This is the published version of a paper published in *Policing & society*.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Basic, G., Yakhlef, S. (2022)
Anomie and collaboration in intelligence and operational police and border guard work in the Baltic Sea area: in-group mentality and construction of the other
*Policing & society*, 32(9): 1103-1123
https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2021.2023525

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:lnu:diva-109555
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To cite this article: Goran Basic & Sophia Yakhlef (2022): Anomie and collaboration in intelligence and operational police and border guard work in the Baltic Sea area: in-group mentality and construction of the other, Policing and Society, DOI: 10.1080/10439463.2021.2023525

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2021.2023525

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Published online: 18 Jan 2022.
Anomie and collaboration in intelligence and operational police and border guard work in the Baltic Sea area: in-group mentality and construction of the other

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this ethnographic study is to analyse the collaborative work among intelligence and operative personnel from different border authorities in Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia. The aim of this article is to illustrate and discuss how transnational/inter-organisational police identities and trust come into being through officers sharing a construction of specific significant ‘other’ – in this case that of ‘Russian spies/crooks’. Cross border collaboration among police organisations is made difficult as police officers tend to be suspicious of outsiders and colleagues that they have not yet worked with. In this study, we explore how trust among a specific group of officers was however built by contrasting themselves against not (just) criminals but an enemy that could be found among them or have an influence over their colleagues, namely Russia or Russian spies. We refer to this category as ‘norm-dissolving Russian’. This category included concepts such as being a spy, a criminal and a potential military threat, and became a sort of ‘Other’ that reinforced their own in-group bonds. Intelligence and operative personnel present in the analysed collaborative sequences create their professional identities by contrasting themselves with these categories. Drawing on ritual theory as well as symbolic interactionism this article discusses how an in-group feeling and idea of a higher moral order was created and recreated during their collaborative work. Morality is thus created and recreated in the encounter with people that are associated with being the ‘enemy’, present in the situation both in physical and invisible form.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 18 March 2021
Accepted 20 December 2021

KEYWORDS
Norm resolution; intelligence police work; ethnography; interactionism; ritual; anomie; in-group; stereotype; Russia; enemy; operational police work; morality; identity; field notes; field work; qualitative interview; document analysis

Introduction
The recent decades have seen an increase in the cross-boundary mobility of people, production, information, investments, knowledge, and ideas, but also growing restrictions, laws, and regulation to surveil this mobility. Regional law enforcement organisations face great pressure to communicate daily, exchange information, and coordinate enforcement actions with colleagues in other parts of the world (Aas and Gundhus 2015, Yakhlef et al. 2017, Yakhlef 2018). This article focuses on a specific collaborative effort that took place within a European border police collaboration project called Turnstone. The project took place between 2014 and 2015 in Baltic Sea area in northern Europe (Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia), aiming to address issues related to irregular migration and cross border crimes. Project Turnstone was an intelligence and operative police

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and border guard project with the aim of increasing close collaboration and control in the Baltic Sea area, as well as decreasing and preventing cross-border crime and irregular migration. The EU and Schengen agreement is the background of the project that implies a superior requirement for transnational police and border guard cooperation (Yakhlef et al. 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2016, 2017, Yakhlef 2018, 2020). Although the participating organisations where part of EU member states and had some previous experiences of collaboration, interviewed officers reported that a lack of trust between the officers often hindered collaboration. The reason, according to the officers, was that they did not know each other on a personal level, and some were apprehensive of working with people from other cultural and social contexts. Stereotypical understandings of one another through national stereotypes was described as an obstacle for bilateral collaboration (Yakhlef 2018). Stereotypes can be understood as tools or categorise helping people to organise and make sense of their social worlds, often focusing on traits typical of a certain social category, such as for example age, gender, or nationality. Stereotypes can often be misleading and lead to negative attitudes (Hrebícková and Graf 2014). However, in this study we see national stereotypes as symbolic features and as an important part of the officers’ social and collaborative interaction (Blumer 1986[1969]; Mead 2015 [1934]). In this context, (negative) national stereotypes and assumptions were used to establish an ‘in-group mentality’ and identify members that could be trusted, that were not Russian spies or corrupt, criminal officers. In studies of police work and border guarding, trust is often regarded as risk-taking; partners who experience mutual trust are more willing to take risks because there is a belief that others will not take advantage of you (Deutsch 1973, Hufnagel and McCartney 2017). A lack of trust between law enforcement officials and organisations (for example between EU member states) can slow down or hinder information exchange and prospects of collaboration (Bigo 2008, Block 2008a, Yakhlef 2018).

Researchers of cross-border policing have previously taken an interest in the complexity of the structures of cross-border police collaboration as well as intergovernmental relations in general (Benyon et al. 1993, 11–13, Bowling and Foster 2002, Loader and Walker 2007). However, there is more to the transnational sphere than inter-governmental connections, especially the role that law enforces play in transnational policing (Sheptycki 1995). The establishment of new informal collaboration networks demand a certain level of trust, as well as commitment to the group and to the work that the group is to perform (Al-Alawi et al. 2007, Cotter 2015, Whelan 2016). An important aspect of the collaborative effort of the officers was to thus establish a trust-based work relationship by getting to know one another on an interpersonal level. Transnational border policing and border guarding is essentially a targeting practice focusing on protecting national borders against potentially dangerous ‘others’ (Yakhlef 2018). In the case of Project Turnstone, these dangerous others were not only potential criminals, but other collaboration partners rumoured to be corrupt of to be mistrusted with secret information regarding organised crime. From the onset, several Swedish and Finnish officers described that they were reluctant to collaborate with the Baltic states because of their close connection to Russia. On the other hand, Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian officers similarly described a fear of Russia and the countries’ involvement in their nations. Interviewed officers from the Baltic states all described that their organisations faced internal difficulties based on cultural differences between Russian speaking members of staff and Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuanian speakers. On a similar note, the Swedish and Finnish participants also mentioned fear of Russian involvement within the Baltic organisations from the onset of the project.

Important aspects of this project were thus joint work sessions where the officers were given the chance to work together daily, getting to know one another, and eventually establishing a common-sense of belonging (as officers protecting Europe) from potentially dangerous others (criminals or invaders). Borders (and thus bordering practices) are inherently associated with collective identification assuming a common sense of belonging, entailing the assumptions of an ‘us’ and ‘them’ and ways of defining community and exclusion (Balibar 2010, Aas 2011, 334). ‘Criminals’ or other people who deviate from the norm are categorised as antagonist ‘others’, as opposed to the police officers who are legitimised by their actions (Becker 1963, Basic 2018a).
Intelligence and operative police and border guard collaborative work in the Baltic Sea area, as well as transnational collaboration in this context, is associated with a rhetorical construction of crime fighters as defenders of current norm-stability in the society and ‘Others’ (criminals combated) as actors attacking current norms in society (Durkheim 1979[1897]; Durkheim 2013[1893]). Occasionally, the officers described suspects as ‘criminals’ or ‘spies’ from Russia in various cases that they work on during the project. The threat of a Russian invasion was often mentioned by interviewed officers, especially from the Baltic states. As the Crimea area was occupied in 2015, the officers were shocked and awareness of Russian activity in the Baltic Sea area increased. As one officers said, they were always aware of ‘Russian activity’, and they were always worried that Russia would (again) try to invade the Baltic nations. ‘Russian military invasion’ was thus also given a main role in demonstrating the crime fighters’ defence of a norm-stability in the society and thus became another symbol of ‘norm-dissolving Russians.’

