. From the quote below a frustrated mix of disappointment, anger and regret can be extracted. Zana's preconceptions of what kind of country Sweden would be and how she and her daughter would be received has been shattered and now she stands amidst the shards of the broken promise of protection.

*Migrationsverket* is helping them (people who has threatened Zana and her daughter). I mean instead of protecting me it is like they are doing what these people want, to make me feel neglected and (that) I can be punished. This is how I feel. Sometimes I regret, I regret it because of what my daughter is going through but what I was expecting in a country that cares about um journalism and

women's rights and children's rights and all these things, but I was treated like a felon (Zana).

Zana elaborated on her experiences as an asylum seeker in Sweden and how it made her feel to see her child be treated differently from Swedish children, as a result of the difference made by and on the border.

When I became a refugee, I realized it is lots of suffering, it is like if you are already traumatized the experience of being a refugee makes you even more traumatized and, the waiting, the treatment, everything. It makes you, it makes it worse for you if you are refugees and I don't know how people who are already um in a worse situation than mine... They are in the war or they saw people getting killed, I can't imagine how they deal with another process, hard process. Um also, what I wanted to say (silence) Yea, I felt sometimes I felt, hate inside me to be honest. I realized why people become terrorist and try to harm citizens or... Because you feel like you are different. And um when I see Swedish kids I wonder 'why is my daughter not treated like any other kid?' I don't like the idea that I felt this hate inside me but if I wasn't um raised in the way I was raised I think that I probably would be a bad person and I would do something bad. So now I totally understand the feeling of being neglected and treated badly and see that your kids are not like their kids. (gasping) You feel like you're... It is not a good feeling at all because you are, especially if um I mean I have never had this experience (before) but now I understand, I used to defend other people's rights. Especially in Yemen they treat black people in a different way and I used to defend them, but it is different when you are in their place. So, I totally understand how they feel, you start to feel like you are not recognized as people, as if these people are different. (Zana).

Here the suppressive emotional work that Zana apply, in order not to react violently to the discriminatory exclusion she and her daughter faces, emerges. Zana does not like the things the process has made her feel. She reflects that if she had not been provided with certain tools through her upbringing, she would probably be inclined to do bad things, she would let the now restrained rage out.

At one point during our interview Zana pointed to the dark area under her eyes and asked me if I have seen the pictures of her from when it was even worse. I nodded silently but she showed me the pictures in her phone anyway. The face on the picture is worn and tired, bearing witness about multiple waking nights. The waiting, waking, worry and fear have all

taken their toll and so has, probably also, the active suppression of the hate that she says she feels inside.

Zana is astonished that her daughter still likes and identifies with Sweden “strangely my daughter she doesn’t hate Sweden” she said during our interview, “she always says that she is like them she has the same personality as swedes”. While the daughter does not express anger the things that the circumstances around the process make her feel acts as a locus for Zana’s anger. She describes how her daughter sometimes, without any discernible warning “goes down” in a state of hopelessness and is unable to motivate herself to go out, eat, or even go to the bathroom when she needs to. With anger in her voice Zana exclaimed “I don’t know why they think it is okay to be totally destroyed and then later they say, ‘now it is okay now you can stay, now we will have you, now you deserve to stay’”.

After one of our visits to the service centre when Parvaneh went to retrieve her new bank-card and we were taking a walk in the snow she started talking about how she experienced the treatment at the reception. See how that woman behind the desk talked to me, she said. Parvaneh thought that most of the staff she met in the office acted coldly and unpleasantly. Maybe she is tired of her job, I suggested. Tired? Parvaneh recanted, not catching my drift, it was just 9 in the morning, she just started, how can they be tired already? Parvaneh thought it more likely that the staff just did not like immigrants very much. The perception is echoed by Zana in the quote below which speak to a deep sense of powerlessness and futility of resistance as well as a frustrated desire to vindicate perceived malpractices.

Usually with Migrationsverket it all depends on your case officer. If he is someone who hates immigrants, then he will do whatever he can, and you cannot even say ‘Why?’ or punish them or... It is their right they can tell you what protocol is. Whatever they do they can tell you it is protocol, even if they are not following protocol (Zana).

“Protocol” becomes for Zana an almost mythical entity that *Migrationsverket* can refer to whenever they cannot or do not want to explain why they do the things they do. This leads us to the final chapter which will take a closer look at the Kafkaesque qualities of the bureaucratic process of seeking asylum.

