

# Processing Alterity, Enacting Europe: Migrant Registration and Identification as Co-construction of Individuals and Polities

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## Abstract

This article introduces the concept of “alterity processing” to account for the simultaneous enactment of individual “Others” and emergent European orders in the context of migration management. Alterity processing refers to the data infrastructures, knowledge practices, and bureaucratic procedures through which populations unknown to European actors are translated into “European-legible” identities. By drawing on fieldwork conducted in Italy and the Hellenic Republic from 2017 to 2018, this article argues that different registration and identification procedures compete to legitimize different chains of actors, data, and metadata as more authoritative than

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others. Competing procedures have governance implications, as well, with some actors being included and others being excluded. Furthermore, there is evidence that—despite procedural rigidities—applicants themselves propose alternative chains of actors, data, and metadata that are more meaningful to them. In this tension, it is not only the individual Other that is enacted but also specific bureaucratic orders cutting across old and new European actors and distinctive understandings of “Europe.” From a technology studies perspective, this article engages in a dialogue with the emergent debate on Hotspots, the scholarship about the infrastructural construction of Europe and political sociology.

### **Keywords**

migration, Europe, data infrastructures, population, metadata, bureaucracy

## **Introduction: Translating Alterity into “European-legible” Identities**

On July 20, 2015—exactly one month before the growing number of migrants crossing the Balkans pushed the Republic of Macedonia to declare the state of emergency—an almost unnoticed technical switch in the *Eurodac* system marked a major shift in population data management Europe-wide. Eurodac is a European Union initiative introduced in 2003 to support the application of the Dublin Regulation on asylum (European Parliament and Council of the European Union 2013). It univocally identifies asylum seekers through fingerprints, so that they cannot apply in more than one European member state.<sup>1</sup> On July 20, Eurodac was made interoperable with national police authorities’ databases Europe-wide. From that moment, member states’ authorities could query European data sources not only to grant asylum but also to conduct investigation on serious and petty crimes carried on in their territory.

This example points out how data infrastructures for population management can reveal and at the same time perform broader legislative, political, and administrative transformations in the European bureaucratic order. On one hand, data infrastructures are methodological entry points, analytical sites in which broader processes become visible. On the other hand, they contribute to “enact” or “perform” that same change.<sup>2</sup> Eurodac’s interconnected end points do not only pinpoint cross-European collaboration in data sharing, they also operationally allow it. By so doing, they also contribute to

standardize the ways in which individuals unknown to authorities are enacted as “migrants,” “refugees,” or “criminals.”<sup>3</sup>

As a framework chapter of a broader project on informational migration management and European transformation,<sup>4</sup> this article introduces the concept of “alterity processing” to account for the simultaneous enactment (or co-construction) of individual “Others” and emergent European orders. At once more holistic and more specific than “migration management,” alterity processing refers to the data infrastructures, practices, and bureaucratic procedures through which populations unknown to European actors<sup>5</sup> are translated into “European-legible” identities. As such, alterity processing points to the knowledge-related material dimension of migration management, as a building block for subsequent developments, for example in care or control.

Drawing upon empirical evidence collected in the Hellenic Republic and Italy between 2017 and 2018, this paper further specifies the main argument by showing how the abovementioned co-construction takes place in a number of cases. It argues that different registration and identification (R&I) procedures compete to legitimize different chains of actors, data, and metadata as more authoritative than others (Pelizza 2016). While some procedures remain at the stage of proposals, they nonetheless suggest how things could be otherwise. They reveal governance implications, with some actors being included and others being excluded from priority procedures and regimes of legibility. In this tension, it is not only the individual Other who is enacted but also specific bureaucratic orders cutting across old and new European actors and distinctive understandings of “Europe.”

