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To fly or not to fly – Imposing and undergoing airport security screening beyond the security-privacy trade-off

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About the PRISMS project

The PRISMS project analyses the traditional trade-off model between privacy and security and devise a more evidence-based perspective for reconciling privacy and security, trust and concern. It examines how technologies aimed at enhancing security are subjecting citizens to an increasing amount of surveillance and, in many cases, causing infringements of privacy and fundamental rights. It conducts both a multidisciplinary inquiry into the concepts of privacy and security and their relationships and an EU-wide survey to determine whether people evaluate the introduction of security technologies in terms of a trade-off. As a result, the project determines the factors that affect public assessment of the security and privacy implications of a given security technology. The project uses these results to devise a decision support system providing users (those who deploy and operate security systems) insight into the pros and cons, constraints and limits of specific security investments compared to alternatives taking into account a wider society context.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The PRISMS project analyses the traditional trade-off model between security and privacy and devises a more evidence-based perspective for reconciling security, privacy and trust. It examines how technologies aimed at enhancing security are subjecting citizens to an increasing amount of security measures and, in many cases, causing infringements of privacy and fundamental rights. It conducts both a multidisciplinary inquiry into the concepts of security and privacy and their relationships and a EU-wide survey to determine whether or not people evaluate the introduction of security technologies in terms of a trade-off. As a result, the project determines the factors that affect the public assessment of the security and privacy implications of a given security technology. The project has used these results to devise a decision support system providing users (those who deploy and operate security systems) insight into the pros and cons, constraints and limits of specific security investments compared to alternatives taking into account a wider society context.

The criminological work package (WP4) included within PRISMS aims to contribute in two significant ways to the general remit of the overall project. As outlined in deliverable 4.1, the first goal was to arrive to a formulation of a conceptualisation of the notions of security and privacy from a criminological perspective that could be and were used to provide input for the development of the survey, its concepts, questions and hypotheses. The second objective of WP4 was the contextualisation of the results of the survey in light of a qualitative research case study conducted at Brussels airport, in order to further feed with its insights the development of the decision support system, one of the final outcomes of the project. The latter is what is detailed in the present deliverable.

The main goal of the second research task of WP4 is to explore citizens' attitudes and evaluations of security. This means that our leading question is: *How do people experience security-privacy practices or situations?* To get insight people's experiences with security practices we can only rely on how people frame and account (narrate) these experiences and events. Accounts or narratives are tools that individuals use in a sort of radical reflexivity connecting actions and accounts.¹ As announced in the work package description, a qualitative case study can precisely focus on the analysis of accounts or narratives concerning the experience of participants of security practices. That way we can access *how* participants make sense of the situation they are part of.

This deliverable is structured as follows: first, we will discuss the Brussels airport case study afterwards, we will shortly evoke the normative framework for aviation security in place before and after 9/11; then we will very briefly describe the governance of this field, with particular emphasis on the Belgian case. Finally, we will present the main empirical findings of our qualitative study, which will be used as the basis for the conclusions advanced in the final section of the report.

¹ von Lehn, Dirk, *Harold Garfinkel: The Creation and Development of Ethnomethodology*, Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, CA, 2014.

2 A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF THE (BRUSSELS) AIRPORT

The airport site was chosen for the PRISMS qualitative case study because it is a well-defined area in which security and privacy play an important role, both in terms of discourses and narratives, of practices and attitudes, and one with which an increasing number of people are familiar. The air travel and airports are situations in which the security-privacy trade-off is strongly embedded.² It is one of the more telling examples where the security discourse and practices have been developed increasingly, since 9/11/2001. These security practices have been implemented with an impressive breaching of the privacy of passengers. And they have been legitimated by a trade-off discourse since their first introduction. Such is the power of the now prevailing security discourse that the memory of a time where airport control consisted merely of border control – that is, when only the identity of the passenger was checked against valid proof of ID – has been, to all extent and purposes, erased.

Today, airport security practices are diverse, multilayered and interconnected. Airports can be understood as sites of institutionalised mobility and transit, complexified by being a “multi-faceted environment dominated by doctrines of risk management and customer services, (where) the confessionary complex facilitates the self-policing of transiting individuals, and (...) the overlapping and obscured lines of authority subtly restrict the possibilities of resistance”³. Salter’s approach makes clear the relevance of an airport case-study for PRISMS, as it is in the airport – specifically when going through security – that passengers have to face and participate in security practices, legitimated directly by the security-privacy trade-off.

The choice for Brussels airport as case study for WP4.2 of PRISMS must be understood in this perspective. The PRISMS project, and the criminological WP in particular, intend to research empirically, if so, whether and how people *actually* evaluate security practices in terms of a trade-off between security and privacy. Not what it *should* be, but rather *how it is embedded in everyday practices* and situations. How are these situations and practices perceived, experienced and evaluated? In other words, what kind of meaning these situations get? Therefore, what matters is that we come to understand *how individuals experience security practices* and *how their evaluations can be understood in this process*.

The empirical research we have set up at Brussels airport connects to these questions. Therefore, we opted to focus on a very specific moment in the security governance and policing of airport passengers, notably the security screening of passengers and hand luggage before arriving at the flight gate. This specific situation remains one of the few situations where flight passengers (citizens) experience security practices in a very practical, common and direct way. This situation is one of the few examples in which a tangible encounter and interaction between on one hand agents enforcing and performing airport security and on the other hand passengers, can be practically observed.

The central aim of this empirical approach is to acquire insight and shed light on the notions of security and privacy that people develop *in practice* while they are at the airport and passing through security checks. Therefore, our research task sought to investigate: *how people experience security (checks)*, in which terms they understand their participation in the screen-

² Adey, Peter, "Secured and Sorted Mobilities: Examples from the Airport", *Surveillance & Society*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 2004, pp. 500-519. Salter, Mark B., "Governmentalities of an airport: Heterotopia and confession", *International Political Sociology*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2007, pp. 49-66.

³ Salter, 2007, [p. 47]. See also Scherrer, Amandine, Emmanuel-Pierre Guittet and Didier Bigo (eds.), *Mobilités sous surveillance, perspectives croisée UE-Canada*, Athéna Editions, Outremont, 2009.

ing process and *how do they relate to screeners and or to passengers?* We approach the airport security screening of passengers as an interactional situation with different participants (screeners or security agents, supervisors, camera's, passengers, etc). It is important to stress that from an ethnographical perspective all these participants are part of what airport security screening of passengers *is*.⁴ Therefore, we analyse peoples' behaviour and narratives on their experience with this very specific and limited situation. Methodologically this means that apart from non participant observations of the screening practices in Brussels airport we not only carried out interviews with passengers, but we also turned to the screeners themselves and their narratives of "doing security screenings". People working the line of passengers security checks are interacting with passengers and have their own experience of how passengers react and interact within the security check practice. We were especially interested in how these employees describe this situation, how they feel about specific security practices involved and how they see and experience conflicts that may emerge. Focusing on these conflicts is relevant for our study, because they can be characterised as moments where the limits of dominance are tested and become "public" or visible.⁵ These conflicts show that even where at first glance there is complete submission to the security practices, another (hidden) discourse or narrative exists. This resistance can be observed in small forms of behaviour, described as forms of *infrapolitics*.⁶

⁴ von Lehn, 2014.

⁵ Scott, James C., *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1990.

⁶ *Ibid.*

3 THE NORMATIVE LANDSCAPE BEFORE AND AFTER 9/11

The Chicago Convention of 1944 established the International Civil Aviation Organization (hereafter: ICAO), a specialized United Nations agency responsible for the regulation and coordination of international air travel. Among its tasks falls the development of common standards and practices in the field of civil aviation, which are outlined in a series of Annexes to the original convention and cover a variety of matters, from the licensing of personnel to the marking of aircrafts and the units of measurement whose use is authorised. Within the scope of this deliverable, of particular relevance is Annex 17, *Security Safeguarding International Civil Aviation against Acts of Unlawful Interference*, which details a series of common security standards to be implemented by all member states for the protection of passengers, crew, infrastructures and aircrafts from terrorist attacks. First adopted on 22 March 1974, the Annex has so far been amended 13 times, with the latest version being released in June 2013. While the specific contents of the Annex are restricted, it is nevertheless possible to make a few points about the historical evolution of international security standards in the field of civil aviation.

It is clear to the eye of the contemporary reader how all the international Conventions on air travel tackling the topic of aviation security (Tokyo, signed 1963, effective 1969; The Hague, signed 1970, effective 1971; Montreal, 1971, effective 1973; Protocol to the Montreal Convention, signed 1988, effective 1989) are focused on one very specific type of threat – the hijacking of planes –, on how to manage those, and on the sanctions against individuals and groups involved in their planning and execution. With peaks in the 1960s and the 1970s, in fact, this was a common tactic deployed by terrorist groups, so much so that in those years the so called 'Common Strategy' came to be developed by the US Federal Aviation Administration, instructing crew members to comply with the hijackers' requests and passengers to remain inactive in order to increase their chances of survival. This strategy basically remained unchanged until 9/11 and was only shelved when suicide hijackers came onto the international scene.

