The UK border security continuum: virtual biopolitics and the simulation of the sovereign ban[†]

Nick Vaughan-Williams
Department of Politics, Amory Building, Rennes Drive, University of Exeter, Exeter EX4 4RJ,
England; e-mail: N.Vaughan-Williams@Exeter.ac.uk
Received 3 November 2008; in revised form 21 October 2009; published online 26 April 2010

Abstract. This paper analyses the emergence of the UK's new border security doctrine. It argues that the vision of the UK border being put forward is not one that corresponds to conventional under-standings of what and where borders are in contemporary political life. Rather, the UK border is increasingly projected overseas and across UK territory, ever more invisible, electronic, and mobile through the use of sophisticated identity management technologies and is based on principles of preemption. In search of critical resources appropriate to the analysis of these practices, I draw on the work of Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, and Jean Baudrillard and argue that the UK case is symptomatic of broader attempts to simulate the effect of security in the West.

Introduction
Within one month of his accession to the UK premiership on 27 June 2007, and in the aftermath of the bungled attack on Glasgow airport, Gordon Brown announced a series of measures designed to "increase national security and combat the threat of international terrorism" (Brown, 2007). At the heart of Brown's first statement on security was the notion of *three lines of defence* around the UK: the first located *overseas* "so that terrorist suspects can be identified and stopped before they board planes, trains and boats to the United Kingdom"; the second to be found at the *main points of entry* on UK territory where "biometric technologies are already in place" and a "new unified border force will be in operation"; and the third more diffused *throughout the UK* "to help prevent people already in the country using multiple identities for terrorist, criminal or other purposes" (Brown, 2007).

The commitment to enhanced border control as a central tenet of UK homeland security policy was underlined in the 2007 UK Borders Act, the 2008 National Security Strategy, and the 2009 Strategy for Countering International Terrorism. Furthermore, in April 2008 the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) was established, which currently employs 25 000 personnel across 135 states (Cabinet Office, 2009, page 79). Within its first year of operation the UKBA's £1.2 billion 'e-Borders' programme searched more than 400 000 pieces of freight, checked more than 90 million passenger movements in and out of the UK, and collected 4 million sets of fingerprints at a cost of 14p per passenger (Cabinet Office, 2009, page 79). Indeed, such is the scale of the activity, investment, and rhetoric that a new age of UK border security seems to have been created: "The UK Border Agency… is currently delivering the biggest shake-up of border security and the immigration system in a generation" (Cabinet Office, 2009, page 97).

Yet, though Brown's premiership has witnessed a feverish push towards heightened border security, this emphasis represents a continuation of, rather than a departure

---

[†] Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the 2nd Annual WISC Conference, Ljubljana, July 2008; the Critical Geopolitics Conference, University of Durham, September 2008; the BISA Annual Conference, University of Exeter, December 2008; the ISA Annual Convention, New York, February, 2009; and Queen's University Belfast, October 2009.

from, the Blair years in government. Indeed, the primacy given to the development of UK border security can be traced back to the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001. Within six months of the attacks, for example, the Home Office released a white paper on migration and border control, *Secure Borders, Safe Haven* (Home Office, 2002), in which a high-tech, integrated, and flexible approach to the UK border was outlined. Added impetus was given to UK border security in the wake of the bombings in Bali, Istanbul, Madrid, London, and subsequent reports of thwarted attacks internationally (Cabinet Office, 2007, page 7). In December 2006 a Home Office white paper was published, the *Borders, Immigration, and Identity Action Plan*; this marked the first of several documents announcing radical changes to the UK border (Cabinet Office, 2007; Home Office, 2007).

In *Securing the UK Border*, for example, two models of 'the border' are presented: a traditional "single staffed physical frontier, where travellers show paper-based identity documents", and a *new border doctrine* fit to deal with "the step change in mobility that globalisation has brought to our country" (Home Office, 2007, page 3). The main factor prompting the need for the new doctrine, "exponential growth in global movement", is presented as potentially both a good and bad phenomenon for the UK (Home Office, 2007, page 2). On the one hand, it is said to "bring great opportunity", such as the contribution of those working legally to GDP (page 2). On the other hand, it is claimed that the scale of global mobility "creates new challenges", including identity fraud, illegal immigration, organised crime, and international terrorism (Home Office, 2007, page 2). On this basis, it is argued that an approach which balances economic prosperity with security imperatives is required: "The goal is to find the optimal relation between an appropriate degree of security, and the free flow of people and goods" (Cabinet Office, 2007, page 28). As such, the aim of the new doctrine is to simultaneously deter 'risky' subjects (potential fraudsters, illegal immigrants, criminals, or terrorists) while welcoming in trusted subjects (business people, tourists, 'bona fide' asylum seekers, legal economic migrants): "The aim of border control is to sort traffic into legitimate and non-legitimate and maximise the effort directed against movements that would, without action by the state, be detrimental to the UK, while minimising the burden on those that would not" (Cabinet Office, 2007, page 48). Thus, rather than operating simply as a 'barrier' or obstacle in the physical sense of a wall, "the border at work" here is one that seeks to *enhance* mobility, circulation, and flow.

