Declaring, scanning, sniffing, searching: Unpacking the mobility cultures of Australia's biosecurity

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Biosecurity restrictions regulate the types of materials that international travellers can bring into certain countries. Australia is well known in international travel cultures for stringent customs regulations and checks of all incoming passengers. This blanket approach to biosecurity governance implies that all materials, even banal personal possessions or luggage, pose a potential threat to the nation's biosecurity. This article explores how individuals prepare for and experience declaring personal belongings while migrating to and entering Australia. Drawing from interviews with recently arrived migrants on temporary visas, analysis of the required customs declaration card and government information, I highlight the inconsistencies of how materials, and the people who carry them, come under close scrutiny at the border. The findings show that the stringent surveillance of biosecurity perpetuates perceived risks and threats, relying on stereotypes of certain migrant and traveller profiles in the way biosecurity is promoted, monitored and enforced. Biosecurity manifests social, spatial, and material concerns in how it is performed and regulated, thereby transforming passive materials in a person's luggage into active threats to national security, further complicating the rigid governance of international mobility and migration.

Keywords: biosecurity; customs; airport; air travel; mobilities; materiality; migration

Introduction

International travel and migration involves a variety of processes that travellers must perform and systems they must conform to. Examples include checking-in baggage; navigating through airport security screening; instructions during flight; queuing to board and disembark; processing at immigration and border control; and often there are customs and biosecurity checks to declare foreign and unknown materials upon entry. These 'cultural performances of risk management' (Hall, 2015, p. 15) are at every stage of the journey. The plethora of instructions and procedures that one encounters during international travel can be a disorienting

and confronting process (Adey, 2009; Barry, 2017; Hall, 2015; Parks, 2007), especially for those who are not seasoned travellers. In airport security and border spaces, materials, and the people who carry them, are subject to close monitoring and scrutiny.

This article explores how the materials that travel with us (belongings, luggage, documents, pathogens, and many other nonhumans) instigate specific travel and migration cultures that are secured at airport borders. Anticipating what to bring and declare, and what needs to be offered up for security checks is dependent on local customs and laws. While airport security procedures post 9-11 have intensified and transformed air travel cultures (Adey, 2009; Amoore, 2006; Parks, 2007; Salter, 2008) to enforce what types and quantities of materials that travellers can bring (Barry & Suliman, 2019; Hall, 2015), security screenings that relate to biological threats complicate processes of arrival or quarantine at the end of each international journey. Importantly, the coronavirus pandemic has necessitated even closer attention to the nonhumans that we may unknowingly harbour.

Biosecurity sits at the intersection of security concerns related to public health, agricultural, ecological, and/or acts of terror (see Braun, 2007; Donaldson & Wood, 2004; Hinchliffe & Bingham, 2008; Hinchliffe & Ward, 2014). There is a particular element of security anxiety around materials that involves potential weaponry of objects (e.g. knives, bombs, etc.) and also biological agents that threaten public health and environmental security (e.g. contamination of water sources). Biosecurity 'implies the maintenance of a spatial separation between categories of biological things' (Donaldson, 2007, p. 1552). Even the most banal material possessions have the potential to transform into a security risk. The circulations of potentially risky materials results in the production of 'good' and 'bad' forms of materiality (Hinchliffe & Bingham, 2008, p. 1535). Individual behaviours are altered in accordance to perceived threat and suspicion, as bodies and biological things are categorised, ordered (Donaldson & Wood, 2004; Shilon & Shamir, 2016), and mapped onto the profiling and

monitoring of individuals at the border. In this sense, the agency of materials is complicated by the entanglement of the social, cultural, and political motivations—known or unknown—that are carried by internationally mobile people.

While there have been significant writings on biosecurity in geographical and security literature, and a plethora that are emerging during the coronavirus pandemic, these have often been positioned as theoretical or broader governance inquiries, rather than focusing on individuals' actions or the consequences this has on mobility and migration experiences. There have been notable studies of enacting biosecurity in the context of agricultural risk that focus on individuals in these industries (e.g. Frawley, 2014; Hinchliffe & Ward, 2014; Miller, 2019), and the theorisation of biosecurity practices as a specific focus on the biological and variances of "life" that lives alongside humans and in international border spaces (e.g. Amoore, 2006; Barker, 2010). But there is scarce literature on how biosecurity and customs checks at international borders are experienced and navigated by individuals through empirical or ethnographic accounts.

Certain countries have an international reputation of rigid and ruthless customs and biosecurity checks. Australia has a fortress model of migration where everyone and everything should presume to be under scrutiny. Promoted widely through a popular reality TV show, the government closely monitors what types of international mobility cultures and narratives of Australia's border governance set a tone for what to expect upon arrival (Anderson, 2017; Andrejevic, 2011; Hughes, 2010). The ways that global mobility has instilled an anticipation of threat and preemptive monitoring of individuals (Amoore, 2007) is a specific form of governing mobility through 'material dispositions' (Bærenholdt, 2013, p. 28), which is especially the case for the surveillance of the generic profiles of the "foreigner" or the "migrant". Expanding on work on the biosecuring of migration (e.g. Barry & Ghimire, 2020; Hoskins & Maddern, 2016), these concerns of quarantining and securing international

mobilities are even more pertinent for the anticipated post-pandemic geographies (e.g. Cole & Dodds, 2020), and the infusion of migration experiences in geographical inquiry (Brown & Gilmartin, 2020). For geographers, the collision of spatial, material, and geopolitical concerns in biosecurity offers a vast landscape for studying how biosecurity is experienced and performed by individuals and, in turn, how these reflect or enforce rigid notions of border regimes and mobility governance.