The landscape in which these Conventions were drafted was also radically different from today's; despite the emphasis on the need for stronger international cooperation, aviation security was at the time very much a national affair. In Europe, responsibility for implementing appropriate measures fell with member states of what was then called the European Community, and civil servants were carrying out the checks in airports in a majority of cases. While this progressively changed due in no small parts to efforts towards the liberalisation and integration into a single European market made by the EU of the distinct national markets for air travel, and the decrease in cost and increase in traffic that resulted from those, along with the appearance of new carriers – notably, low cost airlines – a common EU-wide framework for aviation security only emerged in the wake of the 9/11 events. This means that, while there was an expectation that the measures outlined in the various international conventions would be implemented by all signatory states, it was left to single members to decide how to do that.

3.1 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR AVIATION SECURITY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION AFTER 9/11

The events of 9/11 sparked a radical rearrangement of the field of aviation security, with the EU legislator recognising, and addressing, the need to establish common rules for safeguarding civil aviation. Such efforts initially resulted in regulation EC 2320/2002, which introduced

a first common set of security measures to be adopted in all European airports. In the light of the knowledge gained in the intervening years, that regulation was repealed in 2008 and replaced with regulation EC 300/2008, which simplified, harmonised and clarified the existing rules on aviation security as laid out in regulation EC 2320/2002. Taken together with regulation EU 18/2010, regulation EU 185/2010 and regulation EU 1411/2011, these legislative acts represent the binding legal framework for matters pertaining to the security of civil aviation operations in the EU countries, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

The ultimate goal of this regulatory framework is twofold; it aims at the establishment of common security rules for civil aviation, along with the creation of appropriate mechanisms to monitor compliance. In order to do this, Member States had to designate a single authority as the body responsible for the implementation of common security standards, while at the same time develop two national programmes: a national civil aviation security programme to 'define responsibilities for the implementation of the common basic standards on aviation security' (regulation EC 300/2008, recital 13), and a national quality control programme to monitor compliance with relevant legislation. Significantly, the regulation also acknowledges the possibility of derogations to common rules, introduced by member states in light of risk assessment analyses, or on the back of considerations on factors such as 'the size of the aircraft, the nature of the operation and/or the frequency of operations at airports' (regulation EC 300/2008, recital 9). In case the measures introduced on the back of a risk analysis are more stringent than those commonly adopted throughout the EU, these must be relevant, objective, non-discriminatory and proportional to the risk that was assessed.

Other relevant actors – specifically: airports, air carriers and all other entities involved in the provision of services to airports – must also develop their own security programmes (these are respectively: airport security programme, air carrier security programme, entity security programme), detailing the methods and procedures to be used in order to guarantee compliance with EU legislation and the appropriate national security programmes.

Within the scope of the present deliverable and in light of the fieldwork that was carried out at Brussels airport, the specific provisions regarding the screening of passengers and of cabin baggage and the characteristics of the security equipment to be used to this end – as laid out in regulation EU 185/2010 – are particularly relevant. Passengers can either be screened by hand search or made to pass through a “walk through metal detector” (WTMD). Manual body searches must be performed “so as to *reasonably* ensure that the person is not carrying prohibited items” (regulation EU 185/2010, attachment 3-B, article 4.1.1.3. Emphasis not in original.), while hand-held metal detectors (HHMD) can only be used as a supplementary means of screening. Jackets and coats must be taken off before undergoing security control. Cabin baggage can be manually searched by a security agent, go through an x-ray machine or be screened with explosive detection system (EDS⁷) equipment. As is the case for passenger screening, “all alarms shall be resolved to the satisfaction of the screener so as to *reasonably* ensure that no prohibited articles are carried into the SRA [security restricted area] or on board an aircraft” (regulation EU 185/2010, attachment 3-B, article 4.1.2.6. Emphasis not in original). Laptops, tablets and other large electrical items must be removed from the baggage and screened separately, as is the case for liquids, gels and aerosols (LAGs). Explosive detection dogs and explosive trace detection (ETD) can only be used as an additional means of screening. LAGs might also be screened by means of chemical reaction test strips or bottled

7 Explosive detection systems (EDS) employ x-ray technology, while explosive trace detection systems (ETD) detect the chemical traces left by particles of explosive materials, usually by rubbing a wand onto the surface of the object to be tested.

liquid scanners. “Tasting and testing on the skin may be used as a supplementary means of screening” (regulation EU 185/2010, attachment 3-B, article 4.1.3.2).

Security scanners (the so-called body scanners in common parlance) were added to the list of the methods available to perform passengers screening with regulation EU 1411/2011. Significantly, this document openly references the privacy implications of the technology and provides passengers with the right of opting-out of this specific means of screening in favour of alternative methods. At the same time, it also identifies explicitly the use of security scanners based on automated threat detection (“so that it is no longer necessary for any human reviewer to analyse images”. Regulation EU 1411/2001, recital 8) as a goal the Commission will strive to implement in European airports. Currently, security scanners are not in use at Brussels airport.

3.2 BRUSSELS AIRPORT: THE GOVERNANCE OF AVIATION SECURITY

The designated national authority for Belgium is the Belgian Civil Aviation Authority (FR: Direction Générale Transport Aérien, NL: Directoraat-Generaal Luchtvaart. Hereafter: BCAA).

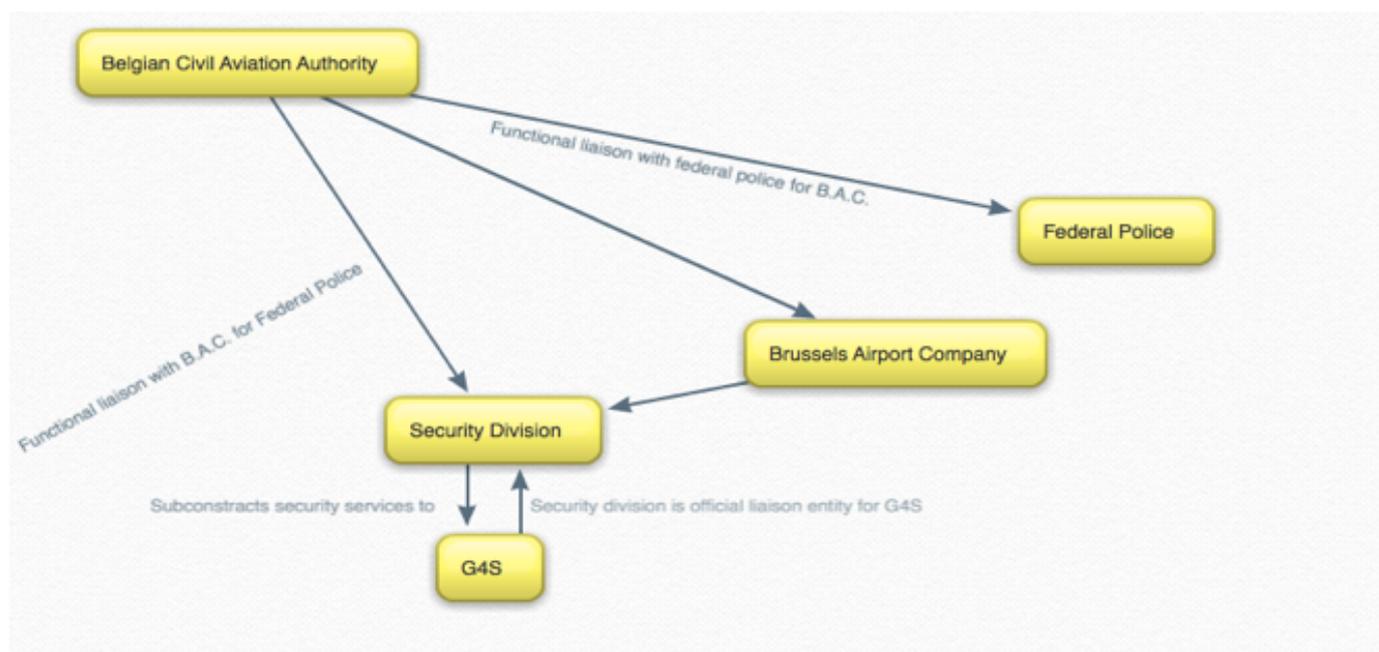


Figure 1: Security actors at Brussels airport.

Before 1999 Brussels airport was owned by the Belgian state and airport police forces were in charge of public order, security control and access control. After 1999 Brussels airport became a privately run company, with a participation of 25% by the Belgian State. The 1999 law⁸ and afterwards the 2001 Belgian police reform of had an important impact on the organisation and involvement of public police forces in airport activities and security. Today the airport police is part of the federal police and organised under the Directorate of Airport Po-

⁸ Wet tot regeling van de bevoegdheidsverdeling ingevolge de integratie van de zeevaartpolitie, de luchtvaartpolitie en de spoorwegpolitie in de federale politie, 3th of May 1999. (B.S. 3-5-1999). http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi_loi/change_lg.pl?language=nl&la=N&cn=1999050330&table_name=wet

lice⁹. After 9/11 the privatisation of airport security activities expands: in 2011 G4S (security company) becomes the security subcontractor at Brussels airport. The company provides services concentrating on passengers screening, luggage screening, vehicle screening and access control. The security division of Brussels Airport Company has two main tasks; on one hand, they audit everything that is related to security within the boundaries of the airport, while on the other they are responsible for the training of chief security inspectors. In terms of auditing, most of the efforts are directed at making sure that the overall levels of security are satisfactory and that the quality of the service provided by the subcontractor G4S is always up to the agreed standard and fully compliant with EU legislation. Today the security division of Brussels Airport Company comprises senior staff, which are former state employees and were part of the former airport police. As made clear in interviews with the staff, they do not employ people who ever worked for the private security company.

