

PAPERS AND PEOPLE – ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATIONS OF THE PASSPORT PARADIGM

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[87,872 words]

A thesis submitted to the School of Anthropology
and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford,
in Trinity Term 2022 for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the product of a seemingly endless five years of work through which I would certainly not have made it, had it not been for the support of a large number of people.

Thank you...

... Marcus Banks, for accompanying me on the first few years of this journey. Your trust and confidence in my abilities have allowed me to develop an intellectual independence that I will value forever. It saddens me that you could not see this project, which profited so strongly from your input and creativity in its conceptual stages, come to fruition. I hope you would be pleased with what I have created.

... Inge Daniels, for reaching out and welcoming me into your group of DDDers when I was really not quite sure what was going to happen with me. Your careful readings of my work, thoughtful advice, and constant encouragement, not just on matters anthropological but also beyond, have provided me with a wonderful guiding light.

... Michael Herzfeld, for being there during the turbulences of it all and for letting me benefit from your vast experience. Your enthusiasm for our discipline is infectious and has allowed me to rediscover the joys and richness of the anthropological endeavour.

... the DDDers, for your thoughtful and generous engagement with my work as well as providing a sense of community during what can be a rather solitary experience.

... Henry, Sophie, Alex, and Mayanka, for your wit and companionship, which have brought laughter and happiness to my Oxford days.

... Charlotte and Max, for providing shelter, friendship, and brilliance during a rocky start into the field.

... Loni, for always keeping me grounded and helping me gain perspective whenever it is sorely needed.

... Mama and Papa, for listening, for being patient, and for always having my back.

... Leo, without you I would simply not have made it. Thanks for listening to my ideas, worries, and complaints and for having confidence in me whenever I do not. You are my rock!

... the many collaborators, whose viewpoints are assembled across this thesis. I will be forever grateful for your openness, trust, and curiosity.

Finally, it feels appropriate – at the risk of sounding self-centred – to also thank past Alice for sticking with the project even when at times it felt insurmountable. We might have actually made it!

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ABSTRACT

Passports, IDs, and related identification documents are powerful objects: redrawing borders on bodies and projecting states onto people, the documents we (do not) hold define how we become known in the public arena, which privileges and obligations we (do not) hold, and what our official status is in the societies in which we exist. This reality gives rise to what I call the *passport paradigm*, wherein the governance of basic rights, mobility, and belonging is enacted by identity qua documentary form. Yet why and how have documentary identifiers become so consequential? And what do those who use them and those who make them want from these documents? Drawing on a multi-scalar, object-oriented ethnographic approach, I trace these questions across the lifeworlds of various groups shaping and experiencing the documentary regime in Germany as well as on the supra-national level. The constituencies portrayed range from border guards and document experts, regulators and passport manufacturers, to normal people navigating the passport paradigm. Across these different groups the roles, meanings, and consequences of documents fluctuate, leaving us with the realisation that the devices we use to stabilise identity do not hold a fixed identity of their own. The only continuity to be found, it appears, is the inherent fallibility of the identificatory project itself. Notwithstanding, a consensus that identification documents *do* work persists among all studied groups. What to make of this? I suggest that the fluid quality of identification documents, reflected in their changing roles, renders them an effective *Ersatz* in the fulfilment of the often-contradictory desires pervading the administrative system. This *Ersatz*-quality – identification documents' ability to stand in for a large number of wants and functions – is crucial to their long-term prevalence and intense consequentiality for it enables an *identificational realism* in which any identificatory failures – social, technical, political – are eventually absorbed and transformed by the system into a demand for more of it. In a world in which identification technologies, both documentary and digital, gain increasing currency in ever more dimensions of daily life and an abundance of scholars across the board of social science are engaged in their study, this realisation is crucial, for it may set us on a new path to formulating critiques and alternative visions more attuned to identification's evasive nature and thereby the wider fields of activity, such as governance, policing, and state-making in which it is immersed.

Consequential documents – Towards an anthropology of the passport paradigm

SUMMARY

In a world marked by high mobility levels and a post-9/11 drive for the “securitization of identification” (Rose 1999) identification documents have a wide-reaching impact on how their holders roam the world: assigning, materialising, or withdrawing such abstract terms of eligibility and affiliation as nationality and citizenship, the document(s) we (do not) hold enable us to or prohibit us from legally crossing a border or settling in a certain place. Though the markers of identity these documents entail and inscribe can certify a deeply felt sense of self or force upon us an identity in which we cannot recognise ourselves, we must cope with our paper identities: for in today’s “documentary regime of identification” (Robertson 2009) the individual simply “cannot be a self-authorizing and self-verifying agency in relation to his/her identity” (Breckenridge and Szreter 2012:29). Yet why and how have documentary identifiers become so consequential? What do those who use them and those who make them want from identification documents? And how must we apprehend anthropologically this *passport paradigm*, wherein the governance of mobility and belonging is enacted by identity qua documentary forms? These are the core questions with which this thesis wrestles. In this introduction I shall map out what their pursuit entails, introduce the main conceptual orientations in which the coming chapters are rooted, as well as establish their collective ambition: to develop a nuanced anthropological account of the becoming of the passport paradigm as a socio-political force.

Theresa

Theresa¹ is a Munich native, born in the city in the 1990s. She has lived in or near the Bavarian capital all her life, went to kindergarten there, then to school, to university, and finally started

¹ To protect the identities of the people whose viewpoints are assembled in this thesis I use pseudonyms throughout except for where a collaborator explicitly requested to be named.

her career in the city. Throughout her life Theresa has been very committed to the local community: in school, at church, or at work Theresa has always taken on responsibility for the world that she inhabits. Her passion for public service has recently earned her a fellowship with a foundation dedicated to supporting young political talents and their ventures in Germany. It also gained Theresa a certain degree of local prominence in the suburb in which she grew up, so that when I google her name ahead of our first encounter, I find a video that shows her in conversation with the mayor. Seated on a bench in a park in which Theresa used to play as a child, the two discuss the future of their town. At some point the mayor asks Theresa what the park means to her. She replies without any hesitation: "Childhood, roots, home." Yet her ties to this place that she clearly loves, and Munich more largely are not purely sentimental or only by her own choosing: throughout her childhood Theresa was only able to leave town a handful of times. Whenever she did, she had to request permission from the local authorities to do so, even if the occasion was just a school trip and the destination a twenty-minute train-ride away. The German immigration authorities have been keeping tabs on Theresa's whereabouts ever since she was little and even today that she is legally allowed to travel beyond the confines of Munich suburbia, a trip bears a plethora of stresses. For even though Theresa was born and grew up in Germany, she does not hold a German passport. In fact, she holds no passport at all, as she has no nationality, is not a citizen of any country: Theresa is *stateless*² and has been so since birth, with no state "claiming" her and no clear path towards naturalisation.

² Statelessness is a complex legal status and lived experience, in which individuals can find themselves for various reasons and without any fault of their own: from states weaponising citizenship by stripping certain individuals or groups off their nationality for political reasons (and against international law, which forbids states from rendering a citizen stateless) or patriarchal citizenship laws preventing women from passing on their citizenship to their children, to the lack of birth registrations causing an existence to remain unrecognised by a state or the collapse of states and the concomitant vanishing of their nationality-endowing powers, people have experienced statelessness as long as the nation state has existed. All with the same result: no sovereign state recognises and embraces them as citizens, denying stateless individuals the basic statist protections and privileges that their nationalised counterparts enjoy, such as political participation through voting, but also, depending on each case, the right to live in a certain place, to get married, work, or travel at all. Whilst some stateless people will be recognised as such by the authorities of the country in which they reside, rendering their statelessness *de jure*, others, will see their statelessness be doubted or their nationality be considered undetermined, all whilst having no access to the rights of nationality anywhere, leaving them *de facto* stateless.

Theresa's statelessness is bureaucratically inherited as well as *in-situ*, i.e. her status was derived at birth and she is stateless in her home country, without any material links to other states. Whilst the reasons for this are difficult to fully grasp in their legal complexity, the story goes something like this: Theresa's parents fled their West-African home country before she was born and arrived in Germany in the early 1990s unable to present the necessary documents required by the German authorities to legally verify their identities and nationality. In a migratory regime that operates by sorting individuals according to the documentary identifications that they can provide, this rendered Theresa's parents' identities *undeterminable* to the German immigration authorities and their claim for asylum was rejected: no passport, therefore no verifiable identity or nationality, therefore no definitive judgement on their future in Germany. Due to their lack of papers, they could not be deported, yet neither were they granted an official visa or leave to remain. With no way of accessing the required documents and their attention focused on preventing them and their young family from being expelled from the country that they thought was going to be a safe haven, the undeterminedness of their identities lingered and was transferred by the German authorities onto their children, who neither gained German citizenship nor the citizenship of their parents' country of origin:

Instead of granting Theresa citizenship³, German authorities considered Theresa's nationality and thus identity – the identity of an individual that has been known to the German bureaucratic apparatus since the very moment that she arrived in this world – equally undeterminable until and unless the proper papers would be provided by her parents. For the first ten or so years of her life Theresa's presence in the country of her birth was thus only *geduldet* (tolerated), never embraced or supported: *Duldung* (toleration) is a legal status instantiated by German immigration law to designate the status of those who are present in Germany, yet according to German law have no right to be so, their deportation merely

³ At the time of Theresa's birth German citizenship law operated on the principle of *ius sanguinis*, i.e. German citizenship was only to be acquired at birth if a child was born to a German parent, not by the mere fact of being born in Germany (the legal situation has since changed partly, yet changes do not apply to Theresa).

Introduction

suspended for specific reasons, such as legal or medical issues, or logistics – for where to would one deport a person that in bureaucratic and national terms belongs nowhere?

Though meant to be a temporary condition, Theresa's *Duldung* extended throughout large stretches of her youth. As a consequence, Theresa could not enter on the route towards naturalisation, even though she had lived in Germany all her life. For to become naturalised, German citizenship law stipulates that one must have *rightfully and permanently* resided in the country for at least six years; yet Theresa's *Duldung*, despite its permanence, did not count towards this mark: it simply was not rightful in legal terms. Though she eventually did receive an official, if temporary residence title at some point, Theresa always had to live with this ambivalence: she exists in a place that ties her in and monitors her firmly whilst suspending her ability to truly settle. Consequently, Theresa never dared to imagine her life in Germany as long term and when asked about the future, she describes it as something that is never localised: envisioning her life in ten years she names many goals to be achieved, yet the dimension of location remains "neutral", as she says, non-defined; the result of years and years of living with the sense that in the end she cannot control *where* her life takes place.

However, a few years ago Theresa's situation changed for the better: during a routine re-evaluation of her immigration status at the hands of the authorities, her classification, entirely unexpectedly to her, was altered from *undetermined identity* (i.e. the German state considers the identity and national status of an individual unclear) to *officially stateless* (i.e. the German authorities acknowledge that the individual does not hold any nationality) and she was granted leave to remain. So long as the authorities do not change her categorisation again (which is a possibility), she may thus be able to finally apply for citizenship soon. Though her new status gives her a certain sense of security, it also comes with a newly felt fear of loss: Theresa now stands to lose privileges that she previously did not have and that thought terrifies her. So much so that she – who describes herself as somebody who never, ever procrastinates – has been delaying applying for a new travel document (stateless people can be issued a passport-like document by the German authorities for the purposes of identifying themselves and to

travel abroad), for fear that the authorities might simply change her categorisation again: “You hear those stories of people getting their new documents and all of a sudden it is XXX instead of XXA again. Nobody tells you why and you cannot reverse it either. I am just extremely worried that they’ll take it away again.” XXX is the international code employed in travel documents to designate people with undetermined identities/nationalities, whilst XXA is used to demarcate *de jure* stateless individuals. For Theresa, the only recognised proof she has to verify her particular status are these three letters – XXA – noted in her residence permit and travel document.



Figure 1: Sample images of the covers of Theresa's *Reiseausweis für Ausländer* (left) and a German *Reisepass* for nationals (right). © Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat

Yet documents, or the absence thereof, have not only rendered Theresa stateless or lie at the root of how the German state came to see her to be without an official identity and thus deny

her nationality; they are also a central marker through which the state sets Theresa apart from the nationalised German population. When I meet with Theresa for the first time, she says the following sentence: "I always say passport when I talk about my document, but that is of course wrong. I have a travel document, not a passport." For the purposes of travel Theresa has been issued a *Reiseausweis für Ausländer*, i.e. a travel identification document for foreigners, by the German authorities. Her document resembles a passport in many ways: it employs the same pocket-sized format, the pages of the booklet are similarly dedicated to visa and stamps, the first page equally contains her picture, her personal details, and a chip encoded with her biometrics, all secured by the same security features as in the national passport. The documents are structurally virtually similar. Yet unlike the *Reisepass* (the passport for nationals), which is steeped in a rich burgundy and adorned with golden lettering, granting holders visa-free access to a soaring 190⁴ countries, the *Reiseausweis* is fashioned in a dull, light gray, its lettering black, and requires for Theresa to get a visa for the large majority of countries to which she wishes to go.

The distinction drawn between Theresa and nationally German citizens is poured here into paper, becoming immediately visible and operational whenever she hands over her document. Yet her documentary separation from Germanness as a nationalised category is not absolute: whilst the nationality indicated in the document is not "DEU" for German, but "XXA" for stateless, her document cites Munich, Germany, as her place of birth and is issued by the German state. This combination appears to routinely stun German border officers, who are used to seeing the *Reiseausweis* issued to refugees or foreigners living in Germany who cannot otherwise access a travel document, yet not to German-born individuals. Moreover, as a recognised stateless person, officers expect her to hold a travel document for stateless people (which is blue in colour), not one for foreigners, yet the issuing authorities decided otherwise (why is unclear). Border officials thus frequently question Theresa about her papers: "They just look at my document and it criminalises me immediately", Theresa describes her border

⁴ See the 2022 Henley Passport Index: <https://www.henleyglobal.com/passport-index> [online]. Accessed on 20 September 2022.

encounters, which are almost always deeply uncomfortable for her; an experience intensified by the fact that Theresa is a black woman, her interactions with the authorities thus often being marked by the racialisations projected onto her by the various agents of the state whose probing questions she must so often endure. Time and again when trying to exit or enter back into Germany she will thus have to explain her biography and educate those who are positioned to preside over her immediate fate about what it means to be stateless, and that no, she is neither German nor does she hold another citizenship. Thus, whilst Theresa's *Reiseausweis* certifies an identity that the German state considers applicable to Theresa and that renders her a subject within its reach, the document also works to keep her at bay and marks her out as *not a citizen*, leaving her to have to articulate and argue her right to travel, indeed her right to exist in Germany over and over again. Theresa's non-passport-passport so fundamentally evinces her liminal status: German, yet not.

When people learn about Theresa's story and the extraordinary consequences of her stateless status, a frequent reaction, Theresa tells me, will be utter disbelief: "That can't be possible!" they will gasp. This incredulity, Theresa feels, does not simply indicate the inability of the unproblematically nationalised to fathom what it must be like to exist sans nationality, but Germans' unwillingness to acknowledge that the system protecting them could simultaneously produce a result as unjust as Theresa's now almost thirty-year-long exclusion from the rights and privileges that the majority of people born and raised in Germany enjoy. In their disbelief, those who learn about her experience with statelessness will equally cite Theresa's various accomplishments as if they should remedy her legal predicament. Yet her accolades and constant commitment to the community play no role in the German authorities' assessment of her deservingness of German citizenship. A passport, Theresa knows, is not something that can be earned: "It really does not matter at all what kind of person I am and what I have done so far with my life. It has no effect on my status in Germany whatsoever, because it really is not about that; it is not about how well-integrated one is, or whether I am a good citizen. That rhetoric is nonsense. In the end it is about power, and it is about what type of documents you have. Put it this way: if I had documents, I would have long been naturalised." Theresa now considers her

attempts in younger years to prove her worth to society a draining and futile exercise intended to placate a type of bureaucratic hostility that cannot be placated. For no matter how exemplary a member of the community she is, in a migratory system in which eligibility and belonging are first and foremost determined through nationality, endowed, conveyed and verified through identification documents, Theresa, for now, remains trapped in bureaucratic limbo: no passport, therefore no valid, determinable identity, therefore no nationality, therefore no passport.

Anthropologising documentary identification: conceptualising the passport paradigm

Theresa's story is a gloomy, cautionary tale of the intense consequences of documentary identifications: her original sin is to have parents who were expected to arrive in Germany replete with documents that identified and nationalised them in a verifiable manner yet did not. This documentary absence, which preceded Theresa's birth, changed the trajectory of her entire life and affects her daily existence until this day. Her story so points to a key quality of contemporary life in the global bureaucratic order; a condition that lies at the heart of this thesis and to which I shall refer as the *passport paradigm*: a techno-bureaucratic state in which the recognition of an individual's legal identity, rights, belonging, and claims to mobility by statist authorities is contingent upon the correct manifestations of their legal personhood in the bureaucratic prism. The passport paradigm is thereby marked by three core properties:

Firstly, in it an individual's access to certain rights, privileges, and sovereign spaces is conditional upon specific individual markers that are deemed to be identificatory in nature and are thus formalised or assigned in dedicated external referents, first and foremost identification documents, but also civil registries or increasingly digital tokens. *We can describe this as the operationalisation and standardisation of identity for politico-bureaucratic purposes.* Secondly, in the passport paradigm the individual does not hold a position of authority when it comes to auto-identificational claims vis-à-vis agents of the state. It simply "cannot be a self-authorizing

and self-verifying agency in relation to his/her identity" (Breckenridge and Szreter 2012:29) and must thus rely on said state-sanctioned tokens to make itself known. *We can refer to this as the verification-authentication imperative.* As a consequence of these first two properties, all conduct within the passport paradigm evolves around producing, authorising, and performing verifiable identifications. These verifiable identifications bring into being what Craig Robertson in his historiography of the US passport system describes as a "documentary regime of identification" (2009), "intended to capture the specific ways in which individual identity is defined, the evidence needed to verify that identity, and the authorities who could ultimately determine an individual's (official) identity" (Robertson 2009:337). The passport stands at the helm of these efforts – and my analysis – as a supra-national bureaucratic consensus on how identity is to be formalised, verified, and authenticated across borders. Yet the notion of the passport paradigm extends beyond its namesake document to the plethora of identificational forms, such as visa, IDs, birth certificates, or biometric tokens, which intermingle in the documentary management of identity, mobility, and belonging by nation states and will thus equally shape my analysis.

This configuration spawns a first (of two) research questions motivating this thesis: (1) *how have passports and similar documents, such as IDs, become so consequential and how must we apprehend this consequentiality anthropologically?* This question hones in on the genesis of identification documents as a socio-political force and its formulation has pre-dated the ethnographic work carried out for this project. I brought it with me to the field, intending to track the larger cultural context and sociological properties of the passport paradigm. However, it leaves some important matters untouched and is thus complemented by a second, ethnographically derived guiding question, emerging from a further, if more hidden, paradigmatic property:

I will describe this third property as *the instantiation and perpetuation of a techno-bureaucratic belief in trusted identities*, which, as coming chapters will show, is pervasive across different communities of practice involved in the passport system – such as travellers, border guards,

government officials, identification document manufacturers, or supra-national regulators. To understand what is meant here consider again Theresa: having recently founded an organisation to bring attention to the issue of statelessness and campaign for political reform, her and her team have developed a set of policy recommendations to the German government intended to bolster the rights of stateless people in Germany⁵. Among them is a request for the German state to commit to issuing dedicated identification documents to stateless people (who currently, at best, hold a residence permit or travel document, neither of which is an effective identification document in practice). It is, one might feel, remarkable that Theresa, who in light of her experiences might well have come to consider identification documents and the nationalised bureaucratic order they represent and perform the root of all evil, uses her platform to perpetuate a bureaucratised approach. Yet in her eyes bureaucracy itself is not to blame: she sees documents as mere tools that currently work in service of a particular political ideology of nationalised thinking; tools that she and her organisation can use to mend the system to a fairer, more equitable state.

We find here a crucial dimension of the passport system: its ability to sustain hope for various, at times contradictory potential outcomes, even when the realities that it produces are, at least to some, fundamentally hopeless; and its concomitant success in creating the belief, among those who engage with it, of the necessity for more of it. This is not an uncommon trope within the literature on bureaucratic practice: bureaucracy, theorises Monique Nuijten (2003), is a machinery for the generation of hope and Tess Lea suggests that it is “the nature of bureaucracies [...] to be sustained by the faith that people place in their efficacy” (Lea 2021:67). Theresa exemplifies these observations: she is hopeful that employing existing means can rectify the system at large and thus welcomes a bureaucratic solution to her equally bureaucratic predicament, even though the bureaucracy has thus far failed her. She also still believes that documents, which have delimited her freedoms for so long, can bring her, if not freedom, then at least less restriction. As this thesis progresses, we will see this pattern

⁵ I would like to disclose here that I have, in the aftermath of our research collaboration, joined Theresa’s organisation as a volunteer in an advisory position.

repeated among various communities of practice operating within the passport system: we will encounter document manufacturers and issuance authorities labouring towards technological innovations, driven by the perpetual desire for better, more secure identification, only to find their documents being replicated by forgers in record time – but they remain committed in their efforts. Simultaneously, I will show how border officers work hard to hone their skills in analysing documents and compete for spots on dedicated training courses which they believe will help them do a better job, all whilst document fraud is fast overtaken by imposters and biometric attacks, which cannot easily be detected through purely documentary controls, making their efforts seem misguided – yet the ability to verify documents well maintains tremendous currency. On a more global scale we can see governments turn time and again to identification documents to regulate migration and bolster (inter-)national security, with ambivalent results.

The perpetual promise of identification documents despite their imperfect nature embodies a connecting thread across all constituencies of the passport paradigm studied in this thesis. It forms a central point of departure for the understandings that I wish to generate over the coming chapters and has inspired the second question governing my work: (2) *What do different institutional and individual agents operating in the passport paradigm want from documents as well as how do they employ passports and related documentary forms to achieve their various goals?* By asking these questions, I wish to understand the diverse desires, concerns, and calculations that modulate the passport paradigm and allow for it to become promising of various things; in this I follow Tess Lea (2021) in her call to focus on the “psychological longings” (2021:60, see also Chalfin 2010, Aretxaga 2003) that permeate bureaucracy and animate those who operate within it. For, as I shall show over the coming pages, they embody a unique prism through which to understand the micro-psychological condition of life in the global administrative system.

To productively engage the questions outlined above, so I shall argue in this introduction and illustrate across this thesis, documents’ materiality and objecthood must be taken analytically

seriously and considered fundamental to their identificatory function. The perceptual “humility” (Miller 1987:85-108) of documents, a “phenomenological quality of mediators more generally” (Hull 2012a:253), implies that the identificational performance they enact is frequently being taken for granted, whilst their objecthood is overlooked at the advance of discursive, historical or structural approaches (see e.g., Caplan and Torpey 2001, Klein, 2012, Robertson 2012, Salter 2006, Torpey 2000). Yet the artefactual configuration of documents is central to the workings of the wider passport paradigm: as I delineate in chapter 2, it is through material personalisation, i.e. the material document’s inscription with markers of personal identity that documents acquire their identificatory character; once they are deployed, we will find in chapter 3, intensely material forms of engagement are required to make the identifications they carry come to life at the border; the materiality of identification documents is thereby not static, but subject to constant political negotiation, techno-material evolution, and routine intervention (see chapters 2 and 5). These material changes configure and reconfigure what it means to become known in the public realm. The current gap in passport literatures regarding these dimensions of identificatory materiality and its socio-political ramifications (exceptions include Ericson and Haggerty 2000, Klein 2012, Navaro-Yashin 2007, Lyon 2009, van der Ploeg 2003), provide an opportunity for anthropology to make a meaningful contribution. To this end an approach will be required which addresses the passport paradigm through the prism of its objecthood and the means and modes of material performance and becoming that mark it.

Methodologically, I argue, ethnographically stationary approaches, which dominate in existing accounts of documentary identification (see e.g. Pelkmans 2013, Kelly 2006, Navaro-Yashin 2007, Reddy 2015, Reeves 2013; an exception being Shahram Khosravi’s (2010) auto-ethnographic work) must be extended, as they are not well-equipped to account for the disparate forces and diverse communities of practice shaping the passport paradigm: placed, as I shall develop below, at the intersection of material and social; ideology and practice; nation and international community; collective and individual; security and risk; foreign and own, passports structure a dispersed field of people, ideologies, and institutions. The “abstract labour” (Stein 2017) – to borrow Felix Stein’s adaption of Marx in his ethnographic work on

management consulting – these documents conduct is thus “premised on and conducive to creating relations with vast amounts of people that were marked by an emotional and affective disengagement from them” (Stein 2017:5-6). In this vein passports must be conceived of as “boundary objects” (Griesemar and Star 1989): inherently intersectional and multi-authored, they mediate the engagement between variant parties, spaces, and sovereignties: “they are simultaneously [...] specific and general, conventionalized and customized” (Griesemar and Star 1989:408). This *inbetweenness* of identification documents is a hallmark of bureaucratic artefacts more generally. Yet, as I will argue below, it is due to identification documents’ globality as a form issued by virtually all nation states that a multi-perspectival analysis is particularly urgent: documentary identifiers and the paradigm of identity, mobility, and belonging they generate exist at a scale that necessitates a critical understanding of the competing economies of knowledge and control in which they are embedded as well as calls for an approach that is mindful of the multiple and dynamic contexts in which the document becomes relevant and salient. Though this perspective is acknowledged and discursively pursued by some existing accounts in the identification/documentation realm (e.g. Caplan and Torpey 2001, Lyon 2009, Salter 2004, Stanton 2008, Torpey 2000), an ethnographically driven study of the (inter-)national networks shaping and being reciprocally shaped by passports or other documentary identifiers is lacking. To fill this gap in the current record, I trace the emergence of the passport paradigm across the dimensions of (1) its national production and governance, (2) the local and situational reading of passport identities at an airport border, (3) individuals’ personal relation to their document(s), and (4) the supra-national regulation and conception of passports. Through this multi-scalar and -sited ethnographic design (discussed in more depth in the methodology chapter following this introduction), I will track the shifting techno-material ideologies, politico-bureaucratic objectives, and embodied practices, which shape the passport paradigm.

Having given a brief overview of the guiding questions driving the research presented in this thesis as well as the analytical and methodological orientations against which they will be answered, I shall use the remainder of this introduction to detail their analytical promise and

conceptual background: I shall begin by examining and developing in dialogue with relevant literatures the foundational proposition informing my work, namely the idea that *identification documents are socially consequential*, i.e. that they matter in social terms, and that their study can shed light on issues of anthropological relevance. By mapping out three core pillars of passports' social consequentiality – their generative effect on personhood, their ability to modulate social encounters, as well as their role in executing political macro-ideologies – I define the thematic terrain on which my thesis operates. These foundational considerations will aid me in further characterising the passport paradigm and what is at stake in its anthropological consideration. Finally, I shall close this introduction by giving an overview of the upcoming chapters, their findings as well as their collective ambition: to produce a detailed anthropological account of the becoming of the passport paradigm as a socio-political force.

Understanding impact: the social consequentiality of documentary identification

On its most basic level this thesis proposes that passports and other identification documents matter in socio-cultural terms. This notion is highly palpable in Theresa's account, where the manifold ramifications of a documentary absence point, ex-negativo, to the heightened role documents play in today's bureaucracy and Germany's identification as well as migration regime: it embodies a vivid example of their *social consequentiality*. In this introduction I wish to define more closely the specific resonance of this notion and the programmatic it sets for the coming chapters. I suggest that identification documents' social consequentiality manifests in three primary ways: (1) through the generative impact of documentary identification on the subjectivities of the identified as well as public understandings of personhood, (2) via the document's role in structuring everyday organisational practice and modulating encounters, as well as (3) by means of the centrality of the documentary form to the execution of the global macro-ideology of nation-statehood. Collectively these *realms of consequentiality*, which I will discuss in this section, map out the primary contextual conditions of the passport paradigm as it is conceived in this study as well as orient and refine my research interests: if the previously

stated research questions of *why are identification documents so consequential* and *what do people want from them* serve as guiding posts for my inquiry, then these realms of consequentiality embody the sociological terrain upon which they are pursued, bearing conceptual and methodological ramifications for the coming chapters. Working through them below, I will put forward a number of hypotheses on the sociological workings of the passport paradigm that the chapters of this thesis will go on to probe, problematise, contest, or reaffirm. They so define the scope of understandings that I hope to generate in this work.

In my description of each realm of consequentiality I build heavily on my intellectual forbearers whose work has fundamentally informed mine. Yet the body of potentially relevant scholarship is vast: though the passport, to this date, has occupied a rather marginal position within academic writing – only a hand full of significant contributions from history and sociology exist (Caplan and Torpey 2011, Claes 2010, Klein 2012, Robertson 2009, Robertson 2012, Salter 2003, Torpey 2000) – other forms and practices of documentary identification have featured more prominently: contributions ranging from history and sociology, to political theory, critical criminology as well as surveillance- and border studies have brought to the fore a sophisticated analysis of the socio-political conditions and effects of the international identification regime. Within anthropology itself, theories and ethnographies of bureaucracy and documentation as well as the everyday practices and representations of the state touch upon the granular workings and situated, productive effects of (identity) documentation within the statist project and beyond. The multidisciplinary marking the current state of scholarship on the topic, “underscores”, as historians Jane Caplan and John Torpey note, “the variety of paths that have historically led to the intensified documentation of individual identity: to corral it into the confines of a single discipline would do no justice to the scope of the subject” (2001:4). Yet, as the list of potential references is simply too long to be represented here in full, I shall not produce an exhaustive review, but foreground select, relevant perspectives.

(1) Documenting identity, (un-)making personhood

When Theresa reflects on the myriad experiences of being excluded, rejected, and relegated by the authorities due to her documentary condition, the alienation this has caused her to feel vis-à-vis not just the German state but the ideology of nation-statehood in general is a prominent theme: in a remarkably emancipatory move she describes to have outgrown the need for national belonging altogether. Whilst in the past she might have desired to “become German” in the statist view, she feels that she has now managed to disentangle the quality of Germanness from the rights that she actually desires and previously epitomised in the idea of becoming naturalised: freedom of movement, the ability to vote, the ability to get married if she so pleases, the luxury of not having to worry about whether her status might be transferred onto her future children. She still wants these things, and she understands that in pragmatic terms these will only be available to her if she does become naturalised, yet she has no desire to be a German national. Theresa attributes to this a positive connotation: she believes that her experiences have allowed her to be free of the type of “categorical thinking” (German or foreigner) that venerates through her encounters with the unproblematically nationalised. This newly found state of mind has also affected her occupational identity as a founder of an organisation dedicated to fostering the rights of the stateless.

Notwithstanding the general positivity of these identificational ramifications, when I ask Theresa what about her personality she feels might be different had she been granted citizenship early in life, the implications she foresees are equally tremendous: she tells me that she believes she would be braver, less worried to make the wrong move or upset the system; more at ease and less plagued by the fear of what the future might hold for her and her family. The ramifications of her documentary-derived status on her identity are thus complicated, multi-directional – yet they are very much there: for no matter her inner emancipation, as the passport paradigm inextricably interweaves the notions of identity and nationality it leaves her ability to vest herself in the public sphere limited. Her account illustrates how “identity documents [or the absence thereof] penetrate into the lives of those who hold them” (Kelly 2006:89) in complex ways and

how personal subjectivities are impacted by the quandaries of legal personhood. Yet how does this effect come to be?

The historians Keith Breckenridge and Simon Szreter note that “identity registration systems have been crucial practical tools” in the project of “endowing” individuals with “legal personhood”, a term they define as “the entity to which rights and duties are ascribed in law” (2012:22). Even the most fundamental human rights, Szreter and Breckenridge maintain, “mean little in practice if they are not conferred on identified and self-identifiable individuals with recognized membership of a national jurisdiction”. Registration, i.e. “the official recognition of existence and an identity”, they thus conclude, “is the grounding and basis for personhood and human rights” (Szreter and Breckenridge 2012:22) in today’s administrative system. This observation (reiterated by many scholars working on documentation and registration practices see e.g. Caplan and Torpey 2011, Mariner 2019, Navaro-Yashin 2007) might seem like a simple academic iteration of what Theresa and others have known all their life: without registration, no recognition; without the correct paperwork, no effective legal status. Yet the implications are crucial, as they point to the generative capacity of bureaucratic practice: it is here observed to not simply represent or formalise an extant entity or identity, but to bring into being new registers of personhood that otherwise, i.e. without their bureaucratic reification, cannot exist. In this vein, Theresa is only stateless, because the bureaucratic system makes her so: it produces this category, rather than simply formalising it. The bureaucratic project so unfolds a generative character. This is not a new insight or claim, yet it is of foremost centrality to the coming chapters and we must thus consider its conceptual implications:

In his writings on the genesis and structure of the bureaucratic field (1994) Pierre Bourdieu describes the generative effect of bureaucratic practice, when enacted by the state, in the following manner: “By stating with authority what a being (thing or person) is in truth (verdict) according to its socially legitimate definition, that is what he or she is authorized to be, what he has a right (and duty) to be [...] the State wields a genuinely creative, quasi divine, power” (Bourdieu 1994:12): it institutes, through the “official nomination” of citizens, or voters, or tax-

payers – through the means of registrative or documentary technologies – these categories as “socially guaranteed identities” (Bourdieu 1994:12), which bar the state’s designative interventions would not exist. This is what Luis Althusser, in his famous writings on the ideological state apparatus (2006) describes as the project of interpellation: the hailing of individuals in the statist ideology, which transforms them into statist subjects. The canon of instantiated (bureaucratically) derived identities through such interpellation, Bourdieu further argues – and Althusser might contend – thereby has a normative effect. For through its symbolic interventions into the classification of its people through bureaucratic means “the state has the ability to impose [...] a shared principle of vision and division, identical or similar cognitive and evaluative structures” which engender “a tacit, pre-reflexive agreement over the meaning of the world [...]” (Bourdieu 1994:13, see also Chalfin 2006:248, Scott 1998, Trouillot 2001): if we think back to Theresa, then her experience and the category of stateless can only exist in a world where states have predefined and imposed the unit of the nationalised, documented subject as the individual upon which the identification and mobility regime acts. This stance then normalises a world constituted by a global community of nation-states and thus forecloses or at least relegates other potential identificational renderings within the global administrative system, such as a non-nationalised existence. Consequentiality here implies not just a generative capacity, but a normativising efficacy of the passport paradigm: through it, individuals are reproduced as subjects that must be aligned with pre-defined statist registers of identity.

The markers contained by passports and identification documents more generally in their normativising capacity thus “work to make certain factors observable/knowable/visible, whilst hiding others” (Heimer 2006), diverging in part from the embodied subject’s sense of self. This introduces an understanding of passports and related identificatory documents as a kind of “ontogovernance”, a concept derived by sociologists Steve Woolgar and Daniel Neyland (2013): a type of “situated ontology” implying “the practical constitution of matter, both in the evidential sense of bringing matter into being”, as in the case of the citizen, the alien, or the stateless person, as well as “in the sense of constituting what ought to matter, why, how,

assessed by what means, using what kind of process, and so on" (Woolgar and Neyland 2013:255). Read through this lens, the passport paradigm must thus be apprehended as making operational systems of techno-bureaucratic sorting and politico-moral values. In the passport paradigm this is most obviously expressed in the hierarchy of nationalities with regard to the freedom of movement available to differently nationalised individuals, as well as the concomitant ranking and sorting of travellers at the border according to their national status as inscribed in passports. However, the valorised identificatory worlds passports create exceed far beyond the (il)-legalisation of (im-)mobility via national status: employed to automatise and organise bureaucratically desired inclusions and exclusions, passports theoretically enable "classification for differential treatment" (Lyon and Bennett 2008:12) across any of the markers of identity that they entail (see also Lyon 2003; Salter 2003, 2006; Stalder and Lyon 2003).

This ontological and normativising configuration introduces into the document-bearer dialectic the potential for tension between the specified register of personhood endowed by documents as well as the self-identifying capacities of the embodied subject. Beckenridge and Szreter define this tension to occur "between the legalistic fiction or convention of fixed, defined or stated identities", produced by the passport, "and the more messy social and cultural reality of individuals' [...] multiple attributed, aspirational, or imagined relations of identity [...]" (2012:20, see also Brubaker and Cooper 2000, Giddens 1991, Torpey 2000). This is reminiscent of Stuart Hall's analytical differentiation between *identity*, as the dynamic project of self-realisation across multiple and emergent categories and associations, and *identification*, as the production of authoritative, static registers within which a particular bureaucratic status is to be performed for a particular purpose (Hall 1996; see also Baumann 2001, 1992): in this reading the type of identity entailed in identification documents must be understood, "not [as] an essentialist, but a strategic and positional one" (Hall 1996:3). It is inherently differential, i.e. tailored to individuate bureaucratically rather than represent holistically. This bears the important implication that the passport (and the form of nationalised, operationally individuating, and verifiable identity it brings into being) is not simply representative of the person but productively indexical of it, rendering the identificational document – to speak with Derrida – akin to a sign which "does

not have its referent [...] outside of itself" (Derrida 1972:13). Consequentiality then becomes not simply the instantiation of normative registers of personhood, but the emergence of the passport as a somewhat autonomous form that stands in a complex relationship to the documented self. A crucial question, one that will also embody a continuous theme across many of the coming chapters, thus becomes how we can best conceive of the paper-person interrelation.

In a paper thematising the role of identification documents during the second Palestinian intifada (2006), the anthropologist Tobias Kelly, sheds light on this dynamic: focusing on the realm of the checkpoint and the centrality of identification documents to Palestinian's life chances, Kelly elucidates ethnographically that "the implications of holding identity documents are always partial and unstable, as the laws and regulations that give them meaning are often incoherent and the possibility of forgery is always immanent" (Kelly 2006:90). In light of ever-changing levels of enforcement at the border, identification documents thus fuelled "considerable anxiety for all those subject to their use" (Kelly 2006:90) instead of providing certainty. Kelly draws from these observations the following analytical conclusion: "although identity documents create a separation between the legal and the physical person, these two aspects of personhood are brought back together as, through their fears, people come to embody the indeterminacies of the documents that they hold" (Kelly 2006:90). This foreshadows an amalgamation of document and bearer, which will be most important in coming chapters, yet repositions the paper-person-amalgam as one forcefully animated by affect. Here the consequentiality of the documentary regime lies in the affective responses it elicits (see also Navarro-Yashin 2003, 2007, Reeves 2013) and renders documents a prosthetic for the careful calibration of subjectivity in the hopes to stabilise indeterminacies vis-à- the Israeli border regime. So much so – Kelly goes on to write – that "[i]dentity cards acted like masks, however uneasy the fit, to be put on in the presence of Israeli soldiers" (Kelly 2006:100).

In her study of Thailand's Mae Sot border region and its navigation by Burmese workers, the anthropologist Malavika Reddy complicates our understanding of documentary

consequentialities even further: addressing explicitly the question of how “paper becomes peopled”, i.e. “how assumptions about personhood and polity are enacted via paper instruments.” (Reddy 2015:253), Reddy works from an understanding of “legal status as a problem of material forms and the practices around them” (Reddy 2015:251). Yet, by observing encounters between the Thai police and Burmese migrant workers, she notes an important tension between what she describes as two different modes of documentary practice: “the first mode reifies these markers [i.e. identificational information contained in documents], asserting them as connective tissue between a legal status and the person designated on the document. The second minimizes their import, invoking instead a typological approach to personhood” (Reddy 2015:254). The two antagonistic modes, Reddy suggests, coalesce in a “fraught feedback loop, in which the practical inefficacies of the first mode reinforce the second.” (2015:254). She illustrates this point through the description of a scene in which a group of Burmese workers is detained in spite of having the correct paper-work, based on the Thai police’s ethnifying judgements of them: the legal status ascribed to the workers through their documents here held no value, as the police’s identificatory practice relied entirely on a typifying logic in lieu of documentary readings. From this Reddy infers that “documentary practices individuate Burmese people in Mae Sot not as bearers of a determinate status, but as one of a type of person whose legal status is largely insignificant to their personhood” (2015:254).

In an ethnographic history of the Indian (welfare) state’s identificational practices, the historical ethnographer Tarangini Sriraman similarly argues that “if [identification documents] occasionally make people and their representations legible, they more often obscure and render opaque the claim-making and the welfare-allocating process” (Sriraman 2018:xxix; see also Das 2006). Yet unlike in Reddy’s case where racialised readings of the Burmese workers by the police rendered the workers’ legal subjecthood ineffective, Sriraman shows that “it is owing to the contributions, contestations, and collaborations of ‘the enumerated’ in the making of ID documents that the Indian state has been able to carve out niches of administering subjects in marginal spaces” (Sriraman 2018:xxvi) in the first place: so rather than focusing purely on “the

effects of ID regimes” Sriraman zooms in on “collaborative aspects of creating ID documents and claim-making in the domains of food and housing” (Sriraman 2018:xxx). She thereby opposes a purely Foucauldian reading of identificational regimes and introduces alternative registers of becoming known that are co-produced by the identified (Sriraman 2018:xxvi).

Kelly’s, Reddy’s, and Sriraman’s work echo the complexity and ambiguity of Theresa’s document-shaped subjectivities and point us to an important realisation: whilst documents are socially consequential, their impact on the embodied subject and public understandings of personhood more largely is not deterministic; they might penetrate the lives and identities of those that they endow with a particular identification, but do so “not as reifying abstractions, but as an unpredictable and unstable technique of governance” (Kelly 2006:89). Though the bureaucratic logic “cuts, shapes, and changes phenomena more with regard to its own hermeneutic of closure than in terms of how these phenomena otherwise exist in the world” (Handelmann 2004:20), the embeddedness of the documentary form in highly situated and culturally specific fields of practice allows for it to unfold mercurial effects. This introduces into my work the necessity to consider not simply and narrowly the configuration of the paper-person interrelation, but its political, social, and affective implications and insertions in wider fields of activity and ideology. To fully understand identification documents’ personifying effect we must thus account for their configurations *in action*. Yet before I delineate the programmatic impact of this circumstance more explicitly, let me summarise the conceptual implications of the above for my approach going forward:

Collectively the above suggests that documents (un-)make people and create subjectivities as much as people (un-)make documents: they are fundamentally co-constitutive. This co-configuration brings to the fore the necessity to evaluate explicitly – empirically and conceptually – the manifold dependencies and interplay between documents and their bearers instead of “repeating the mantra about the contingency of identity” (Pelkmans 2013:99). For passports and related identificatory documents’ defining ability to *stand for* the person can only be understood through a critical examination of the multiple and evolving material, juridical,

corporeal, affective, and semiotic modulations that connect paper and person, thereby emerging the paper-person-amalgam at issue in the moment of identification. Going forward, the question of how the embodied subject and their statist identification documents are integrated and (re-)produce each other as well as the implications thereof for the ontologies of personhood in the passport paradigm will thus be a core concern: chapter 2 will assess the identificatory logics, legal provisions, and material bonds which allow for a document to become identificational in nature via a close reading of German identification documents and ethnographic engagements with those who regulate, design, and manufacture them. Moving further towards the interplay of document and person in practice, chapter 3 looks at how identification unfolds as a matter of reading people through papers at the border. Finally, chapter 4 maps out personal passport stories, connecting individuals and their documents in an attempt to make sense of the ambivalent effects of the documentary paradigm on the documented.

(2) Rendering practice, modulating encounter

When I ask Theresa what it is like travelling on her non-passport travel document, she tells me it depends: the control process at border checks will always take longer for her than it takes for other people, but the experiences may still vary dramatically injecting into her experience of travel an inherent sense of uncertainty. Her encounters at German borders are always the most tense. The questioning is endless and Theresa often feels as if officers will put her in shackles and arrest her at any given moment. Yet elsewhere, the experience can be quite different: she describes a scene where she arrives at London Heathrow and tries, unsuccessfully, to enter through the electronic control gates. Predictably, the system rejects her document and so she sees an officer to sort out the situation. He checks her documents, simply says “Looks like you!”, and lets her through. When she tells the story she tells it in amazement and with determination: it *can* be that simple, it *should* be that simple – yet it is not always so. Her experience of travel is situational: with her document, status, and intersecting matters such as her race, there are no predictable outcomes. This gives her document a very ambiguous

meaning: it is, as she says, in many ways the closest that she has ever come to a sense of freedom; yet it has also conditioned some of the most traumatic experiences of her life, involving rejection, deportation, emotional turmoil. This ambiguity points to the fact that the practical consequences of the identificational regime for the various people involved in it, such as Theresa, are not linear functions of their documentary inscription, but assemble in situational encounters:

In her seminal work on reconfiguration and/at the interface, Lucy Suchman observes that “[e]mpirical investigations of the workings of standards and other technologies aimed at the reproduction of sameness”, of which state-issued identification documents in their effort to produce the identifiable citizen-subject must be considered an example, “provide ample evidence that the agencies of such artifacts do not inhere in the prescriptions themselves but rely on the skilled practices that bring them into alignment with a given case at hand” (Suchman 2012:269). Equally, the political geographer Louise Amoore in her important work on governing by identity contends that any empirical approach to identification should orient itself towards “the practices and modes of identification that make an identity claim possible” (Amoore 2008:22). For as the anthropologist Ilana Feldman points out in her ethnography of the civil service in Gaza, any “analytics of government requires attention to the form, context, and details of the exercise of rule” (Feldman 2008:5). These points are reflective of a general consensus emerging across much scholarly writing on the subject of technology, especially technologies of governance such as identification documents. It points to the idea that the meaning and social efficacy of any technology manifests as much in its enactment, as it does in its design or conception. This stance is also well documented in the ethnographic canon (especially on bureaucratic conduct see e.g. Harper 1998, Hull 2012b, Mathur 2015, Pellegrin 2012) and it is worth considering for a moment a few such examples that concern themselves directly with the passport paradigm:

In her study of Kyrgyz migrant workers in Russia the anthropologist Madeleine Reeves looks at the interplay of uncertainty and documentary (in-)authenticity in the Russian governance of

migration: beginning her account with the story of a Russian passport that is shared by eight Kyrgyz workers in an attempt to overcome the restrictions paused on migrant workers by immigration quota, Reeves notes that in a world of shared documentary identities and counterfeit documents (oftentimes sold by supposedly legitimate visa agencies) “documents are never entirely knowable and never completely transparent, which creates spaces of possibility [...] but also generates practices of suspicion” (Reeves 2013:509). Much like Reddy in the previously cited example, Reeves infers that as the boundaries between ‘fake’ and ‘real’ are blurred and the uncertainty around the authentically documented grows, “the physical person becomes scrutinized all the more intensely as the locus of truth” (Reeves 2013:512). Her observations around the policing of migrant workers, their identifications, and documents thereby point “to the role of documents and documentary regimes in heightening insecurity and normalizing suspicion toward certain ethnically marked bodies” (Reeves 2013:520, see also Reddy 2015), i.e. those who are read by authorities as visibly non-Russian. Here the documentary form modulates practice in a twofold manner: its proneness to manipulation conditions a space of identificational possibility utilised by migrant workers, which in turn effects the racialisation of their bodies and corporealisation of their identity in the documentary regime.

Addressing documentary forms issued and produced by the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Yael Navaro-Yashin (2007) equally queries the distinctions drawn between what she calls “make-believe”, “legal”, and “counterfeit” papers: shedding light on the “performative and phantasmatic” (Navaro-Yashin 2007:92) quality of documents issued by a state that is not recognised as such by the bulk of the global community, Navaro-Yashin elicits how identification and travel documents, irrespective of their “legality” and “validity” incite “affective energies when transacted or put to use in specific webs of social relation” (Navaro-Yashin 2007:81) that are very real to those who engage with them. The consequentiality of the documentary form here manifests as an emotive charge: “when placed in specific social relations with persons, documents have the potentiality to discharge affective energies which are felt or experienced by persons” (Navaro-Yashin 2007:81, see also Strathern 1999).

Similarly probing documents beyond their official function, Mathijs Pelkmans, in his study of "Passports, Passages and Dilemmas of Identification on the Georgian-Turkish Border" (2013), describes how the "relevance of passports", as he observed it, "was not their official status, but instead their capacity to reveal particularities about individuals" (Pelkmans 2013:91) that would then form the grounds for their extortion by border guards. His ethnographic observations "reveal the basic logic by which customs officers – on the basis of passports and passport data", such as citizenship, ethnicity, age, or gender "defined the worth of each individual passenger" in a very literal sense: the price they would have to pay to be allowed to pass. The valorisation of travellers through corrupt border officers by means of their documents, mirrors, Pelkmans notes (2013:104), the general asymmetries of a mobility regime ranking individuals and their deservingness of mobility by means of their nationality. The practical consequentiality of the documentary form in post-soviet Georgia, Pelkmans so shows, is therefore its instrumentality in the formation of a "personalized theatre of power" (2013:105), wherein a statist system "based on the categorization of its population into ethnically defined constituencies disintegrates [and] is replaced by patronage networks that depend on, and perpetuate, those same categories" (2013:106); a "machine of extortion" (2013:91) as Pelkmans contends.

