

BORDER PRACTICES AND SPEED

Cultural Perspectives on Borders and Smuggling

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Understanding borders from different perspectives has been important to ethnological research since the beginning of the twentieth century. This article will revisit early discussions on borders as well as the more elaborated ethnological border studies of the end of the twentieth century. As some principal themes of these ethnological border studies are brought forward, the article demonstrates how a focus on speed informs contemporary border studies with insights regarding borders and border zones. The illegal liquor trade in the Baltic Sea during the 1920s will serve as the case being discussed, thus establishing analytical distance to contemporary European border processes.

Keywords: borders, practice, speed, inertia, smuggling

In 1921 several articles in the periodical *Lanternan* (The Lantern) – the Swedish Customs Federation’s official organ – discussed an increase in the smuggling of alcohol into Sweden. The debate in *Lanternan* was concerned with the illegal border traffic, but also with speed and modernity. The smugglers used fast, modern motorboats and in comparison the coast guards’ equipment was deemed dated: “Yes, it seems sad, not to say ridiculous, that the Swedish coast guard use unmodern yachts ‘from old times’” (*Lanternan* no. 10, 1921). The polarisation between on the one hand fast smugglers and on the other hand slow coast guards carried an important message: Those who master new technology and speed are often afforded, or capture, the role of popular heroes, which allows them the opportunity to influence social and political change (cf. Marvin 1988; Tomlinson 2007). If the fast-moving smugglers were

defined as heroes, even though they challenged the national border, then the representatives of the government risked losing their legitimacy. Thus, according to the debate in *Lanternan*, an effort to modernise and speed up the coast guard was of paramount importance. High velocity would stop the smugglers and turn the border zone into a controlled, inert landscape. The question of how speed destabilise (and stabilise) borders is at the centre of the discussion in this article: The aim is to investigate how the smugglers’ use of fast, modern technologies challenged national borders thus forcing the authorities to establish new border practices. Through a discussion of the case, I will demonstrate how a focus on speed can provide ethnology and contemporary border studies further insights regarding the cultural dimensions of borders. The rereading of earlier ethnological border studies is important for the ar-

gument since it frames my understanding of borders and speed. I will, however, start with a discussion on contemporary ethnological border studies and will then introduce speed as an important aspect of this field of research.

Border Practices, Inert Border Zones and Speed

In *The Border Multiple* (2012) borders are conceptualised “as practices that are situated and constituted in the specificity of political negotiations as well as in the everyday life performance of them” (Andersen, Klatt & Sandberg 2012: 6). Accordingly, borders are the result of historical, political processes and agreements, but they are also a culturally complex matter. The position of territorial borders is quite often invisible (as for instance in cases where borderlines are drawn in water); therefore, borders need to be materialised in other locations where they must also be performed by different actors in order to manifest the inside–outside partition (cf. Donnan & Wilson 2001; Löfgren 2000; Nilsson 2007). For instance, tollbooths are rarely built on the location of a territorial border (cf. airports), and customs officials as well as coast guards are often working in vaguely defined border zones. This makes borders flexible and complex; they appear at different locations and in different (uni-)forms. Ethnologist Marie Sandberg argues, similarly, that border practices are performed by a variety of actors in an ongoing process of ordering. Such a perspective emphasise that borders are in a state of becoming, they are characterised by processes of stabilisation instead of stability, of ordering instead of order (cf. Sandberg 2012: 119–120). Understanding borders as practices, speed becomes an important element in de- or destabilisation of borders that should not be underestimated. For instance, it makes a difference if a person tries to run through the passport control at an airport or if this person slows down while approaching the counter, eventually stands still and presents the passport to the agent (who in this case of course is immobile inside her or his booth). Border controls are in fact quite often designed with slowness as a key feature (even though there might be a “fast lane”

for some travellers); the narrow lanes in front of the passport control at airports; the speed bumps on the bridge between Denmark and Sweden; and the concrete blocks at “hot” borders forcing cars to slowly meander towards the border control. Thus, ideally borders and border zones are inert landscapes – even inside the Schengen area where borders are supposed to have disappeared (cf. Nilsson 1999, 2010). At borders, speed produces problems. Travellers who challenge inertia are defined as threats and accentuate the need for (new) border practices that encapsulate and slow them down.¹

To analyse the relationship between speed-inertia and the re- or destabilisation of borders, I will employ the concept of “vector”. According to Paul Virilio, a vector is a “transporter of speed” ([1984]1996: 54) that structures our understanding of distances, the way we interact with the world and transcend borders. Vectors such as cars, trains, aeroplanes and the Internet facilitate new border practices that allow more people to travel to, or communicate with, places that once were “far away” and “time consuming” to reach (and of course such distances in space and time are not absolutes, but relative). The function of vectors might be regarded as something positive: they produce speed as well as freedom to roam the city streets, the highways, and eventually the globe. From another perspective, of course, such acceleration potentially evokes feelings of dissolution, not only of time-space, but of identities, norms and moral. In this sense, the vector is a producer of anxiety, fear and uncertainty. In the preface to Virilio’s *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, Peter Handberg argues that vectors are “latent carriers of dissolution; they are the carriers of violence, shock and destruction” (1996: 10–11). From this understanding of vectors I will consider how different vectors, like boats, cars, and radio, destabilise (and sometimes stabilise) borders through speed. This argument is based on a research project on smuggling and speed I intend to publish in its entirety. In this forthcoming book a variety of sources are analysed, such as: police reports and interrogations; letters sent from local customs officials to the Swedish Customs Administration in Stockholm and other senior officials

in major cities; articles published in newspapers and periodicals; and brochures and pamphlets addressing the problematic smuggling. Quotes below are all from this extensive material.

Even though border studies have developed as a highly dynamic field of research at the beginning of this new millennium, borders as well as speed have been an important theme in Swedish ethnology since the beginning of the twentieth century. As I will discuss in the following section, early Swedish ethnologists, such as Sigurd Erixon, were preoccupied with the inertia as well as the disappearance of borders; furthermore, this line of thought was still very much present and important towards the end of the century. Hence, I will begin by revisiting Sigurd Erixon's discussions on borders. As mentioned in other articles in this volume and elsewhere (cf. Arnstberg 1989, 2010), ethnology at its (Swedish) conception was practically defined by Erixon, making his publications (and conception of borders) an obvious point of departure. From this, I will move on to a discussion of how a renewed interest in borders emerged towards the end of the twentieth century. Although some lines of thought persisted from the earlier phase, this new wave also included some interesting elements. For practical purposes and in order to move this argumentation forward, I will mainly focus on Orvar Löfgren's contributions to the new wave. This enables me to distil an understanding of the foundations of contemporary border studies and leads directly to my conclusion, that speed is of crucial importance if we are to understand the cultural dimensions of borders. I will demonstrate this through my discussion of smuggling as a speedy border practice.

