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The inauthenticity of policing: Obedience and Oblivion

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Abstract

Following superior orders or the crowd are commonly used excuses to avoid responsibility. Taking the case of border control in Hungary, this article explores how such *inauthenticity* can shape police professional identity and practice, both in the Sartrean and Heideggerian sense. It is interested in how police officers 1) have denied their freedom of choice in the face of their role expectations, and 2) have fallen prey to political discourse and anti-immigrant public sentiment. Interestingly, most participants in the study used the phrase “I am just following orders” only in relation to their mandatory deployment at the border but not regarding the ill-treatment of irregular migrants. The concept of excessive use of force no longer appeared to be applicable; physical abuse of migrants has become the norm and standard practice. The findings seem to suggest that officers have been overtaken and driven by public attitudes towards mass migration. The article argues that the real threat to authentic role play does not stem from a desire or temptation to conform. Rather, it manifests itself in dominant discourses that reinterpret the purpose of policing, thus underpinning the self-understanding of officers.

Keywords
Bad faith, policing, Heidegger, das Man, inauthenticity, obedience, Sartre, social authenticity, Hungary

1. Introduction

Gündoğdu (2022) has recently demonstrated how racialised violence has become routine police practice at the Spanish-Moroccan border in Ceuta. This issue is certainly, and sadly, not exclusive to Spanish border control authorities. In his July 2022 speech in Băile Tuşnad (Romania), the Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orbán scolded Western European states for "mixing" with "non-Europeans" claiming that Hungarians do not wish to be a nation of "mixed-race". Orbán later claimed that he was misunderstood and meant "culture" rather than "race" when his words triggered international outrage. Nevertheless, at the time of writing, the government is recruiting so-called "border hunters" to stop irregular migration at the Hungarian-Serbian border. The Hungarian authorities have, in fact, become infamous for their harsh and inhumane treatment of irregular migrants arriving in Hungary. Both the Court of Justice of the European Union and the European Court of Human Rights have recently ruled against Hungary for violating the rights of migrants.[1] As a result of the government's anti-immigrant campaign, xenophobia has been on the rise nationwide since the so-called refugee crisis in 2015. Not only that, but border control has also gained priority above all else, and police officers have been transferred to the Serbian border from all over the country, with the specific task to keep migrants outside of the newly built border fence. Although the police enjoyed significant public support, resignation rates increased, and the media reported a lack of enthusiasm among would-be applicants to carry out border control tasks mainly due to humiliating working conditions. Considering this, coupled with the growing international criticism of the Hungarian policy, I was interested in the police's own take on their involvement in border control. Because officers have been deployed from across the spectrum of service units, it was not self-evident whether they fully identified with their new role as border police, nor if they were committed to it, or were merely following orders.

There has been ample research on the everyday realities of the governance of mass migration problematising the routine dehumanisation, criminalisation, and exploitation of people (for a review see Franko, 2020; Melossi, 2015). However, most of these studies predominantly focus on the state apparatuses which perpetuate it and the experiences of migrants. To be sure, some ethnographic studies provide a valuable insight into how the police relate to their own role in migration and border control (Parmar, 2020; Aas and Gundhus, 2015; Andersson, 2014; Fassin, 2013). Save the racialised aspect (see e.g., Gündoğdu, 2022; Parmar, 2020; Guenther, 2019), our understanding is, however, somewhat limited as to how and why one can reconcile abusive border control practices with one's own role as a law enforcement officer. In other words, what is relatively neglected is the theoretical insight into the underlying structures and dynamics that shape the police's role identity in this respect. This is particularly important because, even though the Police is a highly centralised body which typically functions based on the chain of command, police officers exercise a significant amount of discretion when implementing policy. How they subjectively interpret and appropriate their own role may aggravate or alleviate the experiences of migrants. The existentialist and phenomenological literature on *(in)authenticity* is helpful in this regard because it is concerned with one's relationship with oneself, addressing the problem in relation to, although not exclusively, the performance of roles.

The next section of the article provides a brief phenomenological clarification of the relationship between social roles and the self. Based on qualitative interviews conducted with police officers involved in border control, drawing on Sartre's concept of *bad faith,* the third section demonstrates how officers denied their freedom of choice in the face of their role expectations. [2] As we shall see, although officers were not fully satisfied with their deployment at the border, they very much agreed to, and seemed to embrace, the pushback of migrants which has become the norm and standard practice. Based on Heidegger's concept of the *They* (das Man), the fourth section then goes on to explore the potential impact of political discourse on such attitudes and the self-understanding of police officers, i.e., how they have fallen prey to the anti-immigrant public atmosphere. Now, it could be argued that Heidegger's account of authenticity leaves no room for sociality, broadly construed, because the public strips one of authorship and ownership of one's actions. Conversely, owning and owning up to abusive practices may well be considered authentic. In other words, inauthenticity may not be an apt conceptual tool for criticising border policing, or to formulate any social criticism whatsoever. To resolve these possible objections, the fifth section introduces some contemporary interpretations of *Being and Time*, which attempt to save authenticity from being anchored to self-determination and an inward-looking self, arguing that it inescapably involves recognition of difference and is a precondition for social change.