This article explores how individuals prepare for and experience declaring materials when migrating to Australia, tracing their knowledges of restricted items through the social and political agendas of biosecurity and international mobility. I question the extent that these biosecurity procedures are effectively communicated and understood, as well as the mechanisms for screening and identifying material possessions that are considered as potential threats. I draw on interviews with recently arrived migrants on temporary visas, analysis of the customs declaration card and government promotional information. I argue that the widespread blanket approach to distrusting materials of all kinds contributes to uncertainty of individual's behaviours and inevitably, serves to reinforce the rigidity of international borders.

Securing materials and the people who travel with them

Nation-state borders serve to secure not just the movement of humans but also the assortment of materials that travel with us. Materials—such as one's luggage, the left-overs of a sandwich, or souvenirs bought in the airport—become coupled with the human traveller through biosecurity governance. The mobilities of materials are moved by travellers' bodies either 'openly, clandestinely, or inadvertently' (Urry, 2016, p. 4) include the *desirable* (cargo, aircraft, vehicles, vessels, consumables, and the plethora of substances that enable large-scale mobility hubs and routes) and the *undesirable* (viruses, flora, fauna, or bacteria). Materials of

all kinds—human or nonhuman, animate or inanimate, mundane or extraordinary—become heavily regulated under the broad guise of "biosecurity", a series of practices that regulate a state of security within a clearly demarked geographical context (e.g. the airport screening room, a farm perimeter, a quarantine hotel, or a nation's borders). Extensive theorisation of biosecurity (e.g. Barker, 2010; Braun, 2007; Donaldson, 2007; Hinchliffe & Bingham, 2008; Hinchliffe & Ward, 2014; Maye et al., 2012) shows that biosecurity practices take shape under three main focuses: agricultural management, prevention of invasive species, and the threat to human life of biological agents and viruses. As Donaldson (2007, p. 1560) explains, '[b]iosecurity is a condition or status to be maintained' which can protect or threaten the borders of a nation-state. Hinchliffe and Bingham's use of the verb 'biosecuring' (2008, p. 1542) highlights the many ways that biosecurity practices are done: it can be a state of securing materials (people, goods, microbes, and more); complex geopolitical orderings (Donaldson, 2007); a means of differentiating the 'good and bad circulation' (Hinchliffe & Bingham 2008, p. 1535); a series of 'basic' individual practices 'such as hand washing' t (Donaldson, 2007, p. 1553); or a strategy of anticipatory surveillance of individuals at borders (Parks, 2007; Adey, 2009) in 'banal and ordinary "normal" activities and events' (Amoore, 2007, p. 221). The wide-range of activities and materials that come under the framing of biosecurity governance necessarily incorporates the mundane materialities of policing, surveillance, and border spaces that international travellers necessarily traverse and engage with.

One of the central purposes of biosecurity restrictions in Australia is to preserve unique flora and fauna, as well as the agricultural sector against invasive species. Only recently has biosecurity in Australian border spaces focused almost entirely on human disease control. We can see this in the "hard" closure of international borders due to the coronavirus pandemic. In ordinary mobility circumstances biosecurity restrictions in Australia apply to the importation and carriage into the country of a range of materials such as foods, medicines, duty free

allowances, organic matter, soil on footwear, animals, plants, and more (Australian Border Force, 2018). These restrictions of bringing goods and materials into Australia are well publicised to international travellers through government advertising, in-situ signage throughout air and sea ports, on-board announcements on incoming flights, security and customs staff upon arrival, and notably via the internationally-viewed reality television show *Border Security: Australia's Front Line*, which embellishes the risks and penalties imposed for failing to declare potential biosecurity threats. While this television show will be discussed in further detail later, it is important to note that *Border Security* has a vast international viewership and is endorsed by the Australian Government (see Andrejevic, 2011; Hughes, 2010; Pottie-Sherman & Wilkes, 2016).

Upon approach to Australia, travellers are given an "Incoming Passenger Card" (IPC) to fill in their personal details, address, duration of visit, and customs declarations. The IPC[1] is printed on a yellowy-beige card, of a similar size and dimension to a boarding pass for a flight (Figure 1). It asks in eleven questions, beginning with a personal travel history, followed by questions (6-10) about specific materials and quantities:

> 6. Meat, poultry, fish, seafood, eggs, dairy, fruit, vegetables?
> 7. Grains, seeds, bulbs, straw, nuts, plants, parts of plants, traditional medicines or herbs, wooden articles?
> 8. Animals, parts of animals, animal products including equipment, pet food, eggs, biologicals, specimens, birds, fish, insects, shells, bee products?
> 9. Soil, items with soil attached or used in freshwater areas e.g. sport/recreational equipment, shoe?
> 10. Have you been in contact with farms, farm animals, wilderness areas, or freshwater streams/lakes etc in the past 30 days? (Australian Border Force, 2018)

Lightly-shaded rectangular boxes demark where travellers should write, although as can be seen in Figure 1, the shape of the boxes varies for different types of questions. Small boxes, in which one letter at a time should be printed, using only a blue or black pen, along with even smaller boxes that should be ticked to declare "yes" or "no" are difficult to neatly write into. Text is printed mostly in black, with only the "yes" declarations printed in bright red. The IPCs distributed by airline crew are only in English with additional language cards available in the pre-customs queuing area (see Barry & Ghimire, 2020). Given that IPCs are distributed on-board flights, and expected to be completed prior to arrival at the border queues, the motion of the aircraft and the small area to complete this in an aircraft seat, makes it challenging to fill in.