It becomes clear from these few examples that, as ethnographically inclined readers will surely have predicted, different dimensions of the documentary form are foregrounded and varying consequentialities effected, depending on the cultural-historical context in which identification documents are considered and the specific communities of practice that dominate it. Equally, each of the coming chapters will unveil a dimension of documentary identification that can only come into focus when viewed from the particular perspective of the specific community of practice represented in that chapter: chapter 3, e.g. illustrates, how the way border officers are taught to read and scrutinise documents and their bearers at the airport border, renders identificatory practice a type of somatic paperwork, in which bodies animate documents and vice-versa. The resulting corporealisation of identity – a major consequentiality of the passport paradigm at large – has strong political and racialising implications. However, shifting from the

border to the realm of supra-national standardisation in chapter 5, documentary practice becomes a type of regulatory maintenance work, enacted to produce a semiotic infrastructure for inter-statist identification. The practical consequentiality of the documentary form and its enactment hereby lies in the production of a mutually recognising community of sovereign states. Across the other fields and communities that I study the documentary identifiers assume even more gestalten: they feature as tools of aesthetic self-realisation, a mode of encounter, a type of rhythmicity, a material-semiotic infrastructure, medium of techno-bureaucratic auto-poiesis, and a material gateway to a post-documentary future; they are as collectivising as they are individuating; discriminatory and at once forcefully inclusive; abstracted yet embodied. And they are made so in practice. In short: the passport and the class of identification documents with which it belongs are bureaucratic jacks of many trades and equally diverse are their practical consequentialities. We find here a first indication that any attempt to produce an ethnography of the passport paradigm as an overarching phenomenon must overcome the singularity of one context at the benefit of a multi-perspectival framing. Yet before I explicate this stance as well as its limitations more clearly in the following methodology chapter, let me take a moment to consider how the above bears on my inquiry going forward.

The social consequentiality of the documentary modulation of specific practical encounters, when viewed through the lens of the above ethnographic examples, highlights that identification documents are not fetishistic entities (see also Reddy 2015:256)⁶; they are not ipso facto powerful, but their impact emerges in tandem with the politics and desires of those who engage them and are themselves engaged by documents. This designates consequentiality as, both, the result of an *orchestration of* and *instrumentalisation in* practice. This points to identificatory documents' role as structuring devices, enabling certain choices, subjectivities, and mobilities, whilst prohibiting others, yet also hints at the limits of the documentary form as a standardising entity. Studying the passport paradigm thus must imply

⁶ Though I acknowledge that identification documents can indeed hold a fetishistic quality (see e.g. Gordillo 2006) my own ethnographic data, as the reader will be able to verify over the coming pages, does not, by and large, follow this perspective.

tracing, to echo Annelise Riles, “how diverse types of agency are produced, stretched or abbreviated through the medium of the document; in short, in the responses, human and non-human, that documents demand or offer up” (Riles 2006:21) in specific socio-culturally situated contexts. Yet, when practice and context determine the meanings and social effect of identification documents, rendering documentary consequentiality a profoundly emic category, in how far can we then talk about the idea of an overarching paradigmatic phenomenon? A key concern going forward, one that a multi-sited ethnographic approach is uniquely situated to address, will thus be the question of whether it will be possible to discern across different domains of practice within the passport paradigm consistent “structuring” logics or effects at play. This also necessitates close attention to “the interplay between individual agency and structural forces” (Feldman 2011:184) as they unravel within different communities of practice and their specific documentary pursuits.

(3) State-making, world-making

Let me now shift to the third and final realm of consequentiality that sets the scope of interest for my inquiry going forward. I shall start again with Theresa and the ideological double-bind that she feels characterises her situation: the state, so it seems to Theresa, does not want her to be German but leaves her no choice other than trying to become naturalised if she wishes to be “a full participant in German society”, as she frames it. The seeming irreconcilability of these parallel realities puzzles her: first it renders exclusive what she feels does not need to be so. “If I became naturalised, that would not take anything away from anybody else, would it? My becoming a German citizen would not mean that another citizen loses their nationality. Yet they want you to think of it as a scarce good”, Theresa analyses the situation. Second, this construction of nationality as an exclusive and limited resource, Theresa feels, conditions the inherent ambiguity of the political signalling at play: “The state does not want that [stateless] people can simply get naturalised, yet even so the system is designed in a manner that the only possible goal that people could ever have is to seek naturalisation. That is just super weird. You don’t allow people in, but you still somehow want them to be focused on gaining a nationality –

because you give them no alternative scenario. You want them to want this so bad that they give and do anything for it". She describes this dialectic as toxic as it keeps stateless people chasing the proverbial carrot of naturalisation.

When Theresa speaks of the irreconcilability of the unattainable status of being a national with the singularisation of this very status as the only desirable one, she identifies a mechanism that works to reinforce statelessness as a permanent state of exception. We see here re-iterated the idea, discussed above, of the state's ability to bureaucratically render certain states of existence as "socially guaranteed identities" (Bourdieu 1994:12) and the normativising impact thereof on societal conceptualisations of legitimate and primary forms of becoming identified. Yet Theresa's analysis, I argue, suggests that the impact of what she observes goes beyond the mere bureaucratic hailing of embodied subjects as particular bureaucratic personas (through documents). In her analysis she excavates the traces of what I propose is a third, crucial configuration of the passport paradigm's social consequentiality: namely its centrality to the realisation of certain socio-political macro-ideologies, first and foremost the ideology of nation statehood and a world constituted by such states.

To make sense of this proposition, let me first define my understanding of ideology. It is broadly influenced by a materialist perspective, first and foremost Althusser's aforementioned writings on *Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus* (2006): expanding the traditionally Marxist understanding of the "State as a force of repressive execution and intervention" (Althusser 2006:90), Althusser argues that states reproduce the conditions of production and thus themselves by deputising a certain number of "Ideological State Apparatuses" (ISA), such as schools, the church, but also the family or the media, with the dissemination of a dominant, i.e. ruling-class, ideology. In his analysis, he identifies two central dimensions to the workings of ideological reproduction, which I consider particularly decisive to our understanding of the ideological consequentiality of the passport paradigm: first, Althusser marks out the profoundly imaginary character of ideology, stating that "[i]t is not their real conditions of existence, their real world, that 'men' 'represent to themselves' in ideology, but above all it is their relation to

those conditions of existence which is represented to them there" (2006:101). In this vein ideology is understood to comprise the effective charting of imaginary positionalities, thus bridging the gap between the real and perceived. Second, Althusser maintains that these imaginary relations and their enactment have a necessarily material existence: an individual's "ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject" (2006:103). When considering ideology we must thus consider the material conditions of its replication and the imaginary relations it thereby instantiates. For it is therethrough that ideology becomes a central tool for "the multi-layered composition, and potential re-composition, of a collective world" (de León and Rockhill 2020:96).

The imaginative potential of ideology identified by Althusser as well as his insistence on its material realisation, especially when enacted by the state in its own reproduction, are of course reminiscent of Benedict Anderson's (1983/2006) seminal notion of the imagined quality of the nation as a political community of individuals which can never all meet, "yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (2006:6). So conceiving of nation-ness as a cultural artefact which entails an imaginative type of relationality, i.e. an ideology in the Althusserian sense, the emergence and spread of which must be carefully dismantled, Anderson goes on to define – much like Althusser in his listing of ISAs – a number of cultural forms and institutions, such as maps, the census, or the museum that have allowed states, especially the colonial state, to enact this imaginative performance successfully (2006:164). Of the census particularly, he writes: "The fiction of the census is that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one – and only one – extremely clear place – no fractions" (2006:166). The imaginative instantiation of the idea of the nation, "imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (2006:6), appears here as a historico-cultural strategy of ideological envelopment: of making a disparate set of entities, individuals, and identities into one through artefactual practice, and thereby fixing it in place. In this view we see at play in the passport paradigm a material formation or ISA that effectively renders "nation-ness [...] the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time" (2006:1) – not only by re-producing the embodied subject as national or citizen (as we found in

a previous section), but by deploying documentary identifiers as “vehicles of imagination” (Hull 2012a:260) which hold in place nation-statehood as a fundamental state of being.

The sociologist and historian John Torpey (2000) – in what is one of the most important works on passports to date – identifies a similar dynamic of national envelopment as inherent to the passport regime: noting that “[b]oundaries between persons that are rooted in the legal category of nationality can only be maintained, it turns out, by documents indicating a person's nationality, for there simply is no other way to know this fact about someone” (2000:1), Torpey re-envision the distinctions drawn by states on the basis of papers between citizen and alien as a type of statist “embrace”. States “embrace” their own citizens through passports, which allow them to control their mobility and belonging, thereby enabling “the supervision of the growth, spatial distribution, and social composition of populations within their territories” (Torpey 2000:7). He develops his notion of embrace vis-à-vis what he calls “penetrationist” approaches to statist power in the Foucauldian vein, which Torpey feels have “little to say about the mechanisms adopted and employed by states to construct and sustain enduring relationships between themselves and their subjects” (Torpey 2000:10):

The infrastructural strength of nation states today, Torpey maintains, lies in their very ability to embrace, i.e. “‘grasp’ or ‘lay hold of’ in the sense of register” (Torpey 2000:11) a carefully delineated citizenry and the passport is crucial to this effort (see also Caplan and Torpey 2001:8). This highlights an understanding of passports as collectivising and institutionalising rather than merely individuating. The embrace of the passport is thus complex: it is not simply protective of the citizen, but of statist interests more largely. This can lend it a cage-like quality, as e.g. in the case of a German humanitarian worker, recounted to me by a German government lawyer working on the topic of passport law. The woman’s passport was withdrawn to hinder her from traveling to Afghanistan, where she was involved in building schools for girls. The German authorities claimed to have received intelligence indicating that there was a significant threat for the woman to be abducted by the Taliban and so saw its interests at risk; for the government did not want to fall into a position where it needed to negotiate with the

Taliban to free the worker. It thus utilised the embrative quality of the passport to protect itself, at the cost of the woman's mobility and liberty to pursue her work.

This embrative quality endows national identification documents with an instrumental role in the project of state-making. As Torpey and others note, this becomes particularly evident when considering the early days of nation-statehood at the end of the 18th century after the French Revolution: the foundational triad of Westphalian sovereignty – territory-nation-state – indicates that in order to be a state and become socially effective as such, a community of the governable, i.e. nation, is required. It was thus paramount to newly formed states that "[t]he civil identity of the individual [within their territory] had to be clearly recognized [...] in ways that would supersede the old confusions associated with 'religious and civil' records of births, marriages and deaths" (Lyon and Bennett 2008:10, see also Kertzer and Arel 2011, Noiriel 2002, Sriraman 2018:xxxiii). Only so could the nation as a community of civil subjects emerge and replace pre-existent forms of community and institutional affiliation. In the existing literature a variety of bureaucratic devices and practices, among them practices and technologies of registering and documenting identity, are attributed a critical role in this project (see e.g. Breckenridge and Szreter 2012:7, Ferguson and Gupta 2002, Scott 1998). They collectively suggest that it is "as a spectral presence materialized in documents" (Das 2004:250–51), such as the passport, that "states actually constitute and maintain themselves as on-going concerns" (Torpey 2000:3) in the lives of the nation. Individuals like Theresa, who lack documentary identification and a nationality represent "a disquieting element" vis-à-vis this carefully crafted equilibrium: "by breaking up the identity between man and citizen, between nativity and nationality, [they] throw into crisis the original fiction of sovereignty" (Agamben 1995, see also Khosravi 2010:3). By re-integrating Theresa into the nation as an included-exclusion, enacted through dedicated documents for the non-nationalised, the German state could thus be understood to attempt to contain this very disquieting effect.

The documentary centrality to the maintenance of sovereignty that shines through here, prompts Torpey (2000) to offer a reconfiguration of Max Weber's famous paradigm: whilst

Weber in his *Politics as a Vocation* (1965) speaks of sovereignty as the monopoly on legitimate physical force held by the state within its territory, Torpey renders the history of the passport a narrative of the sovereignty endowing effects of the monopolisation of the legitimate means of mobility and identity by states. Torpey characterizes this as a “monopoly of movement” (2000, see also Mitchell 1999:188, Lyon and Bennett 2008) in which “individual states and the international state system as a whole successfully monopolized the legitimate authority to permit movement within and across their jurisdictions” (Torpey 2000:9). Within this monopolistic structure, border-crossers have to “comply with [the] patterns of legibility” (Gordillo 2006:171) agreed upon by the international community and expressed as well as inscribed in passports, as deviance from the prescribed protocol renders their mobility pursuits “specifically ‘illegal’” (Torpey 2000:9); the (il-)legality of mobility, a trope that today almost appears foundational to the political discourse on migration, is thus, one could argue, a direct product, if not an invention of the passport paradigm under the conditions of statism, rendering the document a central kinopolitical tool: it is designed to counter the perceived threat of uncontrolled mobility – and thus the feared erosion of the nation and states’ territorial sovereignty – by enabling states to manage access to their territory based on the primary distinction of citizen and alien. The passport regime so cements “the fundamental right of the sovereign [...] to exclude and define the limits of its population” (Salter 2006:174) thus establishing the state as “a concrete, overarching, spatially encompassing reality” (Ferguson and Gupta 2002:981-2).

The above indicates that it is only in acknowledgement of the passport paradigm’s fundamental orientation towards managing mobility, i.e. the policing of the movement of embodied citizen-subjects between and across sovereign territories, that the scope of its ideological effects become fully comprehensible⁷: today’s high levels (even post-pandemic) of “the border-

⁷ Though travel documents of some kind can be traced back to the middle ages (see Groebner 2001, Salter 2003, Torpey 2000), the passport regime only proliferated at the outset of the twentieth century. The bureaucratic centrality of passports and the complementary visa-system sprung from the condition of an increasingly mobile civil population and high levels of displacement in the aftermath of the first and second world war. These heightened levels of mobility appeared to threaten and challenge the “idea of

transgressing circulations of people” contest the “territorial inviolability of nation-states”, rendering borders “porous” (Sharma and Gupta 2006:6; see also Das and Poole 2004). Since however the presumption prevails that “all collectivities should ‘occupy a place in the world’” (Jansen 2009:824), the documentary management of mobility gains criticality in the project of stabilising the sovereign nation-state by appraising increasing volumes of border-crossing people – restricting access for some, while easing entrance for others: “what is remarkable about the contemporary system of passport controls” is that in doing so “it bears witness to a cooperating ‘international society’ as well as to an overarching set of norms and prescriptions to which individual states must respond” (Torpey 2000:3). For under the conditions of globality regulating border control protocols is not “the sole purview or ‘right’ of the modern state” (Sharma and Gupta 2006:7), but “a property of the international system as a whole - that is, of nation-states acting in concert to enforce their interests in controlling who comes and goes” (Torpey 2000:8). Consequently, and as shall be illustrated in chapter 5, responsibility is “mapped onto supranational and nongovernmental organisations” (Sharma and Gupta 2006:7) such as the United Nations International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) that produces technical specifications for passports and related travel documents to make them globally interoperable, or the International Standardisation Organisation that supports ICAO in its work and formulates internationally applicable protocols for the encryption of passport data. This shift turns a formerly “national monopoly” of documentary identification into an “international oligopoly” (Lyon and Bennett 2008, see also Lyon 2009).

The passport paradigm so emerges from a highly complex and politically charged process of inter-statist cooperation, discussed at great length in chapter 5, in which national sovereignty is produced, affirmed, and, rejected within a global, inter- and supra-statist context. The ideology

belonging that is at the root of the concept of citizenship” (Torpey 2000:12) and consequently the state, causing the *League of Nations* to take first steps towards harmonising and popularising the passport regime in the interwar period: calling on its members to adapt comprehensive and permanent passport controls, which ordinarily did not exist outside the circumstances of war, the league issued a standardised passport proto-type that embodied the first wide-spread incarnation of the typical passport booklet that is pervasive today and eventually spawned the contemporary comprehensive passport and visa system (see chapter 5).

executed, to return to the above parable, is thus not simply one of nation statehood but of a global community of mutually interdependent nation states that rely on each other for their reproduction as sovereign entities. From this emerges a wider global order, effectively reifying not just the individual nation state but a world constituted by such entities. Yet it is also in this very context that the limits of the performative impetus of identification documents in the project of enacting sovereignty become apparent: the issuance of national identification documents alone does not necessarily effect a sovereign state, as Rebecca Bryant in her work on the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), a state only recognised by Turkey, indicates: as “international society participates in the construction of sovereign states” (Bierstecker and Weber 1996:6) any performance of stateness through, e.g. identification documents such as those issued by the TRNC to its citizens, yet not recognised by the global community, requires “an audience to see and recognise the performance as such.” (Bryant 2021:60). As a result, the issuance of “passports” rather than passports, as Bryant marks out the difference, does not have a sovereignty endowing effect on the TRNC and its people; rather, she suggests, identification documents are part of a set of forms and practices that always points towards the very “foreclosure” of sovereignty, which is always already “rendered impossible by the hegemonic norms of the international community” (Bryant 2021:62). This complicates our understanding of the performativity of the documentary form and provides an important corrective to overly generous readings of identification documents’ sovereign consequentiality.

Of course previous contributions have already established the centrality of bureaucratic practice and artefacts to the production of particular forms of social order (Feldman 2008, Ferguson and Gupta 2002, Gupta 2012, Herzfeld 1992, Mitchell 1999, Riles 2000, Trouillot 2001). So what does the realm of documents’ ideological consequentiality⁸ imply for the approach developed

⁸ There is of course a whole host of other ideologies that are perpetuated or effected by the passport paradigm: e.g. in the documentary regime “non-literacy-based [...] or performative ritual methods for establishing mutual recognition, rights and obligations” (Breckendridge and Szreter 2012:27) are, on the surface, completely discarded (though, as I shall show in chapter 3, the situation is complicated when we attend to documentary identification as embodied, interpersonal encounter at e.g. the border).

in this thesis? How does it shape its programmatic? Viewed in the above vein the passport paradigm embodies a powerful prism through which to enact an anthropological analysis of macro-ideology: through it we can trace, to borrow Talal Asad's characterisation of the issue of ideology as an anthropological subject, "how particular political and economic conditions maintain or undermine given forms of authoritative discourse [e.g. nation statehood and its global prevalence] as systems" (Asad 1979:607); a project to which ethnography is uniquely suited, for "ideology functions as a microscopic process of composition with macroscopic consequences" (de Léon and Rockhill 2020:108). In coming chapters I shall trace the granular processes of ideological reproduction at play within the passport paradigm: chapter 2 shows how states cast an image of themselves in documents whilst chapter 4 addresses the question of how the "state comes to be imagined, encountered, and reimagined by the population" (Sharma and Gupta 2006:12 on statist documents more generally) through the documentary form; finally, chapter 5 will look at how statist sovereignty is moulded, constructed, and materialised in the supra-national regulation of passports. Beyond refining our understanding of documentary identification and adding to the broad ethnographic record on statecraft, these approaches will enable a close analysis of the important issue of "nationalism's indevorcable marriage to internationalism" (Anderson 1983/2006:207) from a materially-grounded angle. Finally, it is only with a clear awareness of the passport paradigm's macro-ideological effects in mind that we can advance towards a consideration of the future of identification, towards which I shall embark in the conclusion. For as Breckenridge and Szreter note, "[b]oth contemporary and historic diversity demonstrate not only that changes in technology and in forms of economic exchange produce differences in the registration systems prevailing in different societies, but also that these factors interact with distinctive ideologies and the political contexts in which states operate" (Breckenridge and Szreter 2012:27-28).

Moreover, the individuation of personhood according to Western ideologies of individualism must also be understood to be an ideology advanced by and through the passport paradigm in which identity is conceptualised as the statistical individuation of a person to the exclusion of all others, producing the individual as the core unit of governance (see chapter 2 and 5).

Thesis overview: mapping the passport paradigm

Having clarified the subject at issue (the passport paradigm), the questions that I ask to address it, as well as the conceptual terrain in which the coming chapters are grounded, the question becomes: to what do these amount? Each chapter in this thesis is loosely organised around a particular constituency of the passport paradigm, i.e. a specific community of practice or perspective, which contributes to the emergence of the passport paradigm in Germany and beyond. The narrative presented does not follow the chronology of my journey through the field, but develops according to a thematic arch that moves from the artefact to its application and from present to future, across the scales of the national, the local, the personal, and the global. I start out with a methodological discussion (chapter 1) and then move to a consideration of the artefactual protagonists of this thesis – identification documents – and those who shape them (chapter 2); eventually, I work my way through different dimensions of the passport paradigm as practice, from the realm of documentary identification at the border (chapter 3) and individual's experience of navigating the identificatory regime (chapter 4), to the supra-national regulation of the passport as a global form (chapter 5). Finally, I shall synthesise these findings in the conclusion of this chapter, to develop an over-arching perspective on the question of how we must understand the passport paradigm anthropologically. Below the narratives and arguments presented in each chapter are summarised briefly.

Chapter 1: *Tracing emergence*

Before I begin my ethnographic analysis of the passport paradigm, I shall offer some methodological reflections on the ethnographic set-up on which this thesis builds. Focusing on the conceptual considerations that have prompted me to select a multi-sited approach, as well as the analytical perspectives that have aided in its execution, I delineate the larger methodological commitments of this thesis: working from the idea and ambition of *tracing emergence*, i.e. reconstructing the perpetual genesis of the passport paradigm via a study of a set of its central constituencies, I introduce the communities of practice which are ethnographically explored in coming chapters. In the project of generative reconstruction, the

documentary form takes on the role of an artefactual thread that enacts an analytical relationality across constituencies and thereby connects various scales operative within and through the passport paradigm. It is thus through the orientation towards the artefact, I argue, that I can track and conceptualise the passport paradigm as “a sociality outside and beyond the here and now” (Riles 2000:2) that ranges across various dimensions of documentary identification and -practice. Finally, I conclude this chapter by commenting on the particularities of and rationales for situating my project in Germany, as well as my own positionality within this study and setting.

Chapter 2: *Making known*

Moving from methodology to analysis, I begin the ethnographic portion of this thesis with an attempt to familiarise the reader with the artefactual protagonists of my work and those who design them. As I chart a portray of German identification documents and their creators, I seek to answer the following questions: (1) How are documents oriented towards the world? (2) What are the political and aesthetic concerns shaping these orientations? (3) And how do those who create these documents relate to the world through them? To answer these questions I follow a twofold approach, moving from an analysis of the markers through which identities are fixed in documents, to a consideration of the techno-material processes governing the production of secure documents. Throughout, I marry a close artefactual reading of the German passport and national ID card with ethnographic insights derived in conversation and collaboration with those within the German authorities and adjacent institutions working to design them – legally, materially, technically. Thereby the project of creating documentary identities comes into view as a field in which the realisation of a multiplicity of identities is at stake, extending far beyond the documented citizen and positioning documents as crucial in the self-realisation of the state, its agent’s, and their particular vision of “the German way”. Thereby the desire for techno-aesthetic achievement and the mundanity of politico-bureaucracy embody key influences in the creative identificatory process, highlighting dimensions of bureaucratic becoming that, whilst prominent in the wider bureaucratic literature, have been insufficiently acknowledged in existing analyses of the documentary regime thus far.

Chapter 3: *Interfacing encounter*

Shifting from the matter of the configuration of the documentary identificational form to its deployment during identificational encounters, the next chapter takes us to the airport border. Drawing out ethnographically how documentary identities are approved and rejected by border officers, I trace the micro-dynamics of document-based identification through its three constituent stages – *bearer authentication*, *document verification*, *narrative synthesis* – to highlight the laborious, corporealised, and fundamentally ambiguous nature of conjuring identity at the border. I show that practices of verifying identity claims and the documents through which they are made, work towards bridging the “space of indeterminacy” (Reeves 2013:520) inherent to the documentary regime and momentarily fix *identity* i.e. *the situational recognition of an embodied subject through their document*. These insights then inform a conceptual repositioning of the passport as a socio-material *interface*: it structures the conditions of engagement between officers and individuals and is generative of a performative aesthetic of coherence that works to veil the geo-political chaos marking the borderzone. The interface thereby mediates the conditions of not just identification and mobility at the border, but its very sociality, replacing mutual recognition with unilateral identification; only when the documentary interface is subverted, does the possibility for real encounter re-emerge.

Chapter 4: *Passport stories*

Having explored in some depth two different sets of constituencies and their respective roles in the design and enactment of the passport paradigm, chapter 4 marks a turning away from state-affiliated actors and towards the mundane experience of navigating life in the documentary regime. In this more exploratory chapter I ask if and how people relate to their identification documents as they manoeuvre through the passport paradigm. However, rather than a systematic answer, I present a set of narratives – *passport stories* – that embody situated, personal accounts of the lived experience of navigating the passport paradigm. Each story illuminates a particular perspective onto and from within the passport paradigm, bringing within the reader’s field of perception the parallels and sharp divergences of a shared condition: being documented. The stories are preceded by an introduction, describing the

methodological impetus of this more unconventional chapter vis-à-vis existing conceptions of the paper-person-amalgam. The chapter ends in an attempt to think through people's experiences and explore the inchoate commonalities among experiential multiplicity, eventually indicating the fundamentally rhythmic quality of documented live and their effect on individuals' sense of self-sovereignty.

Chapter 5: *Crafting globality*

Whilst chapter 4 works from the recognition that being documented is an almost universal trait, with identification documents embodying a technology touching lives everywhere, chapter 5 goes to probe this ominous quality of globality in a world that can otherwise agree on very little: how is globality derived in the passport paradigm, i.e. how has the passport in particular come to materialise a supra-national bureaucratic consensus on the certification and verification of identity? And what are the conditions, effects, as well as limits of this shared *uni-form*? In this chapter I address these questions by exploring the passport's regulatory becoming at the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), a United Nations agency tasked with regulating passports on behalf of all UN-recognised states. Weaving together ethnographic insights stemming from interviews conducted with ICAO bureaucrats with a close reading of the organisation's regulatory outputs, I show that ICAO's work towards a documentary *uni-form* has allowed for the emergence of a *material-semiotic infrastructure* (Weichselbraun 2019) through which states mediate not just identification and border control, but their respective interdependence as well as sovereignty.

Conclusion: *What is documentary identification?*

If previous chapters will have taken us through different communities of practice and emergence of the passport paradigm, the conclusion brings us back to the beginning in pursuit of making sense of identification documents' inherently contradictory character: the roles, meanings, and consequences of documents fluctuate vastly between the passport paradigm's different constituencies, leaving us with the realisation that the devices we use to stabilise identity do not hold a fixed identity of their own. The only continuity to be found across the

multiple scales tracked in previous chapters, it appears, is the inherent fallibility of the identificatory project itself. Yet a consensus that identification documents *do* work persists among all groups. What to make of this? I suggest that the fluid quality of identification documents, reflected in their changing roles, renders them an effective *Ersatz* in the fulfilment of the often-contradictory desires pervading the administrative system. This *Ersatz*-quality – identification documents' ability to stand in for a large number of wants and functions – is crucial to their long-term prevalence and intense consequentiality for it enables an *identificational realism* in which any identificatory failures – social, technical, political – are eventually absorbed and transformed by the system into a demand for more of it. In a world in which identification technologies, both documentary and digital, gain increasing currency in ever more dimensions of daily life, this realisation is crucial, for it may set us on a new path to formulating critiques and alternative visions more attuned to identification's evasive nature and thereby the wider fields of activity, such as governance, policing, and state-making in which it is immersed.

Tracing emergence – Charting systemic artefacts

SUMMARY

In the introduction I have defined the questions and concerns to be addressed by a project dedicated to the passport paradigm. Yet how can this programmatic be executed empirically? Focusing on the conceptual considerations that have prompted me to select a multi-sited approach, as well as the analytical perspectives that have aided in its execution, this chapter sets out to delineate the larger methodological approach of this thesis. Working from the idea and ambition of *tracing emergence*, i.e. reconstructing the perpetual genesis of the passport paradigm via an ethnographic study of a set of its central constituencies, I introduce the communities of practice explored in coming chapters. In the project of reconstructing the genesis and maintenance of the passport paradigm, the documentary form takes on the role of an artefactual thread that enacts an analytical relationality across constituencies. Through this orientation towards the artefact, I am able to track and conceptualise the passport paradigm as “a sociality outside and beyond the here and now” (Riles 2000:2) that ranges across various scales of documentary identification and -practice. Finally, I conclude this chapter by commenting on the particularities of and rationales for the *German-ness* of my project as well as reflect on my own positionality within the paradigmatic form that I address.

Reconstruction

“[T]here is no more potent tool for rupture than the reconstruction of genesis” (Bourdieu 1994:4) stipulates Bourdieu in *Rethinking the State* and proceeds to outline what he deems “a model of the emergence of the state” [emphasis in original] (1994:4), tracing along the concentration of different types of capital in the culmination of which he sees the state to be founded. Whilst an analysis of stateness through the prism of Bourdieusian capital is neither the goal nor method of the project advanced in this thesis, Bourdieu’s methodological offering nonetheless embodies an important inspiration for the ethnographic approach presented here:

the idea of a reconstruction of genesis, i.e. the tracing backwards of *emergence*, encapsulates neatly the conceptual stance that has informed my ethnographic design. In my methodological operationalisation of tracing emergence I presuppose two things: first, I conceive of genesis as a dynamic process of perpetual becoming, which does not follow a linear trajectory or centrally-defined principles of coordination. The emergent entity at issue, the passport paradigm, gains through this dynamic generative process a disparate quality, i.e. it is a distributed form spread across different institutions and communities of practice. Second, throughout this distributed, generative process and paradigmatic inchoateness the passport and related documentary forms embody a connective, material thread. Following this documentary thread in an adaption of the Marcusean tradition of “following the thing” (1995) and the material anthropological approach of tracing the socio-cultural trajectories of things (Appadurai 1986, Kopytoff 1986), I suggest, can help us make sense not only of specific situated meanings of the artefactual entity, but of the passport paradigm as a whole.

Below I shall unpack this suggestion and introduce the ethnographic design that has enabled me to derive and formulate the insights presented in this thesis. I do so via three steps: first I lay out the conceptual considerations that have prompted me to select a multi-perspectival ethnographic framing and the benefits this has to offer in the project of developing an anthropological analysis of the passport paradigm. I then move to map out the instrumentality of a material orientation within my work and its crucial role in the project of integrating, within the intellectual context of this thesis, the variant perspectives presented. Furthermore, as the mobile nature of my ethnographic work complicates its Germany-centric quality, I shall devote some time to thematising these complications, the reasoning that has let me to choose Germany as my ethnographic focal point in the first place, as well as the inherent limitations that come with this particular position. Finally, I shall reflect on my own positionality within the various fields of ethnographic exploration at play in this thesis.

Unpacking genesis: devising a multi-perspectival design

The ethnographic design enabling the collection of data presented over the coming pages is rooted in a conceptualisation of the passport artefact and related documents as *travelling* forms, that do not only dis- and enable mobility but in their identificational deployment move, necessarily, through different regulatory, industrial, civil, and political realms as well as across registers of the private, local, national, and the inter- or supra-national. This is a function of identification documents' previously described character as boundary objects, which mediate the engagement of different parties marked by a lack of familiarity with each other, thus conditioning the need for identification. The doubling of mobility inherent in this conception suggests that an equally mobile ethnographic approach is required to grasp the dynamic at play; a multi-perspectival framing, which examines how different communities and institutions involved in the regulation, design, manufacture, or deployment of identification documents and related technologies shape and are themselves shaped by as well as emerge and emerge from the passport paradigm.

Working from the context of migration studies Greg Feldman offers up the notion of a “non-local ethnography in a world of apparatuses” (2011, see also Feldman 2012) to engage with these particular ethnographic affordances: Feldman’s apparatus demarcates a form which “organizes social relations between disconnected actors through abstract, mediating agents that replace direct social connections” (Feldman 2011:378). Studying such formation, Feldman argues, then necessary calls for a non-local ethnographic set-up: the ethnographer must move between different relations and nodes of the apparatus as well as may alternate modes of inquiry, in order to uncover the “apparatus’s specificity, contingent possibilities, and counter-intuitive logics” (Feldman 2011:378). Yet to do so, Feldman suggests, we must update our conceptualisation of ethnography (2011:378): a focus on relations, i.e. the mediated linkage and alienation of individuals or groups in an apparatus, rather than connections, i.e. direct, immediate contact – and thus the traditional focus of ethnographic activity – is best suited to a

non-local approach in which “the object of study [is not necessarily] the object of observation” (Trouillot 2001:135, cited in Feldman 2011:377).

“The apparatus” Feldman claims, thereby “offers analytical purchase in grasping how unconnected actors are nevertheless related in social constellations” (Feldman 2011:380) and collectively emerge a cumulative effect (in Feldman’s case the Migration Apparatus, in mine the passport paradigm) despite their lack of intimate familiarity with each other. He so emphasises what Annelise Riles describes as a “sociality outside and beyond the here and now” (Riles 2000:2). Understanding the passport paradigm in this vein then renders identification documents an organising principle, an artefactual relation, “pulling together the otherwise disparate elements” (Feldman 2011:390) of (inter-)national governing bodies, border guards, issuing authorities, airlines, security experts, technology providers, and documented subjects which come together in the emergence of the passport paradigm. Each of these constituencies is defined by its own practices, ideologies, and affordances vis-à-vis documentary forms and therethrough exerts influence on the appearance of the overall paradigmatic phenomenon. It is their individual situated character, attitudes, and meanings as well as their collective sociality, which I aim to unearth through the cumulative ethnographic insights presented over the following chapters.

Applying Feldman’s approach to my own research design, I myself thus had to become non-local to trace the apparatus that is the passport paradigm: carrying out fieldwork during a core phase between the autumn of 2018 and the autumn of 2019 and then in various sporadic follow-ups up until the summer of 2022, I moved between places, communities, and continents, tracking (in loosely chronological order) the following constituencies (see fig.2): (1) I worked with bureaucrats at the Montréal based United Nations International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), engaged in the development of technical specifications and standards for the design, manufacture, and control of travel documents, first and foremost passports. Due to ICAO’s broad mandate these standards are binding for all UN-recognised states wanting to issue a

passport. Here I primarily sought to understand how the globally applicable passport *uni*-form, i.e. the basic template of the passport booklet in all its details, comes to be; (2) I also worked with German border officers carrying out passport checks and other border control activities at

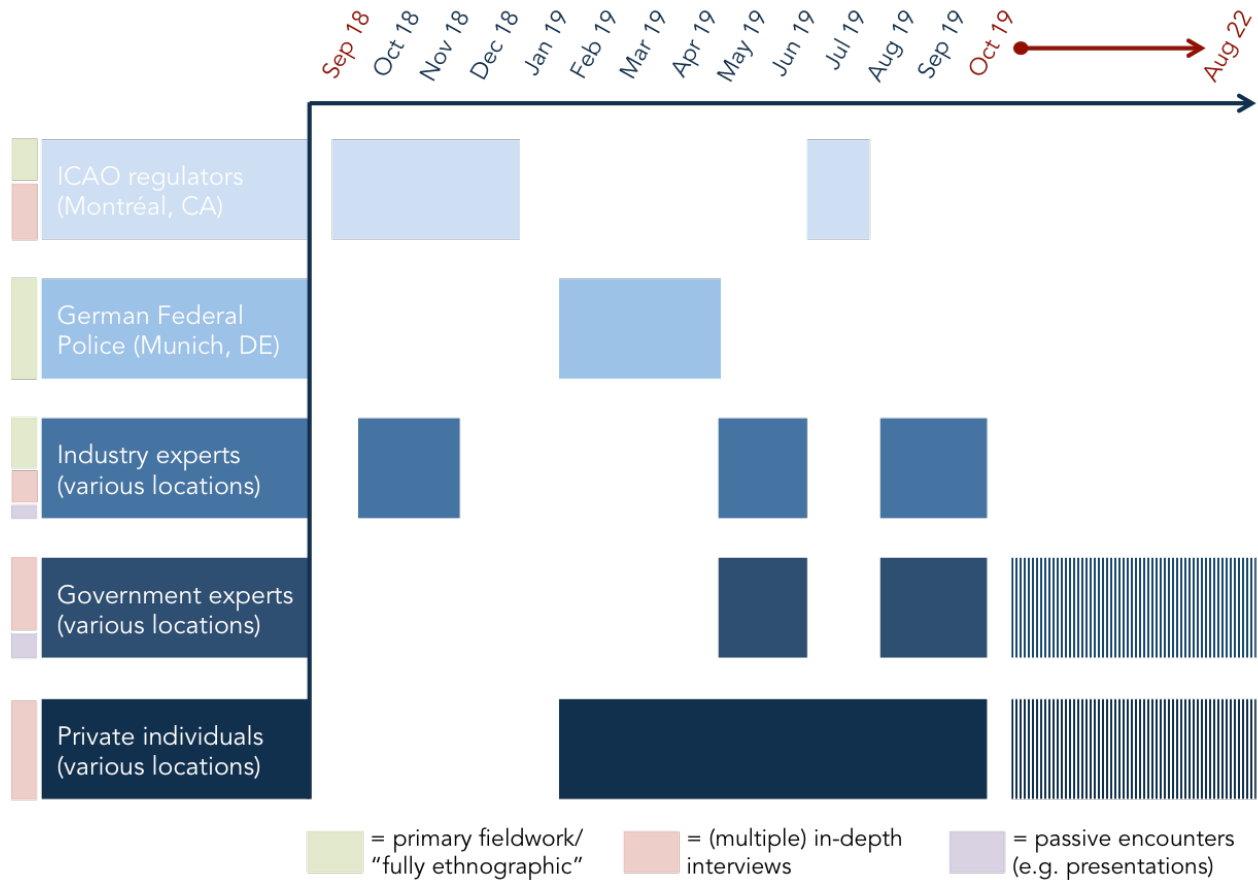


Figure 2: Overview of the constituencies studied, and the chronology of the fieldwork conducted.

a large German airport. With this group my inquiry centred on how identification was enacted at the border, i.e. how people were read through their documents as well as how documents are verified exactly; (3) I moreover engaged with industry representatives and researchers working in the identification document/technology and border security realm. Here my inquiry focused on developing an understanding of the technological complexity of modern-day identification documents, their economics, and the potential identificational futures currently in the making; (4) Additionally, I studied technical and legal experts working for the German government on the regulation and design of German identification documents. In my

engagement with this group my primary interest lay with understanding the techno-political logics and intentions that inform the construction of the documentary regime in Germany and the role it plays on a policy level; (5) Finally, I spent time interviewing individuals, who live in Germany long-term (with different national statuses), and (have to) navigate the documentary regime. In this final strand of inquiry, which ran parallel to the other four, I was interested in learning people's individual passport stories, i.e. the manifold ways in which individuals (do not) relate to and through their document(s).

The approach pursued is thus, in principle, a realisation of George Marcus' seminal notion of a multi-sited ethnography in which "multiple sites of observation and participation that cross-cut dichotomies such as the 'local' and the 'global,' the 'lifeworld' and the 'system'" (Marcus 1995:95) are considered. This is not unprecedented in the study of identification documents: the aforementioned excellent ethnographic history of identification documents by Sriraman, "demonstrates the popular making of ID documents" across "local economies, social, and cultural spheres, such as the bureaucracy, the refugee registration office, the ration office, the urban housing office, refugee squatter settlement, the slum, and the enrolment centre" (Sriraman 2018:xxvi-xxvii). Equally, the idea of following documents around has been championed by ethnographies of documentation more broadly (e.g. Ahmed 2007, Harper 1998, Hull 2012b, Mathur 2015, Pellegrin 2002). However, rather than being of the Marcusian tradition, many of these approaches within the realm of the anthropology of bureaucracy refer back to the wider material anthropological literature that has emerged in the aftermath of Arjun Appadurai's seminal edited volume *The Social Life of Things* (1986) and Igor Kopytoff's "The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process" published therein, which put material artefacts at the heart of more systemic considerations, especially in the context of consumption and commodification (e.g. Miller and Woodward 2011, Scheper-Hughes 2000, Wilk and Barbosa 2011). Appadurai describes the gist of the approaches presented in his paradigm-shifting volume in the following manner:

[...] we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these

trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things. Thus, even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context.

(Appadurai 1986:5)

The social life approach, one could argue, so shares family resemblances with the world system in Marcus' understanding: it looks at how individual social contexts become through things in motion at the same time as considering the thing's systemic becoming throughout its trajectory. Sophie Woodward's and Daniel Miller's *Global Denim* (2011) is a case in point: in their study, the ubiquitous nature of denim jeans becomes a point of departure for understanding "the existence of denim as a global phenomenon" (2011:2). As they trace and track denim across various locales and through the prism of a range of disciplinary approaches, they set out to gather "something of the meaning that blue jeans have to the modern world" (2011:5). Woodward's and Miller's denim jeans share with the passport paradigm their global ubiquity and "blindingly obvious" (2011:2) nature. Equally, my work shares with their approach the desire to unearth something of the broader cultural meaning of the passport paradigm as a global phenomenon, beyond individual locales. What sets my work apart from other, non-local ethnographies in the field of bureaucracy is then its oscillation between the different levels of individual-local-national-supra-national, which previous works in the realm do not traverse as explicitly. From this, I argue, can emerge a more critical understanding of the operations of bureaucratic forms within an administrative system that is intrinsically scalar and entangled in global flows and frictions (more on the relevance of scale in a moment).

Both, Marcus' follow-the-thing as well as Appadurai's things-in-motion necessarily engage with the re-construction of emergence or the unpacking of genesis as I propose to do in the coming chapters. Equally, both embody approaches that emerged during the early days of a rising awareness of the effects and intensifications of globalisation. This was also a time during which, as Alison Hulme notes (2017), the followability of things was still comparatively more straightforward, i.e. less complex and more linear, than it is today. In the current moment, however, no matter how expansive the set of sites tracked or how long the chain of

commodification considered, the fact cannot be evaded, as Marcus notes, that analytical movements across sites will be reductive as well as gain themselves a generative dimension: “as this mode investigates and ethnographically constructs the lifeworlds of variously situated subjects, it also ethnographically constructs aspects of the system itself through the associations and connections it suggests among sites” (1995:96). Thus, as I track and portray different groups and nodal sites involved in the passport paradigm’s becoming, I myself generate a particular vision of the constituent parts of the passport paradigm that is rhetorical in nature and necessarily partial:

The above noted set of constituencies is the result of an amalgam of decisional factors, comprising strategic preferences and focused efforts to get access, as much as chance and pragmatic limitations, such as time, language, and money constraints. Oftentimes the question of whether I was able to take up work with a particular group was a simple function of who picked up my email sent to an info@... email address in the hopes of gaining access. Sometimes, personal contacts got me an in where it might otherwise have been difficult. How I came to work with each of the above groups thus varied significantly – and so did the methods and degree of my ethnographic engagement with them (the methodological specificities of each group are discussed in more detail in the respective chapter in which they feature). Thereby the set of communities studied misses, for reasons such as failure to attain access, limited time and resources, or concerns about legality, a whole host of potentially relevant and fascinating groups: street-level bureaucrats at the passport office, photographers specialised in taking passport portraits, officials at the foreign office negotiating visa requirements, or forgers and human traffickers utilising documents to subvert the regime are all not featured here, even though their perspective on the paradigm’s becoming might be crucial.

The ethnographic design embodying the empirical fundament of my work is thus multi-, not omni-perspectival and as such far from exhaustive. This is reflected in the title of this thesis, in which I choose the terminology of “ethnographic explorations”, rather than ethnography, to indicate the open-endedness and lack of definitiveness of the presented work. For as Marcus

reminds us: the goal of a multi-sited approach “is not holistic representation” (1995:99) anyways. Rather, the intent is one of an outside-in – to play on Annelise Riles’ (2000) famous methodological offering – perspectival shift: “any ethnography of a cultural formation in the world system is also an ethnography of the system, and therefore cannot be understood only in terms of the conventional single-site *mise-en-scene* of ethnographic research” (Marcus 1995:99). The selection of communities shown in fig. 2 is an attempt to work towards such a dualistic understanding, simultaneously generating insights on the cultural formation at hand (documentary identifiers, first and foremost the passport) as well as their systemic context (the passport paradigm).

The necessity of an adaption of ethnographic expectations and modalities in a mobile ethnographic approach – identified by, both, Feldman and Marcus yet less acknowledged among the things-in-motion crowd – is intensified by the pragmatic reality and frequent limitations presented in the project of “studying up”, a label which applies to at least some of the ethnographic work presented here. As Laura Nader (1972: 306–7) herself noted, the project of ethnographically approaching elites may require certain methodological adjustments. Take the example of the high security document and border technology industry, one of the constituencies on which I worked and in which I found a hand full of collaborators: the nature of passport manufacturers and similar firms is to be cautious of public attention and infiltration, due to the highly sensitive nature of the data and technologies that they employ in their various products and services. The strict legal protections and public relations concerns that come with this territory meant that a traditional ethnographic engagement in the form of, say, a year long stay at a particular unit within such company would have simply been impossible. Instead my ethnographic engagement with this community unfolded via a hand full of one-off on-site visits at select companies and interviews with those employees willing to engage in talking to me (oftentimes only off the record). I also travelled between countries and continents to attend a number of high profile conferences at which this severely internationalised industry congregates, and the discourse on how identification is thought off, technologised, and reconfigured is shaped. To be able to work at all with this particular class of ethnographic

collaborators thus simply necessitated departing from a stationary, long-term immersive approach. Following Dominic Boyer I view the resulting “inadequacies in ethnographic knowledge” – what some might consider a lack of thickness – not as something to “be papered over as embarrassments but rather lingered on as prismatic gaps through which the contingencies/limits/opportunities of the anthropology of experts are fully revealed” (Boyer 2008:44).

Tracking relations: materiality, juxtaposition, scale

I am not alone in my impulse to cast a wide net vis-à-vis the particular subject of the passport: Torpey renders his *The Invention of the Passport* “a study that began by asking how the contemporary passport regime had developed and how states used documents to control movement [yet] ineluctably widened to include other types of documents related to inclusion and exclusion in the citizen body, and to admission and refusal of entry into specific territories” (Torpey 2000:1). The passport paradigm thus invites a certain sense of burgeoning expansiveness that can at times be hard to fight. This is a central challenge with which my work wrestles – not only in its ethnographic approach, but equally in my attempt to synthesise the findings derived: the writing-together of a multi-sited approach requires one to be mindful and transparent of the rhetorical quality of the relations being made between sites and the overall vision presented. Moreover, it demands of the anthropologist to bring “these sites into the same frame of study and to posit their relationships on the basis of first-hand ethnographic research [...] regardless of the variability of the quality and accessibility of that research at different sites.” (Marcus 1995:100). This can be problematic, as – to speak with Anna Tsing – my various collaborator “are not positioned in equality or sameness, and their collaboration does not produce a communal good” (2005:246), at least not intentionally so: the passport paradigm as an over-arching global administrative order is usually not the primary goal at issue in my collaborators’ work, thoughts, and interests. Rather, it can be understood as a collective by-product. So how do we evaluate the interplay of perspectives derived at different sites, through

different ethnographic engagements, and with groups that differ vastly in their degree of influence? How do we place any potential findings in dialogue?

I propose that a potential methodological resolve to this problem lies in assembling the different groups represented in my writing around their shared artefactual counterparts, the identification documents. Yet, as I have argued in the introduction to this thesis, the passport paradigm is not simply a *thing*; it extends beyond individual documentary forms and stretches towards a particular politico-cultural logic, practice, and ideology of making and becoming known. As I follow the things that are identification documents through their social lifeworlds, I thus also trace a conceptual condition – one that I seek to reincarnate in the coming pages. As I have been writing to realise this goal, Natasha Dow-Schüll's seminal ethnography of machine gambling in Las Vegas, *Addiction by Design* (2012) has embodied an important source of inspiration: in her attempt to understand addiction to gambling machines Dow-Schüll ethnographically explores a multitude of agents involved in the emergence of what she calls the machine-zone: talking to machine designers and marketers, to casino managers, architects, and finally, addicts themselves, she maintains a differentiation between gamblers, on the one hand, who primarily act upon themselves in their engagement with the machine, and the host of agents "in a position to act on others at a distance, delegating to technology the task of soliciting and sustaining specific kinds of human behavior" (Dow-Schüll 2012:20-21). Acknowledging individual collaborators' specific positionality and the way it impacts her engagement with them she develops a "relational understanding of addiction", in which "addiction to gambling machines emerges out of the dynamic interaction between machine gamblers and the design intentions, values, and methods of commercial gambling environments and technologies" (Dow-Schüll 2012:21). What seems to allow Dow-Schüll to place into dialogue designers and users is thus her emphasis on the material infrastructure of gambling addiction: the common denominator of the machine (zone). In my own work I equally look towards the material artefact of the passport form and related documentary agents as a prism through which to view and place the various communities studied into relation. The documentary form so becomes "an orienting analytical procedure" (Reed 2006:163) enabling

comparison and juxtaposition across sites and communities – strategies of analysis that Marcus deems central to the iterative elevation of situated insights into a broader, systemic perspective, i.e. the foremost goal and potential of multi-sited ethnographic approaches (1995).