Border Studies in Swedish Ethnology

Sigurd Erixon published several studies in which discussions of borders are an integral part of the analysis: "Svenska gårdstyper" (1919), "Svensk byggnadskultur och dess geografi" (1922), and *Svenska kulturgränser och kulturprovinser* (1945). When the latter was published, Erixon had occupied himself with the project *Atlas of Swedish Folk Culture* since the 1930s. In *Svenskt folkliv* (1938) Sigurd Erixon

even stated that the study of cultural borders was one of the most important tasks in ethnology (1938: 277). Through mapping Swedish folk culture and practices, ethnology as a discipline had to be interested in cultural borders – those between villages, vicarages, and provinces, but also those between cities and the countryside. The point here is that those early discussions established an ethnological understanding of borders (as well as of speed).

Using the Swedish province of Scania, once a part of the Danish kingdom, as an example, Erixon argued that cultural borders do not necessarily follow national borders. The so-called Danish-Scanian farm was, according to Erixon, a materialisation of a cultural border that separated different cultural areas in Sweden (1919: 28). However, Erixon did not elaborate on the border as such, or any sort of border practice that might have existed, as the primary focus of his analysis was the typology of culture(s). In *Svensk byggnadskultur och dess geografi* (1922) Erixon's arguments were almost identical, though slightly more elaborated. He argued that the southern parts of Sweden could be defined as a distinct cultural province, making the border between the provinces Halland and Scania in the south-west and the rest of Sweden "one of the most important and interesting borders in the country" (1922: 262). The diffusion of cultural elements, he argued, had been hindered by this border, hence making the folk culture north of this border more "authentic" Swedish (1922: 281–282). Some years later Åke Campbell, another leading ethnologist in Sweden at the time, refined Erixon's argument on the cultural borders and areas in southern Sweden. Campbell stated that the old Danish landscapes (Scania and Halland) were to be understood as a base, with cultural roots in continental Europe, from which cultural elements found their way to Sweden, but not without resistance: "The borderlines show where the foreign cultural streams had run into a dam caused by domestic nature and culture" (Campbell 1928: 2). Using the dam as a metaphor, borders and border landscapes were defined as inert matter, although not entirely impermeable. The idea of inertia was something to which Erixon would later return. He clearly un-

derstood the permeability of borders as anchored in historical circumstances and rationalities: "The population in one district was normally influenced by trends in other districts that for historical reasons were considered a role model" (1945: 14). Some borders were more stable than others and, thus, authentic folk culture was preserved in some archaic areas (Erixon 1945: 19). The lack of communication, due to vast distances or a difficult terrain, was defined as a factor that greatly decided the permeability of borders. The mind-set among the population – they could be "hostile" towards new trends, thus creating a "cultural barrier" – was another crucial element: "Even though the cultural diffusion is affected by geography, the defining power is to be found among the population, thus making cultural borders a compromise between nature and history" (Erixon 1945: 19).² However, as modernity, and acceleration, intensified, the cultural borders seemed to wither away. In *Atlas över svensk folkkultur* (Atlas of Swedish Folk Culture) (1957), Erixon stated that industrialisation and agricultural reforms caused cultural borders to disappear (1957: 9). This process was further intensified by new communications: "New impulses from big cities and abroad travelled faster and became more dominant than before" (1957: 10).

Thus, Erixon conceptualised borders as consequences of nature, history, political agreements and economy, but also considered them products of everyday life, habits and traditions. Borders were, furthermore, understood as regulators of flows making border zones inert landscapes.

This idea of inertia prevailed when at the end of the century political changes, in particular the dissolution of "Eastern Europe" and subsequently the collapse of the Soviet Union, triggered a new interest in borders and border practices among ethnologists. From the end of the 1980s, national identities or mentalities, thus, became a dynamic field for ethnological research. Borders and national identities became a hot topic as nations or regions tried to navigate in a transformed political landscape (cf. Nilsson, Sanders & Stubbergaard 2007). In a special issue of *Ethnologia Europaea: National Culture as Process*, Orvar Löfgren (1989) identified a need for research

of the complexity of national culture. Compared to the early ethnologists, that is, Erixon and his contemporaries, during the following years, a different and more elaborate discussion of borders developed.

In a study of the nationalisation of Sweden Löfgren (1993) discuss how national borders are transformed into cultural borders. Borders are conceptualised as barriers, but also as a sort of actors: they direct the travellers' gaze towards differences and turn geographical landscapes into highly emotional national landscapes. Understood as actors, borders produce a desire for the strange and adventurous land on the other side as well as a longing for the home(-land) (Löfgren 1993: 86–87, 117). Convincingly, Löfgren argues that material culture is one important ingredient in the analysis of national borders and identities – but he claims this with a different twist from the early ethnologists. Whereas the early Swedish ethnologists wanted to map the distribution and diffusion of cultural artifacts to be able to identify cultural provinces, Löfgren focuses on how trivial things such as road signs and border crossings produce differences in an ongoing construction of culture.³ Borders are still primarily seen as inert matter, as dams or barriers regulating flows, but new elements are added: borders are conceptualised as actors producing motion (migration and different sorts of transnational movements) as well as emotion.⁴ In an analysis of the making of the Öresund Region, Löfgren (2000) addresses speed as an important *metaphor* in urban development and transnational region-building. Speed as a border practice, though, remains unexplored.⁵ In the following sections, I will use a practice oriented border concept, but I will add a focus on speed as an important ingredient. Analysing the illegal liquor traffic during the 1920s, my aim is to demonstrate how speed, as an analytical concept, can provide contemporary border studies with further insights regarding border practices.

I will start with an overview of how this smuggling was organised; some structural foundations for its origins will also be brought forward as will a depiction of some actions taken to regulate smuggling. The smuggling and the state authorities' per-

ceptions of these activities must first and foremost be related to Swedish alcohol policy and debate.

Smuggling – a Border Practice

After the First World War Sweden's borders had been tightened up and in conjunction with restrictive alcohol policy smuggling appeared as a lucrative branch (Lundin & Nilsson 2010). Denmark, Finland and Norway went through similar changes, and so did the USA. According to the historian Marc Mappen (2013), Prohibition, and thus smuggling, formed a new generation of criminals in the USA. They came from the margins of society but Prohibition gave them an opportunity to find a short cut to *The American Dream*: the possibility of social advancement, wealth, status and respect was alluring (Mappen 2013: 2–4).

