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## Ontological Security in Times of Global Transformations?

### Bureaucrats' Perceptions on Organisational Work Life and Migration

#### **Abstract**

Processes of globalisation have accelerated over the last decades with profound consequences at the individual and societal level. This paper discusses the repercussions of global changes in welfare organisations. In this context, migration is often portrayed as the main cause of the multiple insecurities caused by global transformations. It is examined how *ontological insecurity* caused by global transformations influences individuals and how these influences manifest themselves in the working life of bureaucrats. The aim is to explore how bureaucrats express themselves regarding their work with migrants and about migration in general and how we can understand these perceptions. A sample of 130 open-ended responses that were part of a nationwide survey directed towards bureaucrats from two of the main Swedish welfare institutions was analysed through systematic content analysis. The results show that bureaucrats use different identity strategies, namely, *retreatism* in the form of distancing oneself, *essentialism* in the form of resentment towards migrants, and *engagement* in the form of mutual dialogue. These strategies are used to handle uncertainties and overcome complexities not only as professionals in their work life, but also as private individuals.

Key words: Ontological security, identity strategies, migration, organisational work

Processes of globalisation have accelerated over the last decades with profound consequences at the individual and societal level. Bauman (2007) captures this development with the concept of negative globalisation. He argues that the negative consequences of globalisation are large and include growing numbers of people with no place to go, increasing inequalities, and growing difficulties for states and communities to provide a sense of collective security (Bauman, 2007; Thomson, 2016). Giddens (2006) uses the concept of *ontological security* to capture this existential dimension of feeling safe in society. Individuals increasingly perceive the present as unstable and the future as uncertain and unpredictable, which results in a feeling of loss of collective security. Laing (2010) states that being ontologically secure entails having a “sense of ... presence in the world as a real, alive, whole, and, in a temporal sense, a continuous person” (p. 39). A lack of trust and the lack of ontological security, however, result in feelings of existential anxiety and fear, one feels ontological insecure. In current political and public debates, migration is often portrayed as the main cause of such multiple insecurities. For many people migration can result in a feeling of uncertainty, a loss of stability for the individual and potentially great fear for the future of one’s own being. But migrants are also seen as a security threat and are often made the scapegoats of the consequences of global transformations. With regards to ontological insecurity, the focus of this paper is on bureaucrats and their experience of uncertainty with regards to their work with migrants.

Whereas studies into the magnitude and outcomes of migration make up an extensive research field (e.g. Castles, Haas & Miller, 2013), we find fewer studies that address how migration affects welfare agencies and especially few studies looking at bureaucrats’ experiences of the insecurity that migration is perceived to convey. Scholarly interest into migration and ontological security have thus far mostly been developed in the area of international relations (IR), e.g. to understand state behaviour in international conflicts. Scholars have also studied how individuals experience contemporary transformations and how they react towards it with different practices that help the individuals to define themselves in contrast to others, so called identity strategies (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011). Studies into public administration; i.e. studying public employees and their service delivery, have largely focused on internal organisational processes and how they shape the bureaucrats’ work (Lipsky, 2010). Yet, very few have taken into account how external processes like migration might impact both welfare organisations and the work experiences of their bureaucrats. This paper attempts to contribute to this research gap by linking the ontological security literature to the public administration one.

The overall aim of this paper is to discuss how *ontological insecurity* caused by global transformations influences individuals and how these influences manifest themselves in the working life of bureaucrats. The study analyses survey comments by bureaucrats in two Swedish welfare organisations in order to understand their perceptions of migration and their perceptions of their work with migrants. The research questions are the following: *How do bureaucrats express themselves regarding their work with migrants and regarding migration in general? How can we understand these expressions as forms of ontological insecurity addressed through various identity strategies?* Drawing on theories on ontological security, the paper analyses identity strategies bureaucrats deploy to regain a feeling of ontological security.

This theory driven understanding of experiences is motivated by what Hage (1998) calls an under-theorisation of the relationship between ‘what people think’ and ‘what they do’ in relation to attitudes towards minorities. The paper thus contributes to discussions on both bureaucrats and ontological security by explicitly addressing why bureaucrats might express resentment towards migrants when accounting for their ontological insecurity. The paper thereby provides a novel use of the ontological security perspective towards understanding organisational and professional experiences of those who experience global transformation in their work life.

## **Previous research**

The following section offers a short overview of the existing studies when it comes to bureaucrats’ attitudes towards migrants and it also shows existing studies that make use of the concept of ontological security.

Research on bureaucrats’ perceptions of migrants is conducted following different approaches. First, there exists a considerable body of qualitative research examining welfare work and migration in the Swedish context, mostly through interview studies (e.g. Johansson & Molina, 2002; Eliassi, 2017). These studies show that bureaucrats often have preconceived ideas about migrant clients and use generalised stereotypes to compensate for a lack of information, which might result in exclusionary practices. While these studies show that bureaucrats can hold negative attitudes towards migrant clients, they offer no understanding on why these perceptions occur in relation to multiple sources of insecurities.

Secondly, there is a line of research using surveys to investigate bureaucrats’ perceptions on migrants. Pitkänen & Kouki (2002) examined the attitudes of Finnish authorities towards migrants and Park et al. (2011) explored bureaucrats’ attitudes towards immigrants in the US and showed that they hold overall positive attitudes except for undocumented migrants. More recently, Schütze (2019) investigated Swedish bureaucrats’ attitudes towards migrants in a nationwide survey study showing that bureaucrats with more positive attitudes towards migrants are less likely to perceive their work with minority clients as being difficult. Thirdly, there is also an extensive body of literature examining discrimination in welfare services through experimental-design studies showing disfavoured treatments of minorities compared to their white counterparts (e.g. Grohs, Adam & Knill, 2015; Arai et al., 2016; Pedersen, Stritch & Thuesen, 2018). These quantitative studies offer confirmation and generalizations about bureaucrats’ attitudes towards migrants in different countries and confirm what the qualitative studies listed above have suggested, namely that negative attitudes towards migrants can lead to unequal treatment. While being able to show ‘what’ happens, these studies offer little understanding on ‘why’ these attitudes and related actions might occur.