This, as previously mentioned, speaks to a certain concern with scale that a focus on materiality can help to analytically mediate in a multi-perspectival setting; a concern which is also implicit in both Marcus' and Feldman's methodological proposition, as well as Nader's and Boyer's aforementioned calls for appropriate ethnographic expectations vis-à-vis certain groups of ethnographic collaborators: Marcus and Feldman seem driven in their explorations by the perceived urgency of a study of global phenomena and the question of how the original, localised scale of ethnographic conduct can be reconciled therewith. Similarly, Boyer and Nader grapple with the issue of scale as a matter, less of position and ethnographic presence, than of the appropriate means for the contextual conversion of the particular quality and configuration of ethnographic knowledge. They therefore all concern themselves, broadly speaking, with the reach – be it qualitative, political, spatial, or epistemic – of certain ethnographic subjects and their related modes of knowledge production. Similarly, we can conceive of Dow-Schüll's work as an ethnographic attempt to bridge different scales of addition: her ethnographic work is not simply multi-sited or multi-perspectival, but multi-scalar.

I take this idea of a multi-scalar ethnography from Biao Xiang (2013), who introduced it as a method of fieldwork, analysis, and writing in the context of migration studies way before the notion of scale gained its recent currency (Hecht 2018, Mathur 2021, Tsing et al. 2019). A multi-scalar approach, Xiang argues, is uniquely equipped to "delineate how movements are constituted at different scales" and with what effect, for "smooth flows at one level can be disruptions or encapsulations at another" (Xiang 2013:282). The identification of and emphasis on (dis-)continuities across different scales of lifeworld and system, feature here as anthropological tools for making sense and reconciling potentially disparate and contradictory multi-sited data: "What appears to be a clear pattern at one scale may fragment into something else when looked at closer, and what seem randomly scattered may start falling into well-integrated

wholes once we take a step back" (Xiang 2013:285). It is thus productive, Xiang argues, leaning heavily on Marilyn Strathern, to "perceive more than one scale at the same time, to move from individual actions to the rite, or from a comparison of several rituals to an exemplification of elements they have in common, or from individual institutions to a configuration" (Strathern 2005:14). Xiang eventually summarises their concept in the following manner:

Multi-scalar ethnography simultaneously 'studies up' to interrogate the centre of power (Nader, 1972), 'studies down' to examine everyday interactions, and most importantly 'studies through' (Reinhold, 1994: 477–9; cited in Shore and Wright, 1997:14) to 'trace ways in which power creates webs and relations between actors, institutions, and discourses across time and space'

(Xiang 2013:295)

Their words foreshadow the pathways of the chapters laid out over the coming chapters, which move from the day-to-day interactions at the border to the upper-echelons of the passport paradigm's technocratic elite.

To achieve the analytical impetus promised by a multi-scalar ethnographic mode, Xiang posits the following guiding questions: "At what scales do the key actors operate? How is each of the scales constituted and maintained? What are the inter-scalar relations, and how are the relations reproduced or disrupted?" (Xiang 2013:290). These questions have been instrumental to my own thinking about and thinking through the variant sites and communities whose perspectives have been assembled in this thesis. However, as I have asked these questions, I have necessarily grappled with the fact that the passport paradigm does not simply play out across various scales, but is itself scale-making: through its foundational nature to the project of nation-state-making, the passport paradigm can be considered to insert the scale of the national, the inter-national, and the global into the lifeworld of its constituencies as much as these are scales from and at which it can be experienced and analysed.

This dialectic is a central bind in which we find ourselves when making sense of systemic categories. Its critical reflection is thus crucial to the chapters presented here, which oscillate

between scalar understandings of the passport paradigm and an investigation of its scale-making impetus. Whilst I see no way to entirely resolve this ambiguity, I once again orient myself towards the material form in order to navigate these recurring dichotomies: in the coming chapters the documentary artefact will figure as what Gabrielle Hecht describes as “interscalar vehicle” (2018): an empirical object of analysis marked by its multi-scalar “deployment and uptake, its potential to make political claims, craft social relationships, or simply open our imaginations” (2018:115). “What happens when we treat empirical objects as interscalar vehicles, as means of connecting stories and scales usually kept apart?” (2018:115), Hecht asks. This we shall find out – yet first we must attend to the fact that this project, despite its multi-scalar nature, is still partially rooted in a very specific, national context.

Defining German-ness: the global passport paradigm in/from Germany

Due to the shifts in scale that my translocations from constituency to constituency imply, the *German-ness* of my approach is volatile and complicated: it slips in and out of focus as the scales of consideration change and a national lens is replaced by localised, personalised, or supra-nationalised adaptations. Simultaneously the general globality of the phenomenon at issue, the passport paradigm, implies a conceptual push that perhaps is best characterised in the words of Antonio Gramsci: “[t]o be sure, the line of development is towards internationalism, but the point of departure is “national”—and it is from this point of departure that one must begin” (Gramsci 1999:499). The German localisation of my work thus presents a central starting point, yet it disintegrates and re-aggregates as we move from chapter to chapter. Notwithstanding, I must explain why it is that I chose Germany as an ethnographic focal point, as fuzzy as its boundaries might be. The answer is threefold and is shaped equally by pragmatic considerations as well as strategic factors specific to the country that render it an interesting context-cum-perspective in and from which to explore the passport paradigm:

Chapter 1

First, Germany is – compared to many other nations – highly invested in the design and maintenance of the documentary regime, within the country itself but also beyond. The German state has teams of representatives at three separate branches of government working on the matter of identification documents full time. Its Federal Printing Office, the Bundesdruckerei (BDR), moreover allows for the “in-house” manufacture of German documents, an unusual luxury in a system where large-scale commercial providers, such as *De La Rue* or *Idemia*, usually produce the majority of identification documents on behalf of states. Through *Veridos*, a joint venture between the state-owned BDR and the private German high security technology businesses *Giesecke+Devrient*, Germany is also an important international service provider in the identification document realm, producing passports, IDs, and various identity verification as well as authentication solutions for other states, as well as shaping the market through technological innovation. Politically, Germany’s leadership in the securitisation of identification documents is felt supranationally through the government’s and private sector players’ dominant representation at various regulatory and standardising bodies from the EU to the UN level. Finally, German passports regularly top passport power rankings, a fact that receives regular and pronounced attention in the German media. Collectively, these observations trace the contours of Germany’s hegemonic position within the passport paradigm, and the emphasis placed on the documentary realm as a field for the exertion of a type of techno-bureaucratic soft-power.

These particular conditions make for fertile ethnographic grounds. They also render an ethnographic study of the passport paradigm from and in Germany an account of significant privilege and supra-national influence. My work so adds to the ethnographic record a perspective onto the documentary regime that is insufficiently addressed thus far. The bulk of ethnographic engagements with identification documents addresses their deployment in oftentimes precarious circumstances and addresses the experience of being documented and identified from the vantage point of primarily subaltern subjects (e.g. Jeganathan 2004, Pelkmans 2013, Kelly 2006, Reddy 2015, Reeves 2013). The insights generated by these studies, as indicated in the introduction, are far-reaching and doubtlessly crucial, as they shed

light on the passport paradigm as a matter of lived experience. However, a shift towards a perspective of privilege and influence in the documentary regime, as well as a more direct attention to communities of practice shaping the passport paradigm beyond the street-level, can complement these existent insights productively. For if anthropology wishes to realise a more involved position in the extra-disciplinary discourse on matters such as bureaucracy and global governance, an intricate understanding of technocratic elites and “power players” is just as crucial as is a grounded analysis of street-level practice and the disenfranchised. For both sides are intertwined in the over-arching effect or apparatus that is the global administrative system.

However, this is not to say that a concentration on the German case is more important or worthwhile than an ethnographic study of say the Peruvian, Canadian, Chinese, Liberian, or Sri Lankan documentary regime. Despite the above-cited particularities the selection of the German context is, in many respects, random. Yet it is also not that: for the German-ness of my project is of course a direct product of my being a German citizen; a fact, which has shaped and conditioned the work presented here in myriad ways. Most importantly perhaps, it prescribes my own particular position within the passport paradigm, intensified through other such characteristics as my race, my education, my gender identity: as a white, highly-educated, cis woman who holds German citizenship, the global identification regime is much kinder in its treatment of my person than it is of many other people sharing in it. I have no personal experience of my nationality being put into question due to my race, of enduring added scrutiny at a border crossing due to my nationality or visa status, or of being unable to access identification documents due to public disarray or crisis. Besides these factors being foundational to my own positionality within the system that I study, the ease at which I am able to travel also had concrete effects on my research: e.g. had it not been for my ability to travel to and stay in Canada for several months without much administrative effort and only low visa costs, I would not have been able to execute my research with ICAO as easily and across two separate research periods.

Chapter 1

In my choice of regional context I have also been driven by a number of rather pragmatic, personal and logistical considerations that stem from my own rootedness in Germany: when embarking on this project I knew that it was not going to be easy to retain access to the type of institutions that I had in mind and to navigate the dispersed nature of the ethnographic subject at hand. My extant knowledge of German bureaucracy and political culture was tremendously helpful in effectively overcoming entry hurdles, whilst an existing personal network helped offset the difficulties and costs of moving repeatedly between sites (within Germany). The nature and technicality of the conversations and ethnographic encounters marking my work also demanded a level of language competency that I could only feasibly offer in German and English. Moreover, choosing Germany as my primary fieldsite also allowed me to remain engaged in personal and professional commitments that were important to me and helped me through a year of fieldwork that was, at times, financially and emotionally draining. Collectively these factors point to the fact that the study presented in this thesis is one that is not exclusively shaped by the affordances of the anthropological subject at issue, but also my own needs and limitations as a fieldworker (see Günel, Varma, and Watanabe 2020 for their important and eloquent discussion of this dimension of fieldwork).

Conclusion

It is my hope that the above will serve the reader as a sort of meta-map that guides their journey through the ethnographic explorations of this thesis. Yet before I enter into these explorations, I wish to issue two disclaimers: first, as the environments in which the coming chapters are set are technologically and regulatorily fast moving, the legislative conditions of the passport paradigm as well as its techno-material configuration today will not be the same as they were at the point in time that I carried out my fieldwork. I try to be as transparent as possible regarding these changes. Second, when the reader enters into the ethnographic portion of this work, I ask that they keep in mind the fact that the following chapters embody only the first contours, i.e. *explorations*, of a project that must carry on further. They are thus an ethnographic overture of sorts that establishes a gate-way into the multi-faceted ethnographic

realities of the passport paradigm as well as its anthropological complexities; whilst each chapter bears important insights, each also points towards deeper and farther levels of exploration that are required to portray, engage, and problematise more fully each of the constituencies portrayed. In light of these two caveats, the re-construction of genesis, as a multi-sited methodological approach to enacting ethnography and writing anthropologically, thus has an intrinsically preliminary quality: it endeavours to begin “to delineate”, to borrow from Marilyn Strathern’s characterisation of her and her colleagues’ early work on audit “something of the scale and pervasiveness” (2000:2) of the paradigmatic formation at issue, allowing a view of how different systemic parts fit together and thereby laying the ethnographic as well as analytical grounds for further, yet narrower considerations. But better to show, then to tell. So let us begin.

Making known – Creating national identifications

SUMMARY

This chapter sets out to familiarise the reader with the artefactual protagonists of this thesis and those who create them. As I chart a portray of German identification documents and their creators, I seek to answer the following questions: (1) How are documents oriented towards the world? (2) What are the political and aesthetic concerns shaping these orientations? (3) And how do those who create these documents relate to the world through them? To answer these questions I follow a twofold approach, moving from an analysis of the markers through which identities are fixed in documents, to a consideration of the techno-material processes governing the production of secure documents. Throughout, I marry a close artefactual reading of the German passport and national ID card with ethnographic insights derived in conversation and collaboration with those within the German authorities and adjacent institutions working to design them – legally, materially, technically. Thereby the project of creating documentary identities comes into view as a field in which the realisation of a multiplicity of identities is at stake, extending far beyond the documented citizen and positioning documents as crucial in the self-realisation of the state, its agent's, and their particular vision of "the German way". Thereby the desire for techno-aesthetic achievement and the mundanity of politico-bureaucracy embody key influences in the creative identificatory process, highlighting dimensions of bureaucratic becoming that, whilst prominent in the wider bureaucratic literature, have been insufficiently acknowledged in existing analyses of the documentary regime.

Politics and aesthetics

When I arrive at the German home office's headquarters (Bundesinnenministerium, BMI) in the Alt-Moabit area of Berlin in the spring of 2019, I am greeted by a police officer manning the security gate through which visitors have to pass before entering the ministry. I have to explain the reason for my visit and name the person I am here to see. The officer then asks me to handover my ID and looks at it briefly, so as to verify my identity. At this point I am used to this

procedure and the reality that my study of identification documents regularly requires me to employ these very documents myself in the pursuit of getting access to the highly shielded institutions of interest to my work. Without further comment the officer grabs his phone, calling the person I claim is my host in order to confirm that I am indeed expected and asks them to pick me up at the visitors' lodge. He then hands over a visitor's badge, asking me to wear it at all times whilst in the building and informs me that they will keep my ID as deposit until I return the badge after my visit. I nod along to his instructions as he buzzes me into the lodge, where another officer guides me to a waiting area and asks me to take a seat until my host arrives.

I sit down in the waiting room and look around. The walls, covered in a dark wood, are decorated with various contemporary artworks, among them a photographic piece, showing an abstracted shot of a hilly, green landscape. A black, white, and pink blur sits in one corner of the image. Look again and a cow's snout impressing itself upon the photographer's lens comes into focus. Against this background a slogan is layered: "Heimat ist der Ort, wo ich dazugehören will und darf" reads the piece – "Heimat is the place where I want and may belong". In literal terms *Heimat* means home or homeland, or the place where one is and feels at home, yet it is one of those untranslatable notions with no exact English equivalent that covers its specific cultural connotations. As a term of political potency it is a favourite of the rightist *Christlich-Soziale Union* (CSU), who at the time of my visit presides over the home office. When the home secretary, the CSU's Horst Seehofer, took over in March of 2018 at the beginning of Angela Merkel's final term as Chancellor, he renamed the home office, formerly simply the "Ministry for Interior Matters", as "Ministry for Interior Matters, *Heimat*, and Building". Seehofer's move sparked an extensive public backlash due to the nativist connotations and the politics of belonging entailed by the notion of *Heimat*. Read against the minister's carefully calculated public image as an anti-immigration hardliner and patriotic Bavarian – incidentally the German state with the highest number of cattle in the country – the artwork and the definition of *Heimat* it presents appear particularly pointed. It does not seem accidental that next to the piece a display is placed carrying leaflets advertising Seehofer's then

most recent policy initiative, the Migration Act, further cementing the anti-immigration impetus of his political project.

My train of thought is interrupted when my host, Dr Berger, a civil servant and lawyer by training who works for the *Department for Passport and Identification Document Matters* (*Pass- und Ausweiswesen*) arrives. As we walk over from the lodge to his office, I ask him about the waiting area's political décor. He shrugs it off. Later Dr Berger, a mild-mannered person who speaks carefully and eloquently about his job, will tell me that what he appreciates very much about the nature of his work in the identification document resort is the fact that unlike other issues on the home office's slate of responsibilities, such as migration, his métier is not, in his eyes, "very political". When he e.g. writes draft legislation for the German passport law, German ID law, and the German electronic ID law (the three main codes over which his department presides), he says the technicality of the subject by and large shields him from direct interference by the political branch of the home office or anybody higher up the food chain. His stance reminds me of a comment made by one of his colleagues at the department, who I had met at a conference a few weeks earlier. In reaction to my enthusiasm to learn about their department's work, the colleague said sarcastically: "In the end my job boils down to such exciting matters as deciding where exactly in the passport the federal eagle [the symbol of the German state] should be placed. A real cliff-hanger!" Nothing to see here, the basic tenet of his words seemed to suggest. Yet as my conversation with Dr Berger evolves, this a-political appearance is complicated: he describes many instances in which political concerns set the frame within which he and his colleagues could enact their formal work. Dr Berger perceives such moments to pose a risk of politics intervening with the clarity and straightforwardness of the law, the foremost ideal towards which he strives. Much of his time is thus spent carefully reconciling formal and political requirements so as to turn the ambiguity of at times opposing techno-political positions and juridico-procedural ideals into intelligible legal code.

In its work in managing and monitoring the regulation, design, and issuance of German identification documents, the home office is supported by a troika of specialised institutions:

the Federal Criminal Police Office's (*Bundeskriminalamt*, BKA) document experts, the Federal Office for Information Security's (*Bundesamt für Sicherheit in der Informationstechnik*, BSI) data protection and encryption specialists, as well as the aforementioned German Federal Printing Services (*Bundesdruckerei*, BDR), which provide the required expertise in manufacturing documents. A few weeks after I meet with Dr Berger and in my quest to assemble various perspectives, I thus find myself in the western German town of Wiesbaden, home to the BKA's headquarters. I am there to see Dr Müller, a physicist by training and advertised to me by those in the know as *the* person to talk to when interested in German identification documents. Dr Müller heads the BKA's IT-Forensics and Documents section, including the document security unit (*Urkunden und Ausweissysteme*), tasked with developing and improving anti-counterfeiting and verification technologies for German identification documents, as well as the forensic investigation of forged documents seized by the criminal police and the maintenance of a central database of genuine and forged documents used by the BKA and related authorities for reference purposes. Dr Müller joined the unit almost twenty years ago, brought to the topic of document security by his previous work on optics and laser technologies in academia and the industry.

When we sit down at a small conference table in his office, Dr Müller has a whole host of materials prepared that lay out the granular features of the German document suite and their intricate workings. He talks about "his" documents, down to specific security elements with incredible care, intent, and oftentimes pride. Of the *Identigram*® (see fig.3), a particular hyper-personalised holographic emblem contained in both, the German passport and ID card and developed by the *German Federal Printing Services* in close collaboration with the BKA, Müller says that ever since its inception in 2001 it embodies an unparalleled anti-counterfeiting innovation. He praises the *Identigram*®'s high quality protection against replication (a forger cannot simply copy or master the imitation of the hologram once and then replicate as many times as required, as each specific hologram for each document is customised to include such details as the image, name, and document number of the holder), and emphasises that as a technology it is unique to German documents; no other country or commercial manufacturer

has succeeded at developing a similar technology yet. This will be a recurring theme throughout our conversation: the technological prowess and uniqueness of what Dr Müller will often refer to as “the German way”. Yet at the same time he emphasises that security, in the service of which he sees the documents he guards and develops to work, can only be achieved “if everybody does it”. To be too far ahead of the pack, it seems, is not fully desirable either. And so when talking about his work on the European Commission’s board for the development of guidelines for a harmonised EU identification card format, Dr Müller, sent there to lend his expertise as well as represent German interests, emphasises that a smallest common denominator must be found: that the lowest bound has to be pushed, not the top levels, and that he cannot feasibly expect other countries to adopt a technology such as the *Identigram*®, because no matter its sophistication, it simply is too expensive to develop and implement for many other states.



Figure 3: The *Identigram*® can be seen here as a yellow-green holographic reflection of the document portrait stretching across the centre of the document. It further extends to holographic reflections of other personalised document elements such as the document number and the bearer’s name. © Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat

A few weeks after my meeting with Dr Müller I also meet with Dr Wagner, a lead researcher at the *German Federal Printing Services* (Bundesdruckerei, bdr). Dr Wagner is a chemist by training and has worked in the BDR's research and development department for twenty years, playing a key role in the development of such flagship security features for German documents as the *InnosecFusion®* procedure. The technology has allowed German authorities to retain a full-colour portrait whilst transitioning from a paper-based document format to a polycarbonate card base across all core documents (passport, ID, residence permit). This, as those familiar with the affordances of printing securely on credit-card-like tokens will confirm, is no small feat: most passports or IDs that use poly-carbonate material carry only black-and-white photographs as portraits are engraved using laser technologies that cannot apply colour. Though a full colour image is much preferable when it comes to the identification of a person on the street-level by, say, a police officer or a bank employee, printing with polycarbonate ink to achieve colour is tricky. "As a chemist", Dr Wagner explains, "it is essentially my job to bring together materials that do not want to stick together". Mastering this, he continues, is the key success of *InnosecFusion®*: infusing the card with the portrait in a way that makes it impossible to replace or manipulate the image without it being noticeable. Yet his work extends far beyond identification documents: in his day to day, Dr Wagner develops security features and security systems for all sorts of high-security documents, such as banknotes, stamps, tax-stamps. "If you look into your wallet today, about half of the items in there will probably contain elements on which I and my colleagues have worked", he tells me with some pride.

Dr Berger, Dr Müller, and Dr Wagner, the above shows, have vastly different backgrounds and spend their days working on substantially different tasks – from drafting a law, to finding ways to print polycarbonate. Yet their efforts stretch towards a collective goal: they are part of a relatively small group of people working towards the secure-making, regulation, and manufacture of German identification documents, and so collectively effect the passport paradigm's material foundations in Germany. In this chapter, I wish to explore this collective effort and the concerns and hopes that drive it more closely. To do so, I shall focus on a commonality among all three men as well as others who work in similar roles. Namely, the

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interplay of techno-aesthetical ambitions and political concerns marking their work: throughout my conversations with the three Drs, the obscure image of the *Heimat*-artwork that I encountered in the home office's waiting room stuck with me; not because of the piece's specific political message – though the documents around which my conversations circle do work in service of a “may belong” ideology purported by the piece and underlying the passport paradigm as a whole, and though my collaborators all work for or with the state, they are not political appointees and their work does not explicitly concern the question of who gets a passport or what privileges somebody with a particular passport receives – rather it was the artwork's unabashed amalgamation of politics and aesthetics that resonated with this theme running throughout my conversations: Dr Berger's concerns regarding the political contamination of the (aesthetic) ideal of legal clarity, Dr Müller's commitment to the uniqueness of German documents beyond mere anti-counterfeiting concerns, and Dr Wagner's work towards making uncooperative materials cooperate in the service of preserving the uniqueness of German documents, all point to the profound entanglement of form and instrumentality and of techno-aesthetic and political concerns in the creation of documentary identifications. This should be of no surprise to anybody who has ever, even briefly, looked at or inspected an ID card or passport: designs that play on national history and symbolism, colourful holographic shadows on a document held at an angle, watermarks, strings of alpha-numeric, machine-readable code, or micro-script running in ornamental lines all hint at the strongly techno-aesthetic condition of identification in the passport paradigm and the corresponding amalgamation of form and function. Yet what do these politico-aesthetic commitments pervading my collaborators' approach and shining through in the products of their work imply? How can they aid us in developing an improved understanding of identification documents' consequential nature?

In this chapter I take my cues in regard to these questions from a growing number of accounts within the anthropology of bureaucracy, documents, and documentation that attend to the material-aesthetic configuration of bureaucratic artefacts as an ethnographic means of analysis. These works emphasise “the role of bundles of document features, including rubrics of

classification and graphic elements such as paragraphs, tables, subtitles, fonts, margins, and bullets" (Hull 2012a:254), yet understand such elements as non-representational entities. Most famously, Annelise Riles in her seminal *The Network Inside Out* (2000) pursues an ethnographic analysis of "the character and aesthetics of information, the manner in which information is elucidated and appreciated, its uses, and its effect" (Riles 2000:2) to indicate how such "focus on the aesthetics of bureaucratic practices" enables "an ethnographic understanding of the character of contemporary institutional knowledge, on the one hand, and an understanding of how 'information' becomes an anthropological subject on the other" (Riles 2000:16). Through tracing the aesthetic configuration of bureaucratic artefacts produced by her collaborators, Fijian bureaucrats and activists participating in a UN conference on women, Riles develops a sophisticated analysis of transnationalism and institutional knowledge production under the conditions of globality.

Others have since followed Riles' example; collectively these works indicate how within bureaucratic institutions a concern with form is oftentimes primary to and untethered from technical function: Riles herself describes how UN negotiators during the collective drafting of conference reports, defined their success not based on textual meanings but saw accomplishment as the satisfying of "the aesthetics of logic and language" (1998:386). This speaks to a concern with appearances that echoes through much of the literature on bureaucracy and aesthetics (see e.g. Göpfert 2013, Stirrat 2000, Hodžić 2013). Oyvind Eggen, e.g., in a study of governance and bureaucratic practices in Malawi (2012), finds that their collaborators' pride in carrying out an elaborate allocation process for government subsidies even when the centralised process is quickly undermined by local networks, points to the performative value of "aesthetic criteria" vis-à-vis "a particular vision of modernity" (Stirrat 2000:31): in the staging and execution of a dedicated and orderly allocation process, bureaucrats "perform the ideals of modern statehood to a much greater degree than they actually reflect them" (Eggen 2012:15). Aesthetic performance here enables autonomy and greater access to funding for the Malawi state now perceived as bureaucratically savvy and thus modern by its allies. Consequently, "[i]t is by carrying out procedures according to primarily

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aesthetic rather than instrumental considerations, that the[se] utilitarian effects are made possible" (Eggen 2012:19).

The idea that utilitarian effects are achieved through aesthetic, materially performative means rather than instrumentalist approaches points to the force and persuasiveness of form (see also Strathern 2000:2) – a dimension that has, as of now, not received any serious attention in the study of identification documents. Yet, there is, I shall show below, a crucial political potential to (documentary) aesthetics, the contours of which I believe are astutely described by the philosopher Jacques Rancière in his seminal writings on aesthetics and politics:

'aesthetics' at the core of politics [...] should not be understood as the perverse commandeering of politics by a will to art, by a consideration of the people qua work of art. If the reader is fond of analogy, aesthetics can be understood in a Kantian sense – re-examined perhaps by Foucault – as the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.

(Rancière 2004:8)

Rancière's conceptualisation of aesthetics connects to "the basic characterizations of bureaucracy as sociality organized by form" (Hull 2012a:254, drawing on Handelman 1981) which resonates in most aesthetic readings of documentary and bureaucratic practice. Yet, Rancière quite explicitly develops a vision of aesthetics as determining "the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience", whilst politics in turn "revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it". The common denominator of aesthetics and politics, in this reading, is thus their ability to demarcate what is perceptible and possible and what is not, i.e. the cutting of the network of potentiality or the "elicitation of a sense of appropriateness" (Strathern 2005:10) through form (see also Ghertner 2015). A seemingly apt description of the identificational project, in which the complexity and multiplicity of identity is somehow

reconfigured and made appropriate to statist sensibilities as a documentary identification. Reconciling aesthetics with its political impetus in Rancière's sense of a material ideology of perceptive hierarchy then allows us to avoid what Yael Navaro-Yashin in her accomplished, affect-focused work on documents and documentation describes as the danger of "sterilization and neutralization" inherent to aesthetic accounts: she sees them to divert attention "away from the much greater – at times, excessive – potentialities of political objects of this genre" (Navaro-Yashin 2007:95). For re-conceived through the prism of Rancière, an emphasis on political aesthetics circumscribes nothing less than the question of how the abundant potentiality of the embodied subject and its knowability is reconfigured and filtered through the medium of documentary aesthetics – a question that is certainly not sterile. Taking a Rancièrian lens to an analysis of the passport paradigm's national design then allows us to think through a fundamental question: how do identification "documents", in the words of the philosopher Brian Cantwell Smith, become "about or oriented toward some other entity, structure, or patch of the world" (1996:13)? I.e. how are documentary identifications made to relate to the world that they inhabit and which they govern? And how, in turn, do those that create documents relate to the world through their creations? These concerns drive this chapter.

To explore them I pursue a three-fold approach: I begin with an analysis of the identificatory categories introduced in documents to represent a bearer and make them identifiable to the exclusion of all others. In a second step, I move from the identificatory data to its material token, tracing the conditions of documentary materialisation and the electronic secure-making of documents that have long outlived their purely papery form. Conjointly these readings of the making-of of documentary identifications, so I will argue in a final section, render the realm of documentary identifications a field in which the realisation of a multiplicity of identities is at stake – extending far beyond the documented citizen and positioning documents as crucial in the self-realisation of the state, its agent's, and their particular vision of "the German way". Thereby aesthetic achievement and the mundanity of public governance embody key *modi operandi*, highlighting dimensions of bureaucratic becoming that have, thus far, been insufficiently acknowledged in scholarly readings of the passport paradigm.

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The below discussion relies on ethnographic insights derived through conversations with individuals working for various branches of the German government or document manufacturers. I talked to seven people, all men, most middle-aged, most with a highly specialised background⁹, working in various capacities concerned with the making-of of German identification documents in senior positions. Out of this set of participants, four were willing to go on the record. Collectively these men embody a group of people whose role vis-à-vis the passport paradigm in Germany I shall loosely describe as “creators” or “designers”. I conceptualise this role as inclusive of a whole host of activities enacted towards the *formation*, i.e. the taking shape of the documentary prototype: it implies regulatory activities, which produce the legal ecology that poses and inhibits certain identificational affordances, as much as technical work and scientific research, the results of which produce the visual-material configuration of the documentary token. I attest to these creative or designerly activities an *inscriptive* capacity (see Akrich 1992, Latour and Woolgar 1986), which conditions their importance to a socio-politically oriented analysis: the inscription of identification documents in the process of their regulatory, material, political, and aesthetic configuration predefines (and precludes) certain types of engagement with passports or IDs. Whilst I do not consider these scripts deterministic in their effect on other constituencies of the passport paradigm, their analysis can illuminate a programmatic of intent against which ethnographic impressions regarding the deployment of documents can be layered in later chapters. Moreover, a focus on design invites an attunement to the concreteness and consequences of form and is thus appropriate to the politico-aesthetic commitments of my approach.

⁹ I did try to contact a small number of women working in this very male-dominated area, however my attempts did not lead to fruition.

Deriving identity: how do documents become identificational?

The German passport (fig.4) can be obtained by citizens at the price of €60.00. It is an elective document, i.e. there is no imperative and indeed need for German citizens to hold a passport unless they want to roam outside the Schengen area¹⁰, yet still around three million new passports are issued annually (for reference, there are ca. 75 mio. German nationals and passports are valid for ten years for anybody above the age of 24). The legally prescribed *Ausweispflicht*, i.e. the obligation of all German nationals residing in Germany according to §1 of the *Act on Identity Cards and Electronic Identification* to carry a governmentally issued identification document from the age of sixteen, is primarily fulfilled by the German ID card (fig.5), which almost the entire citizenry holds. Roughly eight million copies of the document, which comes at the price of 37.50€, are given out every year and it is also valid for ten years. The document is used for the bulk of day-to-day identification purposes in Germany, be it voting, opening a bank account, signing a contract, or proving you are of age when buying alcoholic beverages etc. Though not a travel document in its primary conception, the ID card can also be used for identification purposes across the Schengen area and has thus become a para-travel document.

Whilst the German state issues a host of other forms of identification (residence titles, emergency identification documents for refugees or asylum seekers, travel documents for non-nationals, refugees, stateless people, diplomats, or persons conducting official business on behalf of the German state, visa etc.) the two, in terms of sheer volume, embody the core of the German documentary regime and are frequently discussed conjointly by my collaborators. They form what those in the know call a documentary “family”: their family resemblances present in their shared security features, visual appearance, and material design. Whilst the documents

¹⁰ “The Schengen Area is an area comprising 26 European countries that have officially abolished all passport and all other types of border control at their mutual borders. The area mostly functions as a single jurisdiction for international travel purposes, with a common visa policy.” – Schengen Area entry on Wikipedia (online) [accessed on 20 September 2022]: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schengen_Area

differ in terms of where they are identificationally valid – only within Schengen (*ID*) or also outside of Schengen (*passport*); offline only (*passport*) or also online (*ID*) – they are unified in their identificational function. Yet what does that function entail?

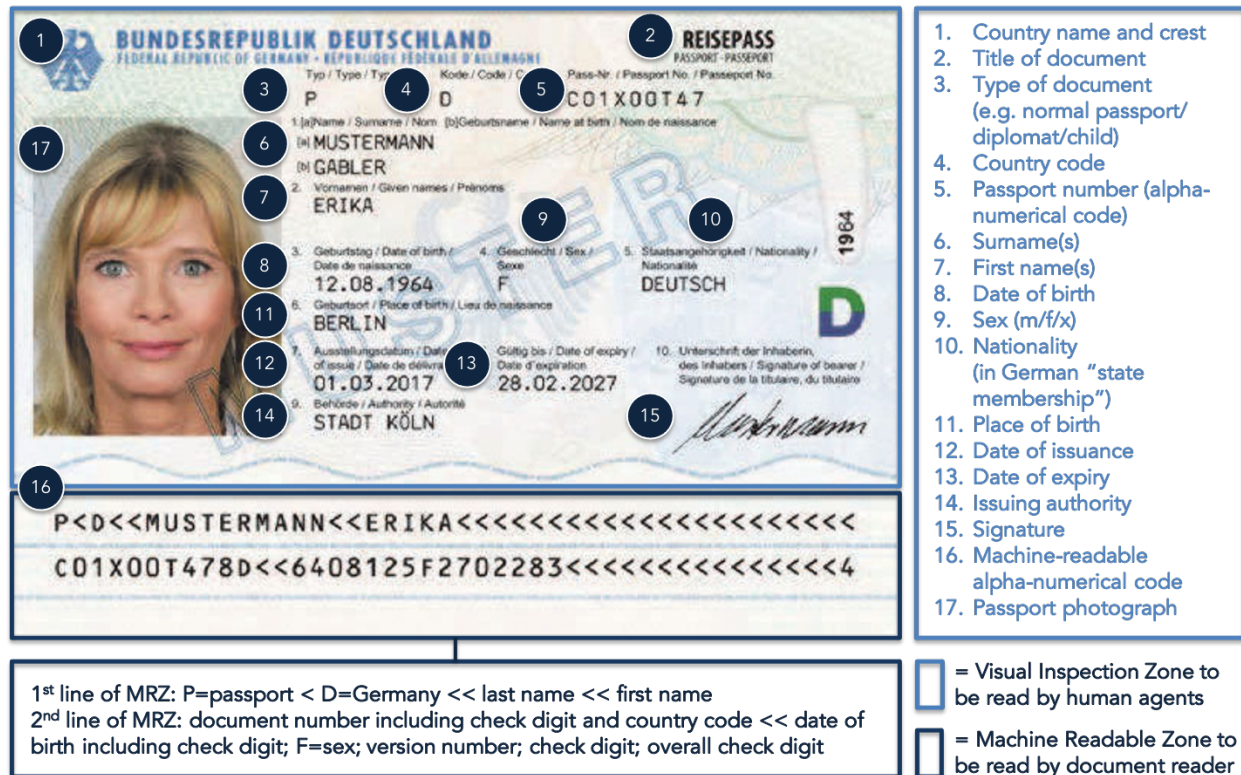


Figure 4: The biographic data page of the German passport (3rd generation e-passport first issued in March 2017).
 © Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat [descriptions added by the author].

"What do identification documents do?" When I meet Dr Berger he poses this question before I can even ask it. He tells me that he asked it himself when he first started work at the department, which he had not planned to join when first applying to a civil servant position at the home office (young lawyers like Dr Berger who begin their career in the civil service are staffed on their first post without much of a say in the matter). However, over time he has grown to really enjoy the work – a common origin story for people in the passport world, as I will learn – and it shows in the enthusiasm he brings to our conversations. Through his involvement in the regulatory structure on which the German passport and ID system is built, he has developed an

engaged perspective. His nuanced thoughts about the system and his department's work on it will often cause him to flag his responses: "this I say as a civil servant" – "now I speak from a personal perspective, not on behalf of the ministry". Oscillating between the official line, which in itself is not monolithic as department and minister, or minister and cabinet might not always agree, and his personal thoughts on the subject, our conversation evolves across various aspects of the legislative process around identification documents. When we then reach the matter of the purpose of documentary identification he gives a careful, technical answer right off the bat:

I would say that in passports and IDs we are trying to grasp the person in a corporeal sense, i.e. how they are somatically separate to and from their environment, despite the many epistemic problems this might bear. We are trying, so to speak, to grasp the person, to whom rights and responsibilities are attributed within the legal order. The law works by assigning to the legal subjects, the people, rights and responsibilities. It is thus about being able to say Hans Maier, born on this day, is exactly the person who we now find in front of ourselves – and not the other guy standing nearby.

Passports and IDs, he explains, allow the state to do just that: they "summarise the markers of a person's identity, which we, as the state, perceive to be sufficient to allow us to identify a person." In their specificity and epistemic awareness Dr Berger's words might appear rehearsed, yet that is not the sense I get when he delivers them. I find his dualistic description of identification documents' official function striking: his words render the project of identification a somatically oriented process of corporeal separation, yet see its instrumental value to lie in the facilitation of legal attribution on the level of the subject. This dual conception is mirrored by responses I receive from other collaborators. Dr Müller of the *Federal Criminal Police* similarly finds documents to fulfil two core purposes: first, he sees them to secure the identity of the holder, by matching document and bearer, where secure (*sicherstellen*) implies both, to fix as well as render certain. Secondly, he names a nationalising (*staatsbürgerliche*) function: "The bearer of the document is marked out (*ausgewiesen*) as a German citizen." Both men so conceptualise a relational understanding of identification, where documents are employed to (1) operationally isolate and make accessible a certain person to

the state's reach as well as (2) designate a certain status and the rights to which a person is entitled per this status. Yet how do documents do this?



Figure 5: The German electronic ID card (first issued in August 2021). © Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat [descriptions added by the author].

To answer this question, let us first consider the identificatory data contained in documents: the ID or passport data pertaining to the bearer and considered of identificational value is seemingly simple, relatively well known, and does not differ much across documents except for the inclusion of such more exotic categories as “academic title” and “artist or religious name” in the national ID card (see fig.5). In the case of the ID card the markers are listed on both sides of the document, whilst in the passport, the identificational markers are primarily located on the front of what is called the biometric data page (BDP see fig.4), the main identificational page (usually the first page in the booklet and materially distinct from the other pages e.g. laminated or made from a credit-card like plastic). The patterns according to which these identificational

markers are organised in both documents follow a global standard, set out by the *United Nation's International Civil Aviation Organisation* (ICAO), the aforementioned organisation tasked with regulating border control and travel documents on behalf of all UN states, and are also shaped by various EU regulations. Finally, both documents contain a chip on which a digital replica of the identificatory data carried on the pages of the documents is saved, including a copy of the portrait as well as the bearer's fingerprints.

Looking at the actual data points employed to identify the person in both documents, we can distinguish two overarching categories: bodily data (passport photograph; biometric data contained on microchip; on a separate page, height, hair colour, eye colour) as well as biographic information (name, address, date, place of birth, nationality, and academic title, artist or religious name). As almost all of my collaborators will emphasise, stability is a key characteristic rendering these markers attractive to the state. Stability here implies continuity over time, i.e. a perceived quality of stagnation for at least the duration of the validity of the document. Names, date and place of birth, height, a fingerprint – these are not easily changed, either because they are regulated by law (names), previously registered in the bureaucratic record (date or place of birth), or thought to be biologically fixed (height, a biometric fingerprint). They thus pertain to and describe an individual's identity in ways that can remain operational in the long term. This is connected to a second key concern: verifiability. Markers are then most valid to the state when they are perceived to be unambiguously verifiable. Verifiability here implies an amalgamation of pragmatic dimensions, i.e. the accessibility and universality of a feature (every citizen should have the feature and it should not be tedious to make it accessible to control) and epistemic considerations, i.e. the perceived in-corruptibility and parsability of a marker (the feature should be as immune to manipulation as possible, yet it must also be parsable to the control apparatus). Beyond verifiability and stability, there are, however, other factors shaping the identificatory data-set, as becomes especially clear when considering the aforementioned unusual categories of "Artist Name", "Religious Name", or "Academic Title" optionally included in the German ID card:

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Dr Berger explains that there are recurring debates at his department on whether to keep these in play or not. Opinions at the ministry differ: some argue these markers do not fulfil a strictly identificatory function, whilst others lean in favour of their cultural and identificational value to certain groups within the population. “It was extremely fascinating to me when we had this discussion at the department, because it became clear to me then, that documents are not, in fact, simply what I have previously described them to be. But that people also want to embody their self-image in documents. And that is why people want their PhD to go in there – because they worked so very hard for it. Or their artist name, because they identify fully with that name. And suddenly, the whole thing is not a technical matter anymore, but it becomes a question of identification in the wider sense!”, Dr Berger reflects. Whilst for now, he explains, it was decided for the data set to remain unchanged, his descriptions indicate that beyond stability and verifiability, the cultural appropriateness and acceptance of certain identificational features among the citizenry, as imagined by Dr Berger and his colleagues, play a role in the deliberations around how to demarcate identity.

How these various factors intermingle in the transformation of a feature into an identificational marker is not always easy to tell: as noted above, the German government does not necessarily have free reign in deciding which information should be entailed in documents, as ICAO and EU guidelines applying to the design, issuance, and manufacture of identification and travel documents also bear a strong influence. Deliberations will thus take place across a multitude of decision-making bodies. Moreover, the bulk of categories currently contained in German identification documents pre-date my collaborators’ own involvement with these documents: they were simply not around when such profound decisions as, say, the call to include a date-of-birth or a passport portrait in the documents were made. Yet there is one more recent addition to the identificatory data set, in which at least Dr Müller played a prominent role: the introduction of a biometric facial image and fingerprints, pioneered in the first German electronic passports in 2005/2007. The process, I believe, can shed some light on the granular considerations at play when the question of *how* citizens can become known is deliberated:

The shift towards biometrics in travel documents took place globally in the 9/11 aftermath. Prompted by the US Patriot Act and the move to make biometric documents a mandatory requirement for participation in the US electronic visa-waiver-program, the EU issued regulation 2252/2004, enforcing the issuance of biometric passports in all member states. The hasty ratification process and accusations of policy laundering against the then home secretary, Otto Schily, who many Germans felt had circumvented parliament and ignored public criticism by working to realise the push for biometrics on an EU level, made for a tumultuous start to this new biometric era in Germany (see Klein 2012); yet today, all passports, IDs, and residence titles carry biometric data. In his capacity as a leading consultant to the German home office, Dr Müller played an important role in bringing this project to fruition, but perhaps even more significantly, he was also a key figure among the group of document experts that developed global regulatory requirements for biometrics in travel and identification documents when the US impetus hit: as a currency of international identification, passports only work if they are (a) recognised and (b) can be authenticated (i.e. are technically parsable/legible and verifiable) to all states that a traveller might possibly want to visit. International coordination is thus key and was especially urgent when it came to the introduction of biometrics on a global scale, as an entirely new mode of routine, travel-related identification and border control. When the UN Security Council under heavy US influence issued a resolution demanding for biometric standards to be formulated to enable a globally interoperable system for biometric documents, it was thus ICAO – the UN organisation mentioned above, which will also be the subject of chapter 5 – that had to pick up the slack.

Dr Müller was among the group of experts leading this effort on ICAO's behalf (the organisation's regulatory efforts rely heavily on expert working-groups and German authorities and industry representatives have a strong presence). When I ask him about this time and the work done by him and his international colleagues to devise a framework for the inclusion of biometrics, he tells me that after they had recovered from the sudden and unexpected political push for the inclusion of biometrics, all began with three key questions: "Which primary biometric marker should it be? On what type of token can we encode it? And in which format

should the biometric marker be saved?" For the first question fingerprints were considered but rejected due to their perceived criminal connotation among some states. Equally, the working group thought about using iris-based identification, yet the owner of a core patent was initially unwilling to open this to international usage. Consequently, the decision fell on the biometrics of the face to function as the primary biometric marker (i.e. the mandatory marker to be used by all countries wishing to issue biometric documents, with fingerprints being available as a secondary option). Their decision was supported by the fact that the passport portrait was already an integral feature of the document and application process. "That meant that the workflow was already defined": people already brought in their pictures, they already were comfortable with the inclusion of their photograph in the document. This, the group felt, would make the collection of biometric markers at passport offices far easier. Moreover, the face – unlike irises or fingerprints – is a dually verifiable feature, which, both, humans as well as machines could parse and match to a person. An important dimension for Müller, who emphasises that as a representative of the police he is invested in keeping an eye on the ramifications of technological changes for "officers on the streets" without access to sophisticated verification technologies. Identification documents, he explains, must also always work when the only available verification mechanism is the "human sensory apparatus".

For the second question, the matter of the medium on which the biometric data should be saved, the considerations were equally complex, yet limited by the affordances posed by the standard passport format already in place – the *Formfaktor* (factor of form) as Dr Müller calls the well-known passport booklet. The working group considered 2D Barcodes (think the codes used on a boarding pass), yet the size such a barcode would have taken was incompatible with the standard passport format: it would have overwritten inscriptions of other identification markers. Equally, contact chips were considered (think your credit card before contactless pay came around), but again this would have required the usage of a standard-sized chip, placed at a specific position within the document, which did not work either with the passport's current form nor the geometry of the reading device. Finally, the decision fell on Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) chips, which provided the greatest degree of flexibility (though opened

them up to criticism with regards to data protection, a topic to which I will return at a later point in this chapter).

When marker (facial biometrics) and medium (RFID chip) were in place, the third matter had to be addressed: how, i.e. in what format, to save the biometric feature on the RFID chip? Two options were considered: save the raw data, i.e. a digital copy of the passport portrait from which biometric markers could then be extracted and biometric vectors derived anew, on the fly, during each verification process. Or save a biometric template, i.e. the algorithmic expression of a biometric feature, and then draw on this vector in any verification process. In the end the decision fell on saving the raw data, as finding a globally interoperable template seemed an impossible feat: algorithms used for the extraction of biometric markers differ across different technical providers and templates might thus not have been compatible with some of those algorithms, unless public and industry stakeholders would have agreed on a globally standardised way. “That just wasn’t going to happen” Müller explains, “though, believe me, many countries tried hard to convince others that they or the companies they worked with had the best algorithm on offer”. However, there was also a technical advantage to going with the raw data: “With each update to an algorithm the extraction process becomes better, i.e. more secure and faster. With the raw data we can profit from the innovations in extraction speed and precision, whereas going with a template version we would have been frozen in time: technologically stuck at the point when the first electronic passport would have been issued. With a validity period of ten years for these documents, that would have been highly counterproductive”, Müller explains.

Dr Müller’s account sketches out dimensions of the conduct and process of identificatory design that shed light on its more pragmatic complexities: his narrations highlight matters such as intellectual property and the resulting availability of a technology to the global community of governments engaged in issuing passports as a major factor in the selection of an identificational marker, causing the prevalence of facial over iris biometrics. Equally, his descriptions of how the existing documentary form of the standard passport token has shaped

the choice of data carrier for biometric markers does not only shed light on the pragmatic dimensions of securitisation in the post-9/11 aftermath but emphasises that the material pre-conditions of identification documents as long-term technologies have a stark influence on how the practice and paradigm of identification evolves. Finally, they also speak to the importance of the broad cultural acceptance of a marker as being a core requirement for its functionality on a broad scale. This adds important context to existing readings of the identificational data set in dominant literatures, which emphasise their categorical nature (e.g. Caplan and Torpey 2001:9, Lyon and Stalder 2003, Lyon 2009, Salter 2006). For in the above descriptions German identification documents do not appear as definitive forms, devised exclusively according to a governmental rationality of statistical individuation, but as a set of markers that is laboriously negotiated and takes turns prompted by rather mundane factors. Now what do we make of this?

Documentary assemblages: how is identity materialised in documents?

In his work on biotechnological governance Javier Lezaun makes sense of “the dialectic between the enunciation of [an] object of government in a legal text, and the administrative and technoscientific instruments that give it material meaning” (Lezaun 2006:504) by introducing the notion of *demarcation*. Demarcation, he suggests, describes “the administrative practices and technical instruments through which [...] an object is made bureaucratically unambiguous and analytically distinct” (Lezaun 2006:504). He explores this practice of demarcation in the context of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and the EU’s desire to regulate these as well as make them traceable. To realise the project of demarcation, i.e. of giving material meaning to legally derived categories – in his case the so-called “transformation event”, i.e. the moment at which an organism becomes genetically modified – Lezaun argues, two important steps are required, one bureaucratic and the other one analytic: first, a unique identifier must be formulated, i.e. the legal transformation event at issue must be given a

material name that only pertains to this specific version of a transformation event. Second, a scientific method that allows for the specific detection of said event needs to be derived.