The aim of this paper is to examine the vision of what and where the UK border is according to the new doctrine. It begins by tracing moves to transform the UK's border from a static, physical frontier located at ports, airports, and other traditional sites of border control on UK territory to a more electronic, invisible, and impalpable "global network of border security" (Home Office, 2006, page 11). The discussion draws on a range of official documentation produced by the Cabinet Office, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Home Office, together with data collected from presentations given by companies providing border solutions to the UK government at the 2008 and 2009 Homeland and Border Security Conference in Westminster. It proceeds by identifying three key characteristics of the vision for UK border security: the 'offshoring' of the border away from UK territory, the reliance on technologically advanced forms of identity management, and an increasingly preemptive logic based on risk profiling. From here the analysis explores how transformations in the UK border challenge conventional notions of what and where borders are in contemporary political life. The paper then examines the prospects of two alternative paradigms—the biopolitical and the virtual—for developing border thinking beyond the confines of the modern geopolitical imagination.

Offshore security

Throughout the various documents outlining the UK's new border doctrine are multiple references to the need to 'offshore' bordering practices:

> "Border control can no longer be a fixed line on a map. Using new technologies ... we must create a new offshore line of defence" (Home Office, 2007, page 2).

> "The aim is to create a new offshore line of defence to check individuals as far from the UK as possible and through each part of their journey" (Cabinet Office, 2007, page 31).

> "We want to extend the concept of exporting our borders around the world" (Home Office, 2006, page 11).

The concept of 'offshore' bordering, though not unique to the UK context, has come to underpin the government's approach to 'security in a global hub'.[1] Central to this concept is the notion that by the time 'risky' subjects have arrived at traditional border crossings on UK territory, such as ports and airports, it is simply too late. Rather, the stated innovation is to take the border to the perceived locus of threat before 'it' departs for the UK in the first place.

In one sense, there is quite literally an 'exporting' of the border so that it is physically transported to territory overseas through 'juxtaposed controls' whereby the UK monitors mobility in other states and vice versa. For example, since 2001 the UK has taken its border to sites in Boulogne, Brussels, Calais, Coquelles, Dunkerque, Frethun, Lille, and Paris in order "to detect and deter potential clandestine illegal immigrants before they are able to set foot on UK soil, fundamentally altering the way the UK operates at its border" (Cabinet Office, 2007, page 38). In addition to traditional forms of border control reliant on paper documentation, new technologies such as carbon dioxide probes, X-ray scanners, heart-beat sensors, and heat detectors have been rolled out in order to detect the illegal entry of people concealed in freight (Cabinet Office, 2007, page 38).

In another sense, offshore bordering also relates to other forms of control on movement that are increasingly not related to territory in any straightforward way and rather that are more electronic, invisible, and ephemeral. These practices enable the expansion of UK border operations beyond reciprocal ventures with fellow EU member states. Indeed, one of the main objectives of the new UKBA is to reach beyond Europe in an attempt to 'globalise' the UK's border (Home Office, 2006, page 11). In this context we find the development of a global network of overseas border security advisors such as Airline Liaison Officers (ALOs). The role of ALOs, of whom there are currently fifty-five working across thirty-two states worldwide, is to work with local intelligence and law-enforcement agencies to "detect and deter inadequately documented passengers" (Cabinet Office, 2007, page 38). Another dimension of offshore bordering practices that complicates the traditional relation between borders and territory is the implementation of the new 'e-Borders programme'. This initiative, which involves data capture prior to travel and analysis undertaken at the new Joint e-Borders Operations Centre, aims to literally count 'most foreign nationals' in and out of the UK.[2]

---

[1] There are obvious parallels between the offshoring of the UK border and US Homeland Security initiatives and the activities of the new EU border management agency FRONTEX. I have written about the latter elsewhere (see Vaughan-Williams, 2008).

[2] Presentation by Tom Dowdall, Director, European Operations Border Force, at the Homeland and Border Security 08 conference. For further information on the e-Borders Programme, see http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/managingborders/technology/eborders/.

While older forms of border control continue at conventional points of entry across UK territory, the new border doctrine implies a shift in thinking in government and policy-making arenas about what and where 'the border' *should be* in an increasingly 'interdependent world' (Cabinet Office, 2008). Indeed, the offshore projection of the UK's border is interesting precisely because it complicates commonsensical geopolitical notions about the location of borders as well as conventional understandings of the distinctions between inside and outside, domestic and international, and so on. Although, as I shall go on to argue, such offshoring does not necessarily eradicate these distinctions, these practices do challenge the prevalent assumption in the modern geopolitical imagination that states' borders are coterminous with their territorial limits.

Identity management

A further characteristic of the UK's new border security doctrine is a particular focus on risk-based identity management:

> "We want ... to fix people's identities at the earliest point practicable, checking them through each stage of their journey, identifying those presenting a risk and stopping them coming to the UK" (Home Office, 2007, page 3).

> "Our work to strengthen our borders and related work on the National Identity Scheme will also help in disrupting terrorist travel and restricting the use of false and multiple identities by terrorists" (Cabinet Office, 2008, page 27).