In the next two sections, we draw on the literature on performative state formation and European infrastructural construction to develop the hypothesis that alterity processing does not simply enact bureaucratic orders. If we adopt the perspective that the modern bureaucratic state coagulated as a response to the informational needs of emergent forms of authority, then following contemporary bureaucratic rearrangements for population management might suggest directions in which emergent European polities are developing. As the time span of the research underpinning this article is too short to justify grand claims, the goal is not to provide definitive answers but to suggest a methodology making use of analytical tools provided by technology studies (section 4).

In fifth, sixth, and seven sections, we discuss a range of evidence showing how alterity processing constitutes a field of bureaucratic tensions among authorities at different scales (section 5), between state and nonstate actors (section 6), and between applicants and authorities (section 7). We conclude by stressing the potentiality of the concept of “alterity processing”

to establish a dialogue between technology studies and the emergent debate on Hotspots, the scholarship about the infrastructural construction of Europe and political sociology.

This article draws on fieldwork conducted in 2017 (July to August) and 2018 (March to August) at disembarkation ports and R&I facilities in Italy and Greece, the two European member states most active in alterity processing. Fieldwork has included observation of disembarkation, registration and identification, semistructured interviews with police and registration officers (twelve), officers in charge of first- and second-level reception (three), social workers operating at second-level reception (four), nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operators (three), a member of the judiciary, international organization operators (two), policy makers not directly involved in disembarkations (two), and a journalist. Additionally, this article draws on an analysis of policy documents and directives issued by the European Commission since the 2015 summer of the “refugee crisis,” as well as on templates for personal data collection and screenshots of actual database interfaces used by authorities.

## **Population Knowledge Performing Emergent Polities**

In the last decade or so, a small number of historians of technology have reengaged with Foucault’s (2007) legacy looking at methods of enumerating, regulating, and managing population as practices of governing that brought about the establishment of the modern state (see also Mitchell 1991 for an early insight). The performative relationship between data production and polity formation has, for example, been investigated by Carroll (2006). He has shown that the “political arithmetic” put in place by William Petty to engineer Ireland relied on the creation of land and people registries, which ultimately allowed redesigning Ireland as a modern state under British control. In the same period, mapping infrastructures were introduced in France by Jean-Baptiste Colbert, though with different outcomes. Colbert hired low-rank experts tasked with conducting land measurements and reporting them to the central administration. Not only production and circulation of paperwork contributed to reducing the influence of aristocracy, dossiers also enabled a new type of administrative capacity at the central level of the nascent French state (Mukerji 2011).

These and other studies stress the performative agency of data production and circulation for the nascent nation-state: “the new administrative practices of power were not formed around a rational bureaucracy, but rather by the circulation of papers and contracted expertise. The new

knowledge regime created a novel political capacity in the state” (Mukerji 2011, 225). New regimes of bureaucratic knowledge production and circulation performed the emergent nation-state bureaucratic order. Data infrastructures did not so much act as tools to make bureaucratic activities more efficient and reliable. Rather, the bureaucratic machine of the state coagulated as a response to information handling needs.

Such arguments are not confined to early modernity, as they have also been moved for nineteenth-century Britain (Agar 2003). They are, however, mainly confined to the form of the nation-state. One of the few exceptions extends the performative capability of maps to nineteenth-century Egypt–Great Britain imperial relationships. Mitchell (2002) has indeed looked at knowledge infrastructuring as a way to subordinate colonial territories by deploying Western technology, rationalities, and forms of governmentality. Following this example, one of the aims of this article is to decouple knowledge performativity from a teleological take focused on the nation-state and open it to the possibility of accounting for contemporary emergent bureaucratic orders. We might thus ask which emerging polities are being enacted by alterity processing.