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[1] The CJEU judgment in case C-808/18 Commission v Hungary is available online at: https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2020-12/cp200161en.pdf; and for the ECtHR judgment in R.R. and Others v. Hungary (36037/17) see: https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre#{%22itemid%22:[%22002-13163%22]}.

2. Performing roles

Berger and Luckmann (1967, pp. 89-96) refer to performers of roles as actors whose actions occur in the context of a particular socially objectified body of knowledge common and typical to actors of that type. The emphasis here is on the socially objectified nature of the context. For example, raising one's hand at an auction, a concert, or whilst standing in traffic, dressed in uniform, have totally different meanings. However, by knowing the significance of a raised hand in each of these situations, people around would know that one was bidding, enjoying the music, or signalling to stop the traffic. In virtually all aspects of our social life, how such socially shared and typified actions and contexts co-determine each other helps us to mutually anticipate each other's intention (i.e., the role we take on) and respond accordingly. Roles are the precondition of social interaction, i.e., society manifests by means of roles, which is most apparent with respect to professions (cf. Schmid, 2017; Jaeggi, 2014, ch. 6).

Performing a role often requires more than learning and being familiar with the relevant skills and routines. It is also necessary to internalise both the values and "affective layers" socially attributed to it (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 94; Mitchell 2000, pp. 149-150). That is, to identify with the role of the police and take it as my own, not only do I have to learn, for example, the rules and techniques of when and how to arrest someone, but also to embrace the objective purposes and limits of my actions; in this case, to maintain public safety in balance with the rights of the individual. The emotional identification can be so strong in certain cases, considering one's role, e.g., as a father or a friend, that self-identity and role-identity quasi-overlap and seem hard to separate (Schmid, 2017, p. 270). Moreover, as Schmid argues, if our role relates to a group we identify with as a member, i.e., our role-identity simultaneously reflects our social-identity, the role is not merely what we play, but it is who we are. If a performance, however, does not involve the otherwise necessary identification with the corresponding values and emotional aspects of the role, the actor might only take it on for individual purposes, such as belonging to a group, a job that pays the bills, and so on. Furthermore, one may abuse the role and "act it out" for manipulative, role-inappropriate purposes, when one uses the uniform, for example, as a cover or simply for exercising authority (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 192).

One way or another, as Natanson (1974, pp. 163-189; 1970, p. 45) points out, roles, such as that of the judge or the police, have a "masking" effect that provides a high level of "anonymity" for the role-taker. In these cases, to bracket myself as an individual, subordinated to the role, does not only carry the risk (or opportunity) of becoming a "bureaucrat of mundanity", but is also a requirement. I am bound to act in a typical manner and in accordance with the role expectations attached to the role. Simply put, when wearing the uniform, an outside observer expects me to behave as a police officer and nothing else. As we shall see, society is, in a sense, complicit in our tendency to blindly follow the pre-established script of a role.

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[2] I interviewed seven officers with different ranks and from different parts of the country, two civilian employees of the Police, and two soldiers who had been involved in border control since 2015; the excerpts below are taken from police participants only. Due to lack of official access, I used snowball sampling and interviews were conducted outside police premises in the officers' off-duty hours in summer 2019. My interview sample size is certainly not representative, nor am I suggesting that officers showed no compassion towards migrants without exception. However, a quantitative survey, based on a different and larger sample (29 officers), corroborated that the majority of the police were likely to have supported the government's border control policy (Author, 2022).

From my point of view as the role-taker, however, regardless of role expectations or how hard I try to identify with the role, I can always distance myself from it. In fact, as Natanson underlines (1974, p. 165), it is precisely my conscious efforts to eliminate my personhood to conform to the role that secures self-awareness. No matter what, although one's self-apprehension is determined by the socially attributed characteristics of the role during performance, the roles one occupies only make up certain distinguishable facets of the self (or identity) as a whole. It would be manifestly absurd to claim that I cannot, at any moment, step out of a role and subjectively reflect on it (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, pp. 90-91; Natanson, 1974, pp. 210-211). To deny this freedom of detachment is what Sartre calls *bad faith*, i.e., when we fall into self-deception because of a pretended unconditional submission to the role.