Albeit focused on novel bio-legal entities, Lezaun's account exhibits important parallels to the work enacted by my collaborators: "the key dynamic explored", he writes, "is the dialectic between the enunciation of a new object of government in a legal text, and the administrative and technoscientific instruments that give it material meaning" (Lezaun 2006:504). Thinking back to Dr Berger's identificational programmatic of the necessity to differentiate between bodies, and assign to them irrevocably and unambiguously the particular identity that the state deems appropriate, we find an example of such enunciation, i.e. a legally expressed desire to make explicit the somatic citizen-subject; Lezaun describes this form of legal enunciation of a governable entity as delimitation. Dr Müller's account, however, sheds light on the bureaucratic and analytical complexities of the material execution of this legal delimitation, i.e. its demarcation, foreshadowing the fact that in the passport paradigm delimitation and demarcation do not interlink seamlessly (neither, so reports Lezaun, do they do so in the context of GMOs). However, the demarcation of the citizen-subject is not achieved by a mere stipulation of the characteristics that define it; it must equally be understood to imply the materialisation of these identifying markers in a fixed, transactionable form. To understand the demarcation of identity more full, we must thus ask how documentary identities are materialised and secured:

When I sit down with Dr Wagner at the *German Federal Printing Services'* (BDR) offices in Berlin in pursuit of this question, he has a large brown envelope with him, filled with a whole host of document specimens – IDs, passports, driver's licenses, banknotes – in all sorts of shapes and colours. Invisible to the uninitiated, these documents lay out Dr Wagner's life's work: developing highly specialised inks used to print secure elements, building inlays for electronic documents, or realising visual features, seamlessly incorporated into the overall composition of a document, Dr Wagner has been in the business of making documents secure for a long time. His employer, the BDR, a state-owned, yet independently run security printing and -systems

provider, manufactures all German identification documents, and Dr Wagner has played an integral role in their making for a long time. During our conversations he draws on the specimens to make the scientific complexity of his day-to-day job somehow accessible to a laywoman. Among the specimens is what looks at first sight like a German ID card that has begun dissolving, peeling off in multiple layers. Yet what appears like error or decay, is actually the opposite – an illustration of how the document comes to be assembled: in the production of the main German documents (national ID card, residence permit, and the passport's BDP) there are no blanks anymore. Designing or manufacturing these documents does not mean simply inscribing or printing upon a blank base; rather, security features and identificational data are inscribed, infused, and imprinted on separate foils which are then stacked up, layer for layer, to form the final document, the *card*. Dr Wagner likens this process to the making of an elaborate, layered cake:

When I set out to configure a new document, I have a recipe, like a pastry chef. Based on this recipe I build the document, like a cake, layer for layer. How many layers do I want? What can I put in each layer? What *must* I include? – The sponge and cream, so to speak. – What *can* I include? – The cherry on top, if you want. Like with a cake you have to be careful not to overdo it, not to overload a layer with too many ingredients. Calibrating these layers is a matter of composition. It requires teamwork, as different people work on different layers, and it requires experience. Due to my experience, I can say: this layer works best with this personalisation technology, and this foil should be placed in this position, so that a security feature on which I work comes out particularly well. Take the example of the ID card: see these interchanging visuals of the portrait and the validity date? This is made possible through a very particular layering of different foils in the card. If one of these foils was placed only fifty micro millimetres higher than it is here, then this feature would look very differently. It would not work, just like it would not work to place the sponge on top of the cherry.

Dr Wagner's descriptions of the process of configuring a document encapsulate an important facet of the project of documentation: there is no document before it is personalised, i.e. only in the process of being inscribed with the personal data of a bearer does a document emerge. Documentation and personalisation are thus parallel endeavours, interweaving a multitude of highly functionalised materials with the identificatory markers of the bearer. In this process, the

individual markers themselves become security features, the passport portrait being the most prominent example: the photograph of the bearer can be seen in multiple material incarnations – as holograph, as engraving, as infused print in the main picture – scattered across the document. What has led to such multi-personalised documents is the idea that forgers cannot simply create a card-base proto-type and then replicate this to inscribe various identities. The identificational data thus takes on a dual function: it is representational of the bearer, as well as protects these very representations against interference.

This highly personalised process of documentary production leads Dr Wagner to speak of the “identity of the object” as being just as central to his work, as is the identity of the identified: as the inscriptions that documents carry are infused, engraved, imprinted in various different ways across multiple document layers, a token rotates, in the process of its assembly, across a number of different machines: photograph, holographic image, laser engraved data, and chip data are all administered by different apparatuses. “When our IDs reach a certain machine, they already have an identity, a number, and the right data has to be matched to that number”. In my collaborators’ minds and work, documents thus appear not as generic cards, but as an assemblage of techno-aesthetic micro-achievements, which collectively work to emerge the final identificational token.

This is not an accidental occurrence: the three documents of the ID card, the residence title, and the passport embody what my collaborators call a documentary family; they feature a cohesive look and functionality, a configuration that is motivated by two reasons: the first is ease of verification, as the BKA’s Dr Müller explains: “to me it is first and foremost about in-the-field authentication, i.e. control work carried out by police officers at the border or in the street. If I know reasonably well how to verify the German passport, I will be able to do the same thing with the national ID card and vice-versa.” This, he feels, makes life easier for officers and ensures that controls are effective. But there are also economic concerns rendering a cohesive approach more cost-efficient: it is extremely expensive to develop high-quality security features. Innovations thus only really pay off, if used in more than one document type. This also

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makes supply-chain matters easier: materials can be purchased in bulk and need not be specific to just one document.

To accommodate the family-framework, the security features and layers on which Dr Wagner and his colleagues at the BDR work thus have to be modular innovations, which can carry over from one document type to the next. The aforementioned *InnosecFusion®* procedure for the integration of full-colour portraits in polycarbonate cards is an example of such a modular feature: a few years ago the German government decided to re-launch German documents in a polycarbonate format – a decision driven not by security concerns, but (a) by the political wish to assimilate German documents to the wider EU documentary ecology for the sake of a harmonised approach as well as (b) looming supply-chain problems and rising costs of document production, prompted by the fact that the previous paper-based approach had become so exotic, it was increasingly hard to come by the required paper type. The change to polycarbonates, however, implied a “loss of exclusivity” for German documents, as Dr Müller puts it, which is now constructed more similarly to other EU documents on the market. Whilst the German authorities were willing to give up their niche existence for the sake of harmonisation, Dr Müller and his colleagues at the BKA were not prepared to compromise on the documents’ photograph. A full-colour image of a certain size, they felt, was essential for the verifiability of documents by officers without access to computerised verification aids, and so should be retained. The expectations were thus clear: whilst the new ID card, which pioneered the polycarbonate format, was going to be significantly smaller in size than the previous version, the portrait was to be the same size. Moreover, even though all other polycarbonate documents at the time (and mostly still today) used laser technologies to engrave photographs, which could only deliver monochrome results, German documents were to retain a full-colour image. Finally, the document was to far exceed security requirements set by ICAO – “We wanted and still want the most secure document in the world”, will, both, Dr Müller and Dr Wagner tell me with great seriousness.

Based on these requirements Dr Wagner and his colleagues got to work, slowly making their way towards their realisation in close collaboration with the BKA. "Developing documents is teamwork, it is an iterative process that cannot be done top-down", he explains. Yet neither he, nor Dr Müller can tell me much more about the process due to the high confidentiality of their work. Their silence on the more granular workings of security features speaks to the fact that securing documents implies a constant oscillation between the creation of semiotic openings and closures: security features must be legible and verifiable, i.e. semiotically open, yet simultaneously they must remain as immune as possible to manipulation, i.e. semiotically closed. To manage these openings and closures, documents are designed to include a broad range of security features ranging across different security levels: level 1, overt features, describes security elements that can be authenticated by anybody, either optically, by the naked eye, or haptically through touch. They thus require no additional equipment for verification, and the existence and form of these features is usually publicly known, as they are overtly perceptible. Level 2, covert features, comprises a set of elements that require equipment-driven verification, with tools ranging from light sources or magnifiers to document readers; whilst the equipment to read features might not be easily available, anybody can essentially procure it and the existence of these features is equally part of the public record; finally, there is level 3, forensic features, which can only be authenticated using highly specialised laboratory equipment. Many, if not all of these features, are fully confidential, and will only be known to governmental actors and manufacturers. The three levels embody a so-called pyramid, which has long guided documentary securitisation. Yet the shift to biometrics and electronic documents has lead document manufacturers and regulators to new territories: the biometrification of passports allowed for the traditional passport to be "upgraded to a platform for electronic identification" (Liersch 2009:96). Through this electronic, datafied dimension passports have, however, also developed new security affordances: data protection and encryption.

The main driver behind the introduction of electronic documents carrying biometric data was the goal of tying together document and bearer more firmly, i.e. making the verification of the

paper-person interrelation more secure and potentially automatable. Yet for electronic documents to really enable improved identificational security and to protect citizens from novel forms of data theft that could potentially arise through electronic identification, protocols were required that, both, allowed for the fast processing of documents at control points as well as offered strong protections. Whilst the exact technical details regarding the various security mechanisms employed in German documents to protect the RFID chip and the data it holds exceed the scope of this chapter, it is important to give a general overview¹¹. Let us begin with the question of what type of data is held on the chip: the chip contains all the data included on the biographic data page of the passport, including the passport photograph. Furthermore, the document bearer's fingerprints are saved, yet stored separately to the other data in a different position within the chip's logical data-structure. The biometric chip data is stored exclusively on there, i.e. no additional copy of this data exists in any centralised database¹². When it comes to securing the document chip, two forms of protection are required: (1) access authentication: unauthorised as well as secret access attempts must be prohibited to protect the bearer's data as well as (2) authenticity and integrity protection: any corruption or cloning of the saved data needs to be ruled out to ensure the integrity of data and chip. In their technicality these access control as well authentication protocols exceed what can sensibly and responsibly be covered in this chapter. Notwithstanding, I shall briefly explain in basic shape the data protection mechanisms employed, as they hold some relevance to understanding a later point:

For purposes of data protection two different types of access control are utilised: first, *Basic Access Control* (BAC, passport) or *Password Authenticated Connection Establishment* (PACE, ID) are used to protect document chips from being accessed without the holder's knowledge as

¹¹ For a more comprehensive overview of the protection mechanisms employed in German electronic identification documents, please see the following resource provided by the Federal Office for Information Security: *Security Mechanisms in Electronic ID Documents*: <https://www.bsi.bund.de/dok/6650148> [online], accessed on 20 September 2022.

¹² To clarify: the data contained in documents, including the photograph but excluding fingerprints, is also stored de-centrally at the respective passport office at which an application for a document was made. Fingerprints, however, are deleted from any databases once a document has been issued to its rightful bearer.

well as to shield an authorised authentication process from interception by an illicit player. Whilst BAC and PACE differ slightly, they share some general similarities: a key is required for a reading machine to access the data on the document chip. This key is derived from calculations made by the reading machine based on visual access to certain visual document elements, e.g. the machine-readable zone of ID and passport or their card access number. Moreover, a session key is derived, which further shields the communicative process from external interference or eavesdropping. As the keys in use during PACE/BAC rely on the reader having visual access to the document, a closed passport booklet or an ID card enclosed in a wallet should be protected from unauthorised access – yet at the same time, anybody with physical access to the document and the required reading software (apps are easily available to anyone) can access the chip. However, they will not be able to extract from this more information than they could gain from visually assessing a document. For BAC/PACE protocols are applied only in the protection of the digital biographic data page data and the biometric photograph. For fingerprints a more restrictive protection format is applied: Extended Access Control (EAC), during which in addition to similar processes as BAC/PACE the reader (“terminal”) requires specific and closely guarded authentication certificates (“terminal authentication”) to be able to access the required data.

To most lay-people these will sound like tedious details. Yet the question of which access control protocol to employ, or, in fact, whether one should have access protections at all can be contentious: Dr Müller describes how during the inception phase of biometric passports, he and his German colleagues had to convince representatives from other countries, first and foremost the United States, that some type of access control was indeed required. The US, Müller explains, remained unconvinced, prioritising the speed of control (BAC might have added 1-2 seconds to a control process at the early stages of biometric document control) over data-protection concerns. Whilst these differences are today a matter of the past (almost all passports employ BAC today, including US documents), more recently Dr Müller faced a similar conflict with his colleagues from the *Federal Office for Information Security* (BSI), the agency responsible for document chip security, when the first electronic identification card (eID) was

issued in 2010: the Ministry of the Interior (BMI), expertly supported by the BSI, decided the chip as a whole was to be protected by an EAC mechanism, as it feared that citizens using the eID function online for digital identification purposes could fall prey to fraudsters trying to learn elements of their identity that they should not have access to. Müller and the BKA, on the other hand, felt that what was gained in security through the chip feature would be of no use, under an EAC protocol, to officers carrying out identity checks in the field, as there initially simply was no infrastructure in place to make accessible the highly secure and shielded certificates required to carry out EAC controls. As Müller sees it, both parties were playing their respective role: he, as the representative of the police, had to foreground policing and crime prevention, whilst the BSI, in its more technical and civilian positioning, strictly emphasised data-protection matters. The BSI won the first round of prolonged negotiations, yet shortly thereafter new EU regulations set a different tone so that today German eIDs employ “only” PACE to protect biographic data and photograph (whilst EAC is still used for fingerprints). The dispute, as technical as it may appear, exposes that in the project of designing identifications and demarcating the uniquely identifiable citizen-subject, competing institutional projects have a significant impact on the documentary form.

Documentary orientations

In the opening pages to this chapter I quoted Smith who asks how [identification] documents are “about or oriented toward some other entity, structure, or patch of the world” (1996:13). I also drew on Rancière to introduce the idea of aesthetics as a delimitative force of foregrounding or making perceptible and thus a suitable access-point for understanding documents’ worldly orientations as well as the intentions – political and aesthetic – that drive them. The below is an attempt to reinterpret previous considerations of the process of documenting identity in the light of these framing thoughts, which I believe will allow us to venture closer to an understanding of the consequential quality of documents, at issue within the larger undertaking of this thesis.

Documentary embodiments: somatic separation and its discontents

Considering the entirety of identificational markers assembled in identification documents – from biometrics and the passport portrait, to physiognomic markers such as height or eye colour – as well as the way these physical features are operationalised in the project of verifying and making secure documents, we find a pronounced somatic focus. The demarcation of the legal subject – the starting point of the identificational project as my collaborators view it – here seems to become a matter of separating unique bodies, codified and contained in documents. This appears at odds with the notoriously unstable corporeal ontology: “[h]uman bodies leak, they spill beyond their corporal boundaries” (Banks 2013:16) and evade any clear fixation. The idea that bodies can be easily read resonating in identification documents is, in the bulk of scholarship on the matter discussed primarily in the context of biometrics and its heavy reliance on technology to access the presumed veracity of the corporeal (see e.g. Maguire et al. 2018, Lyon 2001, Rao 2018, van der Ploeg 2003) an exception being Cole 2001 who however foregrounds criminal identification. Yet what the above indicates, is that the emphasis on somatic separation is not a mere effect of the biometric method, but intrinsic to the passport paradigm’s constitutive logics: it testifies to what I shall call a techno-aesthetic concern with documentary embodiment, as described by Dr Berger in the early pages of this chapter:

Throughout my conversations the ideal of documentary embodiment features again and again, when e.g. Dr Berger mentions that Germans should not hold their breath waiting for an online application process for passports and IDs, as “the idea is, that we want very much to see people every ten years. We want them ‘in flesh and blood’ in front of us to be able to carry out a real control... you might make things easier for people if everything can be done online and remotely. But these processes are a lot more vulnerable to manipulation because the information has to complete a ‘journey’ that would not be needed, if the person was physically present.” His words indicate a vision of the identified as fundamentally embodied agents and of corporeality as a guarantor of immediacy and veracity – so the juridico-delimitative ideal (to invoke again Lezaun). However, the government’s insistence on the physical presence of the

identified during the application process for a new document also hints at the weak link in the project of documentary embodiment and thus the inherent messiness of identificatory demarcation: the enrolment of (bodily) markers into the system.

“No matter how sophisticated an ID card is, it is only as reliable as the document on which it is based. Administrative identity is established as a series of references, from one document to the other, all the way down to, ideally, the birth certificate. The reliability of the last document, a new ID card, is defined by the weakest link in this chain of references” note Stalder and Lyon (2003:84). Applied to the project of documentary embodiment, their words hint at the fact that corporeal markers, such as the passport photograph with its dually verifiable quality as a biometric as well as visual referent, might enhance the verifiability of the paper-person relation, whilst secure inscriptions like *InnosecFusion®* minimise manipulation, but neither measure can ultimately overcome the problem of a potentially fraudulent root identity – they cannot prohibit the case of a document being wrongly embodied. “Documents really only verify a documented identity”, Dr Müller confirms. “You cannot really know whether a document, that is issued in the name of person X, really implies that this is person X. Perhaps person X applied under a false identity or is for instance placed under a witness protection program, therefore bearing a government issued alias.” This uncertainty has always existed, even beyond the case of government-sponsored alias identities: look-alike fraud has posed the danger of illicit brokers gaining access to authentic documents and matching them to their clients in need of an alias identity (a matter discussed more deftly in chapter 3). Yet the biometric era has made this problem more acute: where identification is increasingly enacted biometrically, at electronic border gates or other algorithmically driven thresholds, without sustained involvement of a human agent that might draw on additional, conversational data to derive an identificational outcome, the conflation of bodies must be avoided at all cost. After all, that was the promise of biometrics: absolute uniqueness. Yet the project of biometrically separating bodies has recently been forced to confront an unexpected enemy: the concept and practice of morphing.

Morphing describes the phenomenon and increasing prevalence of so-called face morphs in identification documents: the passport portraits of two people are morphed into one using dedicated software. When the pictures are fused, they are not merged to a 50-50 point of amalgamation, but there will be a primary face and a secondary face, so that the resulting face morph looks more like the primary face, yet is simultaneously biometrically related to the secondary face. The primary bearer then uses the morphed picture to apply for a biometric identification document in their name. The resulting authentic, state-issued document will be biometrically usable to both, the secondary and primary bearer, at electronic border control points or other biometrics-based control situations that do not involve human agents: the algorithm parsing the secondary face and comparing it to the morphed passport portrait will find a positive match. Due to the increasing prevalence of automatic, biometric-based border control points, this will then allow the secondary person to travel on the primary person's document and identity – two people sharing one identity. Though physical discrepancies between the morphed picture and secondary bearer are often immediately visible to the human eye, travellers on morphed passports have a high chance of making it through checkpoints, as the sheer volume of machine-driven border crossings makes it impossible for border officers to carefully assess every machine-derived match.

The practice of morphing, which my collaborators assume to have been around since ca. 2015 and of which they say there is no way of knowing the real number of cases as they assume only a fraction of morphed documents are intercepted at border controls, so achieves what the project of statistical isolation through documentary embodiment most fears: the conflation of bodies. "[T]he body as the inscription site for bureaucratically mediated economy and state powers" (Lea 2021:63, see also Das and Poole 2004, Ferguson and Gupta 2002, Li 2007, Lyon 2001, Maguire, Rao, and Zurawski 2018) becomes slippery, blurry, ambiguous in a way that the designers of the system in all their expertise did not anticipate it to be (see also Rao 2018). Significantly, the ad-hoc weapon selected in the fight against this corrosion of the fixity of bodily markers is – again – the body: "We simply need life-enrolment", so is the unequivocal consensus among my collaborators, where life-enrolment implies the idea of taking an

applicant's picture on-site instead of having applicants bring in their own portraits (a method that is already common practice in some countries, yet is not in Germany). This way, there would be no opportunity for applicants to interfere with the somatic unambiguity of their photograph.

It seems like a simple fix, yet once again, technological straight-forwardness is complicated by politico-pragmatic factors: "If we move to have portraits taken on site", Dr Berger explains, "that will effectively render tens of thousands of photographers redundant, whose main source of income has become taking passport portraits." At first this argument stuns me, though I hear it over and over. And indeed, months after I meet with Dr Berger, the government presents a draft law to implement life-enrolment and the uproar among photographers is so significant, the government initially dials back their suggestion and issues a call for proposals to work with photographers to find an alternative way: a certification process for digital photographs that would allow photographers to directly and securely forward certified pictures to the authorities, in a manner that would minimise interference. As things stand now, this certification process alongside a life-enrolment process available at passport offices will be rolled out from 2025 onwards, meaning that ten years will have passed between the problem – a problem that all experts agree severely undermines the security and identificatory interests of the state – being noticed and a solution being implemented. "It is a matter of having to weigh opposing societal interests. There is the business interest of photographers and the security-political interest of the state", says Dr Berger; "It is an interesting example of a problem being recognised, yet little is being done about it", feels Müller at the time that we speak (when no concrete actions had been taken yet), though today he is glad that tighter regulations, for which he and his department campaigned, have come into place.

The interference of morphing with the techno-aesthetic ideal of somatic separation through documentary embodiment holds two important learnings for an understanding of the project of identificational design: first, it is indicative of a normative aesthetics of corporeality and individuality informing my collaborator's work. As Woolgar and Neyland note in their work on

mundane governance, “the very possibility of governance through ID cards is premised on an idealized, standardized normal citizen presenting him or herself to the technology under specific (‘ideal’) circumstances. Visions of prospective governance, in other words, configure a specific imagined user” (2013:11). In the above-described case the collective designerly vision of potential documentary users, both illicit and proper, simply assumed for these to be irrevocably somatically separate. “We never imagined for anything like this to take place”, is a sentence I hear many of them say, in a tone of, both, anger and reverie for the creative capacities of their illicit counterparts. The case of morphing thus highlights the impact of designers’ techno-imaginative capacities to envision the identified in the project of conceptualising identification. Dr Berger reflects:

You cannot imagine the things life is capable of: one formulates a rule and thinks about it carefully. Yet somehow, there are always two or three cases that will pop up and that one did not anticipate. This whole thing is essentially like a game of ping-pong: the ball goes over the net but will always bounce back. It is never finished. You formulate a rule and then practitioners will tell you, it is not really working for them in this really particular way. Because the ‘normal’ case for which you wanted to produce regulations, was an entirely different case. And so either you have to somehow interpret the rules in a way that allows you to accommodate that new, unanticipated scenario, or you have to change the rule.

The project of demarcating identity here does not appear to evolve along the lines of a bureaucratic techno-rationalism, but an inherently trial-and-error approach to governance. “[T]hings go wrong, thus creating an awareness of the multiple alliances needed to create functional body-machine pairings” (2018:68), writes Ursula Rao in her important work on the deployment of biometric technologies in India. Rao’s observation points to a second important condition of designing identifications that this chapter has unearthed and which becomes especially prevalent with regards to the unexpected role of the photographer’s lobby in the fate and future of the German identificational regime: the seemingly “mundane” economic and political concerns, which the project of documentary identification must routinely confront.

Materialising the German way(s): the many identities of documentary design

Of course the weight that is given to such mundane influences varies for any given scenario and across different groups: e.g. Dr Berger and the home office are, by means of their political position, required to consider the wider societal consequences of their choices in a way that can be at odds with the narrower focus of Dr Müller and his colleagues at the BKA, who see it as their job to emphasise the perspective of crime prevention and policing; a prism through which the problem of morphing appears most acute. Notwithstanding, they must enact their respective politics in the arena of a shared form; and it is not only BMI and BKA who might bud heads as they strive to enact their respective mission: as the previous description of inter-agency clashes over access control mechanisms for the German electronic ID card show, each of the institutions and service providers involved in the project of making known play, as previously stated, a specific “role” which often only comes into full shape as it confronts differently oriented politico-aesthetic concerns.

The fact that unexpectedly quotidian considerations can inform decision-making does not automatically render mute concerns brought forward by scholars working on the discriminatory potentials (e.g. Jacobsen and Rao 2018, Salter 2006, Stalder and Lyon 2003) and surveillant impulses (e.g. Aas 2001, Amoore 2008, Ericson and Haggerty 2000) of the identification apparatus, as well as the reductive quality of bureaucratic knowledge production more largely: it is without doubt at the expense of the multifaceted qualitative potentiality of being in the world that documentary identifications are constructed. “Bureaucratic knowledge is all about schematization [...] ignoring all the subtleties of real social existence and reducing everything to preconceived mechanical or statistical formulae” (2015, online) writes Graeber; “statistics are to bodies and social types what maps are to territories: they flatten and enclose” (1993:334), notes Appadurai; identity in documents, of course, is very different to identity in a more personal sense, agree all my collaborators. Yet the ethnographic material presented over previous pages indicates that in the becoming of national identificatory regimes “the state” is not a monolith working in an entirely concerted manner, towards the execution of these reductive results, but

is constituted of variously placed actors who pursue specific – at times intersecting but also often diverging – goals. That in itself is nothing new. However, as the circle of designers of the documentary regime in Germany is relatively small, their individual impact on their collective creation is rather significant, as they seek to realise their own identities – institutional, individual, professional – in the documentary form. It is thus crucial to understand what drives them and how they seek to relate to the world through the documents they fashion:

When I ask Dr Müller and Dr Wagner what drives their efforts, they give an identical answer: “To create the most secure document in the world”. “We have, as far as security is concerned, a reputation to keep. We stand for absolute reliability and quality”, says Dr Wagner. “We are highly respected and trusted on the international stage. We are known to be know-how driven. That is the German way,” says Dr Müller. What is secure enough and how documents take shape is then not necessarily determined by exclusively rationalistic concerns with preventing document and identity fraud. Indeed, as my collaborators’ frequent references to the EU indicate, securing identities and thereby managing domestic security and migration within the Schengen regime is not a goal to be achieved merely by making one’s own documents hyper-secure. My collaborators of course realise this, hence their efforts to promote “the German way” on a supra-national stage and to shape documentary regulations accordingly. Regardless, they still pursue, in the domestic context, the design of documentary forms that far exceed these regulatory bounds. The production of secure documents, it seems, is not exclusively about securing against fraud, counterfeiting, or illegal immigration; rather, it seems to also be oriented towards techno-material achievement and its display towards the world. This orientation plays out in the frequent references to uniqueness and exclusivity made by my collaborators.

When this goal is not achieved, it hurts, not just on the level of a political fear of identificational lapses, insecure borders, and fraud, but on a somewhat personal level: Dr Müller cites the example of his close involvement in the design of the then most recent Schengen visa, for which Germany had provided the initial concept. He and his team gave it their all, yet only a

few months after the new version had been issued, a significant number of forgeries started circulating. "I take that quite personally, because that visa was our baby. Of course any document is eventually going to be forged, but not that fast, please!" he tells me ironically. I ask whether he holds respect for the forgers, adapting so quickly to an ever-changing landscape of identificational documents. "Absolutely yes", he exclaims. Forgers, the illicit counterparts of my collaborators, are in this sense part of a group of agents, who collectively produce what Mirco Göpfert describes as a "peer-reviewed aesthetic" (Göpfert 2013:328, drawing on Lipsky 1980:76) of identification:

Analysing bureaucratic writing practices enacted by the Nigerian gendarmerie, Göpfert shows how police officers' pronounced investment in the formal configuration of reports they produce extends beyond mere functionality, following certain aesthetic desires (Göpfert 2013:328). These desires, Göpfert finds, are driven by a jointly crafted aesthetic of bureaucratic prowess, where in the crafting of a report officers are concerned with how these documents might be perceived aesthetically by their colleagues and superiors, more so than with (or just as much as) the accuracy and effectiveness of their contents. Applying Göpfert's insights to the case of my collaborators is not to deny "the significance of the rational or the calculative; it is rather to insist", drawing on Asher Ghertner's framing of aesthetic conduct, "that [...] certain ostensibly calculative technologies [...] can have equally important aesthetic functions" (2015:6). In a similar sense Dr Müller's concern with the forgeability of "his" documents points to the fact that he is not content with producing a document that can be verified well (for the detectability of forgeries could be an alternative marker for success), though he does of course do so; rather Dr Müller wishes to create documents that forgers will not even touch. That appears to be the ambition of "the German way" as he conceives it. To achieve this, he needs to not only think about the verifiability of a document, but about its ability to deter, by means of the techno-material impression it makes, any efforts of replication or interference.

One of my collaborators will call this perspective the Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde syndrome: he feels that in his work of making documents secure, he has to constantly be both – think about the

matter of creating secure inscriptions from his position as an engineer of physical security features (the Dr Jekyll), as well as imagine the perspective of his counterparts, the forgers aka the Mr Hydes of identification. The two are connected in perpetuity: “unforgeable does not exist”, is a sentence frequently uttered in the interviews I conduct. “The forgers will always find a way”. In the endeavour of realising, through identification documents, certain techno-aesthetic desires – of being the most advanced, the most secure, the one with the most know-how – the goalpost is thus moved constantly, as the example of morphing cited above also indicates. “To make a really secure document is one thing”, says Dr Wagner, “but to ensure that a document stays secure – that is an entirely different story”. Though by and large, Dr Wagner and Dr Müller both feel that they are doing a good job.

Yet, my collaborators are not necessarily fully aligned in their understanding of what makes their work successful: Dr Berger, during a conversation about the legal difficulties of reconciling a professed need for a state-governed digital identity with German data-protection laws and a general culture of suspicion vis-à-vis the statist expansion of technological reach, laments: “Anything that has been in existence elsewhere for ages, will be fought against until the very end in Germany”. From his personal vantage point, Germany is lagging behind in a digital evolution that he feels is inevitable. Dr Müller, however, comes to a rather different conclusion; he sees Germany to be outperforming others: “We are of course not entirely un-proud (sic!) of the fact that we always rank very highly in passport rankings. I think recently we made it to first place again, and then Singapore wrestled its way to the top again. But that is also an important dimension when it comes to our passports: secure passports will give you more access to visa-free travel.” Of course such comparison is limited, as Dr Berger and Dr Müller compete in rather different disciplines – one in the law, the other in the world of secure documents. Yet their diverging viewpoints both cast German documents and their configuration as a measure through which they and the institutions that they represent control themselves and their self-image – as well as that of the German state more broadly.

When I ask Dr Berger whether in light of the many regulatory interventions into the

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configuration of passports, IDs, and residence titles on the EU level, a joint EU document, issued to all EU citizens is in sight, he waves off the suggestion quickly: "Not within the next 15 years. An EU ID card or passport would very much nib away at states' sovereignty. So that is more about the state's identity than that of its citizens. I don't think that member states would commit to this in the near future". In fifty years, he says, things might be different. The centrality of the documentary form to the type of statist self-reassurance that is sovereignty, indicates the self-generating power documents hold: they realise, not simply the statist desire of somatic separation and thus nationalised identifications, but the identit(ies) of the state as well as the various agents, individual and institutional, involved in their making.

Finally, however, there is one important absence from the set of identities injected into and realised in the making-of the documentary regime, as it is shown above: though my collaborators are concerned with artefacts that extend from their desks and laboratories into the pockets of each and every German citizen, they carry out their work in a manner that can appear somewhat detached from the average person who will later carry these documents around. The peer-reviewed character of their work is of course not completely shielded from public opinion and political intervention, yet it is my sense that the identified person is only spoken off on occasion. Indeed, even when I ask my collaborators to state, explicitly, the "users" that they have in mind when they carry out their work it will, with exceptions, mostly be intermediaries of the passport paradigm that they describe: street-level clerks at the passport office; police officers checking somebody's ID on the streets; a bank employee trying to verify the identity of a person opening an account; forgers who create false identification documents; photographers on the verge of losing half of their business. *It is those that do the identifying rather than those who experience it*, who seem to inform the work of the people who populate this chapter. It is here that the aesthetic project of identification takes on its distinctly political quality in the Rancièrian sense, i.e. as an aesthetic programmatic of what is (not) seen. This finally returns us to the *Heimat* artwork in the home office's visitor's lounge described in the introductory section of this chapter and the limitations its slogan places on belonging and participation: though the project of documentary identification is dedicated to the secure

documentary embodiment of the citizenry, the citizenry is not privy to its becoming. It is not perceived to *belong* in the process.

Conclusion

The above discussion has brought into view a vision of the project of documenting identity and making known that is marked by a multiplicity of identities – national, individual-professional, institutional – seeking their realisation in the material, documentary form. Thereby the desire for techno-aesthetic achievement and the mundanity of politico-bureaucracy embody key influences in the creative identificatory process, highlighting dimensions of bureaucratic becoming that, whilst prominent in the wider bureaucratic literature, have been insufficiently acknowledged in the existing scholarship on the passport paradigm. Within the larger project of this thesis, this chapter thus sheds light on the techno-political intentions vesting the documentary form, and the aesthetic impetus, which drive them, laying the groundwork for identification documents' consequential effects. Yet as Sara Ahmed reminds us in her work on the politics of documentation, "[r]ather than assuming [...] documents do what they say, [...] we need to follow such documents around, examining how they get taken up" (Ahmed 2007:590). Thus, as we move to the next chapter, we turn from the question of how documentary identifications take shape to the matter of how the identifications inscribed and mobilised in documents are turned into "categories of difference" at the border and thereby "are made relevant (or not)" (Netz et al. 2019:642).

Interfacing encounter – Identifying people and papers at the border

SUMMARY

In this chapter I ask how and to what effect identification and travel documents shape the border encounter at a large German commercial airport, to discern the concrete workings of documents' identificational potency. Drawing out ethnographically how documentary identities are approved and rejected by border officers, I trace the micro-dynamics of document-based identification through its three constituent stages – *bearer authentication*, *document verification*, *narrative synthesis* – to highlight the laborious, corporealised, and fundamentally ambiguous nature of conjuring identity at the border. I show that practices of verifying identity claims and the documents through which they are made work towards bridging the "space of indeterminacy" (Reeves 2013:520) inherent to the documentary regime and momentarily fix *identity* i.e. *the situational recognition of an embodied subject through their document*. These insights then inform a conceptual repositioning of the passport as a socio-material *interface*: it structures the conditions of engagement between officers and individuals and is generative of a performative aesthetic of coherence that works to veil the geo-political chaos marking the borderzone. The interface thereby mediates the conditions of not just identification and mobility at the border, but its very sociality, replacing mutual recognition with unilateral identification; only when the documentary interface is subverted, does the possibility for real encounter re-emerge.

Interception

"Sorry, I have to take this call!", Oliver announces, interrupting my questions regarding his job as a document expert with the German Federal Police at Munich airport in the south of Germany. "No problem", I reply, but he is already on the phone. For a few seconds he simply listens while the voice on the other end of the line talks, then goes: "Understood. I am on my way!" He hangs up the phone, turning towards me: "Okay, we need to be quick! Follow me!",

and off he runs, through the precinct's operation room in which we were talking, towards the exit, down two flights of stairs into the busy airport terminal. "Where are we going?", I ask breathlessly whilst attempting to keep up. "Gate 17. I'll explain when we're there".

When we arrive at the gate, a flight to Dublin is boarding, a dozen or so passengers still waiting in line. The airline staff working the gate spot Oliver as he hurries towards them and gesture for him to join them at the top of the line. When he gets there all pleasantries are skipped, for time is everything at the airport: "The young lady is waiting over there", the airline staffer explains, pointing towards a corner a couple of meters away. There waits a young woman in her mid to late twenties: she stands in silence, her legs crossed, hands folded into each other. When she realises we are looking at her, she smiles, just slightly, then straightens her shoulders, on which a heavy-looking backpack is resting. The airline liaison hands a foldable paper ID document, an old Italian *Carta d'Identità* over to Oliver. "She tried to board the flight with this. We think she's using somebody else's document, probably stolen or lost. And it looks like the picture was swapped", the airline staffer explains. Oliver tells me that Italian ID cards of this type – almost endearingly old fashioned with their papery feel and slightly pompous, burgundy red design – are notoriously popular among forgers, as their simple security features paired with the absence of an expiration date make them an attractive target for manipulation: they offer the same mobility potential in and beyond the Schengen¹³ area as do other EU ID cards, but are easier and cheaper to alter than the more sophisticated polycarbonate documents issued by other states; they can also be re-forged multiple times since they do not expire, making them a popular choice for smugglers and traffickers. For all the same reasons, however, the document is also a frequent target of border officers' scrutiny, with manipulations often being easy to detect.

¹³ "The Schengen Area is an area comprising 26 European countries that have officially abolished all passport and all other types of border control at their mutual borders. The area mostly functions as a single jurisdiction for international travel purposes, with a common visa policy." (Schengen Area entry on Wikipedia 2021)

“Okay, I’ll take it from here”, Oliver assures the airline liaison and walks over towards the woman. He introduces himself and asks her what her name is, where she is from, why she wants to travel to Dublin, and whether this is indeed her document. The woman smiles and nods, but remains silent. Gradually it becomes clear that she does not understand Oliver. She speaks neither German nor English and Oliver has no other languages to offer. He alternates between posing more questions to her and explaining his process to me. “You should always continue asking questions in English, because you might get a read or an indication that somebody actually does understand you. Some just pretend they can’t understand.” Then his attention moves from person to paper: first he compares the image contained in the document to the woman standing in front of him, his eyes wandering from the picture to the person and back again, finally concluding that they do congrue: “You can tell from the position of her ears, which are quite pronounced and the features and proportions also fit”. Then, pulling out a magnifying device designed for the inspection of documents, he begins to investigate the *Carta* itself to check on the suspicions the airline people offered: that this was in fact an authentic document, issued by the Italian state to a “real” citizen, but that the original photograph of said citizen had been removed and replaced by a picture of the woman standing in front of us, who was therefore now appropriating an identity that was not her’s.

Crouched over the document, the magnifier pressed firmly to his eye, Oliver carefully traces the background print on the last page of the paper booklet and the micro-script framing the page, to verify the veracity of the document base and ensure it is not an all-around counterfeit. He searches for inconsistencies in the intricate patterns that shape the design. Through experience Oliver knows how ink and paper are to behave against the different types of light (ultraviolet, infra-red, white) projected onto the document by the magnifier and he immediately recognises whether or not a pattern has been imprinted in the right manner and with the proper technology. The document at hand, Oliver concludes, is indeed authentic, so now he must find out whether it has been manipulated. His discerning focus, lead by the magnifier’s lens, moves to the image inserted in the *Carta d’Identità* parsing the edges between paper and picture for clues: are there traces of glue that look out of place? (Likely yes, though he is not a hundred per

cent sure.) Can he spot any material or graphic inconsistencies in the stamp, placed across the corner of image and page as an additional security feature? (Yes, two different types of inks appear to have been used) Does it seem like the document was somehow manipulated or information altered in other places? (Yes, the date of birth appears to have been chemically erased and overwritten, suggesting that the person to whom the document was initially issued may not have fitted the woman's age range). After spotting the chemical erasure, Oliver stops his visual investigation and gently strokes over the suspicious looking area where the paper is slightly rougher, then nods: "That erasure is a clear-cut thing, so at the very least we are looking at a case of document fraud. Identity fraud, if the picture has also been swapped, which I think it has but I cannot tell for sure," he declares.

At this point two of Oliver's colleagues, both younger, uniformed officers have joined us. The document circulates between them and they discuss their impressions. "She is clearly nervous – look at her hands, they're shaking like crazy," remarks one. "And the backpack looks really heavy for carry-on luggage, plus the airline people just said she did not check in any bags", adds the other. "These would be good indicators that she may be trying to travel to Ireland illegally," Oliver explains to me. "The fact that she did not check a bag: that is an indicator that she may have arrived here at the terminal on a flight a couple of hours ago from somewhere outside of Schengen, and then never entered Germany, just staying in the non-Schengen area of the terminal to get on the next flight to Dublin, using a different identity. That way she did not have to face any scrutiny with my colleagues at the border checks, but it also means she was not able to get outside the secure area and check in a bag." I am dizzied by the complexity of the patterns and suspicions he maps out. "And she is really nervous", he adds. "But wouldn't you also get quite nervous if you were surrounded by uniformed strangers, talking about you in a language that you did not understand?", I ask him. "Maybe, yes, but the document is very likely falsified. So that's a pretty reliable indicator that something is wrong. What we'll do now is we'll call a colleague who speaks Italian. If she really were Italian, she should be able to speak to him – at least statistically speaking the majority of people with Italian documents speak Italian, so it's a reasonable assumption to make, I would think. Though if she's Georgian or

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Albanian, which would be my guess based on her looks, she might also speak Italian. Many of them do. Let's see."

Throughout my exchanges with Oliver, the woman looks at me intently. I am the only other woman, the only other civilian in the group. Oliver now has his Italian-speaking colleague on the line and hands the phone over to the woman. The colleague asks her a number of questions in Italian, to which she cannot respond. It appears she does not speak the language. "From what it looks like so far we need to bring her in," concludes Oliver. "The inconsistencies in the document ... and it's a flight to Dublin. Classic pattern: we constantly see Georgians and Albanians, who cannot get a work visa, use Italian ID cards trying to make it onto flights to Dublin or London to find work there. They usually have networks over there, family, friends and so on. Many of them speak and look Italian, so they use Italian documents because it's easier to make the right impression and because they are cheaper to procure than other IDs." "But why would these people be your problem, so to speak? Why not let them get on their flights and leave it to the Irish?", I ask. Oliver just laughs at me, shaking his head: "That's not how it works. We have a responsibility. If they do make it on the flight, the Irish or Brits will send them right back again. Our colleagues there are really good at spotting forgeries and imposters, so it's important we do our best as well." Other than this brief hint at a sense of professional pride, his voice does not reveal any particular type of emotion. It seems he is taking stock of the scene at hand, comparing it to a mental list of indicators that he thinks can help him identify and approximate what is *really* happening: who this person is – not so much in terms of her true personal identity, but her motives and relationship vis-à-vis the document at hand – and what the appropriate protocol of response might be.

When he eventually reaches a verdict, Oliver tells the woman that she has to follow him to the station. "We need to sort this all out", he explains, gesturing back and forth between her and the document that he is still holding, his hand seemingly tracing the disconnect between her papers and her person. Of course she still does not understand, so he gently grabs her arm and points towards the door through which we entered the terminal. Tears appear in the woman's

eyes. She still has not said a single word. I turn to Oliver: "Wouldn't you need to find an interpreter to explain to her what is going on? She clearly does not understand what's happening!". "Yes, we'll find an interpreter. But we'll have to bring her in first and search her things. Perhaps we can find some other identification documents among her belongings so we can learn where she is from and what language she speaks. Then we can find someone to translate and maybe she'll tell us her story." Oliver instructs one of the younger uniformed officers to tell the airline staff that they should go ahead with departure as planned. The woman looks at me, defeated. As we walk away we hear the announcement through the intercom: boarding to Dublin is now closed.

Checkpoint: understanding the documentary dimension of borders

In the previous chapter I considered how documentary identifications are materialised as well as markers of identity inscribed and selected to enable the demarcation of the nationalised, individuated body. Yet how are the identifications fixed and inscribed in documents activated in practice to carry out identity checks? The airport is one key arena in which passports and other identification documents unfold their identificatory potential: looking at the above scene, we can see how documentary readings, "produce legitimacy [or illegitimacy] and establish "truths" upon which [street-level] bureaucrats" (Borrelli and Andreetta 2019:3), such as Oliver "act", i.e. mount their verdict of (im-)mobilisation. The border here manifests in the very moment of documentary identification, during which the dialectics of identity and intent as well as fake and authentic transpire and the right to access (to an aeroplane, to self-determination, to life chances) is determined. Identification documents thereby "shape political and economic options, and in doing so create particular forms of agency, order, and knowledge" (Kelly 2006:91). This is however not a straight-forward process: the reading of a person and her documents evolves as a complex iterative process, wherein expert knowledges and techniques of verification intermingle with situational and experiential indicators as well as sociocultural, nationalised, and racialised stereotypes in the assessment of the veracity of an individual's claim

to a specific identity and the document presented in support thereof. How must we understand this dynamic of identification and make sense of the role documents play at the border? And what can the link officers make between “legibility and eligibility” (Farinha 2022:59) tell us about the passport paradigm’s consequentiality? It is with these questions in mind that this chapter works through the realm of border control.

In this pursuit I build on a plethora of accomplished scholarship on borders, their logics, crossing, and governance. These accounts, too numerous to be represented here in full, are highly successful in illuminating myriad dimensions of bordering, covering aspects such as the political, economic, and moral logics of the border (e.g. Andersson 2014, Bigo and Guild 2005, Pratt 2010, Weber and Bowling 2004) the effect of changing geo-political and migratory regimes (e.g. Bosworth 2008, Colombeau 2017, Fassin 2011), as well as new technologies of bordering (e.g. Andersson 2016, Broeders and Dijestbloem 2016, van der Ploeg 2011) and the resulting deterritorialisation (e.g. Bigo 2002, Sassen 2007, Walters 2006) and virtualisation of the border (e.g. Amoore 2008, Ericson and Haggerty 2000, Lyon 2001, Salter 2006). Among these studies a growing literature – especially in the field of criminology and anthropology – scrutinises the role and work of border officers, in the context of various border types and locales, shedding light on such domains as the configuration of discretion (e.g. Brouwer et al. 2018, Côté-Boucher 2016, Gilboy 1991, Pratt 2010), decision-making and classifications (Heyman 2001, Pickering and Ham 2014, Pratt and Thompson 2008), as well as the role of occupational culture (e.g. Weber and Bowling 2004). Many of these writings acknowledge the bureaucratic dimension of borders as a phenomenon emerging at the intersection of administration and policing as well as the role that documents play in such a setting. Yet only few works (e.g. O’Byrne 2001, Jeganathan 2004, Kelly 2006, Salter 2004, 2006) – most of them theoretical in nature – pay sustained attention to document-based decision-making, despite identification documents, especially passports, being an omnipresent and highly palpable element of the practical border terrain. Conversely, a significant body of work surrounding the theme of “documented lives” (Navaro-Yashin 2003:89, see also Kelly 2006) indicates the potential promise of foregrounding the documentary dimension of border-crossing, migration

regimes, and the general realm of policing (see e.g. Jansen 2009, Kelly 2006, Koshravi 2010, Navaro-Yashin 2007, Reeves 2013). While this theoretical and empirical body of work scrutinises identification documents and sensitively engages their effects on peoples' lives, it does so with a firm and important focus on the perspective of those who use and are being read through papers: travellers, migrants, refugees, citizens. Yet if we wish to understand the process of documentary identification and thus the potency and consequentiality of documents more fully, we must also look closely at those who are doing the reading (see Loftus 2015:116 for a similar call). For the border at issue in this chapter "is not an impersonal machine mechanically rejecting immigrants" but "composed of men and women [like Oliver] who routinely generate decisions affecting the lives of others" (Fassin 2011:218, see also Gilboy 1991) and so become a crucial element of the very configuration of documented life.

Brought into dialogue and in the various overlaps that they share, both strands of literature – that of border policing as well as that of "documented lives" – point to a significant opportunity for ethnographic exploration: if we seek to understand how borders manifest as a key locus of friction in a globalising world, as an experience of access and alienation, and as realms in which issues of broad anthropological interest, such as identity, belonging, and statist sovereignty are negotiated, approved, and subverted, it is imperative that we understand how identification documents are operationalised in and condition themselves border practice. In this chapter, I thus intent to delineate how and to what effect passports and other identification documents shape the border encounter from the vantage point of border officers, such as Oliver, in order to discern the concrete workings of identification documents' ability to identify as well as to enable and disable mobilities. I do so by analytically privileging the element of identification, i.e. the process of assessing a travellers' document-derived identity. At issue in this chapter is then not the project of a theory of the border as a statist symbol and institution, nor an authoritative account of the profession of policing, but a grounded analysis of the border's document-driven mechanics and their socio-material effects.

I begin this work by mapping out the borderzone at Munich airport, the ethnographic site on which this chapter is based, to indicate the decision field in which officers conduct their identificational duties. Based on the resulting parameters, I look at border officers' day-to-day practice, paying close attention to the micro-processes and material techniques governing the reading of papers and persons during the three constituent stages of identification: bearer authentication, document verification, and synthesis. Verifying identity claims and the documents through which they are made, I shall show, is a matter of accruing identificational evidence summoned to bridge the "space of indeterminacy" (Reeves 2013:520) between document and person and differentiate between "true" and "fake". This renders border identities a derived, situational, and corporealised status that exists only in the momentary perceptual convergence of document and bearer during identification. To interpret this dynamic I move beyond classic interpretative tropes of social sorting and surveillance and reconceptualise identification documents as a powerful socio-material interface that structures the conditions of engagement between officers and individuals, thereby standardising and delimiting the conditions of not just identity and its corporealisation, but the very sociality of the border: the passport and its documentary siblings, I will conclude, feature equally as mediators of identification and inhibitors of encounter, replacing mutual recognition with unilateral identification in a socio-technical regime that works to suppress the potentiality of sociality emerging between agents of the state and individuals. Only when the passport interface is suspended or subverted, does the border become a place of real encounter.

My discussion develops based on findings generated through a three months ethnographic study of border policing at Franz-Josef-Strauss airport (MUC) in Munich, Germany, conducted during the early months of 2019. Working with the *Bundespolizei* (BPol), i.e. the German Federal Police, tasked with controlling all German borders, I accompanied officers during a wide variety of activities, employing a portfolio of traditional methods including process- and participant observation as well as dedicated semi-structured interviews: I spent many hours sitting in at the control box, observing officers conducting identity and document checks for passengers entering or exiting the Schengen zone; I joint young officers as a participant during

a number of trainings, among them a one week document inspection class, allowing me to study how identification and document verification were taught and learned; I shadowed and interviewed members of a number of specialised units, such as forensic document experts, data analysts, and information systems managers working with and around travel documents; on occasion, I would accompany officers on control activities or ad-hoc calls, such as documentary checks conducted at aircrafts, during boarding or exit; finally I spent time roaming the precinct, either observing organisational and bureaucratic processes or simply socialising with officers in the break room and during lunch. All along I worked with a total of approximately 50 officers across ranks and with various areas of expertise.