When it comes to studies using the concept of ontological security, a wide range of research has emerged in the last years. Kinnvall (2004, 2006) and Kinnvall and Nesbitt–Larking (2011) have used the concept to study how rapid social transformations contribute to uncertainty and ontological anxieties for minority but also majority groups in Asia and Europe. Kinnvall and Nesbitt–Larking (2011) suggest that ontological anxieties are activated through 1) structural

and political mechanisms of exclusion 2) politics of othering and 3) assimilation. Similarly, Botterill, Hopkins and Sanghera (2019) studied young minorities everyday challenges in Scotland through the ontological security lens. They suggest that ontological insecurity is an effect of trauma young minorities have that is activated through experienced racism in their everyday life's and a fear of being targeted in public spaces and what might happen when being in contact with other people. This line of research focuses on a subjective feeling of security in order to understand fears and anxieties among individuals. Other recent publications focused on the understanding of European security (Kinnvall, Manners & Mitzen, 2018) with studies focusing on socio-psychological reactions to the '2015 EU crisis' (Alkopher, 2018) and studies focusing on uncertainty and political decision making in relation to the Greek referendum vote in 2015 (Sools et al., 2018). Relatedly, Bilgic, Gjoerv and Wilcock (2019) examined the social trust building by the state by constructing a state level narrative of 'the other' in the case of Norway. Innes (2010) and Croft (2012) contribute by examining how particular groups are constructed as a threat in the UK and how this process benefits to maintain a national (British) identity. Innes (2010) shows how asylum seekers are perceived as a homogeneous group that is portrayed as a threat in the media. Croft (2012) further demonstrates that a feeling of national belonging is important for shaping predictability and in turn ontological security. These studies offer understandings about the ontological insecurity of the general population in the European Union, of minority groups in different contexts, how states react towards seemingly 'threats' (e.g. 2015 refugee crisis) but also how national identity is important in composing ontological security structures. While this body of research offers understanding of fears and anxiety on the individual and the state level, there seems to be less focus on integrating an organisational level and for the understanding of the individuals (e.g. experiences of professionals that work with migrants). In the next section a theoretical framework is suggested that can help to understand experiences of uncertainties and of individuals working with migrants in welfare organisations.

### **Towards an analytical framework**

This section will give a short overview about the public administration literature and the concept of ontological security. Eventually, both theoretical streams will be integrated with each other to better understand bureaucrats' uncertainties regarding their work with migrants.

#### *Public administration literature*

The public administration scholarship studies organisational processes linked to service delivery to citizens by focusing on the people working in public institutions, i.e. bureaucrats. In this research field a lot of attention is paid to what happens within the organisations (Brodkin, 2013). The public administration literature deals to a large extent with implications of organizational constraints through authorities from above and its implications for interactions and services given from bureaucrats to clients (Lipsky, 2010). Hereby the influence of the market to public organisations, described through the term New Public Management (NPM) plays an important role. NPM trends are for example characterised by standardisation of production and amplification of control mechanisms (Andersson et al., 2012). To capture bureaucrats' working life and its challenges in relation to NPM, Seim (2017) suggests

conceptualising bureaucratic labour processes as a “two-dimensional field of struggle” in order to combine vertical and horizontal conditions (p. 452). On a horizontal level, bureaucrats struggle over the distribution of work and act in reference to each other as well as to their clients. Along the horizontal lines, organizational constraints can be related to NPM strategies that are characterized through for example, performance measurement and administrative burden, i.e. ‘being buried under paper’, where outcomes are linked to administrative rules and performance indicators (Sandfort, 2000). This horizontal control affects the self-identity of the bureaucrats and their sense of security (Brown, 2000). Moreover, control exercised by monitoring one’s work can cause feelings of vulnerability and a sense of loss of control and can increase levels of anxiety and stress. On a vertical level, the bureaucrats are influenced by the way the state governs the welfare institutions – vertical constraints appear as hardened internal bureaucracy linked to hardened rules and regulations. In that way, bureaucrats act in reference to managers, rules and routines and other pressures from above and they struggle with those in charge of controlling and managing their labor. Along the vertical lines, organisational constraints can also be related to pressure or workload that might lead to unjust service decisions due to limited time spent with the client and limited time available to make thorough decisions, which might result in frustration (Jewell & Glaser, 2006; Ryu et al., 2012).

I suggest that experienced uncertainties and anxieties of bureaucrats and responses to them due to societal and organisational challenges can be understood through an ontological security lens. In the following I will introduce the ontological security lens further and its related identity strategies that individuals employ as responses to uncertainties.

### *Ontological security*

Ontological security, an emotional phenomenon, was coined by the psychiatrist Laing (1990/2010) and then further developed by the sociologist Giddens (2006). Laing (1990/2010) used the concept of ontological security to understand the mental illnesses of his patients whereas Giddens (2006) developed a more general approach to understand anxieties in contemporary societies. Croft (2012) categorizes that ontological security is used and developed 1) by Laing to understand an individual level, 2) by Giddens for a sociological perspective and 3) by Mitzen<sup>1</sup> for the national/international level mostly used in the IR literature.

Giddens (2006) explains the consequences of contemporary societies where taken-for-granted protective structures in one’s own community have fallen apart, traditions have changed within a larger context – not always, but often triggered by distant events – and the individual is left alone without a sense of security or the tools needed to navigate through this new environment. This leads to a general anxiety that threatens one’s sense of security or the basic trust ‘in the world’ that conditions the development of self-identity. Croft (2012) explains, drawing on Giddens, that the ontological secure individual has trust in its everyday life and the world surrounding it with no fear of its current form changing. Everyday routines are thereby shaping the individual’s ontological security. Yet, even well-functioning routines can be disturbed by what Croft (2012) calls “critical situations” that threaten the acquired ontological

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Mitzen (2018)

security (p. 25).

Along these lines, Giddens (2006) claims that to sustain one's basic trust and identity, individuals carry what he calls the 'protective cocoon'. He explains that children receive emotional boosts from their caretakers that allows them to have trust in the world and to uphold something like a defence shield that they carry around throughout life to draw on when faced with challenges or difficulties. A rapidly changing external environment makes it more and more difficult however to sustain this defence shield. This is an individual mechanism of protection. The universal welfare state and its organisations have functioned as a 'collective protective cocoon', i.e. a societal mechanism of protection. The universal welfare state provides security in people's lives through universally available services such as basic education, child and elderly care but also social welfare programs (Rothstein, 1998). Therefore, one might adapt Giddens's (2006) concept of the 'protective cocoon' from the individual mechanism of protection to a societal mechanism of protection provided by the universal welfare state and its organisations through social security providing trust in the system of the nation state and therefore a feeling of safety<sup>2</sup>. This stands for a collective social dimension of security in people's lives that offers consistency and coherence. It offers thereby a sense of shared community which generates a shared identity and thereby offers security (Innes 2010). As a reaction to uncertainties and existential anxiety individuals might respond through different identity strategies that help them to cope, which are discussed in the next section.