> "The National Identity Scheme will provide a secure way to safeguard personal identities from misuse, and will 'lock' a person's biographic information to their unique facial and fingerprint biometrics on a National Identity" (Home Office, 2009, page 107).

Whereas paper-based passports and visas allow for identity fraud and the use of false aliases, it is argued that new forms of biometrics "lock applicants into an identity at the earliest possible point in their journey, allowing authorities to track more easily their previous and future dealings with the UK" (Cabinet Office, 2007, pages 32–33). By checking biometric data against immigration and asylum databases, it is then possible to both cross reference back to any previous application and discover histories of criminality to refuse travel (Cabinet Office, 2007, page 33). Such data are defined as "information about external characteristics" and can include fingerprinting and features of the iris or any part of the eye (UK Borders Act, 2007, page 10). Importantly, while these systems are designed in part to deter some travellers deemed to be illegitimate, they perform a double function in terms of easing the journey of trusted others. 'Project Iris', for example, is a biometrically controlled automated border entry system that enables preregistered passengers to "proceed through automated gates at the border rather than queuing to present their passport to an officer at the control" (Cabinet Office, 2007, page 42).[3]

The development of identity capture and management systems has relied heavily on private enterprise and investment. With a step change in both the intensity and scope of border security measures, new business opportunities have emerged around homeland defence creating a multimillion-pound industry. Contracts for designing and delivering the technological infrastructure necessary for the UK government's border transformation programme were put out for tender in 2007 and have been won by global multinational corporations such as BT, Thales, Detica, and Raytheon.[4]

[3] For further information on Project Iris, see http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/managingborders/technology/iris/

[4] These observations and those that follow about the relation between border security and corporate enterprise are based on my experience as a delegate at the recent conference Homeland and Border Security 08: Working Together, Securing the Nation, 3 July 2008, QEII Conference Centre, London.

For example, the defence firm Thales International has developed second-generation digital identity technologies designed to supersede current paper-based documentation.[5] Whereas the latter is based on a static capture of physical identity typically valid for only ten years and reliant on trust, the former provides continuously updated forms of identity capture using biometry and cryptography. The identity life cycle of the citizen is reflected in the life cycle of the identity smartcards, which automatically register changes in physical appearance and status (eg if someone has married, divorced, or had children) and enable continually evolving 'live histories' of the subject.

Detica, a UK-based digital intelligence company, has designed an identity management system, NetReveal, able to discover different entities (people, places, vehicles, phones, etc) and relationships between them over time. Historical behaviour is contrasted with current behaviour, and high-risk changes are identified to alert the system operative to a potential threat. A map of activities, such as financial transactions, web bookings, and travel histories, can be compiled using billions of records from different agencies in order to build up a dynamic profile of individuals or groups. The stated aim of the NetReveal software is to allow data to 'drive' the analysis in order to render networks of activity more visible than they would otherwise be due to the sheer volume of data. Applying this system to border security means that "groups of related identities can be identified, correlated with known threats, and intercepted at the border before the threat can enter the country" (Detica, 2009, page 4).

What is clear is that the concept of identity is absolutely central to both government and corporate visions of the new UK border doctrine. The common approach, however, is not one that sees entities as having a single, fixed, static identity reducible to an immutable physical core. Rather, there is a more sophisticated understanding of the contingency, instability, and fundamental heterogeneity of identities at work, which is recognised as necessitating a far more multifaceted and dynamic response. In this way the evolving 'live history' of the Thales smartcard takes as its starting point the constant becoming of the subject. Indeed, according to Paul Fenton, Business Development Director of Thales, the pertinent question is not 'What is identity?' but rather 'How is identity being used'?

Preemption

Emphasis given to identity management and the offshoring of bordering practices points to the emergence of a broader principle that has come to underpin the UK's new border doctrine: that of preemption. The 'traditional border philosophy' relied on the identification of threats at a single flash point lasting for only one or two minutes at ports, airports, and other conventional border crossings. This approach to border management has been criticised precisely for not acting early enough to prevent the 'wrong' sort of travellers to the UK: "it can be too late—they have achieved their goal in reaching our shores" (Home Office, 2007, page 3). By contrast, as we have already considered, the vision for the new UK border doctrine is one that involves prior intervention before perceived threats depart for the UK in the first place (Home Office, 2007).

The five foundations for the new doctrine, as outlined in *Security in a Global Hub*, are: (1) act early, (2) target activity, (3) manage bottlenecks, (4) maximise depth and breadth of protection, and (5) reassure and deter (Cabinet Office, 2007). The attempt to prevent 'risky' subjects from embarking on their journey to the UK relates explicitly to the first of these foundations: "the most effective...way of addressing risks to the UK is to identify those movements which present a threat and to stop or control them

before they reach the UK" (Cabinet Office, 2007, page 9). As per Brown's "Statement on security", preemptive bordering precisely constitutes the first 'ring of defence' envisaged by the UK government (Home Office, 2006, page 6).