3. Obedience and *bad faith*

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre introduces "facticity" ("being-in-itself") and "transcendence" ("being-for-itself") as two distinct aspects of human existence. The former comprises my physical and objectified features, such as my body, personality traits, and my social roles as determined by social situations, here-and-now observable from an outside perspective. The latter refers to the ability that differentiates us from unconscious worldly objects in that we can freely reflect on and detach ourselves from these factual attributes. Thereby "negating" or "nihilating" our facticity, we can always delude ourselves with the thought that we are not what we are. Because of this freedom of consciousness, existence is open-ended in the sense that our possibilities of self-interpretation are essentially infinite. For Sartre, *bad faith* is a form of self-deception or inauthenticity when one refuses to accept and reconcile this ambiguous duality of the human condition by either fleeing one's facticity or freedom. In his famous example, the waiter desperately tries to identify himself with his role and be nothing but the role, denying his freedom to avoid responsibility. He is not entirely comfortable with his situation but tries to distance his possibilities by imitating and merging with the idealised role of *the waiter*, who he is not. Sartre maintains that every human project is at risk of bad faith because consciousness is inherently prone to a perpetual oscillation between, and confusion of, one's facticity and transcendence (Sartre, 2003, ch. 2; cf. Varga and Guignon, 2020; Carman, 2009; Detmer, 2008, p. 78).

As to my participants, reasons varied, but almost every participant felt unease, to a certain extent, about being deployed at the border. Some found the lack of routine uncomfortable; the working conditions humiliating; being far from family difficult to cope with; most of the tasks boring and/or ineffective; and some did not consider border control a typical policing task at all. An officer mentioned that many of their colleagues either had already quit or were planning to do so for the above reasons. Bad faith is, arguably, well-exemplified by those police officers who did not think border control was something they signed up for when joining the police, nonetheless stayed because they believed that obedience was part of their role and had no choice but to follow orders. As some of my participants phrased it:

> I am a policeman, I do whatever I am told to do and go wherever I am told to go, when you join the organisation, this is what you sign up for (…) Our job was to prevent them (migrants) from crossing the fence (…) We don't care about politics, we were happy when those few days or weeks were gone and we could come back home…I am not interested in politics or why people do what they do…we are like soldiers, if we are sent there, we go there and don't question why. (Interviewee 01)

> I execute orders. We have to enforce the law. I have my own opinions, but it doesn't influence my work, I do whatever I am required to do. (Interviewee 06)

Like Sartre's waiter, officers, having been confronted with the facticity of their situation, identified themselves with the role in denying their freedom (to complain, to be transferred, resign, or simply find another job) for the sake of convenience. Sartre applied the concept of bad faith to obedience in the context of oppression in his later work *Anti-Semite and Jew*:

> In espousing anti-Semitism, he does not simply adopt an opinion, he chooses himself as a person. He chooses the permanence and impenetrability of stone, the total irresponsibility of the warrior who obeys his leaders – and he has no leader…He chooses finally a Good that is fixed once and for all, beyond question, out of reach; he dares not examine it for fear of being led to challenge it and having to seek it in another form. (Sartre, 1995, pp. 53-54)

Bad faith is understood here as the denial of responsibility in the oppression of people in order to justify and secure one's supposed superior status. Sartre's anti-Semite 1) chooses to hate, 2) is fully aware of the condemnable nature of his actions, and yet 3) carries on and looks away for the claimed greater good, because 4) the slightest self-criticism would raise doubt about the very purpose of his being (Sartre, 1995, pp. 19-20, 50; cf. Gordon, 2002, 2020; Martin, 2002, ch. 3). When talking about negative and uncomfortable experiences, with a few exceptions, my participants agreed with the policy and did not find the current border control practices excessive or inappropriate, nor did they feel the necessity to justify the push back of migrants. In contrast to what they felt about their own situation, officers seemed to be indifferent to that of migrants, completely disregarding them, unaware of the gravity of what they have been participating in. To them, although inconvenient, border control was just another task to deal with, causing no more emotional conflict than controlling the traffic or patrolling the streets. When interviewing them, they had no guilty conscience about their job at the border and, as it were, could not have been more apathetic about migrants. If accused of abuse, perhaps they would have responded like meat-eaters would, lacking any sense of shame experienced by would-be vegetarians: "What do you mean?" These officers, as I see it, do not neatly fit the definition of bad faith in *Anti-Semite and Jew* concerning their attitude towards migrants and yet it does not seem plausible to argue that they were acting in good faith or authentically in any way.