In Sweden, anxiety for the negative influence of alcohol had grown strong at the beginning of the twentieth century. Misuse was extensive and the situation among the poor and vulnerable in society was especially bad (Larsson 1999: 53). Alcohol stood out as a grave problem and there were massive campaigns in action with the aim of forbidding, or alternately limiting, access to alcohol (Ambjörnsson 1988). To some degree, the keen supporters of sobriety were successful. In 1914 a ration book (the so-called *Motboken*) was introduced which limited access to alcohol, as the owner of the ration book was allowed only a certain amount of alcohol for a limited period of time. A specific application for a ration book had to be made and it was then decided by a special inquiry if the applicant was thought suitable to shoulder the responsibility (Johansson 2008). Some years later, in 1922, a referendum was carried out for a complete “Prohibition of intoxicating liquor” but the zealous supporters lost. The referendum as such, however, does illustrate the anxiety that alcohol caused.

The restrictive alcohol policy created the basis for comprehensive illegal alcohol dealing and an intensive alcohol smuggling. The deal between sellers and buyers was as a rule agreed beforehand. Informal contracts were established in special restaurants or hotels, for example the Hotel Savoy in

Malmö, Hotel Kronprinz in Kiel, the restaurant Aalborgkælder in Copenhagen, and Berns Salonger in Stockholm. The alcohol was transported by large vessels, depot ships, from Baltic and German ports to international waters. These depot ships usually anchored in shallow water, for example *Herthas Flak* in the Kattegat and *Plantagenet's ground* in the southern Baltic Sea. From these marine nodes the alcohol was loaded onto smaller boats, which headed for the Swedish border. Just outside the border, the cargo was loaded into even smaller, but also much faster motorboats. In unguarded places, local recipients waited for the delivery and transported the alcohol by car or lorry to the buyers in towns. Of course, the Swedish State tried to stop the illegal border practice.

In order to counteract smuggling the legislation was changed. The most common punishment for smuggling was a fine, but in 1924 a law was brought into force that meant that smugglers of alcohol could be sentenced to harsh prison terms. During the 1930s, the legislation and sentences were once more toughened up (Larsson 1999: 59). Apart from these measures a police unit focusing on illegal dealing with alcohol (Spritpolisen), was organised and an international agreement on smuggling was eventually signed, the so-called Helsinki Convention. The states in the Baltic region agreed on sharpening the control of the export of alcohol and legalising inspection and seizing of vessels outside territorial waters. Initially only Sweden, Finland and Norway approved, but all the states round the Baltic Sea would later on affiliate themselves (Larsson 1992: 49–50). Even civil society was engaged in the war against smuggling. The Association against Smuggling (*Sammanslutningen för smugglingsbekämpande*), an association founded with the sole purpose of combatting smuggling, wanted to change people's attitudes towards smuggling. This would be achieved by “spreading fliers and brochures” but also “organising lectures in order to win support for their activities” (*Lanternan* no. 6, 1925). As we shall see, this help to protect the borders was needed.

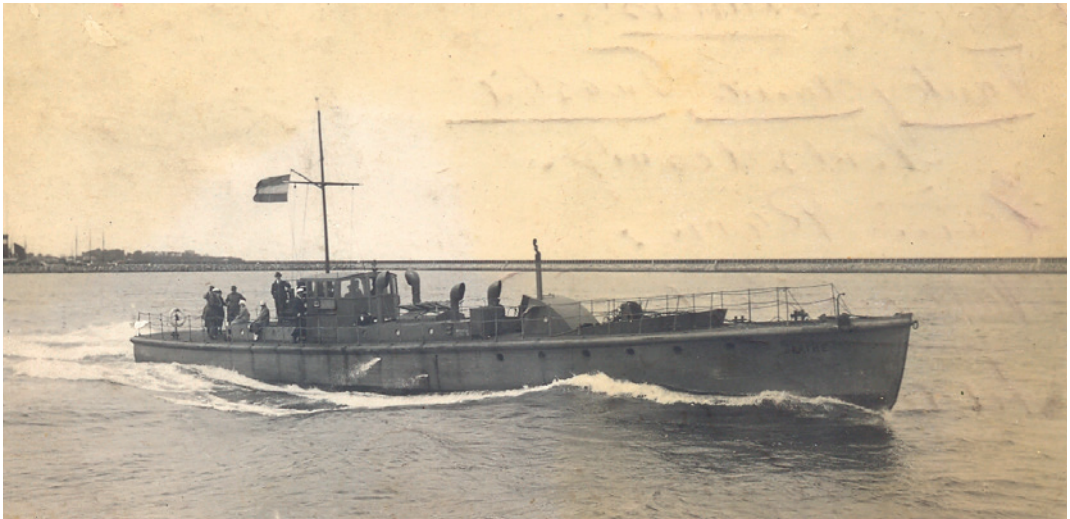
Speedboats and “Liquor Racers”

At the end of 1923 a large smuggling “expedition” had been exposed in Scania, the most southern part of Sweden. A customs detective had had the opportunity to closely follow the planning of this expedition as well as the attempt to execute it.⁶ According to plan the motor schooner *Luna* would approach the Swedish coast with 20,000 litres of alcohol on board. Naturally the authorities wanted to confiscate this substantial cargo of alcohol, but as *Luna* could make 12 knots there was a problem: “Swedish customs at the coasts of Scania did not have any vessel that could be used with any hope of success of commandeering the smuggler vessel *Luna*.” After several failed attempts to borrow or hire fast boats, the customs detectives hired the steam-driven tugboat *Hurtig* (Jaunty or Spry).⁷

The tugboat had cautiously advanced to the area where the smuggling was expected to take place and after some hours *Luna* was discovered, even though the smugglers had tried to become invisible and soundless by putting out lanterns and only using sail. The smugglers’ attempts to avoid detection were futile and *Hurtig* approached *Luna*. When only five metres separated them, the smugglers decided to head for international water using engine power

and maximum speed. *Hurtig* was left far behind, and not even when “revolver shots were fired at the smugglers’ vessel” did it stop. The customs detective concluded resignedly that *Luna*’s high speed made it impossible to commandeer the vessel: “Had I had at my disposal a sufficiently fast vessel as well as the necessary weaponry, the smugglers’ vessel would of course have been seized.”⁸ According to the customs detective, better technological equipment in order to prevent the dissolution of the nation’s borders and thereby the morals was needed. The customs detective was not alone in calling attention to the authorities’ sluggishness at sea and the smugglers’ speediness. In another report for example, the speed of the smugglers’ boats was in focus. It was concluded that transports from depot vessels “are made by motorboats which reach high speeds.”⁹ It was not unusual either for the smugglers’ speed boats to be called “liquor racers”. The denomination strengthens the impression of the authorities perceiving the smugglers as extraordinarily fast, making the question of speed interesting as an element in border practices.