On this basis, preemption involves gathering information and identifying risk before travel begins: "The earlier that risk is identified and can be acted on, the greater the chance of it being successfully resolved, and the less it usually costs to do so" (Cabinet Office, 2007, page 48). Moreover, innovations in biometric forms of data capture, together with the rolling out of the new e-Borders Programme, are also designed to use deterrence as a form of preemption: "In addition to the opportunities to collect data and intervene, border controls represent an important opportunity to deter criminality" (Cabinet Office, 2007, page 53). Although it is recognised that the effectiveness of deterrence of this kind is difficult to measure, it is nevertheless considered to be just as (if not more) important than more formal methods of bordering: "Border controls should ... strike a balance between actions to improve the effectiveness behind the scenes—such as information and intelligence sharing leading to targeted activity—and actions that provide a visible presence at certain key locations" (Cabinet Office, 2007, page 54).

The principle of preemption also connects with the second of the five foundations above since the targeting of activity involves the prior construction of risk profiles out of "a single pool of information about suspect identities and risky individuals" (Cabinet Office, 2007, page 48). Yet, while official documentation makes frequent reference to the importance of 'intelligence-led risk management', it remains unclear precisely on what grounds an individual or group is deemed 'risky' under the new border doctrine. Indeed, the criteria on which decisions about the legitimacy of travellers are made are not available to the public and few clues are given in the policy literature. On the one hand, assurances have been made that the level of harm posed by individuals will be determined by 'reliable' forms of intelligence: "Our ultimate vision is to use intelligence, risk assessment and analysis to apply scrutiny based on individual risk *rather than nationality*" (Home Office, 2007, page 9, emphasis added). On the other hand, there is a problematic presumption that those from inside the European Economic Area (EEA) are somehow more likely to be low-risk 'trusted travellers' than non-EEA nationals (Home Office, 2006, page 11; 2007, page 5).

Perhaps more significant is the scope for prejudice based on perception and mere suspicion alone. One method of data collection for the purposes of risk profiling is simply "the way things look and people behave" (Cabinet Office, 2007, page 50). As has already been examined in different contexts, the concern is that this sort of generalised suspicion translates all too easily into racialised modes of perception in the context of the global 'war on terror' (Amoore, 2007; Butler, 2004; Pugliese, 2006). Further still, although perhaps decisions need to be made about the legitimacy of not only certain travellers but also services and goods in circulation, an approach based upon risk profiling and suspicion alone raises significant ethical–political questions.

A mode of preemption based upon racialised stereotyping and/or algorithmic logics eliminates decision making about individual cases. Such a move has the obvious advantage of speed, which is seen as vital to the 'customer experience' of those deemed to be legitimate (Cabinet Office, 2007, page 55). Nevertheless, it marks a significant departure from slower evidence-based practices that build nuanced pictures and lead to judgments on a case-by-case basis. Instead, attempts are made at calculating the future through generalised and bureaucratic methods of data capture and analysis. This depoliticisation of the circumstances under which people travelling to the UK are risk assessed, categorised, and treated is, of course, itself a highly political move, albeit one buried beneath the seemingly neutral language of technocratic and commercial practices.

The UK border as a security continuum

The vision of border security outlined in the UK's new doctrine is one that elongates, temporally and spatially, what we commonly understand to be the border. This elongation is referred to by Adam Isles, CEO of Raytheon, in terms of a *border security continuum* from departure overseas, to arrival on UK territory, to in-country stay management, to departure, and finally to postdeparture.[6] As we have already seen, the stretching of the UK border has a distinct temporal dimension in the sense that attempts are being made to extend the reach of control into the future via preemptive security practices; spatially, the border is increasingly projected globally beyond the territorial limits of the UK via offshore practices. Yet, in another sense, the border is also being projected *internally throughout UK territory* in ways that connect with practices at traditional flashpoints and overseas locations to form a security continuum.

Some of the technologies of control composing the inner-ring of UK defence, such as hotel registers, social security data, and the use of identity documents for non-EU citizens, are prominent and familiar in the UK and elsewhere (Walters, 2002). Others, for example the nationwide network of detention centres for those seeking asylum, are again not a new phenomenon but are largely hidden from the public gaze (Darling, 2009). In addition to these practices, however, are a range of newly developed extensions of the border reflecting what Isles refers to as forms of "in-country stay management". Thus, Raytheon conducts border surveillance for the UK government by monitoring suspicious individuals via analysis of online activity using social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Another example of stay management includes controversial new immigration rules that effectively turn universities into border sites as staff are called to be on the look-out for patterns of suspicious activity among international students.

Thinking the UK border in terms of a security continuum challenges a number of assumptions about what and where borders are according to the modern geopolitical imagination. Instead of viewing the border as a fixed control on movement located at the outer edge of the state the border security continuum is decentred and diffused across a global terrain. Bordering practices, such as those offshore preemptive modes of identity management characterising the UK's new border doctrine, no longer correspond only to thin 'lines in the sand' as depicted on Mercator's map. Rather, there is a spatial and temporal *thickness* to borders, which belies the 'line' metaphor and calls for new ways of thinking about the striation of space.