The limits of Sartre's concept of authenticity

To be sure, Sartre is rather pessimistic about the very possibility of authentic existence and the solution he hints at in a footnote in *Being and Nothingness* has never been further developed: authenticity would presuppose "a self-recovery of being which was previously corrupted" (Sartre, 2003, p. 94). According to Bell's interpretation, this implies the acknowledgement of the inherent tension between facticity and transcendence, i.e., authenticity is "the awareness and acceptance of – this basic ambiguity" of human existence (Bell cited in Varga and Guignon, 2020). Sartre returns to the concept of authenticity in *Anti-Semite and Jew* and, in fact, argues that authenticity requires "a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, in assuming the responsibilities and risks that it involves" (Sartre, 1995, p. 90). As opposed to a passive acceptance of the expectations and characteristics commonly attributed to a role, to be authentic, one must proudly embrace it as their own with all the consequences it entails (Sartre, 1995, pp. 108, 136-137). Nevertheless, this definition has been criticised for setting a low threshold for authenticity. In Anderson's reading, it is "empty", in ethical terms at least, because it may as well be applicable to a mass murderer who is ready to face the consequences of his crimes (Anderson, 2000). Others are hesitant to share this view in arguing that any form of oppression is necessarily rendered inauthentic, because authenticity, besides responsibility and self-awareness, also involves the recognition of, and respect for, others, i.e., the recognition of others' freedom (Storm Heter, 2006; Reynolds and Renaudie, 2022). Now, suppose a border control officer recognises and respects the situation of asylum seekers, and yet chooses to reject them because he is genuinely convinced that, in doing so, he only serves national security interests. In this scenario, both the narrow and broad interpretation of Sartre's conditions for authenticity are, arguably, met. The person is fully aware of the consequences of his deeds and assumes responsibility, not for asylum seekers, but for the people he represents and there could be no doubt about his commitment. Most participants, although feeling out of their comfort zone, agreed to policy initiatives, and, in fact, looked at border control duties as necessary to protect the public. To be sure, in *Notebook for an Ethics,* Sartre explicitly links authenticity to a mutual respect for one another's freedom and prescribes the ultimate goal for humankind to create a "reign" of freedom (Sartre, 1992, pp. 393, 407, 491-515). Both Anderson (2000) and Guignon (2000, pp. 44-46) pointed out, however, that anchoring authenticity to individual freedom without any guidance as to *how* and *to what end* we should exercise our freedom is futile from the ground up. As Anderson notes, it makes Sartre's stance even more problematic that he pinpoints individual freedom as the source of all values. This narrow, subjective notion of value pre-empts the possibility of a consensual normative framework and essentially renders all sorts of goals to be respected and worth pursuing, even that of, again, the mass murderer.

Now, arguing that social norms and values stand in unresolvable conflict with individual freedom in Sartre's analysis, would fail to do justice to his position. Sartre argues that one's self-understanding is ultimately determined by one's "projects", i.e., the web of motives that underlie one's actions (Sartre, 2003, pp. 472-475). These motives or intentions, together with the totality of dispositions one adopts towards life, the world, and others, form what Sartre calls "fundamental" or "original" project (Ibid, pp. 484-492, 501-502, 584). Sartre maintains that our free choices stem from and are formulated in integrity with the original project, which itself is "a certain choice which the For-itself makes of itself in the presence of the problem of being" (Sartre, 2003, pp. 478). His argument for why the fundamental project is a choice (the "original choice") is rather complicated and is not necessary for the current purpose. What is important here is that, although my choices are free, they "must appear on the background-world and in the perspective of my facticity" (Ibid, p. 492). Moreover, as Sartre elsewhere points out, in all aspects of my life, I always "find myself engaged in an *already meaningful* world which reflects to me meanings which I have not put into it" (Ibid, p. 531, emphasis in original). According to Varga, if our choices through which we constitute our identity are made against the background of such pre-established and intersubjectively constituted meanings, the original project is better understood as a "horizon of intelligibility" and certainly cannot be accounted for by an individual choice: "we should therefore no longer speak about meaningful disclosure of the world following from one's choices, but rather of something that reflects being embedded in a 'field' or collectively shaped background of a particular historical-cultural context" (Varga, 2012, p. 92). It follows that one cannot consider individual freedom a source of authenticity without acknowledging that it would still be necessarily underpinned and conditioned by socially pre-established norms and values. As we shall see, Varga's interpretation of the original project resonates well with some recent readings of Heidegger's account of authenticity. Nevertheless, on standard readings of Sartre, socially shared norms are rather associated with inauthenticity than with authenticity.

Bad faith and society

When discussing the example of the café waiter, Sartre himself notes that by expecting the waiter to comply with and fulfil his social role, and nothing more than the role, society is complicit in his self-deception (Sartre, 2003, pp. 82-83). This suggests that there is more to bad faith than an isolated self in denial of the obvious. Perhaps the most famous and extreme example for the role of social pressure in contributing to bad faith is found in Hannah Arendt's coverage of the Nuremberg Trials where Nazi war-criminals, perpetrators of the Holocaust, put the blame on their superiors for abusing their obedience (Arendt, 2006, p. 175). Arendt (2006, p. 277) raises the rhetorical question whether any one of them would "have suffered from a guilty conscience if they had won". She does not only refer here to their defence of being mere "cogs" in the machinery of the Third Reich with no base motives. Rather, she emphasizes how the collapse and change of the entire moral order in contemporary German society led to an atmosphere where self-deception and conformity to new rules became an integral part of public mentality (Arendt, 2006, pp. 52, 103, 295; 2003, pp. 42-45). Hence, Arendt's ultimate reason for condemning Eichmann was precisely his blind obedience to authority and the zeitgeist, his lack of criticism ("thoughtlessness") about the spirit of the law which he claimed only to follow. As she elsewhere argues:

> "The greatest evil perpetrated is the evil committed by nobodies, that is, by human beings who refuse to be persons (...) By stubbornly remaining nobodies they prove themselves unfit for intercourse with others who, good, bad, or indifferent, are at the very least persons" (Arendt, 2003, pp. 111-112).