## Conclusions

In this chapter I have focused on my interlocutors’ own narratives about emotions in the asylum process and other asylum-seekers public expressions of emotions connected to

*Migrationsverket*. Long periods of waiting and unpredictability of the duration of wait create boredom and a sense of one's time, or even one's life being wasted as in Hameed's drawing where a whole life-time passes before the asylum-seeker get his turn before *Migrationsverket*. The sense of being powerless that is expressed by many of the asylum-seekers I have talked to has been analysed. The perception of being powerless engenders feelings of frustration, meaninglessness and fear, but also responses in the form of jokes and laughter. I have brought up the concept of suppressive emotion work and how it is practiced by asylum-seekers at the Service Centre. For an apt illustration of the power that goes into that kind of emotion work, consider the hate and anger that Zana describe and then consider the action, she tells us about taking, to express that anger. She experiences a hate in the face of her exclusion, that to her, is so powerful that she says she now realize why people become terrorists and try to harm people. When she finally let her feelings impinge on the surrounding physical world, they are embodied in the mundane gesture of spitting out a chewing-gum on the floor.

## Chapter 3

# Entanglements with Kafkaesque Bureaucracy at the Border

This chapter engages with sensebreaking, contradictory and maze-like qualities of the bureaucratic organisation of the asylum-process as experienced by my interlocutors and how they engage with *Migrationsverket* as an opaque and overly complex organization.

### Stuck in Registration

As we entered through the revolving doors we walked right into a line of waiting people. The queue led up to a station consisting of a registration computer with an integrated number-tag-dispenser. As Parvaneh stretched out her hand towards the computer to get a number-tag an employee stepped out and blocked the way. ‘What is your errand’ she asked, with careful intonation. Parvaneh, equally mindful to articulate, answered ‘I want to apply for asylum’. The employee pushed the button for reception errands, “mottagning” and gave Parvaneh a number-tag with the letters “MOTT” followed by three digits. Reflecting on the procedure afterwards Parvaneh said:

Before, it was really easy to walk in and for example if one wants a number-tag, one can get it oneself, but now we have to stand in line and ask the personnel and tell them your problem. First I have to tell them my problem and then they give me the tag. To two persons, first to the one standing close to the machine and then to the other one (Parvaneh).

After Parvaneh had received the number-tag for herself and the children, we all went to find seats in the large waiting hall. On later visits this procedure of stating one's errand to an employee who administered the right, or as in Parvane's case, the wrong, number-tag was only used during rush hours at the centre.

As Parvaneh declared her errand to the clerk behind the desk, a woman she had met before at one of the old offices, she was abruptly informed that she had taken the wrong kind of number-tag and that she could not apply for asylum at this reception section. The tag she

should have had was one that read "TILL" for errands related to residence permits. "But this is the tag the girl gave me, I should not have to wait again because of her error" Parvaneh complained. The clerk had a look of disbelief on her face when she asked, "what girl?" but nonetheless she said that she would fix this. She got up from her office chair and walked over to a male clerk with a serious expression seated in the TILL-section. After a brief discussion he agreed to start processing Parvaneh's errand even though she did not have a number-tag for his section.

If Parvaneh had not received the wrong kind of number-tag from the clerk and thus not been made to wait longer than necessary, it is quite likely that the procedure would not have struck her as a worsening at all but as an improvement of the service. The way this specific situation unfolded however made the person administering the number-tags appear as an obstacle that hindered her from reading the information about which number-tag to get for her errand and have the right one from the start. The queue for the "TILL" section of the reception was significantly shorter than that for the MOTT-section and getting the right number-tag from the start would likely have saved Parvaneh and the children at least two hours of waiting.

The clerk asked for Parvaneh's and the children's names, nationality and age and collected their old LMA-cards. Then he sent us all out to the waiting hall again and asked Parvaneh to sit where he could see her as he would call her back in when he had finished registering them into the system.

"Again?" Parvaneh asked in disbelief. "But you already have our fingerprints and pictures". Yes, we must do it again the clerk answered.

We sat and waited for another 30 minutes as he finished the procedure and were then called back into the reception. The clerk asked Parvaneh a few questions regarding her and the children's background, their respective birthplaces and their latest place of residence in their country of origin and with a smattering sound fed the answers into the computer. After a few minutes he told them to go out to the waiting hall again and wait to be called in for photographing and finger-printing for new LMA-cards. I asked him how long he thought they would have to wait, and he answered that it would be at least a couple of hours, maybe three. This time the personnel would call out their names and there was no number-tag, so they would have to sit close by the door from where they would be called.

Two women called out Parvaneh's and the children's surnames and we all entered through first one door and then another into a white room with several stations for photographing and

scanning of finger-prints two other groups were already in the room. One of the women asked who wanted to go first and as they looked at me I explained that I was not there to register. The women then hurriedly declared that only those who were to be photographed could stay in the room. I and a young man who had also accompanied someone were swiftly escorted back to the waiting hall.