While the access I received was thus comprehensive, my presence within precincts and the secure border area was itself in some regards policed: before beginning my work at the airport, I had to sign a non-disclosure agreement prohibiting me from sharing information entailed in classified documents I was to encounter. Furthermore, my weekly schedule was organised in close collaboration with my liaison at the office of the head of the border force. This liaison always informed a precincts' leadership and other specialised units about my presence and interest ahead of my arrival and set a schedule with them. While my requests for access were never denied, the amount of time I spent doing certain activities was thus nonetheless predetermined. This was partially necessitated by the fact that I was not able to enter the secure airport area – in which precincts were located – by myself, as the required security clearance would have been difficult to acquire. It therefore became my daily routine to arrive at the police info-point in the public area of the main terminal, deposit my ID card for a visitor pass, then wait for an officer to collect and escort me through security checks. Once we arrived at the terminal precinct, I was then either left to myself or handed over to an officer assigned to me for the day. As time went on my presence in precincts became less formalised and I developed relationships with officers who would take me under their wing or approach me with topics, documents, and questions that they thought might be of interest to me.

Yet officers remained acutely aware of the fact that my research into their work was somehow sanctioned and indeed encouraged by the central leadership; a tremendously lucky condition, caused by the fact that the head of the border force at MUC – with whom I was put in touch by a local officer to whom I was introduced by my father – had previously collaborated with a PhD researcher (albeit in an unrelated subject area) and found it to be a worthwhile experience. However, due to the hierarchical nature of the organisation, my presence – announced and supported by superior officers – was at times almost too readily accepted, causing me to be especially careful in assuring officers that they could refuse to work with me and marking out that I was not myself a BPol employee. Only on two occasions did officers openly voice their scepticism towards my presence, based on the same peculiar suspicion: they suspected that I had been inserted covertly by the leadership to report on their performance, the PhD being a mere cover story. This, it was explained, became a concern, as my being on friendly terms with officers across the hierarchical spectrum was considered highly unusual. While tensions were easily defused, many officers remained puzzled by my work and interests, their collaboration with me becoming itself an exercise in identification: my narrative was subjected to scrutiny in the quest to discern who I was and why I was studying their work. Identification, then, was not just the subject of my research but also an ethnographic mode of mutual encounter.

Mapping the field: the airport, the border, and the border force

Before zooming in on the concrete dynamics of document-based decision making at Munich airport, I shall first draw out the “decision field” (Brouwer et al. 2018:450) in which officers carry out identification checks; for as Kelly (2006:92) drawing on Messick highlights, practices of documentary identification are highly situated, necessitating a perspective that “stresses [their] cultural and historical variability rather than [their] universal characteristics [...]” (Messick 1993:2 in Kelly 2006:92). I shall thus briefly map out the formative parameters of this situatedness: Franz-Josef-Strauss is Germany’s second largest airport, processing just short of 50 million passengers annually, prior to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The airport is organised

into three terminals, all of which service national and international flights, broadly divided into Schengen and non-Schengen arrivals and departures. Two terminals exclusively cater to Star Alliance airlines (e.g. Lufthansa, Swiss, Air Canada, Singapore Airlines), marked by higher carrier rates and flight routes tailored to touristic and business travel. The other terminal serves a broader mix of airlines, many of them low-cost carriers operating a more diverse set of destinations and routes.

Amidst the hustle and bustle of the international airport operates the Bundespolizei (BPol), as a specialised federal police force tasked with enforcing the German *Aufenthaltsgesetz* (i.e. the law dealing with the rights and responsibilities of non-German nationals wishing to enter, exit, or stay in Germany) as well as corresponding EU legislation, first and foremost the Schengen Borders Code. BPol border guards are thus police officers¹⁴ who conduct their duties separately from other agents involved in the airport security complex, such as the Federal Customs Agency, tasked with the policing of goods, or the Airport Security personnel, a fleet of civilian workers that conducts security checks (screening of travellers and their carry-on luggage) before travellers can enter the secure terminal area. The scope of responsibility of German border officers is thus limited to primarily two dimensions: (1) policing border entries and exits, which takes up the bulk of personnel and also implies the processing of clandestine entrants or suspects of all kinds when they are prohibited from crossing the border; as well as (2) providing aviation and terminal security, which is primarily done through patrolling terminals and responding to incidences.¹⁵ There are a total of four precincts at the airport to fulfil this dual

¹⁴ To join the BPol officers have to pass an entrance test (physical as well as written) and undergo three years of training. Freshly graduated officers are frequently as young as eighteen when they take up work at the airport. While not necessarily the most popular of posts among younger officers, many of whom consider work at the border control stations a mere “bureaucratic service” marked by paperwork rather than “proper policing”, the majority of young guards will start their career there rather than as part of a mobile-/special unit or as a member of a precinct policing the terrestrial German borders. This is due to the fact that under the Schengen paradigm the sheer volume of border crossings to be policed is highest at Germany’s airports.

¹⁵ While the policing of all German ports of entry embodies the largest area of BPol’s activity, the organisation is furthermore responsible for railway security, as well as the protection of German embassies and consulates around the globe. The BPol also runs special forces and mobile units deployed in various policing contexts.

purpose, three of which are located in the three respective terminals and carry out routine duties, whilst a fourth consists of specialised units active across terminals (e.g. investigation services, data analysis, information systems, the deportations unit) but away from the actual border. Yet what is the border at issue in this chapter? What are its characteristics?

As a so-called port of entry the border-zones at MUC reproduce the “margins of the state” (Das and Poole 2004) at the heart of German sovereign territory. This is achieved through the juridico-architectural modulation of the airport’s operational terrain: the border as a physical gateway on the path into sovereign German territory is – as is common at airports – marked by a string of control stations referred to as *Passkontrolle* (passport control). The *Passkontrolle* is inserted into the airport complex to separate the flows of travellers and demarcate “Schengen” and “non-Schengen” zones: it is when passing between Schengen, i.e. the territorial amalgam of Germany and its 26 partner states, and non-Schengen, i.e. the “non-space” (Augé 1995) limbo of arrivals and departures from outside Schengen legally marked as “not Germany”, that all travellers must undergo document and identification checks. Policing entry to and exit from Germany therefore always also implies gate-keeping access to the larger Schengen territory. Officers are highly aware of the concomitant complications: “You try to think European, but essentially it is a layered thing: first you probably think of Germany and then of course, you need to consider all of our partners as well. So in some situations I do think to myself: what would my colleagues in another Schengen country do with this? The problem is, there is no real comparability, neither of political interests nor of methods”, one officer sums up the situation.

The policing of the intra-Schengen zone, he explains, is a case in point: even though under the maxim of freedom of movement travellers departing to or arriving from intra-Schengen destinations are theoretically and legally exempt from mandatory border controls, document checks still occur- So-called *Lageabhängige Befragungen* (LABs), i.e. the situational and intelligence-based questioning of travellers arriving on targeted flights from specific destinations, have proliferated in the aftermath of the 2015 refugee crisis, driven by the Syrian civil war and the societal response following the arrival of just below a million refugees seeking

protection in Germany that year. With German authorities intent on enforcing the Dublin agreement¹⁶, the questionings, which frequently include document checks, were introduced to detect and prevent refugees and migrants irregularly arriving via Greece or Italy from entering Germany. Unsurprisingly “internal borders are [thus] still a site in which the state manages individuals’ mobility” (Colombeau 2017:480, see also Brouwer et al. 2018, Colombeau 2020) in a way that seems conceptually at odds with a border-free Schengen Europe. Thus, as Andreas reminds us “rather than simply eroding, as is often assumed, the importance of territoriality is persisting” (Andreas 2003:78) in today’s mobility regime. The phenomenon of LABs so echoes a dimension of bordering at MUC foreshadowed in the opening vignette: document-based identification checks allow for the border to essentially manifest anywhere in the airport space, conjured by an officer asking a traveller for identification, thus momentarily suspending their identity and right to enter or exit a certain space.

Enacting documentary identification: reading people through papers, and papers through people

Asked what they consider to be the purpose of *Passkontrolle*, i.e. document-based identity-checks, many officers raise the notion of *Filterfunktion Grenze* (the border as filter). The trope highlights the commonly invoked idea of the border as a site where “bona fide global citizens” must be differentiated from “crimmigrant others” (Aas 2011), to balance out the “two powerful governmental desires: [of] security and mobility” (Salter 2004:72)¹⁷. Document-based

¹⁶ The Dublin agreements (2003, 2013) signed by the members of the EU as well as Norway, Liechtenstein, Iceland, and Switzerland, set out the rules and responsibilities for its signees regarding the processing of asylum claims made by stateless individuals or individuals from outside the EU. The agreements identify when a state is responsible for handling an asylum claim.

¹⁷ The notion hints at the fact that territorial edges are imagined to be potent spaces to intercept dangerous individuals and criminals, with many young officers dreaming about catching a high-profile organised crime member, or a violent offender with a warrant out for them, who has been escaping the law. The border, in the minds of officers, is thus a space for the regulation of entrance and exit to sovereign grounds as well as the deterrence of criminal activity. In practice, however, this vision swiftly crumbles, for it is the intercepting of attempts of irregular migration that embodies the single largest area of activity for BPol officers.

identification assumes a key role in this process of filtering travellers: at the border the passport ascribes official belonging and certifies (in conjunction with supplementary documents such as the visa) a particular national and juridical status based on which entrance is granted or rejected. However, the realisation of this designating function is not at all trivial: as it is the passport, not the embodied subject, within which the entitlement to enter or exclude from foreign grounds lies, access or rejection are contingent upon the moment of perceptual convergence of document and bearer in the officer's eyes and mind. For eligibility to be derived at the border, the border officer must thus read the individual against the according to the bureaucratic logic more trustworthy, officialised identity contained in and produced by the passport, which itself needs to be verified. Only then can the complex congruence of person and paper, their respective authenticity, and the concomitant passage rights (or the lack thereof) be confirmed. Documentary identification therefore verifies national identity as a "precursor of differential treatment" (Broeders and Dijstelbloem 2016:245).

If we look back at the scene described at the beginning of this chapter we can see the process of documentary identification unfold across the following three steps: (1) *Polizeiliche Identitätsprüfung*, i.e. the authentication of the relationship between bearer and document, conducted by Oliver through comparing the photograph contained in the ID card with the woman using it; (2) *Urkundenprüfung*, i.e. the verification of eligibility through the reading, authentication, and classification of the identification document, done by a strategic inspection of certain document elements; as well as (3) *synthesis*, i.e. the attempt to derive travellers' intentions as well as a policing verdict by synthesising the identificational information available to and acquired by officers through the previous steps, which Oliver enacts by comparing the situational amalgam of the paper at hand, the woman encountered, as well as the travel route she takes with his knowledge of certain categories of clandestine entrants. To understand the process of document-based identification more fully, we must zoom in on each of these three steps.

Polizeiliche Identitätsprüfung: authenticating bearers / reading people

Officers refer to the careful matching of papers and their bearers as *Polizeiliche Identitätsprüfung* (PIP, i.e. *police identity examination*). In-person checks are thereby still the norm, as the encoding of biometric markers in documents is not a mandatory global standard and so only a subset of documents and travellers are processed biometrically in dedicated, semi-automated gates. During the hundreds of *Passkontrollen* I observed, PIP always embodied the first step undertaken by officers: whenever a traveller walks up to the control box they hand over their document through the narrow pass-through in the glass wall separating officer and public. The officer then picks up the document and opens it up at the biographic data page where all personal data and the passport photograph are contained. They hold up the passport and look onto the photograph, then across the edge of the page towards the traveller and back again for as many times as required. If a traveller is moving or looking away officers may ask them to look straight at them. They will also take into account the identificational information available to them via the document, such as the age, nationality, height, and gender of a traveller. Through the PIP process a verdict is usually reached within seconds, unless a potential discrepancy catches an officer's eye. In the latter case the process may take longer and be moved from the first line of control (the checkpoint) to the second line of control (the precinct), where an expert specialised in PIP will be consulted and an official, recorded analysis is conducted.

There are three potential outcomes to the PIP process: "identical", i.e. person and paper congrue, "non-identical", i.e. the person presenting a document is not the person identified in the document, or "unclear/doubts", i. e. further investigation of the document-bearer relationship is required. When I ask officers how a PIP verdict is reached, they usually describe a dual process consisting of: (1) the *Lichtbildabgleich*, wherein the relationship of document and bearer is probed by scrutinising their physical equivalence, and (2) the *Profiling*, during which the bearer's overall appearance and demeanour (physical, sartorial, linguistic, cultural) is assessed to see whether they "match" the document. Let's unpack these sub-elements:

Through the *Lichtbildabgleich*, literally “matching the photograph”, the link between paper and person is supposed to be verified. Yet how does one recognise somebody as themselves? Whilst in most cases the process is done in a few seconds, the PIP protocol of *viewing to match* is theoretically informed by a systematic method of reading the face – and body –, taught to officers in dedicated training courses: in these courses officers are instructed to divide faces into four segments – forehead, eyes and nose, mouth, ears. For each of these segments officers are advised to select “relatively unalterable features”, e.g. bone structure or cartilage, to enact their comparison and not be swayed by “easily modifiable features” such as facial hair, eye colour, make-up, or clothing. To enable a more technical view of the face as well as allow officers to communicate their readings to their colleagues in cases where a verdict is difficult to achieve, contested, or must be recorded in writing, the PIP *Lichtbildabgleich* operationalises a harmonised catalogue of bodily features described and presented in guidebooks and training materials. The more markers from this shared catalogue are selected and correctly described, the higher the supposed “evidential value” of an analysis and thus the firmer the verdict of sameness or distinctness of document and bearer.

There are of course fundamental limitations to the PIP method: if there is doubt about the similarity of photograph and person officers must always consider benign causes of physical change such as aging, weight loss or -gain, or plastic surgery. Furthermore technical factors, such as low-quality photographs or differences in lighting and posture can make the process difficult. To train their abilities in enacting the *Lichtbildabgleich* young officers therefore work through expansive sets of real-life cases during trainings, each case reduced to two photographs: a picture of the portrait contained in the document used by the traveller, as well as a portrait taken of said traveller by an officer. For each pair officers must decide whether they are “identical”, i.e. bearer and document belong together, or “non-identical”, i.e. the bearer is an imposter. Observing a cohort of officers work through the picture pairs, I noticed that while for most pairs there was a consensus decision among officers, they rarely based it on the same indicators; whilst some emphasised the nose as the give-away feature others felt it was all in the ears. This may be considered a mere issue of preference: “We all have our favourite, go-to

facial markers”, I heard officers say many times throughout my fieldwork. Yet the lack of agreement regarding how a shared position was derived also points to the fundamental elusiveness and fragmentary nature¹⁸ of the *sameness* of document and bearer produced in the border zone: the relevant control outcome of “*She, the embodied subject, is her, the woman in the picture*”, is rendered a matter of “*this woman has the same ears as the woman in this picture, her philtrum is similarly curved, and the proportion of the three different facial segments is equal in both. The woman and the document are thus, in fact, identical*” and each officer for each individual border crossing, must evaluate and physiognomically re-construct this sameness anew.

There is thus a significant degree of contingency to the PIP process, which is intensified by its second component, the profiling of document bearers: “You must ask yourself, does this document fit with this person? If something looks off, you have to find out more”, explains a young officer. Profiling here is a reading practice that goes beyond the question of the sameness of bearer and photograph. The officer’s statement is suggestive of a reciprocal relationship of paper and person during the control process: both simultaneously set standards for the other, and modulate officers’ expectations with regards to how a “fit” may look. I learn this as I sit in the control box with Frederick during peak time, where travellers from multiple flights are simultaneously arriving at the border. Frederick scans the people waiting in line, then nods, turning to me to say: “Ah, I can already spot all the Albanians. Albanians look like Italians, just with larger ears. So for example, if one of these guys presents an Italian passport, and they look Italian but their ears are quite large and pronounced – it’s likely that that guy is probably an Albanian misappropriating an Italian identity.” Whilst over the thirty minutes that I spend with Frederick many Albanian travellers do indeed pass through the control point, none of them present Italian documents, and so Frederick does not get the chance to prove his point. Yet his reasoning exposes a complex and problematic if not unsurprising configuration of

¹⁸ Talking about biometric technologies Adey observes that “the unity of the body is undone by focusing in on pieces of it. These pieces stand for the whole, for the whole of an identity”(Adey 2009:27). Yet what the above shows, is that this particular logic of identification predates the arrival of the biometric border – a fact overlooked by many commentators.

identificational steps: physicality is gauged as an indicator for nationality, which is then translated into a prediction of (criminal) intent based on the officer's experiences, and finally linked to a specific paper-person configuration, a profile, that must be scrutinised: the Albanian-looking traveller with the Italian document.

Frederick draws on physiognomy to gauge, which document a traveller will be using rightfully or with the intent to deceive. However, it is equally common for officers to take the opposite route, wherein certain documents elicit certain expectations vis-à-vis the physical appearance of their bearers, as in the case of a Black teenage boy traveling on a Swedish passport and arriving on a flight from Cairo. While roughly half of the travellers on the flight were BIPOC, many of them travelling on Egyptian and other non-EU passports, making it through checks relatively smoothly, the officer processing the boy was taking his time: he questioned the boy about his trip, his destination, and where he lived, while also scrutinising the document the boy presented. Eventually he let the boy through. "Why did you focus on that Swedish boy?" I asked the officer later as we walked back to the precinct: "Well, he did not look Swedish. I mean, you know what I mean – obviously he can be Swedish, but statistically speaking there are fewer black Swedes than there are Caucasians. Had he presented a US passport, for example, that would have been different. And he was a young man, travelling by himself. The Swedish passport is an attractive document – many refugees want to go to Sweden. So you have to verify that all is in order. But everything seemed all right with this one. The document looked good."

As the above indicates, PIP relies strongly on physiognomic readings, which are integrated with wider and often highly typified understandings of the document-bearer interrelation. PIP does usually go beyond just the ethnicity of a person, attending to clothing (a nice suit combined with worn-down shoes is a red flag), language (not speaking the language of the country by which one's documents have been issued is a red flag), or obscurely specific understandings of national traits (e.g. asking a person claiming to be from Paris which *département* of the city they live in and if they did not correct you to say that it was actually *arrondissement* they were likely

not Parisian). Yet officers do still rely heavily on ethnicity to infer certain judgements: in the case of the black Swedish boy the officer drew from the boy's race the impression of a lesser likelihood of the compatibility of his person with the document he presented and the national status he thereby claimed. Though the control process lead the officer to drop his suspicions, the example testifies to the fact that who can and cannot easily perform a certain document and therethrough nationality and legality at the border is very much a matter of race and ethnicity (see also e.g. Reeves 2013, Kamaloni 2019, Kapoor and Narkowicz 2016).

The large majority of officers (about 99.9% of those that I encountered) are white and though all are aware that they must not racially profile, what it means to do (and not do) just that is not clearly defined by the BPol as an institution. Whilst some officers are highly critical of their peers' racialising control practices, there persists a deeply-held belief that tailoring controls based on the "physiognomic profiling", as officers will call it, of travellers will yield better results, i.e. more cases of fraud uncovered than e.g. through randomised control – a belief that relies on a perceived collective and experiential understanding of the effectiveness of physiognomic profiling strategies (no randomised studies to derive the counterfactual have ever been conducted, my collaborators will tell me). Conjointly, these attitudes cause border controls to be, unsurprisingly, more extensive, strenuous, and intrusive for BIPOC travellers than they are for white people.

As officers are acutely aware of the legal, social, and moral unacceptability of racial profiling, PIP takes on a central legitimising function as a "quasi-scientific framework" (Pratt 2010:462) for visual identification that is supposed to ensure that judgements are rationally-derived: as a form of professional vision, i.e. "a socially situated, historically constituted body of practices through which the objects of knowledge which animate the discourse of a profession are constructed and shaped" (Goodwin 1994:606) PIP's methodological value lies in aiding officers in explicating the notoriously tacit dimension of corporeal recognition (Polanyi 1966, 2009) in a manner that re-constructs the *polizeiliche Bauchgefühl* (a police officer's gut instinct/intuition) which officers often name as a main driver in their decision-making as a "collective,

collaborative, and discursive" (Wilke 2017:1041) visual practice. Through its organisation and institutional positioning of "professional norms about focusing attention, reading visual data, and using the lenses and filters that yield professionally appropriate results" (Wilke 2017:1041; see also Goodwin 1994) the reconfiguration of a judgement in PIP terms can thus be used to rationalise perceptive intuitions that do not necessarily stem from a systematic and politically careful assessment. It is therefore often unclear in which direction the evidential current of PIP flows: does it prop-up and place into commensurable terms a pre-conceived verdict, or is it used to derive an impression? Throughout my time at the border, I developed the sense that it does both.

Knowing this it became difficult to judge situations such as the one evolving around Oliver and the young woman at the gate described in the introduction to this chapter: had the woman's nervousness and heavy back-pack really served as clues, or did he draw on them as rationalisations after the fact? This inherent ambiguity of PIP becomes most clear to me when I sit with Anton, an officer in his mid-twenties, who is working on a written PIP analysis for a suspected case of document abuse committed by a young woman arriving from Barcelona on a Belgium ID card, but thought to be Iraqi due to an Iraqi passport found in her bag. He has in front of him three pictures: an enlarged scan of, both, the portrait contained in the Belgium ID as well as the Iraqi passport, and a picture taken by a fellow officer moments ago of the woman herself. It is Anton's job to verify the suspicion of his colleagues that this indeed is a case of look-alike fraud. He begins: "So, what do we know? That's her, we know that", Anton nods, pointing to the picture of the woman taken moments ago, and begins his process by drawing three lines across the woman's face, emulating the PIP-recommended facial segmentation. He then focuses on the in-changeable features in each segment: eyes – he draws a line between the inner corner of both eyes to visualise the angle at which they are positioned vis-à-vis her nose and ears; mouth – he draws another line between the outer corners of the mouth extending the line across the entire page, once again to visualise certain proportions. He works his way through the woman's face with ruler and pen, then takes a step back and thinks about which features of the woman are most decisive, most suitable to his analysis of the two

documents. He then does the same with the other two pictures, carefully segmenting them, and then going back and forth between pictures to derive a decision and select a final set of three markers based on which he can present his analysis. He finally lands on eyes, nasio-labial folds, and lips and decides that they confirm his colleagues' suspicion: the woman present at the precinct was, in Anton's analysis, congruent to the woman in the Iraqi passport but not identical with the woman depicted in the Belgium ID. When Anton finishes his report I ask him how he has finally come to this conclusion. He talks me through his observations regarding the woman's facial physiognomy, which seem convincing to me, yet finally he offers: "I could probably also produce a PIP analysis that could support the opposite claim". Here it is the "persuasiveness of form" (Strathern 2000:2) not just the particular form of the PIP analysis chart but also the modal form of dissecting the facial features in a way commensurable to a shared vocabulary that eventually enshrines a verdict, yet simultaneously renders opaque, even to the officers themselves at times, how this verdict was really derived.

Urkundenprüfung: verifying documents / reading papers

Whilst the relevance of PIP in border identifications at MUC is indicative of the 'extent to which the body has become a site of observation, calculation, prediction and action in moving across borders' (Loftus 2015:117; see also Adey 2009, Lyon 2006, Maguire et al. 2018, Salter, 2004), the corporeal engagement and evaluation of identification is not effective in singularly achieving eligibility: the key operational category of the border, nationality, can only become actionable if the document on the basis of which a national status is claimed can be authenticated.

At the control box, the process of document verification begins manually and in concert with the PIP process: when officers take over a document with which they are already familiar, they usually glance at a go-to security feature on the biographic data page which gives them a first idea of the veracity of the document. Unless officers perceive the document to be obviously counterfeit or falsified or have already derived a negative PIP result, all machine-readable

documents (the majority of passports and Schengen identification documents in circulation at MUC) will be placed in the document-reader fitted to each control station. The reader verifies the document by parsing the machine-readable zone of documents as well as scans for security features, comparing these to reference documents stored in a data-base. The findings are then projected onto the officer's screen and a colour-coded scheme allows for a quick evaluation of any inconsistencies: green, everything clear; orange, a particular feature requires further scrutinisation; red, something is amiss. For electronic passports fitted with a chip onto which the passport data, including the portrait as well as biometric fingerprints are encoded, the integrity of the chip is verified and the electronic image is also projected next to a scan of the portrait area of the physical document. This can allow officers to detect a picture swap quickly and thus confirm or reverse their initial PIP decision. Finally, the document number and the traveller's name and date of birth are automatically cross-referenced with a set of national and EU databases, producing an alert if there is a match for the document or the bearer it represents. These matches could e.g. be caused by a document being listed in INTERPOL's stolen and lost travel documents database (SLTD), or by the name on the document matching an entry in the EU's Schengen Information System e.g. because a fellow Schengen state has banned a person of that name from entering or because there is a warrant out for them. The entire process will then be repeated for any additional documents an individual may require crossing into or out of the Schengen zone, such as their permanent resident card or a Schengen visa.

If the system detects any documentary inconsistencies, the officer will usually confirm this by manually scrutinising the security feature in question, utilising a dedicated magnifier, carried by every officer. To verify documents effectively officers must memorise security elements and standardised technologies of inscription used across different documents as well as know how to assess those features using simple analytical means: officers will optically scan for the clarity and demarcation of a printed line, the shape of perforations, and the precision of micro-scripts; they will watch out for a particular ink or paper to light up under a specific type of light or see whether the contours of a stamp run smoothly across the edges of a picture. Officers will also stroke and rub for inconsistencies, such as a rupture of the paper, a chemical erasure, or a fold

in a foil placed on top of an image; they may sniff the pages for the smell of fresh glue or ink, and at times even hear for the correct sound of a polycarbonate card falling onto a desk. The complex sensory nature of verification is openly embraced when experienced officers tell their novices “to feel [their] way through the document’. ‘[F]ar from a narrowly scopic sense of perception, seeing on this account [thus] comprises embodied competencies enacted within particular, socially and materially configured, sites of action and interaction’ (Suchman 2012:201).

A verdict of falseness or authenticity is thus mounted on a matrix of multi-sensory impressions. If a suspicion firms up, an expert officer, specialised in the inspection of documents, will be called to the control station and conduct another manual check. Only then is a decision made as to whether or not a traveller is brought into the precinct, where another officer will check the documents again and the traveller will be questioned. If the document is deemed to have been falsified or forged, it is eventually transferred to the airport’s *Kriminaltechnischer Dienst – Urkunden* (forensic services specialised in document analysis) to verify the initial verdict and determine whether the document at hand embodies a *Totalfälschung* (counterfeit, i.e. the document is forged from scratch), *Verfälschung* (falsified, i.e. an authentic document was altered/manipulated), or whether it is a matter of *Dokumentmissbrauch* (i.e. an authentic document was misappropriated by an imposter).

Throughout the investigation, be it algorithmic or manual, officers try to find definitive markers, rather than produce an exhaustive assessment: document authentication is thus equally fragmentary as is PIP. It is not enacted to check and approve the entirety of features that secure a document, but employed to find definitive proof of manipulation, mirroring the modularity of securitisation during documentary design discussed in chapter 1. Yet not every deviation is a clear marker of foul-play, for even in the standardised universe of documents legitimate exceptions to the rule do exist, as in the case of an old man, travelling on an Afghan passport and a German permanent residence card, presenting at the *Passkontrolle* while I was observing: when the officer inserted the passport into the document reader it generated an alert. The date

of birth appeared to have been manipulated. The officer checked the area in question again manually and came to the same conclusion: the date had been altered, though she did not understand why, for when she checked the document against the *Ausländer Zentralregister* (a centralised registry of all non-Schengen nationals living in Germany) everything seemed to be in order. Not knowing how to make sense of the results of her inspection, the officer called for a document expert to join her at the border. Upon careful inspection the expert officer moved away from the biographic data page that is often at the heart of officers' and algorithm's attention, to the second page of the document, on which the issuing authority was recorded: the Afghan consulate in Bonn. "Bonn! I knew it – they often make mistakes when issuing documents, but rather than printing a whole new document they erase and overwrite that data-field themselves to save money", the document expert explained. While the issue was so resolved, the scenario indicates that documentary configurations of fake and real are complex and manifold: a manipulation, if conducted by an official entity, can be legit; an authentic passport can contain a counterfeit visa and vice-versa; false documents can represent real identities, where travellers do not have easy access to documents; a forged or falsified visa may be the result not of travellers' bad intentions but of fraudulent visa agencies; finally fake can present itself as a perceived aesthetic, rather than a legal category, and thus the most fake-looking documents can be valid and authentic, as e.g. in the case of Greek ID cards, of which officers would jokingly say that the faker and more destroyed they looked, the realer they were.

Officers must act in awareness of this plethora of possibilities; but they must also focus their attention and at times make judgement calls. To do so documents are profiled as much as are people: in the eyes of officers documents are always more likely to be falsified if they have something to offer, i.e. rank highly in the "Documentary Hierarchies of Passage" (Jansen 2009:823): "It's always the documents that give you ease of travel, which will be counterfeited. There is simply little point in, say, using a forged Russian passport when trying to cross into Schengen. Unless you only want to conceal your identity but not get in – which makes little sense", an officer explained to me. The mobility potential offered by a document combined with their susceptibility to manipulation determines whether they are considered high risk or

not. There are documents for which the default assumption will almost always be that they are false (e.g. Greek and Italian IDs at MUC airport) leading to their bearers automatically receiving further scrutiny, whilst other documents are perceived as inherently low risk (e.g. officers consider it a rule of thumb that people are less likely to use a forged document from the country which they are trying to enter and thus think it improbable to be on the receiving end of a forged German passport). Yet for each rule there will always be an exception.¹⁹

Once a document is verified (and assuming a positive PIP result was previously established), it transforms into a manual for border conduct: it is on the basis of the valid document that the requirements for a traveller to be able to cross the border are determined. At MUC there are essentially four classes of travellers whose status is derived based on their documents: first, there are Schengen citizens who can enter and exit without any further requirements; second, there are third-party nationals that are visa-exempt but require a stamp in their passport when entering and exiting the country, so as to verify that they do not overstay the permitted maximum duration of their visa-free stay; third there are third-party nationals who require a valid Schengen visa to be allowed to enter; their fingerprints must be registered during entry checks and their passports stamped at entry and exit. All travellers in category two and three are also subject to the so-called *Schengen-Befragung*, i.e. a series of questions set out by the Schengen Code, regarding the purpose and duration of their stay, their ability to fund said stay etc. The questionings – if not prohibited by the frequently significant language barriers at the border – are conducted more or less thoroughly, depending on the suspiciousness of the traveller as it is perceived by the officer based on an amalgam of considerations such as their nationality, their gender, age, travel route, dressing and behaviour; officers may also ask for proof of certain claims, such as a hotel reservation, a return ticket, or a statement as to which sights a tourist is planning to see, or what meetings a business traveller will be attending.

¹⁹ It is interesting to consider officer's assumption alongside this auto-ethnographic report by Koshravi: "For a few hundred dollars, one could get a Danish, German, Spanish or Greek passport. Southern European passports were much in demand and therefore more expensive, due to the Mediterranean look of these nationals. An Iranian could pass more easily as Greek or Italian than as German. Another factor that determined the price of a passport was the amount of stamps inside it. More visa stamps and entry/exit stamps in a passport made it more bona fide and hence more expensive." (Khosravi 2010:61)

Finally there is the category of special interest travellers, such as diplomats, seafarers, or military personnel, for whom separate rules apply. However, the classificatory placement of certain nationalities in certain categories is not stable: relations between countries change. They are further complicated by the fact that people of the same nationality may be treated differently depending on what type of national document they present: a case in point at the time of my fieldwork was Ukraine, where nationals travelling on an electronic, i.e. biometric passport, were visa-exempt, whereas their compatriots using a simple, machine-readable document still required one.

Synthesis: making known

While the above gives us a good idea of the constituent elements of documentary identification, it leaves us with a rather segregated sense of the process. How are the fragmentary identificational impressions derived during bearer authentication and document verification synthesised to effect a border identity on the basis of which travellers are granted or refused entry? Of course the above-described processes are in practice, and in the large majority of cases, conducted within seconds, and their synthesis happens equally fast: in the absence of suspicion, conditioned by the verified integrity of the document, the perceived authenticity of the document-bearer relationship, and the absence of any “red flags” as they might be perceived by officers, both elements slip seamlessly into the moment of *identity*, i.e. *the situational recognition of an embodied subject through their document*. Once identity is established, the right to passage is determined and documentary identification becomes actionable: Schengen travellers pass through, while third-party nationals must answer additional questions. Travellers with a valid visa need to submit their fingerprints, then they and all other third-party nationals receive a stamp in their document before they can enter or exit. The act of crossing is realised.

However, how exactly is synthesis achieved, especially when discrepancies are detected during earlier stages? “[S]uspicion (like doubt) occupies the space between the law and its application”

(2004:285) writes Asad; it is this space which synthesis must overcome. To do so synthesis pursues the narrative contextualisation or resolve of the disparate identificational indices established through the PIP and document verification process: we can see this in the opening vignette, wherein Oliver iteratively assembles the clues he collects about the falsified document, the behaviour of the traveller, her flight route, her lack of luggage, her appearance and the languages she does not speak, into what Josiaj Heyman in his ethnography of US immigration officers describes as a “plausible story”, “the core of the immigration classificatory process” (Heyman 2001:132): an Albanian or Georgian woman, having arrived in MUC from outside of Schengen, using an Italian document in her attempt to enter Ireland to find work and join an assumed network of friends and relatives. It is on the basis of this plausible story that Oliver (1) recognises the woman as a policeable persona whose wish to cross the border must be rejected, as well as (2) determines his own actions.

Plausible stories, Heyman analyses based on his work at the US-Mexican border, “consist of multiple planes of classification intersecting at shared symbols; a single symbol often elicits markedly different evaluations in each plane” (Heyman 2001:132). In crafting and selecting plausible stories, officers thus situate the markers and indices of identification generated through PIP and document verification (the symbols) vis-à-vis potential interpretative framings (planes): as is common in policing these framings are derived from a complex set of experiential and risk knowledges, including information received in training, situational intelligence gathered by officers abroad, previous cases experienced, stereotypical beliefs, “common sense” and stories heard over lunch with colleagues; knowledges that are thus “neither wholly expert nor lay, neither fully reasonable, nor merely suspicion” (Pratt 2010:462) and can vary across units and precincts (Côté-Boucher 2016, Brouwer et al. 2018). In the coming together of these knowledges to form a plausible story we can see a qualitative shift from “who is this person”, the operational question of identification, to “what does this person want, what motivates them to cross a specific border, and how are they trying to do this”, i.e. an approximation of intentionality. The moment of synthesis must thus be understood as an

attempt to overcome passports' and other identification documents' key operative shortcoming: their inability to record or make legible intent (Salter 2004:84).

While the term of the plausible story does not exist in the BPol's jargon, the ability to critically engage with and draw out a traveller's backstory, which officers refer to as *Legende* (legend), is commonly considered the "high art of policing". It requires knowledge, sensitivity towards the traveller, and the ability to interpret critically the information at hand. Depending on how an officer synthesises the available information, the resulting plausible story can work to criminalise a given configuration of paper, person, and intent or legitimise it; it can exculpate a traveller or incriminate them. Plausible stories are hence not merely identificational in their effect; they are highly normative: credibility here becomes a matter of fitting with the narrative, and thus of fulfilling officers' expectations. "That which diverges from "the normal" becomes an indicator used to place people in high risk categories" (Pratt 2010:468-9). The plausible stories crafted by officers around the paper-person amalgam are moreover often telling of how they themselves relate to the individuals they police: they can e.g. be skewed by officers' desire to "find something" and generate a hit to demonstrate their occupational prowess (see also Brouwer et al 2018:459), or indicate an officer's sympathy for an individual's attempt to irregularly enter Schengen driven by the "honest" desire to find a job and build up economic security.

In the construction of plausible stories that contextualise documentary deviation, officers usually draw on what is referred to as *Phänomene* (phenomena): a phenomenon, in its most basic sense, describes the repeated occurrence of a particular triad of (1) "real" traveller nationality (e.g. Albanians and Georgians), (2) the documents they use and the nationality they thereby assume (e.g. old authentic Italian ID cards with the picture swapped), and (3) route taken (travelling from MUC to Ireland or Great Britain). These triads can be specific to MUC or occur across German airports, and will often form the back-bone of a plausible story to which additional layers are added. The longer a phenomenon exists, the more detailed it becomes: if forged documents are used, the typical markers of the forgeries will be known; if many

travellers have been intercepted and questioned, officers will be familiar with their journeys, their cover stories, as well as their motivations to seek to cross a certain border irregularly.

The plausible stories in which the paper-person amalgam becomes enmeshed thereby map out a migratory and documentary landscape that inserts MUC airport into the wider field of geopolitics: plausible stories imply casting roles for other states, including scapegoating neighbours and creating hierarchies of which partners have porous borders and which do not (Colombeau 2017:487). Phenomena also testify to and mirror global events, such as political or economic crises or diplomatic relations: which documents one sees a lot at a given border and which one does not, tells an important story about geopolitical flows (see also Kelly 2006:98). As capabilities and alliances change, so do paper-person configurations encountered at MUC; phenomena and legends as well as the narrative context they generate at the border must then be re-thought (see also Colombeau 2017). This points to the futility of plausibility: while it is “crucial to the decision to admit or reject” (Salter 2006:182), it can only momentarily suspend the heightened ambiguity of identity, intent, and belonging at the border to allow for a decision to take place.

In the process of synthesis, facilitated by plausible stories, finally becomes apparent the productive duality of document-based identification at the border: it simultaneously comprises the process of learning about the traveller, their nationality and intentions, as well as, reproducing them as specific nationalised personas. We can see here an iteration of the productive dimension of documenting identity raised in the introduction: border identifications are materially consequential, yet rather than being rooted in the documentary creationism of bureaucratic statehood, they speak to the interpretative sovereignty marking (border) policing (Ulrich 2018, Pratt 2010). Sovereignty here does not feature as an abstract and essentialised condition of the state, but as an interpretative capacity, enacted by officers through their identifying work: their document derived readings trump any identificational claims made by the embodied subject in the borderzone. “We must [therefore] understand the reading of identities at the border not as mere ‘handling’ documents but as [people] coming into being in

particular ways through them” (Jansen 2009:816). This is an important point: documentary synthesis exhibits a performative capability; it finally transforms the embodied individual into a policeable entity, subject to a specific bureaucratic protocol, and concludes the process of identification.

The passport interface: the socio-material function of border identifications

How, then, can we make sense of the mechanics of document-based border identifications laid out above? The phenomenon of documentary identification is commonly conceptualised under the twin paradigms of control and social sorting. Such approaches (e.g. Lyon 2003, 2008, 2009; Salter 2004, 2006, 2013), render identification documents “technologies of social screening designed to police the mobility of those deemed to belong to suspect social categories” (Loftus 2015:117); contributors within this literature successfully diagnose and alert us to the asymmetries in power marking the documentary regime. Yet this type of analysis often fails at sufficiently accounting for “the role of identity documents in producing the particular texture of relationships” (Kelly 2006:89) which enable said power asymmetries – they merely state that nationalised documentary regimes have this effect. I believe that the above analysis of identification can aid in further delineating the documentary role in this dynamic:

Salter describes the passport as a “modern heuristic device, which serves to link individuals to foreign policy, and according to which government agents classify travelers as safe or dangerous, desirable or undesirable” (Salter 2004:72). Whilst I agree with Salter’s framing, I think we must go further and ask what type of heuristic devices passports embody: throughout the stages of bearer authentication, document verification, and synthesis we can observe identification documents to emerge as core means through which officers “relate to the various publics with whom they encounter” (Loftus 2015:120). To achieve this, documentary identifications have to bridge the linguistic, cultural, and political gaps that may lie between them. Documents, I propose, thus take on the role of a border *interface*, i.e. the “means by

which interaction or communication is achieved" (definition of interface, Merriam Webster 2021), structuring the conditions of engagement between officers and travellers. Now what does this reconceptualisation mean in anthropological terms and what can it tell us about the passport paradigm?

The media theorist Alexander Galloway argues that "an interface is not a thing; an interface is an effect" (Galloway 2012:36) that engenders specific modes of signification. Among the different modes Galloway identifies the "poetic mode",

a mode which may be labelled poetic in that it combines an aesthetic of coherence with a politics of incoherence. [...] It is labelled "poetic" simply because it aligns itself with poesis, or meaning-making in a general sense. The stakes are not those of metaphysics, in which any image is measured against its original, but rather the semiautonomous "physics" of art, that is, the tricks and techniques that contribute to success or failure within mimetic representation as such. [...] the "poetic" regime is always receptive to diverse political adaptations, for it leaves the political question open.

(Galloway 2012:49-52)

The passport interface, I suggest, effects precisely this dialectic of an aesthetic of coherence and a politics of incoherence at the airport border: documentary identifications assign meaning to illegible bodies and lay a veil of bureaucratic unambiguity over the border as a space of socio-political incoherence. They so temporarily mute the geo-political chaos marking a globalising world and place a veneer of technicality on the fundamental injustice inherent to the nationalised determination of border flows. The classifications of the paper-person-amalgam generated by border officers thereby create the perception of order by "contrast to the qualities of confusion and ambiguity that characterize [identity at the border and in] ordinary life" (Martin 2018:137, see also Schielke 2008). Heyman observes a similar dynamic, when he states that "bureaucracy as a form projects an aura of finality, completeness, and inhuman objectivity [...] over empirically complex and often highly biased results" (Heyman 1995:264-5). At the same time identification documents' socio-political purchase at the border, i.e. the mobilities they enable or prohibit, remains open to "adaptation" by the law and the same geo-political dynamics they disguise: the border-protocols a given passport triggers can change any

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time if geo-politics change. Here the effects of the passport interface intensify the quality of “policing as a kind of agency that fabricates provisional fixes to a world shuddering under the historical weight of its own moral incoherence ” (Martin 2018:143).

As a struggle for coherence, the passport-based logic of identification has far reaching effects: identification documents shape how officers perceive and communicate about travellers by extending their nationalised, categorical logic beyond the paper frame onto e.g. the top right hand corner of a white-board on the wall of a precinct’s operation room on which the cases of travellers are summarised as follows:

1 – IRQ – w – 28

2 – AFG – m – 21, 27

1 – RUS – w – 45

1 – IRQ – w – 28, translates into one Iraqi woman aged 28; 2 – AFG – m – 21,27 stands in for two Afghan men, 21 and 27 years of age. When an officer walks in looking for a traveller they will ask “Where can I find the Iraqi?” rather than refer to them by their name and often complex and ambiguous story. The documentary interface so contributes to a certain “distance between those who act in the name of the state and their citizen/subjects [...] hid[ing] actual bodies behind layers of administration and piles of paper” (Kelly 2006:91). Some people, as we will see in the next chapter, may appreciate this effect: “the assumption that legal status is an intrinsic aspect of personhood allows people to hide their own personal histories in the presentation of legal documents” (Kelly 2006:99). Yet the distance generated through the insertion of the documentary interface between officers and travellers, I argue, also inhibits the emergence of a foundational component of inter-human encounter: sociality.

Border encounter: documentary fragilities and excess socialities

Reeves argues that “documents are never entirely knowable and never completely transparent, which creates spaces of possibility but also generates practices of suspicion” (Reeves 2013:509, see also Kelly 2006:91). In officers’ eyes, however, documents are standardised and verifiable which makes them appear fundamentally knowable: “Documents can be made to tell the truth even when they lie”, a forensic document expert told me, “you just need to know how to make them talk”, while another officer went as far as to say that he preferred documents over people: “They are easier to deal with, easier to read. You cannot standardise people to tell them to be a certain way. So it is more difficult to work with them. The document also tells me what to do – I look at it, and I know exactly what the next steps are, which questions to ask the traveller etc.” Even though “the possibility of forgery [may] always [be] immanent” (Kelly 2006:90) in the documentary regime, this is embraced as being “part of the game”, as officers would say. A game, which they feel they can win. So while there may be counterfeits and imposters that go unnoticed – a fact readily acknowledged by officers – documents are still considered a trustworthy prism through which to view and assess people. This makes them so powerful in their aesthetic effect: whilst documents enable identification, their seductive veracity inhibits officers from trying to get to know travellers more comprehensively. The passport documentary interface so simultaneously features as a mediator of identificational control as well as an inhibitor of a more personal type of mutual encounter.

This effect of passports may not be by design – indeed, none of the document experts and governmental legislators I encountered voiced arguments in this vein. Yet the delimitation of the social quality of the border, and therewith mutuality, sympathy, empathy, or compassion (all in themselves controversial notions in bordering, see e.g. Feldman 2013) could be considered an attractive side-effect of a documentary regime of identification that is reliant on officers being able to execute exclusions in an inherently unfair nationalised global order. Yet even so,

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the interfacial workings of identification documents are not deterministic in their effect, as the following incident illustrates:

On one of my last days at MUC airport I came across the case of a traveller found to hold a configuration of documents that produced many questions among officers: (1) a German refugee passport and a permanent residence card to go with it as well as (2) a Turkish passport. All documents appeared authentic and the man seemed to be their rightful bearer, yet the German and Turkish documents certified two different identities: a different name, a different date and place of birth. The man, who crossed the German border without any issues using the refugee passport, had been pulled out by customs for a search, which eventually turned up the additional Turkish document. Upon examining both documents more closely, the BPol officers who had been called by customs to assist found that the refugee passport had been manipulated: the name of a country listed in the banned country list – a common feature in refugee passports usually marking out the so called *Verfolgerstaat* (prosecutor state), i.e. the state from which a refugee is seeking protection – seemed to have been removed. The suspicion emerging: the traveller had been issued the refugee passport on the agreement that he would not return to Turkey (the country he must have presumably been seeking refuge from) and was now in violation of this condition, as a ticket for a flight arriving from Turkey was also found, issued to the name and identity listed in the Turkish passport. During questioning the man eventually claimed that he had been given a new identity (and the suitable papers) by German authorities several years ago after fleeing Turkey due to threats made against his life (by whom remained unclear). The man and his family had since been living in a Bavarian city a short train ride away from the airport. However, the man did not believe the death threats to pose a credible risk anymore, thus wishing to return to his old identity and name. To do so, he explained, he needed to get a Turkish passport issued to his real/former identity, and so he travelled to Turkey.

For a long time officers remained uncertain about the best way to handle this unusual situation, further complicated by the fact that one of them had let the man through in the first instance.

Could the man be trusted? Officers felt that the presented identification data (*vorliegende Personalien*) first needed to be checked with the *Ausländeramt* (Foreigners Office) to verify the man's claims. Then the forensic document experts should assess whether the manipulation of the banned country list – a result, the man claimed, of a piece of chewing gum accidentally having fallen out of his mouth onto the page, removing the top layer of the paper – really embodied an act of forgery, i.e. represented an actual offense. Finally, the legal consequences of the un-approved travelling to the *Verfolgerstaat* had to be assessed in order to derive a strategy for pursuing this case further. In their confusion officers congregated around a table looking at the set of documents, thinking aloud together: "This is such an odd case", one of them sighed, as others nodded, a further one contending that the man had most likely initially arrived in Germany without documents and then claimed asylum, which was granted on the basis of a made-up identity. Others disagreed, explaining that this could not be, seeing as the man had been in jail for a period of time under his German name having been convicted of charges of human trafficking. Moreover, one officer informed the others, there were a total of eight other identities listed in various data-bases, somehow connected to the man now seated in the precinct's waiting area. "In the end", Florian, the officer who had brought in the traveller, sighed, "it really only boils down to the offense of travelling to the prosecuting state. That is the only offense we can be sure off." Whilst their debate continued, the case was eventually decided quite quickly: the sergeant in charge determined that since there was no credible flight risk, the man should be sent home and receive an *Anhörungsbogen* (questioning form) via post, instead of calling in the investigation service to question him right away. Many officers appeared disappointed with this decision: they were excited by this case and wanted to "solve" it right there and then. Others thought the man should be taken into custody. With their shift ending soon and many more cases needing to be processed the sergeant, however, had different priorities: "Let the man go home and we will take this up later! He obviously is not going to run – this is his home, so we only need to make sure we are able to find him. Florian, check his contact details, will you?" Case closed.