Moreover, though it is popular to think about the border as an 'exceptional' site in global politics (Doty, 2007), the UK border security continuum also works in part by precisely permeating everyday life. Thus, 'good' citizens are enjoined to be on the look-out for 'suspicious individuals' not only in public spaces such as the airport, railway station, or shopping centre but also among their neighbours at home (Vaughan-Williams, 2008). As a consequence of this banalisation of the border, while UKBA personnel formally police strategic flashpoints, ordinary citizens are increasingly involved as agents of various types of 'borderwork' (Rumford, 2008).

Further still, as we have seen, the particular conception of 'the border' at work in the UK is not one that is simply about preventing flows of movement. The vision of the UK border security continuum bears more resemblance to a virtual firewall than a wall in the traditional sense (Walters, 2006). That is to say, the primary objective of the new UK border doctrine is not simply to stop movement as would a physical impermeable barrier. On the contrary, as the Project Iris initiative indicates, the aim is to facilitate faster, more efficient, and comfortable customer experiences for trusted liberal subjects whose movement the economy depends on.

[6] All references to Raytheon are based on a presentation given by Adam Isles and Martyn Dawkes at the 2009 GovNet Homeland and Border Security conference.

These challenges pose conceptual and methodological problems for the interdisciplinary study of borders in global politics. Indeed, the main puzzle, as I see it, is how to develop border thinking apposite to the analysis of developments in contemporary border-security practices without reverting the territorialist epistemology and ontological trap of the modern geopolitical imagination (Agnew, 1994; Lapid, 2001; Parker and Vaughan-Williams, 2009). What follows, therefore, is an exploration of two alternative registers—the biopolitical and the virtual—that I argue offer innovative critical resources for examining what is at stake in the new UK border doctrine and broader dynamics of global security relations.

The virtual biopolitics of border security

In *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* Michel Foucault (1978) refers to the process by which biological life (*zoē*) has become included within the modalities of state power (*bios*) as the transition from politics to 'biopolitics'. As is well known, biopolitics is the term used by Foucault to describe the emergence during the 17th century of attempts to govern populations through the institutionalisation of medicine, the use of vaccinations, and other methods of curing and preventing disease. Foucault's argument is that, whereas for Aristotle life and politics are treated as separate, biopolitics calls into question the idea of life itself: "modern man is an animal whose politics calls his existence as a living being into question" (Foucault, 1978, page 188). For Foucault, the entry of *zoē* into *bios* constitutes a fundamental shift in the relation between politics and life, where the simple fact of life is no longer excluded from political calculations and mechanisms but resides at the heart of modern politics.

With the emergence of biopolitical technology to optimise human life as a state of life, Foucault argues that sovereignty is constituted no longer by the ability to decide over life and death but by the ability to "make live and let die" (Foucault, 2003, page 241). According to this reconfiguration, sovereign power not so much disciplines as regularises life: a "technology which aims to achieve a sort of homeostasis, not by training individuals, but by achieving an overall equilibrium that protects the security of the whole from internal dangers" (Foucault, 2003, page 249). Furthermore, whereas disciplinary practices structure space by isolating, concentrating, and enclosing bodies in order to enable some form of control over them, biopolitical apparatuses of security work precisely by allowing circulation, flow, and movement, in order to govern mobile populations in an increasingly expansive space. In this way, Foucault writes: "we see the emergence of a completely different problem that is no longer that of fixing and demarcating the territory but that of allowing circulations to take place, of controlling them, sifting the good and the bad, ensuring that things are always in movement, constantly moving around, continually going from one point to another, but in such a way that the inherent dangers of this circulation are cancelled out" (2003, page 65).

The move Foucault identifies from disciplinary to biopolitical practices is in many respects reflected in the step-change in the vision for the UK border. The 'old border philosophy'—predicated on a single physical frontier located at a fixed site designed to hinder movement—structured space by enclosing bodies within a given territory. By contrast, as we have already seen, the new UK border doctrine resembles more of a biopolitical apparatus of security in its mobility and enhancement of liberal subjects' movement. Yet, although Foucault's diagnosis of the spatiality of biopolitics resonates with the UK border security continuum, it arguably fails to grasp the way in which these are essentially sovereign practices that put lives in habitual jeopardy. A focus on the productive relation between politics and life excludes an appreciation of how the border security continuum leads to forceful incarceration, torture, and even execution. It is for this reason that Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben seeks a different form of biopolitical analysis

to that of Foucault: one that brings sovereign relations and thanatopolitics, or the politics of death, back into the analysis (Coleman and Grove, 2009).

Whereas Foucault reads the movement from politics to biopolitics as a historical *transformation* involving the inclusion of *zoē* in the *polis*, for Giorgio Agamben the political realm is *originally biopolitical*. On Agamben's view, the West's conception of politics has always been biopolitical, but the nature of the relation between politics and life has become even more visible in the context of the modern state and its sovereign practices (Agamben, 1998, page 6). For Agamben, and contra Foucault, the activity of the biopolitical machine is inherently linked with sovereignty, specifically a sovereign decision about whether certain forms of life are worthy of living. Such a decision produces an expendable form of life banned from conventional juridical – political structures that Agamben refers to throughout his work as 'bare life'. This form of life is the subject of practices of securitisation whose exceptionality defines the normality of the politically qualified life of the citizen—a life that is secured by sovereign power in order to secure itself. Under conditions whereby security has become the normal technique of government, however, Agamben has (in)famously argued that "we are all *virtually* homines sacri" (1998, page 111).