### Lost in Registration

After 40 minutes in the biometrics and photographing room Parvaneh and her children came out again. I had begun to worry that something was wrong. Maybe Parvaneh had come down with a panic attack as had happened before at another one of *Migrationsverket's* offices or maybe they had started asking her more questions instead of just photographing and fingerprinting them. I had advised Parvaneh that she was not obliged to give detailed information about her grounds for asylum at the registration stage but was in her full right to be brief and even decline to answer some questions until the real investigation when she would have a lawyer and interpreter present. I smiled and tried to conceal my anxiousness and casually asked what had taken so long. Before Parvaneh had the chance to answer Azadah exclaimed that it had took a hundred years because something was wrong with the machines. The children started to talk over each other, filling in the details of how only one of the machines had worked properly so everybody had to wait, and it had taken several tries to register all the fingers.



Figure 18



Figure 19

When it was time to retrieve the new LMA-cards two weeks after the registration the clerk behind the desk looked puzzled as she smattered the tangents on her keyboard. She went away for a minute and came back with three cards. "It seems they forgot to put in the order

for your card” she told Parvaneh, “but I will do that now, you can come back in two weeks and in the meantime, you can use this receipt that I will print for you” she continued.

Parvaneh looked bewildered. “But why?” She asked. The clerk did not know. We later figured that the clerk ordering the cards had probably waited with Parvaneh’s card because her request for being allowed to work was still pending, and then, when the request was approved they had forgot to put in the order.

In February when it was time to renew all the cards something went wrong again. Parvaneh got her new card but the children’s registrations had all vanished from the system. It was unclear if the data had not been registered at all in the archive or if the registration was somehow faulty and the link between the archive and other databases was broken. They were told that they all would be called to re-register. Parvaneh told me this over Nowroz (Afghan new year) dinner. My period in the field was officially over but I and Parvaneh still hang out and when something out of the ordinary happens in relation to *Migrationsverket* she tells me “You have to write this down when you write about *Migrationsverket*”. Before I left their home, I asked Setareh, Parvaneh’s eldest daughter, how she felt about doing the registration procedure again. “Really boring” she said with a sigh and roll of the eyes. In late April Parvaneh informed me over the phone that after the re-registration of the children they had booked three appointments to retrieve the children’s new LMA-cards and each time they had been unsuccessful in doing so and told to book a new appointment in two weeks. When I commented that it must have been tedious to keep coming back and wait in vain. Parvaneh confirmed that it was “really boring” but what was worse, she said, was that the children had missed school each time and still had no LMA-cards to show for it. The personnel had been unable to explain what the problem was, all Parvaneh knew was that there was a problem with system somehow and the order for the cards had either fallen through or not been correctly filed.

I read Parvaneh’s and her children’s being asked to come back again, time and time again, and the authority’s failure to explain what the problem was and correct the mistake as an example of the social reproduction of indifference at the centre. On Parvaneh’s third visit trying to retrieve the children’s LMA-cards she asked how it was that *Migrationsverket* kept failing to order them. They just apologized, Parvaneh said, but no explanation. “I don’t think they have any idea what the problem is themselves” Parvaneh told me over the phone. She narrated an interaction from the last visit. The clerk had called over a senior colleague and eventually someone who Parvaneh thought might have been their boss. They had all looked



at the computer screen, which Parvaneh could only see the backside of, and talked to each other. As far as Parvaneh could tell the group had reached no conclusion. The perception that at least parts of the process was confusing for insiders too was shared by Zana:

Everyone is telling you different things. It is like they are not aware, not well informed about the laws, because they are confused, it is like there are new laws and they don't know which one is right and which one is wrong, and you ask someone, and they tell you something different. It is like nobody knows and many refugees I know they tell me the same, that nobody knows. So, it is confusing!

Paper receipts would have to suffice in place of the real thing for Parvaneh's children in the months to come. The next renewal of the children's LMA-cards is planned in June and whether or not they will get the plastic cards then is still an open question. We need the cards every time they see a doctor or dentist, register for a library card or the local football club or use pharmacy services and a lot of other things, Parvaneh told me, it is difficult to use a paper all the time.

### **Common names and personal identity**

Bahar ran into trouble with the registration procedure with the very first question "what is your name?".

I provided my details, but another girl's photo appeared on the computer screen. She had the same name as me. They asked if I had been there (at Migrationsverket) before. I told them 'No'. Then they asked me when I arrived (to the country) and I said 'a few hours ago'. They showed me the picture of the girl at the screen. I asked them if they meant to say that she was me and I laughed. They told me 'it is you' and I asked 'is it really?' 'After that they told me to wait for an hour before they measured my height and took my fingerprints (Bahar).