Despite the growing interest in transnational police work and transnational collaboration there is still a need for ethnographic studies that focus on hands-on border-police collaboration as well as the everyday-life and work practices of border officers, especially regarding trust building and group socialisation in cross border collaboration (Côté-Boucher et al. 2014, Yakhlef 2020). Furthermore, as most ethnographic studies of (border) police work takes place in a singular social and/or cultural context, as for example within the same police station or nation this study provides unique insight into what happens when officers from several different countries, units, and stations must work together. The project presented a unique opportunity to observe ongoingly (in the here and now) how an in-group mentality was formed, enabling its participants to collaborate, and to better handle issues of suspicion and distrust. The aim of this study is thus to focus on a particular series of events that took place during the collaboration project, namely situations when national stereotypes and ‘us and them’ categorise where used. We argue that these categories enhanced trust among the participants and enabled interpersonal collaboration. Cross border collaboration among police organisations is made difficult as police officers tend to be suspicious of outsiders and colleagues that they have not yet worked with. In this study, we explore how trust among a specific group of officers was however built by contrasting themselves against not (just) criminals but an enemy that could be found among them or have an influence over their colleagues, namely Russia or Russian spies. We refer to this category as ‘norm-dissolving Russian’. This category included concepts such as being a spy, a criminal and a potential military threat, and became a sort of ‘Other’ that reinforced their own in-group bonds. Intelligence and operative personnel present in the analysed collaborative sequences create their professional identities by contrasting themselves with these categories. We explore how the creation of an in-group mentality (as norm stabilising European officers) was created and contrasted with another category, that of the ‘norm-dissolving Russian’, that reinforces the in-group ties of the participating Swedish, Finnish, Lithuanian, Estonian, and Latvian officers.

Empirical material for the study was collected inspired by previous ethnographic studies (Gubrium and Holstein 1999, Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, Emerson et al. 2011), as well as previous ethnographies of police work and transnational and border policing efforts (Van Maanen 1973, Fassin 2013, 2017, Aliverti 2021). Ethnographic research of the police can help the researcher get insight into the rules and tacit knowledge of the police, the nature and deviation of formal policing procedures, attitudes towards criminals, as well as opinions of what constitutes so called real police work (Terpstra and Schaap 2013). Fassin (2017, 8) underlines that the strength of ethnography is the focus on the ordinary and the mundane, the uncertain and the ambiguous, in contrast to the often spectacular, tragic, or heroic accounts provided by commentators or journalists in public news media. By participating in project Turnstone, researchers gained access to the daily work performed by the intelligence and operative police and border guard officers in the Baltic Sea area who participated in the collaboration project. Multiple forms of empirical material were analysed in this study: observations and photographs taken during the field work (718 field hours), interviews (73), documents produced by intelligence and operative personnel (Project Turnstone 1 2014, Project
Turnstone 2014, Project Turnstone 3 2014, Project Turnstone 4 2014), and media coverage concerning intelligence and operative actions (Border Guard Latvia 2014, ATL Lantbrukets Affärstidning 2015, Göteborgs-Posten 2015, Norrtelje Newspaper 2015, Police Stockholm 2015, Svenska Dagbladet 2015, Swedish Institute 2015); (see section ‘Ethnographic methodology and variation in the empirical material’).

In the empirical material, we discovered a wide range of new symbols produced collaboratively when they interacted with one another (Blumer 1986[1969], Charon 2001, Mead 2015[1934]). Our data is presented in three analytical themes regarding the creation of ‘norm-dissolving Russian’: (1) as criminals, (2) as spies, and (3) as a military invasion.

**Society, interaction, and anomie**

Resolution of the prevailing norms in a society in the context of war, occupation, anarchy, and takeover by criminal forces dispels the old norms. However, new norms are also set but can in turn can be quickly dispelled (Basic 2018a, 2018b). According to Durkheim, all individuals live and are influenced by a collective consciousness. A collective consciousness consists of a totality of shared emotion-driven actions arising from the interactions among people (Durkheim 1979[1897], Durkheim 2013[1893]). Based on the collective consciousness, solidarity is created, which can also be analysed as a result of interpersonal interaction (Blumer 1986[1969], Charon 2001, Mead 2015[1934]).

Durkheim’s attention is directed at interpersonal interaction and how it creates changes in society, often showing the various pathological features that can lead to frustration and conflict. When the old network dissolves, it becomes impossible to maintain the old norms and values. The individual is no longer limited by the rules of morality and authority. Instead, the individual may develop a pattern of constantly exceeding all limits because the collapse of the former social control coincides with the development of the system that requires constant growth of individual needs. The product of such interactions is a state of society where there is uncertainty about values, goals, and norms. Durkheim refers to this state as ‘anomie’ (Durkheim 1979[1897], Durkheim 2013[1893]).

In his analysis Collins (2004, 34) further develops Durkheim’s (1979[1897]) view of social life with the help of Goffman’s theory of situational significance. Goffman (2002[1959], 15–16) argued that individuals define any given situation to assess how to act when meeting other people. Every definition of the situation has a normative character – it tells us what we should and should not do. The definition of the situation also depends on the actors’ actions in the situation – and this refers to both the participants’ and the audience’s actions (Goffman 2002[1959], 21). This normative accepting and rejecting can happen in a short-term interaction instance or during a prolonged interaction chain (Goffman 1982[1967]).

Within an occupational setting, drawing on amongst other Durkheim (2013[1893]), and Goffman (2002[1959]), Van Maanen and Barley (1984) explore the notion of occupational community in their quest for understanding why it is that people behave as they do in the workplace. They develop the notion of an occupational community as an alternative to an organisational frame of reference for understanding why it is that people behave as they do in the workplace. They focus on the social worlds that surround the workers as well as the problems of diversity and conflict in the workplace. Their ethnographic observations suggest that insiders generally see their occupation quite different than outsiders, and that insiders may group themselves or distance themselves from work members based on values and dimensions that escape outsiders.

**Identity construction and occupational culture of the police**

There are previous interactionist ethnographies of police work focusing on the habits and conduct of police officers, as well as identity, workplace socialisation, and workplace rituals. For example, Van Maanen (2010) describes identity construction and display amongst urban police officers in the
U.S. Van Maanen analyses the work culture of the officers by focusing on the routines and rituals of the officers in their daily work and the values that they attach to certain aspects of the job, being that they considered street level policing as real police work whereas office work has a lower symbolic status.

Punch (1981) further explores police work and occupational culture from a symbolic interactionist sociological perspective. The background of the study are corruption scandals and the aftermath of these events among the Amsterdam police in the 1979s. The corruption scandal studied by Punch shows that moral blame occurred between two groups of police officers, mainly the lower ranks and senior officers, who each blamed the other group for the misconduct. The study reveals how moral blame can be distributed in a workplace setting and exemplify the dichotomy between values, social distance, mutual mistrust, as well as various levels of manipulation and control among police officers.

Another example is Manning’s (1982) ethnographic study of the U.S police and the relationship between (police) organisations, information, and technology. A dramaturgical and symbolic interactionism perspective is used to investigate the symbolic aspects of policing at two communication centres in the U.S where the police received messages from the public. The study concludes that the police produce drama when they interpret messages from the public and that the officers reproduce their own metaphoric version of society in the ritualistic process of encoding, decoding and recoding messages and actions.