A fuller exegesis of Foucault and Agamben, and a commentary on the nature of the relation between the two, is beyond the scope of this paper.[7] Furthermore, I recognise that there are potentially many major problems with Agamben's work, particularly in respect of his treatment of subjectivity (Butler, 2004) and the sovereign exception (Connolly, 2004; Prozorov, 2005). Despite these problems, however, there is an interesting spatial dimension to Agamben's thought that is otherwise relatively overlooked in the literature. Notable exceptions in this context are, of course, Claudio Minca (2005; 2006; 2007), who has examined the spatial ontology of Agamben's use of concepts such as the ban and the camp, and Eyal Weizman (2007) who has analysed the global archipelago of spaces of exception in which bare life is (re)produced. Elsewhere, I have sought to contribute to this literature by considering how Agamben's oeuvre prompts a reconsideration of the spatial limits of sovereign power in terms of a "generalised biopolitical border" (Vaughan-Williams, 2008; 2009a; 2009b). What I want to consider in greater depth here, however, are the spatial dimensions of Agamben's claim that "we are all *virtually* homines sacri" (1998, page 111). To do so, it is first necessary to comment on the concept of the 'virtual' in Agamben's controversial formulation, which, despite being prominent in one of his central theses, remains remarkably uncommented upon.

According to Jean Baudrillard, the verb 'to simulate' means "to feign to have what one doesn't have" (1994, page 3). For Baudrillard, however, simulation is not the same as merely 'pretending'. He illustrates this point by quoting Littré: "whoever fakes an illness can simply stay in bed and make everyone believe he is ill. Whoever simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms" (page 3). The order of 'pretending' leaves some notion of 'reality' intact, whereas, Baudrillard claims, "simulation threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false', the 'real' and the 'imaginary'" (page 3). Baudrillard argues that, if once we knew something of the 'true' or the 'real', today all we have are simulacra, or 'reality-effects', and simulacra of simulacra (page 1). It is not then that reality is somehow being 'masked' by practices of simulation but that 'the real' can only be understood as a form of 'hyperreality' without an origin or ground (page 1). Consequently, the 'real' cannot be taken as a pure, stable, foundation; it is always already 'hyper-real', or what Baudrillard refers to as belonging to the realm of the 'virtual'.

[7] For more on this theme see Ojakangas (2005) and Coleman and Grove (2009).

In *Simulation and Simulacrum* (1994) Baudrillard expands his diagnosis of the virtual conditions of contemporary political life with reference to the growing omnipotence of security. He argues that a "hyper-model of security" has emerged: "a universal lock-up and control system whose deterrent effect is not at all aimed at an atomic clash ... but, rather, at the much greater probability of any real event, of anything that would be an event in the general system and upset its balance" (page 33). Central to the pursuit of 'maximum security' is the notion of deterrence and the idea that "nothing can be left to contingencies" (page 34). Indeed, such is the extent of deterrence, according to Baudrillard, that security has now come to "encompass the entire social field" and "virtually ... all social relations" (pages 61 – 62).

While Baudrillard's insights were written against the specific backdrop of the collapse of détente and the beginning of a new phase in Cold War history, I want to suggest that they resonate with current global security relations and are potentially helpful, especially when read alongside Agamben's account of biopolitics, for an analysis of the dynamics expressed in the vision of the UK border security continuum. In his reading of Baudrillard, François Debrix refers to the way in which the intensity of simulation is intrinsically bound up with contemporary security practices:

"The totality of simulation systems in transpolitical configurations is such that a virtual auto-immunization of Western societies from all sorts of anticipated risks and dangers provides a complete semblance of security" (page 51).

According to Debrix, this 'simulated overprotection' relates to the West's desire to expunge "death, evil, or the radically other" from its global political systems in order to make "all reality look, feel, and be good" (Debrix, 2009, pages 51 – 52). Thus, for example, contemporary Western security policies work within an ever-expansive understanding of what and where the 'homeland' is: a paradigm of virtual security 'obsessive' about "producing positive effects" ('democracy', 'freedom', 'human rights') (pages 51 – 52). On this view, despite the fact that the above logic continually breaks down, what is more significant about the paradigm of the virtual is the equally constant attempts at simulating the *effects* of total security.

For Michael Dillon 'security' can be understood as "a kind of life science" (2003, page 533). This is because biopolitical security apparatuses first require knowledge of 'life' if they are to succeed in securing it. Within the context of a desire to simulate the effects of total security, there is no room for any form of life to escape such knowledge:

"Life that remains not knowable, unknown or intractable to knowing for whatever reason—it might be a form of life that simply does not show up on the radars of knowing in acceptable ways, or, as an excess of being over apprehension, it may simply not be knowable in principle—is the ultimate danger" (page 533).