#### *Identity Strategies as a tool to deal with uncertainties and existential anxiety*

Kinnvall and Nesbitt–Larking (2011) propose that individuals, in their attempts to secure their sense of self when responding to uncertainties, develop three types of identity strategies – *retreatism*, *essentialism*, and *engagement*. These strategies are “conditioned yet open and changeable practices under which people come to define themselves and their social groups in contradistinction to others” (p. 21). To this point, researchers have often used these concepts to study practices under which minority group members define themselves in relation to majority group members. I mean that these strategies can also be used to understand how bureaucrats respond to structural transformations inside and outside their work as well as responses to work with diversified clientele.

*Retreatism* as an identity strategy is characterised by 'looking inward', avoiding engagement, and distancing oneself. This strategy could be linked to Laing's (2010) form of anxiety 'engulfment' that is characterised by isolation due to the fear of loss of self-identity. In this way, mechanisms of isolation help to counteract anxieties, and this 'survival strategy' also creates a feeling of safety (Ashman & Gibson, 2010).

The identity strategy of *essentialism* is also developed in order to secure the subjectivity of individuals who are experiencing ontological insecurity. Through reorientation, when feeling rootless, the strategy of 'homesteading' provides a feeling of being safe and is a way to handle insecurity and reduce complexities and contradictions in one's life. Anchoring, attaching oneself to what is known, is also a way to deal with feelings of alienation. It also includes claims

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<sup>2</sup> This feeling of collective safety can be applied for universal welfare states, like Sweden, where the national identity is shaped by the welfare state but might be less applicable to less decommodified and more socially stratified welfare states.

of exclusive categories for the self and the perceived 'other'. Here, exclusion might be expressed through open resentment towards migrants. Anti-immigration sentiments are often justified and related to different threats associated to migrants (e.g. Turper, 2016; Hellwig & Sinno, 2016). By alienating migrants into an 'outgroup' one strengthens the identity of the imagined 'in-group' (Innes 2010). Along those lines, welfare institutions and social relations are defined in national terms (Skey, 2010). National identity operates as a source of comfort and as part of sustaining the 'protective cocoon'. National identity offers a reliable source to make sense of the world and to position oneself in relation to 'others' (Skey, 2019; Croft, 2012; Kinnvall & Nesbitt – Larking, 2011; Innes 2010).

In contrast to the essentialist strategy, the strategy of *engagement* offers an approach based on communication and dialogue between majority and minority members. Hereby free agency and valuing individual freedom are crucial requirements when communicating with each other. By engaging, one deals with differences through negotiation, collaboration, mutual trust, and openness towards the other group. On a structural level, it is the expressed need for multiculturalism that characterises a strategy of engagement (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011).

### *Integrating ontological security into the public administration literature*

By integrating understandings of uncertainties and existential anxieties of bureaucrats due to ontological insecurity linked to organisational but also societal transformations, a more comprehensive analysis of understanding bureaucrats' expressions towards their work life and work with migrants can be developed. In doing so, the above presented identity strategies serve as a main focus of understanding. In the public administration literature, three forms of coping are proposed in order to handle organisational constraints, namely moving away from clients by avoiding interactions with them, moving towards clients by adjusting to clients' needs, and moving against clients (Tummers et al., 2015). While these have served well for studies in public administration and welfare bureaucracy, I argue that focusing on coping mechanism in form of identity strategies found in the ontological security literature while attending to the specifications of organisational processes offered by the administration literature offers a more complex understanding of bureaucrats uncertainties in their work life. For instance, the study by Ashman and Gibson (2010) links ontological security to organisational processes. They argue that organisational changes based on NPM and the increasing pressures on bureaucrats create ontological insecurity that can for example be related to increasing rates of mental health problems in the workplace. Moreover, such negative feelings might be drivers of negative attitudes and practices. Other drivers of negative attitudes could be macro-ideological discourses like the current anti-immigration narrative that contributes to increased levels of ontological insecurity for society at large as well as bureaucrats (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011). Moreover, bureaucrats' anxiety caused by management control and increased monitoring might be coped with through the strategy of *retreatism* in the form of distancing and avoiding engagement in client situations. Increased workload might also be coped with through strategies of *retreatism* that help to sustain a sense of safety, but this might result in lower service quality. Overall, the demands at the workplace result in concerns about protecting the 'self' that can be identified as apathy and emotional disengagement from others, or as



“techniques of emotional self-management” in order to sustain emotional equilibrium (Lash, 1984, p.58). Steele (2017) adds to these contributions with a study that explores the role of narratives in organisations, combining Ontological Security Theory (OST) and organisational process models to suggest that organisations shape the ontological security of states. Through organisational processes, state narratives are influenced, and uncertainties and threats are challenged but also conditioned. Steele (2017) not only discusses the interplay between organisations and states but also how individuals, as agents of organisations, are shaped in their acting through organisational structures and routines. The importance of organizational routines and habits that foster a sense of self is also highlighted. Boucaut (2001) appends by suggesting that professionals in organisations are socialised into routines and that an interruption in usual routines can cause disturbance in one’s ontological security. Hereby, the work with migrants might pose some kind of disturbance to one’s usual way of work reflecting the national self and constitutes thereby an additional burden. One can summarise increased anxiety for bureaucrats due to 1) a general negative migration discourse, 2) NPM and 3) uncertainty in work with migrants. Here, experiencing performance pressure due to mechanisms of NPM might be conveyed into feeling that anxieties arising in the work with migrants are causing ontological anxieties. Meaning, migrants are blamed for the anxieties resulting from performance pressure.

In the following I will introduce the empirical context before presenting the methods and then show the results where the two different research fields have been integrated.