## **The Infrastructural Construction of Europe**

Given the performative potential attributed to knowledge infrastructures, it is noteworthy and surprising that the historical literature on state formation has rarely engaged in a dialogue with another tradition in the history of technology, namely, that focused on the infrastructural construction of transnational polities. Such studies have mainly investigated the “hidden integration” of Europe as a *de facto* supranational technopolitical polity (Misa and Schot 2005). Notably, they have analyzed how European transportation (Schot and Schipper 2011), energy, water (Högselius, Kaijser, and van der Vleuten 2015), and communication infrastructures have enacted post–World War II Europe. Their common tenet has been to analyze the construction of new, hybrid polities as outcomes of large-scale technopolitical endeavors. The term “infrastructural Europeanism” has eventually been coined to refer to the infrastructural enactment of Europe (Schipper and Schot 2011).

Infrastructural studies of Europe provide two important insights into the goals of this article. First, they connect the performativity of infrastructures to the so-called governance turn, that is, the understanding that infrastructural practices can enact multiple, sometimes conflicting “Europes.” Crucially, each kind of Europe includes some actors and excludes others. In what follows, we similarly show that different infrastructural regimes for

population management legitimize specific chains of actors as more authoritative, while others are being excluded.

Second, this scholarship has been successful in showing how the infrastructural construction of Europe was characterized by the proliferation of nongovernmental actors: epistemic communities of experts who lobbied to legitimize themselves as intermediaries between national and European polities (Schot and Schipper 2011). As a consequence, the notion of infrastructural Europeanism “attempts to [...] prevent the conflation of the formation of Europe with that of the formal process of European integration. Instead, several co-existing Europe-oriented forms of governance overlapped, competed, or sometimes reinforced each other. ‘Europe’ thus becomes a constructivist notion” (Schipper and Schot 2011, 252).

Such attempt resounds with one of the major contemporary trends in the literature on migration. Accounts of the more and more strategic role of nonstate actors in migration management are proliferating.<sup>6</sup> Most of them concentrate on humanitarian actors and international organizations taking over state functions (Painter et al. 2017; Pallister-Wilkins 2015, 2018). Even when we adopt the alterity processing knowledge lens, the key role of nonstate organizations in collecting and interpreting data for subsequent policy-making is unquestionable. Such evidence reveals a trans-sectorial de facto hybrid Europe that transcends simplistic identifications of Europe with European agencies. Sixth section thus addresses the relationship between states and nongovernmental organizations. Yet, for space reasons, this article does not deal with another crucial nonstate actor, namely, IT contractors developing data infrastructures.<sup>7</sup>

Despite these resonances, it is noteworthy that the literature on the infrastructural construction of Europe has less consistently focused on data infrastructures for population and territory management, the two foundational building blocks of the modern political order (see section 2).<sup>8</sup> With this article, we intend to fill this gap by asking how data production and circulation in the context of alterity processing shape emergent European polities.

Furthermore, it should be noted that actors central to infrastructural accounts of European construction—that is, policy makers, experts, and consumers—are firmly anchored in European identities. Historical infrastructural studies have been very successful in going beyond comparing nation-states and focusing on crossborder connections influencing national developments. Yet the study of how non-European factors influenced European construction has been less prominent. Even when mapping non-European populations and territories, it was mainly European colonizers who gave meanings to those entities (Diogo and van Laak 2016). We

differently suggest that the range of actors contributing to the technosocial construction of Europe should be extended to non-European ones, as shown in seventh section.

## Alterity and Politics in Technology Studies

Accounts of how alterity is subsumed in politics have informed endless work in postcolonial literature (Anderson and Killingray 1991; Saada 2005; Rosenberg 2006; Thomas 2012), political history (Hartog 1988), and political sociology (Honig 1998; Isin and Turner 2002), to name a few. Yet the constitutive role of alterity is not only a theoretical necessity: it comes as empirical evidence, deeply embedded in mundane sociotechnical practices.