Acceleration has, according to cultural sociologist John Tomlinson (2007) amongst others, been a characteristic of modernity. Even if modernity should not be perceived as synonymous with the



Ill. 1: The notorious smuggler Ernst Bremer managed to escape on several occasions and his speedy racers, such as *Kätthe* above, gave him an iconic status during the 1920s and 1930s. (Photo: Tullmuseum, Stockholm)

nineteenth or twentieth century, yet the feeling of acceleration was intensified in the decades around 1900. A number of modern transportation and communication technologies such as railroad, telegraph, telephone, car and bicycle were developed around the turn of the century. Obviously trains and the telegraph had been in use for some time, but now these systems were extended simultaneously as new systems appeared and thus changed society. Faraway places suddenly were within reach (Kern [1983]2003: 111). This in turn made it possible for new groups of people to transgress borders in new ways. As a consequence, the historian Stephen Kern argues, a cult of speed grew among a generation that wanted to conquer time and space ([1983]2003: 111). As mentioned earlier, Paul Virilio uses the vector as a concept in order to understand this development. The vector is understood as a “transporter of speed” ([1989]1996: 54) which, to the extent that the speed increases, gives rise to new patterns of action and communities. The vector can take the form of cars and boats that continuously accelerate the transport of human beings, objects and information (Handberg 1996: 10). Vectors that favour higher speeds and new patterns of movement can represent an alluring future, but can also create anxiety. Since modernity and the cult of speed is linked to transformations, uncertainty is created; when “all that is solid melts into air,” a need for security and safety arises (cf. Berman 1990). With a departure in this understanding of vectors a question has to be asked: Why did the customs detectives have to hire the steam-driven tugboat *Hurtig* in order to secure the border instead of using Swedish customs vessels? To answer this question, we need to return to the turn of the century.

“To Move Hastily” or Not – the Permeable Border

In 1902 a state inquiry was conducted which amongst other things assessed the Swedish customs’ equipment and found that it was rather traditional: “For patrols at sea, in general larger or smaller customs yachts and other customs sailing vessels (...) even rowing boats are used” (1902: 163).¹⁰ There were

however exceptions, in Haparanda customs district in the most northern part of Sweden “patrolling is performed with steam vessels.” This had started in the summer of 1900 in order to more effectively patrol the district’s lengthy and sparsely populated coast (1902: 163). The inquiry also dealt with the question of whether rowing and sailing should be abandoned altogether in favour of the faster steam power.

The Swedish Customs Administration argued that steam vessels were a superior technology as they, regardless of the weather, quite easily would “be able to move hastily.” But, certain stretches of coast were shallow and therefore the deep-going steam vessels rapidly lost their advantages. The Swedish Customs Administration was therefore hesitant towards an increased usage of steam-powered vessels (1902: 164).¹¹ As smuggling seemed to be on the increase in Stockholm’s archipelago, steam vessels could be tried out in this area but with caution: “For this reason the committee has found the question deserves closer investigation, however, the change must have the character of an experiment” (1902: 166). It is not unusual that uncertainty arises when a new technological system is introduced (cf. Marvin 1998) and the authorities’ hesitant stance would characterise the discussions on this technological equipment in the following decades.

In 1914 a commission was set up with the purpose of investigating the customs’ and the coast guards’ organisation. At that time the coastal areas were patrolled by boats that achieved higher speeds than had been the case at the turn of the century, but they were still regarded as slow since it had become common with motorboats in coastal traffic. The commission therefore suggested that fast, so-called customs yachts should be used (1917: 13, 24).¹² The customs yachts would, in order to reconnect with Virilio ([1989]1996: 54), become a vector that compressed time and space and created preconditions for the surveillance of the national territory and borders. Still, the Swedish Customs Administration hesitated. According to them only five customs yachts should be purchased and these would first be tried out in two districts (1920: 127).¹³ Once again, a



Ill. 2: In the beginning of the twentieth century, the Swedish Coast Guard primarily used “slow” technologies such as small sailboats. Although the situation changed gradually during the 1920s, they still had to chase the smugglers with rather slow, unmodern technologies. (Photo: 1907, Tullmuseum, Stockholm)

cautious experimental activity can be discerned in the authorities’ attitude to modern technologies and higher speeds.

The discussions on higher speeds continued for some years and were also concerned with psychological warfare. In a debate in the parliament the Director of the Finance Department, F.V. Thorsson, claimed that high speeds were more important than ever since the smugglers had “moved on to using vessels that reached much higher speeds than 14 knots” (quoted in *Lanternan* no. 16, 1922). For that reason Thorsson pleaded that faster moving customs cutters must be ordered. It was thought that the bare knowledge that the coast guards used new, fast vessels would make the smugglers more

hesitant. The same train of thought was taken up by yet another speaker during the debate: “It is obvious that the knowledge that the state has possession of fast moving vessels in order to keep pursuing the smugglers must be, in itself, a deterrent” (quoted in *Lanternan* no. 16, 1922). The speakers touched upon a basic foundation in warfare. The arms’ race after the Second World War can serve as an example. A prominent element in warfare is the opportunity to influence the feelings of the enemy, which was evident in nuclear weapons policies. The plain knowledge that an attack with nuclear weapons would lead to massive retribution should have a deterring effect (Virilio [1984]1996: 6–7). After yet another period of debates, parliament agreed to order six customs

cutters, but there was a delay until the 1930s before the boat materials had been modernised and speed at sea had increased. Thus, the borders of the 1920s were indeed permeable even though the authorities tried to stabilise them.