## **Empirical context**

### *The Swedish Case – Migration & Welfare Institutions*

Until recently, Sweden was known as one of the most welcoming countries when it comes to receiving refugees, also known as ‘Swedish exceptionalism’ (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011; Emilsson, 2018). However, the year 2015 marked a drastic change for Sweden’s progressive migration discourse. The country experienced a short period of a substantially increased inflow of migration due to increased numbers of asylum seekers, which was the largest increase in Europe (Connor & Krogstad, 2016). Yet, this short migration inflow changed the conversation in Sweden from perceiving immigration as something positive to a more negative discourse towards immigration.

Welfare institutions offer coverage and assistance for the entire population, including migrants who have the right to reside in Sweden. Within this system, the Public Employment Service (PES) and Swedish Social Insurance Agency (SSIA) constitute two of the largest agencies with regard to providing the Swedish population with benefits and welfare services of different kinds. The PES has the overall mandate to give assistance to unemployed people. It has the full responsibility to work with newly arrived refugees who have a residence permit<sup>3</sup> and to provide them with sufficient training and competence to enter the Swedish labour market through the so-called ‘establishment programme’. The SSIA has the purpose to provide financial security at the various stages of life for everyone who lives or works in Sweden. This primarily includes benefits and allowances for families with children, people who are ill, and

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<sup>3</sup> This also includes refugees with a temporary resident permit (PES 2017).

people with disabilities, but also the disbursement of the benefits to the clients who participate in PES's programmes (Mathias, 2017; SSIA, 2017).

## **Methods**

### *Sample*

This study is based on a web survey<sup>4</sup> directed at bureaucrats at the PES and SSIA. The PES and SSIA together have approximately 14,000 employees and offices throughout the country. About 50% of all the employees are members of a Swedish union that served as the sampling frame in order to access the target population of bureaucrats at the PES and SSIA (Buskirk, 2014). The web survey was administered to a random sample of 6,650 workers at the PES and SSIA between October and November 2016. A total of 1,617 respondents answered the questionnaire. The survey included questions about one's workplace and work environment, attitudes towards diversity in Swede, attitudes towards immigrants and some demographic questions. The data this paper is based on are the responses to the final survey question, "Do you have any other thoughts or comments regarding your work and/or migration in Sweden?" In total, 158 people responded to this question. Only responses in relation to ones work or migration were of interest for the analysis. Other comments related to the survey quality or response process were therefore not of interest. After eliminating comments like 'thank you' or 'the survey was too long', 130 responses were left, which constituted the final working sample for this paper. These 130 responses are not representative of the bureaucrats chosen through the random sample, but simply represent the views of the sample of the bureaucrats who chose to respond to this last open-ended question. The high response of bureaucrats working at the PES (70%) might be linked to the fact that the PES has the mandate to integrate newly arrived refugees into the labour market, and therefore bureaucrats at the PES might have more reflections on migration in relation to their work life. An overrepresentation of bureaucrats of the PES in the responses means that many of the reflections made are related to organisational processes at the PES and that the results therefore offer more of an understanding of bureaucrats' work life within this organisation. Detailed descriptive statistics are listed in Table 1.

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<sup>4</sup> The survey was approved by the Regional Ethical Board in Lund, Sweden

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the sample

		PES	SSIA
PES	70.77%		
SSIA	29.23%		
Male	31.25%	34.78%	22.22%
Female	68.75%	65.22%	77.78%
Age	48	49.70	44.26
Majority member (Non-foreign born)	89.23%	88.04%	92.11%
Minority member (Foreign born)	10.77%	11.96%	7.89%
N = 130			

### *Analytical strategy*

Various studies (e.g. Park & Bhuyan, 2012; du Toit & Coetzee, 2012) have made use of analysing open-ended survey responses to explore more complex and possibly ambiguous pictures beyond pre-coded survey questions. Bureaucrats responded to the question, “Do you have any other thoughts or comments regarding your work and/or migration in Sweden?” Given that the respondents had just answered questions concerning their workplace, diversity in Sweden, their attitudes towards migrants, and what they understand as being Swedish together with the indication words ‘work’ and ‘migration’ in the final question, one can at least assume what they were referring to. Other open-ended question studies (e.g. Park & Bhuyan, 2012) based their analyses on the final survey question, “Do you have a final comment?”, illustrating that examining such commentaries has its own value despite the limitation of not being able to completely control what the respondents refer to, as one does in pre-coded survey questions or interview studies. When analysing the data, a concept-driven coding approach was used where the public administration literature and the ontological security approach with special focus on identity strategies were driving the identification of codes in the material. The coding process was highly theory driven with regards to key concepts; e.g. workload, yet a fixed set of codes was not developed in order to allow the emergence of codes that were not not anticipated but that were still within the scope of the theoretical expectations, i.e. coding with a theoretical frame in mind (Campbell et al., 2013).

The use of the Atlas.ti software enabled the analysis of the data<sup>5</sup> (Babbi & Mouton, 2009). In a first step, respondents’ comments (or part of the comment in form of quotes) were assigned a code, the same codes were assigned to similar quotes in order to minimise the number of new codes. In total, 49 codes emerged. In a second step, codes were gathered according to thematic similarity (e.g. the codes *Swedish law above everything* & *Higher requirements for language skills* were allocated to the theme ‘Assimilation, language and education’). 10 themes were

<sup>5</sup> The data was not translated prior to input in Atlas.ti but the text was cleaned, e.g. elimination of letters ä; ö or å. The data was read in Swedish, but codes and themes were assigned in English.

identified and for the final presentation of the results the ten themes were subsumed into eight themes. Quotes and their belonging themes were then further analysed and interpreted in the light of the theoretical frame of this paper. Themes were merged according to thematic consensus while also accounting for quote frequency in order to provide a balanced representation of the emerging themes. One should note that the process of assigning codes to responses and categorising codes into themes was not done automatically but identified upon the researcher's interpretation of the material (Bradford & Bower, 2008). One methodological limitation is that the analysis of the data was conducted by the author solely while acknowledging that multiple authors assigning codes to the data is a good way to assess reliability in content analysis (Campbell et al., 2013). However, codes and themes in relation to the responses were reviewed by two colleagues, which is not the same as having multiple coders and measuring their interrater agreement, but it offers an additional review of the soundness of the codes and themes. Another methodological limitation is the "interpretation barrier" (Kuckartz, 2019, p. 18). The paper reveals meaning in the data through interpretation during the analysis that refers to existing theory, as also done in a similar study by Park & Bhuyan (2012). Yet, Kuckartz (2019) reminds us that the comments analysed could also be interpreted differently. Graneheim, Lindgren and Lundman (2017) suggest that "giving trails" to the readers allows for a better understanding of why decisions were taken. Therefore, in the analysis themes and featured codes are exemplified with several codes. Furthermore, all themes are reported in the appendix, showing their codes, frequency of quotations, and examples of quotations within each thematic category. In the results section, each quote extracted from respondents' comments is marked with a respondent number and information about which organisation they belong to. Quote frequency was part of the accounting of the responses and was reflected in the results in order to provide increased transparency on what themes were more prominent among the responses. Accounting for quote frequency is common practice in studies analysing open-ended commentaries (e.g. du Toit & Coetzee, 2012).