Figure 1: Author's sketch of an Australian "Incoming Passenger Card".

Hinchliffe and Bingham describe that in Australia, biosecurity practices have emerged out of 'the ecological effects of colonisation' that 'have been more pronounced' and therefore produced a discourse of 'good and bad circulation' (2008, p. 1535). Histories of Australia's biosecurity show that the threat of 'contagions' and the practices of immigration and exclusion based on lingering 'body politic' colonial practices, which were developed and reinforced under the guise of disease control (Bashford, 2002). The racialized profiling of persons entering Australia has continued to be regulated, if not actively declared by government, in the way that threats and risks of infectious diseases 'have been part of the legal and technical constitution of the prohibited foreigner' (Bashford, 2002, p. 345). This form of biosecurity governance is not exclusive to the bodies that host potential diseases, but extends to the materials that one may carry with them.

In many cases the exotification of materials and notions of "foreignness" are exaggerated under this form of biosecurity governance, separating forms of belonging and localism to the otherness of foreign species (Lavau, 2011; Miller, 2019). For instance, in the study of the Panama TR4 disease that devastated banana farms in northern Australia, Miller describes that Australia's 'historical preoccupation with invasion has encouraged the othering of the disease vector, resulting in biosecurity practices … that continue to carve out settler spaces concerned with the production and construction of belonging' (2019, p. 3). Maye et al. describe Australia's interpretation and practice of biosecurity as being 'often challenged in a system of politics which operates across a range of scales' (2012, p. 164). The interconnection of human mobility systems and increasing international movement of people and materials complicates the 'neat national/international dichotomy' (2012, p. 164).

One of the most obvious places in which biosecurity is governed is at the international border—the airport arrivals area. The airport has been theorised as a space where the shifting constellations of humans and nonhumans are assembled through the logistics that enable global mobilities (Barry & Suliman, 2019; Salter, 2008; Shilon & Shamir, 2016). Here, the conceptualisation of an "assemblage" is the bringing together in specific spatio-temporal networks and constellations of materialities (DeLanda, 2016). Studies of airport security are useful in unpacking the assemblages of materialities that are suspected, searched, and detected, in processes that Parks (2007) describes as 'close sensing'. The security checks of people's luggage, possessions, and even bodies are haptic processes that 'supplement machine vision with touch' (2007, p. 190) in the search for 'uncertain materialities, mutable things, and camouflaged objects' (195). In the context of air travel security and the role it plays in contemporary migration and mobility, Barry and Suliman note that the aeromobilities assemblages that enrol travellers at specific procedures in the airport 'give rise to new agencies and configurations of action' that generate often unanticipated behaviours and affects (2019,

p. 313). In this manner, ‘strange materialities’ (Donaldson & Wood, 2004) come into existence through such security practices, especially when any kind of material becomes suspicious.

Materialities in highly surveilled spaces, such as the border security and customs points, become ordered through ‘an internal, articulated and detailed control – to render visible those who are inside it; in more general terms, an architecture that would operate to transform individuals’ (Foucault, 1977, p. 172). This results in individuals themselves becoming the regulators and performers of security governance. Understanding Foucault’s biopolitics governance through the parameters of mobility, as Bærenholdt offers (2013), we start to see how acts of biosecurity may come into force via ‘the regulation of mobilities [that] are internationalised in people’s mobile practices’ (2014, p. 29). That is, we patiently queue, we fill out the IPC declarations, we unpack our luggage, we comply with checks, touches, pat-downs, and we attempt to adhere to the stated regulations. Further, Australia’s reputation of a stringent migration regime ensures the coupling of suspicious materials with the individuals’ visa status, creating an uncertain and anxious process of arriving and entering the country. In Amoore’s exploration of the biometric border, she notes that the site of the border becomes infused in traveller’s bodies, so that ‘the body, in effect, becomes the carrier of the border as it is inscribed with multiple encoded boundaries of access’ (2006, pp. 347-348). Here, I suggest understanding the individual as an assemblage of not just their body and the biometrics that are linked through their identification documents and the type of visa issued, but also encompasses the materials that they travel with too. These conceptualisations of how and where borders become mobile or static, or whom and with what is permitted to cross international borders, open important questions of how biosecurity is performed and experienced.