It is precisely for this reason, Dillon argues, that security must produce bare life as a form of life that is amenable to its sway. Agamben's disturbing prognosis that "we are all *virtually* homines sacri" thus offers a clue about the problematisation of life intrinsic to the paradigm of virtual security: one that, as Dillon puts it, 'knows' living things "as contoured by a virtual potential, specifically the potential to become dangerous" (page 537). Central to this notion of security is the production of knowledge about the becoming-dangerous of some risky subjects through algorithmic models of risk management based on the profiling of populations:

"Security becomes a boundless science of the very engendering of mutating form and of the tracking of the virtual potential for what are now essentially conceived as bodies-in-formation in the process of becoming dangerous" (page 538).

Moreover, in the context of the simulation of total security, where everything is potentially dangerous and nothing is safe, there is no *telos* to this project: "security has gone virtual through the ways in which the virtual is being widely scripted

in terms of an infinity of dangerous being" (page 541). On this basis, practices of identity management and preemption associated with the UK border security continuum can be read precisely as new virtual cartographies of total knowledge and vision, which seek to identify and root out uncertainties about who or what might pose a threat.

Returning to Agamben, one might say that virtual biopolitical border security practices pursue the objective of maximum security through the simulation of the space–time of the ban.[8] Following this line of interpretation, Agamben's diagnosis is highly suggestive of a new kind of *nomos* of the earth *à la* Carl Schmitt's classical formulation: one that reveals a far more complex and less spatially/temporally fixed relation between juridical–political order and spatial orientation.[9] As hinted at in Agamben's italicised use of the word 'virtual', this reworked *nomos* is simulated throughout everyday life in such a way that potentially emplaces us all under conditions of considerable uncertainty. On this reading, the sovereign decision to produce some life as bare life is not one that necessarily happens literally at specific points in space and time (though there may be instances where this logic might be revealed by, or perhaps used for particular political purposes to interpret, a given event). Rather, in the order of the virtual as described by Baudrillard, this decision can be reread as a far more generalised and reiterative process in the attempt to simulate total security. If what emerges from Agamben's diagnosis appears to be a 'totalizing vision of sovereign space' it is precisely because this is the vision that animates the project of virtual security (Coleman and Grove, 2009).

Adopting a Baudrillardian reading, it is misguided to pursue questions about whether this or that event or situation 'is' or 'is not' a more or less 'true' or 'accurate' instantiation of Agamben's *Homo Sacer* thesis. The simulation of the ban integral to the security and (re)production of sovereign power means that, for example, debates about whether we can empirically say person x or y has 'become bare life' are ultimately somewhat missing the point. Such a line of enquiry assumes that the line between the politically qualified life of the citizen on the one hand and the bare life of *Homo Sacer* on the other is far more stable than Agamben implies. More importantly, the viewpoint from which this sort of enquiry would be possible reflects a mode of thinking that is *outside* the logic of virtuality and therefore blinkered to the ways in which the sovereign ban operates via a logic of simulation.

Conclusion

This paper began with an exploration of the UK's new border security doctrine as it has been presented in a variety of official documents produced by the Cabinet Office, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Home Office. Three key characteristics of this doctrine were identified and investigated: the move to an offshore UK border thousands of miles away from UK territory, the increased emphasis on identity management using new biometric technologies, and the principle of preemption that has emerged as the basis for border security. It was suggested that, instead of a fixed territorial site at the outer edge of the state, the vision of the border at work is one that reflects a continuum of security practices with distinctive spatial and temporal dimensions. In search of critical resources apposite for the study of these border imaginaries, the analysis turned to the work of Foucault, Agamben, and Baudrillard.

Foucault's notion of biopolitics was shown to offer an important starting point in analysing the spatial characteristics of the UK border security continuum. Agamben's engagement with Foucault, however, particularly in respect of his reintroduction of sovereignty and thanatopolitics, was found to be more incisive as far as the ability to engage with the biopolitics of bordering practices is concerned. Drawing on Baudrillard, I then examined the virtual dimensions of Agamben's thesis; I argued the UK border security continuum is symptomatic of broader attempts in the West to simulate the effect of total security via a biopolitical logic of the ban.

On the one hand, clearly the old border philosophy against which the 'new' UK doctrine has been outlined is not quite dead and buried yet. We still have paper-based passports, and there are many traditional territorial divisions in global politics (as illustrated, for example, by the US – Mexico border, the UK – Ireland border, and the borderscape throughout the Middle East). Furthermore, the extent to which the practices unveiled under the banner of the new UK border security doctrine are 'new' is somewhat questionable, especially in the light of colonial histories. Indeed, when located in a broader historical context, a comparison between the new border doctrine and imperial forms of control on the movement of people, services, and goods overseas is instructive. On the other hand, while we should be attentive to these concerns (as well as the obvious political advantage in presenting the 'new' UK border security doctrine as a novel response to changing global security conditions), there are broader dynamics to which the case points. Today borders are not only territorially defined sites of control but also complex assemblages that are increasingly offshored, decentred, diffused and as mobile as the people, services, and goods they seek to control: a biopolitical threshold that is at once selective, opportunistic, and portable. Although there is perhaps nothing 'new' as regards the biopolitical logic of the practices under consideration in this article, what certainly has changed is the technological sophistication with which this logic is played out across an ever-more expansive global terrain. Both the nature and location of bordering practices has shifted fundamentally as a consequence of new technologies, and alternative forms of border thinking are required in order to identify and interrogate these practices. Thinking in terms of virtual biopolitics offers one such alternative for analysing nascent reworkings of much older methods of striating space and producing subjects amenable to control.