## Results

The following section presents the main identified themes in the responses of the bureaucrats in relation to the three ontological security identity strategies (retreatism, essentialism and engagement). When applying these strategies to bureaucrats working life, I suggest that each of these three types of strategies can encapsulate a professional and individual dimension. The professional dimension relates to strategies put forth in relation to expressions about one's work. Individual strategies relate to expressions about one's overall life. The strategy of *engagement* was least prominent and was made up of professional and individual strategies with a certain fluidity between both dimensions. Strategies of *essentialism* were most prevalent in the material and cover both the professional and individual level reflecting a moving against migrants. Strategies of *retreatism* capture the distance expressed by bureaucrats towards migrants but captured also expressed distance of bureaucrats belonging to a minority group. The table below recaps the analytical findings with regard to the strategies of *engagement*, *essentialism* and *retreatism*.

Table 2. Professional and individual identity strategies

	Professional strategies	Individual strategies
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critique of organisational conditions</li> <li>• Demand for better political response to immigration</li> <li>• Organisational alignment in order to enhance integration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance of global change</li> <li>• Demand for system change</li> <li>• Demand societal responses</li> <li>• Need for multiculturalism</li> <li>• Openness towards migrants</li> </ul>
Essentialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversity as negative development</li> <li>• Demands for assimilation</li> <li>• Nationalism expressed through strong demands of Swedish language and cultural competence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Debasement and resentment of migrants</li> <li>• Nationalism and exclusion</li> </ul>
Retreatism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional distance</li> <li>• Avoidance of engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ignoring societal change</li> <li>• (Cultural) distance</li> <li>• Withdrawal to sustain the protective cocoon</li> </ul>

### *Strategies of engagement*

#### *1. Demands for system changes*

The features of the first theme concern expressions of insecurities due to macro-level societal changes. Demands for system change in society due to an overall changing society and more diversity was expressed along with fear of more division in society through 35 different quotes. According to van den Brink (cited in Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011), this can be categorised into the ‘active citizen’ who is frustrated by its government and the ‘threatened citizen’ who is afraid of the current dynamics in society with all its mobility and migration.

The *active citizen* expresses the need for society to adjust to current trends: “*We live in a time when our basic values, approaches, and laws are challenged. We need to discuss and change this at different levels*” (R<sup>61</sup> – PES). This expression can be interpreted as showing awareness of the need for Sweden as an increasingly diverse society to adapt to current migration trends, but it could also interpret as simply pointing out current challenges that need to be further discussed. This approach towards current developments is further expressed by the quote: “*And for integration to be successful, both parties need to ‘move’, even if it takes time. Advertising isolation does not feel like a sustainable alternative*” (R2 – PES). For society to be sustainable, new forms of thinking about what makes a community need to be developed, forms that do not differentiate between the national and foreign community (Billig, 1995). Relatedly, some responses also reflected upon a proposed change in the integration system in Sweden: “*Much could be improved if Sweden learns to accept foreign education and other ways of looking at things*” (R3 – SSIA). This reflection is in line with the demands for macro-level changes, meaning ideological, political, and practical changes. Along those lines, respondents also expressed that migrants enrich Swedish society: “*...the benefit of immigration, regardless of the reason for arrival, is that they create work, housing construction and that our*

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<sup>6</sup> R stands for respondent.

*demographics become sustainable*” (R4 – SSIA). Overall, such reflection mediates a positive view on the effects of migration for society, and in line with the quotes above it expresses a “deeply multicultural polity in which there can be genuine dialogical engagement” (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011, p.43).

Beyond systematic changes, respondents also expressed fear of more division in society and increased formations of enclave-like groups (including ethnic Swedes) with no communication between different groups, reflecting the *threatened citizen* who fears current dynamics in society and their consequences. Other fears are directed towards growing populism in Sweden and various political parties that intensify a ‘us vs. them’ mentality: “*My experience is that the tolerance for those who come as new (migrants) to Sweden is becoming smaller, which is most regrettable. Some political parties (not just SD<sup>7</sup>) participate in creating divisions and a we-and-them thinking*” (R5 - PES). Another respondent expressed similar concerns: “*SD is our biggest obstacle in integration work because they spread hatred and opposition in society. The passivity and double games of other parties do not make it easier for immigrants to integrate and feel the togetherness of their new country*” (R6 – PES). Populism is not only used by right-wing parties, but also mainstream parties is seen as a threat to current societal developments. The ‘threatened’ and the ‘active’ citizens thus deal with how a changing and more diverse society should function. Despite their differences, they both draw upon the strategy of *engagement* through jointly focusing on communication between majority and minority population groups in order to sustain ontological security for both new arrivals and native individuals (Kinnvall & Nesbitt – Larking, 2011).

## 2. Organisational conditions

Another key theme, as indicated by 24 quotes, regards organisational conditions and bureaucrats’ expressions on their working conditions by pointing out high constraints along vertical levels of the burden of work. The theme focuses on workload at the workplace – “*Nobody talks about workload at work*” (R7 – PES) – and the need for better conditions in the workplace: “*Bureaucrats need to be given time to find the best possible solution for each individual*” (R8 – PES). Within the public administration literature, high workload is discussed in relation to affecting bureaucrats’ performance and efficiency when it comes to their services, thus resulting in limited time available to make adequate decisions for individual cases (Van Berkel & Knies, 2016; Ryu et al., 2012). Overall, service quality is at risk, as also stressed by the respondents: “*If we have time to do one thing at a time and finish it, then we will clearly have more sustainable results in the long run*” (R9 – PES). Along the lines of neo-liberal forces, all processes in society are supposed to take place more quickly, including the work processes within welfare organisations, which might also lead to a feeling of loss of stability and control when wanting to perform one’s work tasks. Bureaucrats feeling the pressure to perform under increased time constraints might therefore tend to suffer from increased ontological insecurity. The already challenging emotional work is thereby impeded by performance pressure (Ashman & Gibson, 2010).

