

Panel 49. Classificatory Systems, Values, and Standards in the Context of Migration, Borders, and Security

Convenors:

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Keywords: border control, border datafication, classification, migration, standardization

Classification systems are constitutive for migration and border regimes, the exercise of state power, the delineation of borders, and the state's creation of "the monopoly on the means of movement" (Torpey 2000). Classification systems are not merely passive reflections of the world, but actively shape and construct it. More generally, classifying is a technoscientific practice that shapes our perception of what we deem as "good" and/or "bad" (Bowker and Star 1999). Legally codified classifications make up different forms of citizenship, distinguishing "good" from "bad" subjects, enabling different degrees of freedom to move, and endowing social and political rights. Classification systems are integral to state infrastructures and the enactment, differentiation, segmentation, and hierarchization of people. They are embedded into material objects, technological devices, and infrastructures, like databases, passports, or questionnaires. In this sense, classifications become fundamental tools through which the state exerts control, enforces boundaries, and governs "alterities" (Pelizza 2020).

Research at the intersection of STS, critical migration studies, and border/security studies has explored a variety of technologies and data infrastructures, ranging from biometrics, techniques of risk analysis and preemption, to interoperable databases and AI-driven tools. Scholars have investigated the ways in which they categorize, filter, and sort people through "differential exclusion" (Mezzadra and Neilson 2020). Yet, even though classification systems and their standardization procedures are key for bureaucracy and statecraft, and for their increasingly digital forms of trans- and international governing, they have attracted relatively little attention.

We therefore invite conceptual, methodological, and empirical contributions that explicitly explore classification in the context of borders, migration, and security. This panel is interested in contributions that discuss, e.g.,

- how classification systems are materialised and embedded within standards and infrastructures of migration control;
- how legal, technical, and political classifications intersect and operate across different domains in migration governance;
- how classificatory systems, values, and standards become transformed in the context of datafying borders and migration control;
- actors and their expertises, arenas, and practices that transform classification systems into standardized forms and techno-legal entities to become legible for state authorities and suitable to bureaucratic practices;
- the genealogies of classification systems, including their racialized and colonial roots, in the realm of borders and migration; as well as their inconsistencies, messiness and incompleteness (Bowker & Star 1999);
- everyday work of "making fit" and "tinkering," performed by asylum case workers, officers, screeners, or bureaucrats;
- the margins of classification systems and the work of affected people to work towards or around classifications;
- how classification systems and standards racialize, vulnerabilize, discriminate, illegalize, and criminalize people;



- the silence, visibility, and invisibility of classification systems, which contribute to strategic
- ignorance and selective knowledge production.

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ID 264 - The Exclusionary Logic of ID Blocking in South Africa

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Keywords: Biometric, Data doubles, South Africa

On January 16, 2024, the South African High Court ruled in favor of more than 700,000 people whose identity numbers had been blocked by the government. The High Court declared this practice unconstitutional, marking the end of a decade-long policy by the South African Minister of Home Affairs that systematically blocked the identity numbers associated with the official documents of thousands of South African citizens and (mostly) permanent residents and migrants as part of its broader management of identities and migration flows.

Why did the South African government block these IDs? While there is speculation about motivations such as the exclusion of vulnerable or foreign populations due to an increased xenophobic sentiment, little to no academic scholarship has directly addressed this phenomenon. Drawing on the ideas of classification infrastructure and data as artefacts of cognition (Bowker and Star, 1999; Alaimo and Kallinikos, 2024), this paper situates ID blocking within broader debates on how data regimes in and outside the borders can produce the systematic exclusion of population strata. Specifically, this paper focuses on how the South African data regime was distinctively produced over time.

South Africa's historical relationship with biometric technologies provides a critical context for understanding its modern identities and migration control practices. The development of biometric architecture in the country is not a recent phenomenon. Under the influence of Francis Galton, a pioneer in eugenics, South Africa became a key site for early eugenic research and the application of biometric methods for colonial governance (Breckenridge, 2014). During apartheid, the government introduced a policy of racial separation, creating a series of identity enclaves to divide the population according to ethnic and racial categories. This policy of separate development sought to assign every Black South African to a designated 'homeland'. As a result, population registries, which mushroomed in the homelands, inherited significant errors, inconsistencies, and duplication (Breckenridge, 2005). The systemic flaws in these early registration practices set the stage for modern challenges in biometric data management, as well as shaping contemporary migration control strategies. Duplication in "data doubles" (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000; Trauttmansdorff, 2022) was usually handled by blocking the duplicate ID number. Derived from a historical technological legacy, this practice was, however, subsequently used to set an internal "digital border," shaping who could access legal rights and freedom of movement.