Methods

A total of 36 participants were interviewed about their experiences of entering Australia. These interviews are part of a larger ongoing project exploring the experiences of migrants with temporary visas who are living in communal accommodation (hostels or sharehouses) and undertaking agricultural work in south-east Queensland, Australia. The interviews were conducted in 2018-2019 before the coronavirus pandemic. The participant group includes a range of visa categories: Working Holiday Makers (hereafter: WHM; traditionally the "backpacker" group), international students, the Seasonal Worker Program, and two people who had arrived on temporary visas but had Permanent Residency applications under consideration and had recently returned from overseas travel. The majority of participants were aged between 18-35 years, only 3 were aged between 35-55 years. The interviews were conducted by the Author (a white, female, Australian citizen) and a Research Assistant (a Nepalese male, studying on a temporary visa), and took place in participants' current place of accommodation. The interviews were semi-structured and ranged from 20 minutes to 1.5 hours and were conducted in English or Nepali and later translated, transcribed, and anonymised to restrict details to only age, gender, visa category, and nationality.

Specific questions were asked about the process of transiting and arriving in Australia. Questions were used to frame the situation and context of their arrival and the customs process, such as: 'When you flew into Australia, before the plane landed you were given a customs card to fill in. Do you remember this? Did you have anything to declare?' Subsequent questions about security scans, queuing, passport/visa checks, and whether or not they were searched by customs officers, sniffed by customs dogs, or asked to unpack their bags. Participants were asked how they felt about this, and depending on their level of interaction with customs staff, as to whether they were upset, worried, or scared by the situation. They were asked if they had any prior knowledge of the customs declaration process in Australia, or if they had been to Australia before.

Due to the larger project's focus on communal living experiences of migrants on temporary visas, the assortment of nationalities and visas reflects the snowballing recruitment, rather than seeking out specific nationalities to participate. It also indicates the variety of people who are living in shared and temporary accommodation situations, where individuals from many nations will live, work and socialise alongside each other in these communal accommodations. The focus on people with temporary visas arriving in Australia (all but 2 were arriving for the first time), aims to show how these infrequent international travellers experiencing specific scrutiny at the customs and border control areas. As migrants (holding new and temporary visas) who were arriving into Australian airports, they are sorted at the border and profiled differently to Australian citizens, permanent residents, or even to short-stay business or tourist visa holders.

Further, this is positioned alongside research into the extensive and intensive preparations that migrants undertake for international mobility (e.g. Ghimire & Barry, 2020; Burrell, 2017; Pink & Postill, 2017). For those who are migrating, arriving in a new and unfamiliar place, and having spent significant time preparing for their move, deciding which materials should be declared at customs is layered with anticipation and uncertainty. Although these interview methods could have been applied to any incoming international traveller, because the focus here is on temporary migrants who are relocating to Australia, their particular experience is indicative of broader concerns of the geographies of mobility and migration experiences.

The research design specified that the interviews took place in the participant's place of current residence (whether permanent or temporary, such as a sharehouse or hostel). Due to the temporary nature of migration that all the participants were part of (they were all on temporary or bridging visas), it is important to note how materiality also played a role in the interviews in terms of the socio-spatial setting of how the interviews took place. During the

interviews, I encouraged the participants, if they felt comfortable, to show me their belongings they had travelled with, as they talked through their experiences. Several participants "evidenced" their narration by showing me key objects that had caused them issues at the customs or security checks. These are techniques of listening to participants through the materialities of their experience, narrating through their migration journey, homemaking practices, and personal belongings, fits within established methods used in geographical and migration research (e.g. Ratnam, 2018; Tolia-Kelly, 2004). Holding the materials while they spoke, showing these items, and reflecting on specific objects, complimented the verbal articulations of their migration experiences. Even though these materials may seem banal, they form an integral part of the lived experience of migration (see Pink & Postill, 2017). While this article only draws from verbal excerpts of interviews, it is important to highlight the way that materials became part of the in-situ assemblage of materiality, memory, and migration mobilities that were woven through the interview process.

Findings

Of the 36 participants, 21 said they had nothing to declare on the IPC. Only 9 people actively marked that they had something to declare, and an additional 6 people stated they had something to declare but did not mark the IPC because they had forgotten or overlooked certain materials. 13 people had their bags scanned, but of these, there were 7 who had not declared anything. 5 of these people were found to have materials that should have been declared. The biosecurity "checks" included: bags being x-rayed; being removed from the queue and subsequently having bags searched by customs officers and a sniffer dog; or being asked to completely unpack and show specific items to customs officers. Materials that were declared (or discovered during searches) included: dried fruits, cigarettes and tobacco, medicines, dried meat, hiking boots, tents, left over fruit from the flight, wool, bottled water, coffee, biscuits,

chocolate, ghee, home-made meals (as gifts), woven grass baskets, golf clubs, and tools and hardware.

Almost half (15 people) said they were aware of Australian customs and quarantine restrictions based on the reality TV show, and several had received advice from friends and family who had visited Australia. One female Italian WHM described:

> I didn't bring anything. My brother and I watch this show, I think it's an international show, that shows you when you arrive at the airports that they check your luggage, and if you have things that you don't have to bring inside the country they fine you [laughs]. That TV show told me not to bring anything!

A female from Ireland on a WHM visa described her experience passing through customs, where she realised that she had twice the permitted allowance of tobacco. She explained:

> At the last minute I just chucked it in the bin because I was too scared. … because we used to watch *Border Patrol*. So I thought they were going to drag everything through our bags and go through everything, ask us, take us into a room and question us, take your fingerprints, pictures of you and everything ... Then…it was nothing! I thought it was going to be a hell of a lot harder to get in.