⁹ http://www.polfed-fedpol.be/org/org_dga_lpa_en.php

4 IMPOSING AND UNDERGOING PASSENGERS' AIRPORT SECURITY CHECKS

4.1 CONTEXT OF RESEARCH, METHODOLOGY AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Brussels airport is the largest airport in Belgium, with around 219000 registered movements (take offs and landings) in 2013. More than 80 % concerns passenger flights, 84% of which directed towards other European countries. The vast majority of the 19 million passengers (per year) going through the airport are from Europe (74.8 % vs 25.2 %), with 17% of the total amount using Brussels as transit.¹⁰ Being based in Brussels ourselves and having good and long established contacts with the field of private policing and the airport security division through the Department of Criminology of the VUB (in particular through the network of Prof. M. Cools), we opted for Brussels airport. This enhanced our possibilities of access and cooperation enabling the fieldwork. Given the security implications of the fieldwork, it was indeed first necessary for the researchers to obtain formal access to the passengers' security check. The formal procedure of access permission took several months, consisting of a two-step procedure. First the involved researchers (Menichelli and Christiaens) were subjected to a security background check, which involved verifying police and criminal records in order to check whether they met the security characteristics and conditions necessary to be issued an airport badge. It remains somewhat unclear up until where this "security clearance" reaches. Before the badge was issued, just like all personnel working the Brussels airport, we had to view/screen a special Brussels airport security instruction documentary. It was an interesting experience to witness this situation. As a researcher sitting in a small visioning room together with regular personnel of Brussels airport, watching an instruction movie that aims at increasing security awareness in the airport context. Going back to the 1988 Lockerbie case and of course the 9/11 disaster the instruction documentary explains roughly the security organisation of the airport. All personnel is called to be part of and or participating in watching for suspicious activities, persons or objects. As a part of the research it was for us an interesting illustration of the security narrative that underpins all airport security. However present (regular) personnel were clearly uninterested. Watching this information and awareness movie becomes a routine; it must be done each time the access badge expires.

Once the badge was issued, it was possible for the researchers to access restricted areas within the airport, and to conduct the non-participant observations as well as doing interviews with passengers and screeners.

We decided to focus on the security screening lines of passengers (and their hand luggage). This specific "situation" is located between the "border" (customs) and the actual gates to the airplane. In Brussels airport there are two "piers" or gates areas. In the "Schengen" area (Pier A) there is no border check (anymore), passengers go directly from check-in (only digital check of the boarding pass) to the security screening lanes. Once passed through this screening they arrive in the so-called tax free and commercial area, which leads to the actual (A) gates. Passengers flying outside the Schengen area go, after check-in, through customs with passport and boarding pass control. After the "border" passengers arrive in a first commercial area. When going to the gates they will first have to pass the security check (of themselves and their hand luggage), arriving afterwards in the second commercial area leading to the gates. At the gates another "check" of the passengers' ticket and passport is done. When fly-

¹⁰ Brussels Airport Company, "BRUtrends 2013", 2013.

ing to the US a second security check of passengers and hand luggage is (possibly – ad random) operated before really entering the “gate area”.

Observations were carried out at the security lanes (Pier A and B) during the months of April and May 2014. It was initially planned that observations would be conducted at different times during the day throughout the week, so as to obtain a full picture of security controls at various moments. However, it soon became obvious that the very specific patterns of air traffic in Brussels airport would have to be taken into account, which led to a change in the timing, duration and choice of location of the observations. First, because of the presence of European and international institutions and all the organisations that revolve around them, most of the inbound passenger traffic is concentrated between Sunday evening and Monday morning, while outbound traffic reaches its peak between Thursday evening and Friday. Second, because the vast majority of flights have Schengen destinations (64.1% of commercial flights), most of the traffic goes through Pier A (Schengen area). Therefore, while observations were also conducted at Pier B, where non-Schengen flights are directed, and at different times during the week, minimal traffic was observed then, so most of the observations were conducted at Pier A on Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays. In total, the researchers spent 18 hours at the security lanes (Pier A). Observations (20 hours) were also conducted at Pier B (non-Schengen) in the same period as interviews were organised with screeners in the G4S room for personnel located at the Pier B.

In addition to the observations, interviews were conducted. First, we did some more exploratory interviews with (management) personnel from both Brussels airport company and G4S, the security contractor, including the market research manager and the auditor internal quality control & security instructor from Brussels airport company, the service centre manager and the aviation manager from G4S. These interviews were necessary for understanding the organisation of security practices in Brussels airport and more specifically the situation of passenger’s control. In total, 4 of these interviews were conducted. All were recorded and transcribed.

After that, interviews with passenger were conducted. Initial attempts saw interviewing directly at the gates, with people waiting for their flight. However, it soon became evident that due to the noise, passengers wanting to go to the gate, and language barriers this was far from an ideal location. As a result, it was decided to move the interviews outside the airport, with people familiar with Brussels airport and who fly frequently, as it was believed that their wider experience of air travel in general and security in particular would make them more useful respondents. Eventually, 12 interviews, 8 with female respondents and 4 with male respondents, were conducted, ranging in length from 10 to 20 minutes, with people from Belgium, Italy, Romania, Sweden and the United Kingdom. All were recorded and transcribed. At the same time, interviews with the screeners were conducted. These interviews were mainly conducted in a backroom for G4S personnel at Pier B. Interviewees were selected from the screening lines at Pier B. However, all personnel have experience in working at both Piers (A & B). We conducted 13 interviews, with 7 male and 6 female screeners, with a variety of age and working experience. These interviews were all done in Dutch (and one in French). Interviews, ranging in length from 15 to 30 minutes, were recorded and transcribed.

	gender	age	Years working in G4S as screeners	Position
respo 1	F	35	3	team leader
respo 2	M	29	5	screeener
respo 3	M	32	12	team leader
respo 4	M	24	3	mentor
respo 5	F	24	1	screeener
respo 6	F	26	2	screeener
respo 7	M	26	2	screeener
respo 8	M	28	4	screeener
respo 9	M	32	5	screeener
respo 10	F	39	5	screeener
respo 11	M	57	6	screeener
respo 12	M	28	8	screeener
respo 13	F	36	7	screeener

Table 1: Sample composition

Doing fieldwork in an airport is not self-evident and has some implications that should be taken into account. First, the necessity to negotiate access both to the site and to the respondents meant that everything had to be agreed upon with airport management. This is not to say that the companies were uncooperative, as it was clear from the initial meetings that they were interested in the results that the research might produce and were consequently willing to facilitate the researchers' work. However, they were still able to exert a degree of control over the transmission of relevant data, for example concerning the complaints filed by passengers. At the same time, we depended on their organisation to make screeners available for interviewing. That way in fact they selected our respondents.

While this is not in any way different from carrying out research in any context or organisation where access needs to be negotiated with gatekeepers, specific characteristics of the airport heavily influenced how the fieldwork was conducted and the kind of results that were eventually produced. On one hand, the airport is a site that occupies a separate domain from everyday life, with the difference marked physically (by fences and barriers), pragmatically (with specific rites that passengers have to go through in order to be able to board their flight and rules to be followed) and discursively (with great emphasis placed on the necessity for security).

On the other hand, the decision to study the moment when security is made in the interaction between screener and passenger had to take into account the obvious power differentials that characterise relationships between the two parties. Two results from the fieldwork illustrate this point. When in the interviews passengers were asked whether they would be comfortable in speaking up to a screener if they felt they were somehow being mistreated, half of them said they were not so sure they would. Interviewees feared that being perceived as troublesome would eventually prevent them from being able to board their flight. In much the same way, during the time spent at security control, there were no instances of passengers protesting, with people never going much further than muttering something to themselves and shrugging it off with a resigned look on their faces.

It became clear that the interviews with both passengers and screeners would be far more relevant for this case-study than lengthy observations. Beyond the explorative observations, in-

interviews were better suited to understand how people make sense of their participation in the making of security at the lane, as opposed to the fleeting interactions that take place there. Coupling passengers' interviews with the conversations that the researchers had with the screeners made it possible to record how both parties perceive, experience and negotiate their involvement in the interaction, and to compare and contrast these rationalisations in order to identify the dynamics and the strategies each side deployed during security checks. Moreover, during the interviews with passengers and screeners attention was focused on where people would draw the line in terms of their participation and submission to security controls. An important focus of our fieldwork were possible conflicts emerging when *doing* passengers security screening. This focus on what could be called the limits of submission to security practices is linked to the idea that this could offer meaningful insight for our understanding of how citizens experience and evaluate these situations (with a radical trade off).

For readers' clarity, excerpts from interviews or field notes from the observations will be in italics throughout the text. Also, when related to the screeners (4.3), these excerpts are translations of interviews in Dutch (Flemish) and French made by the researchers: some of the formulations may sound awkward in English, but rather than to formalise or try to find the equivalent tone in English, we have opted for a more or less literal rendering of their words in English, because we think that, even if the expressions do not even exist in English as such, they speak for themselves.

