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Murder at the threshold: Private and public in an early modern peasant rebellion

Sari Nauman

On 1 March 1710, the Swedish king Charles XII summoned the peasants of the hundred of Vadsbo for a meeting at Binneberg, their usual gathering place at the heart of the hundred.¹ Sweden was at the time at war with Russia and Denmark, and Danish troops had recently broken into Scania, the southernmost part of Sweden, and were threatening to march north. The peasants of Vadsbo, situated in western Sweden, and the surrounding hundreds were therefore called upon to go '*man ur huse*' – meaning all men to arms, but literally translating as 'all men out of their homes' – to march south against the Danes.

Numerous peasants showed up at Binneberg, several of whom were prepared to march. Not towards Scania, however; they refused to march farther than their forefathers had done, which was as far as the previous border to Denmark-Norway, marked in the landscape by the river Göta. In the midst of negotiations, old grudges resurfaced as the peasants met Johan Warenberg, bailiff in the hundred and one of the officers in charge of the enrolment procedure. At the end of the meeting, Warenberg was violently murdered, and a group of peasants threatened to slay whomsoever marched south as well.²

The rebellion lasted only for a couple of days, but it involved several hundred peasants. At its core were issues of thresholds: thresholds between the community and outsiders, old borders and new, and, most notably, spatial thresholds in the locality. Whereas urban thresholds have been well studied, the relationship of rural thresholds to issues of the private and public remains rather unexplored. In this article, I investigate how the rebels of Binneberg used the spaces of courthouse, courtyard and road to further their case against the bailiff. Particular attention is given to how notions of private and public influenced which actions were deemed proper for certain spaces, and how the rebels, through their actions, partook in shaping the nature of these spaces altogether.

The source material for this event consists mainly of records from the commission that was sent out by the Crown to investigate. The commission not only insisted on written statements from several of the witnesses, but also thoroughly interrogated those peasants who had attended the meeting. Combined with letters from various

office holders, plea letters from the accused, court protocols and sentences, the material amounts to over 400 handwritten pages, giving a detailed account of what transpired during this exceptionally short, but nevertheless brutal, rebellion. All statements were made before the authorities, giving reason to suspect that the peasants carefully considered how to present their cases. Still, the many different testimonies are generally consistent, at least when it comes to spatial details. Together, the sources point to the dynamics of public and private space in an early modern rural society.

The implications of public and private spaces have long been in focus for researchers of the early modern period. Previously, scholars tended to identify the boundaries between these two spheres as more or less clear-cut. While women have been studied indoors, in what has been characterized as the private spaces of households and bedchambers, men's actions have been analysed in the urban outdoors, in public squares, coffeehouses and political buildings.³ More recently, new evidence has been brought to the fore, revealing that the dichotomy of public and private was less clear-cut than this separation of spheres suggests. This was for three main reasons. First, the boundaries between public and private spaces were porous. Women not only dwelled indoors but were frequently present outdoors as well, taking up public space. Moreover, indoors could also be a public space, one that was open for visitors.⁴ Secondly, private and public spaces were overlapping: while spaces could be coded as more or less public or private, private actions could also be carried out in public, and vice versa.⁵ Thirdly, spaces were not clearly distinct in and of themselves; instead, they were characterized by movement. Continuous movements between and within different spaces imply that the factors that characterized any given space as public or private were situational, meaning that the public and the private had an ephemeral, fleeting quality.⁶

Private and public spaces were thus porous, overlapping and fleeting. Acknowledging these aspects of what otherwise risk appearing to us as clear-cut concepts, scholars today investigate how early modern people acted on and thought of liminal spaces, such as doors, windows and thresholds. Boundaries have of course always been an integral part of human societies, differentiating between inside and outside, between us and them. The early modern period was teeming with rituals and beliefs regarding boundaries, intensified by the state-formation process and its attention to frontiers.⁷ A common denominator among scholars of liminality is that they tend to highlight the ambiguous nature of boundaries, which both separate and unite. Private and public merged in these sites, a feature that does not seem to have bothered the people navigating them. In discussing early modern boundaries and thresholds, Robert Scribner claims that one of the challenges facing researchers today is how to acknowledge 'the looseness of structure of daily life and the free-floating manner in which such symbols seem to operate.'⁸ Other scholars, recognizing the ambiguous nature of thresholds in art, literature and everyday life, support Scribner's claim.⁹

Still, however fruitful liminality has proven to be, it has one disadvantage: it is an essentially spatial concept. If we recognize that private and public spaces were porous, overlapping and fleeting, we also need to recognize that they were not simply defined spatially, but that they were also temporally defined. They had a transitory character; private and public was something people did, not distinct spheres into which they entered. In discussing how privacy is enacted, Beate Roessler defines it as 'a protective

shield that we always carry with us, regardless of where we are'.¹⁰ While Roessler claims that we always carry our privacy with us, she also acknowledges that it needs protection, as it can be, and in effect constantly is, challenged and attacked – and, thus, lost.¹¹ I therefore argue that privacy, but also publicness, is in fact *not* always with us, but *potentially* so. The incessant potential for privacy or publicness cuts across both time and space. It pinpoints how these spheres could be temporarily amalgamated, that is combined and fused, sometimes with the result of creating a sphere that was neither private nor public, although simultaneously both. At the same time, it acknowledges that a situation or space could lose its private or public quality as a result of actions or events.

I use the concept of thresholds to capture this potential for privacy and publicness. Besides having strong undertones of liminality, thresholds also carry connotations of movement; as Aleida Assman and Jan Assman put it, they are there to be crossed over.¹² As they separate inside from outside, they also bridge these two worlds, not only spatially but temporally, carrying the possibility of travelling from one to the other.¹³ Thresholds will thus be used as an analytical concept, but I will also analyse the use of physical thresholds, since crossing the spatial threshold of the courthouse was a central feature in the murder of Warenberg. During the first day of the rebellion, peasants followed the bailiff in and out of official buildings, and their actions shifted accordingly. During the second day, they dragged him over the threshold of the courthouse into the courtyard and back again, repeatedly. In a final act of defiance, they dragged his body out in the road, leaving his corpse there as a statement. In the following pages, I will trace these actions and analyse the ways in which they were informed by notions of private and public.