Despite this, the theme of organisational conditions is also directly related to migration, and bureaucrats expressed concerns about whether the welfare institutions were really suitable to

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<sup>7</sup> SD stands for Swedish Democrats and is Sweden’s main right-wing party.

handle immigration: “*The authorities are not prepared to deal with immigration*” (R8 – PES). This reflects awareness of the limitations on both the organisational and governmental level, which also ties into concerns about the resources that are available to adequately work with migrant clients and to implement policies and practices. The trust in the state to take care of uncertainties and to overcome challenges in society is questioned.

The theme *demands for system change* can be interpreted as individual strategies of engagement with a focus on reaching and sustaining ontological security for both majority and minority populations through more debate and dialogue between parties and an openness towards migration (e.g. Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011). The theme *organisational conditions*, however, can be interpreted as professional strategies of engagement since it criticises organisational conditions and limitations in relation to their work but also in relation to the enhancement of the integration of migrants.

### *Strategies of essentialism*

#### *3. Language as a manifestation of the national home*

Part of reaching ontological security is a process of “building walls of ... security around the self” by decreasing factors of ambiguity that jeopardise one’s sense of safety in order to reduce existential anxiety (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011, p. 57). The concept of homesteading is central to these discussions. Through homesteading, the ‘self’ secures itself in relation to others, and one way of reaching this state of mind is to demand the other to adapt or to assimilate so that there exists as little ambiguity as possible that threatens the (feeling of) *home*. In that respect, the everyday (national) life is an important part to providing such a sense of security.

Reflecting a national discourse, respondents expressed needs along the lines of assimilation where references to language and education, as manifestations of homesteading, were expressed in 16 different quotes. It was stated that there should be greater requirements when it comes to language skills because this is seen as a main ingredient to be able to be part of Swedish society: “*To increase the requirement when it comes to language skills because it is a deciding factor to integrate into society and get work...*” (R10 – PES). Referring to the need for language skills reflects the demand to speak Swedish and thereby reduces ambiguity and sustains the feeling of *home*. Relatedly, respondents also pointed out the importance of having an education and that some migrants’ low level of education is a problem when it comes to integrating them into the labour market. Even though education is one of the factors that aid integration into a society, it is also used as one of many requirements that reflect the demand for assimilation. I argue that language is used as a signifier of the national belonging that bureaucrats use to relate to familiarity and to reduce complexities. The feeling of not being able to “operate or communicate in or recognise the national space” that the bureaucrats are located in signals a loss of ‘feeling of home’ (Hage, 1998, p. 40). The majority population feels threatened by foreign languages being spoken, or even accents, thus symbolising the foreign (other) and critically addressing language can be characterised as strategies of *essentialism* used when the core foundations of one’s group (e.g. common language) are challenged (Kinnvall & Nesbitt – Larking, 2011).

Most responses concerned the language skills of the migrants, but one respondent put

forward how a lack of language skills from the bureaucrats' side has implications for their work with migrants: "*I feel that I have a lot to develop in my work with people with a foreign background. To some extent it is because of my preconceived sentences, but often because of language flaws (I use an interpreter when needed, but the possibility of mail, phone calls, etc., for easier shorter conversations is more difficult)*" (R11 – PES). This could be seen as a strategy of *engagement* and a willingness to change in order to increase communication between minority and majority members (Kinnvall & Nesbitt – Larking, 2011). However, the responses also reflected the perception that integration is only possible through assimilation from the migrants' side: "*I think that immigration should be implemented through education about how 'Swedes' live*" (R12 – SSIA). This reflects the idea of the migrant as having to conform to the 'modern democratic' nation, which is an *essentialism* strategy to reduce complexities and contradictions.

#### *4. Migration competence*

The *migration competence* theme comprised nine different quotes. Most prominent was the code of cultural competence, meaning an expressed need to learn more about 'different cultures' in order to have better encounters with migrants within welfare institutions or as a way to make sense of changes in one's work life. The way this need was addressed varied. Some gave broad responses: "*I think that more education about different cultures would be needed to increase understanding*" (R13 – SSIA), while others put forward more concrete ideas: "*Competence development in migration and consequences of trauma among all bureaucrats. I even see a great need for this in the regions, county councils*" (R14 – PES). Initially, learning about 'different cultures' and acquiring more knowledge about different aspects of migration seem like logical measures to improve the services provided to migrants. This could be placed on the horizontal line of bureaucrats' labour struggle that is informed by their relation to migrant clients (Seim, 2017). However, this discussion is twofold. On the one hand, we have practical aspects where certain educational measures might indeed have positive effects on encounters with migrants. On the other hand, the need for 'cultural competence' is conflated with racialisation and absolutist views of culture. Even though cultural competence is seen as a way to "develop flexibility in thinking and behavior" (Pinderhughes, 1989, p.163), it runs the risk of overlooking different power mechanisms and reproduces thoughts about the 'national and foreign community'. I suggest that the demand for cultural competence is seen as a simple solution to overcome the complexities and reduce the insecurities that are perceived as challenging at the workplace in the bureaucrats' micro-level interactions with migrants. The desire for cultural competences indicates the need to make sense of oneself in one's professional role by being able to predict what to expect when interacting with migrants. Acquiring cultural competence helps the bureaucrat to again develop routines and certain expectations in their work that where interrupted by anxiety of how to work with migrants (Steele 2017). In that way, the 'self' can feel safe and operate comfortably. In a way, this is also a form of homesteading within the *essentialism* frame by using cultural competence as a strategy to shape a new space for oneself that allows for decreased feelings of anxiety when interacting with migrant clients.