In other words, the heart of the problem is not whether he knew the difference between right and wrong, but that he refused to question whether what he had been required to do was right or wrong (Arendt, 2006, pp. 287-288; cf. Butler, 2011). Arendt's thoughts resonate well with Beauvoir's analysis of the "sub-man" who "would like to forget himself" taking "refuge in the ready-made values of the serious world", and whose "acts are never positive choices, only flights"; "a blind uncontrolled force which anybody can get control of. In lynchings, in pogroms, in all the great bloody movements organized by the fanaticism of seriousness and passion" (Beauvoir, 2018, p. 32).

As opposed to Sartre's waiter, concerning the police, in general, obedience is traditionally a core component of the role itself: the police are not only expected to conform to the role but to obey as part of the role. Obedience of the police does not presuppose direct orders because it is inherent in, and follows from, the very institution of policing as understood in society (cf. Gibson, 2019). Moreover, as a legacy of the pre-1989 political system, both the functioning and organisational structure of the Hungarian Police is highly centralised and under political control. Objectives and aims are determined top-down, and the outdated and dysfunctional adherence to a rigid and militaristic chain of command pre-empts progressive and critical feedback by the rank and file (Krémer, 2020). However, it would certainly be absurd to say that obedience to secure joint effort and hence effectiveness amounts to bad faith in all circumstances. Sheptycki and O'Rourke-Dicarlo (2011) underline that the police are prone to bad faith and more likely to submit to higher-order interests, because the coercive nature of their job is coupled with facing various but often conflicting expectations of the law, public demands, national security, human rights, politicians, the management, and, as has been shown, their own interest. The main factor underlying blind obedience here is ignorance and the "selective shielding" of dissent (one's own or that of others) in favour of the more convenient, rewarding, or majoritarian perspective (cf. Mitchell, 2000). In Hungary, for example, negative public attitudes towards the Roma ethnic minority have been an ever-present reality, where the majority of the non-Roma population condone ethnic profiling (Boda and Medve-Bálint, 2017; Open Society Institute, 2007). Accordingly, the police have not been hesitant to shift responsibility to the community in justifying excessive force and the ill-treatment of Roma people (Székelyi, Csepeli and Örkény, 2001). This situation perpetuates a vicious cycle; the over-policing of certain groups, who are then perceived to be dangerous by others, generates distrust and aversion towards its members. This phenomenon was termed "institutional bad faith" by Gordon (1995, pp. 45, 74-75, 86), where a web of social conditions, institutionalised habits, routines, and beliefs facilitate the shielding of "comfortable falsehoods" about a group, thus maintaining the belief in one's own superiority and deserving status.

4. Oblivion and the *They*

However, falling into self-deception as an attempt to conform to overt or covert political and/or social pressure is unlikely to be the only driving force that underlies the case of border control in Hungary. Again, pushback practices did not go against the officers' principles, nor did they seem to be in conflict with themselves, trying to shield competing demands, or searching for excuses. Rather, they seemed to be swept along by the public mood, fully convinced of the righteousness of their cause and, as it were, oblivious to the plight of migrants. One of my interviewees, for that matter, who had served in the early 90's when Hungary sheltered tens of thousands of refugees fleeing the Balkan Wars, many Muslims among them, said that the political atmosphere and public attitudes towards asylum seekers were a lot more positive at that time. As a complement to bad faith, Heidegger's concept of the *They* (das Man) may be helpful to account for the current situation. In *Being and Time* (BT), Heidegger argues that having been "absorbed" into pregiven socio-cultural norms and role expectations as a taken-for-granted, unquestioned reality, it is natural to go with the flow and attune our attitude and actions to conform to our social environment. In most aspects of our life, as he phrased it, we are “lost in the they” (BT, p. 383).[3] In “falling prey” to the crowd we can avoid making decisions and disavow the responsibility for our actions by shifting it to the collective:

> The they always “did it,” and yet it can be said that “no one” did it. In the everydayness of Dasein, most things happen in such a way that we must say “no one did it”. In this way, the they *disburdens* Dasein in its everydayness. Not only that; but disburdening it of its being, the they accommodates Dasein in its tendency to take things easily and make them easy. And since the they constantly accommodates Dasein by disburdening its being, it retains and entrenches its stubborn dominance. Everyone is the other, and no one is himself (BT, pp. 127-128).