In our study, the everyday collaborative work of the intelligence and operational police and border officers was characterised by norm-creation and the re-creation of rituals. A workday started with the morning coffee and the first exchange of information regarding operative activities that had taken place or border related crimes that had been reported. The events of various operative activities, such as for example surveillance or control of individuals and/or cars were shared among the partners, assessed, and documented When ‘something had happened’ it was described by the officers as an ‘interruption’ or breach of everyday life. By describing themselves as a team working with ‘spotting things that stand out’ or people who break the rules they depict a desire of preserving the prevailing social order. It was common that the potential suspects were referred to as ‘Russians’ or assumed to originate from Russia, although there was seldom evidence to support these assumptions at that time. In this sense, the symbol of the ‘norm-dissolving Russian’ was constructed although not physically present in the situation.

Trust, suspicion, and collaboration in intelligence and operational police and border guard work

Officers interviewed for this study highlighted that we live in a world with increased risk which demand law enforcement organisations to work collaboratively and proactively. However, despite identifying with a larger ‘European border guard community’, the officers also stated that the organisations participating in the project were ‘on opposite sides of the map.’ The officers claimed that cultural, social, organisational, and political differences had previously obstructed transnational collaboration, hence the development of Project Turnstone.

In previous research, the concept of ‘police culture’ is often described as a set of norms, values, perspectives, and craft rules that informs police behaviour, Reiner (2015, 324-325) or as the cognitions, skills, and affect, which define good police work Manning (1977). Much scholarly (and popular) work regarding the organisational environment of the police has created a stereotypical image of police officers as possessing a cynical worldview characterised by suspicion, pessimism, and prejudice. However, as highlighted by several researchers, being suspicious might help officers spot trouble in advance, notice offenses, and make the officers more efficient in detecting and solving crime (Chan 1997, Holmberg 2003, Yakhlef 2018, 2020). As introduced by Finstad (2000), police officers need to acquire the ‘police gaze’ (politiblicket) to perform their job, that is, they are trained to spot all that is deviant from the norm and that which civilian citizens would not notice. This practice is also referred to as the ‘police eye’ (Holmberg 2003) or ‘police eying’
It is a common view that police officers gradually lose their sense of innocence as they get more and more use to spotting deviant behaviour, detecting the ‘rough’ from the ‘respectable’ (Holdaway 1984), or the ‘good’ from the bad, and thus dividing the public into two opposite camps (Holmberg 2003). This aspect is of interest not only when officers police ‘the general public’ but when they need to collaborate with partners that they do not yet know. Border policing and transnational bilateral collaboration require formal agreements as well as informal networks where collaborating partners can get to know one another and build trust (Block 2008a). As described by the officers, rumours (or sometimes even evidence) of misconduct and corruption, especially associated with Russia, Eastern Europe, and the Baltic States, have been detrimental to a trust-based relationship, placing strain on potential collaboration. Only by developing a trust-based relationship, driven by shared moral values and a common understanding could transnational partners build trust-based context for working together (Yakhlef 2018, 2020).

**Previous ethnographic studies on cross border collaboration**

Previous research on bordering practices, collaboration, and security governance (in Europe and elsewhere) has identified a wide range of social, structural, legal, and cultural obstacles that might hinder transnational collaboration and information exchange of information (Gerspacher and Dupont 2007, Hufnagel et al. 2012, Stenning and Shearing 2012, Aas and Gundhus 2015, Loftus 2015, Whelan 2016, van der Woude and van der Leun 2017, Bowling and Westenra 2018, Brouwer 2020, Colombeau 2020, Gundhus and Jansen 2020). In the EU, the absence of a common legal framework and differences in the internal coordination of collaboration activities are identified as obstacles of collaboration (Dastanka and Chyprys 2014). With regards to intelligence sharing, excessive bureaucracy and hierarchical organisation structures can be particularly troublesome when officers are working under time pressure (Block 2008b, 76). Actors can address such structural or organisational shortcomings by adopting unofficial roles and creating informal networks to overcome limitations set by existing structures and practices (Gerspacher and Dupont 2007; Whelan 2016).

Other researchers have focused on the different professional habitus and work routines in European border guarding or referred to varied group habitus or moral communities when discussing police occupational culture (Fassin 2013, 23–24, Bigo 2014). Informal social communities or networks entail increasing interpersonal exchange and collaboration between officers and their organisations. Such collaboration can highlight cultural differences, competition, and diverging interests between collaborating partners (Block 2008a, Dupont et al. 2017).

Previous ethnographies of transnational and border policing have given much insight into the daily life of border police officers and the complex structures in which they operate. For example, Feldman’s (2019) ethnographic study and in-depth fieldwork regarding the undercover police investigative teams working against human smuggling in Europe provides insight into the complex ethical dilemmas that the officers face. Feldman specifically highlights issues of decision making, ethical judgements, sovereignty, and action in the daily lives and personal experiences of the officers working with migration issues. In a similar manner, Andersson’s (2014, 2019) research and fieldwork regarding the Euro-African border describe the embodied effects of the production of illegality and the means of detection and apprehension of ‘illegal migrants’. Andersson (2014, 2019) further problematises the effects and consequences of such bordering practices as a sight of state investment, concern, and a political geography of fear. Aliverti (2021) explores the everyday work and conduct of inland border control officers in Britain in her empirical study of the relationship between the police, social order, borders, and migration policing. She describes forms of collaboration and how frontline enforcement agents not only enforce but recreate the border in their frontline work. By focusing on the everyday worlds of police and immigration officers, Aliverti describes the legal, political, ethical, and social dilemmas of maintaining order in a global age. Another example is the study by Olwig et al. (2019) who has given us a better understanding of the
implications of using biometrics at European border sites. The study is based on collaborative fieldwork where the experience of the border control agents regarding their perception and application of biometric technologies are at focus. The case studies show that biometric technologies are not as neutral or scientifically accurate as is often claimed, but rather ambiguous and subject to subjective interpretation.

As we have seen, there has been a growing scholarly interest in transnational policing and intelligence-based police work in recent years. New demands on the police regarding international collaboration, the importance of trust and the occurrence of (mis)trust among border police officers have also been noted by in previous studies of transnational policing. Several aspects of dis-trust, trust building, and in-group socialisation among police and border officers have been present in previous research of border and police work (see for example Lemieux 2010, Franko and Gundhus 2015, Sausdal 2018, Hufnagel and Moiseienko 2020). In terms of transnational policing, collaboration is generally difficult as police officers from one country do not really trust their colleagues from another country – and vice versa. Whereas other studies point to the existence of a ‘transnational policing distrust’, this study seeks to explore ways in which trust is, nevertheless, build. Despite an amplified interest in border policing networks and transnational police collaboration, the cultures, and practices of those policing borders and of those enforcing bordering practices are of interest by policing scholars as there is still a need for ethnographic studies focusing on the everyday-life and work practices of border officers.

This article aims at filling some of these empirical and theoretical voids by describing how collaboration was increased and aided by informal interaction and the creation of a European sense of in-group contrasted by an out-group of potentially dangerous ‘Other’. Our specific contribution to the field of border policing research is thus to show how this takes place in practice in the everyday work of a group of collaborating officers. As we shall see in the empirical examples, the potential other is characterised as the dangerous and norm-destabilising Russian criminal as well as the potentially dangerous infiltrator and corrupt officers.

**Ethnographic methodology and variation in the empirical material**

This analysis is based on an empirical study of a qualitative nature, such as recorded conversational interviews, field interviews, field observations, and documents. Methodological and analytical inspiration for this study is found in ethnographic research (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, Bryman 2015, Yakhlef, Basic, and Åkerström, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2016, 2017, Yakhlef, 2018, Yakhlef 2020). Ethnographic research is characterised by a variety of analyses of different types of empirical material (observations, photographs, interviews, and/or documents).