Florian did as he was told: explaining to the traveller the next steps, he told the man that due to the confusion caused by his various identities, they now needed to verify his personal and contact details with his help. For this purpose, he asked, would the man happen to hold any additional official documents? A driving license perhaps? The man, visibly unhappy about the situation, reacted by simply emptying out his wallet, throwing a whole host of ID-shaped cards on the counter: debit cards, a gym membership-card, his dentist's business card – none of them official in the sense that Florian had in mind. Yet the man kept sorting through the documents, eventually handing the officer a loyalty card that he held with German supermarket chain *Netto*: "Here you go!" Whether the handing over of this particular card was just a clever way of pointing out the ridiculousness of the events, as he perceived them, or whether he actually believed the card could help his cause was unclear. Yet when Florian took it, he had to suppress a smile. The man had caught him off-guard: "Not exactly what I meant, but okay. I shop at Netto as well." Eventually, the man left and Florian took the collected info to brief the administrative officer poised to take over the case. In the record, they agreed, it was going to say that the identity and contact details of the subject were based on his own claims as they could not be verified. Over the coming days "Netto guy", as the man was eventually nicknamed, would be brought up many times, with officers wondering how his fate would turn out. Netto guy's story, I argue, is significant for two reasons:

First, it illustrates the fragility of the passport interface and thus the documentary regime of identification: an officer's ability to render a traveller known in the border zone is dependent on their reification through a singular documentary identification. The contradicting identifications entailed in the multiple documents presented by the man made him illegible to officers, leaving them no choice other than to take the man's word regarding his identity – a last-resort move, as becomes clear when looking at the protocol applied in the absence of documents: when a traveller claims to hold no documents (mostly in an effort to protect themselves from being deported) officers will go to extreme lengths to find documentation, as they know that a traveller would not have made it on a flight without any type of ID: they search travellers' luggage, comb through all bins on their route from the gate to the *Passkontrolle*, or go as far as

to search the sewage containers on aeroplanes at the chance that a traveller may have tried to dispose of their document through the lavatory. If the physical document cannot be found, an individual's phone may be searched in the hopes of finding at least a photograph of an original document. Only if all attempts fail a traveller's word will be taken as basis for the identity officers will record. Yet in the case of Netto-guy it was the surplus of identification that brought normal protocol to a grinding halt: the lack of documentary singularity marking the above incident, rendered all three verified and authentic documents available to officers failed records: the identificational clues they constituted and offered resisted synthesis into a plausible story, as the passport interface crumbled, creating bureaucratic ambiguity rather than performing coherence.

Second, the account hints at the potential for excess socialities to follow the subversion of the documentary interface: Netto guy managed to break through the nationalised logic of the border, where officers would usually refer to the subjects of their work solely by their nationality, indicating a heightened degree of intimacy. To shop at Netto, a discount grocery store, here became a sign of being profoundly normal and modest and overwrote alternate, more formalistic identifications. Dace Dzenovska, in her work on Latvian border guards, describes such a spontaneous emergence of a social bond between officers and their subjects as "a public sociality" (Dzenovska 2014:280) which in the example of her account is "animated by a historically formed understanding" shared among the post-soviet subjects populating the border encounter she describes. The criminologist Mary Bosworth has similarly noted that "laying claim to an equivalent kind of membership—as a hard worker, mother, or tax-payer [or in this case a lover of affordable groceries] —unrecognizable in law, but grounded in familiar moral hierarchies" (Bosworth 2014:88) can also be an effective strategy for individuals to escape the reductive nature of border identifications. It is still unclear to me whether the passing of the loyalty card embodied a strategic move, or should be read as an implicit critique of the identificatory system. Yet knowingly or unknowingly, Netto-guy thereby made a claim to a type of identity, and perhaps even Germanness, which spoke to officers, keeping them interested in his fate long after he had left the precinct.

Conclusion

“One of the defining features of street-level bureaucrats is that they need to translate often vague or conflicting laws and policy goals into concrete action” (Brouwer et al. 2018:450). This chapter has attempted to portray, step by step, the process of putting into action identification documents as a currency and determinator of access, mobility, and belonging at the border. I have traced the dynamics of document-based identification through its three constituent stages – bearer authentication, document verification, synthesis – to highlight the laborious, corporealised, and fragmentary yet cumulative nature of conjuring identification at the border. The ethnographic insights derived inform a conceptual repositioning of the passport as a socio-material interface, marked by a performative aesthetic of coherence that works to veil the geopolitical chaos prevalent in the borderzone. Herein lies a core clue to understanding the paradigmatic consequentiality of identification documents: passports introduce a functional sense of unambiguity. Yet as a BPol sergeant emphasised during one of our conversations: “We only see a small fragment of the whole story at the border.” As I move to the next chapter I thus shift emphasis onto those positioned on the other side of the passport interface: normal people, their documented lives, and their respective stories.

Passport stories – Navigating the documentary regime

SUMMARY

In previous chapters I have explored in some depth the role of statist actors in the emergence of the passport paradigm in Germany, as well as the types of consequentialities that their respective documentary practices produce. In this chapter I turn away from the agents of the state and towards the mundane experience of navigating life in the documentary regime. (How) do people relate to and through their identification documents as they manoeuvre the passport paradigm? That is the question posed in this chapter; yet the below does not set out to provide a systematic answer. Rather, I shall present here a set of narratives that I shall refer to as *passport stories*: situated, personal accounts of the lived experience of navigating the documentary regime. Each story illuminates a particular perspective onto and from within the passport paradigm, bringing within the reader's field of perception the parallels and sharp divergences of a shared condition – being documented – that is far less standardising than its makers may purport. The stories are preceded by an introduction, describing the methodological impetus of this more unconventional chapter vis-à-vis existing conceptions of the paper-person-amalgam. The chapter ends in an attempt to think through people's experiences and explore the inchoate commonalities among experiential multiplicity, eventually indicating the fundamentally rhythmic quality of documented live and their effect on individuals' sense of self-sovereignty.

Divergence and coherence

The socio-legal scholar Marie-Andrée Jacob in an ethnographic study of consent forms in an American hospital makes the case that "the documented form constitutes the person even more than it retains her traces" (Jacob 2007:250). The consent form, Jacob argues, "neither represents nor reflects the person who signs it but is rather an alternative term for the person herself. This person is not based on cognitive and humanistic understandings of the consenting individual but rather is constituted and preserved by legal and bureaucratic documentary

proceedings" (2007:250). In tandem with the emergence of this paper-person, the embodied subject equally becomes reified: "not as thing or form, but as individual [...] separated from context, kin, and relationships"; for "the forms leave no place for overlaps between categories, instability, or multiplicity of meanings" (Jacob 2007:253, see also Bowker and Star 1999; Herzfeld 1992:116). These documentary properties and effects allow for the individual to become a consenting subject (Jacob 2007:254): a form-made person, as Jacobs calls it.

Considering Jacobs' words against the background of previous chapters, they do ring true: the parallel emergence of the personified paper and the form-made person, which Jacobs sketches out in her study, introduces a vision of a reciprocity of document and form-filler that resonates with the somatic readings and inscriptions of documentary identification traced in the last two chapters. Yet Jacob's suggestion appears to go even further: rather than effecting an amalgam of document and person which co-produce particular configurations of personhood, Jacob's ethnography indicates a hybridisation of personhood akin to what Alfred Gell has so famously synthesised in the concept of the distributed object or person (1998): working from the example of Marquesan art, which despite its geographical scattering across islands emerges as what he describes as "a macroscopic whole rather than as an aggregate of fragments" (Gell 1998:221), Gell develops the notion of the distributed object as an entity that "combines multiplicity and spatio-temporal dispersion with immanent coherence" (Gell 1998:222). Extending the idea of unified dispersion to the concept of personhood Gell reconceptualises the notion of the person "as the sum total of the indexes which testify, in life and subsequently, to the biographical existence of this or that individual" (Gell 1998:222-223). Personhood here becomes a materially entangled condition that extends beyond the corporeal confines of the embodied subject: it is distributed.

Applying this logic to our understanding of the passport paradigm, we are thus encouraged to conceive of subjectivity as inherently integrated with the material dispersions of personhood, such as the various identification documents that a person holds. This does not simply reiterate Jacob's case-specific ontological reworking of the category of the person: in its totalising

character the notion of distributed personhood goes further in that it offers a conceptualisation of subjecthood that fundamentally extends the category of the person as “routinely distributed outside of human bodies” (Fowler 2010:370). The person here is always an amalgam. This diminishes the singularity of the case of identification documents: in Gell’s paradigm a passport is not necessarily more crucial to a person’s subjectivity than their grocery list, and both are part of a widespread array of correlating artefactual entities furnishing the person (see also Peirano 2002; Salter 2003:154, Sriraman 2018).

The counterpart to the emerging distributed person, is the distributed object: “[p]ersonal agency, as intervention in the causal milieu, generates one of these ‘distributed objects’, that is, all the material differences in ‘the way things are’ from which some particular agency can be abducted.” (Gell 1998:222-223). In this vein, the inscription of identificational markers – e.g the imprinting of a photograph or name – into an identity document, work to endow the documentary product with an agentic charge, by incorporating it into the very constitution of the individual’s personhood and agentic force: the technology of the document is, so Gell, enchanted through the externalisation and continuation of the individual’s sociality in material form (1992). The material efficacy of the document, its social consequentiality as I call it in this study, is thus, in Gell’s reading, not a matter of mere impact but a consequence of its entanglement within the various socialities of its own making and enactment: as documentary identifications are designed, manufactured, inscribed, deployed, performed, and read they are infused with the agentic potential of all those that engage with them. In this Gellian sense (see also Appadurai 1986, Gell 1998, Hull 2012b, Latour 1999, Miller 1987, Strathern 1999), documentary consequentiality, then, implies the parallel emergence of documents and their bearers as mutually implicated, and equally capacitated, agentic entities. Though this line of thought is not explicitly engaged in any of the existing ethnographic accounts of identification documents, previous studies hint at the complexity of the paper-person interrelation, as has been discussed in the introduction. Yet, (how) is this sense of mutual implication perceived and experienced by the documented in the German context? Is the potential distributedness that a

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theoretical analysis might suggest felt or recognised by the documented person and if so, what are its effects? This is the starting point of this chapter.

To approach this question, I choose the medium of what I deem *passport stories*, which I borrow from John Law's notion of *Aircraft Stories* (2002): in *Aircraft Stories* Law develops an STS analysis of the *TSR2*, a British military strike and reconnaissance aircraft that was developed during the cold war but eventually discontinued. The book departs from the problem of reconciling "modernism and its child, postmodernism – and [...] how we might think past the limits that these set to our ways of thinking" (Law 2002:1). For the two movements, Law argues, "are each other's creatures. And as they confront one another they tend to press us to make a choice between the homogeneities of centered storytelling on the one hand, and pluralism of fragmentation on the other" (2002:2). Consequently, Law makes it his project (one of the very many projects denoted in the book) "to evade that choice" (2002:2). He chooses as a strategy of evasion the concept of fractional coherence, which he defines as the objective of "drawing things together without centering them" (2002:2). This is necessary, Law argues, as the multiplicity and fractured nature of identity, commonly attested by modern day social science to the subjectivity of human subjects, should also be extended to things, like an aircraft, or for the purposes of this thesis, the document-bearer interrelation, and – by extension – the passport paradigm:

An aircraft, yes, is an object. But it also reveals multiplicity—for instance in wing shape, speed, military roles, and political attributes. I am saying, then, that an object such as an aircraft—an "individual" and "specific" aircraft—comes in different versions. It has no single center. It is multiple. And yet these various versions also interfere with one another and shuffle themselves together to make a single aircraft. They make what I will call singularities, or singular objects out of their multiplicity. In short, they make objects that cohere.

(Law 2002:2-3)

Through the prism of fractionality he strives to avoid the dualism of one and many, as he describes it – of a coherent whole vs disparate forces, consciously "wrestl[ing] with the idea that objects, subjects, and societies are both singular and multiple, both one and many" (Law 2002:4). Law's concerns resonate with the aforementioned Gellian notion of distributedness as

a quality that “combines multiplicity and spatio-temporal dispersion with immanent coherence” (Gell 1998:222). If we conceive of the embodied, subjective experience of the passport paradigm as such a distributed, fractional form, then how can we tell the story of how it is experienced by *people* in general? I.e. how can I bring into the singular narrative frame of this chapter the multiplicity of individual documentary experiences from which the stories presented below emerge as granular visions of what it means to be documented? Stories and experiences, which at times appear to be marked more so by their divergences than they are by their overlaps (the perpetual problem or strength, depending on one’s perspective, of small samples). For the people portrayed below share nothing but two characteristics: (a) they are subject to the passport paradigm and (b) have lived in Germany throughout their entire lives. Beyond these two dimensions, however, they differ significantly across a whole host of demographic categories, such as age, gender, race, nationality, upbringing, or socio-economic background – much more so than the constituencies inhabiting previous chapters did. Presumably then, their experiences will also differ strongly. The challenge – one that affects this thesis more largely, yet feels especially acute in the context of this chapter – is thus, to speak with Law, to “write about multiplicity in a way that also produces the effects of singularity?” and “about singularity in a way that does not efface the performances of multiplicity?” (Law 2002:4).

In a sense Law – and I – grapple here with the haunting spectre of this thesis: scale, its relation to comparison, and its self-replicating infinity; a topic the detailed discussion of which is reserved for the conclusion of this thesis. Yet we must briefly also consider it here: “[f]aced with the infinite plurality of the cosmos, the finite anthropologist is forced into the false containments of scaling – false because no finite scale could ever contain the whole” (2009:347) write Martin Holbraad and Morten Pedersen. I am inclined to agree with Holbraad and Pedersen in their assessment that any attempt at the containment of scale can provide nothing but the false illusion of having graduated to a high enough bird’s eye view of the whole or, alternatively, having waded through the distractive complexities of larger-scale views long enough to re-settle on the comforting plateau of the granular. Yet I see no choice other than engage in the staging of such illusion. And thus, to enact my narrative magic trick of conveying

to the reader an impression of the passport paradigm's experiential multiplicities and coherences on the level of the embodied subject, I look, once again, towards Law:

growing different stories alongside one another [...] we create and make visible interferences between the stories. We bring new and unpredictable effects into being, effects which cannot be predicted or foretold from a single location. [...] This results in texts that are uncentered, texts that are not singular. And yet, if the bet is right, it produces texts that have intersections that hold together. That cohere.

(Law 2002:5)

This here is the fundamental ambition of the passport stories assembled below: bit by bit, story for story, they illuminate, separately and collaboratively, a segmented conglomerate. As such they replicate, on the level of this chapter, the overall challenge and promise of this thesis: the ethnographic exploration of a unitarily commanding, yet cumulative, discursive formation, i.e. "an entity whose coherence can only be understood as an effect" (Jean-Klein and Riles 2005:175) and is as such necessarily situated and multiple. Let's take a look to see how this plays out.

Paper(s and) people

Marie

Marie is in her late fifties and has been a German national, living in Germany all her life. She describes herself as a very "ortsgebundene und -verbundene" person: a person very much bounded to and rooted in the place in which she lives, who feels no urge to see far-away places. Since she does not travel a whole lot, she does not think about her passport all that much, she explains to me. In the rare case that she does venture outside the country, it is usually within Schengen where she does not need a passport. Same with her ID: it sits in her wallet and is with her wherever she goes, but she does not perceive it to be hugely important to her day-to-day endeavours. In her mind it is something she just has by means of being

German and living in this country, but the privileges these documents extend are not really palpable to her in her day-to-day life. When trying to think of an occasion that she last made use of her ID card, she struggles, then remembers that when she recently went to vote in the German general election she had the document ready, yet nobody asked to check it. Though Marie does not seem to assign any functional purpose to both documents, she makes sure to hold a valid version of her ID and passport at all times: "They are simply part of a *Doppelpack* (a dual set)", she explains; a set, that one simply has.

She always applies for the two documents in tandem, using the same picture and only having to take one appointment at the passport office with its notoriously long waiting times. She got into that rhythm when she first got married – about thirty years ago – and applied for new documents after taking on her husband's name. She remembers that back then applying and receiving these documents in her new name made her marriage feel real: "Getting these documents, I suddenly really was, in every sense, Mrs X", she tells me. I ask her what she means by that and she explains that when she received the documents in her new name, it felt like "the reality that she had created for herself", i.e. taking on her husband's name and becoming Mrs X, became "congruent with her official identity". It felt right.

Yet in Marie's daily life the documents that are most important to her are not her ID or passport, but her driver's license as well as her *Schwerbehindertenausweis* (Disabled Person's ID). She has had a walking disability all her life and her ability to drive herself around is very important to her, as it allows her freedom and independence when otherwise it would be strenuous for her to run errands or go from A to B. The two documents, she says, "make [her] abilities and disabilities evident". They so allow her access to certain rights that matter hugely to her experience of life, "at home, in place". Their impact, she feels, is therefore much more concrete than is that of her ID or passport.

When we talk about how she feels about the way in which her national documents represent her, she tells me that "there are a thousand more important things to know about [her]", but

she feels that the data contained in her state-issued documents is “sufficient for the authorities”. Marie considers the information contained in her papers “key data (*Eckdaten*) that describe my outer shell (*meine äußere Hülle*)”. She has thus always felt that rather than exposing her identity, her ID and passport have shielded her from having to share too much information with authorities, or a border officer in a strange country: to her the documents work as an agreed-upon minimum data set required to claim certain rights. She has thus also never perceived her ID as an instrument of control, more so as a membership or entitlement card that grants her access to certain things. The passport carries more of a control-connotation to her, but she does not object to identity checks at borders per se: “If we have states, and we do and I don’t think I am fundamentally against that, then I guess we need to know who comes in, so we need passports, and we need to know who is who, so we need IDs”.

However, her perspective has changed a little ever since the arrival of biometrics: to her these embody an undue intrusion, which even though propagated as enhancing security, do not make her feel more secure. She calls the idea of identity checks and border controls being run solely on the basis of biometrics nightmarish. When I ask her whether she has any idea what type of data is available exactly on the chips in her documents and how these can be accessed and by whom, she says no. When I then ask whether she would like to know this information, Marie shakes her head firmly: “There would really be no point in explaining that to me. I would probably still believe that the data is accessed beyond what they tell you”. She clarifies that this perspective is not solely conditioned by a dis-trust in the state’s intentions, rather its cyber-security promises: “the law can be as careful and benevolent as it wants to be, but this type of protection cannot be guaranteed”. She thinks it highly possible that digital intruders could access her identification data and use it for purposes that are not of her liking.

Even though her passport plays no crucial role in her daily life, Marie likes it as a document. Holding a passport, she says stroking gently over the dark red cover, gives her a sense of security, a sense of having fulfilled certain expectations. I ask her what she means by that: “Well, it gives me a sense of belonging – I fulfil what is required to belong to a community”.

She realises that the requirement she fulfils is technically one to the fulfilment of which she did not contribute – being born to German parents – but still, the feeling of security is there and she values the document for that. Whenever she does travel she keeps it on her person at all times and would never leave it behind in a hotel safe or so. “My passport is like a flat: it gives me a home that I am always able to return to”. To her that is the most important dimension of that document: it is not about being able to travel to far-away places, but about being able to always return home.

Theresa

A few years ago, after having moved from the suburbs to the city, Theresa, then in her mid-twenties, went to the Foreigners’ Office for the first time by herself. She needed to apply for her residence permit to be renewed and was given a form to fill in. The form presented two problems right off the bat: first, it asked the form filler to enter their nationality, assuming this to be basic information much like a name would be. Yet as a stateless person, or a person with an undetermined nationality (as the authorities categorised her at the time) a nationality is a thing that Theresa does not have. Second, it asked the applicant to give a reason for which they were requesting to be issued a residence permit; the options were plentiful – work, education, family – yet none applied to Theresa: standing at the brink of earning her degree, her university years and student job thus ending soon, Theresa did not fit the categories of education or work. She simply had always been in Germany, yet “born and brought up here” was not a category that the form foresaw. She quickly realised that she would not make any headway like this and that there was no easy fix. On a weekly basis she was asked to return to the Foreigner’s Office to give more information about her situation, but looking back at this time she has barely any recollection of the goings on. “I don’t know whether that is because the individual appointments were so terrible, or whether the process as a whole was just so horrific. The clerk that worked my case was really nice and supportive, but still my mind has suppressed these memories.” She does wonder if and when the recollections might return to her. Yet for now when she goes back in her mind to the grey rooms of the Foreigners’ Office it just goes blank.

She started the process in August, knowing that in December she wanted to go on a trip to Amsterdam with her friends and assuming that the situation could be sorted by then. Yet December came around and still, she had no idea what her status was going to be. Eventually, in response to her pleading, the authorities issued her a one-time, return travel document, a simple sheet of paper with a couple of lines written on it, so she could join her friends in the Netherlands. The New Year arrived and finally, in March, she was asked to come by the Foreigner's Office one last time. When she got there the clerk she had worked with was nowhere to be seen and so another clerk simply handed her a document: "Congratulations", he said. When Theresa looked onto the document, she realised that it was not, in fact, another residence permit, but that she had been granted leave to remain – and that her categorisation had changed from XXX to XXA – from an undetermined nationality to a recognised statelessness.

The outcome, though positive, completely blindsided her: she was expecting for her application to be rejected. Whilst she knows now that legally it was only right for her to be granted leave to remain, as she had lived in the country on temporary residence permits for such a long time, the authorities left her in the dark throughout the process. Likewise, when her status was changed and she was issued the new document nobody bothered to explain to her what these changes implied, her attempts of inquiry being re-directed to website articles, void of practical information. As long as she can think it has been like this: she and her family have been issued documents, assigned statuses, classified and re-classified without explanation or any indication of the consequences, and so she has learned to expect nothing much from the authorities. Before she received her new title, part of her even expected to be deported. When I ask her where to the authorities would at all deport her, she says she does not know and that it did not matter. She remembers that when she was little, her parents were sent to various West African embassies, in the hopes that one would just issue them a return travel document. None did, and so they remained in Germany, yet the authorities did what they could, so feels Theresa, to make their life as hard as possible. "That's their strategy: to wear you down, so that

eventually you give up and leave by yourself. As if I'd wait until I'd actually get deported?! If it ever came to that I would definitely try to find a way to leave on my own terms."

There were moments when she was close to that breaking point: at the same time that she was granted leave to remain, her parents and siblings' applications, made at a different branch of the Foreigners' Office more local to where they lived, were rejected; even though they all had been in the country as long as Theresa, her sisters both having been born in the suburb that now denied their application to stay in their place of birth. "It was a real shock", Theresa remembers, and it sent her to a dark place. Worrying constantly about what they could do and where they would go should her family's situation not be changeable, she reached a stage where it was almost impossible to get up in the mornings. At some point she thought: "What has this whole situation done to me?" Then something changed inside her: "I realised that I had to stop seeing my life-worth in relation to me or my family gaining a particular type of status in the state's eye because then, whenever they would refuse to give me that status, my life would stop making sense. And I could not have that." That was the moment when she decided that Germany could not be the "emotional centre point of her life" anymore, as the toll that the gradual pursuit of German nationality took on her mental health was far higher than what she felt she ever stood to gain. The ramifications of that resonate still: today she is potentially eligible to apply to become naturalised, yet she does not feel like it would be healthy for her to go there at the current time. "I have a life, and that life was not given to me by the state of Germany."

Did she ever consider leaving Germany, seeing what the state has put her through? "Yes, but no, because that is simply not possible with my status." She remembers googling "how to build up an identity somewhere else", learning that it just could not be done because she had no identity on which she could build in the first place. "It is so absurd: I just cannot ever go somewhere else with this status, because elsewhere my documents would be worth and would be understood even less than they are in Germany". And so Theresa finds herself at a

Chapter 4

Kafkaesque impasse: if she wants to free herself from the German state's oppressive hold on her fate, she has to become naturalised as German.

If Theresa had to pinpoint a root cause of the faults that she sees in the system it would be "categorical thinking", as she calls it; i.e. the inclination of the nationalised order and the people that enact it to sort individuals according to pre-defined categories (citizen-alien, national-foreigner), which, in Theresa's eyes, often do more harm than they do good. In contrast to most analysts, many of whom would argue that bureaucracy *is* the systemic enactment of this "categorical thinking", i.e. the production and enforcement of political taxonomies, Theresa does not consider bureaucratic forms, such as identification documents, as inherently of this categorical spirit. She takes a more instrumentalist stance and still desires a documentary identification of her own; a desire, which she has elsewhere described in the following manner: "Those of us [stateless people] who are lucky, have a travel document, and I am one of them. While I don't feel any specific pride about my travel document, [...] it symbolises a long journey of struggle before I was able to obtain it and [...] it is probably the closest I have ever gotten to a sense of freedom". These are powerful attributions. When I ask her about this quote, she dials it back a little. Freedom, she says, really should be replaced with security: her document does not mean the absence of threat or limitation, but allows her to move a little farther away from the abyss. This is a darker rendering, yet the fact remains: Theresa feels people like her must work with the system to change their situation and that documents are part and parcel of this effort.

Thomas

Thomas has held two different nationalities throughout his life, both German. He was born in the 1950s, a few years before the Berlin wall was built and grew up in the Dresden area of East Germany, then the German Democratic Republic (GDR). With both his parents being party members and his father holding a high-ranking position in the finance ministry, he describes his upbringing as "very close to the communist ideals" in which he firmly believed. Throughout his

GDR youth, Thomas and his family travelled frequently: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Poland – wherever they could go, they would. Consequently, Thomas does not feel like it was his documents as a GDR citizen that held him back from seeing the world; rather, he says, his inability to travel beyond soviet confines symbolised by his then papers, materialised the political limitations that were placed on him through the GDR ideology, which he had fully internalised. Put differently: he did not feel like he could not travel on his documents, because he would not have wanted to venture outside soviet territory anyways.

As a young man Thomas decides to become a high-school teacher, yet his mediocre grades and status as a child of the intelligentsia (rather than working class), prohibit him from getting admitted to the required training program. Consequently, he recalibrates his plans and eventually becomes an elementary school teacher. Married to a fellow teacher, with whom he has two small children, Thomas consciously tries his best to live a “politically acceptable” life as he calls it. A few years into their marriage, the couple leverage their good standing to make a big change: they become teachers at the GDR’s embassy school in Rome for diplomats’ children. When they arrive in Rome, relatively free to roam the city and region, Thomas’ vision of the West is turned upside-down: he describes a scene where he and his family visit a public park in the city and venture upon a large playground. As his children start playing, he is confused that nobody is charging them to do so as he expected there to be a fence and a cashier ensuring nobody would play for free. Though he does struggle with the “Western consumerism” he finds in Rome, he forges forbidden friendships with Italian communists. Their conversations further alter his perception of the GDR regime.

After his Rome years Thomas moves to Leipzig in 1989 where he studies to become a high-school *Staatskunde* (state sciences) teacher: “I wanted to tell the pupils what it really was like over there – be honest, be transparent.” He starts attending the seminal Monday Demonstrations, campaigning not for German reunification, but for reforming the GDR state and its socialist ideals, which he still thought could and should be salvaged (though that would change in the months to come). Then finally, on 9th November 1989, after months of protests

and a mass-exodus of GDR citizens fleeing to West Germany, the Berlin Wall fell. On his first trip to West Germany, a place he had never visited before, the first item he buys is a road map of Europe. "We did not have anything like that. On our maps, the roads just ended at the borders to the West". He used the map to go many places, as just like that he was not limited anymore: he could travel, so it felt, to wherever he wanted, and did so as much as he could. "We were *reisehungrig*" he says: hungry for travel. This hunger has continued until today: with his friends from back home he goes on annual trips to far-away places, a tradition that he feels has emerged because neither of them takes their *Reisefreiheit*, their freedom to travel, for granted. Travel, Thomas feels, is the best cure for prejudice: had it not been for his time in Rome, he would not have been able to unlearn his indoctrination.

When in 1990 the GDR falls and gets absorbed into the Federal Republic of Germany, Thomas changes his studies from *Staatskunde*, a subject retired after reunification, to computer science. An internship with Microsoft brings him to the German south, where eventually Act II of his life, as he puts it, will begin. After a successful business career he is now retired, and when I ask him about the documents he still has from Act I he says there are few: Thomas has no recollection of what happened with his old GDR ID and passport – he assumes he had to turn them in in exchange for new federal German documents. Thus, when we first sit down to have our conversation, what lies on the table in front of us, prepared by Thomas are two other documents that he finds to be identificational and that testify to his previous life: his *Stasi-Akte* (the record held by the GDR state security services on his person, produced explicitly ahead of his posting to Rome to verify his ideological and personal suitability to the position) as well as his *Wehrdienstausweis* (his military service ID). Thomas goes through the pages of his Stasi record, which he only received years after reunification, gleefully pointing out the odd language in which it is written. A couple of lines in the document are highlighted: "Signs of a particular craving for recognition or of loquacity cannot be found". He says he marked them up to show to friends as a cheeky way of proving to them that he was not as chatty as they made him out to be.

When the conversation turns to his military service ID his jovial demeanour fades. "Wehrdienst ist nie eine schöne Zeit" he says – "military service is never a nice time". He pushes the document across the table away from him and towards me, inviting me to take a look. As I flip through the pages, which comprise information ranging from his personal details, emergency contacts, and equipment he received, to a tank operator license, he stares at his hands, saying: "It does trigger certain memories". Memories he clearly does not wish to re-live, but the document is making that hard: it seems to pull Thomas in towards the past. "What's scariest", he tells me, "is how they get you to become excited about war through technology, through the abstract". When I ask him to explain, he tells me that in his one and a half years with the military he spent most of his time as a tank operator, first learning himself and then teaching other recruits how to operate the heavy vehicles. He was amazed by the intricate workings of these machines in a way that made the havoc they could wreak on human life recede into the background. When I get to the final page of his service ID, there is a plastic pocket holding the dog tag that all soldiers carried in case their physical remains in the event of their death in battle would not suffice in identifying them. He looks at it: "It was a very tense time".

When I eventually ask Thomas what identity means to him, he thinks about it for a little while, and then explains that identity, in his mind, definitely is a function of *Herkunft*, of "geographic and social origin". He identifies first and foremost as Sachse (the name of the area of his upbringing) and pulls up a picture of a meme recently sent to him by a friend. The meme reads: "I did not choose to be an Ossi...I was simply lucky", Ossi being an initially derogatory nickname given by West Germans to their (ex-)GDR counterparts that has since been re-appropriated. Thomas says the statement resonates with him and that he embraces his Ossi past. On another level he also identifies as European and would love to be given an EU passport. Does he feel German? Not so much, he says. Throughout these different scales of affiliation and identification, his documents play no important role in his eyes.

Thomas' perspective on his ID and passport today are highly utilitarian: he has them, because he needs them, but they do not speak to him in any substantial way. When he got wind of the

fact that the German government was working on a digital identification format he briefly got excited and downloaded the required app: learning soon that there was nowhere to use it really (the roll-out of the German online ID format has been notoriously slow), his enthusiasm soon fizzled. He is unhappy with that, feeling that a more digital, data-based approach to identification was required. I ask him why the experiences of living under an authoritarian regime did not make him more sceptical towards the state having easy access to a mega database of citizen identities? After all, such centralised database is banned by the German constitution precisely because of the two autocratic regimes Germany spawned within the span of a couple of decades. Yes, he says, there are dangers, but in the Germany of today he feels secure enough to give the government more leeway.

Francesca

Francesca was twelve days old when her parents brought her from Italy, the place of her birth, to Germany. Today she is twenty and has lived in Germany her entire life, yet has remained an Italian national. When I meet with her she is in the middle of planning a big trip to Hawaii, about which she is very excited. As a hairdresser on a modest income it was not easy for her to save up for the expensive flight, but she managed, and now cannot wait for her dream holiday. Only there is one issue: she is not sure whether she will have a valid passport by the time that she is supposed to leave for Hawaii. Having read on the website of the Italian consulate that the issuance of a new passport can take up to six months, she tried registering for an appointment in March, knowing that her current document would expire in October (the trip to Hawaii being planned for late November). Yet to no avail: countless calls and emails to the consulate remained unanswered, so that eventually she decides to call Rome to find out whether she could simply get a passport issued there directly. Again she remains unsuccessful, being told by the official on the other end of the line that since she was not resident in Italy they could not do anything and she should thus keep trying the consulate.

And so she does: she goes to the consulate personally to get to the bottom of why her calls and emails are being ignored, yet the security personnel will not let her in. No appointment, no entrance. "I was fuming with rage", exclaims Francesca as she tells me about her ordeal, which at this point had consumed her entire family: her mother and father both equally tried to get access to the consulate but failed. "I felt completely forgotten", Francesca explains, and her despair grew, as she simply did not know what else to do. Finally, her mother contacts a family friend who she knew had good contacts in the consulate, and just like that Francesca gets an appointment the next week. When she eventually arrives at the consulate to put in her application things are utterly chaotic: "I swear to you, the only thing that works in that bloody place is the treasury: in a tidy, separate room sits the cashier and things run smoothly, so you can pay your 116€ for a passport. But I would like to know, what is it exactly that I am paying for? Not for the service and definitely not for short waiting periods". Francesca is still palpably furious when she tells me about her experiences, which at the point of our conversation were already a few weeks in the past. Yet she still has not received her new passport and is haunted by "an intense fear that they'll somehow still mess it all up. The whole process shows the country exactly as it is: chaotic and without system. I honestly think they just can't do any better", she sighs.

Even though her passport has caused her so much worry these last few weeks, she says that she has "no emotional connection" to the document and that it plays little of a role in her life outside of the area of travel. For day-to-day identificational matters, like proving that she is off age when going to a night-club, Francesca always uses her driver's license. Whilst she also has an Italian ID card, she never uses it and finds it looks "forged and cheap" to a point where she simply does not trust it. However, back when she was still underage, she did use her Italian ID quite a bit: with the help of her older sister she had manipulated the document to identify her as eighteen. When Francesca tells me about this she lowers her voice to a whisper. At some point she felt so guilty about her fraud that she tore up the document and flushed it down the toilet, telling her parents she had simply lost it somewhere. Though she did not know so then, the flushed down ID would cause her some problems in the future: when she recently used her

ID to enter back into Germany after trip (her passport unavailable as she had to hand it in at the consulate when applying for a new one), the officer carrying out her document check questioned her about the lost ID and “spent ages examining my document, turning it around, checking this, checking that. I felt super uncomfortable. I thought he thought it was forged. And then he also asked me repeatedly where I lived and from where I had arrived”. The demeanour of the officer, Francesca said, bugged her: “Somehow he was really condescending... not sure whether they have to behave like this. But he was very dramatic”.

I ask her whether these turbulences ever made her think about applying for German citizenship? Yes, she says, she has thought about becoming naturalised, but not because of the bureaucratic chaos of the Italian consulate or problems at the border, but because the Italian passport feels like “too little” to her: she identifies as German just as much as she does Italian and if she had both nationalities “it would feel complete”. Her Italian passport symbolises her roots and ties her to her family, all of whom are Italian nationals. Yet she is, she says, “half German” and hence does not feel like her Italian document fully represents her. If she could choose, she says, she would love to have both her national identities integrated in one document: an Italo-German passport. “That would be *it*”, says Francesca.

Özgür

Özgür – or Özi, as his friends call him – was twenty-seven when he decided to become naturalised, the first member of his family to take on German citizenship. He was born in Germany to Turkish parents and throughout his youth never felt the need to change his citizenship from Turkish to German. Yet the older he grew, the more he noticed the differences a German passport could make when it came to travel: “When you apply for a visa for some random trip for the umpteenth time and realise how much time and money you are spending, and you have this other option, it makes you think”, he says. “And it is not only the visa”, Özi explains, “you just keep paying”. When I ask him to clarify what he means, he tells me about the long drives from Germany to Turkey that his family would go on every year during the

summer vacation. As they would cross all the borders along the way, handing over their documents to border guards at many different checkpoints, they would often be asked to “hand over the passport twice”, as Özi says. The first time for identification, the second time for payment of an appropriate bribe, so was the expectation. When he then started travelling along the same route on his German passport that never happened again. He now only passes his document over once. “The advantage of the German passport is that you simply just make it through. You just make it through, no questions asked.”

Talking about what it felt like becoming naturalised, he says that there was not much to it, though he did feel a little weird swearing an oath on the German constitution. What he does, however, remember acutely is the other side of the coin of naturalisation: renouncing one’s previous citizenship. German law does not easily allow dual citizenship for German-Turkish people – a big point of political contention in the country, which has a large Turkish-German population; and so Özi had to give up his Turkish citizenship before he was able to become German. To do so he went to the Turkish consulate in his hometown, bringing a friend. As he went through Özi’s paperwork the clerk at the consulate asked: “Why are you doing this, my son? Do you not like our passport?”. “The fact that he said son, that really hit me, that was bad”, remembers Özi. When he tried to explain to the clerk that there were “certain advantages” to taking on German citizenship, as Özi put it, the clerk responded: “But there are also disadvantages”. The comments got to him and so his friend, who was with him at the consulate had to reassure him: “It’s fine to do this, just go ahead.” But once it was all done and he got his new documents, he never regretted it.

Sometimes, even though his naturalisation happened years ago, acquaintances or a distant relative will still give Özi a hard time for taking the step: “You are a Turk, how could you do this?” they will say. Özi claims he never really minded those comments, as they never came from anybody close to him. Moreover, for him, personally, the bureaucratic dimension of belonging holds little importance: he might feel “a little more German” since he got his documents, yet regardless of the papers he carries, Özi feels neither fully Turkish nor fully

German. In fact, this category of national belonging does not really matter much to him at all. "A human being is a human being." What's more, growing up his circle of friends was filled with many people who, like him, were "between" nationalities, as Özi would say. "We all knew that we were foreigners anyways in either country, no matter our documents. When I am here, I am the Turk. When I am there, I am the German, because I don't speak Turkish like somebody who grew up there. You have no chance." Papers do not matter much in that context. Yet he does remember that back when he was a teenager queuing to get into nightclubs and he still had his Turkish passport, "the odds were always 50-50 of making it in". There were instances where he would be with a group of friends, all German citizens, and he would be the only one not being allowed in by the bouncer. He was not drunk, he did not make a fuss, he was not dressed differently than his friends, yet he did have another document and he might have looked differently, and that was enough for him to be rejected. Whilst Özi emphasises that he does not like to ruminate about the past he says that "these things stick with you in the back of your mind"; and so as soon as he had his driver's license he would bring that to a night out instead of his passport. "Easier that way", he says matter-of-factly.

Nonetheless, Özi wants me to know that experiences like these did not cause him to apply for German citizenship. He reiterates many times that travel was the key factor: Özi simply wanted a German travel document; he did not seek to become nominally German, to be able to vote, or to fit in more. To him all this is not a matter of identity, but of convenience. To Özi documents are "services" as he says, and he appreciates good service. He therefore also thinks that it is absolutely fine for the government to have citizens pay for documents, even when they are mandated by the law and citizens have no choice but purchase one. "There are production costs, costs of developing technologies, that's not cheap probably. I also run a business, I get it." Moreover, Özi feels that he does get something in return: a *weighty* document.

Throughout our conversation Özi draws on the notion of *Gewicht* (weight) to characterise German documents. Weight is gravitas, is effectiveness, is convenience. He feels that German papers have more of all three than do Turkish papers. But weight, I will learn, is also something

that has to be carefully calibrated, for it is a zerosum game in Özi's eyes: some documents can only be weighty, because others are light, if you will. This is also why he does not like the idea of an EU passport: from a purely personal perspective he thinks it would be great to have such a document because he suspects that its reach and gravitas – its weight – would be even greater than the German passport's; yet on a political scale he believes that such document would *hold too much* weight: it would dwarf almost any other document on the planet, and that, Özi feels, is not a good idea.

Searching for fractional coherence: the rhythm of self-sovereignty

The above five stories do many things: they characterise documents as relevant and irrelevant, as enablers of mobilities as well as bureaucratic anchors allowing one to always return home; as emancipatory devices that drive the synchronisation of the "heartfelt" self with the "handheld" documentary persona (Bakewell 2007) and as expressions of a permanently withheld sense of recognition. Individually these stories thus invoke many aspects that are already commonplace in anthropological thinking about the subject of documentary identification (see e.g. Das and Poole 2004, Jansen 2009, Jeganathan 2004, Peirano 2002, Reeves 2014). Collectively, they also point to the fact that identification documents could not be any less successful as standardisation devices, for they seem to engender vastly different registers of experience. So if documents mean so many different things to those that hold them, is there still something here that we can learn about the passport paradigm as an overarching formation, and – if so – what is it? The below is an attempt to engage, across the decentred narratives of the above, certain fractional coherences of being documented. For if Law's narrative magic trick of "growing different stories alongside each other" has succeeded, we should now be in a position to make out "the intersections, that hold together" (Law 2002:5) the larger phenomenon of life in the passport paradigm.

Documentary disappearances and dys-appearances

I shall begin with a hidden intersection of the above stories, one that lies outside of the narratives presented: the fact that almost all the people whom I approached to talk about their documents found the entire premise rather odd. Documents were simply nothing they had ever considered in depth, even where these had a strong or negative impact on their lives. “Good question – I have never thought about that before” must have been the most common answer given to document-related questions posed across the many interviews I conducted (both, for the stories portrayed above as well as the many ones that have not made their way into this chapter). Whilst my collaborators seemed to readily recognise that their identification documents did important things, the majority of individuals did not seem to *care*, at the outset of our conversations, about their documentary identifiers in a more engaged or emotive way. This set them apart distinctly from the groups considered in previous chapters who all, in principle, shared my interest in the documentary form: in an unexpected inversion it seemed like the documented were far closer in their mode of relating to their documents to a certain bureaucratic rationality of detachment than were the documentary creators and border officers – more archetypically bureaucratic agents in the Weberian sense – portrayed in previous chapters.

The ethnographic record indicates that this apparent disengagement with one’s documentary form is not a given: “Tibetan refugees, Turkish Cypriots, Brazilian slum residents, and indigenous subjects in the Argentinian Chaco region experience hauntings, crippling anxieties, fears, and misapprehensions when they encounter specific genres of ID documents and the citizenship claims that such papers hold and withhold” (2018:xxix) summarises Sriaraman the scholarship on the immensely agitating potentials of documentary identification (drawing on such works as Gordillo 2006, Koster 2013, McConnell 2013, Navaro-Yashin 2007). Elements of this also show in the above stories: Francesca perceives fury at her inability to make the authorities cooperate in her quest to renew her passport, Theresa is haunted by anxiety due to the utter uncertainty pervading her (documentary) status, Thomas feels deep gratitude for the

freedom his German passport grants him, and Marie feels whole in the light of her documents. Yet each of them also explicitly marks out these perceptions as situational and thus not adequately representative of their understanding of their identity papers more largely.

In part this matter-of-factness of my collaborators' conceptualisation of their documents is surely rooted in the relative degree of privilege (national, racial, socio-economic) many of the above people hold: as Marie, a white, German woman, describes in the opening story, the effects of her identification documents do not appear palpable to her in her day-to-day life at all as her claims to identity and citizenship are rarely questioned, whilst Theresa as a stateless, black woman is routinely and forcibly addressed by her documentary status. Yet even Theresa did not seem to actively conceive of her documents as a causal force of her predicament, at least in the early stages of our conversations; rather she would perceive as determinants the law, a nationalist ideology, or bureaucratic conduct more generally. Equally, Özi, who has experienced first-hand the differences specifically nationalised and nationalising documents (German and Turkish) can make in everyday life, is still adamant in recognising their relevance as being on the whole limited to the realm of travel. If previous chapters show the hopes and expectations placed in documents, then the above stories seem to do the opposite: they portray, on the surface, a collective reluctance among the documented to attest any real impact to these forms.

This, I believe, speaks to an explicitly deflective quality of documentary identifiers, which seem to point beyond themselves to that which they perform – status, rights and privileges, exclusions and inclusions, (im-)mobilities, gaining a fundamentally semiotic quality. Consequently, the above stories demarcate the documentary role mostly through the imprint they have on my collaborators' lives, i.e. the experiential consequences which the documents they (do) not hold effect or foreclose: e.g. a dream vacation that might be missed, the guarantee to always be able to return home, worrying less about the future and deportation, not needing to apply for a visa, not being restricted in roaming the world.

Travel, return to home, potential futures – these are of course realms that foreshadow deeper concerns. Yet even though these passport stories do unearth individual engagements with the documentary form that hint at fascinating dimensions, far removed from a mere functionalist framing, the general absence of documents from my collaborators' day-to-day understanding of their place in the world is noteworthy. If documents, as other ethnographic work shows (e.g. Das and Poole 2004, Poole 2004, Kelly 2006, Reeves 2013, Sriraman 2018) play a crucial role in how people experience the state, then how do we make sense of this cognitive dissonance?

In his work on the "absent body" Drew Leder (1990) thematises the conundrum of "why the body, as a ground of experience [...] tends to recede from direct experience" (Leder 1990:1). A particular type of absence that Leder is interested in is disappearance, i.e. the being away of the body from active awareness: when I reach for a cup of tea I do not consciously think about the motor movement required for my fingers to grasp the cup's handle, or about the angle at which I have to raise the cup to be able to take a sip. Yet if the tea is so hot that I burn my tongue, my body suddenly "dys-appears" as Leder describes: in the mode of error it moves to the forefront of my perceptual alertness, instead of residing in the background. It appears in dysfunctionality. Of course documents are not the ground of experience in the existential sense that the body is, yet they are arguably the ground of statist experience in Germany. In this sense it may thus be fair to say that in the above stories my collaborators are then most aware of their documents, when they do not manage to exert their promised functionality and the deflective dynamic is interrupted. It is these documentary dys-appearances – experienced or hypothetical – which would often provide a means for my collaborators to access or develop a mode of thinking consciously about their documentary forms.

Documentary dys-appearances are highly dreaded by my collaborators and those of them who are frequently presented with these types of momentary activations develop strategies to prevent them: both Francesca and Özi (when he did not hold German citizenship yet) report using their driver's licenses as a way of satisfying day-to-day identificatory requirements. Francesca utilises her driver's license to avoid drawing on her Italian ID, which she inherently

mistrusts (why she does so is a fascinating question, yet one that cannot be answered here). Özi, on the other hand, found in the driver's license a vehicle for conveying certain identificatory information – e.g. his age – in a manner that would shield him from or at least reduce the frictions of xenophobia and anti-Turkish discrimination that his Turkish passport would elicit during certain interactions. Yet no matter how skilful one becomes in countering dys-appearance, there are limits to its evasion: though Theresa has become incredibly knowledgeable on the bureaucratic process and migration apparatus in Germany, her documentary dys-appearances materialise routinely: at the border, during encounters with the German authorities, or when she needs to collect a parcel from the post office and her form of ID is rejected. The frequency of activation, the exact rhythm of disappearance and dys-appearance, is thus very clearly marked by such social distinctions as one's nationality, one's race, or one's migratory status.

The dynamics of disappearance and dys-appearance described above hint at the inherent rhythmicity of documented lives, in which identification papers become salient or present to experience only in particular configurations such as travel, re-application for a document, confrontation with the authorities, or other identification checks. The anthropologist Mariza Peirano (2002:12), in her work on identification documents and national values, offers an indication of how this rhythmicity plays out on a macro-scale: comparing and contrasting different types of identification documents in Brazil, she eventually discusses voter registration cards, which tie individuals to the electorate of a certain region. Whilst citizens are supposed to change their registration when they move, many do not as they forget or wish to remain affiliated with their home region, resulting in what Peirano describes as a "truly civic pilgrimage" (2002:12) during election time, when people travel back to their hometowns and -villages to vote. Here we can find a rhythmic activation, a (dys-)appearance that is so pronounced and collective, that it is in effect a mobilisation. Yet the question then becomes: what comes from these rhythms?

Positioning, belonging, and self-sovereignty

As previously stated, identification documents are often attributed a fundamental role in how individuals relate to the state: e.g. Koster (2013) shows how residents of a slum in Brazil obtain documents, longing for a way of relating to such state representatives as the police, whilst also being perpetually subjected to the violence of these same representatives during police controls. “The relationship of these residents with their identity cards is thus both fearful and affectionate, which allows us to understand their citizenship as a confluence of fear and intimacy” (Koster 2013:215). Along similar lines Vena Das and Deborah Poole (2004:15) refer to state-issued documents as supposed “guarantees of belongingness” yet also remind us that these guarantees often do not hold up, thus undermining the “identities and assurances” they supposedly create. Documents (identificatory as well as otherwise) thus “bear the double sign of the state's distance and its penetration into the life of the everyday” (Das and Poole 2004:15). The common denominator among many such accounts is thus ambivalence (see also Reddy 2018, Reeves 2013). Yet what happens exactly when documents do work, i.e. when they do guarantee belongingness to speak with Das and Poole? And what does this guarantee of belongingness imply?

When we look towards the above stories a common denominator appears to be my participants’ desire for their documents to simply work well, i.e. do the various things that they promise to do: identify, enable travel, allow access to certain services. This seems a simple enough demand, yet as these stories also show, it is not always fulfilled. In the friction between my collaborators’ bureaucratic desires and their enactment we find the very ambivalence described by the scholars cited above. However, when we look towards those moments in which the demands they hold are fulfilled, we see a different thing; an odd moment of alignment of bearers and their papers: “it just gets you through”, says Özi of his German passport, his words tracing an understanding of the document as a vehicle for the realisation of his ideal vision of what travel should be. Now what stands behind this moment of alignment? I

suggest that we must conceive of it as a type of identificatory connectedness in one's self-sovereign endeavours to the state's sovereignty. Let me explain:

The notion of belongingness, invoked yet not detailed by Das and Poole, has recently been developed further by Rebecca Bryant. Studying the role of Cyprus Turkish Airlines, the former national airline of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), in the everyday construction and perception of sovereignty in the TRNC, Bryant suggests that "national airlines are an important site for materializing the state as something that belongs to us" (2021:23). This type of belongingness, Bryant argues, is akin to a sort of "sovereignty effect", through "which an abstract externality—'the state'— may come to appear as a vehicle for our agency" (2021:23). This, she shows, endows such entities as national airlines with a totemic quality "producing belief in the state—or calling it into question" (Bryant 2021:23), rendering aeroplanes "complexes of meaning that not only link places but also link state, sovereignty, and peoples" (Bryant 2021:22). Whilst Bryant's account is focused on the role and construction of sovereignty in everyday aeropolitics I believe that her understanding of belongingness as a type of "sovereignty effect", engendered through mundane materialisations of the state, holds an important clue for our understanding of how my participants relate through their documents to the state.