4.2 UNDERGOING SECURITY CHECK

In the course of the interviews with passengers, several themes recurred, revolving around four distinct concepts; 'necessity', 'efficacy', 'proportionality' and 'privacy'. Each will be analysed in greater detail, with quotes.

4.2.1 *Necessary, but efficient*

Perhaps unsurprisingly, all interviewees agreed, though to varied degrees, that airport security is a necessity nowadays in the light of attacks carried out against civil aviation. The normalization of exceptional measures of control has been so successful that security is now considered just another part of the game: if you want to board a flight, this is something you have to go through.

I always feel like those measures have some sort of reason. That's my idea. I just put up with them. I think someone in the past has used something that looks like a water bottle to commit a crime, so I'll just throw my water bottle out. It's not super inconvenient. (...) I trust the people who decide on the rules, so I don't think it's up to me decide what is safe, what is not safe. So if it's in my interest to follow the rules, I just will. (Interviewee 2)

I agree and I accept and I totally agree that we have to protect ourselves against all kinds of single men or terrorist attacks, that it is necessary for all air travel to be as safe as possible, so I understand that this is a pain we have to go through, but it's sometimes very frustrating. But it's necessary. The security is necessary, I guess. (Interviewee 1)

Security regulations have become really a burden for passengers that travel very often. At the same time, I see the reasons behind and in a way I accept and I agree fully as they stand now. (Interviewee 3)

There's probably a need [for security regulations] but I don't know to what extent what they are doing today is actually covering security and how much it is not. I'll come back to the water thing. I am not sure that not taking water on board can prevent whatever. (Interviewee 4)

Thinking about security control in terms of necessity implies considerations about its efficiency. If the process itself cannot be avoided, then at least it should be made as easy and hassle-free as possible to go through it. Not wasting time is, to some interviewees, the number one concern they have when they have to catch a flight.

I make sure that no item will cause the intervention of the manual screeners as opposed to the magnetic one [interviewee is referring to WTMD]. I try to make sure that I don't lose any extra time because of that. It's just a time issue. (...) As far as my personal travel is concerned, efficiency is my main concern, but I understand that certain procedures are necessary for additional security. (Interviewee 3)

- I don't want to lose time, so if I'm in a hurry I don't want to be stopped for stupid reasons.

- What is a stupid reason?

- If they make a mistake, because they think that there's something that it's not right, but mostly it's a mistake of the personnel or the machines. (Interviewee 5)

Under this light, technology comes to play a relevant role, as it is seen as something that can eliminate the need for human screeners, thus making the entire process faster and, at the same time, less vulnerable to errors.

- If the right technology was available, it would be great. Just putting your hand luggage on the belt, without having to take out laptops and liquids and then again, having the right technology, not having to take out all of your items, such as watches and belts and so on and just go through it. A screening that even if more thorough would allow me not to have to go through the process of having to take all items outside my pockets.

- So would you support the introduction of body scanners, for example?

- Yes, I would. But even with current body scanners you still have to take out the items. So in a way, as they are now, they do not really change the burden the passenger goes through, it's just more accurate and more precise. But you still have to take out your watch and your belt and so on. So in this sense there is no real benefit apart from security for the passenger. (Interviewee 3)

4.2.2 Efficacy and the need for more information

In spite of the acceptance of security control, the concurrent theme of 'efficacy' emerged from the interviews, with interviewees expressing uncertainty as to whether, in their current state, regulations actually guarantee and increase security. Doubts revolve around two main questions. On one hand, it is not clear why some items cannot be carried on board, with the regulation on the transportation of liquids in one's hand luggage uniformly mentioned as particularly bothersome. On the other, those interviewees who experienced first hand inaccuracies in how checks are carried out openly question whether security control delivers.

I find them [security checks and regulations] quite random, because they don't really check... they check that I am not carrying any weapons but actually sometimes I had the feeling that I could carry a weapon and the weapon would go unnoticed. I don't feel extremely secure about the efficiency of the control. Because myself, I have introduced sometimes liquids or things that are forbidden and they were not properly checked. Like small liquids, or sometimes I had scissors with me that were not detected. Especially when I am carrying the full carry-on luggage, that is bigger, sometimes I have forgotten that I have scissors in my vanity case and they went through. (Interviewee 6)

[Security at Brussels airport is] Poor. Maybe it's my impression with security in general. It's that I find it... it's being done because it has to be done. It doesn't make me feel more secure, let's put it this way. Because I don't see that there is consistency, either within the airport or between European airports, to take a measurable comparison. I have been able to go through with a bottle of water in an airport and not in another... (Interviewee 4)

I have had issues myself. Only once there was an issue regarding a mosquito liquid, for a trip to Africa. I was allowed to go through the checks once, but it's a liquid that I think can cause irritation and therefore it's not allowed to be boarded with passengers. On the first check it went through, then the flight was delayed and we were taken out and once I went back in, actually this time it was confiscated. So the whole issue was about me dying of malaria in Africa. (Interviewee 3)

They once took a nail file from me and I don't care. The weird thing is, I had been on five flights with that same file and they took it right before I got on the last plane, which... I didn't care. I can get another file. (...) What bothers me is that apparently it could be a threat and they never took it, so that means that they are not always as strict as they should be, or maybe on the other hand there was this one guy that was too serious about it. That made me feel less secure, knowing that the rules can be applied in different ways. (...) It gave me the impression that rules can be random sometimes, and that would simply surprise me and that makes me think that other rules are maybe too much, like the water for example. (Interviewee 2)

The implication that arises from this is the need for more information, in the double meaning of providing people clear details about what they can and cannot take on board with them, and as a key to increased participation of passengers in the making of security. The lack of clear information on objects allowed as part of one's carry on means that it is hard for the passenger to know what the expected behaviour at the lane is, which makes it harder to prepare beforehand and the whole process more time consuming.

In Brussels there are no systematic rules that are explained in a proper way. (...) Like, if you need to take off your shoes or do not need to take off your shoes, if you can keep your laptop in the laptop sleeve or you can't. The information is there, displayed, but the approach changes. (Interviewee 6)

The information is not clear enough. I would improve that by sending that information... More and more people are booking online, and I get my e-ticket also online, and now they start doing that, I booked a ticket last week and I got a list of to dos and not to dos with regard to luggage, but it's too long. It should be small, short, visual. (...) It should be put in a very easy, visual way. (Interviewee 1).

At the same time, not knowing exactly why specific rules are in place and what their actual effect on security levels is, is seen as negatively affecting the willing participation of passengers to the checks, particularly when it comes to the much despised regulation on liquids.

I think if people felt that their contribution to security makes people feel safer, they would be much more helpful. Lots of people are getting annoyed by, for example, having to put everything in a transparent bag and not taking water... If they don't feel that that actually contributes to security. (...) If people could see [statistics], then they would realize that this actually makes sense, to take off your shoes, not to take water. Because now, once in a while, you hear a rumour, like that they are going to lift the ban on liquids, so where does this come from? Is it based on measurables or is it because they feel it is costing too much money? This kind of things. (Interviewee 4).

Proportionality (Legitimate measure?). This last passage opens the door to a further series of considerations centred on the idea of the proportionality (legitimate measure?) of security to the threat being addressed and the risk posed by specific situations and items. Some of the interviewees saw this as a way of questioning whether the effort, time and money spent on security are justified, while others emphasized the negative implications in terms of unpleasantness, intimidation, suspicion and discrimination.

I would leave airports like bus stations and train stations. Completely open. For me. Because I think it would be more efficient in the end and the risks would not be so elevated. (...) I think it's a big effort for the results that it gets. (Interviewee 6)

I still wonder if [security practices] are necessary or not. I understand that some security is needed, but are we still in danger, or something might happen? Because I don't think that shoes can be a danger, or water can be a danger. (Interviewee 10)

I think this 100 ml rule is completely ridiculous. (...) Because if you really wanted to do something, you would find another way. This is ridiculous. (Interviewee 9)

At the end of the day, I think, if the idea is to combat terrorism, no matter what the restrictions are, I think people are going to find a way, because I don't honestly believe that for the time, and money, and effort, and wasted bottles of water... I don't think it's going to deter people, that it is going to avoid, prevent, anything from happening. (Interviewee 7)

The interviews take this line of reasoning in two different directions. On one hand, the illusory nature of total security is explicitly argued, because no matter how stringent measures can get, something or someone is always going to slip through.

That's just impossible. The rules have gone so far that you can't take a bottle of water with you, because it might be a bomb. If the rules have to go that far, I think it's impossible to have total control. (...) There's a fallacy to believe that total security is possible, anyway. They might take out a couple of bad guys, but then again.... I guess they catch a lot of drugs trafficking, or something like that, false passports, those things. (...) But that's not airport security, that's customs, right? So it's a different thing. (Interviewee 2)

At the same time, though, the potential for reassurance of security control is also acknowledged, particularly for those who might find flying scary and stressful. Under this light, ac-

ceptance is more easily given, though this is coupled with persistent doubts as to the actual efficacy of security procedures.