The fieldwork observations in this study were attained in five different countries and at seven different border authorities. The method of the fieldwork observations is organised around the intelligence and operative activities in Project Turnstone. The observational material for the present study was collected during 718 h of field observations in the participating border authorities. The researchers gathered observational material during joint actions such as operative action weeks (intelligence and operative collaborative work), project-related meetings, everyday border guard or police work, day-to-day office work, official project-related meetings, and official organisational meetings.

The 73 pre-scheduled interviews were conducted with 66 persons of the different border authorities including police officers, border officers, coast guard officers, border police officers, and administrative staffs connected to Project Turnstone. The interviews were carried out in English and Swedish. Empirical sequences analysed in this study, which was initially written in Swedish, were translated during the analysis of the article by the authors into English.

The interviewed persons are of different ranks and have different work tasks on different levels, performing intelligence and/or operative-based policing and border guard work. Most interviews were completed individually, but a few were conducted in a group setting. During most of the interviews, a dictation microphone was used. In addition, an interview guide was used in which different
topics that the interviewer wanted to talk over were noted. The content of each guide was usually reviewed before each interview, and the interviewer tried to ask about all the topics of interest during the dialogue.

In addition to ethnographic observations and interviews, in this study, we also analysed documents produced by Project Turnstone (Project Turnstone 1 2014, Project Turnstone 2 2014, Project Turnstone 3 2014, Project Turnstone 4 2014), media reports (Border Guard Latvia 2014, ATL Lantbrukets Affärstidning 2015, Göteborgs-Posten 2015, Norrtelje Tidning 2015, Police Stockholm 2015, Svenska Dagbladet 2015, Swedish Institute 2015), and photographs taken by the researchers during the field work. The purpose of these analyses was to examine whether and how the category of ‘norm-dissolving Russian’ was constructed in this material (Atkinson and Coffey 2004[1997], Emmison 2004[1997], 246–65, Heath 2004[1997], 266–82).

Empirical sequences presented in this study were categorised in the empirical material as ‘Criminal Russians,’ ‘Russian espionage,’ and ‘Russian military invasion.’ Our choice of empirical examples for analysis was guided by the study’s aim, i.e. to analyse how intelligence and operative personnel within the different border authorities in Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia collaborate, and during collaborations created and recreated picture of the in-group mentality among the participating officers which was contrasted with another category, that of the ‘norm-dissolving Russian’, as a sort of ‘Other’ that reinforces their own in-group bonds. Furthermore, the choice of empirical example was guided by the analytical quality of the sequence, i.e. the extent to which the example clarified the analytical point we wanted to highlight. Russian officers and their views of ‘European’ officers were not considered in this study, which would have helped in the analysis of trust issues. However, a few of the interview officers spoke Russian and associated themselves with the Russian speaking community of Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania.

**Anomie and collaboration: example criminal**

The collaborative work of intelligence and operative police and border guards in the Baltic Sea area is permeated by a rhetorical construction of the crime fighters as defenders of current norms in the society, and especially within a European context, with the others (criminals being fought) as actors attacking current norms. Empirical material for this study shows an intensive and interactive production of new symbols in the collaboration context that is being used by actors through display and use in the conflict (Durkheim 1979[1897], Blumer 1986[1969], Charon 2001, Block 2008a, 2008b, Durkheim 2013[1893], Aas and Gundhus 2015, Mead 2015[1934], Yakhlef 2018). In keeping with this production of symbols, reports from the media are dramaturgical (Border Guard Latvia 2014, ATL Lantbrukets Affärstidning 2015, Göteborgs-Posten 2015, Norrtelje Tidning 2015, Police Stockholm 2015, Svenska Dagbladet 2015, Swedish Institute 2015). What is illustrated in the media seems to be Hollywood inspired – criminal leagues are presented as well-organised and carrying out spectacular thefts of jewels and luxury cars (Göteborgs-Posten 2015, Police Stockholm 2015). A few of the officers even described to us that their fascination with police and spy movies had inspired their choice to become police officers. One officer told us that he had a ‘James bond complex’, meaning that he admired and wanted to be like the classical agent hero that often encounter dangerous criminals, occasionally from Russia or the Soviet Union. Another officer conveyed a similar statement: ‘you admire and want to be a little bit like the agents and action heroes that you have seen in movies, even if you know that those movies are not the reality’ (Yakhlef 2018, 151). Despite claiming awareness of the fictional character of action and spy movies, the officers spent a lot of time during their coffee breaks and long workdays telling stories of previous successful cases that had been solved or dramatic arrests that had been made. The stories were often action packed with guns, bombs, organised criminal gangs, and car chases where the criminals were close to getting away from the officers. Sometimes the key figure or criminal of these stories were ‘Russian spies’ or organised criminal groups from the Baltic states dealing with guns, drugs, or human trafficking. Although it seemed clear to most of the listener that the stories were
exaggerated, they always caught everyone’s attention and lifted the mood of the officers. These stories also exemplify norm-preserving symbolic production (Durkheim 1979[1897], Blumer 1986[1969], Charon 2001, Durkheim 2013[1893]). As the ‘criminals from Russia’ often had have key roles in the stories and had to be fought by the law enforcement they symbolise that the threat of anomie and fluctuating morality comes from Russia, and the attenuation of the threat is based on the representation of an effective law enforcement.

When asked about their choice of work most of the officers told us that they had chosen to become police or intelligence officers because of the excitement and action that they associated with the job. However, a different reality is revealed in research observations and photographs taken by the researchers during the field work, and in reviewing documents produced by Project Turnstone (Project Turnstone 1 2014, Project Turnstone 2 2014, Project Turnstone 3 2014, Project Turnstone 4 2014). In the photos, the perpetrators are wearing ripped clothes, drive rusty cars, and have been previously suspected or convicted for not-so-cinematic crimes such as alcohol and cigarette smuggling, shoplifting, robbery, drug related crimes, and theft of old recyclable metals, new and used tools (chainsaws, drill, wrenches), horse saddles, car parts or boat engines. The long workdays at the police stations (sometimes more than 10 h) when the officers assessed intelligence information, made telephone calls, or wrote emails also paint a picture of a group of office workers rather than actions heroes detecting spies.

The field notes and photographs taken by the researchers provide further examples of the lack of dramaturgical attractiveness (or an obvious Russian connection) in the crimes that were discussed during intelligence and follow-up actions in the collaborative project:

Following intelligence information, they identified several individuals traveling in various dual-purpose vehicles as potential thieves transporting stolen goods and stopped the vehicles for control (some of those were traveling to Russia and Belarus). Those individuals selected for control had been discussed earlier during intelligence planning as the most probable candidates for criminal activity based on their extensive criminal records. These individuals were earlier suspected of or convicted for, e.g. copper theft and shoplifting. When the cars are being inspected, the drivers and others in the vehicle are asked to wait outside while the police and border guards go through the car. One officer participating in the car inspection expresses frustration that nothing stolen was found in the cars. He said multiple times during searches of numerous cars (sometimes while inspecting the goods in big full garbage bags) ‘garbage, ‘only garbage.’ The officer is saying that what these individuals are transporting in the cars is unworthy, i.e. ‘garbage.’ The researcher is standing together with the individuals while their cars are being inspected and watching the officers devalue the transported goods and, in a way, disparage the individuals transporting it. Both the individuals and the other officers conducting the inspection can hear the officer when he repeats ‘garbage,’ ‘only garbage’ (this officer is the only one participating in the inspection who was expressing himself disrespectfully about the goods and the individuals transporting it). After the control, which lasted 3 h and resulted in 0 confiscations of stolen goods, the individuals were released. (Field notes)

Intelligence and operative police and border guard collaboration work is a practice based on the notion that there is an abstract threat that can emerge and transform societal norm stability into instability if the perpetrators (criminals) are not fought and stopped. Police and border guards in this study are constructed as important figures in this struggle to prevent norm resolution (Durkheim 1979[1897], Durkheim 2013[1893]) and preserve the current state of society, portrayed as stable and better – at least if we ask the intelligence and operative active police officers and border guards.