Another male WHM from Sweden said that he was 'expecting a camera team to be there, to be on film like in that show'. Two female British WHMs told their extensive preparations while queuing for the customs area, after they had already been granted entry to Australia at the border. One explained:

> I barely got investigated… I'd heard all these stories about how strict it was. They say you have to have lots of money in your bank account, so I made sure I had moved all my money into one back account to show my funds. I had print outs too. I had my visa card, immigration card, copies of emails for my visa

> application and approval, I was just waiting for the investigation, and then they said to me in the queue 'OK carry on' and pointed me to a doorway, and next thing I'm there in the arrivals area.

Even though they had already passed through the border and been interviewed by Australian Border Force staff and granted entry to the country, the next step in her 'arrival' was to queue at the customs area. Yet in her perspective, these processes (of border checks and then customs checks) were intrinsically linked. Out of worry that her visa may not have been approved, she explained that she had queued up in the customs line to declare something, as a precaution, even though she had nothing to actually declare.

7 participants that had not made any declaration were randomly checked and had their bags scanned and then sniffer dogs go over their possessions. One Nepalese male, who was migrating to Australia for study, described that while waiting in the queue he was approached by a sniffer dog who sat down on top of his suitcase, indicating interest in the contents of his bag. He recounted: 'my luggage was taken to a corner, they had a special dog which inspected my luggage through its smell, and then went to sit under my luggage. After that they took me to the other side and said: "open your luggage, we need to check inside"'. He had brought a kilogram of homemade dried meat. While his parents had encouraged him to take it, his friends had advised that it would be not permitted. Upon arrival he declared the meat, and although he was not fined and the dried meat was discarded, he said: 'they thanked me for my honesty. Otherwise, they said, I would have to pay a penalty'. This warning was echoed by all participants who had prohibited materials—that if they had not declared it, they would have received a penalty, and one said she was threatened with possible prison time.

10 participants were asked to unpack their bags for closer inspection. Upon finding materials that were prohibited or that required further consideration and closer inspection, they

all expressed some mild distress and surprise that they had overlooked certain items. For example, a young female Nepalese international student described how her bag was randomly checked even though she had not declared anything. She had forgotten a flower given to her by a friend before departing Nepal, which she had packed into her bag at the airport. She said, 'For that one flower, they unzipped all of my luggages!' As she recounted this, it was clear she was embarrassed, and she received a $250 fine for failing to declare. She was the only person fined out of all of the participants, even though she claimed to have overlooked the flower and apologised. However, an American WHM explained that he thought he had escaped the fine for undeclared food: 'because I'm American, they're really friendly to Americans'.

Another participant, a male Canadian WHM, said he had forgotten some dried mango in his carry-on bag. He had not declared anything on the IPC but was pulled aside into the customs queue, seemingly at random, and then had his bags scanned. He recounted:

> They said to me, again, 'hey do you have anything to declare before we open this up?' and I said, confidently, 'no', because I wasn't hiding anything. But I completely forgot that I'd had the mango snack. … I guess he saw the surprise on my face as well, that I was completely thrown off, I think the mango was almost empty anyway, I'd eaten most of it. I was a little worried, but he didn't fine me. He just said 'Welcome to Australia', simple as that.

I could see his expression change as he recounted the incident, appearing flustered and his face flushed. Although he sounded confident, and the conclusion to the situation was that he was not fined, the lingering imposition of this experience was evident. After this discovery, customs officers closely checked his passport, visa, and financial documents for a second time. He said: 'they took their time, checking again'. Having passports and visa documents "double checked"

and questioned, while waiting for customs officers to search, scan, or have dogs sniff through their belongings, was mentioned by 5 participants.

Several interviews referred to the confusion about what liquids were prohibited or restricted on-board flights, or whether this was due to some type of biosecurity restrictions on 'water' and 'chemicals'. One female German WHM explained to me she had thrown out all of her toiletries from her checked-bag *after* landing in Australia because she thought liquids were not permitted due to biosecurity, and this would impact on her (already issued) visa. Two male Swedish WHMs travelling together were also unsure about liquids and restrictions. One of them described to me: 'I made a huge mistake. I went a bit over reacting on the fluid substances, so I didn't bring any toothpaste, any shampoo, anything like that, there were no fluids'. His friend laughed, saying to me: 'it was his first time flying'. He continued explaining: 'I misheard, I thought it was *all* the baggage, but it was only the small bag that I brought on the plane that couldn't contain any fluids'. When they arrived into Australia, despite their misunderstanding of the liquid rules, when I asked if they had declared anything, the second guy explained:

> Well technically I did, but I forgot about it. I had too much water in my [carry-on] backpack. And the water from the plane. I thought I'd broken some law. I had forgotten about it. But then when I met the people [customs officers] at the security check, I was really nervous, sweating about it. But they said 'oh no, you're right'.