It is important to stress that this avoidance of responsibility is not to be confused with bad faith, techniques of rationalisation and explicit justifications, such as “I am just following orders” or “people are asking for it”. Rather, Heidegger seems to suggest that the very necessity for justification never occurs because we act as per standard practice, as considered appropriate or natural, and, again, because we are entirely unaware of, or oblivious (“forgetful”) to our situation of acting under the influence of the *they* (BT, pp. 44, 322). As he maintains: “in this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the *they* unfolds its true dictatorship” (BT, p. 126, emphasis mine). We get caught up in “levelling down” whereby our possibilities are concealed from us, and “averageness” and conformity are both reassuring and relieving (Heidegger, 1985, pp. 243-250; BT, pp. 126-128, 175-179, 268; cf. Watts, 2011, pp. 55, 82).

The hostile anti-immigrant climate, in tandem with the already wanting human rights culture, the old routines and habits of policing the Roma, has arguably predisposed officers to take new policy objectives for granted. They have fallen prey to the public atmosphere and to the role-expectation of “protecting citizens”, unaware of any circumstance that would cast doubt about the legality, necessity, or proportionality of the new border control measures. Protection should not merely be understood here in general terms as a traditional function of policing, rather as in protecting the symbolic boundaries of the community, those who belong against the alien *Other* (cf. Guenther, 2019; Chamayou, 2012). Such role interpretation has, arguably, manifested in the pushback of migrants becoming self-evident, to the extent that an officer described the tracking of migrants as an opportunity to train police dogs:

> It is a good opportunity for the dog (to practise), how to switch from tracking to holding (on to something). Some dogs have never been in a situation to follow such intense scent…Migrants are stressing, sweating, they leave a very distinct scent behind…It was good for the dogs to practice how to switch from tracking to patrolling and guarding, and to protect its leader. There were lots of situations when the migrant attacked the dog or the officer…it was good to practise these situations; some dogs are not wired for this and are incapable of switching…The dogs were technically hunting. (Interviewee 2)

Others looked at border control as a kind of excursion or team-building event. When asked whether they liked working at the border, an officer answered: “if we went for a few days in a month only, it was good to get away from it all (…) it was leisure”. Some said that officers, mainly single without family, “very much enjoyed” going to the border; it was a new challenge, a good excuse to get away from the boredom/stress of their regular office job, or a great opportunity to be together as a team. If anything, officers were worried about how the deployment at the border would affect their personal life, whether, for example, they would “miss their kids’ graduation ceremony” or not.

Idle talk

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[3] All quotes are from the 2010 English edition, but references are to the page numbers in the 1953 German edition, which are found in the margins of all English editions.

One could argue that, in the age of global interconnectedness, the influence of public discourse is unlikely to be as profound as outlined above. To be sure, NGOs, human rights organizations, and the European Union have expressed strong disapproval of the Hungary's abusive asylum policy. However, much of the media in Hungary is controlled by the government, or individuals loyal to it, withholding and concealing dissent, and conflicting opinions (Griffen, 2020). The persistent and overwhelming anti-immigrant campaign resulted in xenophobia reaching historic high levels in 2016 (Simonovits and Szeitl, 2019). Nevertheless, the way in which anti-immigrant political discourse has contributed to this "levelling down" of officers needs further clarification; what is at stake here is the constitutive role of public discourse in self-understanding.

Being socialised necessarily means that our understanding of the world, including ourselves, is inescapably determined by the community in which we were born, the prevailing culture, prescribed norms, behaviour patterns, and so on. In Heidegger's words, we are "thrown" into the world (BT, pp. 383-389). Our thrownness entails a fundamental form of inauthenticity which Heidegger termed "falling" or "entanglement", behaving like others, unaware of the fact that we merely follow scripts, and which naturally manifests in everyday discourse, as Heidegger calls it, "idle talk". The concept should not merely be understood as small talk, aphorisms, clichés, or stereotypes but as all forms of dominant, socially shared views, concepts, and knowledge. Idle talk fixes meanings and lays down the basis for intelligibility in a way in which it "divests us of the task of genuine understanding" where "things are so because one says so" (BT, p. 169). Holland (2001, 2020) and Beinsteiner (2017) have both pointed out how dominant political discourse and the mass media typically fulfil such non-coercive but authoritative function with a major impact on how one comes to view social phenomena. This does not apply to the world and others only, but also to the self. To Heidegger, discourse (i.e., language), as the "articulation of intelligibility", is constitutive for human existence in that we understand and disclose ourselves in discourse. In falling and levelling down, the dominant public understanding of roles, situations, and contexts, as manifested in discourse, serve as the very source of my self-interpretation (BT, pp. 160-170, 175-179). Guignon (2004, ch. 7) links these ideas to the narrative approach to identity, according to which the self is realised through the acting out of stories that provide a coherent and meaningful interpretation for one's actions over time. Such life stories "are told in being lived and lived in being told", where we act both as storyteller and protagonist (Carr, 1986, p. 61). As Guignon points out, these stories are culturally embedded and necessarily draw from the beliefs, tradition, and history of the community one lives in.