References
Agamben G, 1998 *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* translated by D Heller-Roazen (Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA)
Agnew J, 1994, "The territorial trap: the geographical assumptions of international relations theory" *Review of International Political Economy* **1** 53 – 80
Amoore L, 2007, "Vigilent visualities: the watchful politics of the War on Terror" *Security Dialogue* **38** 215 – 232
Baudrillard J, 1994 [1981] *Simulacra and Simulation* translated by S Faria Glasner (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI)
Brown G, 2007, "Statement on security", http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page12675.asp
Butler J, 2004 *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Verso, London)
Cabinet Office, 2007 *Security in a Global Hub: Establishing the UK's New Border Arrangements* November (The Stationery Office, London)
Cabinet Office, 2008 *The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom: Security in an Interdependent World* Cm 7291 (The Stationery Office, London)

Cabinet Office, 2009 *The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom: Update 2009. Security for the Next Generation* Cm 7590 (The Stationery Office, London)

Coleman M, Grove K, 2009, "Biopolitics, biopower, and the return of sovereignty" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **27** 489 – 507

Connolly W, 2004, "The complexity of sovereignty", in *Sovereign Lives: Power in World Politics* Eds J Edkins, V Pin-Fat, M Shapiro (Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon) pp 23 – 41

Darling J, 2009, "Becoming bare life: asylum, hospitality, and the politics of encampment" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **27** 649 – 665

Debrix F, 2009, "Baudrillard", in *Critical Theorists and International Relations* Eds J Edkins, N Vaughan-Williams (Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon) pp 54 – 65

Detica, 2009 *Secure Borders: A New Age of Data Exploitation* (Detica, London)

Dillon M, 2003, "Virtual security: a life science of (dis)order" *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* **32** 531 – 558

Doty R, 2007, "States of exception on the Mexico – US border: security, 'decisions', and civilian border patrols" *International Political Sociology* **1** 113 – 137

Foucault M, 1978 *History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction* (Random House, New York)

Foucault M, 2003 *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975 – 76* (Penguin, London)

Home Office, 2002 *Secure Borders, Safe Haven, Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain* Cm 5387 (The Stationery Office, London)

Home Office, 2006 *Borders, Immigration and Identity Action Plan: Using the National Identity Scheme to Strengthen Our Borders and Enforce Compliance within the UK* December (The Stationery Office, London)

Home Office, 2007 *Securing the UK Border: Our Vision and Strategy for the Future* March (The Stationery Office, London)

Home Office, 2009 *Pursue, Prevent, Protect, Prepare: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering International Terrorism* Cm 7547 (The Stationery Office, London)

Lapid Y, 2001, "Introduction: identities, borders, orders: nudging international relations theory in a new direction", in *Identity, Borders, Orders: Re-thinking International Relations Theory* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN) pp 1 – 21

Minca C, 2005, "The return of the camp" *Progress in Human Geography* **29** 405 – 412

Minca C, 2006, "Giorgio Agamben and the new biopolitical nomos" *Geografiska Annaler, Series B* **88** 387 – 403

Minca C, 2007, "Agamben's geographies of modernity" *Political Geography* **26** 78 – 97

Ojakangas M, 2005, "Impossible dialogue on biopower: Agamben and Foucault" *Foucault Studies* **2** 5 – 28

Parker N, Vaughan-Williams N, 2009, "Lines in the sand? Towards an agenda for critical border studies" *Geopolitics* **14** 582 – 587

Prozorov S, 2005, "X/Xs: towards a general theory of the exception" *Alternatives* **30** 81 – 112

Pugliese J, 2006, "Asymmetries of terror: visual regimes of racial profiling and the shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes in the context of the war in Iraq" *Borderlands E-Journal* **5**(1), http://www.borderlandsejournal.adelaide.edu.au/vol5no1_2006/pugliese.htm

Rumford C, 2008 *Citizens and Borderwork in Contemporary Europe* (Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon)

UK Borders Act 2007 *Public General Acts—Elizabeth II*. Chapter 30 (The Stationery Office)

Vaughan-Williams N, 2008, "Borderwork beyond inside/outside? Frontex, the citizen-detective and the War on Terror" *Space and Polity* **12** 63 – 79

Vaughan-Williams N, 2009a *Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh)

Vaughan-Williams N, 2009b, "The generalised biopolitical border? Re-conceptualising the limits of sovereign power" *Review of International Studies* **35** 729 – 749

Walters W, 2002, "Mapping Schengenland: denaturalizing the border" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **20** 561 – 580

Walters W, 2006, "Border/control" *European Journal of Social Theory* **9** 187 – 203

Weizman E, 2007, "On extraterritoriality", in *Arxipèlag d'Excepcions* Eds G Agamben et al (Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, Barcelona)