Bahar reacted with laughter and ridicule to the mistaken identity, not unlike Kafka's (1925) Josef K when he is misidentified as a painter by his judge during his first hearing. Such blatant mistakes make a mockery of the court according to K, it simply cannot be taken seriously, nevertheless he is in the end sentenced and punished by that very court.

I tried to imagine what it would be like to be caught up in a situation like Bahar's, when trying to register for something. With one of the 50 most common given names in Sweden and the second most common surname I would have risked having to look at a whole lot of

photographs of other persons before being photographed and fingerprinted myself. Bahar laughed when she told me the story, but she told it over and over again, enough times for me to understand that it had been an unsettling experience for her. Having one's personal identity and previous doings questioned in such a fundamental way has the potential to be quite destabilizing, as Bahar's partly playful, partly confused question "is it really?" also indicates.

### **Dublin Regulation and a missed appointment**

Unpredictability of the process is one of the traits that characterize Kafkaesque bureaucracies and for Zana it induced both anxiety and frustration. A lawyer once told me that the tricky thing about the transfer-mechanism in the Dublin regulation is the lack of preparatory materials, which makes the interpretation of the law more of an open question. The Dublin Regulation assigns responsibility for trying the asylum case to the first signatory state of entry, or as in Zana's case the country that granted the entry Visa (European Parliament, 2013). The regulation however offers no clear answer to whether Sweden, the country that Zana's daughter first entered or the Czech Republic the country that granted Zana a still valid Schengen Visa at an earlier point should be responsible for trying their asylum application.

When I applied for asylum um I was expecting that according to Dublin regulation, because my daughters visa was from Sweden and we have family here, that they would see that it is in the best interest for her. But eh, because they didn't see our file, what our story is, they said it was in her best interest to go with her mom. Because I have this Czech Republic visa (Zana).

The principle of the family's unity (European Parliament, 2013) speaks for assigning responsibility for the trial of the asylum cases of both Zana and her daughter to the same state. Zana's Visa, granted by Czech Republic, speaks for assigning responsibility to the Czech Republic while her daughters Swedish Visa and the fact that they have extended family already living in Sweden speaks for Sweden being responsible. Either outcome could have been justified according to the Dublin regulation (European Parliament, 2013). Herzfeld's (1993) reflections on the language of the law are apt here. "Total clarity is a literalist dream, impossible of realization, but bureaucrats act as though the law were clear, and accept the fetishistic quality of its language" (Herzfeld, 1993, p. 118).

I went to the Migrationsverket to take our new LMA-cards. They told me we cannot give you, uhm we had an appointment for this, because we had to book

three weeks before. They told me we cannot because your file is already sent to the police. I was surprised. Why? I didn't do anything wrong. They said, because uh, because you didn't show up in the morning and you had an appointment in the morning. The meeting that I didn't show up to it was when I was in the emergency and we told them about it and the hospital they sent them that we were there. But then they did not send me any new appointment, so I went there for the LMA and they told me no you had a meeting today and you did not show up. I told them if I wanted to hide why would I come in the evening. They said we do not know, ask your case officer. And I did, I sent an email to them and told them I want an investigation and I called the case officer, she told me she doesn't know. She said you can't pass by us another time, so I said... Uhm why is my file with the police? And I said I want an investigation (Zana).

Zana perceived the unadvertised change of her migration status from asylum-seeker to irregular migrant as a wrongful breach of protocol born out of neglect or even malice. Her repeated question "why?" got no answer that made sense to her and the whole experience can be read as sensebreaking for Zana.

After the 6 months had past, when I realized that they had made it 18 months, then I started talking, to the media. Because I realized that it is real, that they might really deport us whenever the police have time. So, then I started to talk about it. I was silent all this time because I was pretty sure that, no way that they will um, they will do this, especially to my daughter.

In the above quote and the sentences following it Zana expressed a regret that she had remained 'silent' about her experiences and not reported to media earlier about maltreatment in the process and what she understood as failure to follow protocol. In the following quote Zana reasons that maybe she was naïve in thinking that *Migrationsverket* and by extension the Swedish state would act, or abstain from taking action against her and her daughter, out of compassion.

So, um. I didn't take any money from Migrationsverket because I thought that, I am still working, and I thought they will understand that I am independent, and I just want to feel safe, but it works against me. He used it against me actually he is lying actually because he is not following protocol. Because he just did this one missed call and usually it is not like that, usually they will send a letter and call, and there should be another call for another meeting, I should have

missed three meetings. But I missed just one, and the second one I did not know about and he send my file to the police and his excuse is because you are not taking money. Usually we give a warning by cutting the money, but you are not taking any money, so we sent it immediately which is not right, they have to warn me in other ways that they are going to send my file to the police.