The Car – Speedy Transports and Status

The smugglers did not only move speedily at sea but also on the Swedish main roads. In police interrogations, investigations and written communication, a pattern emerges: The car created preconditions for effective, speedy transport of alcohol from major towns in the south of Sweden, such as Malmö and Helsingborg, to smaller communities in the vicinity, but also to more distant cities such as Gothenburg and Stockholm. In 1934, the alcohol police unit in Malmö conducted an investigation regarding this illegal traffic, “as to whether Danish citizen Gaarden Jensen at some time in the past was a passenger in a hearse travelling through the police district of Finja parish.” According to witnesses the “hearse had been black in colour and equipped with corner pillars but otherwise open.” Inside there had been a “yellow coffin on which a wreath had been placed.” The same car had been observed on the streets of Hässleholm and it had been “driven exceedingly fast and to a great extent recklessly.”¹⁴ In reports like this the smugglers appear as speed merchants, or to quote Virilio, *dromomaniacs*, who have been blinded by the opportunity to drive speedily. The term was used by Virilio in a discussion of the Nazis’ taking over public space in Germany in the 1930s. The opportunity to drive around in fast cars made the Nazis into “agents of terror” ([1977]2006: 45). Of course the smugglers, as far as is known, had no such political motive but the term can be said to ring in the Swedish authorities’ view of their rampaging border practices. The car acted as a projectile, which penetrated national borders and moral boundaries. But the car was also an important symbol.

The car was one important technology among others in a wave of modernism that swept over the Western world at the beginning of the twentieth century. After the First World War, the import of cars to Sweden increased and it was above all

American cars that were attractive. The American car was, according to Tom O’Dell, closely connected to dreams of freedom, escape and social as well as geographical mobility (1997: 114–122, 138). Even if the car became more common during the first decades of the twentieth century, it was a technology that was coupled with the upper class (Ingmarsson 2004: 25–27). The car’s coupling to modernity and freedom, but also the upper class and luxury, was doubtless of importance to the smugglers. In 1923 customs detective Asp sent word that two smugglers had been arrested in Malmö and that a “7-seat automobile of the make Hupmobile” had been confiscated. The car’s value was considerable, 4,400 Swedish crowns,¹⁵ and the import of the Hupmobile did not occur until some years later (Ingmarsson 2004: 80). In other words, the smugglers had bought a car that was expensive and unusual. It appears as paradoxical that they chose to drive a car which probably attracted attention, but as mentioned, the car was an important symbol and it is likely that the smugglers had been influenced by the dreams that surrounded this specific make of car: “A Hupmobile becomes a little more than just a car (...) He’ll act! Give you fact after fact, not in words but in deeds, in bullet speeds and ‘Big Bertha’ power!” The quote is from a flier for a somewhat later model but it is obvious that the car should represent powerfulness, strength and high speeds, which was repeated in adverts for other models: “But even more striking is this car’s ability to flash ahead of traffic with lightning speed.” A similar message is found in the adverts for the American cars that were used by some of the central figures in smuggling, Edvin Jönsson and the above-mentioned Niels Carl Gaarden Jensen.

Jönsson and Gaarden Jensen regularly exchanged cars, sometimes with very short time intervals. In the beginning of 1929, they bought an “automobile of the make Anderson.”¹⁶ Anderson was a popular make at this time. In the adverts for the different models of this make of car its “power and speed” are emphasised but it was also a car that signaled status: “It is a car you will be proud to park at the golf links or club.” Apart from this feature, the car’s dependability was highlighted as an important character-

istic: “Yet it is a car for business too, and in dense traffic, or when there is an appointment to be kept, it will serve you faithfully and dependably.” If one wanted to be certain of arriving at a destination and with a businessman’s punctuality then this was the car one should choose. Two days later Jönsson and Jensen replaced this car with a Chandler. In November a second hand Ford was purchased and the next month a “transport automobile of the make Chevrolet.” In the same month, yet another car was bought, this time a Chrysler: “Jönsson had herewith paid 300 [Swedish] crowns in cash and as part exchange handed in a second-hand automobile of the make Willys Knight.”¹⁷ Similar to many other makes of cars, Chrysler wanted to represent speed. In one advert speed was emphasised in the following way: “It flashes in and out of traffic, nimbly outdistancing

the fastest and the finest.” Thus, the symbolic value of the car should not be underestimated, nor should the symbolic value of speed.

The cultural sociologist John Tomlinson claims that high speed, from a historical perspective, is associated with positive values such as success, wealth, vitality, energy, intelligence and being dynamic (Tomlinson 2007: 3–4). Therefore, in the time of Prohibition in the USA it was not unusual that the gangsters – not least those who came from environments characterised by poverty and social misery – regarded expensive, fast cars as kinds of trophies (Gorn [2009]2011: 171). The historian David E. Ruth argues in a similar vein in an analysis of how the gangster became “a paragon of technological modernity” as he used fast cars (and modern machine guns) (Ruth 1996: 53). It can thus be reasonable to



Ill. 3: Feverish car chases were not unusual. Sometimes they ended in horrible, fatal accidents due to high speeds and poor roads. (Photo: 1925, Tullmuseum, Stockholm)

presume that cars not only offered smugglers a means to transport alcohol over larger geographical areas in a short space of time, but also status. Driving American cars is in itself to be regarded as a border practice stating: I am different, modern and cosmopolitan. It was however not only the smugglers who seemed to be in the grip of a need for speed at this time.

Confiscation and Spike Strips – Stabilising the Border

In order to prevent the illegal border practice the police regularly confiscated the smugglers' vessels and vehicles. In a written communication to the Swedish Customs Administration from the police officer John Nilsson the following information was given.

Herewith through confiscation and the informant's claims an automobile of the make Dodge with the registration mark M12797 is handed in with approximately 50 litres of alcohol illegally brought into the country contained in three 10 litre tin cans, as well as three suitcases, in which the cans have been placed.¹⁸

The confiscated cars (yet also boats and goods) were a self-evident part of a compensation system, which was to be found within both the customs and the police force. Police officers who seized goods had the right to one third of the worth that the items were valued at. Within the alcohol police unit, individual officers could thus make a substantial profit as the right to one third of both alcohol and cars as well as one third of fines was theirs (Andersson 2001: 316, 320). But the confiscation system also created competition between the customs and the police, which made collaboration more difficult. They did not freely share information and sometimes anonymous informants directed both of them to the same border area which left other sections of the border ungarded (Blomberg 1968: 136).

The seizures meant the disarming of the smugglers in both a symbolic and a factual meaning. They were deprived of access to fast technologies and symbols of success, modernity and perhaps freedom. The confiscations were, expressed in a different way,

important elements in stabilising the borders. A precondition for the seizures was that it was possible to stop the speedboats, and, as we have seen, this was not an easy task. The same goes for the cars.