Research in science and technology studies (STS) has developed a few tools to deal with alterity, starting from a theory of institutionalization of heterogeneous actors through translation (one example for all, Callon 1986), to anthropological endeavors to launch “postcolonial STS” (Suchman 1994), to an understanding of alterity as one of the four traces of group formation, a methodological solution to the epistemological need to identify actors *ex post* (Latour 2005). It is only recently, however, that technology studies have more consistently interrogated themselves about how the technosocial enactment of alterity is performative of politics. This renewed interest for politics from inside technology studies has crossed digital militarism (Suchman 2016; Weber 2016), security studies (Suchman, Follis, and Weber 2017), occupied landscapes (Bier 2017), and the construction of race (M’charek, Schramm, and Skinner 2014a). Follis (2017), for example, has shown that visual surveillance technologies used at the external borders of Europe alter the character of national politics. According to M’charek, Schramm, and Skinner (2014b), different border management regimes enact diverse Europe(s) while they enact diverse phenotypic others.

We wish to contribute to these developments by proposing the notion of alterity processing as a technology studies–informed lens to look at data infrastructures, practices, and bureaucratic procedures through which people unknown to European actors are translated into European-legible identities, and emergent European politics are enacted simultaneously. Notably, bureaucratic procedures for R&I of non-European citizens are here understood as chains of human and nonhuman actors—including classification systems, forms of expert knowledge, data, and metadata.<sup>9</sup> In the next sections, we show how such understanding of alterity processing can display tensions on which R&I procedures are more legitimate and thus on which chains of actors, data, and metadata are more authoritative.

## Hotspots Orchestrating Intra- and Transnational Bureaucratic Orders

In this section, we focus on those assemblages of migration management procedures, people, organizations, and infrastructures called “Hotspots,” which since 2015 have reshuffled the order of alterity processing in Europe. While the goal of this article is not to describe the Hotspot approach per se in its legal implications, we see it as a crucial methodological step in our effort to illustrate how contemporary alterity processing may challenge existing bureaucratic regimes by prioritizing specific chains of actors, epistemic resources, and data.

The “Hotspot approach” was introduced by the European Agenda on Migration in May 2015 (European Commission 2015a), a few months before the September “refugee crisis.”<sup>10</sup> The Agenda itself incorporated and further developed initiatives included in a road map that the Commission had issued after the Statement of the European Council on April 23 (European Council 2015). Notably, Hotspots were aimed to provide coordinated operational support on the ground to frontline member states (i.e., Greece and Italy), upon their request, by seconding personnel and technologies from European Union agencies in their respective area of expertise: *Frontex* for border control, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) for asylum, *Europol* for policing, and *Eurojust* for judiciary.

Since their inception, literature on Hotspots has flourished, describing them as a tipping point in European migration policy and geography. Hotspots have been described as “sorting centres” (Campesi 2018), “spaces of humanitarianism” (Pallister-Wilkins 2018), “territorial incubators” disentangling territory from rights (Papoutsi et al. 2018), forms of “containment through mobility” (Tazzioli 2017), and “places of strandedness” (Dimitriadi 2017). Less attention has been given to deterritorialized spatialities allowed by data infrastructures that constitute the backbone of the Hotspot approach and connect member states’ peripheral bureaucracies to national and European centers of calculation. Even when Hotspots are acknowledged as experimental building blocks of an emergent European superstate (Painter et al. 2017), the bureaucratic and informational dimension through which such alleged Europeanization would be enacted is rarely investigated.

Pursuing the goal to “swiftly identify, register and fingerprint incoming migrants” (European Commission 2015a, 1), the introduction of Hotspots was indeed meant as a remedy to perceived flaws and inadequacies in European member states’ migration management practices by providing informational and bureaucratic standardization. As a matter of fact, in



September 2015, the European Commission adopted forty infringement decisions against member states who did not comply with European asylum procedures (European Commission 2015b) and almost simultaneously released a common list of safe countries of origin meant to standardize informational resources and asylum decisions (European Commission 2015c).