When I talked to the case officer, the one he mentions here (in the mail) she told me. Um I told her, why this happened? After the 6 months had passed because I was shocked that they did that. She told me because you did not show up. I told her, but I came here twice. She was surprised. I told her, I saw (the other case-officer) about the LMA cards because I need them. I was hoping that because we are not hiding, I thought, probably they will ignore me because they will feel sorry for our situation. This is so... What... It turns out they actually want to get rid of us as soon as possible and they told the Czech Republic 'she is hiding' and they did all that (Zana)

Feelings of betrayal and abandonment by arbitrary procedure and malicious and petty case-officers was surfacing during the interview. Like Josef K, Zana, being an educated person, and a human rights advocate at that, entered the process full of confidence that she would be able to navigate in it, but ended up feeling lost, confused and lonely in a sensebreaking bureaucratic maze or as expressed in *The Trial*, a “great legal organism” eternally in balance, able to replace whatever minor disruption a defendant could cause through his intervention (Kafka, 2009 [1925]).

Remember Zana’s comment about protocol from the previous chapter “They can tell you what protocol is. Whatever they do they can tell you it is protocol”. Protocol is closed to Zana just as the judge’s books are closed to K in *The Trial*, provoking him to state “I suppose, and it’s part of this legal system that one is condemned when one is not only innocent, but also ignorant” (Kafka, 2009 [1925], p. 40). When K. was eventually allowed a look in the books he was repulsed by the crude content and casted them away after a quick glance. Zana has had no opportunity to glean her over her judge’s books but the correspondence she has had with her case-worker via e-mail seems to have left her with a similar taste of perversion of justice that K. expressed in the phrase “And I’m to be judged by people like that?” (Kafka, 2009 [1925], p. 42).

## **Conclusions**

This last chapter has treated asylum-seekers narratives about entanglements with the bureaucratic organization of the asylum-process. Markings of the Kafkaesque institution such as organizational carelessness and sensebreaking procedures have been exemplified and examined. The episodes narrated and discussed speaks to opaqueness of the organization, lack of accountability and feelings of individual abandonment and helplessness in the face of seemingly self-referential or constantly changing rules.

# Findings and Concluding remarks

## Summary of the findings

In this thesis I aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How does *Migrationsverket* in general and the Service Centre in particular, function as a constructing part of the National Border?
2. What emotions arise from and are at work in the process, of seeking asylum in Sweden, considering the process' bureaucratic, socio- material and interactional aspects?
3. How does the bureaucratic organization make visitors feel and act?

I answered these questions through analysing and discussing my findings from the field, within the theoretical framework laid out in the introduction.

In the first chapter I discussed material and design-aspects of the National Service Centre and the asylum process, understood as parts of a Swedish borderscape where the border is displaced from the edges of the nation-state to the interior. Through engaging with these aspects of *Migrationsverket* and the Service Centre I answered the first research question. I showed how glass walls and colour-lines function as borders within the border, marking difference and spatially separating people into different categories. Furthermore, I found that artefacts such as number-tags and temporary LMA-cards serves to make the border real and to attach the asylum-seekers to the border as a zone of simultaneous exclusion and partial inclusion.

In the second chapter I allowed my interlocutors' narratives on emotions, actualized in the asylum process and in interactions with *Migrationsverket* and its staff, take space. Together with data collected from online observations and public news, these narratives exemplify emotions and emotion work that arise in the process of seeking asylum. The emotions emerging in my material were boredom, powerlessness, frustration and hate, but also hope and relief in laughter.

In the third chapter interlocutors' narratives about bureaucratic encounters were put into dialogue with theoretical works by Clegg (2016) and Herzfeld (1993) as well as Kafka's fictional works on bureaucracy, to answer the third research question. I found *Migrationsverket*, as experienced by my interlocutors, to have traits of a Kafkaesque

organization. Many of their narrated experiences as well as events I witnessed in the field had sensebreaking qualities and exposed the applicants to organizational carelessness and indifference engendering a sense of powerlessness and abandonment.

### **Final thoughts**

The time of the writing and publication of this thesis is a turbulent one in regard to asylum policy and *Migrationsverket*. The question of how the Swedish asylum policy will look in the future, is an open one, with negotiations underway about prolonging the validity of the current law regulating the possibility to get refugee protection status and residence permit in Sweden (Justitiedepartementet, 2019). At the same time there are far-reaching plans to harmonize asylum policy over the EU-states (European Commission, 2016).