In October 1921, the coast guard in a smallish coastal town had confiscated a car that transported 200 litres of alcohol. A day or so before the seizure some "suspicious persons" had been observed and for this reason, the surveillance of the main road had been tightened up. After a while, a car with no lights had been spotted and the customs officers had to intervene. In order to stop the car, the local coast guard's supervisor called out to the driver but to no effect: "The speed rather increased than decreased" (*Lanternan* no. 10, 1921). The increase in speed meant that the car went through a metamorphism – from simple transport technology to the projectile that regularly and repeatedly was described in the advert material for the cars of the 1920s. Vectors with higher speed is, as a rule, more efficient and terrifying (Virilio [1989]1996), and the supervisor decided to use his revolver.

A blank warning shot was fired but was not able to hinder the car. When a sharp shot was fired, that caused a hole in the car's body and roof, (...) the chauffeur hit the brakes and gave up the game. (*Lanternan* no. 10, 1921)

Shots fired at sea were not unusual in connection with hunts for alcohol smugglers, but occurred in connection with car chases too. The shots were fired with the purpose of paralysing the driver and thereby stopping the car. As has been mentioned previously, warfare is characterised by a will to paralyse the enemy by terrifying them and this was a war against smuggling.

Firing shots could, however, result in increased speeds rather than lower ones. This was something that amongst others a customs detective in southern Sweden had noted. In a letter to the Coast Guard Director in Malmö, the detective told of vessels and vehicles that refused to obey the "stop signals". In order to deal with the threat other strategies were suggested and used.

The National Committee against Illegal Alcohol Trade (Rikskommittén mot den olagliga smuglingen) presented a proposal of using spike strips. Such beds of nails would, the committee argued, effectively stop the speeding smugglers in their modern cars.¹⁹ The customs detective was doubtful about this suggestion: "That the use of spike strips would lead to catastrophes and outrageous mistakes is obvious." A risk existed that the use of spike strips could put innocent road-users in danger.

The spike strip demonstrates a paradox in what Virilio calls the dromocratic development. The infrastructural planning has aimed at evening out irregularities in the terrain; tunnels have been dug through mountains and under waterways; bridges have been built over valleys; and crooked roads have been straightened out with the aim of transporting people and goods more quickly (1997: 79–81, 84). Similar tendencies can be seen in Sweden during the 1920s. Concurrently with the car becoming more common there were demands for straighter, more even and more hardwearing roads that would make higher speeds possible. But, Virilio points out, at the same time as state authorities around the world have acted for quicker, friction-free traffic flows, new obstacles have been "invented": "Thus, everywhere, the mobile mass's vehicular power is repressed and reduced, from limits on speed or fuel to the pure and simple suppression of the personal auto" (Virilio [1977] 2006: 141). There is, on the one hand, a will to homogenise the road surface and on the other hand a need to keep irregularities in order to create friction and the preconditions for lower speeds. I have discussed similar processes in the border zone where cars cross the border between Denmark and Sweden (cf. Nilsson 2010): Speed bumps simulate natural irregularities in the road at the same time as they perform or materialise the border. In a similar manner the spike strip of the 1920s simulated both natural irregularities in the road and on the border. When cars were used as a kind of barricade, they can be regarded as a simulation of dams in waterways. In April 1926, Gaarden Jensen had attempted to smuggle alcohol into Scania.

As he was on his way to receive the alcohol, he was stopped on the road by a couple of customs officers, who had placed a couple of cars directly across the road to stop his car from continuing. Gaarden Jensen however had jumped out of the car and by running off had got away.²⁰

The authorities did not only try to stop the smugglers' cars; it happened that they themselves used cars. But, as in the case of faster vessels, it was not self-evident if, or how, this modern technology should be utilised in order to stabilise the border.

The Car – "a Trial Appliance"

In several written communications to the Swedish Customs Administration a chief of one of southern Sweden's coast guard districts described the problematic situation. The chief concluded that the war against smuggling had moved from sea to land. The smugglers' ability to bring alcohol ashore made it impossible to hinder them at sea, so therefore the battle took place on Swedish soil. The border was to be protected or stabilised on *terra firma*. As was apparent above, the smugglers had more or less adopted the car in their activities as it offered fast transport over relatively large areas, but the district chief took a watchful stand when faced with this new technology. In 1927, he considered the possibility of "patrolling the roads along the coast with one automobile". But purchasing a car was not of immediate interest; instead the local supervisor in a coastal area should be persuaded to use his own car when on duty. If the smuggling traffic were to change he could consider "taking this question under perusal once again."²¹ He was not convinced that the car could be of real use, but this watchful attitude would change.

In a report written later the same year, the chief reiterates about the local supervisors' car and in a balanced enthusiastic manner concludes that: "On a couple of occasions the automobile in question has been utilised during awaited attempts at smuggling."²² Starting out from experiences, he pleaded for a continued use, against reimbursement, of this private vehicle. The next year, 1928, the situation changed even more. The number of cars employed

on customs' duties in the district had been doubled and the chief applied for funds for this seemingly revolutionary move: "This measure is to be regarded as a kind of trial device and has only come into use on occasions when first-hand information has been involved in smuggling attempts."²³ Yet again, a cautious attitude comes to light; using modern technology in order to stabilise the border was difficult to relate to. In the inquiries that were conducted at this time, the car is in no way self-evident. This hesitation must be related to the discussion regarding the authorities' equipment and the discussion on savings that were ongoing at this time.

"Automobiles should not, in any Scenario, be allowed to be Used"

According to the 1914 Customs Commission (1914 års tullkommission), cars had become more common in society and this made the investigators reflect upon their use within the customs: "Automobiles should

not, in any scenario, be allowed to be used for coast guard duties. They are too expensive to purchase and to maintain and can tempt to misuse" (1917: 26). The commission was tainted by its assignment, as the assignment was to suggest a reorganisation, which would entail lower costs. But their perception of the car was also influenced by the stiff opposition towards the car that was present in society. The car and motorism were considered as dangerous and a threat; others meant that the car mainly was a toy for the upper class. There were yet others who pointed out that the car made too much noise and that it was a pleasure machine "meant for sport and competitions" (Ingmarsson 2004: 12). If the coast guard was equipped with cars there was, according to the Commission, a risk that they would use the cars in an irresponsible way (1917: 26). Naturally, the Swedish Customs Administration brought up the question of the car's place in the organisation and they took an equally hesitant stance towards the use of cars (1920: 112).