Evidence suggests that—far from simply facilitating the collaborative trans-European production of information about unknown populations—the introduction of Hotspots has had consequences for intra- and transnational bureaucratic orders. National R&I procedures have been adapted to transnational requirements on data quality, and local agencies have adopted new fingerprinting standards, machines, and protocols introduced by the European Commission and produced overseas.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, use of the European Commission's information systems by national authorities is strictly regulated by intranational organizational arrangements including secondment of police personnel to civil service and increasing employment of temporary staff.

For example, during our observation in Greece, it became clear that not all officers working at R&I facilities enjoy similar working conditions and therefore similar access to information systems. This is due to financial constraints that impede the Hellenic Government to hire personnel as civil servants on a permanent basis, as well as to the ever-present distinction between police and civil personnel. While temporary personnel are not allowed to access any information system, civil service personnel are not allowed to access European systems. Police personnel can access all available systems, but not in case they are seconded to civil service. Such a complex geography of access jeopardizes the use of European and national information resources.

A major case in point is provided by the array of databases used at Hotspots. Up to 2015, assessment of health conditions was the primary concern upon disembarkation of people rescued at sea. Local health databases were the first information systems used at ports. Systems for identification and fingerprinting were only filled at a second stage. Until 2015, one of the major ports of disembarkation in the northern Mediterranean was only equipped with a medical database, while R&I were conducted at the first reception facility (interview with reception officer). Differently, with the introduction of Hotspots, priority has been given to fill national and European databases collecting administrative personal data. In order to comply with European efficiency and standardization requirements and minimize the time gap between disembarkation and registration, mobile

registration systems have even been introduced in some Italian ports (interview with international organization officer).

A similar change in the priority given to the collection of diverse kinds of data marks a shift in the relative weight of the diverse epistemic resources used in determining an individual's identity. With the Hotspot approach, the relationship between health-related knowledge and administrative knowledge has been inverted, with the first being temporally subordinated to the second. In this, our evidence offers support to scholarship advocating the shift from "care and control" (Agier 2011; Ticktin 2016) to "control and care" (Pallister-Wilkins 2018).

Two considerations follow. First, priority given to the epistemic resources by which unknown individuals are identified cannot be analytically disentangled from the concomitant reordering of the chains of actors necessary for knowledge production. The production of health-related knowledge requires the mobilization of, among others, local physicians, national health taxonomies, personalized local databases. That is, very different actors than those mobilized to produce administrative knowledge: policemen using administrative categories, Frontex personnel, and European databases like Eurodac. In other words, the enactment of the individual Other as administrative subject—rather than as subject of care—goes in parallel with the procedural subordination of a chain of actors producing health knowledge to a chain of actors producing administrative knowledge. This is what we mean with "co-construction of individuals and bureaucracies."

Second, it is important to note how reordering is a relational temporal matter. As Felt (2017) has recalled, time is deeply entangled with issues of power. The metaphor of the R&I "pipeline" (Antonakaki, Kasperek, and Maniatis 2016) is a powerful description of disciplining applicants by imposing on them temporal frames. Yet temporal disciplining does not only concern applicants being registered but also authorities in their mutual relations. Hotspots-induced reordering materializes in the specific procedures and chains of actors that are given priority upon disembarkation. Therefore, administrative procedures and actors are not only the most urgent but also the most authoritative.

Bureaucracy is more about orchestrating priority than about deleting steps. Despite claims for efficient, smooth, and fast R&I, transnational reordering can only prioritize some procedures *at the expenses* of others. While some procedures are accelerated, others are slowed down in order to allow the alignment of relevant actors. This is the case of Hellenic R&I procedures for unaccompanied minors and the elderly, in which

fingerprinting takes place some days after the initial registration. Delay is necessary in order to wait for the results of age estimations conducted by means of X-rays and assure that only verified, high-quality data are uploaded on the European database Eurodac. As a matter of fact, the fingerprinting procedure constitutes the last R&I stage, which marks the definitive closure of a file and its automatic uploading on Eurodac. Officers have reported how correcting any data after it has been uploaded on Eurodac is extremely cumbersome, requiring the involvement of both the Hellenic Ministry of Migration and the Hellenic Ministry of Police. In order to avoid such a bulky process, internal procedures have been redesigned, and fingerprinting has been delayed to wait for age verification.