*Migrationsverket* in the meantime are hard pressed to adapt their operations to cuts in their government funding over the coming years. The government directive that regulate *Migrationsverket's* priorities states that *Migrationsverket* is to expand the capacity of the detention system. Budgeted resources have over the past years been reprioritized from the reception-end of the process to the deportation-end.

Public discourse has since 2015 moved away from the brief time-window of humanitarian concerns about refugee protection and sensitivity to vulnerable migrants' needs, to an aggressive blame-game over whose fault it is that refugees continue to enter European soil. In September 2015 Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven proclaimed that the EU member-states share a common responsibility and that the idea "never, never was for the European cooperation to be a means to keep refugees out, without legal opportunities to apply for asylum" (Löfven, 2015) he continued to say "the idea was never for the member-states to engage in a buck-passing game where the one with the worst policy escapes responsibility"(Ibid)<sup>1</sup>. 9 months later Sweden implemented a new law, aligning Swedish asylum policy with the lowest standard accepted in the Common European Asylum Directive (Regeringskansliet, 2016). The policy on national as well as supranational level being in constant flux makes for a non-ideal foundation to base a predictable and legally secure asylum-process on.

The asylum-seekers that have participated in this study have all found them-selves in the midst of a system that is reforming itself and undergoing changes on every level. Transformation is happening all over the board, from the move and reorganization of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Translation by author

Swedish Migration Offices, to the reformation of EU-policy, and possibly even the rewriting of the Refugee Convention in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In our conversation Zana told me to make sure to mention the prevailing confusion *you should mention that people there they don't know. Everyone is telling you different things. It is like they are not aware, not well informed about the laws, because they are confused, it is like there are new laws and they don't know which one is right and which one is wrong, and you ask someone, and they tell you something different. It is like nobody knows and many refugees I know they tell me the same, that nobody knows.* This is indeed a time of confusion for asylum-seekers and others invested in their individual fates and life-chances. It is also a time of shifting hopes and temporalities with the ratio of survival of migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean is dramatically sinking, border-controls between EU-member-states being reinstated and permanent residence-permits for refugees being abolished.

In my darker moments I feel like part of the audience to a cynical theatre of death or as Jenny Stümer (2018) puts it, a *Deathscape*, constituted by the European border regime. As an activist advocating for migrant rights and people's right to free movement I receive people who have survived the migration, just to discover that they have been set up to fail. Their own bodies are made to testify against them via fingerprints, taken by force in states they have passed, or submitted for past visas. Their arrival and being alive is taken as indicators of deliberate and deceptive exaggeration of the fears they would be exposed to if returned to their countries of origin.

If there is a theatre of death playing out on the fringes of *Fortress Europe* there is a corresponding theatre of absurdity in the interior. Zana narrated her experience of being simultaneously included and excluded as an attendant at a peace conference, held in Sweden, about her country of origin *I attended this Arab peace talk and I was respected there, but I am humiliated I am illegal. It is so strange because I went there as an illegal refugee it makes... I was like (laughter) what am I exactly?* In response I told her about a friend of mine who lived an undocumented life in Sweden for many years and who during that time documented episodes of his life that carried the same kind of juxtaposition of exclusion and inclusion. My friend, when he still resided in Sweden, posted pictures of himself, among other things, doing volunteer work for the Police and shaking hands with the Prime Minister. At other times he could be shaken by the experience of having had to run out the back door at the restaurant he was working irregularly in, as taxation officers and border police officers made an unannounced inspection calls. I think we collectively as citizens and people need to



ask ourselves the same question that Zana asked herself at the conference: *What are we exactly?* And additionally: *What do we want to become?*