#### *5. Equal treatment*



Another prominent theme was to *treat everybody equally at work* and comprised 10 quotes. This normative expression reflects one's professional identity where 'following the rules' and 'treating everybody equally' are underlying assumptions and part of the idea of how a universal welfare state functions (Eliassi, 2017). In that sense, professionalism is understood as meaning that "*in your work you need to treat all people equally*" (R15 – SSIA). One respondent stated: "*To stay objective and keep to the facts is what I do a lot in my work because I cannot take personal responsibility for the legislation, but also to remain professional*" (R16 – SSIA). Being professional is equated with treating everybody equally. One respondent stated: "*I believe in giving all people in our society the possibility to be successful and feel good. ... Try to see behind skin colour, culture, and education, etc. ...*" (R17 – PES). Even these processes can be linked to shaping a sense of ontological security. Highlighting that as a professional one treats everybody equally can be seen as constructing a comfort story, a positive narrative about oneself that helps to navigate complexities and contradictions in interactions with migrant clients in one's work (Hall, 1992 cited in Kinnvall, 2004; Giddens, 2006). These are elements of the professional *essentialism* strategy that help to reduce complexities and contradictions in one's work life, here in form of having to relate oneself to one's clients' backgrounds and how this impacts the way one, as a professional, might treat them.

#### 6. *Migrants as a threat*

This theme covers responses circulating around the subject of immigration being a threat and included 18 quotes. Within the *essentialism* frame, these responses reflect the debasement of migrants and their conversion into 'the enemy' in order to secure one's 'self'. Featured codes included, among other things, welfare chauvinism, the idea of restricting benefits to immigrants, and perceiving them as a burden on the welfare state (e.g. Heizmann, Jedinger & Perry, 2018). Respondents stated: "*Politicians' decision on the right to certain benefits can be considered very generous in situations that were certainly not thought about from the beginning*" (R18 – SSIA). Even though this can be interpreted as an actual fact, it can also suggest a reluctance to have migrants participating in welfare resources, signalling that "welfare state access should remain in the hands of the native citizens" (Heizmann et al., 2018, p.2). Welfare chauvinism is a widespread phenomenon and can be linked to 'economic threat theory' where access to resources seems to be jeopardised by 'other groups'. In this way, the feeling of being a part of the nation generates the expectations of having privilege in benefiting from the nation's resources (Hage, 1998). Similarly, several responses reflected perceptions that immigration is a threat to the welfare state and needs to be reduced, which was also related to the sudden increase of immigration to Sweden in 2015: "*Sweden received a disproportionately large number of refugees in 2015, which puts major strains on our welfare system. It is a good thing that we have now introduced a more restrictive refugee and immigration policy, but unfortunately it did not happen before the expensive refugee flow last year*" (R19 – PES). Here the reference to national space and resources along the lines of 'too many' reflects the assumption of the existence of a territorial space and two distinct groups – those who feel entitled to make a judgment of 'how many should come', and the 'others' who are subjected to this verdict. This reflects an "imagined privileged relation between the imagined race, ethnicity or culture and the national space, an entitlement to feel home" (Hage, 1998, p.38). At the same time this also shows a "hierarchy of citizenship" as Innes (2010) calls it. Innes (2010) further

puts forth that increasing numbers of asylum seekers is intensifying the effect the ‘other’ has for one’s social identity. In the same vein, expressions also reflected a certain aggressiveness and anger: “*The problem right now is that some do not want to learn the Swedish language without everything being served on a silver plate*” (R20 – PES). Again, not wanting to be part of the majority society is linked to language, but it also emerges as a sense of ‘unfairness’ related to ‘who gets what’. Pointing out migrants (in particular, refugees) as simply beneficiaries shows the process of turning migrants into enemies, or abstract imagined objects, that one has to develop boundaries against in order to ensure the ‘old order’ or to sustain the secure home base that is interrupted through these ‘strangers’, and this acts as a form of *essentialism*.

The theme *language as a manifestation of the national home* emphasised the need for assimilation, e.g. there should be stricter requirements for migrants to learn the Swedish language. Different expressions of how migrants should be assimilated into society also emerged. The respondents also pointed out a desire to acquire more ‘cultural competence’ under the *migration competence* theme. These could be interpreted as professional strategies of *essentialism* and how a national framework continues to matter as a way of ‘homesteading’, e.g. overcoming complexities in organisational (work) life (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011). Two different anxiety triggers are at the interplay here, complexities in work life with migrants that increase stress (including language barriers) but also other stress factors due to NPM. Meaning, an already stressed bureaucrat due to NPM might experience an increased stress level due to overwhelming complexities in the work with migrants. Also, the theme *migrants as threat* reflects individual strategies of essentialism.

### *Strategies of retreatism*

#### *7. Racialized expressions*

The theme featured in this section concerns racialised expressions made within the responses, in which a variety of different aspects could be found. One of the codes was about pointing out cultural differences: “*Integration is hampered by the number of non-European immigrants and thus, among other things, due to extremely large cultural differences*” (R21 – PES). Here culture and the references to ‘non-Europeans’ is used within the cultural racism frame to motivate exclusion (Goldberg, 2015). Another response is an example of racialisation of other EU citizens. This response refers to Roma residing in Sweden: “*The contact with foreign citizens that I experience in my private life as disturbing is primarily with beggars from eastern Europe. It might feel provocative and difficult when you are disturbed by strangers at the door of your home*” (R22 – SSIA). The notion of ‘feeling disturbed at home’ is linked to the emotion of anger because it jeopardises the ‘protective cocoon’. This anger is also related to anxiety, which is “caused by disturbing circumstances” (Giddens, 2006, p.14).

The ignorance of societal changes towards diversity and differentiating between different minority groups was expressed through the following responses: “*I can only say that people's free movement creates chaotic communities according to the United States model. My tools work in a Western culture, not for people outside it*” (R23 – PES) and “*There are some ethnic groups*

*who work harder to integrate into Swedish society than others”* (R24 – PES). These expressions show a clear trend towards pointing out racial (or ethnic) hierarchies. By turning the migrant not only into an object, but also into a form of abjection, it is easier to sustain hate in order to re-establish feelings of security and inclusiveness in times of crisis or change. Innes (2010) calls this the debasing of the ‘stranger’. Alienation (of the self) and the other is expressed through feelings of loss and is dealt with by shifting to more abstract levels of the other that allows for feelings of hate at the same time as a feeling of ontological security (Kinnvall, 2004). The drive to feel ontologically secure is hereby satisfied by identifying a threat, migrants in Swedish society, which aides to turn anxiety into a threat and thereby getting closer to feeling ontologically secure. This strategy of sustaining one’s ontological security might have severe consequences for the ‘other’ due to the risk of highly exclusionary processes that in turn might lead to ontological insecurity for the ‘other’, which will be discussed in the following theme section.