While recounting this story, he looked flustered, but his friend interjected, telling me that they had queued separately at customs, and he had seen him being taken out of the line to a nearby area for an individual check. As he stood nearby, he was close enough to hear, and he recounted: 'they [customs officers] were talking to each other, I could hear, repeating what he

had said. They were doing *imitations* of his Swedish accent, in a really comedic tone'. Although they both laughed while recounting this to me, they paused, and he asked: 'they're not meant to make fun of people, right?' I failed to hide my appalled tone, at hearing that officers had mocked and imitated his accent. I replied to them, 'well, no, they are not meant to make fun of someone's accent'. Here, the tension between the authority they were faced with, unsure if they had broken any laws, and nervous because they had forgotten about bottled water they'd been given on-board the flight, highlights the confronting situation.

The Swedish WHMs went on to say that one had brought a type of 'utility spoon', something 'like a Swiss army knife, a multi-spoon', which had been confiscated not at their departure airport in Stockholm, but in-transit in Qatar:

> The [Australian] government have a website with all the things that you can and can't bring... There's a lot of things about knives. I did think about it, whether I could bring it. Then, I was in Qatar, at the security, they took my spoon. It has this thing that you can fix your bike if it breaks, which is why I brought it. So you can remove screws. They said I couldn't bring it on the plane, because I could remove screws [laughs] I didn't care too much.

Another similar example is a female from Nepal, arriving on a student visa, who described that she was confused about bringing metal cutlery. She had brought a spoon in her carry-on baggage, which was confiscated at Kathmandu airport before departure. But she also had more cooking equipment, including cutlery, in her checked bag. She was unsure and 'scared' when she arrived in Australia whether or not she should declare the cutlery in her luggage. After declaring it, her bags were scanned and unpacked by customs officers, and they found nothing of concern.

Discussion

The recounts from participants give the impression that biosecurity regulations are perceived as an important step to gaining entrance to Australia as an arriving migrant. The notable concern in several participants about their visa approval or close "double checks" of their passport and documents, highlights the potency of biosecurity as key feature of perpetuating Australia's reputation for strict border governance. Here, biosecurity is inscribed in the migrant identity that the Australian government propounds (idealisation of who is the "good" migrant with the "right" belongings, wealth, and travel experiences, or, who may be excluded). The relationship between biosecurity and air travel security was linked in many of the participant's understandings of the arrival process, and about half of them had anticipated close scrutiny that was fuelled by their knowledge of the international television show. The discussion is themed around these two main aspects, teasing out how these interview statements hint at the implied or perceived "risks" of certain materials, and the mapping onto migrant profiles when entering the country.

The confusion and conflation of pre-travel security screening and post-travel customs declarations was apparent in the majority of the interviews. Participants were asked if they had declared anything at customs after they landed, yet most responses described items and procedures that occurred *pre-travel* in the security screening. People recounted in detail their processes of carefully selecting and packing their liquids or declaring items that they thought might be considered 'weapons'. However, it is important to clarify that the area where the customs checks take place in Australian airports are designated spaces that, in their spatial design, closely resemble the pre-boarding airport security checkpoints. There are large aluminium tables for unpacking bags, x-ray machines, swabs and scanner for detecting trace amounts of prohibited chemicals, and usually several staff to facilitate and oversee individual checks, along with sniffer dogs, and ample CCTV. Individuals (and their materials) are

assembled into this performative space of biosecurity. But at this point, the individual has already passed through border gates, been granted a visa and entry to Australia, and has collected their luggage. The threat of non-compliance as a migrant with temporary visa persists in the sorting and profiling of travellers and their belongings well beyond the border gates.

However, not all bags are screened at Australian airports prior to every departing or arriving flight due to high passenger loads (Barry & Suliman, 2019). While pre-boarding security checks do scan all carry-on items and every person is passed through a scanning device (though not all checked-in bags are screened), arriving flights are subjected to only randomized checks that rely heavily on the information provided on the IPC. Enacting biosecurity faces the problem of 'how to select between movements, and it is a problem that is confounded by the quantity of circulations. In a mobile global planet, opening every bag and every container is hardly practical' (Hinchliffe & Bingham, 2008, pp. 1535-1536). The interviews show that participants were unsure about which stages of travel security was prioritized, and therefore conflated the security concerns of flying (potential terror attacks, use of weapons, and so on) with the customs and biosecurity checks upon arrival. Contemporary security screening in air travel produces a 'transparent' way of seeing and doing (Hall, 2015), which governs mobility in a way that magnifies the threat of a singular object to the nation-state. Airport security checks produce a situation where, 'when all of our personal belongings are reduced to transparencies, they are not just objects to be looked at, they become symptomatic of a more permeating gaze' of the nation-state (Parks, 2007, p. 194). For those who are returning nationals, any issues at customs checks may result in a fine (or possibly imprisonment, if the matter is serious enough). However, for someone who is arriving on a temporary visa, and has already been subject to rigorous approval processes for their finances, character checks, relationship status, and so on, even a minor incident at the border may jeopardize their chances of migrating.