# References

- Abu-Lughod, L., 1991. Writing Against Culture. In: R. G. Fox, ed. *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present: Seminar: Papers*. Santa Fee: School of American Research Press, pp. 137-161.
- Ajana, B., 2013. *Governing through Biometrics: The Biopolitics of Identity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ascher, H. & Wahlström, Å. S., 2016. "Bli inte hopplösa" En studie om vardagsstrategier hos barn på flykt i en papperslös situation, Göteborg: Stiftelsen Allmänna Barnhuset, Folkhälsokommittén i Västra Götalandsregionen, Göteborgs Universitet.
- Balibar, É., 2011. *Politics and the Other Scene*. London: Verso.
- Bear, L. & Mathur, N., 2015. Remaking the Public Good: A New Anthropology of Bureaucracy. *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, 33(1), pp. 18-34.
- Beatty, A., 2019. *Emotional Worlds: Beyond an Anthropology of Emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Benedixen, S. & Eriksen, T. H., 2018. Time and The Other: Waiting and Hope among Irregular Migrants. In: J. K. Manpreet & A. Bandak, eds. *Ethnographies of Waiting : Doubt, Hope and Uncertainty*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, pp. 87-112.
- Berberich, C., Campbell, N. & Hudson, R., 2013. Affective Landscapes: an Introduction. *Cultural Politics*, 9(3), pp. 313-323.
- Block, K., Riggs, E. & Haslam, N., 2013. Ethics in Research With Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Processes, Power and Politics. In: K. Block, E. Riggs & N. Haslam, eds. *Values and Vulnerabilities : The Ethics of Research with Refugees and Asylum Seekers*. Toowong: Australian Academic Press, pp. 3-20.
- Boddy-Evans, A., 2018. *Pass Laws During Apartheid*. [Online]  
Available at: <https://www.thoughtco.com/pass-laws-during-apartheid-43492>  
[Accessed 8 May 2019].
- Brighenti, A., 2007. Visibility A Category for the Social Sciences. *Current Sociology*, 55(3), p. 323–342.
- Clegg, S. et al., 2016. Kafkaesque power and bureaucracy. *Journal of Political Power*, 9(2), p. 157–181.
- Czarniawska, B., 2007. *Shadowing and Other Techniques for Doing Fieldwork in Modern Societies*. Malmö: Liber.
- Davies, C. A., 2002. *Reflexive Ethnography : A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*. London & New York: Routledge.
- dell'Agnese, E., 2015. Neo Geo-graphies of Border(land)-scapes. In: C. L. J. S. J. W. & B. G. Brambilla, ed. *Borderscapes: Imaginations and Practices of Border Making*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, pp. 53-62.
- DeWalt, K. M. & DeWalt, B. R., 2011. *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*. 2 ed. Lanham, Maryland: AltaMira Press.
- Douglas, M., 2002. *Purity and Danger*. Oxon, New York: Routledge.

European Commission, 2016. *Towards a reform of the Common European Asylum System and enhancing legal avenues to Europe*, Brussels: European Commission.

European Parliament, C. o. t. E. U., 2013. *Document 32013R0604*. [Online]

Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu>

[Accessed 25 April 2019].

Fassin, D., 2011. Racialization: How to do Races with Bodies. In: F. E. Mascia-Lees, ed. *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, pp. 419-434.

Green, S., 2016. A Sense of Border. In: T. M. Wilson & H. Donnan, eds. *A Companion to Border Studies*. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, pp. 573-592.

Hallett, R. E. & Barber, K., 2013. Ethnographic Research in a Cyber Era. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 43(3), p. 306–330.

Herzfeld, M., 1993. *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Heuman, S., 2015. *Personuppgiftsbehandling på utlännings- och medborgarskapsområdet*, Stockholm: Statens Offentliga Utredningar.

Hochschild, A. R., 1979. Emotion Work. *American Journal of Sociology*, 85(3), pp. 551-575.

Justitiedepartementet, 2019. *Förlängning av lagen om tillfälliga begränsningar av möjligheten att få uppehållstillstånd i Sverige*, Stockholm: Regeringskansliet.

Kafka, F., 1962 [1927]. *Amerika*. New York: Schocken Books.

Kafka, F., 2009 [1925]. *The Trial*. Oxford: Oxford University Press .

Kafka, F., 2009 [1926]. *The Castle*. New York: Oxford University Press Inc.

Karlsson, J., 2016. *Asylsökande släpps inte in på krogen – id-handlingar godkänns inte*. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.metro.se/asylsökande-släpps-inte-in-på-krogen-id-handlingar-godkänns-inte-xr>

[Accessed 8 May 2019].

Khosravi, S., 2014. Waiting. In: B. Anderson & M. Keith, eds. *Migration: A Compass Anthology*. Oxford: COMPAS.

LIFOS Migrationsverkets rätts- och landinformationssystem, 2011. *Om Lifos*. [Online]

Available at: <https://lifos.migrationsverket.se/om-lifos.html>

[Accessed 7 May 2019].

Lipsky, M., 2010. *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. New York: Russel Sage Foundation.

Löfven, S., 2015. *Tal av statsminister Stefan Löfven vid manifestationen för flyktingar*. Stockholm: Regeringskansliet.

Low, S. & Merry, S., 2010. Engaged Anthropology: Diversity and Dilemmas. *Current Anthropology*, 51(2), p. 203–226.

Lyon, D., 2009. *Identifying Citizens: ID Cards as Surveillance*. Malden: Polity Press.