I know it has to be done to avoid possible problems, but also to show people that you are doing something. Because people get very scared of travelling and this kind of things seem to happen more on planes. So this is also a way of calming down your travellers. So I can accept that it's a system to provide more security and I don't mind going through it. (Interviewee 9)

- [The rationale of security measures is] Maybe to give passengers a safe feeling, too. Because it might have that effect. Since the thing with the [nail] file, I have decided that people can still slip through with anything that can kill someone. You can kill someone in various ways. It might give you a false sense of security.

- Is that a bad thing?

- Of course not. A feeling of security is positive, unless it's crazily overstated.

(Interviewee 2)

One of the elements that concerned the researchers from the very beginning of the fieldwork was the unbalanced nature of the relationship between screeners and passengers, and how this power differential might impact on people's behaviour during security control. In order to address this issue, we asked interviewees whether they had ever witnessed a confrontation taking place between a screener and passenger, whether they had ever had one, and finally, if they would feel comfortable in speaking up to security personnel, should they feel they were somehow being mistreated. While interviewees were split in half as to whether they would feel comfortable in speaking up to a screener, none recalled being either a witness to an argument and only one said she had complained during security control, which means that, even for those who would talk back, this has so far largely remained a hypothetical scenario.

- I would speak up, but there are some consequences. If you are running late for your flight, I don't think it's a good idea because it can steal time to your connection, or whatever. I have spoken up several times, mostly about attitude and about tone and about the clarity of the information.

- And what happened to you?

- Not much. As I said, they keep talking to you, they maybe ask you to go aside, explain, and then you might lose your place in the queue, or they might check you more carefully. Open your luggage fully.

(Interviewee 6)

I think I would [speak up]. Kindly, I think everyone can argue if something is not right in the way in which they are treating you. I don't feel scared about saying what I think. (Interviewee 5)

I would tell them [security agents], especially in Zaventem because I'm in my country so it's easier, I think. They should follow the law that I know better. (Interviewee 8)

If I felt that [the search] is very intimidating and that it's going over the top, I would [speak up]. But it hasn't come that. If it did, I would certainly speak up. (Interviewee 4)

It's difficult. Hypothetically, I'd like to think that yes. But knowing myself probably not. It's kind of hard to say in the abstract. I guess I would if I really felt a boundary had been crossed. (Interviewee 7)

On the opposite side, others were not as certain they would speak up, mentioning the intimidating nature of the screening process and explicitly saying they would be afraid such behaviour might result in further problems, delays and, ultimately, missing one's flight.

They are very intimidating. I feel like security in airports is a very serious something. (...) I am not sure if I would speak up to them. Right now, I'll say 'yes, I would', but on the spot I am not so sure that I would. (...) I'm not afraid of the consequences. I think, I am sure, that there is some sort of law that protects me at that point. But maybe in the exact situation I would not be as self-assured because the situation is intimidating to me as a passenger. (Interviewee 2)

I might ask questions, but at the same time there is idea of authority and you have to comply because otherwise they might delay you and you could miss your flight. Rather than deal with it, I'd rather say 'whatever' and go. (Interviewee 9)

Some of the interviewees explicitly talked about the discomfort and intimidation experienced when going through security.

I think [security] shouldn't make you uncomfortable. Intimidate you. (...) I got used to it, now it's a practice, but I feel much more comfortable taking the train, or a bus, and I find it as secure as taking a plane. (Interviewee 6)

It's like they assume that you might be a danger and that's what annoys me. They don't start with the assumption that you are innocent, at least that's the feeling I have. And that's where I feel that it's going too deep. (Interviewee 4)

However, the possibility of being a victim of discrimination was only acknowledged sporadically, and in both cases it was mentioned as someone that the interviewees find problematic in the abstract, rather than something that they had been the victims of.

- I would draw the line in being more unreasonably treated than other people, like being the one that is picked out all the time, or having to undergo more than other people.

- Has that ever been the case for you?

- No. I'm white, I'm Belgian, I'm blond. I look very trustworthy.

(Interviewee 8)

...Anything that targets particular groups or individuals, for instance. You have a long beard and you are an Islamic man wearing a tunic, therefore you require more rigorous investigation than the white girl in jumper and jeans next to you. I guess, anything that discriminates on outward appearances, unless you have concrete grounds to believe on basis of data that comes up on a security check, that an individual poses a particular risk, anything that discriminates on grounds of appearances. (Interviewee 7)

4.2.3 Privacy and choice

One of the goals of PRISMS is to shed light on whether and how people understand the relationship between security and privacy (in terms of a "trade off" or differently), so in the interviews particular attention was paid to any mention of privacy by the respondents. However,

we decided not to ask specific questions about privacy, because this might result in biased answers and, consequently, unreliable data, but rather to allow the conversation to follow its course. In addition to being a more solid decision methodologically, this opened the door to the observation that for most of the interviewees privacy is not stated as such an issue. If supported by survey results, this could mean that the relationship between security and privacy is not a trade off, indeed, because the former displaces the latter completely. Of the three interviewees that mentioned privacy explicitly, one formulated the idea that if you have nothing to hide, then privacy automatically becomes a non-issue. The others, though more critical in their approach, acknowledged that it is harder and harder to maintain a firm stance in terms of privacy if you want to catch a flight.

- I don't mind if someone opens my bag, I am more fed up when I have to take my laptop out of my bag, because sometimes you are in a rush and you have already packed and everything is fine the way it is and you have to open and take things out of your bag.

- So you don't feel concerned about privacy?

- Not really. Because they are doing their job, so if they are going to check me, to touch me, my body, to see if there is something hidden on myself, it's part of the job. They have to. If they have to open my bag, when I am travelling normally I don't have dead bodies in my luggage, it's just clothes and papers.

(Interviewee 10)

It's always annoying to pass security. I don't like the body scanner, though it happened to me that they used it in some airports in which I was. In general I don't want that security practices are too invasive in terms of personal privacy. I don't want to be searched if it's not necessary, I don't want them to need to scan my body if it's not necessary. But I know that if you want to fly, it's just part of the game. (Interviewee 5)

- The privacy issue [is what concerns me the most]. They get to check whatever you take, they know who you are, they want to.... I know that in other airports more and more they scan your iris, you have to give fingerprints. In Schiphol recently I got this body scan and that I find very uncomfortable to do (...)

- And how do you protect your privacy when you have to go through security?

- There's not much you can do. You have to follow the rules, you have to listen otherwise you don't get on a plane. So I don't really do anything, I just obey.

(Interviewee 8)

However, if we widen the scope of the analysis to include elements beyond any explicit mention of privacy, an interesting, and related, issue comes to the fore: choice, or, better, the lack thereof.

I don't like the fact that my passport now has an electronic chip. I don't like the idea of biometric data. I guess I have more of a problem with the idea of the data being collected and passing through a scanner, even the other kind where you just pass through, but nothing is recorded and it is not linked directly to my identity. (...). What I really dislike is the idea that there is a big database and they are collecting data and they know all my movements. (...)

- Can you choose whether to get a biometric passport?

- *That's a good question. I am assuming no, or that it's not obviously indicated at least, because I now have one and I am pretty sure had there been the option I would have chosen not to.*

(Interviewee 7)

[Interviewee is talking about the body scanner she had to go through on a recent trip to Asia]: I feel like I don't really have a choice. Well, apparently, I do have a choice but I didn't know. You are allowed to say no, but then they will have to pat me down. (...) So the metal detector is fine, but the body scanner I find too intrusive.

4.3 SCREENERS ON CHECKING PASSENGERS

4.3.1 *Security as a profession and the importance of routine*

At Brussels airport screeners are organized on passenger's security lanes in a "rotating" team. Every 20 min they change position on the line. That way all personnel on the line "learns" how to carry out the different tasks that as a whole constitute the passengers' security check: from the sorting of passengers at the beginning of the line, up until the possible manual body search at the end of the security check line. All interviewed screeners stressed that doing passengers' security check, and especially the body search, becomes a professional routine. At first, all our respondents spoke about their job as "in the books". Acquiring the professional culture can be considered as important as acquiring the necessary professional skills to perform the job. Screeners describe their job as "*what we do is about security*", "*about to guarantee passengers a safe flight*", etc. Some respondents specified that the job is about giving passengers a feeling of security and of a safe flight. Comparing it to a respondents' own experience in Egypt, an interviewee stated that "*people have to get the feeling of, well, here we were thoroughly checked, and here we will get safe to our destination*" (R8)

Providing security and, therefore, checking passengers is the respondents' job. Although most respondents recognize that conflicts can emerge from what screeners have to do in practice (as for example verify luggage), they all refer to the *necessary, inevitable and evident* character of their interventions. The admitted intrusive practices, such as the body search or the checking of hand luggage, are "part of the job". During their theoretical training (before they start the job) as well as during the training "on the job" they learn to interiorize this discourse entirely: they are part of a whole in which this moment of security check is self-evident and unavoidable.

When listening to the respondents talking about their work, several sources of stress become apparent. One of those is the flow of passengers and its fluidity. Interestingly, commercial and security goals meet in the performance indicator expressed by the waiting time of passengers before the security procedure, which should be as short as possible. Almost all respondents referred to this criterion as setting a certain pressure on their work.