For Bryant the power of the airline lies in its "combination of separateness and connectivity" (2021:26). As "mobile containers of the homeland" (2001:26) national airlines connect a state and nation to the outside world, yet also perform and mark out that nation's separateness or own-ness from that world. It is easy to see how passports mirror this dialectic: they mark out the state, making it portable, whilst connecting it to the global community of nation states as the document is primarily utilised by individuals to roam beyond their states' sovereign confines. This dynamic is essential and, in fact, the topic of the next chapter. Yet, here, I wish to attend to another dimension of the separateness-connectivity dialectic; its incarnation on the level of the individual: identification documents perform, both, an individual's insertion in the community of national citizens (connectivity), as well as their separateness as an individually identified,

autonomous citizen-subject. It is, I argue, when the qualities of this individual separateness and connectivity become aligned that the sovereignty effect emerges: if documents work well, they endow the individual with the ability to enact themselves by drawing on the sovereign potential held by the state. Belongingness through documents is thus not a sense of feeling at home with one's documentary incarnations nor the state that issues them, but of vesting a sense of agency through the documentary form: this is what Theresa refers to, albeit hesitantly, when she describes the effect of her newly gained travel document as being somewhat freeing and granting her a modicum of security: it increases her level of self-sovereignty, expressed in her ability to travel and leave behind German confines more independently, despite the fraught relationship between her and the German state.

In a sense we find here the flipside of dys-appearance, i.e. the surfacing of the documentary form as an affirmative force, which equally allows my collaborators to perceive their documents more actively. When Özi tells me how his German passport is shielding him from requests for a bribe, which in the past were a constant on his drives to Turkey, then he experiences exactly that: his passport, to put it crudely, is showing up for Özi. It "just gets [him] through" as he now channels the sovereignty of the state into his own pursuits. This is, I argue, what he expresses as the particular *weight* of German documents. Another such appearance or moment of self-sovereignty can be found in the sense of completeness that Marie describes to have felt when she received documents in her new name after she got married: the material alignment of a reality she had created for herself with the public perception of her person gave her a sense of orderliness that felt right. In both cases "the indeterminacies of the documents that they hold" (Kelly 2006:90) align, momentarily, with my collaborators' pursuits of self-realisation. The distributedness of their documentary existence, to return to the theoretical prism after Gell (1998) laid out in the introduction to this chapter, resurfaces here, yet the agency that runs through its branches is not one originating solely in the individual, but emerges from their momentary synchronisation with the sovereignty of the state.

Yet how about the collective? Does this connective, agentive charge of the belongingness engendered by the documentary form create a lasting relationality between my participants and the state(s) that they inhabit? I.e. does the totemic quality that Bryant describes spill over, in the case of these people and their papers from “I” to “us”? The answer is no: documents, the above passport stories would indicate, cannot easily create bonds that are not already heartfelt. Thomas and Theresa who both, in very different ways and for very different reasons, have been forced into their relationship with the German state and the documents they (do not) hold, have not forged an identification (in the active sense of identifying with a thing) with the German state through these documents. Their situational documentary belongingness falls short of a heartfelt connectivity. Equally Özi, despite his documentary insertions into two states, does not feel full belongingness towards either: neither Germany nor Turkey is fully “his”. Francesca, on the other hand, feels a strong attachment towards the German state and collectivity even though she does not hold German citizenship; and whilst Marie explains that her passport “gives her a sense of belonging – I fulfil what is required to belong to a community”, it appears that this sense of belonging exceeds and precedes her documents. Ambivalence remains.

Conclusion

“[A]n anthropology of documented lives requires that one study documents as they are experienced by their subjects” (Navaro-Yashin 2013:89). The above has been an attempt to do just that, yet it has done so, not in action but in reflection: the bulk of existing studies look at identification documents exclusively in the moment of their activation – at the border or at the street-level of statist administration, in the context of migration, registration, and identification – thereby unearthing the acute meanings of the documentary form when it is salient. Yet documents, the above has shown, are often dormant – they disappear from consciousness. The methodological attempt of this chapter to artificially “awake” documents from their perceptual disappearance through conversation and elicit intersections between diverging experiences by letting them run along side each other, has generated the insight that the nature of

documented life is entirely rhythmic: documents disappear, dys-appear, appear and disappear again from the awareness of those who they identify. Thereby each activation, each (dys)appearance can reconfigure the relationship between people and the state(s) with which they engage. Thus, if documents set out to standardise identity, they certainly do not effect a uniformity of experience: people who share a documentary form might still be positioned in vastly different ways within the passport paradigm as race, nationality, and cultural belonging shape the ways how people can enact and are confronted with their documentary identifiers as well as the frequency of (dys-)appearances they endure. If documents thus fail as a grand equaliser on the level of the individual, what type of "sharedness" can we assume them to perform on a more macro level? In the next chapter I will pursue this question further by probing the nature of one particular identification document, the passport, as a global, i.e. supra-nationally shared, uni-form of identification.

Crafting globality – Regulating a supra-national *uni*-form

SUMMARY

The passport, as perhaps the most pervasive of identificatory forms, embodies a curious case of a seemingly global bureaucratic consensus in a world that can otherwise agree on very little: all states appear to issue passports and they resemble one another strongly in their formal configuration and technical workings. This global uniformity is not accidental, but the product of the efforts of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), a UN Specialized Agency tasked with regulating travel documents on behalf of all UN member states. As a consequence of ICAO's work, a passport today must be *ICAO-compliant* to be accepted by other states. In this chapter I zoom in more closely on this reality and the processes of its creation. How is an identificatory form derived that is equipped to serve the entirety of UN member states? And what role does this "global" *uni*-form serve these states? Tracing these questions across the various dimensions of ICAO's regulatory work and the concomitant becoming of the passport as a globally shared and standardised form, I shall argue that the key function of the ICAO passport format in a global community of sovereign states lies in its ability to provide a material-semiotic infrastructure for the inter-statist mediation of sovereignty and (dis-)trust among the global community of nation states.

Standards and Recommended Practices

A remarkable characteristic of passports as a bureaucratic form is their "pervasive familiarity" (Herzfeld 1992:34): while not everybody holds one, most people I dare to claim would

recognise a passport if presented with one. On the one hand this is a function of the artefact's ubiquity: almost all states issue passports. On the other hand their recognisability is an effect of passports' structural uniformity: in the most simple terms a paper booklet, its cover imprinted with golden lettering, on its first page a picture and the identificational data of the holder, then a set of pages dedicated to stamps and visa. These patterns of uniformity and ubiquity, which render the passport a truly "global form" (Collier and Ong 2005:12), are not an accidental occurrence: the format is the result of a conjoint effort among the international community of nation states to devise a primary document for international travel after the First and Second World War, culminating in the emergence of a dedicated United Nations Specialized Agency, the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). Tasked with regulating the form and workings of travel documents on behalf of its now 193 member states (i.e. almost, though not quite, the entire world²⁰) ICAO embodies a supra-national forum from which the passport as a globally recognised and operationalised document of identification and travel emerges.

Yet not only does ICAO shape significantly the documents we use to travel the world, it is itself a place of the world: crossing through the seemingly un-ending corridors of ICAO's headquarters in Montréal, one moves through an ever-changing linguistic geography. Near the desk at which I work on my first few days at the organisation English and Spanish soundscapes will dominate; a few days later I move a couple of rooms down the hall and French is all I hear. The next day Arabic fills the elevator. Few of ICAO's employees are Canadian and everybody has lived in various countries as well as travels constantly across the globe for the many "missions", as they are called, on which ICAO officers are sent to further the project of civil aviation as an international endeavour. Yet despite this global orientation and the buzz of the world congregating within its walls, ICAO, unlike its sibling organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or World Health Organisation (WHO), tends to remain

²⁰ A state's recognition within the UN system of which ICAO is a part, is of course the product of highly normative, formalised, and politically charged considerations and discourses. While a thorough discussion of the mechanisms employed by the UN to determine eligibility is not possible here, the fact that a state's eligibility to ICAO is predetermined by its ties with the UN embodies a first indicator of the necessary limits of ICAO's globality.

outside of the public eye. When I roam the building on my first visits, I think of Richard Harper's introductory remarks in his ethnography of the IMF (1998): he describes how the ethnographer, standing by the window at an elevator landing could "watch the theatre of bureaucratic life" (Harper 1998:1) unfold through the glass-walled atrium at the heart of the fund's monumental headquarters. At ICAO there is no such opportunity for surveying the goings-on of the place. If anything, its spatial configuration appears an inversion of the IMF's: many offices are windowless and meetings take place behind closed, visually impenetrable doors. So what is it that happens behind these doors?

I pose this question to Robert, a senior ICAO officer who joined the organisation years ago coming from the airline industry and spent a significant part of his tenure working on ICAO's *Traveller Identification Program* dedicated to the advancement of regulatory issues surrounding travel documents and border control. When I first meet Robert in the autumn of 2018, he is keen to share his thoughts and experiences, and so we have our first interview shortly thereafter during which he explains to me ICAO's work on documents and border control in the following manner: "It is very simple: when it comes to the question of what is it that we are doing, what is it that we are responsible for, what is it these 192 countries [ICAO's member states] need to do, leaving aside the spin: it's what's in here!" Robert insists, pointing onto a document lying prepared on his desk. The document, titled *Annex 9 to the Chicago Convention – Facilitation*, Robert explained, contained all the "SARPs" (Standards and Recommended Practices) that ICAO has issued on the matter of border control and travel documents, first and foremost the passport. SARPs, Robert explains, are ICAO's central tool for moulding and shaping the regulatory passport prototype. Yet what exactly is a SARP?

A SARP is a snippet of legal language, bound up in amendments to or new editions of existing annexes, and embodies the final output that emerges from ICAO's bureaucratic machinery. Once released into the world, SARPs shape the landscape of border control, as ICAO's member states are legally obliged to abide by them. An Annex 9 SARP, pertaining to passports and border control, could look like this:

Annex 9 to the Chicago Convention, 15th Edition, October 2017, Chapter 3, Section D – ‘Travel Documents’:

3.11 All passports issued by Contracting States shall be machine readable in accordance with the specifications of Doc 9303, Part 4.

Note.—This provision does not intend to preclude the issuance of non-machine readable passports or temporary travel documents of limited validity in cases of emergency.

(Annex 9 2017:3-2)

The SARP outlines a general rule for contracting states – *only issue passports which are machine readable unless it is a case of emergency* – and then specifies where they can turn to learn how exactly they must go about fulfilling the stipulated expectation, in this case “machine readability”, which in short can be defined as the necessity for the document to be legible to and verifiable by a computer through the method of optical character recognition. Notably the standard refers outside of the textual frame in which it is embedded (the Annex 9) to another regulatory text: “Document 9303, Part 4”. Doc 9303 contains all of ICAO’s technical specifications regarding travel documents. These are comprehensive, ranging from matters such as the placing of the passport photograph or security features, and the definition of a universally employed font, script, and transliteration protocol for all textual insertions, to more technologically complex issues, such as quality standards for passport photographs and encryption mechanisms used for the protection of biometric data in electronic passports. Doc 9303 hence explicates the *how to* of the demands made by SARPs; for while SARPs instantiate a specific desirable reality of practice, graphic form, or technology as the new law of the land – or globe – they seldom provide a rationale for a requirement’s supposed desirability, nor do they indicate a pathway to its realisation.

Collectively, passport-related Annex 9 SARPs span four core dimensions: on the level of the object these are (1) specifications pertaining to the identificational information to be entailed by passports; (2) a detailed template for the artefact’s graphical organisation as well as the Logical

Data Structure of information entailed on the chips included in electronic, biometric passports; as well as (3) a set of shared and standardised techno-material strategies for the secure inscription and retrieval of identificational markers in documents, including their electronic parts. Then there is a last class of SARPs, which do not only apply to the techno-material configuration of travel documents, but (4) prescribe protocols for border control more widely, including the handling of travel documents by different groups involved in aviation, their rights and responsibilities, as well as the process of document issuance and verification. As such SARPs evince passports as documents *in action*, artefacts that operate within a wide network of human and non-human actors:

A passport SARP like the standard on machine-readability cited above does not only imply a particular material intervention into the passport artefact, which is reconfigured to be parsable to a machine, but by means of its technical affordances shapes and configures the larger border encounter: it defines, by shaping the documentary token, the modes through which individuals' identity claims are verified at the border and the devices needed to do so (the requirement of machine-readability implies of course the requirement for there to also be machines that do the reading) as well as the training border personnel require to competently engage with documents (new technologies inevitably will trigger new forms of fraud, see chapter 2). However, not all Annex 9 SARPs will have such far-reaching effects as they vary greatly across a spectrum of definitiveness and directness: first of all they can be binding standards (shall/shall not) or non-binding recommended practices (should/should not), where most standards begin their regulatory life as recommended practices; they can be prescriptive, defining a techno-material reality to which to adhere, or prohibitive, i.e. asking states to refrain from a certain practice or technology; further, they can be absolute, in that they manifest one singular way of doing things, as does the standard on machine-readability cited above, or conditional, in that they follow an if-then logic: if you use biometric passports, which you do not have to but can, then you must do it in this particular way. Finally, SARPs might be specific, i.e. describe a narrow technical or procedural demand or formulate a more qualitative expectation. The type

of uniformity these standardisations create, thus exists on a spectrum, as Laksh, another ICAO officer explains:

You could say that ICAO establishes the standards on building a house [read passport]. We say: you have to have four walls, you have to have a roof, you have to have pipes and electric connections. But then whether you want a big mansion as opposed to a small house, or whether you want a garden or a swimming pool, that's up to you. And of course we don't know how to set up technical wiring and how to set up the plumbing and all that. And so therefore we go to another organisation, like the International Organisation for Standardisation, and together we work on helping the owners build their house.

His words encapsulate a guiding principle of ICAO's work in standardisation: the necessity to connect the minute and contextual with the ideology of general principles – detail standards, but leave sufficient room for their interpretation; make clear that there needs to be a house, but leave a choice between a mansion and a condo. “That is the beauty of it”, declared Robert, “and the challenge”.

Today all passports must be “ICAO-compliant”, i.e. compliant with the spectrum of uniformity laid out by the dense network of SARPs and technical specifications comprised in Annex 9 and Doc 9303, in order to fulfil their promise as a currency for travel; for only if they achieve this criterion of compliance are passports to be accepted by the community of ICAO's member states. In this chapter I wish to zoom in more closely on this reality and the challenge, as Robert says, of its creation. How is an identificatory form derived that is equipped to serve the entirety of UN member states? And what role does this *uni*-form serve a global community of nation-states that can otherwise agree on very little? Tracing these questions across the various dimensions of ICAO's regulatory work and the concomitant becoming of the passport as a globally shared and standardised form, I shall argue that the key function of the ICAO passport format in a global community of sovereign states lies in its ability to provide a material-semiotic infrastructure for the inter-statist mediation of sovereignty and (dis-)trust.

Yet before I begin my discussion, I must briefly consider the methodological intricacies and limitations that have conditioned the collection of data presented here: despite their good will and the welcoming nature of all those that I encountered at ICAO, I was often only able to observe bureaucratic life at a distance. Meetings regarding passport regulations at the section were generally concentrated around larger events in ICAO's institutional calendar, which follows a tri-annual cycle of which my visit – unknowingly²¹ – covered a period of relative calm. Moreover, officers at the section tend to spend a significant amount of time on missions to member states to discuss and advance ICAO's regulatory projects, which for many reasons I could not join.²² My primary mode of engagement and gateway into the work and world of the Facilitation Section was thus through dedicated one-on-one meetings with section members, ranging from recurring hours-long conversations about the world of regulation to shorter, more structured, one-off interviews with individuals less free or willing to engage with me. In between those meetings, I would spend a lot of time combing through the section's records, conveniently stored in the small office I occupied: tracking ICAO's activities in the facilitation realm since the late 1940s, the records opened up a window into a regulatory and institutional

²¹ The affordances posed by "the unstable and episodic formation of policy-making bodies" (Tate 2002:89) in the context of regulatory institutions such as ICAO have been noted by many (Mosse 2006, Schia 2016, Zabusky 2002); yet it is worth reiterating, that the intricacies of ICAO's organisational schedule were difficult to predict before entering the field. More importantly, when negotiating a suitable time for my presence at ICAO, my collaborators consciously (and understandably) chose a period of relative calm in order to be able to grant time and attention to my inquiries. This, however, limited my ability to observe first-hand the bureaucratic processes in the lead-up to, during, or post larger-scale meetings and gatherings with policy implications.

²² The globality of ICAO's operation poses additional ethnographic difficulties: there were instances when I was offered to join a panel of particular interest to my research, only to learn that it would require me to suspend later fieldwork activities in another research site and fly across the globe to Wellington, New Zealand (it is part of ICAO's global orientation to hold gatherings of its various advisory bodies across the globe). In another instance I learned only after the fact that a gathering had been held in my home-town of Munich, which I could have easily attended. These occurrences mark out that beyond the institutional road blocks faced in the project of "studying up" (Nader 1972), the ethnographer will also often not have the temporal, informational, or financial resources to keep up with the communities she tracks. It is hence no coincidence that one of the most significant and accomplished ethnographies of an international organisation existing to date, Harper's "Inside the IMF" (1998), was conducted by a researcher working within the corporately financed framework of Xerox's Rank Research Centre (i.e. the European branch of Xerox's PARC labs, dedicated to the study of Human Computer Interaction). Though, of course other successful contributions by anthropologists working in the university environment do exist (e.g. Riles 2000, Douglas 2013).

past, which became the historical canvas onto which I could plot the present dynamics of ICAO as I encountered them in its hallways and offices and through the words of my collaborators.

The difficulties of conducting fieldwork with an organisation like ICAO, from the challenges of creating an ethnographic presence in shielded institutional spaces to matters of power and critique are of course well documented (see e.g. Deeb and Marcus 2011, Harper 1998, Mosse 2006). A focus on documents and bureaucratic practice has hence become a common avenue of anthropological inquiry into the institutions of bureaucracy and policy, having generated a complex body of ethnographic insight (documents and materiality Hull 2012a, Mathur 2015, Pellegrin 2002; aesthetics Riles 2006, Riles 2000; affect Yavaro-Nashin; the state, Ghupta; international organisations Harper 1998, Lamp 2017, Strathern 2000). I understand the below to aspire towards such accounts, yet as a consequence of the predominance of interviews in my methodological approach, the findings presented come often in the shape of discourse, i.e. bureaucratic conduct and ideology mediated through verbal exegesis, documents, or reports, rather than the ethnographic description of processes of bureaucratic production observed first hand. While this limits the immediacy of my insights, a discursive-documentary engagement also mirrors the dominant *modi operandi* of ICAO's regulatory process: regulation is always also a matter of the verbalisation, textualisation, and reification of bureaucratic and expert knowledges in documentary artefacts. As such my mode of inquiry and the findings it generated align closely with the reality of practice of those I study (see also Riles 2000).

The history of the ICAO passport: trajectories of facilitation

To understand the regulatory becoming of the passport at ICAO we must first comprehend the organisation's historical and institutional background²³: ICAO is a post-WWII institution, founded on the firm belief in a necessity to develop joint procedures for the expected boom in

²³ For an in-depth history of ICAO see Mackenzie 2010 and Weber 2017.

civil air travel that shaped the attitudes of its 52 inaugural members in the late 1940s. The war had brought about many innovations in aviation and the thought of a more mobile future, catalysed by civil air travel, was seen as technologically obvious and economically promising. Viewed against the background of the global warscape, ICAO's founding document, the *Convention on International Civil Aviation* (commonly referred to as Chicago Convention (CC)), signed in 1944, its signees including countries then still under German occupation, encapsulates an almost astonishingly utopian vision of a connected world, wherein peace is furthered through global air travel. To fulfil this promise, it was decided that clear mobility arrangements were required, i.e. a legal, technical, and material infrastructure that could enable aviation across and between member-states, thereby necessitating a cooperative approach. Among many things this implied a continuation of the regulatory activities on travel documents, which the League of Nations' Passport Conferences of the 1920s had begun (see Kalm 2017), thus furthering the implementation of the political shift that had commenced between the wars: a reconfiguration of the passport-free internationalism of the 19th and early 20th century, into the post-war era of border control (Salter 2003, Torpey 2000, Kalm 2017).

The shared passport form embodied a means for states to mediate this newly established phenomenon of permanent border identity checks. Yet, when ICAO first took up its regulatory activities, the question of a unified form of identification seemed to already have been addressed by a recommended template issued by the League of Nations in the 1920s. ICAO consequently focused its activities between the late 1940s and early 1960s on ubiquitousising this template as the primary identification document to be used in air travel. Simultaneously, it mandated states to not ask for a host of different forms of identification at their borders and summoned them to streamline their processes of passport issuance, in order to improve citizens' access to passports. Interventions into the passport template itself remained sparse, though highly normative, during those early years: they included a standardised format for the inscription of names, which to this day can make things tremendously difficult for those whose name does not follow the "given name-surname" pattern or the roman alphabet, and instantiated a "one person-one passport"-logic, doing away with practices of having entire

families inscribed into one document. Fuelled by the mandate given to ICAO under the Chicago Convention, the organisation's regulatory demands took effect as signees where required to follow suit.

Interventions became more comprehensive when in 1968 ICAO's passport experts and a handful of member states devised plans for the automation of border identification protocols through making passports machine-readable, promising faster processing, electronic stamping, and improved documentary security. From these considerations a blueprint for the manufacture and deployment of machine-readable passports (MRPs) emerged in 1980 – the precursor to Doc 9303 and the machine-readability standard cited above – embodying ICAO's first decisive step towards taking charge of the material and technological configuration of passports. The new format did not add to the information required for identification, but it reorganised the way this information was encoded in passports to enable their verification through non-human agents of the state, overhauling the entire biographic data page: this overhaul established a unified computer-legible font for all passports and inserted into the document the two lines of machine-readable text or code – now commonplace –, specified to encrypt all the information entailed in the document. While the new MRP format did not become a mandatory requirement for all states until 2005, ICAO's members gradually adapted it throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, so that today it is a fixed feature of all passports of the world. The problem of not knowing for certain whether a document was authentic and the bearer was indeed the rightful holder, it was thought, was now mitigated, as computer checks were to provide an additional layer of security.

Then came a period during which the perpetual problem of secure identification seemed to lie latent: though ICAO's expert advisors worked towards exploring new technologies, such as biometrics, which ICAO began to assess in the late 1990s, there was no political pressure to expand the regulatory scope, and so extant regulatory paradigms were refined and non-mandatory guidelines offered for applying these to other document types, such as visa and national identification cards. However, when the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre

struck on 11th September 2001, a sudden burst of attention overcame the world and security of aviation. The events reconfigured the realm of air travel as paramount for international as well as domestic security and the US soon took action through the UN Security Council (UNSC), which issued resolution 1373 (UNSCR 1373), deciding that states shall “[p]revent the movement of terrorists or terrorist groups by effective border controls and controls on issuance of identity papers and travel documents, and through measures for preventing counterfeiting, forgery or fraudulent use of identity papers and travel documents” (UNSCR 1373:3).

At first it seemed that this mandated nothing new. After all, border controls were already common practice and “the dream of perfect security [...] far predate[d] 9/11” (Salter 2013:20, Bigo 2008). Yet the resolution set into motion a string of UNSCRs, which recast the passport format as an instrument in the toolbox of counter-terrorism, and began pushing ICAO – statutorily forced to follow UN orders – towards regulatory interventions that strongly expanded the technological scope of the until then analogous, paper-passport: a trajectory that resulted in a blueprint for an electronic, biometric passport in the early 2000s and continues today with the issuance of regulations for increasingly virtual forms, such as *Digital Traveller Credentials* (DTC), i.e. a digital ID/passport held and presented on a smartphone or *Advance Passenger Information* (API) and *Passenger Name Record* (PNR), i.e. data-exchange protocols building on passport information sent by air carriers to receiving states ahead of a flight, thereby allowing receiving states to pre-screen and reject travellers before they have even boarded their flight, let alone arrived at the border.

The ICAO passport format, the above indicates, is a fundamentally “un-ending” (Bowker 2015) techno-aesthetic phenomenon, undergoing perpetual regulatory re-construction. Throughout its transformative 70-odd year trajectory, there is, however, a constant: regardless of the impetus of counter-terrorism and security in recent years, or the exact technology currently in play, passports (and other travel documents) at ICAO are framed as a matter of air travel “Facilitation” which holds in itself an inherent tension: bound by the UN view of a world of autonomous nation states, each holding the right to guard its territorial sovereignty, ICAO’s

work is explicitly not designed to do away with “borders and the techniques used to mark, maintain, and control them” (Green 2013:355); on the contrary, it quite directly furnishes them on behalf of its member states: for the organisation not just regulates passports, but border control protocols more widely, among them those which travel documents themselves necessitate and engender (e.g. document verification and biometric matching). However, at the same time ICAO is situated within the realm of civil aviation, a field strongly shaped by a powerful industry, the perpetual growth of which and the resulting economic benefits for all involved are firmly assumed. While at ICAO’s founding these two dimensions overlapped significantly – many airlines and airports were still state-owned – the gradual commercialisation of the entire field of aviation has led to the emergence of a more complex set of stakeholders in the regulatory project: instead of states and national aviation authorities, there are now airlines, aircraft manufacturers, airport operators, privately run aviation oversight contractors, and a booming security and technology industry to consider. The organisation so must cater to what one officer describes as “a truly global industry that knows no respect for borders”.

This points to “a political economy of documentary production [...] in which state and market are thoroughly entangled” (Reeves 2013:511) creating a central challenge for the Facilitation section (ICAO-FAL), described here by an officer: “there are two related functions: one is border control as its done by the state, to check who comes into the country. And the other part is making sure that people can actually cross the border, as air travellers, pretty much unimpeded.” This dialectic of security and unimpeded mobility echoes across the trajectory described above, where technological innovations, such as machine-readability or biometrics are always related to a dual promise of, both, improved identificational security as well as enhanced automation and faster processes. The dialectic also encapsulates ICAO’s complicated mission: acknowledge borders, but – through regulatory tools and in the service of aviation – overcome them. Now what role do passports play in this endeavour?

A smallest common denominator: enabling confidence through form

The motivating challenge underlying identification documents as a political technology on the level of the state is, as explored in chapter 2, the matter of how the unbound potentiality of *identity* can be turned into an *identification*, i.e. can be made stable, bureaucratically unambiguous, and systematically verifiable. This ideology carries over to the level of the supranational and the work conducted at ICAO's Facilitation Section (ICAO-FAL):

It is a fundamental precept that if public authorities are to facilitate inspection formalities for the vast majority of air travellers, those authorities must have a satisfactory level of confidence in the reliability of travel documents and in the effectiveness of inspection procedures. The production of standardized specifications for travel documents and the data contained therein is aimed at building that confidence.

(ICAO Doc 9303:2)

This stance indicates ICAO-FAL's key programmatic: regulatory interventions (i.e. the issuance of SARPs) are deployed to foster state's "confidence" in travel documents issued by other states, rendering inter-state trust a matter of material reliability. So how is this material-reliability achieved? In short, ICAO relies on the power of SARPs to achieve this goal: the regulations and technical specifications issued through Annex 9 and Doc 9303 set the boundaries within which states can construct their documentary forms, holding the promise that as long as states stick to these mutually agreed upon rules for the design, issuance, and verification of travel documents, their passports are fundamentally trustworthy and shall be accepted by all other states. Returning to the metaphor of the passport as a house, brought up by Laksh in the introduction to this chapter, the idea behind ICAO's work is then, so to speak, to provide building codes, which are supposed to ensure – and this is key – the safety of *everybody* visiting the house, not just those living in it. In the case of the international civil aviation system everybody, however, means of course all 192 ICAO member states, as diverse

their bureaucratic cultures and as unequal their disposable resources may be. Unsurprisingly, this renders ICAO's regulatory work a challenging endeavour:

The development and ratification of SARPs is a technologically complex and procedurally laborious process, which ICAO carries out in liaison with a large number of experts and expert institutions due to the high technicality of the subject. In the realm of travel documents ICAO is especially reliant on the work of its *New Technology Working Group* (NTWG). The group is constituted by a set of leading identification technology and document security experts hailing from, both, the industry as well as ICAO member state governments. They are tasked with exploring new technologies for identification on ICAO's behalf as well as making technical recommendations for SARPs to the TAG-TRIP, the board of ICAO member state representatives making decisions on which types of travel document-related SARPs should be put forward for ratification by the ICAO assembly²⁴ (essentially ICAO's parliament). The NTWG furthermore authors Doc 9303, which unlike SARPs is not ratified by ICAO's assembly, as the sheer technicality of the document renders it inscrutable to anybody but technical experts.

At the time that I carried out my fieldwork (2018/2019), the NTWG was led by Dr Müller, the German Federal Police's head of document security whom we encountered in chapter 2, as well as featured a number of additional German members. This was not unusual: Germany, alongside the Netherlands, the UK, Canada, the US, and New Zealand, embody a small set of states that feature frequently in the processes of developing regulations around travel documents at ICAO. These countries, ICAO officers will readily admit, have formed an

²⁴ Modelled in the structural image of the UN, ICAO is divided into a political and a separate bureaucratic body: the former is constituted by diplomatic representatives (delegates) from each member state and organised according to different subject-specific committees and panels. At the top of this political body sits the ICAO assembly (the organisation's quasi-parliament which convenes at least every three years) lead by the ICAO council (the corresponding quasi-government elected by the assembly). In formal terms, it is in the assembly that decisions are made and regulations are ratified, thus gaining their legal force. Vis-à-vis the political complex sits the ICAO-secretariat, headed by the secretary general and divided into five bureaus. The secretariat, which can be likened to a sort of supra-national civil service, is populated by "non-political" ICAO employees, like Robert and Laksh, many of whom are career bureaucrats, lawyers, or technical experts, who previously worked in the aviation industry.

influential presence in ICAO's expert groups, which advise the FAL-Section on a voluntary basis and are hence not subject to the otherwise strict rules of geographical representation which apply to ICAO's political bodies. As ICAO-FAL depends on individuals committing themselves freely, recruitment to these groups is both, a question of who has resources to spare, as well as a matter of pre-existing connections among the expert network. This "underbelly of personal relations" (Riles 2000:60), does not tend to diversify the circle of ICAO advisors. When Wright posits that a key question in the critical anthropological engagement of policy must always be "[w]hose voices prevail?" (1995:79), the answer here is therefore that it is only a predictable fraction of ICAO's member states which are persistently engaged in the configuration of technical specifications for passports. Even though – as FAL officers will emphasise – ICAO's main political body, the assembly, constituted by representatives from all member states, will vote on any new SARPs suggested by the NTWG, the limits of the ICAO passport as a *global* form come into view here; for the particular configuration of advisory groups like the NTWG, has the effect that SARPs and the technical specifications of Doc 9303 are often authored and advanced by representatives and experts from the very countries which already employ (and are often home to the companies which manufacture) the technologies which are then, through the authority of ICAO, made globally mandatory or recommended.

Notwithstanding, when one asks ICAO officers what the type of uniformity constructed by the totality of SARPs contained in Annex 9 represents, given these power asymmetries, the most common answer will still be that ICAO's guidelines should and do embody a "smallest common denominator"; i.e. a mandatory format that is acceptable to and can feasibly be accomplished by all member states, taking into account their vastly different resources and administrative structures: "What has to be implemented in the actual world? What is the impact on the people and the businesses who actually have to do it? And the government departments that have to do it?", lists Robert when I ask him about the considerations which go into weighing the suitability of e.g. a recommended practice to become a standard. The answers to these questions are not just a function of what is already common practice or new and promising (for very new technologies get rarely picked up by ICAO but are found in practice well before they

then become integrated in the regulatory canon). By and large the regulatory demands made by ICAO regarding passports are marked by a very long period of becoming to ensure technologies are reliable and states are prepared. We can see an extreme example of this in the history of the aforementioned standard on machine readability: ICAO issued its first blueprint on machine readable passports – the precursor to what is now known as Doc 9303 – in 1980, with debates around the topic of automating the reading and verification of travel documents dating back to the late 1960s. Notwithstanding, the technology only became a standard in 2005, when already more than 100 member states had been using machine readable passports (see MacKenzie 2010:391-2), and even then states were granted a 10 year implementation period for this new technology to which a handful were not able to adhere.

At roughly the same time (2003), however, as the MRP became mandatory (2005), ICAO also issued its first blueprint on biometric passports (ePassports) – an *if-then* standard, i.e. countries are not required to use biometrics but if they do so they must technologically realise it per ICAO's requirements – which draws on a much more advanced and costly technology. The parallelism of these regulatory advancements indicates that the ideology of a smallest common denominator is not reflective of all standardising activities at ICAO. It glosses over the fact that the future and present always happen simultaneously at the organisation, constantly reconfiguring the margins of a global documentary uniformity: whereas obligatory standards demarcate a minimal expectation, i.e. that which is deemed necessary, recommended practices and conditional SARPs such as the ePassport standard, advance towards that which is technologically possible and politically desired by ICAO's member states. The ICAO-FAL officers often liken these parallel timelines to a process of "maturing" standards:

Standards are the really, really important pieces. This is where you are making obligations upon states. Every single state on the planet, without exception. So the rule-making process is a process of maturing and taking time. That is for example why we do not rush to an ePassport standard even though many states already use it. Because, once you make it a standard, what you are saying is that 192 countries have got to do this. So you need to make sure that it is proportionate, that it is achievable. That there is a good rationale behind it. A lot of this comes with high expenses for countries. People sometimes criticise our

work and say 'well, it's so slow'. Well - yeah, but you don't want to rush this stuff cause you'll get knee-jerk reactions to global events and things like that. You want to take your time, you want to make sure that you developed it properly, so that what comes out is feasible. Because once it appears in Annex 9 as a standard everybody *must* do it. You can file a difference²⁵ in the short-term, but that is not a long-term solution. You can't say, I am not going to do it. That is not an option.

This philosophy of slow change appears to be heartfelt by ICAO officers, who see it as their role to prevent, as Robert puts it, knee-jerk reactions from placing an undue strain on member states. Both Robert and Laksh will refer in this context to themselves as guardians of Annex 9, seeking to shield this document, which they feel has played a substantial role in the enhancement of air travel, from "political spin" as Robert will call it. Yet their commitment to exploiting what bureaucracy does best, i.e. carry its work out slowly, has recently faced up against an intense acceleration of regulatory action, driven by the increasingly frequent intervention of the UN Security Council (UNSC) into matters of Facilitation through the issuance of resolutions (UNSCRs): beginning in the post 9/11 era and under the main influence of the US, interventions have proliferated over the years, with the most recent of such resolutions (UNSCR 2178 (2014) and 2482 (2019)) calling upon ICAO to develop and ratify standards pertaining to the aforementioned field of "Advance Passenger Information" (API) and "Passenger Name Record" (PNR). API and PNR embody related technologies enabling what is generally referred to as pre-emptive border policing, i.e. the sorting of travellers by the receiving state through digital means before they even board their flight.

The simpler of the two technologies, API, works as follows: a passenger's passport data are collected by the air carrier at check-in (either through the scanning of the document at the airline counter, or entered into the system by the traveller themselves during e.g. online check-in). The data set, saved as a secure token, is then sent to the responsible authorities at the receiving state, which will assess the identificational information against a number of data bases

²⁵ The "Electronic filing of differences" (EFOD) is a mechanism for ICAO to monitor incidences of non-compliance among member states. States, which see themselves unable to adhere to a standard during a time when it is already mandatory notify ICAO which in turn notifies other member states.

and certain “risk-profiles”. Based on this assessment the receiving state might then prohibit a traveller from even boarding their flight, or subject them to closer inspection once they arrive at the border. While PNR follows a similar logic, the data set that it comprises is much vaster: adding to a person’s passport data, PNR entails everything from the travel itinerary, ticket information, contact and payment details, to a traveller’s seat number, baggage information, and choice of meal on the flight. PNR cracks the question of “how can a person become known” wide open, transplanting identification into the realm of the virtual, and rendering the passport a material connector between the data sets held about an individual and the embodied person. Moreover, the technology is hugely costly and demanding in its implementation, requiring states to adjust their national legal frameworks, develop a secure and suitable IT infrastructure, make that inter-operable with airlines and other states, and convince their own population to accept the erosion of privacy PNR embodies to many. ICAO-FAL officers are aware and concerned about the many issues looming when looking towards developing and implementing regulations for PNR, but they see themselves forced to take a pragmatic stance, as one officer describes:

Until the last resolution my position was effectively that we have to focus on API implementation. One step at a time. Now: as the UN has decided that states should be implementing PNR, we have to help them do that. We do not really have a choice. The good thing that I can see here is that we can kill two birds with one stone: meaning that if we have the UN’s resources and assistance to implement PNR, we can try to have only one technical framework for both API and PNR. I am talking about ICT of course, legislation also, and a regulatory framework inside the states.

We can see here, that despite the challenges posed by the UNSCR’s interventions, officers remain pragmatically committed to that which ICAO has always done: produce standardisation, which is disguised here in the terminology of “framework”. However, as ICAO’s process of maturing is disabled by the UNSCRs, the division of states into those, which set standards (i.e. those having influence in the UNSC) and those, which follow is exacerbated. ICAO thus finds itself increasingly involved in the business of implementation, rather than regulation.

On the one hand they must reify a political ideology which is not of their choosing by developing suitable SARPs and technological protocols for the realisation of the UNSCR's political goals; on the other hand, they have to become service providers in that they need to aid states in the realisation of SARPs, as these become too financially and technologically challenging for some states to implement. This shift from the production of regulatory interventions to the provision of implementation support is significant for two reasons: on the one hand, these changes draw ICAO further into an ecology of crisis and securitisation, where dedicated "risk management" (Lyon 2001:296) becomes a condition for the reconciliation of security and mobility. Identification technologies, in this context, are a means of assigning a risk value to an individual and, thus [supposedly], making a security intervention possible even in face of profound uncertainty" (Amoore 2008:24). This is rather different to the comparatively simple idea of the ICAO passport as a guarantor of material confidence among states, previously described to be the core of ICAO-FAL. On the other hand, the fact that an institution of the global bureaucracy is summoned, by its parent organisation and individual powerful states, to not simply regulate but realise and take over operations, indicates that states are not fully entrusted anymore with the ability to provide the means to securely partake in the global mobility regime: looking at how some ICAO-run implementation projects are funded, we can see certain entities (e.g. the OSCE) and countries (e.g. Canada or the Netherlands) invest heavily into border control and identification documentation projects in e.g. North Africa and Eastern Europe.

This condition highlights the fact that increasingly countries of the global North see their security as being dependent on how other states construct and deploy their identification and travel documents. If the limits of the globality of the ICAO uni-form were already palpable when considering the narrow group of countries shaping the technological discourse on identification at the NTWG, then these recent developments further suggest that the confidence ICAO endeavours to instil in countries through its regulation of the passport prototype is fast eroding.

Gate-keeping globality: a supra-national infrastructure of identification

Of course the very existence of visa schemes indicates that the ICAO-compliant passport has never fully succeeded in instantiating a smallest common denominator that is universally trusted or manages to elicit full confidence among receiving states, as appears to be the goal of ICAO-FAL. However, ICAO's work in PNR and API today seems to embody an even starker shift: a move away from the idea of a shared, decentralised form, carried by the individual traveller, towards the exchange of data sets that far exceed passport data and re-locate borders to databases. In light of these various developments, how can we best conceive of the type of global *uni*-form that emerges from ICAO's regulatory efforts?

In its essence the project of international standardisation reflects what Andrew Barry describes as a "demand"—central to the modern political imagination – "for technical practices and devices to be comparable with each other. If an empire or international market is to be formed then some common standards and agreements are necessary" (2001:13). In this project, of which the emergence of an international civil aviation system after the world wars would be an example, technical devices such as the ICAO-compliant passport, Barry argues, "function as the infrastructure of an international economy [...] – connecting it together" (2001:13). This possibility for connection and the characterisation of the technical device of the ICAO-compliant passport as an infrastructural form, I believe, embody a helpful prism through which to conceive of ICAO's work. The effort to create a means of identification in which all member states can have confidence through the careful regulatory delimitation of travel documents, I argue, brings into being a global semiotic infrastructure for the mediation of not just identification, but sovereignty.

I take this notion of a material semiotic infrastructure from Anna Weichselbraun's (2019) work on temper-proof metal seals placed by nuclear safeguard inspectors of the *International Atomic Energy Agency* (IAEA) at nuclear plants. The seals are employed to verify whether a country is

abiding by the internationally agreed terms and are thus, argues Weichselbraun, “signs of geopolitical sincerity” (2019:509) – or the lack thereof – which bureaucrats and technicians at IAEA “regiment [...] so that a maximally unambiguous interpretation of [their] status can be achieved” (Weichselbraun:508). Tracing the meanings attributed to seals “across their material states of intactness and brokenness”, Weichselbraun shows that they “are neither only signs nor things. Instead they make up the semiotic infrastructure of nuclear governance that materializes international law and geopolitical relations between states” (2019:505) and enable the “flow of trust and the accumulation of confidence across nations participating in the global assemblage (Ong and Collier 2005) of the nuclear non-proliferation regime” (2019:506). While ICAO, unlike Weichselbraun’s IAEA, does not produce, issue, and control its own seals (i.e. passports), I argue that its regulatory work still has similar effects. It creates the potential for infrastructural and semiotic devices, which states employ to communicate with as well as recognise other states:

Applying Weichselbraun’s model of a “semiotic infrastructure” to the ICAO-compliant passport format allows us to develop an understanding of the political aesthetics and moral programmatic which passports effect on international relations. To realise this analytical proposition, let us start by looking at the artefact’s semiotic workings: during a brief encounter at an event hosted by ICAO a delegate from an Asian member state told me that a passport should be understood as a business card, i.e. that which the rest of the world sees first and remembers longest. The delegate’s words indicate the immense symbolic force of passports: they signal towards and around the world. Through its regulatory intervention ICAO generates an interpretative as well as constructive paradigm for these signifying capacities. We can see here, what ICAO’s programmatic of “confidence” through “reliable” form, cited earlier in this chapter, really implies: by requiring certain technologies and practices while discouraging others, effectively dictating how passports as material and semiotic entities are to be assembled, ICAO creates a script for the navigation of the semiotic passport infrastructure, allowing receiving states to decipher which documents – and thus the identity claims made through them – are to be trusted and which are not. For issuing states, it provides the means to

design a nationalised version of the agreed upon format and insert themselves into the global infrastructure of identification and mobility through it. The global passport form so “serve[s] to techno-semiotically mediate relationships of trust and promise between states [...]” (Weichselbraun 2019:522): the issuance of documents according to ICAO requirements by a state signals compliance with a global protocol and is tailored to prompt receiving states to entrust the certifying abilities of the issuing state as well as the promise that this person is who their passport makes them out to be; the non-compliant passport, however, much like the broken seal, elicits questions about the reliability, trustworthiness, and intent of an issuing state (a sense which might then be extended to and affect the individual traveller). This is an important facet of semiotic infrastructures: they always signal, irrespective of whether they are compliant (in-tact) or non-compliant (broken) (Weichselbraun 2019:523).

Given passports’ semiotic weight, their form must be guarded carefully. This is the very purpose of ICAO and the regulatory measures I have explored over the previous pages; for vulnerabilities of the passport form can cause repercussions for the entire semiotic infrastructure which they constitute: new SARPs and technologies are perpetually developed to prevent fraud and tempering. The intricacies of this dynamic are exemplified in ICAO’s regulatory stance on biometric passports: the technology is already commonplace and used by a majority of ICAO members, yet this same majority objects to making the biometric passport a mandatory requirement for all states. “Here is the paradox”, explains Robert, echoing concerns previously put forward by Dr Müller in chapter 2:

You are producing this really secure document now. More secure than all of the old documents used to be. The assumption with that is therefore that everything in this really secure document is correct and genuine. Because of that you have to be really sure to issue it to the right person. Cause otherwise all you’ve done is, you’ve perpetuated the problem except you created something that looks super secure and valid, but if you issued it to the wrong person, then you have lost. So this is the counter argument to rushing off and saying make ePassports a global requirement. Rather than investing in ePassports you should invest in evidence of identity.

Evidence of Identity (EoI) describes the artefacts of verification and documentation of a person's identity, such as a birth certificate or a proof of naturalisation document, which provide the basis on which an individual becomes eligible to being issued a passport. The reasoning Robert describes in relation to the issue of EoI exposes an important facet of passports' infrastructurally semiotic capacities: *they can be too conducive to confidence or trust* and so deflect scrutiny from the chain of their own becoming. Unlike the IAEA seals, passports are not manufactured and issued centrally; they are not quite as uniform and their signalling capacity goes beyond the binary (broken, intact) described by Weichselbraun. As such the possibility exists that a sign becomes too strong, too trustworthy, to the point where its signifying capacities inhibit and deflect an interrogation of how it came to be assembled and assigned to its bearer. This is assumed to be the case with biometric documents, exposing the semiotic fragility of the passport form, which also resonates in the very notion of infrastructures: while "promis[ing] circulation and distribution" they always also "threaten to break down and fail" (Anand et al. 2018:3). Viewing the network of regulatory artefacts, such as Doc 9303 and decision-making bodies involved in ICAO's regulatory production of the compliant form against this perspective, we must hence recognise these entities and documents as a first order regulatory infrastructure, detailing and ratifying the elements of form to be operationalised in passports on behalf of the "operative community" (Opitz und Tellman 2016) of its member states, to prevent the failure or break-down of the second-order semiotic infrastructure of passports.

Webb Keane argues that "semiotic ideology" matters "because of its ethical or political entailments" (Keane 2018:72); "[i]t ties general semiotic processes to specific judgments of ethical and political value: to take a sign a certain way is to take seriously the world it presupposes and, often, the life that that world recommend" (Keane 2018:64). The question thus becomes *which* political entailments and rationalities the semiotic ideologies inscribed into the ICAO passport instantiate among ICAO's member states. The first has already been identified above: confidence through material reliability. Yet the characterisation of ICAO-compliant passports as "tokens of trust" (Lyon 2001:305) is of course somewhat misleading or

at least only partial: as Harvey et al. observe, “attempting to gain trust through practices of transparency undermines the possibility of achieving trust” (Harvey et al. 2013:301, see also Strathern 2000). Reading the passport as a semiotic and infrastructural device, which is applied to communicate the veracity of the identity claim made by an individual, but more importantly here the seriousness of a state’s intentions vis-à-vis the safe-making of the wider statist community, we must hence acknowledge that the passport form indicates the default condition of the system to be distrust, conditioning the need for verification.

Second, the requirement of compliance with ICAO norms renders “[f]ree mobility” a conditional “reward”, “rather than a right” (Salter 2013:10), even though a non-compliant passport is in the large majority of cases the result of a lack of resources or expertise, rather than a function of intent or an unwillingness to comply with a hegemonic order. From the stance of the international organisation system, however, intent is only marginally relevant. What is important, is proven, materialised commitment. This becomes increasingly strenuous for states, as the unrelenting tightening of the passport-border-control-complex through UNSC resolutions which are then executed by ICAO, causes the “logic of appropriateness” (March and Olsen 1998), which marks ICAO’s regulatory project, to gradually extend towards the realm of making moral obligations. Here we can see a third instance of Keane’s “political entailments”: verification technologies, as are passports, whilst “often understood as a merely technical mechanism of formal accountability”, in fact are “transduced into a register of moral responsibility” (Weichselbraun 2019:522): *in its semiotic and infrastructural capacity, the issuance of ICAO-compliant passports by a certain state becomes a matter of proving to take on moral responsibility regarding the secure-making of other states.*

This motif is especially stark in the language used in UNSCRs, which cast travel documents as primary means for counterterrorism and achieving international security, thus raising the moral stakes of issuing secure documents (see e.g. UNSCR 1373 2001:2-3). We see here an inversion of the earliest roots of the passport document: “[a]t its core, the passport is a request by one sovereign to another sovereign to aid and protect a nationally identified bearer” (Salter

2004:72). The “sovereignty as responsibility towards another” dimension lies latent in this rendering, yet it is administered in the exact opposite manner: in its early form the passport embodied a request for the receiving state to take responsibility for a foreign national, by granting safe passage. In the material-semiotic infrastructure of documentary identification maintained by ICAO these roles are inverted, so that it is the issuing state, which is requested to signal responsibility through the passport form.