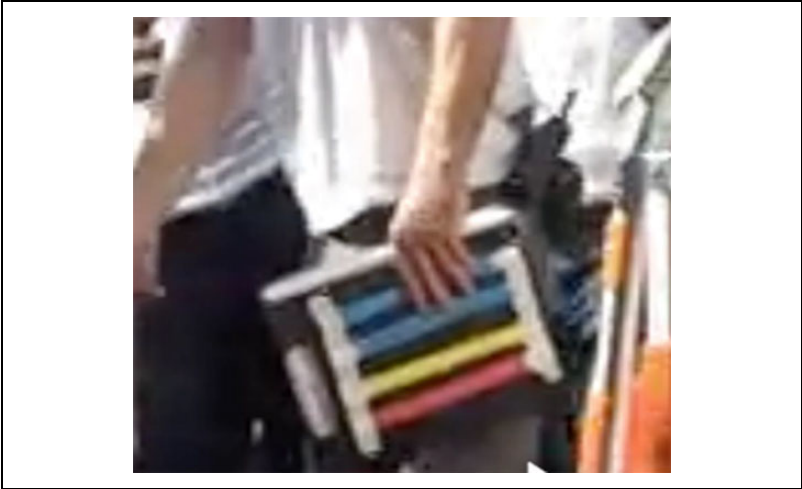
Such evidence shows that the Hotspot regime—with its requirements for transnational high-quality data sharing—prompts adaptation of intranational procedures to transnational orders. At the same time, in case of low-quality data, control is exerted at the national level by two ministries. This suggests a renewed role for national authorities, which reassert their jurisdiction over population data in the moment when intranational procedures leave room to transnational ones.

To conclude, paraphrasing Suchman (1994), we suggest that Hotspots' inscription of formal representations of interinstitutional action in information systems can ignite shifts in the order of European bureaucracies. Rather than simply prompting pan-European collaborative production of population data, Hotspots have entailed reshuffling of priorities, eventually challenging existing bureaucratic orders. In the next section, we further specify how diverse bureaucratic procedures struggling to legitimize some chains of actors, data, and metadata as more authoritative than others bring about broader governance implications, notably in establishing specific regimes of legibility.

## **Metadata Frictions Establishing Regimes of Legibility**

The sun is hitting hard on the concrete ground. Only a mobile tent offers relief to the hundreds lining between the vessel and the dock. Yet police, European and international organizations' officers, local authorities' and NGO's physicians, administrative and army officers, bus drivers, and people who only a few hours before were rescued from drowning do not seem to pay much attention to temperatures exceeding forty degrees Celsius.

The rescued wear bracelets in different colors: some only one, others even five. Some women wear up to ten bracelets; next to them there are kids who wear none. Later, we will be told that different colors indicate different health