"The tempo is set by the waiting time for passengers. It depends a lot on how many luggage passengers carry and how many bags we have to check. The waiting time is set at 12 min average." (R 1)

Second, and related source of stress are the "quality control experiments". Several respondents pointed out that the department of quality control (part of the Brussels airport security

division) send out “actors” that do effectively carry security sensible material and try to get those through the lines, in order to put the screeners to test. The use of such practical tests was also reported to us during the interviews we had with the members of the quality control division of Brussels Airport. The sheer possible existence of such anonymous and fake carriers of security sensible things that test screeners in regards of their the accuracy indeed creates pressure.

“You have the test coming through of Brussels Airport, which causes some stress especially for the screeners, (...) you know trail subjects who carry a knife between their breasts or in their belt or a package in luggage, and you have to detect them, and that are really not so evidently detectable things (...) and you miss it ... everybody has had a test package getting through” (R13)

Of course, the screeners have the task, if not “duty”, to “catch” the quality control agents disguised in bad passengers, and that generates a constant pressure sharpening vigilance and suspicion, since next to the “real” security risks that can be deemed to be exceptional, they have to also envision recurrent staged risks. This kind of quality control tactics has in fact permanent effects, since every passenger can be a fake passenger; such a possibility impacts screeners in a permanent and persistent way. However, and ambiguously, this pressure brings our respondents to voice that there is at any rate no such thing as a 100 % effective security check: they firmly state that neither personnel nor technology, nor their conjunction, can (ever) guarantee a zero-risk result. The technological devices used are not error free or 100 % reliable.

“Computers make mistakes, the human factor is important ... computers functions well up until the moment there is a malfunction or interruption” (R11)

“When you work here, you know that 100 % security does not exist. Then you learn that there are possibilities, but they are here at the security screening of passengers” (R13)

However, this “realistic” view upon their role, capabilities and work is of course not completely in line with the security driven discourse of their company and Brussels Airport management.

A lot of respondents pointed out that the first body search they had to perform was an awkward and confronting experience. It is the security logic linked to the job that however will eventually result in a “normalisation” of these everyday practices in the discourse of screeners. Pursuant, it is interesting to note that screeners also explicitly indicate that these searches gradually become less awkward, because, after the first experiences, the people they have to search become more and more “strangers” to them. Somehow, by “depersonalising” passengers that have to be checked, the screeners “accept” more easily that the intrusive character of what they do is an essential and a so-called inevitable part of their job. Professionalism, automatism, habit and routine contribute to this evolution.

“It becomes a routine, (..) you don’t see anymore who you are searching, (...) in fact you don’t really look at people who they are, even with friends, may be that is bizarre for them, but for me they are just a passenger” (R13)

Some screeners explicitly refer to situations wherein relatives or friends would have to be checked as “impossible” or “awkward”. When the face returns, searching the body becomes difficult again.

“It would be awkward for me if it were one of my friends (...) if you know the people then it would be difficult” (R5)

The security practices are clearly and obviously crossing the limits of the passengers’ “privacy”, and the interviewees are well aware of this. On the other hand, the every day routine of the security line, the changing positions and tasks, the learning on the job, the quality control testing, all these factors enhance the normalization of the procedures that screeners the *also* experience as intrusive (for the passengers as well as for themselves).

An important effect of this normalization can be detected in the way the screeners explain how they react when faced to conflicts with passengers. Almost all of our respondents stated that in these cases passengers are “*reacting against the uniform*” not against the individual. Anything a passenger would or could say is to be considered by the screeners as being “non-personal”. In these narratives we can detect the importance (and impact) of the training on the job. Training on the job is a way of practical learning, enabling more easily the interiorising of a professional discourse. Precisely this interiorisation is an important step in the process of socialisation into a professional culture, here of security professions. But an important paradox of the studied situation remains: on the one hand screeners are taught to and have to treat passengers as clients, while, on the other, they *per se* communicate a suspicion and distrust towards the same clients.

4.3.2 Security screening and the submission of passengers

All interviewed screeners are aware of the tension embedded in their work, which relates to the intrusion into passengers privacy in a very direct and concrete way. According to them, however, passengers have been given a choice, and by being there at the airport at the security lanes, this choice is unambiguously expressed.

“Some people don’t like that and they (...) take the train or the boat. Here (at the airport) you know that you will be confronted with this (security screening). In principle they can’t refuse.” (R1)

Screeners act as if the passenger’s consent has already been given and the privacy-security trade-off has already been settled at the moment and by the buying an airplane ticket. The security check of passengers the appears as a self-evident consequence of an already made choice. Screeners perceive the security screening of passengers as part of airport mobility. There are no choices, alternatives available or discussions possible. Illustrative of this view is the rationalisation of one of our interviewees who affirmed that “*passengers give us the permission of checking their luggage, because they hand it over at the beginning of the line*” (R12). The situation is clear and straightforward for interviewed screeners. It is a *fait accompli*, as many interviewees explicitly phrase: “*people have to submit to it, it is my job*” (R11). Therefore, the practice of passengers’ security checks is, according to the screeners, in fact no longer and thus not a “trade-off” situation *an sich*, because there are no options or alternatives that can be considered and/or explained. If people want to fly, there is no way around the security practices as they are organised today.

Henceforth, it is not surprising that the screeners are surprised and even turn slightly irritated when confronted to what might be described as *airport security stupidity* or *dementia*

“people that don’t know the rules or just don’t understand why some things cannot pass, which is bizarre because it is written everywhere” (R12)

“we call this airport dementia; people arrive and they forget everything.. it really is remarkable, the tourists, they arrive and they forget, or they don’t listen” (R9)

As observed and described for courtroom practices, such “stupidity” refers to the fact that citizens (passengers) are not capable of participation because they don’t know or cannot understand the rules.¹¹ This creates a situation wherein professionals (screeners in this case) are left to lead “the game”. This perception of (some) passengers as not “adequate” makes even more visible the dominance of security rules and measures, and its mirror, the expected submission of travellers.

4.3.3 Passengers: the good, the old and the different

Some passengers are considered to be difficult. Screeners mobilise all kind of criteria to categorise passengers. Based on the interviews, there is obviously a clear line between “good” (easy) and more “difficult” passengers: many screeners at Brussels airport consider regular and experienced travellers, as embodied by the “business passengers”, as the “good” ones, the examples. The perfect passenger is the traveller who knows “the game” and voluntarily plays by its rules: such a doesn’t need any explanation, guideline or directive on how to proceed, (s)he just does what (s)he’s expected to do.

“Business people know what they have to do” (R5)

They too have interiorised the features and routines of the security line; they anticipate by taking off of their shoes, watches and belts, laying out laptop and other devices, showing liquids in plastic bags, etc. The perfect passenger doesn’t speak up, submits fully and complacently, and expects to get through fluidly. “Easy” passengers aim at getting through the security check swiftly and as fast as is possible.

“When they beep, they want you to do the manual body search immediately without too much tralala” (R2)

Moreover, priority-screening lanes are provided so that “good clients” can get through faster (together with airport personnel). This special screening lane is accessible depending on the type of ticket you bought. Access priority security lanes is a (commercial) privilege given to some clients in function of the sort of ticket they bought or as a result of promotional activities of carriers.

In the eyes of the screeners, the more difficult passengers are first time flyers, older people and/or passengers from a “different” culture and/or religion, including indeed, problems of language or and clothing habits.

“Well those Moroccan men, in their culture women are beneath them, but here in this situation they have women giving them orders, sometimes they just ignore my colleague, they just look at me, well I tell them then that my colleague is talking to them (...) With the Jews it is just as well, women have nothing to say” (R11)

“Passengers behave that way because of the stress of travelling, starting at home, leaving in time, and getting to the gate” (R11)

¹¹ Carlen, Pat, *Magistrates' Justice*, Martin Robertson, Oxford, 1974.

Also considered difficult are passengers who speak up, making jokes or ironic remarks as a way of express their recalcitrance towards the procedure, or their unhappiness with the situation. Some respondents reported that passengers also do put them to test:

“Passengers that are not paying attention, they are already on holiday, you ask something and they say no, but then it is yes (about liquids for example) ... but some do it on purpose, and say then: oh yes I just wanted to see if you were going to detect it, or they say: oh I just wanted to try it; and then you think hello we are not plying a game here?” (R11)

Some interviewees said they could “feel” immediately when looking at the waiting line if the next passenger would be a difficult one or not.

“at the beginning of the line you can already see it ... if he is already sighing (...) then it can become difficult if we have to take something out” (R 1)

“you can see it immediately by the way of doing, making faces, «oei oei oei», rolling with their eyes, body language and expressions of faces, (...) well that will not be a simple client to handle” (R11).

Most screeners attribute the difficulties with a passenger to the latter’s personality, the moment of the day, the stress of travelling, and the pressure to be on time at the gate ...

Even some “good” business passengers can turn into “difficult” ones, be it only because “as they travel very regularly, every day, they don’t understand why they have to be checked each time” (R10).

One of our respondents also explained how the random selection of passengers going through the “metal detection gates” sometimes causes hostile reactions from precisely these passengers; then, the complying and submitting passengers get angry because their complying and submissive behaviour is not paying off. They are suddenly under suspicion, which they consider as totally absurd, precisely because they play the game of self-disclosure¹², but get nevertheless picked out.