Migrationsverket, 2017. *Asylum – from application to decision*. [Online]  
Available at: <https://www.migrationsverket.se>  
[Accessed 18 March 2019].

Munro, I. & Huber, C., 2012. Kafka's mythology: Organization, bureaucracy and the limits of sensemaking. *Human Relations*, 64(4), p. 523–543.

O'Shaughnessy, M., 2011. French Film and the New World of Work: From the Iron to the Glass Cage. *Modern And Contemporary France*, 19(4), pp. 427- 442.

Ögren, A., 2019. Polisen: Migrationsverkets LMA-kort säljs illegalt – för 2 000 kronor styck. *Metro*, 17 February.

Packard, J., 2008. 'I'm gonna show you what it's really like out here': the power and limitation of participatory visual methods. *Visual Studies*, 23(1), pp. 63-77.

Pérez, A. M., 2015. Emotional alliances in bureaucratic encounters. In: H. Flam & J. Kleres, eds. *Methods of Exploring Emotions*. London & New York: Routledge, pp. 144-152.

Popescu, G., 2012. *Bordering and Ordering the Twenty-first Century : Understanding Borders*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Ramos-Zayas, A. Y., 2011. AFFECT, Learning Affect/Embodying Race. In: F. E. Mascia-Lees, ed. *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 24-45.

Regeringskansliet, 2016. *Lag (2016:752) om tillfälliga begränsningar av möjligheten att få uppehållstillstånd i Sverige*. Stockholm: Regeringskansliet.

Schimanski, J., 2017. Glass Borders. *antiAtlas Journal*, Volume 2.

Seitz, D. K., 2017. Limbo life in Canada's waiting room: Asylum-seeker as queer subject. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 35(3), p. 438–456.

Speed, S., 2008. Indigenous Women and Gendered Resistance in the Wake of Acteal: A feminist Activist Research Perspective. In: V. Sanford & A. Angel-Ajani, eds. *Engaged Observer: Anthropology, Advocacy and Activism*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, pp. 170-188.

Speier, H., 1998. Wit and Politics: An Essay on Laughter. *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(5), pp. 1352-1401.

Strickland, D. & Schlesinger, L., 1969. "Lurking" as a Research Method. *Human organization*, 28(3), pp. 248-250.

Strollo, E., 2013. *Det städade folkhemmet: Tyskfödda hembiträden i efterkrigstidens Sverige*. Göteborg & Stockholm: Makadam.

Stümer, J., 2018. The DEAD are COMING Border Politics and Necropower in Europe. *Cultural Politics*, 14(1), pp. 20-39.

Sutton, R. & Vigneswaran, D., 2011. A Kafkaesque state: deportation and detention in South Africa. *Citizenship Studies*, 15(5), pp. 627-642.

TT, 2019. *Utomstående bakom "Jävla Migrationsverket"*, Stockholm: Svenska Dagbladet.

- Tuckett, A., 2015. Strategies of navigation: Migrants' everyday encounters with Italian immigration bureaucracy. *Cambridge Anthropology*, 33(1), pp. 113-128.
- van Houtum, H., 2010. Waiting before the Law: Kafka on the Border. *Social & Legal Studies*, 19(3), pp. 285-297.
- Vince, R. & Samantha, W., 2012. Participatory Visual Methods. In: G. Symon & C. Cassell, eds. *Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges*. 55 City Road: SAGE Publications, pp. 275-295.
- Walz, M., Hoyer, P. & Statler, M., 2016. After Herzog: blurring fact and fiction in visual organizational ethnography. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography*, 5(3), pp. 202-218.
- Warner, M., 2007. Kafka, Weber and organization theory. *Human Relations*, 60(7), p. 1019–1038.
- Wasserman, V. & Frenkel, M., 2015. Spatial Work in Between Glass Ceilings and Glass Walls: Gender-Class Intersectionality and Organizational Aesthetics. *Organization studies*, 36(11), pp. 1485-1505.
- Weick, K. E., 1995. *Sensemaking in organizations*. California: Sage.
- Wettergren, Å., 2015. How do we know what they feel?. In: J. Kleres & H. Flam, eds. *Methods of Exploring Emotions*. London; New York: Routledge, pp. 115-124.
- Whalström Smith, Å. & Ascher, H., 2016. Forskning Tillsammans med Barn på Flykt i en Papperslös Situation: Etiska Utmaningar och Erfarenheter. In: M. Sager, H. Holgersson & K. Öberg, eds. *Irreguljär Migration i Sverige: Rättigheter, Vardagserfarenheter, Motstånd och Statliga Kategoriseringar*. Göteborg: Daidalos, pp. 395-417.