To be a state among states: the (un-)freedom to conform

In the above reconfiguration of the notion of the “public good” to which ICAO caters, we can see “the subtle negotiations of power characteristic of bureaucratic encounters” (Baer and Mathur 2015:19). However, given the ever-changing margins of uniformity and the at times immense costs involved in the realisation of a new standard, it appears pertinent to ask why states would at all adhere to ICAO’s regulatory demands, seeing as the organisation formally cannot instantiate sanctions? When I pose this question to Laksh, he tells me that in his eyes it all boils down to the self-interest of states: if a state today does not issue machine-readable documents, the citizens of this state will face difficulties travelling, as machine-readable documents are a requirement per ICAO’s regulations. As a result, a non-machine-readable passport may simply not be accepted by a receiving state. “That’s what the international law is. It works, because all countries recognise that it is in their own interest and that their people will be disadvantaged if they don’t do it”, summarises Laksh.

His stance appears to gloss over the complicated obligations and ambiguous freedom, which mark membership at ICAO: states are obliged to abide by standards, but there are no sanctions if they do not fulfil them and so self-interest is rendered key to states’ response to ICAO’s authoritative demands: “everybody travels and [hence] everybody needs a passport”, says Laksh, rendering the mobility of the global populace and the passport’s place in it a simple fact. This casts a vision of statist freedom and sovereignty, which could easily be conceptualised through the prism of neoliberalism (a notion which might be even more ubiquitous than are

passports). Collier and Ong, following Nikolas Rose, describe neoliberalism as “a political rationality that seeks to govern not through command and control operations but through the calculative choice of formally free actors” (2005:13), engendering a world wherein regulation is rendered “an internal mechanism of self improvement” (Dunn 2005:176) and costs and benefits are defined in market terms. This is a seemingly adequate description of ICAO’s regime and the imaginaries which frame it: a global world of continuous flows, prosperous through transnational aviation, states free to abide (or not), yet under implicit pressure to follow suit. In this reading, the notion of a sovereignty of ICAO’s governable entities, the states, is hence also a rhetorical device for the entrapment of formally autonomous actors in a hegemonic scheme.

“[W]hat is remarkable about the contemporary system of passport controls is that it bears witness to a cooperating ‘international society’ as well as to an overarching set of norms and prescriptions to which individual states must respond. This does not mean, as some seem to think, that there is no such thing as ‘sovereignty,’ but only that this is a claim states make in an environment not of their own making.”

(Torpey 2000:3)

What Torpey suggests, here, is that despite its implicit pressures, there might be more nuance to ICAO’s mode of making obligatory and state’s (un-)freedom in issuing passports than meets the eye: as Sopranzetti (2017a, 2017b) reminds us, any notion of a freedom of choice must always be understood within the granular context of the specific moral world at issue²⁶. Through such a perspective, he underscores, we can conceptualise a freedom that is “both personally emancipating and structurally oppressive” (2017b:83); a more apt characterisation, he argues, of the at once precarious yet liberating conditions which his collaborators (motorcycle taxi drivers in Thailand) face: the answer to the question of “why do people accept being part of

²⁶ Brown, central to Sopranzetti’s position, emphasises that “freedom is [...] a relational and contextual practice that takes shape in opposition to whatever is locally and ideologically conceived as un-freedom” (1995:124): a violation of states’ freedom, in the eyes of the secretariat, would be solely the interference with their sovereignty, i.e. their political, territorial, and executive autonomy, through e.g. sanctions. It is a central shortcoming of this thesis to not have a systematic answer as to how this stance is perceived by the community of ICAO’s member states. Yet I would like to offer, that other work in the international organisation realm, such as Schia’s study of Norway’s participation in the UN Security Council (2016) or Telesca’s study (2015) of the building of a consensus on international fishing quota at an international governing body have shown that the dynamics of involvement of states with varying degrees of influence and resources as well as their perceptions of their role are always contextual and complex.

hegemonic systems or being interpellated in them”, he contends, “is quite simple. It is because they understand freedom, emancipation, and oppression as contextual practices and processes” (2017b:83).

This stance brings to the fore the dialectic of emancipation and oppression, which as we have seen in earlier chapters is highly characteristic of the passport artefact and system (see also Gordillo 2006, Caplan and Torpey 2001). Now if we take seriously the notion of self-interest, we must look to what a state stands to gain from following ICAO’s regulatory imperative – what are the emancipatory qualities offered by the ICAO passport to states on the supra-national level? I suggest that the promise of the passport as a global form administered under the auspices of ICAO is first and foremost to become a state among states: as the wide array of existing engagements with passports show, the artefact is not just a key emblem of statehood, but a powerful and generative means for the symbolic and bureaucratic production of the citizenry, and thus the state itself (see e.g. Torpey 2000, Robertson 2009, Navaro-Yashin 2012). Passports can thus become surprising priorities among governments everywhere, even if – as in the example of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus studied by Bryant (2021) and Navaro-Yashin (2012) – the documents will not be recognised for travel by the global community of nation states as the initial claim to statehood is rejected. This symbolic charge of passports is rather alien to ICAO-FAL officers, who will often express frustration over the many emails, which they receive from entities seeking to issue passports:

We get all sorts of groups reaching out to us. I always tell people, do not even reply, because even by replying we are sort of recognising them and all sorts of crazy things. We find ways of handling it but they want the three letter code for their travel document, you see, which is through us. And in the end we’re very clear: unless the United Nations has basically recognised, that this is a member state, you know, like South Sudan being created more recently as a new country, you’re not going to get the country code for the passport, therefore you cannot issue a passport that works, that is recognised. And therefore it’s a meaningless exercise.

The three-letter country codes, which are mentioned here, more precisely referred to as ISO 3166-1 alpha-3 codes, are utilised in documents to mark a bearer's nationality as well as designate which state has issued a document. According to this norm Afghanistan comes to be AFG, Canada turns into CAN, Hong Kong HKG, and Kenya is KEN. The norm is specified by the International Standardization Organisation (ISO) but issued to eligible members by ICAO. In order to be able to produce a passport, which will be accepted by all ICAO member states, a state hence requires, at the very minimum, to have been assigned these three letters. This renders the FAL section a gatekeeper to statist recognition: it assigns or withholds from states the ability to re-produce themselves materially and symbolically outside of their territorial confines through recognised travel documents.

This indicates both, the power and the limits of form: if the condition of statehood as a function of UN recognition is not fulfilled, compliance in form is worthless. The replication, the "make-believe" passport (Navaro Yashin 2012) or its enactment in "drag" as Bryant (2021) puts it, can never fully succeed in affording a state's citizens the ability to travel if the issuing state is not already recognised by the global community. Yet at the same time, the pronounced safeguarding of country codes – "do not even reply to their emails" – by ICAO as a regulatory access key exclusively available to recognised members, is suggestive of the assertive significance of passports within the global community: a national document materialising the bond between a citizen and a state, the passport has been elevated and recast by ICAO as a statist means to signal and affirm allegiance to a specific global order and mobility system:

"[T]he state is not an essence but a performance", notes Bryant (2021:63), and so it does not seem far-fetched to assume that the same goes for the global community as a whole (see also Weber 1994, Bierstecker and Weber 1996). This is not to say that passports single-handedly instantiate the UN-sanctioned community of nation states; but they possess the capacity to materialise as well as curtail this otherwise opaque socio-legal reality and transform it into experiences of mobility and immobility (see also Salter 2003). The passport at ICAO thus becomes a dialectical device of creation, wherein its regulatory crafting advances based on the

need for order in a presupposed, pre-imagined globalised world, but simultaneously brings this very world into being.

Conclusion

The study of the passport's becoming as a globally recognised form at ICAO has allowed me to trace the practical and ideological underpinnings of identification as a large-scale global order. Tracing out the infrastructural quality of the ICAO passport format as a protected yet connective, sovereignty-endowing, yet equally -subjugating global form, I have laid out the practical and material complexities of identification as an administrative and political endeavour enacted across borders. Of course "many governmental interventions [...] have a creative dimension" (Lezaun 2006:501) and it is thus not surprising to see the ICAO passport exhibit this effect in the world. Yet scale matters here: "with the structures and symbolics of modern statehood replicated over the whole of world terrain" as is the case with ICAO's regulatory interventions, "expectations of common ordering [...] are fundamental to the interplay of exclusive dominion and reciprocal recognition which makes modern sovereignty possible" argues Chalfin (2006:245), speaking in favour of the recognition of scale in our understandings of the sovereignty-endowing effects of symbolic forms; for "[g]enerating standardized forms of practice, they equally serve as a language of recognition between states." (2006:248). The ICAO passport, the above has shown, falls within this category, making powerful interventions in the world and branching out to not just individual states, but individual citizens. Yet what will happen, once the material infrastructure of the passport fades and is replaced entirely by virtual technologies like PNR and API, which albeit regulated by ICAO are transient and not state-issued, thus lacking in their sovereignty-endowing effects? Is there an *after* to the passport paradigm? As we move to the conclusion of this thesis, I will reflect on the future possibilities of identification to think through what might change and what will remain.

Conclusion

What is documentary identification? – Documents and their discontents

SUMMARY

In this conclusion I revisit previous chapters in pursuit of making sense of a central contradiction that has emerged across them: the roles, meanings, and consequences of documents fluctuate vastly between the passport paradigm's different constituencies, leaving us with the realisation that the devices we use to stabilise identity do not hold a fixed identity of their own. The only continuity to be found across the multiple scales tracked in previous chapters, it appears, is the inherent fallibility of the identificatory project itself. Yet a consensus that identification documents *do* work persists among all groups. What to make of this? I suggest that the fluid quality of identification documents, reflected in their changing roles, renders them an effective *Ersatz* in the fulfilment of the often-contradictory desires pervading the administrative system. This *Ersatz*-quality – identification documents' ability to stand in for a large number of wants and functions – is crucial to their long-term prevalence and intense consequentiality for it enables an *identificational realism* in which any identificatory failures – social, technical, political – are eventually absorbed and transformed by the system into a demand for more of it. In a world in which identification technologies, both documentary and digital, gain increasing currency in ever more dimensions of daily life this realisation is crucial, for it may set us on a new path to formulating critiques and alternative visions more attuned to identification's evasive nature and thereby the wider fields of activity, such as governance, policing, and state-making in which it is immersed.

Caspar

Caspar is a man of many identities: as a consultant in the identity and migration management realm he has worked for governments across the globe, designing and implementing visa, ID, and biometric identity schemes; as a freelance writer, he produces reports and articles on the very world and industry that he helps shape; finally, as a private citizen, he is the bearer of three different nationalities: Canadian, Irish, British. "I wear many different hats", is the first thing that he will say about himself when I meet with him for an interview. The man of many hats is also

one of many opinions. His answers to my unending questions evolve as a tour de force of the documentary regime of which Caspar has seen many facets. His explorations range from the treaty of Versailles, to ICAO, to the post-documentary future. In his contemplations there is a central theme to which he always returns: Caspar thinks of the passport and related identificatory forms as a misguided “technological solution to a social problem”, namely that of the statist desire to shield itself against “others” coming in from the outside. It is the mistaken belief that passports could realise this desire that he feels lies at the root of the passport’s “litany of failures”.

The passport, Casper is convinced, could never do what it was supposed to: “it cannot identify in the way that people want it to identify, and people are starting to realise this”. Casper backs this claim up with anecdotes from his work: he talks about how it is an open secret in the industry that there are many countries where you can simply buy an authentic, state-issued passport for a few hundred dollars, issued in whatever name you want it to be, allowing anybody who is willing and can pay to cultivate a slate of documentary identifications and use these in travel. Administrations know this and so do not believe anymore that passports can suffice in telling them what they must know about a person to be able to admit them to their sovereign grounds safely – so they have begun collecting the information themselves and biometrically affixing these data sets to foreigners seeking to cross into their border: wherever Caspar goes these days to develop a project, he finds border authorities immersed in a tidal shift towards centralised, biometrically supplemented migration management systems, running on the idea of individual dossiers being kept by the state for each and every individual crossing into a given country from elsewhere. The proliferation of these projects and their expansion to an ever-wider fraction of the population, he says, echoing developments at ICAO, is evidence that the predominance of the passport as a globally trusted form is quickly eroding. A similar trend, Caspar tells me, can be seen in the current proliferation of so-called “trusted traveller” programs, creating a tier of border-crossers that is pre-assessed and pre-approved and so receives preferential treatment: for a fee, travellers can voluntarily apply to enrol in these national programs and – if approved based on the border authorities’ risk-assessments – benefit

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from expedited control processes when crossing the border. This creates a category for the sorting of travellers outside of nationality, Caspar claims, further undermining the nationalised paradigmatic logic of passports (though it is worth noting that eligibility to trusted traveller programs is almost always restricted to only specific nationalities).

Both, biometric, dossier-based visa schemes and trusted traveller programs subvert the idea of a *globally shared and trusted, decentralised* identificatory infrastructure: the identificational information relevant to a receiving state is not held, anymore, in the passport document, but in dedicated and state-specific data-bases, the document being relegated to a mere link between the embodied person and their record or, in fact, removed entirely from day-to-day conduct if biometrics are used instead. “No one cares anymore, if I am Caspar, or Bob, or Jane, born on this or that date. It’s just: do we have this identity in the record and can we affix other information to that person”, remarks Caspar. The dossier-based risk assessment of travellers embodies an approach to identification where who we are in the logics of the document (name, date of birth, nationality, height etc.) only ever matters marginally, whilst data collected in the dossier, the contents of which are, as of now, entirely defined by the state compiling it and can be tremendously black-boxed, far-reaching and intrusive (Amoore and de Goede 2008, Lyon 2003), will constitute the identificationally relevant information for the question of whether one shall pass or not and under which conditions.

I tell Caspar that what he maps out sounds to me like a “mere” visa-fication of the passport system: i.e. nobody will be able to travel exclusively on their passport anymore, the provision of additional information is always required, and people have little control over what is done with this information, how long it is kept, how it is used. Yet for many travellers, this is already the case. So given the fact that this approach seems somewhat derivative of existing juridico-technical approaches, e.g. the visa system, which is equally failure-prone as are passports when it comes to the issue of identification, what is the difference that these new approaches will make? Will this solve the perpetual problem of identification and definitively enable states to

enact their desire to include and exclude (un-)desirable subjects from their territory? Caspar's answer is a clear no:

Identification is a hyper-object: it is never going to be resolved; it is just going to advance. Every layer of technology will allow the failure of the previous layer to be moved forward. Popular opinion will be swayed, governments can say we are doing something about it, until the next thing proves that actually what we just implemented is a complete load of rubbish, and it is very easy to circumvent, because it does not work for all nations. I think it will continue that way.

Caspar's conceptualisation of the hyper-object of identification describes an unending hope of technosalvation driving the passport paradigm without palpable success; his words map out a chain of technological evolutions in which previous incarnations affect, shape, taint their successors, pointing to the eventual impossibility of statist identification as the project of distinguishing with certainty between those that belong and those that do not according to the bureaucratic logic. Caspar's words so resonate with a recent paper by Nayanika Mathur (2021): based on an ethnographic study of the identification of big cats, such as tigers, perceived to be a threat to the human population in multiple locales across India, Mathur suggests that identification is simply an impossibility if we understand it to be an exercise intended to produce certainty of identity. No matter the claims made by her collaborators in the field and the skills deployed to intuit a beastly identity, a perpetrator can never be identified before it is killed. Thus, the actions taken (such as the killings of specific cats believed to have previously intervened with or attacked human life) are never certain to have addressed the right target. The impossibility of beastly identification, Mathur argues, demonstrates the limits of bureaucratic action more largely (and conservation, though the latter part is less relevant here). Yet, she notes, this reality of the impossibility of identification – to which Mathur appears to attest a wider validity (see also Mathur 2020) – is seldom engaged in works on the identificatory project more generally.

This productive provocation of the impossibility of identification stands seemingly in stark contrast to the dynamic described by Caspar: if identification is an impossibility and if governments everywhere have borne witness to the passport paradigm's many practical

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failures, why does the identificatory impetus persist? What makes it a hyper-object, as Caspar calls it? In this conclusion, I shall use this apparent contradiction as a starting point from which to revisit and re-conceive the findings presented in previous chapters. If documentary agents do not always produce certainty of identity, I ask, what *do* they do? Can we distil, against the background of systemic flaws and identificatory impossibilities, qualities of what identification documents are that hold validity across the various groups studied in this thesis? To tackle these questions, I shall start out by looking more closely at the paradoxical parallelism of identificatory failure and persistence.

Identificational realism: the auto-poiesis of the passport paradigm

In Caspar's account the litany of failures marking the passport paradigm is a slate of glitches and broken technological promises as they are seen and experienced from the perspective of the state. Yet, as previous chapters have shown, identification documents fail in other ways and they fail other groups: chapter 2 shows how carefully thought-out security features are quickly and perpetually undermined by forgers, agonising documentary designers who, in the project of making papers secure, seek to fulfil their own high, aesthetic standards yet must accept that any documents they create will eventually be forged. Along similar lines, chapter 3 foreshadows that as documents become more technologically sophisticated, border guards increasingly face imposter-fraud, yet their reliance on and investment in the documentary form leaves them ill-equipped to deal with authentic documents attached to ambiguous bodies that are harder to verify than are papers. Equally, the racialising, identificational readings of bodies at the border, propped up by the severely corporealised conception of identification in documents and policing practice, routinely cause BIPOC travellers to find their identificatory claims challenged or made the subject of suspicion. Identification documents so fail border guards and BIPOC travellers simultaneously. The failure of documents as a method for standardising identification is also palpable in chapter 4, wherein vastly different passport stories testify to the diversity of experience differently situated and identified individuals have of the passport paradigm – even

when they share a nationality or live in the same country. The reality that a material standardisation of identification will not immediately translate into a uniformity of practice or outcome is further documented in chapter 5, where ICAO's perpetual efforts to maintain a joint identificatory infrastructure is shot-through with the power-play of global politics and the gradual ascension of nationally protectionist approaches to identification that leave behind the passport paradigm's globalist aspirations. There are also more macro-scopic failures, such as the problem of root identities, i.e. the first entrance of an embodied subject's totality of being into a statist system of registration, that echo across chapters. What's more, these diverse failures are almost all openly acknowledged by those who experience them – indeed, nobody with whom I worked in the process of realising this thesis ever denied that documentary identification was a fallible endeavour.

Yet just as pervasive as these glitches and their acknowledgement, is the continued belief among the majority of those who engage with identification documents in their functional value: documentary designers by and large are convinced of the success of their work and deeply invested in the identificatory tokens that they collectively create. The perpetual subversion of their creation by forgers does not stop them – rather it spurs them on. Border officers openly say that they prefer documents to people, as they are drawn to documents' seductive legibility – a legibility that they do not perceive the living, breathing, embodied subject to offer. Among the people to whom I talked, there equally was not a single one that questioned the statist monopoly on identifying them through documents, even when they saw the fault lines running through the system; to the contrary, almost all considered the documentary form to be capable, in principle, of making a person become known. Finally, at ICAO the conviction of the necessity of having a shared identificatory uni-form in play globally still reigns strong. In the introduction to this thesis I suggested that this paradoxical dialectic of hope and failure was in fact a paradigmatic condition of the passport paradigm; that the instantiation and perpetuation of a techno-bureaucratic belief in trusted identities was an inherent feature of the system as a whole. Yet that is not an explanation, merely a diagnosis. So what do we make of this?

Conclusion

A first clue can be found in Caspar's discursive explorations of the system: his critique begins as one of the passport and only gradually evolves into an acknowledgement of the impossibility of identification at large. This, I argue, is a dominant pattern, where the identificatory failures of the passport paradigm are most commonly deemed to be documentary (or generally process- or medium-based) *in cause* and identificatory only *in effect*. Take the example of the morphing of passport portraits to make a document usable to two different individuals, which was brought up in chapter 2: the occurrence was read by my collaborators (and indeed the larger expert public to whom I talked about this issue) as an isolated if un-anticipated technological loophole. Though the potential consequences to border security were considered to be grave, the failure was deemed process-based (i.e. we simply need another way to collect photographs and then we will have solved this) and never threw into question the more general feasibility or risks of identifying embodied citizen-subjects through biometric passports. Rather, the fact that biometrics sabotaged by morphing could not ensure identificational uniqueness and the statistical isolation of a bearer to the exclusion of all others, prompted a push to render more immediate and thus less error- and fraud-prone the collection of biometric markers included in passports. This points to the significant transformative potential of the passport paradigm as a macro-logic of world-making: it is capable of incorporating into its own logic, anything that appears to contradict it. I shall call this, drawing on Mark Fisher, the passport paradigm's *identificational realism*.

In his 2009 book *Capitalist Realism* the late cultural theorist and philosopher Mark Fisher defines this notion as "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it" (Fisher 2009:2). This, argues Fisher, renders capitalist realism "not a particular type of realism" but "realism in itself" (Fisher 2009:4): an "infinitely plastic entity, capable of metabolizing and absorbing anything with which it comes into contact" (Fisher 2009:6) and thereby perpetually incorporating externality, i.e. that to which it stands in contrast. In the

current moment, which Fisher understands to have emerged since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, there is no outside to capitalism left anymore:

What we are dealing with now is not the incorporation of materials that previously seemed to possess subversive potentials, but instead, their *precorporation*: the pre-emptive formatting and shaping of desires, aspirations and hopes by capitalist culture.

(Fisher 2009:9)

The consequence of this, in Fisher's eyes, is the subsuming of the contradictory into the mainstream and the reduction of anti-capitalism to an aesthetic disavowal: "So long as we believe (in our hearts) that capitalism is bad, we are free to continue to participate in capitalist exchange" (2009:13) he describes this state, citing the example of "fair" or "green products", which manage to suggest that "western consumerism, far from being intrinsically implicated in systemic global inequalities, could itself solve them. All we have to do is buy the right products" (Fisher 2009:15).

I am not well positioned to comment on the merits of Fisher's critique vis-à-vis capitalism. Equally, even though in their workings of transforming identity into a transactionable entity that holds significant exchange value, identification documents could be read as an intrinsically capitalist technology, this is not the point that I wish to make here; rather, I believe the concept of a realist mechanic of incorporation of the contradictory or external to be applicable to the passport paradigm's ideological operation: it does not negate identificatory failure, but absorbs it and turns it into a requirement for more of it: more secure, if slightly differently configured, identificatory efforts (see Harvey et al. 2013:304 for a similar argument about uncertainty and transparency).

This dynamic has three effects: (1) it allows for the identificatory effort to seem without alternative and naturalises it – *of course the government has to have some idea of who is who*, would every single person portrayed in chapter 4 say, even though they might have different

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takes on the means that are appropriate for the state to realise this; equally, as Mathur notes, it is almost impossible to find people consciously questioning the general idea and necessity of identification in academic writing on the subject. (2) It gives the passport paradigm a timeless, absolute quality, even though statist efforts to monopolise identification and control mobility via nationalised identifications are still a relatively recent historic occurrence (see e.g. Groebner 2001, Torpey 2000). (3) It endows the passport paradigm with a fundamentally auto-poietic quality, where the system creates the conditions for its own perpetual proliferation through the identificational realism that it has injected into contemporary, administrative society – even if that means having to leave behind its documentary roots at the advance of new digital-material incarnations. Collectively, these effects have turned identification into what Mathur describes as “a feverish, never-ending pursuit” (Mathur 2021:10, see also Sriraman 2018 who even hints at this in the title of her work).

Consequentiality beyond identification: the documentary Ersatz

Notwithstanding the above, it would be wrong to reduce the identificatory project to just a failed endeavour, merely a perpetual pursuit, only an ideological con. For on many occasions that, which we call identification through documents, does work: people pass through borders using their passports, open bank accounts or collect parcels at the post office drawing on their IDs, or employ a driver’s license to proof that they are off-age when buying cigarettes. So if identification documents do not succeed at identification in an absolute sense, then what do they do that allows them to fulfil these functions?

Whilst the ethnographic record is rife with complex and sensitive critiques of identificatory forms and accounts of their various dysfunctionalities (e.g. Reddy 2015, Rao 2018, Sriraman 2018), it offers little in the way of giving an explanation as to what these forms do that allows them to remain so prevalent despite their intrinsic shortcomings. The many theoretical approaches to identification technologies, stemming mainly from the sociology of surveillance

(e.g. Bennett and Lyon 2008; Lyon 2003, 2009; Salter 2004, 2006), suggest that the identificatory instrumentalism for surveillance and control might be a key driver, yet fail to reconcile their observations with the frequent inconsistencies and failures of these very forms. Where scholars have tried to venture towards understandings of the documentary form beyond identification and in awareness of their contradictory nature, especially in cultural history, explanations have usually focused on the perspective of administrations or the state (e.g. Caplan and Torpey 2001, Robertson 2012, Torpey 2000). Yet as this thesis shows, documentary identifiers in today's Germany seem to be accepted, engaged, re-conceived by a plethora of agents beyond "the state" and the composite emergence of the passport paradigm from their collective ambition puts into question whether the state is at all the primary driver of the concrete manifestations of identificatory technologies (see esp. chapter 5 and also Sriraman 2018). So what are identification documents good for and what do they do that allows them to persist against all odds?

It is tempting to consider the passport paradigm and its documentary agents in a purely Foucauldian light, for the dimensions of power and control are doubtlessly crucial to their apprehension. Indeed, much of the scholarship on identification documents, stemming from the sociology of surveillance, follows a clearly neo-Foucauldian logic (Foucault 1970, 1977), reading identification documents as a realization of Scott's classic account of the primary statist desire to make the citizenry "legible" (1998). These accounts understand identification documents as a potent element of the "power/knowledge grid in which individuals are processed and constituted as administrative subjects of states" (Torpey 2000:15). One important assumption of readings in this vein, is "that the effort to impose control in such environments begins with systematic attempts to annihilate the 'identities' - the selves" (Torpey 2000:15 following Goffman) of those to be governed. Passports and related identification documents are thus understood to not just add to, but somehow erase an essential identity (a problematic notion in itself) and replace it with state-approved typological roles and identifications. Such re-identification is then seen to mark the emergence of a personified bureaucracy, where "portable means of states' disciplinary control" (Pelkmans 2013:93, Salter

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2004) sit in the pockets of the citizenry, making them accessible to the statist “surveillant assemblage” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, Ericson and Haggerty 2000, Jeganathan 2004). These surveillance-focused readings have gained prevalence in recent years, due to the growing embedding of identification systems in data-bases and the algorithmic sorting of documented persons they enable, as described by Caspar. While the majority of perspectives within this set of literatures lacks empirical backing, they often refer to historical cases illustrating the discriminatory or even genocidal effects of “the disciplinary [...] purposes of modern state information systems in moulding the subjectivity of their own citizens” (Breckenridge and Szreter 2012:23, referring to e.g. Agamben 1998:119-159, Dean 1999, Ferguson and Gupta 2002, Rose 1999), examples of which can be seen in Nazi Germany or the Rwandan Genocide (Longman 2001). Beyond these extreme accounts, contemporary contributions from critical criminology and border studies also attest to the discriminatory and dis-empowering effects of the documentary system, particularly in the context of forced displacement and precarious migration (see e.g. Bosworth 2014, Feldman 2011). We have also seen these very effects in the descriptions of border practice presented in chapter 3. Collectively these accounts could be read to suggest that it is first and foremost the statist interest in exerting identificatory control what keeps identification documents and related technologies in play even in light of the technology’s shortcomings.

Whilst these approaches are crucial in sensitising us to the potentiality of suppression and discrimination arising from the passport system, facets that have re-surfaced throughout this thesis, there exist alternative narratives: recent ethnographic inquiries into the deployment and usage of identification documents indicate, that “state efforts to pigeon-hole each individual into a single category of identity, and then conceive of the whole population as divisible into these units, have faced resistance” (Kertzer and Arel 2011:27). Localised subjects “have struggled both to change the categories and to change their distribution across them” (Kertzer and Arel 2011:27, Peirano 2002, Sriraman 2018), effectively reclaiming agency in how they become known and claim certain rights in the public arena. “[C]reative uses” (Agar 2001:111) of documents and critical modes of reception become apparent, which play out in tendencies of

localisation, intervention and personalisation as much as in corruption, fraud, and abuse (Holmes and Castañeda 2016, Jansen 2009, Neofotistos 2009, Peirano 2002). Beyond these narratives of alternative documentary engagements, some approaches reconceptualise the documentation of civil identity altogether, emphasising its value as a recognising performance, which endows individual agents with the necessary capacities to be able to broker the statist and international system (see e.g. Holmes and Castañeda 2016, Neofotistos 2009). Identification documents here are understood to “provide a legal technology and resource for individuals which strengthens civic society” (Breckenridge and Szreter 2012:7) and empowers citizens to articulate their needs as demands or claims (Donald 1996). Certainly, many of the stories presented in chapter 4 fall into this vein. Here the question of why do documents persist even when they fail routinely in delivering identificatory certainty, would probably be answered by the assumption that, on balance, they carry pragmatic value for people and embody a civic resource of sorts.

Once again, we are left with a dialectic of seemingly opposing viewpoints. When I present Caspar with the dialectics of emancipation and control that mark academic understandings of documents, he is not surprised. When I then ask him what a passport is as a sociological phenomenon or object in his eyes, he comes back with a slightly cryptic response:

It is many, many things, and it changes over time and circumstances. [...] It is not a hard and fast thing, it is much more an idea. It is in people's heads. And arguably, that is all it needs to be, because all this stems back to this issue of othering. You know, national fear of other people coming in coupled with the recognition that, well, we do have to let some of them in. And provided popular opinion believes enough is being done to protect their interest, protect them from others coming in, then they will trust in the passport. But still: you are German, I am Canadian, and British, and Irish. So for us our passports are facilitators of travel. But for a lot of nationalities it is a barrier to travel. And somewhere there is a line drawn in-between. So it cannot be one thing.

The plurality of documentary meanings Caspar invokes resonates with the ethnographic explorations of previous chapters, which lay out a multitude of sociological functions taken on by passports and other identification documents: they feature as aesthetic devices of self-

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realisation, interfaces of encounter, a type of rhythmicity of bureaucratic existence, material infrastructures for the distribution of sovereignty and inter-statist trust, or, as in Caspar's account cited above, a material gate-way to a post-documentary future as well as a device for the realisation of an exclusionary, statist ideology. Yet the paradigmatic, one would assume, must be more than just the sum-total of the individual, local configurations and sociological patterns identified in each field of practice (see also Miller and Woodward 2011:2-3 for a similar point on the global). So is it possible to discern from these variously configured, situated documentary functions any sociological continuities?

Let us begin by looking at these paradigmatic multiplicities through a slightly different, yet related prism: that of fluidity, as it is put forward by STS scholars such as Marianne de Laet and Annemarie Mol in their famous writings on the "Bush Pump – B Type" (2000). The bush pump is a manually operated water pump made to the specific conditions of the African bush, and deployed in Zimbabwe, where it has proven to be a successful and popular water pumping device – yet not just that. The bush pump, De Laet and Mol show, is *fluid*: it is "a changeable object, that has altered over time [...] is under constant review", and "not too rigorously bounded", which allows it to transfer well and "travel to 'unpredictable' places" (de Laet and Mol 2000:227). Accordingly, the identity of the Bush Pump as a device is multiple: as a hydraulic mechanism it is an efficient means of accessing water; by providing clean, drinkable water to populations that previously did not have any it is also a health device and an hygienic intervention; as the pump has to be operated by the a group of people to work and be maintained, it is also a community building device; finally, as a crucial element in the emergence of a national water infrastructure built to Zimbabwean standards, it is also a nation-building device. These multiplicities, de Laet and Mol show, complicate our ability to judge whether or not the pump is successful. However, at the same time, they also are foundational to its ability to be it – i.e. successful: for technologies like the bush pump, which must operate in non-standardised environments, de Laet and Mol argue, work best when they are "adaptable, flexible, responsive" (2000:227): "[e]ffective actors need not stand out as solid statues but may fluidly dissolve into whatever it is they help achieve" (de Laet and Mol 2000:227). The pump's

fluidity, much like that of identification documents, thereby raises questions about what people expect technologies (and states) to do.

The pump's uncanny ability to dissolve into its environments muddies the ontological waters of its existence in a very material sense: e.g. if the pump requires people to be operated, are these to be considered part of the pump? *What is the pump and where does it end?*, ask de Laet and Mol (2000:237), and *What is the passport paradigm and where does it end?*, ask I. Identification documents are more than just documents – we know that. They implicate international standards, reading devices, and embodied performances; they are an aesthetic device, a political device, a social device, a communicative device. Yet there are also many things that they are not: a grand equaliser, a pony, a meal. Their fluidity therefore does not render identification documents neutral or infinite: like the pump, they are not boundless: “each of its identities [...] comes with its own different boundaries” (2000:252), which “define a limited set of configurations” (2000:327), shaped by the environments in which it is engaged and affecting whether or not it is a successful actor. So perhaps a closer consideration of these boundaries can help us assess the continuities across multiplicity (de Laet and Mol do not suggest this, but I still hold hope):

Crucial to the unbounded boundedness of the bush pump in de Laet and Mol's account is the pump's designer, who instead of patenting the technology and governing its distribution as a “power-seeking strategist” (2000:227), chose to release his invention into the public domain, thus himself fluidly dissolving into the background. This, de Laet and Mol show, is not simply a sign of the creator's modesty but also crucial to the pump's success – only by abandoning centralised forms of control, “distributed action” can be made possible (2000:251). Now here is where the parallels between the pump and identification documents become complicated: as previous chapters have shown, there is no one central entity that governs or “owns” identification documents; yet whilst they are not a patented technology, their distribution is highly policed still – only states are “licensed” to issue officially recognised identifications that hold currency across borders and institutions. Though this monopoly might dissolve in the

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future as financial providers and tech giants are increasingly involved in the certification of digital identities, we do have our first boundary here. For now states' influence in the issuance of identifications through documents endows these devices with an inherently discriminatory quality – both, in the political and the literal sense: they are deployed to differentiate between people.

Identification documents, unlike the bush pump, are not, therefore, humanitarian devices, nor are they a public good. Yet, the displacement of their becoming in everyday use, I argue, like the displacement of the pump's creator, still plays a central role. Despite their immediate and visible connection to the state, the fact that who makes the rules and what it is that these documents do cannot always be pin-pointed, is as crucial to their success as is the bush pump's maker's dissolution in its application and distribution. For despite the analytical weight I have given in this paper to the material, regulatory, and semiotic transformations and practices involved in the passport paradigm's becoming, in the daily utilisation of identification documents these are likely to be absent from conscious action and processual awareness. Indeed, I would argue that it is only by omitting the processes and transformations of their own derivation, their own multiplicity, that passports can fulfil their functional capacities: their fluid potency is conditional upon their ability to eclipse erratic multitudes – be they of embodied being (chapter 2), of geo-politics (chapter 3) and international relations (chapter 5), or of personhood and belonging (chapter 4), to name a few of the inherent uncertainties pervading the global and national administrative realm. It is this quality of displacement that renders identification documents a powerful *Ersatz* and thus its fluidity an *Ersatz* fluidity: I here take *Ersatz* to mean the next best thing that is however highly available; or: an at least somewhat inferior alternative that hides its messiness and inadequacies behind a shiny exterior. Let me explain:

Through the omission of their own processes of becoming, identification documents emerge e.g. not as conveyers of identificational certainty, for lots will get lost in translation; rather, they are an *Ersatz* identification, i.e. the next best thing to actual identity. Equally, the passport as a

global form does not embody a true, supra-national consensus, but as we found in chapter 5 it is an *Ersatz* uniform – a smallest common denominator. One's ID or passport is not freedom and belonging, but as chapter 4 shows, it is the next best thing – an *Ersatz* platform through which to communicate one's status and pursue self-realisation. Highly securitised identification documents are never an unforgable document – they are, see chapter 2 and chapter 3, a cunning *Ersatz* to incorruptibility and identificatory veracity. *Ersatz* then implies artifice – yet not deception or the illusion of authenticity, for the *Ersatz* is always known to those involved not to be the real thing but a pragmatic alternative, relying on appearances and momentary validity. This makes the documentary *Ersatz* the ideal platform for the passport paradigm's identificational realism, for it offers the exact material and semiotic fluidity required to host the ideological flexibility of identification as a realist project.

As Caspar describes, identification documents must simultaneously be able to express the imperative to include, as well as legitimise the right to exclude. Which of these potentialities becomes activated is entirely contextual: it has to do with where in space and time a person finds itself, what the political climate is, who their parents were, what the law says, what they look like etc. Yet once the identificatory verdict is derived, it has to appear fixed. This appearance of unambiguity, also described in chapter 3, is the *Ersatz* – the next best thing to actual certainty or clarity of bureaucratic belonging. Similarly, as Caspar says, identification documents do not endow the state with absolute control over migration but are an *Ersatz* to control – the appearance of a well-regulated system for who is and is not allowed certain privileges. Burgeoning visa schemes extending the identificatory weight of the passport paradigm are then, equally, an *Ersatz* for actual inter-statist trust and collaboration. Finally, the absence of an official, state-sanctioned identification, as in the case of Theresa with whom this thesis began, is also an *Ersatz* exclusion or deportation: a successful bureaucratic means to keep at bay a person that is materially, fundamentally part of society.

Thus, unlike the bush pump, which is the best thing, loved (de Laet and Mol 2000) not just by the authors of the paper but seemingly most of the people who come across it, identification

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documents are not that: they are the perennial *next-best* to a multitude of desires and intentions pervading the passport paradigm. Consequently, even my answer to the question of “what is the continuity among the passport paradigm’s multiplicities?” is in itself an *Ersatz*: the tentative commitment, next-best to an actual declaration, that the only constant across the constituencies studied in this thesis is the absence thereof. Learning that the thing that identifies uniquely does not have a fixed identity of its own might be an unsatisfying result, especially to those readers that have made it this far. This ambivalence also means that the multi-sited path that I have chosen, this expansion of the scale of ethnographic exploration, does not deliver more certainty than more localised approaches. In fact, the vision developed here is far less concrete and thus, perhaps, far less helpful to our collective academic project than are the rich, situated, nuanced accounts of my ethnographic predecessors. But perhaps, *What do identification documents do? What are they?*, are the wrong questions to ask. Perhaps that, which we learned along the way is enough to have made this whole endeavour worthwhile. In the remainder of this conclusion I want to reflect on the question of methodology, to sketch out its role in the becoming of the above insights, as well as the learnings it might hold for those interested in tracing the emergence of larger-than-local phenomena.

Scalar stories: identity, alterity, and making bigger claims

“[O]ne may think that by changing one’s viewpoint on one’s material (e.g. scaling up to gain an overview of its general contours [...]) one may reduce its complexity, but in doing so one soon realizes one is playing a zero-sum game” (2009:373), recognise Holbraad and Pedersen in their work on scale. Intensity and complexity, they contend, are present on every scale, no matter how elegant or extravagant the analytical, scaling move. That is what makes multi-scalar projects so “messy” as Hecht writes: “because [scale] is both a category of analysis and a category of practices” (Hecht 2018:114, see also Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Quite how much this applies to the passport paradigm becomes of course most clear in chapter 5, where identification documents’ scale-making and scalar dimensions, their analytically and practically

scalar quality collide in their configuration as a global standard. Similarly, the contemplations brought forward in this conclusion seem like a scalar echo of the discussions around fractionality and coherence, which have shaped chapter 3. Scale is thus a Russian doll, simultaneously nesting within and without itself. This means that when writing about scale in the context of this thesis it feels like anything that one could say about identification documents is simultaneously true for scale itself – and vice versa: documents are multi-scalar, so is scale. The findings of this project are multiple, so is scale. Scale shapes what can be seen or is made visible and thus recognisable, so do documents. Scale is both an analytical and a political category, so are documents. One could continue endlessly. Moreover, the kinds of scales traversed in previous chapters are also plural: they are, both, qualitative (different types of sites, actors, contexts) as well as quantitative (a different number of perspectives presented); politico-spatial (local, national, global) as well as positional (creators, practitioners, regulators). This renders multi-scalar analysis a challenging endeavour, as the analytical entry points seem endless.

However, the beauty of moving across scales, if one does it long and frequently enough, is that that the dust will eventually settle: “[w]hat appears to be a clear pattern at one scale may fragment into something else when looked at closer, and what seems randomly scattered may start falling into well-integrated wholes once we take a step back” (2013:285), notes Xiang. It is through these reciprocities or iterative contextualisations between scales that stability re-emerges and can be conceptually expressed, as I have attempted to do in the notions of the *documentary Ersatz* as well as the concept of *identificational realism*. Yet epistemic dangers lurk everywhere:

Most obviously the ranging of different scales in this thesis has coincided with an analytical and narrative framing of different contexts within a singular thematic lens; consequently, each of these chapters would look rather differently, had I not brought with me to the field the necessity to consider them on similar terms, namely that of identification documents. Problems of scale are thus also always ones of comparison – and comparison, some would argue, is as impossible (see Candea 2018) as is identification. Comparison, however, could also be seen as

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the most appropriate of possible modes to attend to the problem of identification and its techno-material enactments; for both identification and comparison concern themselves principally with the dialectic of alterity, i.e. degrees and categories of difference, and identity, i.e. degrees and categories of sameness. The work done in the previous section – the attempt to find continuity among multiplicity – resulting in the introduction of the notion of *Ersatz* as an appropriate means to conceptualise the role of identification documents across the different settings in which I have studied them, is an attempt to weigh and incorporate, both, identity and alterity simultaneously in my comparative reading of the passport paradigm's various constituencies.

This brings to the fore the problem of "orientation" as Hecht, in her previously discussed work on interscalar vehicles, reminds us: "how we position ourselves, what we position ourselves against, and what comparisons such locations do (or do not) authorize" (Hecht 2018:114) is an especially important and politically charged consideration in the context of multi-scalar work. One might, for example, ask, if it is permissible to have Theresa's story, the story of a black woman without a passport with whom this thesis began, and Caspar's perspective, the experiences of a white man who has an abundance of citizenships to choose from and exerts influence in the world of identification, co-present in this thesis, without addressing more explicitly their radically different positionalities. Similarly, in the granular readings of each chapter the political sometimes appears to fall by the wayside, as my analysis is immersed in the material, the mundane, the aesthetic, the immediately experiential. There is thus a danger, in the oscillation between emic and etic readings and perspectives (Hecht 2018:131) to create false equivalences. Yet at its best, multi-scalar "simultaneity should serve instead as a sentinel: an indicator (among others) of the unequal [...] dialectic that underpins the making of modernity's scales" (Hecht 2018:131) by "attending to the history and politics of scale-making" (Hecht 2018:115) alongside moving across scale.

In the project presented over the previous pages I tried my best to approximate this ideal, attempting to – speaking with Mathur – let my "ethnographic stories shift scale — from the

local to the global — while remaining faithful to the particular places, histories, peoples, and nonhumans they emerge from” (2021:2); yet surely I have not always succeeded. In fact, the scalar congruence unearthed and constructed through the comparative moves in this concluding chapter will have inevitably come at a price – identity overtaking alterity. Yet as Tsing, Mathews and Bubandt (2019) have recently argued in their work on the Anthropocene,

[e]verything is arguably different in every place now. How are we to understand this radical difference when it happens both site specifically and on a planetary scale? When radical difference is simultaneously a matter of human ontology and multispecies survival? In the face of the challenges of the Anthropocene, anthropology must dare to be more than the voice of parochial alterity; dare to allow anthropological stories of the “otherwise” into concrete transdisciplinary conversations about planetary structures that “change everything” (Klein 2015). We need to reclaim, in a new register, anthropology’s heritage of daring to make big claims about humans and about the worlds that humans coinhabit with others instead of being content to deconstruct such claims. But we have to make such claims with all the circumspection that also is the trademark of anthropology.

(Tsing, Mathews, and Bubandt 2019:187)

Now the passport paradigm is certainly not the Anthropocene, which in terms of scale sits in a class of its own. Yet it is inherently multi-scalar and, like the Anthropocene, it is somewhat of a collective by-product: a global form that has emerged to touch lives everywhere, without central principles of coordination to have driven it towards this point in any deterministic fashion, albeit still being highly systemic. And so the present thesis is an attempt to approximate if not big, than at least bigger claims about an area of anthropological inquiry – bureaucracy, state-making, identification – that is traditionally approached through, as Tsing et al. characterise them, “dispatches from specific sites, which conclude that ‘just-here-where-I-did-my-fieldwork,’ everything is different” (2019:187). To be clear: I do not believe that the multi-sited, multi-scalar prism is a substitute to more localised accounts. Yet it is a necessary and undervalued complement, urgently required if anthropologists wish to collectively synthesise their findings to a point of extra-disciplinary recognition; to move from *yes, but* to *yes, and* in our conversations with potential intellectual sparring partners within the academy and beyond. A position, which we should certainly claim. How might this thesis achieve this?

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Conceptually, the notions of *identificational realism* and *documentary Ersatz* developed above give us tools to talk and think through bureaucratic and identificatory forms more largely in a more pragmatic manner, i.e. one that is attuned to the reality of practice as inevitably flawed and makes the nuances of these flaws and their ramifications computable to other disciplines operating at a more macro-scale. *Identificational realism*, especially, translates the richness of ethnographic findings into a conceptual framework that connects easily – e.g. to psychologists’ and behavioural economists’ concern with the “sunk cost fallacy”: the phenomenon that people are reluctant to divest from a thing, process, or endeavour, if they have already spent time, money, or effort on it that cannot be recovered, even when the outcome of remaining invested might be uncertain, ambivalent, or sub-optimal. Here the notion of *identificational realism* and the mechanism of the *documentary Ersatz* on which it builds might provide tools for a more granular analysis of the cultural logics of this so-called fallacy – for anthropology might draw different judgements – within the field of identification and beyond; an analysis that is crucial if anthropology wants to help shape the future of identification currently in the making and its various, unpredictable consequentialities.

Moreover, having ascended through the layered process of multi-scalar ethnography, both concepts (as the primary intellectual output of this study) thereby carry in themselves multiple scales and can thus be adapted and contextualised across these, rendering them highly communicable conceptual entities. This is useful as the problem of different scales of observations surely embodies one of the most important divides between anthropology and other disciplines committed to understanding human nature and culture, such as economics, psychology, or statistics.

Finally, multi-scalar ethnographic approaches, especially within the realm of governance, provide us with the tools to offer important context to our collaborators even whilst we are still in the field: take the example of the regulators and technical experts portrayed in chapter 2, whose work it is to design identificatory technologies that once fully conceptualised, are deployed elsewhere, far away from their desks and laboratories. Through my iteratively scalar movements through the field I was able to bring the context, the “sticky materiality of practical

encounters" (Tsing 2005:1), into our conversations, sharing insights that they did not have. These types of insights, however, are rarely found on the pages of this thesis due to a problem that is entirely independent from the issue of scale and thus cannot be overcome by scalar mobilities: the reality that oftentimes different types of knowledges are valued in the academy than are in the world of practice, at least as it is perceived and run by the many and various collaborators the experiences of whom form the foundation of my work. Perhaps, then, multi-scalar approaches could also help us as a discipline to understand better the differences between the knowledges we produce for an audience of peers and the types of insights that our work can generate which can be helpful to our collaborators, as well as develop ways to bring both forms of anthropological understanding to fruition – equally.

Summa summarum

Throughout this thesis it has been my aim to move closer to an understanding of two things: (1) the roots of identification documents' pronounced social consequentiality and (2) the question of what the various people engaged with or by documentary identifiers want from and with them. Looking back at the ethnographic explorations constituting this work, I argue that much has been achieved in this regard: first, I have admitted to the collective record nuanced ethnographic accounts of lesser-studied groups within the global administrative system: border officers, high-level national and UN officials, and technical experts engaged in producing technologies of governance. All these represent groups, whose interests, concerns, and desires have not yet been well understood, allowing me to put forward contextualised, situated accounts that have facilitated novel conceptualisations of the documentary form which may find wider applicability within the interdisciplinary study of bureaucracy, governance, as well as identification technologies and practices. Second, I offered a methodological foray into traversing the emic and etic of multi-scalar forms from a materially-oriented perspective. Whilst this approach builds on such cutting-edge contributions as Feldman's *Migration Apparatus* (2012) or Sriraman's *In Pursuit of Proof* (2018), it also works to reaffirm the efficacy and ambition of the material anthropological project. Finally, in this conclusion I have synthesised the insights

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brought about throughout this thesis into an original conceptual suggestion for why statist identification advances despite its many failures (*identificational realism*) and the material mechanism by which it does so (*documentary Ersatz*). It is now up to the reader to take from these various inputs whatever they so please.

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Figure 2: Overview of the constituencies studied, and the chronology of the fieldwork conducted. © the author.

Figure 3: The *Identigram*® can be seen here as a yellow-green holographic reflection of the document portrait stretching across the centre of the document. It further extends to holographic reflections of other personalised document elements such as the document number and the bearer's name. © Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat.

Figure 4: The biographic data page of the German passport (3rd generation e-passport first issued in March 2017). © Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat [descriptions added by the author].

Figure 5: The German electronic ID card (first issued in August 2021). © Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat [descriptions added by the author].

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