First, I give a short account of the rebellion, placing the event within its context. Thereafter, I focus the discussion on the spaces where the rebellion took place – the Binneberg courthouse, courtyard and road, respectively – and examine how these spaces interacted with the accusations made against the bailiff. In the conclusions, I summarize my findings and zoom back out, discussing their implications for how we can understand privacy and publicness in rural areas during the early modern period.

The rebellion

Despite its involvement in many wars, early modern Sweden was a supposedly peaceful country internally. Open rebellions against the royal power have long been considered practically non-existent, thereby distinguishing Sweden from other European countries where rebellions were more common. The lack of Swedish rebellions has led scholars to argue for the long historical roots of a specific Swedish political culture, one directed towards dialogue and negotiation.¹⁴ Critics have claimed the opposite, suggesting that royal power's monopoly on violence and harsh control kept people at bay.¹⁵ During the past couple of decades, most scholars have come to agree that the achievements of the Swedish state depended on both negotiation and control.¹⁶

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, commotion was starting to rise across the Swedish realm. In 1700, the Great Northern War began, and Sweden fought against Russia and Denmark-Norway to keep possession of its domains around

the Baltic Sea. In June 1709, the Swedish army lost the decisive battle of Poltava. Russian armies conquered the Baltic provinces, and then marched north to occupy Finland. At the same time, Danish troops entered Scania. Attacked on several fronts, the Swedish Crown imposed unprecedented drafts upon its populace. According to the military system at hand, Swedish peasants were collectively in charge of appointing soldiers amongst themselves and of maintaining them. As a result of this system, Sweden kept an army which, in proportion to its population, was unparalleled in other European countries, enabling its previous successes in warfare. In 1710, however, the extra drafts befell an already heavily burdened peasantry. Furthermore, the prospects of surviving a war were slim at best; if not killed by the enemy, one risked succumbing to the countless illnesses spreading in the camps.¹⁷

Danish troops entered Scania in December 1709, and in the early months of the following year they threatened to march farther north. The king and the Royal Council of Sweden, therefore, sent orders that all able men in the hundred of Vadsbo were to drive the enemy off and defend the country's borders. Early on the morning of Tuesday, 1 March 1710, the people of the hundred were to gather at Binneberg, where they held their judicial hearings three times a year. There, they were to be counted and noted, and that same day march together, first towards Timmele, 86 kilometres to the south, and then onwards to Scania.¹⁸

In order to be present in the early morning of 1 March, peasants who lived far away from Binneberg started to arrive in the vicinity during the afternoon of Monday, 28 February. Some of them went straight to the inn, located in the same building as the courthouse but with a separate door, for something to drink. Across the road, they could see the church, and the parish priest lived within eyesight. Several parishes had brought what was required of them: clothes and arms, as well as food for a six-week journey. Others, however, had only brought their weapons.¹⁹

Already upon their arrival, the mood among the peasants was agitated. The peasants of the Våring parish later testified in court: 'As the evening approached, more people arrived from faraway parishes, causing too much noise and commotion for one to be able to achieve anything.'²⁰ When the governor of Skaraborg, Carl Gustaf Soop, arrived on Monday afternoon, his efforts to appease the congregation were drowned out in the turmoil. He quickly fled the scene.²¹ Shortly thereafter, at around four o'clock, Bailiff Johan Warenberg arrived at Binneberg, whereupon he was immediately surrounded by an angry crowd. He managed to reach his night quarters just north of the courthouse, where three other office holders had also sought shelter. At first, the crowd followed him, but he temporarily succeeded in calming them down, and went to sleep.²²

On Tuesday morning, Warenberg went to the courthouse to meet with the district judge, Jonas Aurell, who was also his brother-in-law. At the same time, one of the peasants, Jon Andersson, came walking along the road, saying, 'Yesterday I loaded my gun with three bullets, but now I shall load it with sixteen, and they are all for the bailiff.'²³ Before long, Andersson had entered the courthouse, and demanded that Warenberg repay him 8 *caroliner*,²⁴ which Warenberg had received as a bribe to refrain from enlisting Andersson's farmhands as soldiers a few years earlier. Since all able men were now nonetheless enlisted, Andersson and several with him thought it only

fair that the bailiff repaid their bribes. Others had bribed the bailiff in other matters, and likewise demanded their money back.²⁵ By now, the peasants displayed quite a bit of hostility towards the bailiff. According to the testimonies, the courthouse was packed with peasants standing on benches and tables, shouting at and threatening Warenberg.²⁶

In the meantime, District Judge Aurell was outside with two priests, who were holding an outdoor service in an attempt to calm the peasants. Their efforts were futile. Sometime before noon, the peasants dragged the bailiff out of the courthouse, feet first, and hurled him down in the courtyard. They attacked him with spears and guns, and he received a severe beating. After that, Warenberg was hauled back inside, to one of the chambers of the courthouse, where the peasants again started to demand money, and insult and threaten him. He was subsequently dragged back and forth between the courthouse and the courtyard no less than six times. After the fourth haul, he yielded and started to hand out all the money that he had. His attempt at restitution was, however, insufficient, because far too many peasants demanded their money back.²⁷ After the sixth and final dragging, and after repeated attacks with fists, spears and guns, Warenberg died in the courtyard. Witnesses and surgeons performing the autopsy claimed that by the time of his death, he had been so abused that there was not one part of his body left unharmed.²⁸ Finally, the peasants dragged the bailiff's body out on the road, and left it there.²⁹