Utilizing a longitudinal case study methodology that combines archival research and interviews, this analysis shows how examining historical classification legacies – together with contemporary data governance practices – is crucial to understanding the systematic exclusion of individuals from recognised citizenship. Far from a mere technical glitch or a clear-cut policy decision, ID blocking emerges as a structural outcome of how classification systems are embedded in South Africa's bureaucratic and technological infrastructures. This paper thus contributes to broader discussions on how classification and datafication at the intersection of migration, borders, and security can reify long-standing social divisions and extend the reach of xenophobic policies through ostensibly neutral digital systems.



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ID 474 - Curating and deleting: Archival frictions in European security's data infrastructures

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Keywords: archival frictions, data governance, data retention and deletion, appraisal, European law enforcement

This study investigates archival frictions in the governing of data (and their) infrastructure at the core of European law enforcement cooperation. Archival friction refers to the tensions, conflicts, or challenges that arise within archival and information practices due to various factors such as organisational policies, technological limitations, legal regulations, ethical considerations, and cultural dynamics. Critical approaches to criminology and security studies often discuss the algorithmic system's voracity without paying much attention to the socio-technical, legal and political implications of data curation and deletion in actual instances of big (personal) data. To address this gap, we focus on the tension between the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) from 2019 to 2024, where the open conflict over deletion serves as a frame for our analysis.

Drawing on a transdisciplinary framework informed by critical archival and information studies, digital humanities, critical data studies, and criminology, we unpack how Europol operates not just as a law enforcement body but as a data infrastructure and appraisal machine. This paper positions appraisal – the process of deciding what data is retained, deleted, or further processed – as both a tool for understanding Europol's role in shaping power relations and governance practices and a perspective shaped by archival 'appraisal thinking' that highlights the active and political nature of appraisal within broader data governance frameworks.

By breaking down archival frictions into specific events, we examine the dynamics and power struggles in these processes, illustrating how appraisal practices challenge and substitute formal data governance mechanisms. This approach also reveals areas of opacity and ambiguities in European security infrastructures that are often overlooked. Our ambition is to empirically demonstrate the epistemic potential of a transdisciplinary approach pivoting on archival studies, and notably what vantage points it can offer to those literatures in criminology and critical security studies that already focus on European law enforcement.

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ID 506 - Securising by integrating: How to detect and classify deserving migrants

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Keywords: Migrations, borders, security, techno-legal practices suitable to bureaucratic practices

Migrations are often framed as crises by Western countries, implying that their management is a security issue. As a result, migration is not only perceived as an existential threat for the domestic order of nation-states but also as an exceptional situation requiring ad hoc solutions. Exceptionalism replaces normality in social control when power holders perceive security to be at stake, thus creating a blank space that allows governments to develop legal and technical tools to address insecurity. In this context, borders take on a crucial security role, serving both as margins and as tools for collecting data on people and their actions. Borders, then, become sites to produce knowledge that serves various objectives necessary to the implementation of securitisation policies (Pallister-Wilkins 2016).



This research focuses on borders as mechanisms of classification and examines the implications of these classifications in the development of security policies by Western countries. The socio-political use of physical and technological mechanisms of control, in fact, has a direct impact on the development of securitisation strategies, which are often implemented through specific legal and administrative tools by governments rather than solely with ordinary legislation. In particular, the research deals with Italian migration control policies of the last two decades and on how restrictive categorisation is not limited to physical containment mechanisms but it plays a significant role in sustaining security concerns. Specifically, the paper focuses on the civic integration policies implemented by Italian governments over the last fifteen years. These policies, introduced with the explicit motivation of promoting security, are based on the idea that only deserving migrants should be allowed to reside in Italy and that their deservingness must be precisely identified and measured by attending courses and passing tests. They therefore rely on classification criteria that are, however, variable and unstable. In fact, at its inception, the civic integration policy was addressed only to people migrating for economic or family reasons, while asylum seekers and refugees were exempted from signing the integration agreement. The first and broadest form of classification thus distinguished migrants on the basis of their reasons for migrating. Later, the logic of civic integration was extended to asylum seekers and refugees in the form of initiatives to promote free and voluntary work. New categories and criteria of classification have thus emerged, revealing the presence of new legal and administrative borders.