Since the construction of the border fence, government officials, and Orbán himself, have frequently drawn a parallel between mass migration and the Ottoman Conquest in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and compared border control to Hungary's struggle for freedom at that time. In tandem with invasion analogy, the police have been portrayed as successors of medieval border soldiers, modern-day heroes defending the country. According to, for example, a Facebook-group with tens of thousands of followers in support of the police as "warriors" who "defend Hungary and Europe", the comparison appealed to many.[4] This medieval symbolism has not only been echoed by public discourse, but some participants also reflected on their job as "defending the country" rather than simply controlling the border (for detailed analysis see Author, 2022). This is not necessarily to say that they have considered themselves as heirs to medieval soldiers, but it seems to suggest that some officers' self-narrative has been influenced by their historical legacy. In other words, collective memory in the form of historical narratives, as it were, fed into and shaped officers' professional identity.

Thus, one could argue, the real threat to authenticity is not the temptation or desire to conform. Rather, the true "dictatorship" of inauthenticity manifests itself in the potential of populist ideologies to re-establish the moral and social order, whereby one falls into echo chambers. Where narrative scripts and schemas offered by political discourse, re-thematizing the purpose of the police, come to underpin the self-interpretation or role identity of officers. In an overly hostile anti-immigrant climate, created and maintained by the media, and reinforced by one's micro-environment, their family, friends, colleagues and so on, pushing migrants back are hardly considered to be condemnable. On the contrary, "defending" the border to protect the citizenry against migrants is the only responsible approach, which has been viewed as highly appropriate by most Hungarians. Socializing into such social and professional milieu may make future generations of would-be police candidates especially prone to take its assertions for granted and adopt current border control practices without the slightest criticism.

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[4] "Magyar Rendőrök és Katonák, vele-TEK vagyunk": https://hu-hu.facebook.com/ittvagyunkveletek/.

5. Social authenticity

One possible objection could be that the *They* is not merely understood as mass society's corruptive influence, but it also relates to the embedded nature of human existence (Dreyfus, 1995; Thonhauser, 2017a; Meyer, 2017). On this reading, the They belongs to the existential structure of Dasein, against the background of which experiences make sense and, hence, its effect can hardly be overcome. The problem arising from this ambiguity is especially pressing concerning routinised patterns of social interaction, i.e., roles (cf. Weiss, 2008, pp. 155-58). In other words, socially shared meanings constitute the very basis of intelligibility. Culturally pre-established roles, norms, customs, and habits provide the underlying normative framework for what is appropriate or required in everyday situations. Thus, one could argue that any learned conduct or those that reflect the majoritarian view is necessarily inauthentic. Police officers in a liberal society, whose priority, as a result of their training and/or the prevailing culture, is to ensure that their practices meet the need of migrants, respecting their individual rights, would be no exception in this regard.

Moreover, the most explicit solutions Heidegger offers for escaping inauthenticity, on the face of it, leave no room for social sensitivity or some form of sociality broadly construed. *Anxiety* (BT, pp. 186-191), facing one's death (*being-toward-death,* BT, pp. 261-266), and the *call of conscience* (BT, pp. 268-275) are life events that "individualizes Dasein" by "fetching" it back from its lostness in the They. Authenticity, on this account, is customarily interpreted as owning and owning up to one's actions but in isolation and in an inward-looking way (Varga and Guignon, 2020). On this ground, another objection could be that I might take up a socially pre-established role authentically, as long as it is done in a "resolute" manner, i.e., I embrace it as my own. In this way, I do not just blindly follow the crowd, but conformity, if I decide to conform, is based on my own choice (BT, pp. 297-301, 384-387; cf. Carr, pp. 1986, 80-109).