In media reporting on intelligence and operational activities in the project and in the documents produced by Project Turnstone (Project Turnstone 1 2014, Project Turnstone 2 2014, Project Turnstone 3 2014, Project Turnstone 4 2014), the category ‘criminals from Russia’ is not a frequent one. The media report on those from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania who commit crimes in Sweden and Finland, and Russia is rarely mentioned (Border Guard Latvia 2014, ATL Lantbrukets Affärstidning 2015, Göteborgs-Posten 2015, Norrtelje Tidning 2015, Police Stockholm 2015, Svenska Dagbladet 2015, Swedish Institute 2015). The project documents include the nationality of more than 700 individuals who had been suspected or convicted of a crime in any of the European
countries. Few of these individuals are citizens of Russia; most of them are citizens of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (Project Turnstone 1 2014, Project Turnstone 2 2014, Project Turnstone 3 2014, Project Turnstone 4 2014).

The picture presented in several interviews is very different. Actors in this study describe Russians as the leading criminals in the Baltic region. Russian criminals are rendered as organisers and leading figures in various types of crime. The crime that affects Sweden and Finland is reproduced as it comes from Russia via Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Mino, one interviewee, says when we talk about crime in the Baltic region:

Mino: So we see that there is crime, both from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Russia, to Sweden. / … / Because if you look at most of the crime, it will actually originate from Russia in the other nations.
Researcher: OK.
Mino: It is always a transit country, Russia, usually if you look from there.
Researcher: Meaning?
Mino: Human trafficking goes through them, from Russia into the other nations. / … / if we only look plainly (indistinct 11:03) we are talking about theft, human trafficking, arguably transit countries every one of them. Drug smuggling and alcohol and, what is it called, cigarettes, it is also, of course, cars. / … / Car thefts. Equipment for automobiles. / … / These are large areas, then it’s also new areas to discover, there will always be new tax fraud in any way that you …
Researcher: (Coughs)
Mino: One of the countries that is big in this is Russia, unfortunately, that is where the crimes come from usually.

Analysis of the interview with Mino shows the narrator’s production that norm stability of several countries is threatened by crime from Russia (‘most of the crime, it will actually originate from Russia in the other nations’). Similar views and claims were made by other interview officers from all participating countries. For example, several Swedish and Finnish officers associated the Baltic states with corruption and the post-communist heritage, referring to reports and surveys of the frequencies of corruption in Eastern Europe. Many had heard rumours of Russian organised crime groups that operated in the Baltic states due to the enduring Russian interest in the area. During formal meetings as well as private conversations with participating officers there seemed to be a common assumption that collaboration with Russia was difficult and a rather sensitive topic. However, a few Russian speaking participants disagreed and mainly complained about slow bureaucratic rules, rather than difficult interpersonal collaboration. Several Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian officers spoke fluent Russian, as they were ‘forced to learn the language during Soviet times’, as described by on them. An interviewed officer described the benefit of speaking Russian regarding catching criminals:

Many Latvians speak Russian and that is always good for us, because sometimes we can eavesdrop when some criminals speak Russian, and they don’t think that we understand. We caught a couple of guys that way ones.

There was a generally held assumption among the officers that most criminals originated from Russia and Belarus, although there was little evidence presented that this was the case. In this sense, the actions of the participants who highlighted Russian criminals as a potential threat, as well as their audience of the other participating officers, created a common definition of the situation (Goffman 2002[1959]). When talking about and investigating criminals the participating officers often used symbolic categories and national stereotypes when describing criminals that were under their radar. However, the criminals were often described in a generalised manner and as an ‘unspecific threat’ that needed to be combated. This production can be seen as expressions of the generalised other (Mead 1995[1934]) – that is, Mino’s picture of the norm stability of the public or the image of the ordinary, conventional man in a stable society. These verbal constructions – both norm stability and a norm-preserving individual – are threatened by alternative interpretations when the crime from Russia spreads. Thus, the threat of crime from Russia threatens the existence of a normative stable society.
Previous research on intelligence and operational police work shows that collaboration in this context is often characterised, and thus also affected by, a ‘us’ and ‘them’ thinking. Criminals and individuals who differ in other ways (in the style of clothing or ethnicity) become subject of police focus and efforts. Criminals and deviants are categorised as the contra-group or ‘they’ in relation to police officers, who are usually portrayed as a ‘us’ group, entitled to conduct their operations (Williamson 2008, Aas 2011, Stenning and Shearing 2012, Graaff, Nyce and Locke 2016, Yakhlef, 2018).

Mino’s narrative constructs a symbolic reality where law-abiding and conventional actors are grasping to retain a stable normative order, in this case with reference to criminality originating from Russia. This reality is partly an expression of fear and solidarity against norm resolution in the shape of criminality from Russia and partly an expression of social evolution that actualises the need for a contra-group to strengthen the feelings of solidarity in societies with norm stabilities (Durkheim 1979[1897], Goffman 2002[1959], Collins 2004, Durkheim 2013[1893]).

Through his narrative, Mino dramatises symbols for his own group (law-abiding and conventional people) and in that way creates his own kind of world where he can feel safer – in a world without norm resolution – with stable norms. Furthermore, these symbols are used to help the actor deal with the ambient pressure against the group – when norm-breaking and norm-dissolving actions come in different kinds of forms (as in the above quote about the different types of crime coming from Russia).

Mino’s story about crime that is spreading from Russia creates a special social identity with the narrator. This identity is not viewed as permanent because there is a close connection between identities and social circumstances in the ambient society. Identities change because norms in the society change (Basic 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, Blumer 1986[1969], Charon 2001, Dastanka and Chyprys 2014, Gerspacher and Dupont 2007, Huxham and Beech 2008, Mead 2015[1934], Schruijer 2008, Yakhlef, 2018).

To create a new identity during a time of change, when norms are broken and re-created, a new symbolically founded identity is needed that points towards an old normative stable reality or lifestyle. Generally, a social identity becomes most valuable when it is interpreted as threatened and when current society norms are threatened by norm resolution.

Symbolically founded identities such as those that Mino is constructing in his narrative are based on the actual and stable normative states of society. These symbols preserve on an abstract level the cultural fellowship found in society (van Duyne 1993, Block 2008a, Dupont, Manning, and Whelan 2017, Yakhlef 2018): most individuals do not commit crime, and these individuals live in the same society and understand each other, where they are capable of interacting, because they agree on the importance of these symbols.