Security checks are of course not a guarantee that discrepancies will not occur, or that restricted materials will not pass through. But this linkage of biosecurity and air travel security that many of the participants had understood, pushes the responsibility of securing international mobility back onto the individuals. As Donaldson and Wood describe, 'surveillance seeks to reinforce boundaries', but it also works to 'imbue them with a differential permeability' (2004, p. 378). What materials slip through one security check may be identified in a later, closer inspection. This is what Amoore describes as a type of 'vigilant watching for the "Other"' (2007, p. 216) to ensure that everyone is not only monitoring their own actions, but concerned and rigid in their surveillance of each other, too. Security becomes instilled in the individual and is dependent 'on the drawing of the lines between self and other, homeland and strangeland, safe and unsafe, ordinary and suspicious' (Amoore, 2007, pp. 616-217). For example, the two Swedish WHMs who mistakenly thought that bottled water was both a security concern for flying and a threat that would 'contaminate' Australia; or the German WHM who had thrown out all of her liquid items for fear that she had breached some biosecurity law and would not be granted an Australian visa; and similarly, the Nepalese international student who, after having an item of cutlery confiscated at her departure airport, was concerned she had other cutlery and kitchen items in her checked-bag when arriving into Australia. Although these items may be considered fairly trivial, for the newly arriving migrant, who is unfamiliar to the customs, laws, and expectations, with a freshly-granted visa in-hand, these misunderstandings exemplify the threatening perception of biosecurity as migration governance. To imagine that one's visa status could on the line simply because of some liquids in your suitcase or bottled water kept from the flight, shows the potency of how Australia's biosecurity practices are promoted.

Further, these responses indicate that the internationally-viewed television show plays a role in what travellers expect at the border. The show *Border Security* began in 2004, with

the government facilitating access to customs areas so long as it has the 'right of veto over any material that causes concern' (Hughes, 2010, p. 441). This can be read, as scholars have argued, as a public relations activity, ensuring the promotion of the nation's border 'agencies in a positive light' (Hughes, 2010, p. 439). Yet the Australian border is 'framed as existing in a state of emergency ... requiring constant defence' (Anderson, 2017, p. 8). Importantly, the show needs to be understood as part of a broader political landscape where migration is aestheticized through specific categories of desirable or undesirable mobilities. Particularly in the treatment of migrants and asylum seekers, the Australian government expounds a reputation for hard-line conviction and punishment for migrants who do not adhere to stringent pathways and procedures to entering the nation (Hodge, 2015; Hughes, 2010). Understood in this context, the television show replicates political attitudes towards potential threats, offering 'up a litany of risks ranging from the economic to the ecological', including 'illegal immigrants to the workforce, of convicted criminals, … of smuggling of all kinds' (Andrejevic, 2011, p. 169). Due to the long running success of the show (currently in the 14th season), the way that potential threats are mitigated against through the vigilance and rigour of customs officers, serves to reinforce the default assumption that all incoming international travellers (and the materials they travel with) are potentially a threat. The show dutifully reports on the fines, prison sentences, and deportations of those who feature in each episode. It is no wonder, then, that the international viewers, such as the participants in this study, take heed of these possible risks they may be unknowingly harbouring in the materials they bring. As several people described here, they were acutely aware, some even scared, of the possibility of hefty penalties, prison time, or even denied entry to Australia, even if they had done the right thing and declared uncertain materials.

Finally, it is noteworthy that at the time of conducting the interviews, a new biosecurity video informing people how to declare on the IPC, was being played on-board each arriving

flight. Although the participants were not asked about their reactions to this video, a discussion of it here hints at the broader issues of materiality and representations of Australia's biosecurity governance. The video[2], titled *Don't be sorry–just declare it* (Department of Agriculture, 2019), opens with a view of people sitting in aeroplane seats, set against a white background, while filling in the IPC. Various materials—such as bananas, dirty hiking boots, a raw chicken, shells, a dead fish, and so on—appear floating above their heads as the narration repeats the slogan 'Don't be sorry – just declare it', explaining what types of materials should be declared. This is intercut with stern-looking customs officers, against a blank white background, searching through single items of luggage while shaking their heads at dried sausages, fruits, and the dead fish. In fact, the dead fish appears quite lively as it flops around in bag of male of Asian appearance, who speaks with a strong accent, saying 'sorry, a fish? it must have swum into my suitcase'. While this is intended, perhaps, to provide comic relief, he is the only person in the video who presents such a ridiculous item, and the only one who speaks with an accent. Arguably, this feeds into cultural stereotypes on travel behaviours, and the profiling of the 'kinetic underclass' (Wilson & Weber, 2008), who include the less 'desirable' arriving foreigner. According to the government's biosecurity website: 'The commodities that feature in each video have been specifically selected as they align with commodities that are frequently encountered by our staff at airports and shipping terminals' (Department of Agriculture, 2019).

These forms of biosecurity representations in the television show and this video only 'enables the Othering of non-white, non-Western groups' (Pottie-Sherman & Wilkes, 2016, p. 96). Here, biosecurity is no longer a simple metaphor for belonging and citizenship that can be easily categorised. It is a performative act that 'relies upon producing and policing a certain set of boundaries' of the 'natural' and the 'foreign', and the threat of the introduced, unwanted, unknown, or invasive (Lavau, 2011, p. 52). While not explicitly trying to be humorous, the abstracted forms of the restricted materials that hover around against the white background—

the bananas, raw chicken, golf clubs, or the dead fish—take on an amusing tone as they hover around in mid-air. The materials in the video are brightly coloured, slightly oversized, and even very "fresh" looking produce and meats, so that they no longer resemble something that one would actually carry in their baggage. Like other travel security instructions (Barry, 2017), or the in-flight safety demonstration video that 'serves as a significant marker in the journeying arc' (Bissell et al., 2012, p. 698), the requirement of the biosecurity video to be played on all incoming international flights denotes that an important stage in the arrival to Australia is about to occur. Gaining entry to Australia and passing through the border is contingent on the migrant's compliance with biosecurity processes, and their willingness to being searched, sniffed, sorted, and profiled as a potential threat according to their race, accent, appearance, or what they are bringing with them.