Furthermore, passengers become difficult when they try to discuss the rules of security that are announced or applied. As known, these rules mainly concern goods that cannot be taken on the plane, with the bottle of water as the most emblematic example. Even if some rules are considered exaggerated or even unnecessary by our respondents, all of them stressed that there is no room at all for discussion about their application in the line.

“Those rules were once established, and I admit 100% that a lot of these things are pointless, euh what do I say, that rule about the water and those things, ... but, it is the rule, people don’t know anymore why they were introduced” (R13)

Based on our observations, it strongly appears that the primary attitude of screeners is always to “stand by the rules”, to avoid any discussion.

“We don’t go into discussion” (R5)

¹² Salter, 2007.

“you don’t explain ... point (...) because sometimes there are passengers that ask, ‘well yes can I see that on paper?’ ... Then you get the police inspector, who then can explain it” (R2)

“With the bottle of water, you just have to say to the people that the procedure is what it is, but you cannot question your own procedures” (R3)

“They know that it can be taken from them (..) compare it to speeding: you know you can only drive 120 km/h ... so if you speed up to a 140 km/h ... (R2)

“You cannot explain to passengers why some things are prohibited. We are not allowed to do it. We cannot explain why some things are dangerous or what can be done with it. We can only say that the law says (that it is not allowed) and that is it” (R12)

If no discussion is possible or allowed for security agents, they are nevertheless constantly confronted with such discussions, which produces quiet some stress and frustration, according to some respondents:

“Passengers that don’t appreciate what we are doing here, (that is giving stress): (they say) come on there is no harm in me taking this, why can I not take this with me. And then by the end of the day you have this feeling of hello, do you still not understand for what we are standing here? (...) That is sometimes frustrating that people don’t appreciate what we are doing” (R12)

An important part of the interaction between screeners and passengers is precisely about the rules, their legitimacy, and how they are applied. The result of such verbal exchanges is comparable to the “Little Britain” sketch: *Computer says no!* ... In general, screeners refuse to enter into these discussions by giving the message that *“the rules are the rules, and we just have to apply them, we don’t make the rules”*. In almost all our interviews this sort of purely executive attitude was present. This way the practice of screening passengers is presented as neutral and exclusively technical: the security agents are not responsible for what they do. Discussions about the policies defining the situation and the set regulatory framework that governs it (as for example the “no liquids rule”) are neutralised and cut short by reference to a higher authority that is not present, invisible or anonymous, but that justifies and legalizes nevertheless. The balance of power and dominance at play cannot be discussed neither humoured nor laughed at: it is a given, not only for the passengers but also for its executioners. But, as we will see, the submission of passengers to the situation of security screening (and its rules) is not naturally given or as self-evident and unproblematic as such representations assume.

4.3.4 Doing security and privacy: Testing the limits

It appears from the interviews with the screeners that the (strict or blind) application of “the rules” is effectively a source of conflicts. Therefore, it remains remarkable that in the specific situation of the security screening, almost no explanation is given to passengers about the character, reason or origin of the rules at stake. However, during the interviews, the screeners also declared that when this discussion is getting out of hand, they have to call in a superior (a police inspector), who, contrary to them, then might decide not to apply the rule (of the bottle of water, or baby food, food, make up, etc ...) !

“And this is frustrating for us, because for some it can pass and for others it is not allowed”(R11).

Conflicts do emerge during the practice of the screening of passengers. And such conflicts are interesting events for our research, because they embody and can be understood as “petty acts of resistance”¹³ and hence, illustrate and point at the discussion that *can* exist about the rules and the way they are applied. Scott’s perspective on relations of dominance (which is emblematically the case at the airport’s security lines) is that these conflicts are an expression of a constant testing of the limits of domination and its public transcript¹⁴: “A clear view of the ‘micro’ pushing and shoving involved in power relations, and particularly power relations in which appropriation and permanent subordination are central, makes any static view of naturalisation and legitimation untenable”¹⁵. Hence, it is precisely through these conflicts, as small as they may be, that the public transcript of relation of power is tested at its limits and expresses the “hidden transcript”. This draws our attention towards small forms of resistance to the security logic, its implementation and the invoked trade-off, which are made visible through the conflicts. All interviewed screeners described, recognised and explained daily conflicts with passengers as related to a sort of resistance to the expected (complete) subordination to the rules driving these security practices. Again, it has nothing to do with them personally:

“The react to my uniform ... you don’t have to take it personally, they are angry at my uniform, not at me” (R11).

“You don’t have to take that personal, passengers react on something that is our job, they don’t react on me” (R1)

This illustrates not only that screeners have to deal passively with the resistance of passengers, but also that this behaviour is precisely about “the system and its rules”. Consequently, screeners become aware of how the security logic and its devices are experienced by passengers. It shows them (and us) that there are limits to the acceptance and submission of passengers and, via small frictions and sparks, where these limits lay and where submission turns into recalcitrance and resistance, how subtle and muffled it might be .

The “bottle of water” and the “no liquids” rule, seen as the main source of conflicts, provide an interesting example.

A lot of passengers are speaking up when they have to leave behind their bottle of water. Several interviewees reported this conflict, referring to passengers telling them that their water is no risk (!) and proving it by drinking from the bottle. Interviewees did report that passengers were angry about the injustice of taking their bottle away and implicitly obliging them to buy an (very) expensive new one in the commercial area beyond the security check. Some screeners mentioned more humoristic passengers that provoke screeners by offering them a drink ... Most interesting is that our respondents could understand these passengers about the no liquids rule, especially when considering the bottle of water. But, they immediately add that even then the matter cannot even be discussed with passengers, because that would not only delegitimize that one rule, but the entire security check before the gates (*sic*).

The bottle of water is emblematic of the “hidden transcript”, the limits of acceptability and dominance. When obliged to leave behind small bottles of shampoo, cream or other liquids, passengers “growl” and “counter” by accusing security agents of “stealing” their goods. In the interviews screeners explained that all taken goods (liquids) are confiscated and will be de-

¹³ Scott, 1990.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 197

stroyed; they also stated that they more or less ignore such comments, not to antagonise the passenger, and remain friendly and professional (“It’s the uniform”).

But the sources of conflict go beyond the no-liquid rule, and certainly do also involve issues related to the passengers’ experience of their privacy. It is precisely by way of these conflicts that security agents are confronted with privacy-limits of passengers related to their job on the security line. Two other sources of conflicts are very common and illustrative of passengers’ experience of privacy. A first one concerns the opening and searching of hand luggage. When a piece of hand luggage is “screened” by the machine and the visioning on the monitor by a screener reveals a doubt or a suspicious object, it is taken apart as “a risk” in order to be manually checked. Screeners are well aware that this is an interference with the private sphere of citizens and they all confirm and accept that the search of hand luggage should be performed in a discrete way. All interviewees have accounted for situations that seemed delicate or awkward for the concerned passenger. In general this has to do with certain items present in their bag (underwear, intimate toys, .. etc) which might been exposed publicly, especially to the view of fellow travellers standing beside and able to peak in.

“yes, that depends on the sort of passenger that you got. Sometimes you find weird things, that I am not going to name ... but once I found a burial urn” (R7).

“There was a girl that started crying because her colleague stood next to her and had seen her underwear” (R1)

“Sometimes this is embarrassing, for example when a men searching a women’s luggage” (R11)

The interviews show how rationalisation helps neutralising these “awkward” or unsettling situations. Some respondents say they have to ask the passenger explicitly for the permission of searching their bag, but none of them does even consider that passengers would deny them access. In fact, in their eyes, the checking of the luggage is “granted” by the passenger. Some screeners also refer to the fact that

“They give their luggage to us, and that is also how we learned it, they give their luggage for control, so from that moment on they give permission and say in fact that you are allowed to control my luggage” (R12).

But, screeners also report that passengers become annoyed and angry after their luggage is searched and it is left to them to rearrange it. Many of our respondents have experienced conflicts with their client- passengers over this issue. Passengers do speak up to screeners when they are left with their luggage all turned upside down. This attitude illustrates that the involved passenger feels treated unjustly with suspicion, and therefore security agents should take responsibility for that “act”. Interviewed screeners understand and sometimes agree, but they explain (in the interviews and to the passengers) that they are not allowed (by their company) to repack the searched bag. Here the employer is the higher authority.

Last but not least, and certainly not in an unexpected way, are the reactions upon the manual body search. As said above, all respondents pick out this part of the screening as a most delicate one, which easily leads to conflicts. Screeners say they are, of course, aware of the intimate character of the body search: it is undoubtedly invasive to touch the body of another person.