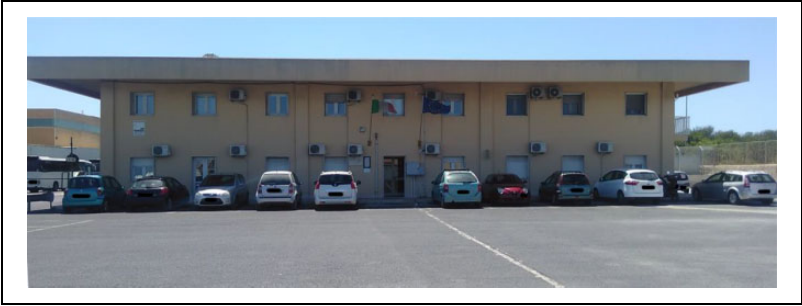


**Figure 1.** Bracelet rubric.

conditions. Red bracelets are given to all individuals. Blue bracelets indicate people affected by scabies. Blue bracelets with a black stripe identify vulnerable people, where “vulnerable” indicates a victim of diverse crimes: from human trafficking to torture, to rape. Finally, yellow bracelets are given to unaccompanied minors. Children with parents are not given any, as their parents wear also their kids’ bracelets. Sometimes, this simple categorization is complicated by a few bracelets in other colors: a reminder that some people were rescued by and transferred from another vessel. In order to avoid confusion, a common code for bracelet colors is currently being discussed among NGOs active in the Mediterranean.

This first health triage was already conducted on board by the NGOs’ physicians after Search & Rescue operations. Given navigation routes, it might take days before analogue data coded into bracelet colors are entered into a digital database at the port of disembarkation, where a second and even a third triage will take place immediately after arrival.

Today, Hotspot authorities’ and NGO’s representatives are discussing. A member of the ship crew hands the rubric reporting the bracelet coding to an officer (Figure 1). Meanwhile, the rescued who have passed a second health inspection and went through preidentification mount on buses. Some buses have already left for the Hotspot located at the other end of the dock (Figure 2). In a couple of hours, the dock will be turned desert (Figure 3; *Hotspot on the south coast of Italy, July 2017. Author’s own observation*).



**Figure 2.** Hotspot building.



**Figure 3.** Empty dock.

Until May 2018, scenes like this used to take place weekly at Mediterranean ports where coast guard and NGO vessels disembarked people they rescued from the sea. In this tragic disorder, what gets materialized every time on southern European docks are attempts to establish order by creating population registers almost from scratch. Analogue and digital systems for

sorting, identifying, registering, and assessing people are tasked with the sensitive assignment of processing alterity. The analogue bracelet-coding system above described is crucial in this attempt.

Despite its apparent simplicity, NGOs' bracelet coding is a sophisticated system that translates a chain of violence and vulnerability into an artifact, while preserving privacy and excluding unauthorized observers. On one hand, the bracelet-coding system translates medical conditions, vulnerability, and signs of violence ascertained by NGO physicians on board into a color: blue for scabies; black stripe for victim of torture, trafficking, or rape; and yellow for unaccompanied minors. Using categories introduced by the early sociology of translation, we can say that intrasomatic signs of violence or vulnerability are translated into extrasomatic artifacts.<sup>12</sup> This "excorporation" is crucial, as it makes medical conditions visible through the bracelet color, without the need for a second medical inspection. As the bracelet "speaks for" the body,<sup>13</sup> in principle, any further medical inspection by Hotspot physicians becomes redundant.

On the other hand, "visible" does not mean "legible." Bracelet coding was introduced by the NGO with the goal to mark specific health conditions while maintaining privacy. On board, only crew members know the rubric for interpreting bracelet colors. As such, the rubric acts as metadata:<sup>14</sup> it allows making sense of visible but not legible data by associating bracelet colors with types of disease. By so doing, it selects who can access data about an individual's health conditions: only those who can access the rubric can actually interpret data.

The NGO's standard procedure of disembarkation, registration, and identification is consistent with this privacy-oriented rationale. It indeed provides that NGO physicians disembark first, in order to hand over the rubric to Hotspot authorities. Only once authorities have had access to the rubric (i.e., the metadata) can the rescued be disembarked. By so doing, authorities can interpret bracelet colors (i.e., the data) by consulting the rubric. However, during our observation, the NGO procedure encountered resistance by Hotspot authorities who asked to invert the order of disembarkation. The rescued were disembarked before the ship crew. In this way, Hotspot authorities did not consult the rubric before establishing contact with the rescued. As they did not acknowledge the extrasomatic delegation of health data to bracelets, authorities reverted to intrasomatic evidence of violence and vulnerability, to be ascertained through a second health inspection. In this way, the legitimacy of Hotspot physicians was reestablished.