With hindsight, one could banter about the insecurity that the car gave rise to, but the past did not have the answers at hand. In this light, it is therefore not particularly strange that the Swedish Customs Administration hesitated. Besides, there was a similar insecurity within other organisations at this time. For example, it was not until 1915 that the Swedish military realised that the car had a strategic value and it took yet another couple of years before the car was a self-evident part of the army (Nerén 1937: 430–434). It was not only in Sweden that the authorities hesitated. In the USA, the police's technical equipment – particularly outside the big cities – was not as modern as that of the criminals (Gorn [2009]2011: 33).

The cautious attitude that the Swedish Customs Administration advocated successively gave rise to yet more stiff criticism from the customs and coast guards, but during the 1920s, the car remained a rare technology in the stabilisation of borders and the war against alcohol smuggling. The smugglers in comparison seemed exceedingly modern, or even hypermodern, as they almost invisibly transcended borders.



Ill. 4: The bicycle was a rather quiet, fast and, compared to cars, cheap technology. Here, the local coast guard in the small village of Domsten in the 1930s. (Photo: Tullmuseum, Stockholm)

“Hypermodern Tools”

In connection with an attempted smuggling on the southern coast of Scania in 1929, it was shown that the alcohol smugglers could communicate rapidly over great distances with the help of another modern technology. One of Sweden’s major newspapers reported: “The whole day the racer had been hindered by the customs’ vessels from getting close to the mother ship [Herkules] which had a radio on board and was hidden somewhere far out in the Baltic Sea.”²⁴ It was no coincidence that the radio was mentioned in the article.

One decade earlier radio communication had become an important part of shipping, but far from all vessels had this equipment on board. When the technology was developed, the interests of the navy were in the foreground, and these were further strengthened during the First World War when wireless telegraphy was an important means of communication. Now it was possible to correct the movements of the vessel even if there were great distances between units, but this development was infested with problems. Communications were performed with Morse code which required trained and competent personnel (Keegan [1998]2006: 278). As special equipment and special competences were demanded, the Swedish merchant navy awaited further developments for a long period of time. Only 47 Swedish vessels had a radio on board in 1913 and of these 31 belonged to the navy. Radio communication would remain a relatively undeveloped area during the 1920s (Heimbürger 1974: 340–343, 593–597) making the radio on board *Herkules* important to mention. It was even more remarkable that a radio was to be found on board the *Herkules* since it was a technology closely connected with the navy.²⁵ The smugglers’ radio communication was perceived as something exceptional and dangerous.

At some time during the year 1935, a hand-written letter was sent to Police Superintendent Ernst Wessman. The letter writer was Johanna Nilsson, a teacher in the small coastal town of Kivik.

Since I suspect that my abode, the preschool teacher’s abode in Kivik, was used as a signal station for

a gang of smugglers I wish to hereby advise you of this. I comprehend neither radio nor radio equipment, yet I believe that some sort of such equipment is to be found. In one place there has been some damage where I think fingerprints could be found. If my suspicions are correct then this gang must surely belong to a widespread organisation that works with the most hypermodern tools. If therefore an investigation is undertaken, it should take place without too much delay.²⁶

It is not apparent if Nilsson had found a radio hidden in the house or not, but obviously she was afraid of this “hypermodern” technology used by the smugglers to transcend borders. Their use of modern technologies contributed to the fascination mingled with terror that surrounded them, but their border practices rested on other foundations as well.

Well Organised and Well Informed

The large amount of alcohol that has been smuggled in and confiscated during the past months bears witness to unusual audacity. The names of the persons involved and their social status underlines the perception of organised smuggling, which even for a longer period of time has been flourishing without protests. (*Lanternan* no. 18, 1920)

Lanternan published articles that dealt with different aspects of the illegal alcohol trade. They focused, as shown earlier, on speed and technology, but also on organisation as such: The smugglers were portrayed as dangerously well organised. Similar opinions were expressed by the previously mentioned Association against Smuggling (*Sammanslutningen för smuglingens bekämpande*). A report published by them informed the reader of what had happened as a large car had been stopped in the town of Malmö. Guards had been placed so that the police could not surprise them and then “boxes of alcohol were taken from the car and bottles and cans were noted down on a list kept by a man in a raincoat” (Bergvall 1927: 49). The man in the raincoat checked the goods almost with the zeal of a bookkeeper or store foreman.

The impression of smuggling being a well-organised enterprise was also connected to the smugglers access to important information.

A letter to the chief of the nineteenth coast guard district informed him that the motor vessel *Nena* had arrived in Klagshamn. On board was amongst others J.P. Jensen who was employed by a ships' chandler in Copenhagen and therefore very familiar with the work of the customs: "[Jensen] is very familiar with the Danish customs officers and their work (...) as well as having good knowledge of the Danish customs vessels' movements, the times they were in dock for repairs etcetera, as well as being acquainted with Jörgen Hansen on the 'Lübeck'."²⁷ It is not apparent how Jensen had acquired knowledge of the activities of the customs, but it is plausible that he through his work in the ships' chandlers had a network that provided him with information. Jörgen Hansen is not unimportant either in this context. Hansen's network and capacity for collecting information had almost mythical features and could even surprise customs officers who had infiltrated his activities.

Jörgen Hansen's principal strength however lies in his having at his disposal a widespread reporting system both in Germany and Sweden. Thus, for example, Hansen could tell me the positions of the different posts with an accuracy that surpassed my own knowledge in that way.²⁸

Resigned and at the same time impressed the customs detective pointed out that "nothing concerning our coast guards was unknown to Hansen."²⁹ It seems as if the border practices of the smugglers were impossible to stop, the border remained porous and there was a lack of inertia.

Concluding Remarks on Borders, Speed and Inertia

As modern technologies were introduced at the turn of the twentieth century, a cult of speed, as well as new border practices, emerged. Places that had previously been far away, suddenly felt reachable, and some borders transformed from barriers to mere

thresholds. The alcohol smugglers of the 1920s were affected by these transformations, and so were the early ethnologists.

Cultural borders were understood as consequences of nature, history, political agreements and economy, but also as products of everyday life, habits and traditions. Besides, borders were perceived as regulators of flows, making border landscapes inert, although not impermeable. Modernity and speed, though, challenged inertia and the idea of stable borders. According to early ethnologists such as Sigurd Erixon, the cultural borders of traditional society withered away as modern, fast communications were established. Similar processes of destabilisation triggered a new interest in borders among ethnologists in the late twentieth century. Borders were still understood as complex consequences of economy, political agreements and social interaction. The idea of inertia also prevailed, but new elements were added. Borders were conceptualised as non-human actors, turning geography into emotionally laden national landscapes. Eventually this border concept moved one step further as speed was introduced as an important metaphor in transnational region-building. Speed as a distinct feature of border practices, however, remained unexplored. Therefore, my aim was to demonstrate how speed, as an analytical concept, can provide contemporary border studies with further insights regarding border practices and the inertia of border zones. For that reason, I applied a practice and speed-oriented border concept in an analysis of the illegal liquor traffic during the 1920s.