During the beating of the bailiff, District Judge Aurell and other officials had fled to the nearby village of Horn. When they heard about the murder of Warenberg, they decided to bring the matter to the attention of higher authorities, and visited Governor Carl Gustav Soop in Skövde. Soop recounted the events in a letter to the Royal Council on 3 March, and shortly thereafter, the Royal Council appointed a commission and assigned a regiment of soldiers to protect it. In this form, the authorities returned to Binneberg at the end of April, and the trial commenced shortly after.³⁰ In the middle of June, sentence was passed on the rebels. Five of them, recognized as the leaders, were sentenced to death, and thirty-eight others received harsh corporal punishments in the form of running the gauntlet or prison sentences. Due to the miserable conditions in jail, seven of them either died beforehand or were too sick to receive their punishments. The other peasants, who could not be proven to have taken part of the rebellion but who nevertheless had failed to intercede, were sentenced to pay heavy fines for failing in their duty to obey their king.³¹

The official building

The courthouse was an official building, with an official purpose: the peasants of the hundred met there at least three times a year for hearings and trials. The sessions were traditionally directed towards conflict resolution, and the peasants themselves generally instigated the cases.³² However, the transition to a more formal court had started during the early eighteenth century: greater emphasis was placed on educated judges instead of laymen, and court protocols were sent to courts of appeal for scrutiny. The building was thus an extension of the royal power into the local community,

representing the crown. As such, it was a protected space. Any crimes committed inside a courthouse were punishable as *edsöresbrott*, crimes committed against the king's oath, meaning that the culprit risked becoming an outlaw; anyone could kill or harm him or her without punishment.³³

Still, the courthouse also had an important communal role, and most peasants visited it as plaintiff, defendant or spectator repeatedly during a lifetime. The matters solved within this space did not only pertain to crimes against the crown, but also included minor disputes among the peasantry.³⁴ Its position in Binneberg close to the parish church enhanced the space's public function: it was a place where people from the hundred met to solve issues of greater or lesser importance, and where they interacted with spiritual and secular authorities, as well as with each other. Furthermore, at the inn, they could get something to eat or drink, and mix business with pleasure.

The courthouse thus had both an official and a public function, and these functions were sometimes hard to distinguish from one another. Nonetheless, considering the events that took place there during the rebellion, the peasants and authorities seem to have disagreed over which function the courthouse served first. A closer look at the rebels' actions reveals that they treated it as a space for the presentation of their grievances and as a space to argue their cases, much as they were accustomed to do under more normal circumstances. First, they forced the bailiff to sit down at the court table. They then placed themselves around him and demanded to be repaid for the inducements he had previously received. Compared with regular hearings in the courthouse, the peasants' actions this time were undoubtedly infused with violence: some of them were standing on benches or even atop the table, and, to keep the bailiff seated, they stuck their spears into the wall above his head. A few peasants even fired their guns.³⁵ The threat of violence was, however, not realized within this space. The shooters aimed above Warenberg's head rather than directly at him, nor did they punch or hurt him physically in any way.³⁶ They seem to have restrained themselves, using the courthouse as a public space for conflict resolution.

Their restraint, however, was considered to be insufficient by the commission. During the trial, and in accordance with the law, the commissioners argued that the fact that some of the rebels' actions had taken place within the courthouse aggravated their crime. They asserted that the courthouse was a 'privileged room'. The bailiff had sought refuge there, and in attacking him within the courthouse, the peasants transgressed the boundary of this protected space, thereby warranting harsher punishments.³⁷ Moreover, the rebels' crime was not only committed against the bailiff; by their actions, they had attacked the courthouse itself. Mayor Svante Segervald argued that the rebels had 'destroyed that same public house with every kind of deed, and turned it into a den of thieves'.³⁸ Testimonies asserting that some of the peasants had stood on the court table, broken it, or entered the area behind the bar with drawn weapons were remarked upon sternly by the commissioners in their sentences.³⁹ To them, the courthouse was primarily an official building, and actions taken against it and its contents were taken as acts against the royal power itself.

Since the rebels were convicted for their actions, the commissioners' opinion prevailed. Still, the events also tell us that the peasants assigned a public function to the courthouse, and, notably, knew how to use this function when protesting against

the bailiff's wrongs. They did not need the authorities to present their case; they used this public space as if it were their own.

The public outdoors

Outside, a severe beating took place, however. Lying in the courtyard, the bailiff endured hits and kicks, and was struck with spikes and hammers. According to numerous testimonies, the assaulters were furious. The autopsy protocol supports these findings; according to the performing surgeons, several of the blows he received had been fatal in themselves. Both of Warenberg's arms and hands were severely injured, and the surgeons concluded: 'Taking everything into consideration, no one can count all of the deceased man's little wounds, cuts, and injuries, as he was not treated as a human being, but without mercy.'⁴⁰

Thus, whereas the inside space was reserved for arguing their case and threatening the bailiff to give in, the rebels used the outdoor space, in contrast, for public retaliation and punishment. According to the testimonies, a 'large bunch of people' stood around Warenberg as he was beaten.⁴¹ Many of them partook in the beating, and several peasants testified that the leaders had urged others on, or even forced them to hit the bailiff. The rebels further drew attention to the act by yelling, screaming, and cursing, shouting insults to the bailiff and entreating others to join in. They drew attention to themselves, urging everyone to bear witness to their actions.⁴² That the peasants reserved the aggressive acts of violence for outside, and tried to draw as much attention as possible, suggests that, even though the courthouse was a public building, the courtyard itself potentially carried an even higher degree of publicness. In this space, it was possible to address the community as a whole.