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ID 553 - Constructing Love: Transnational Couples' Strategies of Displaying genuineness of their relationships within the Border Infrastructure

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Keywords: classification, categorisation practices, border control, infrastructure

This paper explores the UK border as a classificatory infrastructure (Star and Bowker 1999). I argue that while the border creates a classification of individuals embedded in technological devices, migrants attempting to fit into these classifications create feedback loops. In Hacking's words, the border as a classificatory infrastructure is making up people (Hacking 2004). As a case study, I examine the legalisation process for transnational couples in the UK. To marry, couples must visit a local registration office to give notice. Registrars forward their applications to the Home Office and report if they have suspicions of sham relationships. All data is collected by a Home Office unit, where AI triangulates the information to flag suspicious couples.

This process is shaped by a series of layered interactions. Registrars rely on professional tacit knowledge – an intuitive sense of what constitutes a fake or genuine relationship (Maskens 2015). The border infrastructure channels diverse data into AI systems, enabling algorithms to identify potentially sham marriages. Finally, couples themselves actively engage with the classification, trying to determine what evidence will best convince the state of their relationship's genuineness.

Drawing on interviews with transnational couples married in the UK and registrars from local registration offices, this study explores how individuals adapt their behaviour to conform to state classifications, even when their understanding of the government's criteria remains unclear. To demonstrate the genuineness of their relationships, couples actively gather evidence, often relying on word-of-mouth advice and utilising specific genres, visual language, and templates that circulate within migrant communities and among immigration lawyers. These elements enable couples to craft what can be termed a "family display" (Carver 2014, Finch 2007), e.g., the process of using interactional and material resources to perform their identity as a legitimate couple (Goffman 1959). In this paper, I show how couples develop strategies for constructing family displays and how both technologies and communities of practice shape these strategies.

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ID 593 - Coastal borders, technologies of maritime security and the politics of classification

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Keywords: Maritime security, borders, coast, machine-learning, data

At coastal borders, global maritime security challenges (trafficking, smuggling, migration, even terrorism) must be tackled as everyday concerns. The securitisation of maritime migrant arrivals - from the UK's "small boats crisis" to the martial-humanitarianism of the Mediterranean - occludes a broader issue: that small marinas, landable beaches and waterways link local coastlines with all manner of global maritime circulations. Data collection, machine learning technologies and visualisation techniques produce new possibilities for governing maritime domains, especially coastal borders. In the British case, military-grade AI "counter-intrusion" towers now overlook coastal areas, and data about sea-borne objects, vessels and movement is gathered into a "pattern of life" that can be used to autonomously identify targets of interest. Put simply, governing maritime movement is becoming a matter of its transformation into data, with important ramifications for decision-making about bordering, security and saving lives at sea.

The use of data and machine learning technologies in maritime contexts produces distinctive challenges, especially in relation to classification. How to discern moving objects against the sea's mobile materiality? How to target illicit or risky movement in busy coastal regions? How best to distinguish a life in danger from floating debris? Engaging with STS and critical border security studies - and drawing from ethnographic fieldwork with coastal watch volunteers around the UK coastline - I draw out two arguments: the techno-scientific "challenges" of classifying movement at sea become ethical and-political effects in the functioning of maritime borders; and the turn to machine-learning and data at the coast is producing new forms of imperceptibility and insecurity, despite promises of total maritime domain awareness.

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ID 618 - EUROFRONT's Classification Practices- EU Categories of 'Smuggler's and 'Victims' in South America

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Keywords: classification practices, EUROFRONT, digital bordering infrastructures, smuggling

This paper explores how the EU-Latin American cooperation EUROFRONT reshapes migration governance through classification practices. Concretely, it investigates how EUROFRONT seeks to implement European and international knowledges and practices of classification to identify and prosecute the legally distinct categories of 'smugglers' and 'traffickers,' and identify and protect 'victims' of a smuggling operation in South America, where EU interventions in border management are a recent, under-researched phenomenon.