Using speedy motor racers, fast cars and radio, smugglers transcended national borders with ease. They traversed borders in a time when Swedish society began to recognise the consequences of what modernity could offer, and this is probably why they were perceived as hypermodern. As the national borders were de-stabilised by such illegal border practices, representatives of the state tried to re-construct inertia and hence stabilise the border. Confiscating the smugglers' racers and fast cars was one strategy used, but they also tried to stop them with the aid of spike strips and weapons. Hesitantly they even adopted high-speed technologies of mo-

dernity in order to create inertia. Thus, high velocity de-stabilise borders, but there is a parallel process of re-stabilisation and strive for inertia.

There is a need for further investigations of how speed affects processes of de- and re-bordering in contemporary Europe as well as in other parts of the world. Borders and border zones are, ideally, inert landscapes – even if some nations and transnational regions make bold rhetorical claims on fast and friction-free flows of goods, information, money and people. Travellers who challenge inertia are, nevertheless, often defined as threats, leading to border practices that encapsulate and domesticate them. Thus, we need to deepen our understanding of speed as a border practice imbued with culture, and power. Speed is intimately connected with modernity and freedom, but the distribution of speed is unevenly distributed in society. Applying historical perspectives on speed as a distinct feature of border practices can provide us with more knowledge concerning such asymmetries.

Notes

- 1 Not all fast-moving travellers are defined as problems though; when the president of the USA visit different countries, speed is “required” in order to keep him safe. He moves fast on and off Air Force 1, and just as quickly to and from foreign airports.
- 2 Early ethnologists’ seemingly naïve perspective on diffusion was heavily criticised in the 1960s and 1970s as the so-called new ethnology emerged. The older generation, it was said, did not pay any attention to the social context (Bringéus [1976]1990: 44, 93). But perhaps Erixon, and his colleagues, were dismissed a bit too easily.
- 3 Similar ideas inspired Anders Linde-Laursen in his doctoral thesis (1995). Linde-Laursen studied how the political border between Denmark and Sweden, agreed upon in the seventeenth century, gradually turned into a cultural border. He was intrigued by a border that appeared in different social contexts or situations, such as kitchen habits and the everyday practice of doing the dishes.
- 4 This border perspective would eventually become more prominent and a quick glance into the rather important text book *Kulturanalys* (Ehn & Löfgren 1982) can serve as an example of this change. In *Kulturanalys*, borders are briefly touched upon and mainly treated as mental maps. In the sequel, *Kulturanalyser* (Ehn & Löfgren 2001), the border concept was elaborated defining borders as “cultural signal systems” that acted upon people as they reminded them of differences, endings and starting points (2001: 56). Cultural analysis should therefore focus on borders that “are visible and become dominant in different contexts” (2001: 55).
- 5 Speed as a metaphor was of paramount importance in the invocation of the Öresund Region (Nilsson 1999).
- 6 Report, December 24, 1923: Rickard Bengtssons tull-historiska samling, vol. 40, Malmö stadsarkiv.
- 7 Report, December 24, 1923: Rickard Bengtssons tull-historiska samling, vol. 40, Malmö stadsarkiv.
- 8 Report, December 24, 1923: Rickard Bengtssons tull-historiska samling, vol. 40, Malmö stadsarkiv.
- 9 Spritpolisens anteckningar m.m. år 1935. Landsarkivet Lund.
- 10 Underdånigt betänkande afgifvet den 29 oktober 1902 af komitén för granskning af Tullverkets stater. 1. Betänkande och förslag. Stockholm: K.L. Bergmans boktryckeri.
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- 12 1914 års tullkommissions betänkanden 1917: I. *Förslag till omorganisation av tullverkets kust- och gränsbevakning*. Stockholm: K.L. Beckmans Boktryckeri.
- 13 Generaltullstyrelsens underdåniga utlåtanden över 1914 års tullkommissions betänkanden. 1 (A) 1920: Utlåtande över förslaget till omorganisation av Tullverkets kustbevakning. Stockholm: Isaac Marcus Boktryckeri Aktiebolag.
- 14 June 5, 1934: Spritpolisen i Malmö. Inkomna skrivelser. 1934, A: 1.
- 15 Report, October 24, 1924: Rickard Bengtssons tullhistoriska samling, vol. 40, Malmö stadsarkiv.
- 16 Report, January 22, 1930: Kungliga generaltullstyrelsen II, Kanslibyrån, E3:13.
- 17 January 22, 1930: Kungliga generaltullstyrelsen II, Kanslibyrån, E3:13.
- 18 October 27, 1930: Kungliga generaltullstyrelsen II, Kanslibyrån, E3:13.
- 19 Kerwing’s letters to the head of the Coast Guard in Malmö, November 8, 1932. Rickard Bengtssons tullhistoriska samling, vol. 40, Malmö stadsarkiv.
- 20 The story was printed in one of the major newspapers in Sweden (*Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, SDS, February 2, 1930).
- 21 Borgs skrivelser till Kungliga Generaltullstyrelsen i Stockholm. Landsarkivet, Lund.
- 22 Borgs skrivelser till Kungliga Generaltullstyrelsen i Stockholm. Landsarkivet, Lund.
- 23 Borgs skrivelser till Kungliga Generaltullstyrelsen i Stockholm. Landsarkivet, Lund.
- 24 The story was published in *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, SDS, May 16, 1929.

- 25 New technology is often used for reasons the inventors or the state authorities had not foreseen nor desired (Andersson-Skog 1998: 277).
- 26 Spritpolisens anteckningar m.m. år 1935. Landsarkivet Lund.
- 27 Tullkammarens i Helsingborg arkiv –1981. Ämnesordnade handlingar, huvudserie, 1920–1930, F1:4. Landsarkivet Lund. Tullförvaltare B. Borgs hemliga handlingar rörande spritsmugglingsärenden omkr. 1920–1930. Rapporter, förhörsprotokoll m.m. Smuggelfartyg Saml. 1.
- 28 Rickard Bengtssons tullhistoriska samling, vol. 42, Malmö stadsarkiv.
- 29 Rickard Bengtssons tullhistoriska samling, vol. 42, Malmö stadsarkiv.

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