In early modern Scandinavia, as in early modern Europe, hidden actions were considered suspicious and possibly dishonest, whereas the open carried connotations of honesty.⁴³ By conducting their deed in the open, the rebels made the claim that their actions were not to be hidden, implying that they were legitimate and honest. Several of the testimonies support this interpretation. During and after the murder, the rebels boasted of their deeds, saying, 'It was right that shame was slain.'⁴⁴ They claimed that the beating was 'just' (*rättmätigt*),⁴⁵ 'right' (*rätt*)⁴⁶ and 'a good deed' (*en god gärning*),⁴⁷ and that the bailiff had been a 'rascal' (*skälm*),⁴⁸ 'devil' (*fan*)⁴⁹ or 'sheriff's cunt' (*länsmansfitta*).⁵⁰ When leaving the bailiff to die on the road, one of the rebels said, 'The bailiff should not die in an honest man's farm, but as he has been the king's thief, he shall die on the king's road.'⁵¹ It is unclear whether they meant that the bailiff was stealing on behalf of the king, or that he stole from the king by keeping their taxes for himself. There is some evidence to suggest that the former was more to the point. Some of the rebels told one of the priests, 'Thus we shall treat all of the king's thieves,' which the priest interpreted as a threat.⁵² Also, when asked if they were going to follow the king's command and march south, a few of the rebels answered that they had no king, suggesting that they did not consider King Charles XII to be their king anymore. This might have insinuated that they thought that the king had failed in his obligation to protect them and thereby lost his right to reign over them.⁵³

In accordance with this, the rebels lashed out at those who did not participate.⁵⁴ They quickly challenged anyone who acted disapprovingly. For example, they asked a man who was bringing Warenberg water if 'you, you rascal, agree with this rascal bailiff?'⁵⁵ One of the rebels asked the bystanders 'if they did not want to be men and stand their ground', goading them to join in.⁵⁶ Others were threatened with spears and guns, and forced to take part.⁵⁷ Several testimonies indicate that some of the peasants thought that the murder would only be punishable with fines, saying that if all partook, 'we will not get any more wergild than 1 öre silvermynt per man.'⁵⁸ The attempts to persuade all to participate might have been motivated by economic considerations, but the rebels' shouts and insults indicate instead that it was an attempt to promote the honesty of their actions.

Kimmo Katajala has previously shown that rebellious peasants in the Swedish realm frequently presented rebellions as communal activities. They argued that they had taken all decisions together and were thus collectively responsible for those decisions. According to Katajala, this points to communalistic horizontal structures among the peasantry, and he contrasts this notion with the fact that the authorities nevertheless tried each peasant separately, thus insisting on facing them as individuals.⁵⁹ The events in Binneberg show us what happened if the peasants did *not* agree on a rebellion. The rebels argued that all should stand united, but several parishes had withdrawn when the beating started. Others claimed to have been forced to participate upon fear of death, and others still made efforts to assist the bailiff.⁶⁰ Yet their actions were insufficient in the eyes of the authorities, who maintained that they should have put up a united front against the rebellious parties:

The reported rebellious instigators of this uprising were a limited few, to stand against the manifold and large gathering of the peasantry of Vadsbo hundred ... so that the rebellious bunch should not have been able to prevent them from continuing this march ... had their determination and love for their noble king and dear fatherland been steadfast and persistent.⁶¹

In this rebellion as well, the peasants were tried and received their sentences one by one, but the quote suggests that the authorities also held that the peasants should have been able to resist the rebels had they stood united. The publicness of the event, with many peasants gathered at one place and at one time, should have made resistance possible. Instead, the publicness seems to have worked to the rebels' advantage. It guaranteed them an audience, in front of which they could claim that their actions were honest. They did this through their public beating of the bailiff, but also by their boasting and insults.

Several studies have shown how people in urban settings used public, open spaces for solving conflicts, whether with violence or words. Both men and women took part in upholding order in the streets, and they did this in front of each other.⁶² At Binneberg, the courtyard functioned in the same way as urban streets; it served as a public space where conflicts were enacted and resolved, and where order was restored. Furthermore, this public function spilled over into the surrounding peasants' homes, as the rebels went to their night quarters in the evening after the murder. Due to

the many peasants gathered at Binneberg, the inn had quickly filled, leaving several peasants to sleep at other peasants' homes. On their way to and then within these homes, the rebels continued in their boasting, praising themselves for having 'put the bailiff to sleep',⁶³ and saying that 'it was right that shame was slain'.⁶⁴ In so doing, the public act of declaring their actions to be honest crossed another threshold, converting the peasants' homes into semi-public spaces.

When passing the threshold from the courthouse to the courtyard, the rebels moved from an official space to a public one. They demonstrated that the bailiff was not under the crown's authority anymore, but subjected to a social order communally upheld by the peasants. The courtyard was *their* space. At the same time, they might have been trying to escape the authorities' control: by conducting the murder outside, they might have believed that they would escape the harsher punishments of an *edsöresbrott*. As they repeatedly dragged the bailiff first outside, then inside, they paraded their control over the threshold, as well as their power to decide which kind of public the bailiff would face. The threshold made it possible to separate their actions and to carry out both trial and punishment.

The open road

This brings us to the role of the road at Binneberg. Read closely, the testimonies of those involved show why this was the space chosen by the peasants as the final resting place for Warenberg. After the bailiff had died, the peasants dragged him onto the road, claiming that he was not honest enough to lie in the courtyard. The act indicates that the peasants attached certain values to the courthouse and courtyard as spaces of justice and honour, and that the presence of Warenberg's body risked contaminating those spaces. Such a view resonates with how authorities treated criminals, such as murderers, who were not allowed to be buried in cemeteries after execution. While the cemetery was a hallowed space, the courtyard was here claimed as a public and honest space, one from which the bailiff was expelled.

According to the sources, the road carried contradictory connotations. First, it was supposed to be a space of free movement. After the murder, two priests came riding along the road with a mission from District Judge Aurell to try and gather information concerning the events at Binneberg. Some peasants blocked their way, asking them about their intentions. The priests replied: 'It is an open King's road, where people are allowed to travel, even if the peasantry is gathered'.⁶⁵ After noting that the travellers were a couple of priests, the peasants reluctantly escorted them through the crowd. There is a certain discrepancy here: while the priests argued that it was the king's road, the peasants had clearly taken it over and claimed command of it as their own. The road at Binneberg was a space of movement, but no longer free for all.