In 2020, a consortium of EU and international actors, including the International Organisation for Migra-



tion (IOM), initiated the pilot project EUROFRONT. Financed by the European Commission, EUROFRONT organizes trainings, awareness building, technical and technological support and legislative reform at four land border crossing points comprising seven countries, namely Colombia and Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru, Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil (EUROFRONT 2020a). One of EUROFRONT's axes of action centers "the fight against illegal trafficking of migrants" (EUROFRONT 2020b). Within this axis, the IOM is tasked with training local actors, both border officials and civil actors, on respective rights frameworks. The IOM also offers technical and technological support at the pilot borders to identify 'smugglers' and 'survivors of a smuggling operation' and "develop[...] tools for government officials in the prevention, identification and investigation of the crimes of human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants" (ibid.), additionally "improving information technology (IT) capabilities at border checkpoints for the prevention and response to migrant smuggling (ibid.)."

Critical migration research in Europe has closely considered the conflation of the criminalisation of migration with the EU's agenda against smuggling (Alagna and Sanchez 2024; Bellezza and Calandrino 2017) and emphasised how classification systems around smuggling have illegalised and criminalised asylum-seeking persons as 'smugglers.' In the Americas, the phenomenon of human smuggling has received predominant policy and academic attention in Central America, on migration routes to and in Mexico and the US (Sanchez 2014, 2017). Through EUROFRONT, classification practices around 'smuggling' that include the establishment of criminalisation and protection regimes along with the digitalisation of bordering infrastructures are supposed to be 'brought' to South America. In this paper, I thus pose the following questions: How are legal, social and political categories of 'smuggling' and 'victims' defined, invented, approved, contested and produced within EUROFRONT and its target audiences? How are these categories translated into- and applied within digital infrastructures? What effects does the digital registration as 'smuggler' or 'victim of smuggling' have for the persons concerned? How does the digitalisation of these categories produce new classifications, that become legally, politically and socially relevant and profoundly affect people's lives over time?

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ID 734 - Excluding by design: The Architecture of CCAC Infrastructure in the Eastern Aegean Archipelago

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Keywords: Border sovereignty, carceral infrastructure, Greek Turkish borders, CCAC, Eastern Aegean Archipelago

In 2020, a technical department within the Greek Ministry of Migration was established to construct multiple Closed Controlled Access Centers (CCACs) across the Greek territory within a short timeframe. This department's primary objective is to design, construct, and maintain these facilities in compliance with European and Greek legislative frameworks, technical regulations, and local complexities. The new CCAC infrastructure incorporates significant technological advancements and design patterns, aligning with the latest EU migration policy agenda and signaling the spatial and technological transition from hotspots to CCACs. These facilities utilize zoning and classification systems that reflect various power relations, institutional hierarchies to spatialize the EU eastern frontier borderline. The spatial and visual arrangements of segregation are defined by the functions of the spaces and reinforced by digital infrastructure, namely the 'Alkyoni,' 'Centaurus,' and 'Yperion' systems.

The design principles and construction methods for each CCAC follow a standardised "copy-paste" approach, potentially reflecting a unified perspective on border sovereignty. And while standardisation dominates, each facility also adapts to the specific characteristics of its location, shaping carceral spaces on each island and contributing to distinct spatialisation of technologies and infrastructures. At the same time, local hierarchies, power dynamics, and social antagonisms influence the design and operation of these facilities, highlighting the interplay between centralised planning and localised influences and showcasing the porous nature of these spatial arrangements.



Drawing from STS & Feminist Technoscience, Urban Studies & Architectural Theory, this presentation focuses on the design principles, construction processes, and material characteristics of the CCACs, which are characterised by classification and zoning principles and aims to better understand the carceral spectrum and border practices in the eastern Aegean region. Based on multisite field research across seven islands in the Eastern Aegean Archipelago, visits to four CCACs, and engagements with the relevant technical departments responsible for materializing such infrastructure, this paper examines the development of these carceral spaces. It explores their nature, characteristics, dynamics, and contradictions while analyzing the design principles and processes underpinning these hostile spatial and technological interventions. By mapping distinct technologies, design processes, and infrastructure, it seeks to answer the following questions:

- What organisational design principles, tools, and patterns are applied in the making of the new CCACs and what types of spatialities do they produce?
- How are zoning and surveillance techniques embedded in the carceral infrastructure, and what are its architectural elements and technologies?
- Which strategic design patterns are questioned or welcomed by local social antagonisms, and in what ways?
- What forms of everyday life emerge through such patterns, technologies and infrastructure?