#### *8. Bureaucrats’ expressions about racism*

This last thematic section describes 10 quotes that express concerns about racism in Sweden and racism at the bureaucrats’ workplace. Personal experiences and general perceptions are conflated in these responses. Different from the previous responses, the following are reflections only of bureaucrats belonging to a minority group. Their responses suggest that feelings of belonging and security are hampered through discrimination within the organisations they work for. The feeling of ontological security is interrupted by experiences of racism and the feeling of debasement, which in turn might lead to feelings of existential anxiety. Expressions of feeling excluded as well as feelings of frustration were prevalent among the responses. Very prominent were expressions about existing racism in Sweden as exemplified through statements like: *“Unfortunately there exists a silent racism”* (R25 – SSIA) and *“With two immigrant parents, brought up in the 50s, with education and then looking for work, I can today, in 2016, not understand why Swedish society still makes a distinction between ‘Svensson and Abdulla’ when it comes to grades in school and when I am looking for a job”* (R26 – PES). The concept of silent racism was reoccurring in the different responses: *“As an immigrant, you often experience silent discrimination in the workplace. Because you are not Swedish you are not right, your ideas are less worthy, you are less worthy as a person; when people hear an accent then they think that person cannot do anything”* (R27 - SSIA). These responses represent different dimensions to racism. The reference to ‘silent racism’ reflects the denial of existing racism and discrimination (Goldberg, 2015). Because racism is no longer part of the nation-state’s story, it operates in different modes. As mentioned, even though silent, this ‘invisible racism’ still has ‘visible’ consequences for these bureaucrats. These bureaucrats are not only burdened with the ‘usual’ horizontal and vertical struggles, but are also confronted with an additional burden through feelings of not being recognised for their performance by managers and colleagues along with feelings of alienation (e.g. R26) that together might lead to loss of identity (Ashman & Gibson, 2010).

Several responses reflect discrimination at the workplace among the bureaucrats themselves, and the respondents thereby point out existing structural inequality in Sweden based on people’s ethnoracial attributes, like having an accent. Responses among minority group bureaucrats within these organisations reflect the dialectical nature of the processes of ontological security and insecurity that take place within welfare institutions. Experiences of discrimination in

Swedish society as well as being alienated and debased by one's own colleagues leads to the loss of one's sense of security, and paradoxically that very same process of debasement and alienation aids in sustaining these colleague's ontological security. This can be linked to Croft's (2012) argument that national identity "offers to individuals resources that they can draw on in the construction of their ontological security structures, but in so doing might undermine the ontological security of others" (p. 250).

The theme *racialized expressions* reflected individual strategies of retreatism where respondents expressed anger and feelings of invasion into their perceived personal space through migrants that they want to protect through withdrawal. The theme *bureaucrats' expressions about racism* can be interpreted as professional strategies of retreatism. Experiences of exclusion contribute to bureaucrats belonging to a minority group working in these organisations feeling less 'at home'. Bureaucrats belonging to a minority group are therefore constantly occupied in defending against these dangers and thus are hindered in sustaining their 'protective cocoon'. Their existential anxiety is increased by these processes, which might lead to strategies of *retreatism*.

## **Concluding discussion**

The commentaries analysed reveal various themes bureaucrats deem important to point out when it comes to their work with migrants and to migration in general. Even though the analysis is based on a small sample of commentaries, by integrating OST into public administration literature, several key themes could be identified that could be linked to the three identity strategies; engagement, essentialism, retreatment. These strategies add a new dimension to our understanding of how we can understand bureaucrats' expressions as forms of ontological insecurity and how in turn ontological insecurity influences bureaucrats working life with migrants and their perceptions about migrants and migration.

Bureaucrats are influenced both by internal organisational changes and external changes linked to processes of globalisation. Internal processes on the organisational level are marked through neo-liberal forces in the form of NPM processes, while external processes are marked through migration, and together these lead to a sense of loss of control and a loss of a sense of a collective security. This leads to increased insecurity among bureaucrats and might push them into a variety of identity strategies in order to counter-balance feelings of uncertainties. In order to overcome feelings of insecurity, nationalism provides powerful stories to "convey a picture of security and simple answers" (Kinnvall, 2004, p.763). Bureaucrats make use of such stories to shape their own sense of security or 'emotional equilibrium' at their workplace, showing how the concept of ontological security and especially the different strategies developed by Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking (2011) are a valuable conceptual tool not only for understanding minority populations' experiences, as done in previous studies, but also for understanding how bureaucrats' emotions shape their work life.

The paper contributes to existing literature by integrating ontological security approaches into

the public administration literature. The rich literature of both fields is nuanced by this study, linking general and work life uncertainties to identity strategies that are applied to reduce bureaucrat's ontological insecurity. This approach thereby extends previous studies showing that bureaucrats can hold negative attitudes towards migrants by offering an understanding on why bureaucrats might express such resentment towards migrants. The discussions above gives rise to three general conclusions. First, studies into welfare bureaucracy need to capture professional and individual identity strategies in order to better understand complex processes like migration. Professional and individual strategies can be kept apart for analytical reasons, illustrating that bureaucrats are embedded in their organisations as well as being part of wider societal transformation processes that affect them as individuals. Second, the concept of ontological security and related notions are beneficial when trying to understand experiences of organisational work with migrant clients. Bureaucrats stand at the crossroad of external and internal transformation processes, but these also take shape within welfare organisations and embody a professional and individual dimension. Both processes shape uncertainty and fear and create interruptions in bureaucrats' sense of stability not only at work, but also in their personal life, and they counter these with various strategies in order to sustain their ontological security. Thereby, this paper nuances the proposed identity strategies by Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking (2011) and develops them further for analysing individuals working in organisations. Third, the paper demonstrates how complex the drive for ontological security can be for individuals in organisations. This paper, in combination with Steele's (2017) study where OST and organisational process models are combined but also Ashman and Gibson (2010) contribution on ontological security in the workplace, offers a potential side stream for ontological security studies of 'insecurities of organisations and their workforce'. Future research might explore how identity strategies are applied in different organisational contexts. Another avenue of future research could also be to explore further inequalities in welfare institutions with a focus on relations between majority and minority group employees and the role of organisational norms and cultures.

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