Secondly, the road was simultaneously recognized as beyond the peasants' – or anyone else's – area of control. After the priests had been led past the crowd, they insisted on being shown the bailiff's body, which was by then lying on the road. They later returned to Aurell and recounted what they had seen. Aurell was terrified, and demanded that someone should collect the body from the road, 'so that he must not lay there [exposed

to] dog and claw, or to be hurt and eaten by brutish animals.⁶⁶ Two men did as he asked and tried to move the body, but the peasants stopped them, saying that '[Warenberg] was not worthy of anything else, than to lie where he [is], and be eaten.'⁶⁷ The rural road was thus framed as an unprotected space, where dangerous, wild animals roamed. To leave the bailiff's body in such a place must be interpreted as a final act of insult. It indicated that the rebels would allow the bailiff's body to be eaten, thus refusing him the possibility of ever being buried in a cemetery, which would have enabled him to enter God's kingdom.⁶⁸ Furthermore, it echoed the treatment of outlaws, who could be killed but not sacrificed, and who stood outside of the protection of justice.⁶⁹

The rebellion was carried out in three different locations, but they were all connected to each other and gained their respective significance partly through these connections. The courthouse was both an official and a public building, and was used by the rebels for public complaints during the rebellion. Their defiling of an official space condemned them to harsh punishments. The courtyard was a public space, and was used for public revenge on the bailiff. The road, finally, was a space beyond order and control, characterized instead by movement and unruliness. The peasants used it to demonstrate that the bailiff was no longer included in their community – human and Christian. They expelled him, both in this life and the next, echoing the punishment of the *edsöresbrott* and marking the bailiff as an outlaw.

A private man, a public official

So far, I have shown how the peasants drew on notions of official and public spaces to inform their actions in attacking Bailiff Warenberg. In this section, I shall take a closer look at the accusations made against the bailiff – namely that he had taken bribes – and argue that the peasants' actions and choice of venues should be read with this in mind. First, the accusations need to be put into perspective. During the early eighteenth century, private individuals often compensated state servants in money or in kind for fulfilling certain tasks. These tasks were not necessarily considered to be outside of the duties of their offices, but nor were they indubitably within them; rather, they were tasks that the officeholder had the ability perform, but that the state did not pay him to perform. Such tasks could include the writing of supplications for individuals asking for help, the procurement of passports for those wishing to travel, or acting as a middleman in various conflicts or disagreements. Performing such tasks was a much-needed way for the state servant to earn some extra money; the wage received by the state was rarely enough for his subsistence.⁷⁰

Such payments are not to be confused with bribes, although the line between the two was not always clear. Taking a bribe for performing (or not performing) a task was not looked kindly upon by the authorities, since it implied that their orders would not be followed, and that money that might otherwise have ended up with the state went instead into the state servant's pocket. Battling corruption was thus high on the early modern state's agenda, and the Swedish state was no exception. People around the country were encouraged to inform their closest authorities of any transgressions of bailiffs or other state servants in rural areas.⁷¹

As Magnus Linnarsson and Mats Hallenberg have shown, the danger of public officials taking bribes was repeatedly evoked during parliamentary debates in early modern Sweden. A solution was to have private companies or individuals operate public services, and several experiments were conducted within such diverse areas as tax farming, street cleaning, transportation and waste management. However, a private organization was not without its faults: by gaining profit, a private organization could enrich itself at the public's expense. This argument was consistently brought forward during parliamentary discussions on the topic, as Linnarsson has shown.⁷²

The public official thus had to find a balance between receiving money for private tasks executed within his profession, and staying clear of accusations that he was gaining private profit, namely by taking bribes and enrichments that his supervisors might consider to be unlawful. The bailiffs, hardly adulated by their communities, were in an especially exposed position, also risking accusations from affronted peasants. Still, accusations of bribery against bailiffs seldom reached the top, either because such behaviour was infrequent, or because local societies had much to gain from a bailiff that could be bought.⁷³

The allegations against Bailiff Warenberg thus stand out during this period. According to several letters of accusation, Warenberg repeatedly took money for small services, and most of the accusations concerned conscription. During the Great Northern War, Sweden used an allotment system in which peasants were divided into *rote* (units), each of which was responsible for procuring a certain number of soldiers for the army. If a man was appointed as a soldier, he was generally not allowed to pay the authorities to be released from service, but it was possible to pay another man to take one's place. Nevertheless, the peasants accused Warenberg of having accepted bribes; for example, Håkan from Önnerrud claimed to have given Warenberg 8 *caroliner* to exempt two farmhands from military service.⁷⁴ In paying the bailiff to be released from service, it was implied that Warenberg would be responsible for finding another recruit – otherwise, such a bribe would only amount to the *rote* having to find another soldier. Still, the bailiff sometimes failed to do this; Anders Svensson accused Warenberg of accepting 9 *daler* to exempt his son from service, but because Warenberg failed to replace his son, Anders ended up having to enlist himself.⁷⁵

Another example indicates that Warenberg not only took money to exempt certain peasants from service, but also manipulated and tricked peasants into paying him several times over. Lars Bengtsson and his neighbours had recently recruited a man as their soldier for 100 *daler*, only to have Warenberg assign that same man to another *rote* and instead conscript Lars. Lars's father paid Warenberg some silver to exempt the son from service, but instead Warenberg conscripted their farmhand. The farmhand also paid Warenberg to be exempted, after which the *rote* had to recruit and pay for yet another replacement. Then Warenberg drafted Lars's brother for another *rote*, forcing their father to give him even more silver.⁷⁶ Similar accusations were made by the peasants in Delsbäck *rote*.⁷⁷

Having to pay to keep sons and workers from harm's way repeatedly during a period with recurrent recruitments must have been trying for the peasants. Still, several of the accusations, including Lars's and the one from Delsbäck, indicate that it was not the payment itself that frustrated them. Rather, it was the failure of Warenberg to honour

his agreements. In 1710, one third of all men in Vadsbo had been drafted, and due to the state's continuous demand for soldiers, it must have become difficult for Warenberg to exempt peasants from service. However, he failed in other tasks as well. Seeking to retrieve her deceased husband's pay, Annika Persdotter gave Warenberg a set of plaited leather reins and some birch bark to sort the matter out. This sort of payment might fall under the category of fair compensation for services procured, and the main accusation in Annika's letter was not that Warenberg had collected payment, but rather that he had failed to follow through with his promise. When she confronted him, he rebuffed her 'with curses and harsh words', with the result that she did not dare raise the issue again.⁷⁸ Warenberg was thus accused of failing in his duties. He took payment without giving anything back, he cursed and behaved as a commoner; where he should have behaved as a public official, he acted as a private man – a dishonest one, at that.