Some recent readings of Heidegger, however, break with the tradition and attempt to rescue authenticity from the atomistic and overly individualistic approach and link the concept to intersubjectivity, which, in turn, might resolve both objections. At one point, Heidegger hints that authentic being does not require a total suspension of the They but is "only a modified grasp of everydayness" (BT, p. 179). As he elsewhere maintains, authenticity "does not detach Dasein from its world, nor does it isolate it as free-floating ego. How could it, if resoluteness as authentic disclosedness is, after all, nothing other than *authentically being-in-the-world*?", rather it "pushes it toward concerned being-with with the others" (BT, p. 298, emphasis in original). Heidegger, first of all, seems to suggest that authenticity does not require us to be true to an isolated inner self, because there is no such thing as pre-social self (Gallagher, Morgan, and Rokotnitz, 2018; Weichold, 2017; Jaeggi, 2014, p. 85 fn. 38; Varga, 2012, pp. 92-94). Secondly, these passages imply that authentic mode of being does not presuppose a radical change in *what* we do in our everyday life, rather, it is about the way in which we attend to the condition of thrownness, i.e., *how* we do what we do (Knowles, 2017; Thonhauser, 2017b). In Weichold's interpretation, by means of the modification of attitude towards the social world, one comes to realise the embeddedness of one's existence. In other words, authenticity begins with the realisation that the They, the community we belong to, social roles, along with its underlying normative framework is the very constituent of our existence (Stroh, 2015, p. 257). Simply put, instead of escaping the public world, I only become aware of its power over me. According to Weichold, this realisation entails that, for the first time, by recognising the very "perspectiveness" of one's perspective, one starts appreciating alternative ways of being. Understanding this contingency of normativity, in turn, opens up the possibility for scrutiny in recognising the limited validity of one's perspective and by critically engaging with the so far taken for granted reality. Being bound by the actual social milieu, the contingency of possibilities should not be understood in a Sartrean sense, as an unlimited freedom of choice at our disposal. Rather, the emphasis here is on understanding that one's way of being is only one of many potential outcomes. In a similar vein, Borțun argues the authentic disclosure of our own possibilities can be interpreted as the simultaneous disclosure of plurality of others, i.e., the recognition of difference (Borțun, 2017, cf. Guignon, 2004, ch. 8).

Weichold (2017) further argues that this attitude shift, if collectively shared, might also engender more flexibility in the application of social conventions, their revision, and, ultimately, social change. According to Stroh (2015), understanding the interrelatedness of Dasein and the They, beside our dependency on the community, also involves the apprehension that it is us who make up the community. We tend to forget that social roles and conventions are nothing more than our collective achievement. For reasons of practicality and smoothness in everyday interactions, it is "tempting" to follow pre-existing guidelines; it is not only "reassuring", but also "tranquillizing" and "alienating" (BT, pp. 177-178). In authentic mode, however, we see ourselves as active participants in the establishment of the normative framework, that we are essentially the co-authors of the They. It follows that not only is authentic role play possible, as opposed to what Sartre has suggested, but it presupposes a proactive and collective revision of historically handed down roles (Stroh, 2015). On this view, role expectations are provisional both in terms of the content of a role as well as *how* it should or could be performed. Thonhauser (2017b) emphasizes that any such alteration of the pre-existing framework can only be brought about collectively by winning the sympathy and consent of others. It requires the shared understanding and appreciation of the contingency and the open-endedness of here-and-now available possibilities, which, although momentarily binding, are mere historical inevitabilities. The authentic disclosure "cannot be *rigid* about the situation" but it "must be *kept* free and *open*" which "means *keeping oneself free for* the possibility of *taking it back*, a possibility that is always factically necessary" (BT, p. 308, emphasis in original). To put it differently, authentic role play presupposes open-mindedness, whereby *we*, as a collective of actors, are ready to question ourselves and critically re-evaluate our dispositions. Instead of stubbornly insisting on traditions and blindly endorsing the dominant public opinions we are exposed to and socialised into, we need to be attentive to conflicting and competing interpretations, looking for constructive dialogue, and be ready to reverse our position (cf. Knowles, 2017). The incorporation of these insights into the self-understanding and self-organisation of the collective can engender a culture of resistance and change not only among those in marginalised position, as Leland (2001, p. 124) has suggested, but members of the police should also be able to stand up against role expectations imposed upon them by society. This is certainly not to imply, however, that such revelation could take effect from one day to another and suddenly resolve the indiscriminate abuse of people at the border.

6. Conclusion

Based on qualitative interviews conducted with Hungarian border police officers, the article analysed what role inauthenticity may have played in their role interpretation. On the one hand, participants were not comfortable with their mandatory deployment at the border for reasons of inconvenience, often using the phrase "I am just following orders" in this regard. On the other hand, they were fully on board with, and seemed to be committed to the policy objective of pushing migrants back over the border. They did not feel the necessity of justifying the ill-treatment of migrants, because the question whether it qualified as excessive use of force, or otherwise required justification, did not seem to arise from the outset. The article has argued that officers' role identity has been shaped by anti-immigrant public sentiment, and, as it were, they have fallen into echo chambers created by dominant political discourse. However, against the backdrop of classical existentialist thought, "defending" the country against mass migration may not be considered inauthentic if done in a resolute manner, i.e., owning and owning up to one's actions. The article has critically engaged with this view, departing from the narrow, individualistic interpretation of authentic role play. By adopting an approach that considers the social embeddedness of human existence, it has argued that authenticity presupposes recognition of difference.

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