This identity founded in the symbolic also requires a contra-group in its dynamic (Goffman 2002[1959], Collins 2004, Al-Alawi, Al-Marzoqqi, and Mohammed 2007, Cotter 2015, Whelan 2016). The contra-group mentioned above exists in Russia and threatens the existence of the ‘us’ group and the arranged normative existence. Their idea of identity (which originates from symbolic narratives) constructs an ongoing connection (or a chain of rituals) that creates, re-creates, and preserves norms. These interactions can be seen as calming for some people when norms are threatened by resolution. A stable ‘core’ of belongingness guarantees individual continuity with current stability. These interactions are a meaningful source for self-respect and genuine authenticity.

**Anomie and collaboration: example spy**

Anomie does not rise from nothing. It is a product of the interactive dynamic that is actualised when individuals meet acting like an energy that makes it possible for individuals to come together (Durkheim 1979[1897], Blumer 1986[1969], Charon 2001, Durkheim 2013[1893], Mead 2015[1934], Basic 2018a, 2018b). Intelligence and operative police and border guard collaborative work remains within current norms but also establishes new norms that can quickly change with time.
As argued by Collins (2004, 12) norms do not occur in parallel with the group or society but are a fundamental part of social life. Furthermore, normative, and correct action should be understood as a learned and as a ritual-based social practice.

Anomie can be understood as the core during police and border guard collaborative work, a kind of pulsating moral destructive force that no one really can control, but anomie can also attract, seduce, and – paradoxically – bring social order.

As mentioned above, as a starting point from earlier collaborative research, intelligence and operative police work is affected by ‘us’ and ‘them’ thinking (Gerspacher and Dupont 2007, Williamson 2008, Block 2008a, 2008b, Cotter 2015, Graaff, Nyce and Locke 2016, Yakhlef, Basic, and Åkerström, 2017, Yakhlef 2018).

This polarisation in the view of others may deepen and develop dramaturgical forms. The stronger and bigger the ‘other’ is illustrated, the stronger and bigger the argument is that justifies the need for defence towards the other. An illustrative example from the empirical material can be found in an interview with Dal. When we discuss collaboration, intelligence, and operative work in his organisation he says that his organisation must deal with espionage from a Russian authority. The espionage attempts were so serious that Dal’s country’s military intelligence was alarmed (the intelligence entity in the quotes has been shortened to CMI³). Dal describes how CMI was contacted:

Dal: I don’t just pick up the phone and dial CMI and ask, instead I turn to someone very special I know and have confidence in, found in my everyday network. / … /
Researcher: That sounds very interesting, sounds like in a movie (laughter).
Dal: Yes, it almost is like that a little bit.
Researcher: Yes, it really is, yes …
Dal: And it has happened, for me it has happened a couple of times that I was forced into doing so, and it was also about a foreign official at a very high level that started to ask questions. It has also resulted in that people from CMI have contacted other colleagues and informed them that these contacts aren’t so good to, to maintain, instead to respond carefully to the questions that they would want to discuss the matter with us if anything occurred / … / There are the ones who are very interested in our operation, and you could almost call it espionage.

Researcher: Very interesting. From which countries do they come from, that asked the question, if you want to tell?
Dal: Well, eh, it involves Russia primarily. / … / you have a purpose to gather information, that maybe is more espionage than needing the information to conduct border crossing work against crime, against the trans-boundary crime.

Researcher: OK, exactly, now I’m a bit more on the trail
Dal: mapping bits and …
Researcher: Yeah, because Russia as a country, one would think they have their intelligence, in the earlier days they had ZGD …
Dal: Now it’s called GLB⁴ / … / They have their double roles also, many of whom we work with, one can conclude that they have more roles than just being border control or being a boss of a department in the border control, they have other assignment retrieval also / … / And that a few do it maybe in a good way and others do it in a way that makes us ask questions, is it really relevant for you to ask these kinds of questions.

The phenomenon of Russian espionage constructed in Dal’s narratives does not exist in the media coverage about intelligence and operative actions in the project (Border Guard Latvia 2014, ATL Lantbrukets Affärstidning 2015, Göteborgs-Posten 2015, Norrtelje Tidning 2015, Police Stockholm 2015, Svenska Dagbladet 2015, Swedish Institute 2015) or in documents produced by Project Turnstone (Project Turnstone 1 2014, Project Turnstone 2 2014, Project Turnstone 3 2014, Project Turnstone 4 2014). The dramaturgical figure of the Russian spy fishing for information about methods of work in the organisations stands out for its absence as well in most other interviews and field notes that form the empirical base for this study.

The above quote from Dal can be seen as both individual and social gestalt representing moral order in a stable norm society. His narratives, acting, and situational comprehension depend on interactions among people before, during, and after his workday as well as on common collective
ways of thinking and acting accordingly. The context is where Dal has difficulties changing because relationships are relegated, modified, and remodeled outside his reach.

Dal’s interaction with other people and the cooperative way of thinking and acting afterwards creates the solidarity that appears in his narrative. Dal is constructing both similarities between actors keeping current normative order in his society and the cohesion among the participants of his group (‘I turn to someone very special I know and have confidence in, found in my everyday network’). In Dal’s narrative, the actors are not treated as individual actors but as a gathered group.

The described context also brought up a competing group: Russia’s ‘GLB.’ The solidarity constructed in Dal’s relation with contacts working at CIMI does not exist if we examine Dal’s relation with GLB. Dal represents a break in the band where the players in his organisation and GLB actively collaborated and were ordered through this to reach each other by different contacts (‘these contacts aren’t so good to, to maintain’). These connections were there earlier (or could be found in the future) among actors in Dal’s organisation and GLB but are now forbidden by the CIMI, as military intelligence has a higher intelligence position than Dal’s organisation.

The normative correct order based on conversations between people is an important element for creating the conditions for peaceful coexistence (Stenning and Shearing 2012). It means that more people can live and interact in the same context without violence towards each other (Basic et al. 2019). The phenomenon in relation to the individual can be analysed as a product of the interaction between humans. What happens among the actors in Dal’s surroundings means that the social cohesion is strengthened by the very dynamics that lead to the development of dependent relationships among actors. An increased dependence also creates the need for a clear definition of the other. An important dimension of this process is the ability to dramaturgically build up the other’s shape; however, doing so is not an unproblematic process and can be the origin of conflict and the rejection of the prevailing standards that may as a result, as this study shows, hamper cooperation with a certain organisation or nation. The stronger, bigger, and more dangerous the other is constructed to be, the more strongly shaped is the argument that justifies the need for defence against that other.

The fear of the other and potential threat of espionage has been highlighted in previous studies of police collaboration. For example, Block’s (2008a, 193) study on the collaboration between the European Union (EU) and the Russian Federation (RF) emphasises the documented, structural corruption hindered intelligence information exchange, forcing officers to build trust-based relationships and be careful when choosing direct contacts. As Collins (2004, 58-9) points out, when individuals move between different situations, they cannot ignore the experiences of previous situations; past situations together with new ones are important for future situations.

Hence, previous experiences shaped the officers’ willingness to collaborate and trusting new partners.