Early modern Sweden was strictly hierarchical. A public servant had the right to expect a certain amount of respect, especially from those below him. The peasants' reaction to Warenberg's habit of acting contrary to his position was to treat him accordingly; the beating he received reflected a degradation of Warenberg's person. By calling Warenberg foul names and beating him publicly, the crowd stripped from him his public role, and labelled him as their peer, or rather, as their inferior. That the peasants thought that they would only be penalized with fines for the murder of Warenberg further supports this interpretation: they treated him as any other man, not as a public official. That Warenberg should have behaved better most likely only exacerbated their animosity towards him.

The commission disagreed. According to them, Bailiff Warenberg's position as a state servant warranted him extra protection. The crime against him was thus not primarily a crime against Warenberg's private person, but a crime against the state, the king, and even against God's creation, as was made overtly clear in the sentence:

The peasants of Vadsbo hundred have ... indefensibly forsaken their loyalty, against the First Epistle of Peter, 2nd chapter – which bids and commands to fear God and honour the King, and that whoever defies his authorities defies God's creation, as there is no authority but that which is given by God – the Epistle of the Romans [chapter] 13, and against the 2nd and 5th chapter 3§ in the King's law, when they in Binneberg dreadfully tortured and murdered the office holder of the crown, Johan Olofsson Warenberg ... having thus committed *Crimen parricidii, periurii, proditiōis, et falsi*; whereby they have abandoned their subordinate devotion and obligation to their most gracious King, and forsaken it as treacherous subjects.⁷⁹

According to the commission, Warenberg was not a private man, but a public official. Furthermore, he was murdered while conducting his public duty of summoning the peasants to march against the enemy.⁸⁰ The peasants' failure to appreciate this, together with the fact that their refusal to march against Scania had endangered the whole country, warranted the harshest punishment.

From the written testimonies, the extent of Warenberg's corruption seems to have been evident. Still, during the trial, and following explicit questioning from the commission, the peasants collectively recanted their stories, and claimed to

know nothing about any supposed corruption. Village after village, community after community, agreed: 'The late bailiff had never done them any wrong, instead he only did good, and they have no reason to bring up the least reproach against any royal servant.'⁸¹ The trial thus ended up reinstating Warenberg's reputation as a public official, marking the peasants' attack on his body as all the more appalling and unforgivable.

Moving between spaces

In medieval and early modern imagery, the threshold stood for ambiguity. It conveyed change, of being inside and outside and of moving in between, and it indicated the passage between this life and the next.⁸² In the rebellion at Binneberg 1710, these meanings were concretized through the rebels' actions. Passing over the thresholds – from the courthouse, to the courtyard, to the road – signified going from an official space, to a public space, to an open space, and the peasants changed their actions accordingly. Moreover, their movements and actions reflected the accusations they made against the bailiff; they spatially enacted notions of private and public.

A main conclusion of this study is that the peasants who gathered at Binneberg differentiated between two kinds of public. Being inside an official building – a public where the peasants met their authorities – led the rebels to exercise restraint with regard to their violence. They used the courthouse for the official part of the rebellion, which centred on presenting their grievances: they declared that the bailiff had transgressed his authority, and demanded repayment for the money that they had paid him. While the peasants did violate the rules of the building according to the authorities, thereby warranting harsh punishments, the testimonies all suggest that they showed some restraint since they chose to reserve their most violent acts for outside.

The main attack on the bailiff took place outside the courthouse, where the second kind of public actions was carried through. Apart from the gruesome violence that ultimately left the bailiff slain, the peasants used this space to yell insults and to degrade their victim. They urged others to participate in the beating, with the explicit aim of making the rebellion a joint action against the authorities. They used their audience, drawing people close to bear witness to their actions, turning the beating into a public event. Publicness was thus not only dependent on space, but also on actions; the rebels created a public atmosphere. They evoked the potentiality for publicness in a way that indicates that they experienced a need for it; publicness seems to have served their purposes. Scholars have previously found that urban open and public spaces were often used for violent acts, turning a physical attack into an attack on the victim's honour as well. My investigation shows that this kind of public display was important in rural societies as well. Violent acts took place outside, so that everyone could see what happened, as public display implied that the perpetrators had nothing of which to be ashamed.

The treatment of the bailiff at Binneberg in fact mimicked the treatment of criminals in early modern Sweden. They were accused and sentenced within the courthouse, but corporal punishments were performed outside, in the open, before a public. Even in the slaying of Warenberg, the rebels mirrored the punishments they themselves risked,

if found guilty for the *edsöre* crime: by casting him out in the road, they expelled him from the community, and refused him the right of a Christian burial. The dependence on a public to do this is evident from the sources; the rebels insisted on witnesses. The witnesses, however, did not witness what the rebels had intended. Instead of testifying to the wrongdoings of the bailiff, they testified to the crimes of the rebels. The public in this respect was thus both a promise and a threat; it could easily turn on those who called for it.

Furthermore, the investigation identifies how the private interacted with the public when it came to the accusations brought against Bailiff Warenberg. The bailiff was accused of taking private profit and acting as a private man, thus not fulfilling his public duties. The privateness of Warenberg's business was flaunted publicly, the accusations made for anyone to hear, and the beating itself can be read as a display of how the peasants exposed Warenberg's descent into a private man to a wider audience. In a way, it was Warenberg's persona as private or public that was at trial at Binneberg. According to the commission, Warenberg's position as a bailiff accorded him the respect due to a public official. According to the peasants, however, Warenberg had shown in his actions and words that he was not a true servant to the king, and thus not worthy of their respect. To them, he had failed as a public official: as an inferior private man, he was brutally punished.