“I found it difficult at the beginning, because there you enter really a personal zone. (...) There was this women who agreed that I did a manual body search, but she repeated all the time that I couldn’t touch her, yes well (...), finally I had to do the manual search” (R12)

As a matter of fact, passengers sometimes emotionally react to the way agents perform the body search. In the interviews screeners, in compensation, express the feeling or suggest that some passengers overreact. In addition to the privacy aspect conflicts about the body search do also refer to the issue of fair treatment. As in many domains of government activity (crime fighting and prosecution, ...) public trust and institutional legitimacy are (also) based on a fair and respectful treatment and its experience as such by the “subjects”, and this will affect compliance and cooperation negatively or positively.¹⁶ Most agents state explicitly that the body search is more easily and acceptably performed, because passengers are “strangers” to them,

“if it would be people that you know, that would be difficult” (R5)

Passengers are treated as anonymous objects, which creates a “distance” between the involved participants. This neutralises, so the screeners say, the privacy sensitive character of the body search. This is *confirmed a contrario*, by the fact that most respondents point out that searching members of their family or friends on the body would be rather difficult or awkward:

“I am not going to manually search my own mother Yes we are allowed to do that, but I have decided for my self that I don’t check my own family. You are working in security, and I think that you don’t check your own family as thoroughly as others. People that I don’t know, or colleagues, no problem, but when it comes to family, I don’t know (...) then it becomes more personal” (R12)

The manual body search is a very sensitive part of the security screening. Passengers also feel and voice that this makes clear they are considered as suspects, and make remarks such as *“Do you think I am a terrorist” (R7)*.

From the interviews with screeners it seems that the way participants (screeners and passengers) interact is a potential source of conflict. Almost all interviewed screeners stressed the importance of staying calm and friendly:

“If you are friendly yourself, (..) it’s a style of working, (that is important, ... as in a shop, the same principle applies here, it works well, (...) if you stay calm and friendly, that you have less conflicts” (R5)

“but if I look at some colleagues they are can be very uptight, being irritated by foreign passengers, if you don’t treat passengers in a correct way, you should not be surprised that they react. You have to be friendly and respectful, even a bit of laughing can help” (R13)

On the one hand passengers have to submit and keep jokes about the situation of the screening for them. Humour and relativisation are ‘not done’ when interacting with security agents.

“People who want to be funny (..) ah I have a bomb with me ... Well that is not funny in the context of an airport. These jokes can be fined, you bring in the inspector, ... yes

¹⁶ Hough, Mike, Jonathan Jackson, Ben Radford, et al., "Procedural justice, trust and institutional legitimacy", *Policing: a journal of policy and practice*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2010, pp. 203-210.

but I was only joking, (...) well then we have to teach them a lesson and reprimand them ” (R11)

Interviewed screeners confirm that some passengers made fun of them or of the situation, questioning the seriousness and/or legitimacy of the screening. But nevertheless, it is a way through which they voice their disagreement with security procedures towards the agents in a rhetorical way (such as the -during the manual body search- *Do you think I am a terrorist?* (R7)”)

However, on the other hand, screeners and their way of interacting with passengers can also be a source of conflicts. Passengers which feel treated in an unfair, impolite or uncivil way, can react immediately and in a strong way. This happens when they are treated more as suspects than as clients.

Finally, when a conflict occurs, the screener’s rule of thumb is to immediately bring in “hierarchy” and authority. Any agent confronted with a conflictive situation with a client has to call his/her superior, if he or she cannot solve the problem swiftly. Passengers are then taken apart with a new agent who is a superior in rank, generally recognisable because of a different uniform. Ultimately the airport (public) police will deal with the conflict or the “difficult” passenger.

“We are trained to avoid possible conflicts, and so if a situation is getting out of hand, we cannot continue the interaction, we have in fact not the authority – so euh we only are authorised to control people. From the moment a conflict escalates, we have to transfer the case to a superior and or directly to the airport police inspector” (R10)

This chain of conflict solving can be described as “stubborn”: the rules are the rules at every hierarchical level. Of course, passengers can file a complaint, and some actually do so¹⁷. From our interviews it became clear that security agents don’t really know much about how complaints are handled and what the result is.

“A passenger was going to introduce a complaint against me, but I never heard anything about it” (R6)

However the procedure is rather difficult, requiring time as well as accurate information (for example the name of the involved security agents). But at that specific moment, when a client has to catch his flight the endlessly repeated message is: *“You accept it, otherwise you don’t come in ...”*.

¹⁷ We were not able to obtain data of filed complains, the way they were treated, and the final results. A heavy formall procedure that would take too long and jeopardize the timing of this research task even more, made us decide to not involve this sources to our empirical data.

5 CONCLUSIONS: SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE AIRPORT SECURITY SCREENING OF PASSENGERS

The results of this case-study bring us to several reflections relevant for our understanding of how citizens experience and evaluate security practices.

1. Based on the observations, accounts of passengers and of screeners at the security-screening line, we can conclude that there is an overall dominant security logic that requires the almost absolute submission of clients-passengers. As stated before, in this situation of security screening of passengers the security-privacy trade-off has already been settled, in fact it is a condition of possibility for the existing of the *dispositive* as it exists on the site. Therefore, it is simply impossible for any client-passenger willing to step on his/her flight *not* to submit. By buying a ticket you are deemed and doomed to agree with the practices of security screening. A first reflection resulting from this small-scale research is that the security screening of passengers has become seen as a “normal” and integrated part of the taking of a civil airplane. Both passengers and screeners voiced this conclusion. Some forms of intimidation and suspicion are thus supposed to legitimately drive and underpin security-screening practices in airports, even if they create some sort of discomfort. Consequently, it is clear that passengers’ security screening, as an everyday airport practice, is already far beyond an effective trade-off between security and privacy. The choice to be made is “to fly or not to fly”, and both passengers and screeners are aware of that. The security line is far beyond the trade-off between privacy and security, if you do not accept to be stripped of your privacy, you won’t pass the security check. An all-encompassing and first line “trade-off” has become part of air travel, and it implies a very high degree of loss at the side of privacy. The only trade off which remains at the line is: a trade off between returning home and pursuing your journey.
2. Therefore, we can easily understand that passengers’ experience of and attitude towards these privacy “invasive” practice(s) is a pragmatic one. That is also the reason why they submit to “the game” of self-disclosure. However, this submission must not be understood as the acceptance of the security-privacy trade-off as such. As described above, it is on the contrary, “spiced” with diverse strategies and small forms of resistance, such as being or behaving as ignorant of the rules, being impervious, discussing the rules, speaking up to security agents. It is within these conflicts that their discontent with the dominant security logic becomes visible. The acceptance on the security line has to do with resignation in the face of a thing too big to contest. It is indeed easier to accept it.
3. The situation of the security screening of passengers can be seen and understood as part of a disciplinary *dispositive*. By becoming a “natural” or normal part of what airport mobility is about, passengers are nudged and disciplined to meet the ways and ends this routine of security screening is aiming at. The passengers not only are physically channelled and constrained through a sequence of moulds (by human and technological interventions), but also discursively socialised and prepared to the daily practice of self-disclosure (cf. the confession) and made to accept that they have to prove that they are not suspects (!). You have to behave as demanded - to submit -, otherwise you will remain a suspect and be impeached to catch your flight. The normalisation of such invasive security practices refers directly to Salter’s analysis of the *governmentalities of airports*.¹⁸ Over time the entire security process, with its different specific security measures, rules and standards, became

¹⁸ Salter, 2007.

normalised, and got considered as an integral part of some sort of package deal. At the moment, today, the screeners we interviewed find the body scanner too intrusive, but the potential for normalization (especially if supported by an implementation on a large scale) and people's ability to adapt and submit should not be underestimated.

4. The unsettling idea of being treated as a suspect, colours the whole experience: it is heavily present during the screening and is an important source of conflicts. The bottom line is that passengers have the idea that these security practices are set up for others than themselves. The suspects are *others*, and normal passengers have nothing to hide, which is a standard argument in the security-privacy trade-off discourse. Such implicit assumption refers to a mechanism that can be best compared to the criminological concept of the "criminal other" (Oxford Handbook of Criminological Theory, 2013: 679). Passengers submit willingly to the procedure because they (think they) have nothing to hide. More experienced passengers even cooperate by anticipation. However, it is precisely when they are confronted with some contested rules (cf. bottle of water) or methods (like the selection of their bag or themselves for a more specific control), they re-experience what has been normalised: the position of being a suspect. And that is precisely one of the limits where conflict emerges. Suddenly, they are confronted with the fact that *they* are and remained, suspects, even if they have nothing to hide.

5. A last and important reflection brings us to what we could call the security paradoxes. From our interviews with passengers, it looks like more information made available on actual threats, on the precise rationale for specific measures and on possible 'success stories', along with increased transparency about the decision-making process involved in establishing rules and new measures would. These evolutions are likely to increase people's willingness to willingly participate in the security control procedures. However, the key point of the whole system is secrecy, as it is assumed that making information freely available would give potential terrorist an edge. Therefore, the specific situation of passengers' security screening turns into an act that has to be performed, but is emptied of relevant meaning. This, coupled to the recognised illusion of total security through security screening, brings us to an even stronger insight: the security screening of passengers is experienced as a quasi-theatrical and sometimes absurd performance. It has imposed itself as *the* only possible access to airplane mobility, and as an everyday routine, normalised, boring and a nuisance for passengers. Everybody participates (security agents and passengers) pragmatically by playing the game and to reproduce the expected and chewed discourse when asked. Everybody knows there is no hundred percent security or a zero-risk airplane travel. Doubt is consequently creeping in when the meaning, necessity or usefulness of these practices are at hand. But then, remarkably, it works ... in the sense that citizens just submit to security line controls that would be met with outrage and even active resistance in other settings. And this is unsettling, because the recognition of the illusion of total security operates at the same time as the generator of more and new risks to be detected and fought, leading to more security, and thus again, to more risks.

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