Interpersonal trust is often considered as formed on a micro level where individuals can negotiate group roles and motivation (Hufnagel and McCartney 2017). In the present study, participating officers frequently took part in various group rituals. On such ritual that was frequently observed during work sessions was when the officers jokingly referred to one another as spies or of taking bribes. One example is when the officers were sitting in their work room and quietly worked on their laptops:

One of the officers got up and went to get a cup of coffee. He then took a sip of his coffee, glanced out of the window and was suddenly standing right behind another officer. The officers sitting down turned his head and asked the standing officers why he was standing behind him and if he was spying? The standing officers laughed nervously and went back to his seat. (Field notes)

Another example took place at another work week when one of the officers had trouble with his laptop and internet connection and said that he wanted to stay behind in the work room and fix the problem while the other officers went to have lunch. Two of the other officers joked that they would wait with him in case he was trying to access their laptops and spy on them. Most of the
other officers who heard these comments laughed and seem to be amused by the situation. It was generally common that jokes regarding spying and espionage generated much laughter and sometimes embarrassment that they had acted or behaved in a manner that might be misinterpreted. Although all participants seemed to be aware of the threat of structural corruption, few officers admitted to knowing anyone who had been corrupt, and they all openly rejected corruption and espionage as immoral behaviour. In this sense, the informal, seemingly mundane situations of joking might be considered as ritual based social practices where the members of the group established a normative code of what was accepted behaviour of the group and what moral code they were supposed to follow (Collins 2004). Thus, within Collins’ (2004, 79–101, 150–51, 183–222) conceptual apparatus, successful participation in the rituals of the officers’ created norms and a sense of group solidarity.

Anomie and collaboration: example military invasion

The presentation of intelligence and operational police and border guard collaborative work as having varying morals and strengthening the argument for the need to fight against the other (‘Russian’) can be interpreted in different ways. One interpretation is that they are actors updating the specific social relationships between those who consider themselves distanced from the actors of other groups – but with whom they have a minimum of regulatory interaction. Fear of the norm-dissolving Russian can be defined as the expression of a social identity, and it is based on a contrast in relation to the ‘other’. In the interactive creation of contrast ratios, different dramaturgical scenarios are made visible in the situation, such as Russia’s military invasion. Field notes from intelligence collaborative work highlight the dramaturgy of the situational construction.

Lati from Lukland, sitting by his laptop talking about a ‘big fish’ (a man recently suspected of or convicted for several and/or more heavy crimes). In this moment, a military chopper passes by at a low altitude with three uniformed men hanging on a rope. These men are wearing camouflage uniforms (green, black, and brown) as well as black military equipment. On their backs, they have their personal automatic rifles. Everyone in the intelligence office sees the helicopter through the window and loud comments and laughter are heard. Kal from Tuland says loudly: ‘What is that?’ Val from Xland answers: ‘Putin is coming (laughter).’ Luck from Xland says: ‘The Russians are coming’ (multiple persons’ laughter in the room). Lati from Lukland says, ‘Xland’s defense’ (making quotation marks with both his hands; many are laughing). (Field notes)

The field notes above were written in the period when Russia annexed Crimea and when the war in eastern Ukraine escalated (during 2014). This affects the dramaturgical creation of a Russian military invasion and Xland’s made-up defence (‘making quotation marks with both his hands’). Russia as a country is displayed as a threat in many of the interviews, a neighbour that has become more and more aggressive in relation with its neighbours. However, in the media coverage about intelligence and operative actions in the project (Border Guard Latvia 2014, ATL Lantbrukets Affärstidning 2015, Göteborgs-Posten 2015, Norrtelje Tidning 2015, Police Stockholm 2015, Svenska Dagbladet 2015, Swedish Institute 2015) and in the documents produced by Project Turnstone (Project Turnstone 1 2014, Project Turnstone 2 2014, Project Turnstone 3 2014, Project Turnstone 4 2014), the phenomenon of the Russian military invasion is invisible. In the media coverage and in the documents produced by the project, a construction of the phenomenon is made, that is, a fight against border related crime and not the scenario of a defence against the rising threat from Russia’s military.

During field visits and conversations with officers in Estonia and Latvia, it was clear that the Russian annexation of the Crimea peninsula in 2014 had affected the border officers. An Estonian female border guard officer who was interviewed shortly after the initial events of the annexation said that they were very much aware of the situation and that they paid close attention to the acts of Russia. She also clearly stated that ‘Russia is a political partner when it comes to border issues but not a friend’. Several other officers similarly described that the potential threat of national invasion (especially from Russia) was lurking in the back of every border officer’s mind. A few weeks later the participating officers met for another work week and some of the project members
discussed collaboration difficulties with Russia considering the recent events. One officer described that several joint operations and border training that had been scheduled with Russia had now been put on hold and that relations were tense between Russia and the Baltic states. Another event that caused worry during the collaboration project was the European migration crisis in 2015 when a high number of refugees and migrants entered Europe. One day when working together the officers discussed the severity of the situation and that it was problematic to protect European borders and guarantee the safety of the migrants simultaneously. In an interview, a Finnish officer was asked about the situation and how he felt about it. He jokingly said that if such a high number of refugees of people from Russia had tried to enter Finland and Europe, they would have a war on their hands.

In the field notes above, war norm resolution is reproduced (’Putin is coming’; ’The Russians are coming’), and the perspective of ‘us’ and ‘them’ appears clearly. On the one side, we have people present in an office that maintains current normative (peace) order. On the other side, we have a norm-dissolving military invasion. These dichotomous petitioners are not objective, but they are the product of the dramatisation of the interaction between actors. They can be analysed as a result of a moral production. The situation described in the field note above does not lack morality and is not isolated from the moral, and the morality of the situation is acted out by real people: Lati, Val, Kal, and other actors present moral order in a war and peace communities. The moral of the situation can be broken, changed, redefined, redesigned, and newly produced (Basic 2018b, Basic et al. 2019). The actors’ successful participation in such rituals creates and re-creates the moral and sense of solidarity and the emergence of other sacred objects, which in turn are used in following rituals (Collins 2004).

Actors’ normative acceptance or dissociation of the production takes place both during a brief interaction time (in the situation described in the field note) and over a prolonged interaction chain (the flow of information about Russia’s annexation of the Crimea and the escalation of the war in eastern Ukraine). When Lati, Val, Kal, and others present in the situation move between different situations during intelligence and operational police and border guard collaborative work, they cannot ignore the experiences of the wider context. Ultimately, the actors’ previous war impressions (for example, through encountering media reports) are joined by new experiences and are relevant to future situations.

In accordance with previous statements, it is concluded that the morals of peace (norm stable) and morals of war (norm dissolving) are not created parallel to the individual, group, or community. The ‘norm stable’ and ‘norm dissolving’ features are fundamental parts of social life, both in peace and war. The norm-stable and norm-dissolving morals are created in the interaction among humans – especially in meetings that include groups that deviate from their own normative code. That interaction is of a special kind – where the moral creates and re-creates in the meeting with, e.g. the enemy and the perpetrators that are present in the situation both physically and invisibly – as a sacred and important object (Collins 2004).

**Concluding discussion: anomie and collaboration in intelligence and operational police and border guard work**

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to analyse how intelligence and operative personnel within the different border authorities in Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia created and recreated picture of the in-group mentality among the participating officers which was contrasted with another category, that of the ‘norm-dissolving Russian’, as a sort of ‘Other’ that reinforces their own in-group bonds. The ethnographic observations show how police and border guards in the Baltic Sea area reinforce in-group bonds, develop a professional identity, and come to understand the moral aims of their collaborative work by contrasting themselves against the constructed threat of Russian criminals, spies, and military invaders.

Police officers and border guards in this study are constructed as key figures in the struggle to prevent the resolution and preserve the current state of society, which is portrayed as stable and
‘better’ – at least according to the interviewed intelligence and operative police officers and border guards. From time to time, a ‘criminal’ from Russia has a key role in the performance of law enforcement’s fluctuating morality, with the threat of norm resolution coming from Russia and attenuation of the threat based on the representation of effective law enforcement. The media reporting on intelligence and operations, as well as the documentation that was created by the authorities involved in crime prevention and detection in the Baltic Sea area, call out the ‘criminals’ from Russia by their absence.