Notes

- 1 This research was funded by a generous grant from *Vetenskapsrådet* (*The Swedish Research Council*), no. 2018–06596.
- 2 The main source material for this meeting and the ensuing rebellion is kept in the Swedish National Archive (SNA), Äldre kommittéer ([Older Committees], ÄK) vol. 44. Findings have been corroborated in SNA, *Skrivelser till Kungl. Maj:t, Landshövdingen i Skaraborgs län*, vol. 20 (1709–11).
- 3 See the excellent research overview in van den Heuvel 2019, 695–6.
- 4 Cohen 2008, 311–12; van den Heuvel 2019, 697; Laitinen 2017, 142; Ågren 2006, 24–5.
- 5 Gowing 2000, 133; Muurling and Pluskota 2017, 158–9.
- 6 Nussdorfer 1997, 169–70.
- 7 Scribner 1992, 823.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 840.
- 9 See, for example, Jacobs 2018, 3–15; Bawden 2014, 20–32; Justitz 2002, 631–2; Jütte 2015, 11–13; Williamson 2015, 173–6.
- 10 Roessler 2016, 243.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 251–4. See also Roessler and Mokrosinska 2013.
- 12 'Schwellen sind dazu da, überschritten zu werden', Assman and Assman 1997, 8.
- 13 Cf. Simmel [1909] 1994.
- 14 The main proponents are Aronsson 1992; Österberg 1989.
- 15 The main proponents are Nilsson 1990; Lindegren 1992.
- 16 See, for example, Katajala 2004, 263–9; Kepsu 2017.
- 17 See, for example, Villstrand 1992.
- 18 Stille 1903, 204–21.

- 19 See, for example, Protocol 7 May 1710, 194–5; 9 May 1710, 133; 16 May 1710, 173–6, 180, all in SNA ÄK 44.
- 20 'Ju längre det led mot aftonen ju mera folk stötte till från de långväga församlingarna, så att det blev allt för mycket sorl och buller att man intet kunde uträtta', Letter from Värning parish, no date, SNA ÄK 44. Translations are mine throughout this chapter.
- 21 Johan Ek's testimony, no date, SNA ÄK 44.
- 22 Gabriel Andersson's testimony 5 May 1710; Johan Ek's testimony, no date, both in SNA ÄK 44.
- 23 'Igår laddade jag med 3 styckor förr, men nu skall jag det göra med 16, och dem skall fogden få smaka på', Bengt Larsson's testimony 15 March 1710; Protocol 13 May 1710, 140, both in SNA ÄK 44.
- 24 8 *caroliner* equalled about 15 *daler kopparmynt*, roughly a half year's pay for a farm hand, see Lindström and Mispelaere 2015; Edvinsson and Söderberg 2011.
- 25 Protocol 13 May 1710, 139–42. For other examples, see Protocol 7 May 1710, 86; 16 May 1710, 166; 17 May 1710, 187–8, all in SNA ÄK 44.
- 26 See, for example, Gabriel Andersson's testimony 5 May 1710, SNA ÄK 44.
- 27 Bengt Larsson's testimony 15 March 1710, SNA ÄK 44.
- 28 Letter from the surgeons 26 May 1710, SNA ÄK 44.
- 29 Bengt Larsson's testimony 15 March 1710, SNA ÄK 44.
- 30 Soop to the Royal Council 3 and 8 March 1710, in Letters from the governor of Skaraborg to the Royal Majesty, vol. 20, SNA Skrivelser till Kungl. Maj:t. See also Ericsson 2013, 263–4.
- 31 Sentences, SNA ÄK 44.
- 32 This was generally the case in Europe during this period; see, for example, van der Heijden and Muurling 2018, 700–1.
- 33 *Christopher of Bavaria's Law of the Realm*, Edsöresbalken Ch XIII–XV. Even the road to and from court was protected by this law.
- 34 Sundin 1992, 5–11.
- 35 See, for example, Protocol 4 May 1710, 48; 7 May 1710, 85, 13 May 1710, 140–2, all in SNA ÄK 44.
- 36 Protocol 14 May 1710, 150; 17 May 1710, 186; Sentences: 23, 44, all in SNA ÄK 44.
- 37 The sentence of Lars Collin against Hova gäld, and Fägre gäld; Sentences: 5, both in SNA ÄK 44.
- 38 'Med varjehanda åtgärd samma publika hus fördärvat, och likt en röverkula gjort', Svante Segervald to the Commission 25 May 1710, SNA ÄK 44. On references to the courthouse as a 'privileged room', see Lars Collin's sentence on Hova and Fägre gäld; Sentences: 5, 23, all in SNA ÄK 44.
- 39 See, for example, Bengt Larsson's testimony 15 March 1710; Håkan Larsson's testimony 30 April 1710, both in SNA ÄK 44. See also Sentences: 17, 33, SNA ÄK 44.
- 40 'Uti en summa alla den sal[iga] mannens små sår, blemma och blodviten, kan ingen räkna, ty han var icke hanterad som en mänsk [människa], utan obarmhärtl[igen]', Autopsy protocol 26 May 1710, SNA ÄK 44.
- 41 'En stor hop allmoge', Protocol 2 May 1710, 9, SNA ÄK 44.
- 42 Bengt Larsson's testimony 15 March 1710; Protocol 10 May 1710, 97–104, both in SNA ÄK 44.
- 43 See, for example, Shapin 1994, 9–15.
- 44 'Det var rätt att skam blev ihjälslagen,' Protocol 6 May 1710, 70, SNA ÄK 44.
- 45 Bengt Larsson's testimony 15 March 1710, SNA ÄK 44.