Conclusion: Biosecuring Australia's borders

Regulating materials of all kinds involves scrutiny and ordering that, at times, fits into easily identifiable boundaries, and at others, forces people to alter and reflect on their travel practices and decisions. Securing international borders, especially in relation to ecological "risks" and certain types of biological agents that may impact on health, agriculture, industry, and environment is important, and I do not want to detract from the need for this type of governance. Yet despite such extensive publicity of biosecurity regulations in Australia, there is still often confusion of what is expected from individuals at the border. Biosecurity is performed through a range of situations and processes, intersecting with geopolitical assumptions, tensions, and preferences for who and what is permitted to be mobile (Braun, 2007; Donaldson, 2007; Hinchliffe & Bingham, 2008). International arrivals are '[t]reated, read, and scrutinised' as 'the passenger-subject is continuously partitioned into different sort

of life' (Adey, 2009, p. 288). The spatialities of surveillance in the airport collide with the materialities of mobility and migration, and individuals need to navigate through these complexities that assemble when they offer themselves up for biosecurity checks.

In this article I have attempted to sketch out some of the ways that perceived risks, assumptions, and political agendas may be experienced by individuals under the regulations of biosecurity. It was evident that the majority of participants had anticipated some level of scrutiny and expected a rigorous check prior to gaining their visa and entry to Australia. Although this small study has been limited to mostly young persons who were migrating (majority were aged 18-35 years), and these were either WHMs or international students, their experiences are indicative of the way that arriving non-citizens can expect to be treated, profiled, and checked at international borders. Their experience as temporary migrants, who are arriving in a new country with limited possessions to build a (temporary) home in Australia, shows that further research into migration situations where people rely on specific social and cultural guidance on how they can complete their migration trajectories. Further, there is need for exploration into how travellers of certain nationalities—in particularly people of colour or with limited English proficiency—may experience the process of passing through Australian biosecurity checks.

That said, these findings cannot be read outside of Australia's reputation of a hard-line approach to global migration, and the use of biosecurity to craft out the desirable forms of migration and mobility. The narrative on Australian border practices has consistently rendered migration as a potentially unlawful act, where the arriving persons, especially if not arriving via an aeroplane, is treated as suspicious. Australian government campaigns and promotions have employed representations of migration through 'the language of criminality' (Hodge, 2015, p. 123), and as can be seen in several of these participant's experiences, where threats of fines, imprisonment, and even deportation were given, even though they had done the right

thing, declared, and even apologised as they were instructed to. In this manner, biosecurity plays into a much larger role in border governance, where it functions similarly to airport security, as 'a system for selecting or filtering those who are subject to even closer scrutiny' (Parks, 2007, p. 192). Here, these acts of biosecurity scans, checks, and searches 'may take on dangerous dimensions when it is articulated by a vengeful state' (Parks, 2007, p. 192). Biosecurity, in some instances, transforms even the most banal materials into potential risks. It takes a firm place in affixing soft powers of migration governance under the guise of disease prevention, pest eradication, and ecological preservation, and cannot be easily uncoupled from current political attitudes towards migration, nor dismissed from the nation's violent colonial legacy.

As I write this conclusion, the world is experiencing the greatest biosecurity threat in the past century: the coronavirus pandemic. While it is beyond the scope of this study to directly engage with the pandemic, it is noteworthy that in the containment measures of this latest biosecurity threat, already we can see the implications of racialized geopolitics playing out in individuals experiences of travel and migration. It is crucial that we understand how individuals negotiate and understand their rights and responsibilities in biosecurity practices, but also, that these forms of biosecuring and regulating international mobilities do not lead to even further spatial and mobile injustices (see Barry & Ghimire, 2020; Cole & Dodds, 2020). Future geographical inquiries into biosecurity need to delve further into the social and cultural influences of how these border spaces are enforced, but importantly, how materiality of the human and nonhuman intersect in narratives of risk and containment. As Amoore reminds us, the border is carried by bodies (2006, p. 337), in both the identification documents one possesses, as well as the visa category that is mapped onto us in biometric technologies. In this way, concerns of biosecurity, too, travels with us in various, seen and unseen forms—in the materials we possess and bring, but in our bodily capacities to host, contain, or spread the many

microbial movements that extend the biopolitical into our daily lives of risk management. Mobility governance continues to amplify the unknown traveller, assembled through their body and their material belongings, as harbouring potential threats to national security. Biosecurity procedures, therefore, becomes a tool for securing Australia's existing fortress model of migration, where everyone and every*thing* should presume to be under scrutiny.

Notes

[1] A sketched version of the IPC is included to give a visual and spatial reference to the layout and design that is discussed. For a photographic version of the IPC, see: https://www.abf.gov.au/entering-and-leaving-australia/crossing-the-border/at-the-border/incoming-passenger-card-(ipc)

[2] The video is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fXC2NPgD-w

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