The picture presented in the interviews is of a different kind. The collaborative actors in this study describe and frame Russians as the leading criminals in the Baltic region. Russian criminals are represented as organisers and leading figures in various types of crime and Russia is described as the origin of much cross-border criminality. Additionally, the threat of a ‘norm-dissolving Russian’ encompassed not only potential cross-border criminals such as smugglers or thieves, but also other collaboration partners rumoured to be corrupt and who are therefore not to be trusted with secret information regarding organised crime. The informants’ stories construct a symbolic reality where law-abiding and conventional actors strive to maintain stability in the normative order, in this case referring to the crime that comes from Russia. This reality is partly an expression of fear and solidarity against norm resolution in the form of crime from Russia, and expressions of social development that raise the need for a contra-group to strengthen feelings of solidarity in the norm-stable societies. The identity-based symbolism that informants are constructing in their stories is based on the current and stable normative state of society. These symbols preserve on an abstract level a cultural community existing within the community: most individuals do not commit crimes, these individuals live in the same society and understand each other, and they can interact because they agree on the meaning of symbols. This identity-based symbolism also requires a contra-group in its dynamics, which in this case consists of Russia and the Russians that threaten the ‘us’ group’s existence and orderly normative society. As described by some interviewed officers, Russia was occasionally a collaboration partner regarding cross border crime but was not seen as a friend or an unproblematic neighbour. Although the official purpose of the project in general terms was described as the prevention and detection of cross border crime, it was a generally held assumption that the officers were fighting crime mostly committed by ‘dangerous others’ outside of Europe, and especially from Russia and Belarus.

In previous collaboration research on intelligence and operational policing, it is noted that practical work is marked by ‘us’ and ‘them’ thinking. This polarisation of the view of the other person can grow and achieve different dramaturgical forms. The stronger and bigger the other is, the stronger and bigger the constructed argument becomes that justifies the need for defence against the other. In this study we can draw similar conclusions as the officers contrasted themselves with groups that they referred to as others, that is, (Russian) criminals, corrupt officers, and spies.

We can deduce four interactive dimensions incorporated into the observed depictions in this collaboration project, namely: (1) identity creation and the struggle for acknowledgment, (2) dramatisation of a subjective orientation and attitude, (3) inflation of a kind of group feeling, and (4) representation of a particular moral order in a war and peace communities (Yakhlef et al. 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2016, 2017, Yakhlef, 2018, Basic, 2018a; Yakhlef 2020). Actors participating in the observation sequences are integrated into and controlled by peace and norm stability, such as for example war or the threat of war. In this way, they are also influenced by the dynamic normative order created and re-created in society threatened by a change beginning with an invasion. The participants’ performances are characterised and influenced by previous social dynamics of the outside world and influenced and affected by the situation in which intelligence collaborative work is carried out. If we follow Goffman’s (2002[1959]) thoughts on effect, the actors define the situation in order to know how they should act when the unexpected happens (‘In this moment, a military chopper passes by at a low altitude with three uniformed men hanging on a rope’). The definition speaks to actors about what they should and should not do and say because any definition of the situation
has a moral character. The participants’ behaviour depends on and is influenced by other actors in the same situation – the specific actions of actors who are there in that situation.

In the collaborative setting observed during the project social cohesion was strengthened by the very dynamics used to develop dependent relationships among the actors. An increasing dependence also creates the need for clear definition of the other. An important dimension of this process is the ability to perform a dramaturgical build-up of the other’s shape. However, this is not an unproblematic process and represents the origins of conflict and the rejection of the prevailing norms that may have, as a result, hampered cooperation with a certain organisation or nation.

The display of varying moral understandings among intelligence and operational police/border guard collaborative work and the strong argument to fight the ‘other’ (‘the Russian’) can be interpreted as follows: it is the actors’ actualisation of specific social relationships between those who consider themselves as distanced from the operators of other groups – but with whom they have a minimum of regulatory interaction. Fear of the norm-dissolving Russian can be defined as the expression of a social identity. There are different dramaturgical scenarios made visible in the interactions where this social identity is constructed, such as for example the scenario of Russia’s military invasion.

In several interviews, the country of Russia is described as a threat and a neighbour that has become more and more aggressive in relation to its neighbours. An important part of the officers’ interaction was thus to establish a sense of trust and identify members who shared the same sentiment, that is, who did not belong to the category of Russian spy or criminal. However, the phenomenon of Russia’s military invasion is completely invisible in media reporting on intelligence and operational efforts as well as in the documents produced by the intelligence and operative personnel studied by the researchers. The media reporting and documents constructed a different phenomenon: a fight against transnational crime in contrast to a combat/defence against Russia’s growing military threat.

It is not uncommon for different types of empirical material to provide various results in the analysis of intelligence and operational collaborative police work. Other parallels can be seen in the gathered material. For example, the officers’ dramatisation exudes a subjective focus and attitude. They build up a kind of group feeling and present a particular moral order that is created and re-created during their collaborative work. The norm-stable and the threatening norm-dissolving moralities are created by interaction – especially in the meeting with groups that differ from their own normative code. This interaction is of a special kind – where morality is created and re-created in the encounter with, for example, the enemy and the perpetrator present in the situation both in physical form and in invisible and imaginary form – as sacred and important objects.

An interesting question raised during this study is how intelligence and operational police and border guards in Russia pay attention to the significance of Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Are the border authorities from these countries viewed as a norm-dissolving threat by the Russian officials? How are these countries reproduced in the Russian media coverage? How do intelligence and operative personnel within the different border authorities in Russia collaborate?

A different interesting aspect of the phenomena of ‘collaboration’, ‘norm resolution’ and ‘norm protection’ that calls for further research are the normative strategies used for preservation and dissolution of the norms of a society. Another question arose during the work on this study: Is there solidarity in the collaboration between the actors that preserves norm stability, resulting in norm resolution or do the norm stability and norm resolution create the solidarity in the collaboration? The former does not seem to exclude the latter; solidarity in the collaboration can create both norm stability and norm resolution in the same way as norm stability and norm resolution seem to be able to create solidarity in the collaboration. Norm stability, norm resolution, and solidarity, can also, as we mentioned earlier, exclude other people in the collaboration. Therefore, we ask for continued sociological and criminological attention and research on these phenomena.
Notes

1. Some parts of this text were published earlier in Swedish in the article ‘Construction of norm resolution and moral panics. Ethnographic analysis concerning intelligence and operational police and border guards’ work’ (Basic 2018a), in English in the doctoral dissertation in sociology: ‘United Agents: Community of Practice within Border Policing in the Baltic Sea Area’ (Yakhlef 2018), and in ‘Cross Border-Police Collaboration: Building Communities of Practice in the Baltic Sea Area (Yakhlef 2020).

2. Cases of corruption have been documented in the Baltics and that such rumours, even though perhaps exaggerated, are somehow grounded in reality (Grigas 2012).

3. The acronym CIMI is not an actual acronym for any of the military intelligence services of the countries involved in the operation (Project Turnstone). It has been anonymised on purpose to protect the identity of Dal and Dals organisation.

4. The acronym ZGD and GLB is not an actual acronym for any of the intelligence services in Russian Federation. The actual acronym mentioned in this quote have been anonymised.

5. The names of the countries mentioned in this quote have been anonymised.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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