- 46 Erik Lundgren's testimony 14 May 1710; Johan Ek's testimony, no date; Protocol 6 May 1710, 90, all in SNA ÄK 44.
- 47 Protocol 2 May 1710, 21, SNA ÄK 44.
- 48 Protocol 14 May 1710, 121, 157, 187, SNA ÄK 44.
- 49 Protocol 13 May 1710, 137–8, SNA ÄK 44.
- 50 Protocol 12 May 1710, 125, SNA ÄK 44.
- 51 'Fogden ej skulle dö på en ärlig mans gård, utan som han skall varit kungens tjuv, så skulle han dö på kungens landsväg', Protocol 2 May 1710, 21, SNA ÄK 44. See also Protocol 2 May 1710, 22, SNA ÄK 44.
- 52 '[Så s]kola vi hantera alla kungens tjuvar', Johan Ek's testimony, no date, SNA ÄK 44. See also Protocol 7 May 1710, 90, and Sentences: 38, both in SNA ÄK 44.
- 53 Protocol 17 May 1710, 195, SNA ÄK 44. On the bailiff as the king's thief, see also Bengt Larsson's testimony 15 March 1710; Protocol 6 May 1710, 90, both in SNA ÄK 44.
- 54 Protocol 2 May 1710, 17, SNA ÄK 44.
- 55 'Håller icke du skälmer med den här skälmsfogden', Bengt Elg's testimony, no date, SNA ÄK 44. See also Protocol 6 May 1710, 85, SNA ÄK 44.
- 56 'Om de icke ville vara karlar och stå på sig', Protocol 4 May 1710, 45, SNA ÄK 44.
- 57 Protocol 12 May 1710, 124–6, SNA ÄK 44.
- 58 'Lärandes [vi] intet mer löpa i mansbot, än 1 öre Smt till mans', Sven Nilsson of Tattartorpet, quoted in Protocol 10 May 1710, 104, SNA ÄK 44. See also Protocol 2 May 1710, 21; 4 May 1710, 46, SNA ÄK 44. Murder was punishable by death.
- 59 Katajala 2009, 177–8.
- 60 See, for example, Protocol 3 May 1710, 31–2, 35–6; 4 May 1710, 44–51; 6 May 1710, 71–2; 10 May 1710, 97–104; 12 May 1710, 123–6, all in SNA ÄK 44.
- 61 'Såsom de till detta oväsendet angivna upproriska upphovsmän, voro fast få och ringa, att räkna, emot den mångdubbla och stora myckenhet ... så att den upproriska hopen ingalunda kunnat hindra, dem ifrån denna marschens fortsättande ... där viljan och kärleken för dess allranådigste konung och kära fädernesland varit beständig och trofast', Sentence 23 June 1710, 5–6, SNA ÄK 44.
- 62 Lipscomb 2011, 411–13; Laitinen and Lindström 2008, 287; van der Heijden and Muurling 2018, 707–8. See also Ågren 2006, 31–2, 43.
- 63 '[De har] sövt fogden', Protocol 17 May 1710, 191, SNA ÄK 44.
- 64 'Det var rätt att skam blev ihjälslagen', Protocol 6 May 1710, 70. See also Bengt Larsson's testimony 15 March 1710; Johan Ek's testimony, no date, all in SNA ÄK 44.
- 65 'Det var en öppen kungsväg, den folk får resa, fast allmogen är församlad', Johan Ek's testimony, no date, SNA ÄK 44.
- 66 'Att han icke må ligga där för hund och ram, eller och oskäligen kreatur skadas och uppätas', Erik Lundgren's testimony 14 May 1710, SNA ÄK 44.
- 67 '[Warenberg] intet annat vara värd, än där som han låg, ligga och uppätas', Erik Lundgren's testimony 14 May 1710, SNA ÄK 44.
- 68 On the importance of being buried in a cemetery, see Engström 2019, 167–70.
- 69 Agamben 1998.
- 70 Cavallin 2003, 55–65; Frohnert 1993, 74–5.
- 71 Lennersand 1999, 308–13. On corruption in early modern Europe, see, for example, Durand 2017; Knights 2017; Frisk Jensen 2017.
- 72 Linnarsson 2018; Hallenberg and Linnarsson 2016; Linnarsson 2017, 238–44.
- 73 Haikari 2017.
- 74 Håkan Larsson's testimony 30 April 1710, SNA ÄK 44.
- 75 Anders Svensson's testimony, no date, SNA ÄK 44.

- 76 Lars and Nils Bengtsson's testimony, no date, SNA ÄK 44.
- 77 Letter from Delsbäck *rote* 2 June 1710, SNA ÄK 44.
- 78 'Med bannor och hårda ord', letter from Annika Persdotter, no date, SNA ÄK 44. See also letter from Per Larsson, no date, SNA ÄK 44.
- 79 'Men däremot sin trohetsplikt oförsvarligen eftersatt, emot den 1 Pet[rus] epist[el] 2:dra kap[itlet], som bjuder och befäller, att frukta Gud och ära konungen, och den som sätter sig emot överheten, han sätter sig emot Guds skickelse, efter ingen överhet är utan av Gudi, Rom[arbrevet] 13 lika så emot det 2:dra och 5:te kapitlen 3 § konungsba[ll]ke[n] l[ands]l[agen], utan i Binneberg, kronans befallningsman Johan Olofsson Warenberg jämmerligen pinat och mördat ... och således skolat commiterat och begått *Crimen parricidij, perjurij, prodicionis, et falsi*; varmed de sin underdånigaste devotion och skyldighet, emot sin allranådigaste konung, och kära fädernesland avklätt, och som genstörtiga undersåtar åsidosatt', Sentence 23 June 1710, SNA ÄK 44.
- 80 See, for example, the first letter from Svante Segervald, no date, SNA ÄK 44.
- 81 'Att sal[ige] befallningsmannen aldrig dem någon orätt tillfogat, utan allt gott gjort, ej heller de hava orsak över någon annan kronobetjänt det ringaste besvär anförä', Horns *gäld*, Protocol 6 May 1710, 79, SNA ÄK 44. For other communities, see, for example, Protocol 4 May 1710, 60–1; 7 May 1710, 93; 9 May 1710, 96; 10 May 1710, 106–7; 11 May 1710, 115, all in SNA ÄK 44.
- 82 Bawden 2014, 21–32, 384–9; Jacobs 2018, 6–8; Jütte 2015, 11–13.