This case shows two divergent procedures making use of (analogue) data and metadata. In the NGO procedure, bracelet colors worked as data and the

rubric as metadata. Differently, in the authorities' procedure, bracelet colors were replaced by spatial allocation. The rescued were indeed allocated to different areas on the dock according to their type of illness or vulnerability. With this sorting technique, keeping the metadata (i.e., the association between spatial areas and types of illness) confidential was not always possible. The area/illness association was often orally expressed by operators, with the consequence that data about individual health conditions were accessible to all those within hearing distance.

We suggest that similar procedural tensions can be best understood as "metadata frictions." Metadata production is divergent in the NGO and Hotspot procedures, with two versions of the metadata—the rubric and the area/illness association—never being reconciled (Edwards et al. 2011, 676). It is important to note that such metadata frictions enacted different regimes of data legibility. With the rubric, only crew members and Hotspots authorities could "read the body"; with area/illness association, everyone within hearing distance—including European officers from Frontex, EASO, and Europol—could associate an illness or cause of vulnerability to a specific individual. Metadata frictions reveal the prioritization of divergent values as well. On one hand, bracelet coding privileged the value of privacy. By spatially sorting people out, authorities' procedure aimed to avoid contagion and broader outbreaks. Here, the value of collective health was instead given priority.

This case reveals the governance implications of different bureaucratic procedures struggling to legitimize some chains of actors, data, and metadata as more authoritative than others. In the first procedure, authorities' physicians are disempowered with respect to NGOs physicians. Furthermore, the range of actors included in the regime of legibility is more restricted than with the second procedure. In this tension, it is not only the individual Other that is enacted but also different understandings of Europe and specific relations among old and new European actors. Different procedural choices about how health conditions and vulnerability are coded into data and rendered legible through metadata enact people and Europe in different ways. The first procedure conceives of the rescued as individuals and privacy as an indisputable European value. The second, embraced by Hotspots authorities and underpinned by concerns for collective health, considers the rescued as members of a population, at the same time carrier of and vulnerable to outbreaks. It is only in referring to this latter procedure that we can say "people are not governed in relation to their individuality but as members of populations" (Ruppert 2011, 218).

## Enacting Europe through Alternative Chains of Action

Understanding R&I procedures as chains made of actors, including data and metadata, allows accounting for applicants' own engagement with bureaucratic procedures. There is evidence that during R&I, applicants try to propose their own chains of actors, data, and metadata as alternatives to authorities' ones. This happens, for example, when applicants ask R&I officers to take into account other documents than mere passports and IDs in reconstructing their previous identity, such as family books, schools titles, and language certificates.<sup>15</sup>

Given the stiffness of highly codified standard operational R&I procedures designed to limit the agency of applicants, applicants' claims for alternative spokespersons witnessing their identity cannot reach much further than asking to include new documents. Yet evidence suggests that applicants can question what should count as "data" and propose their own data. With highly standardized R&I procedures, applicants are expected to fit into categories and categorical values inscribed in information systems and administrative templates (Bowker and Star 1999). The data they provide are thus not only shaped by questions and reactions of officers over the course of an utterance, as conversational analysts would suggest. Data production is also shaped by the possibilities and constraints offered by empty forms and database categories. Evidence collected during interviews shows that categorical stretching is one way in which applicants challenge what counts as "data" for European institutions. For example, an international organization operator reported the case of seventeen persons declaring to be siblings. When asked for clarification, they answered that they had left together from the same village and that was enough to make them all siblings. In this case, the challenge concerned what could count as a proper value for the category "family composition."

Furthermore, applicants can propose their own metadata to interpret data. As observation and interviews have revealed, what characterizes alterity processing at European facilities is applicants' difficulty to access knowledge about their data collection, storage, and circulation.<sup>16</sup> Retaining the parallelism introduced in the previous section, applicants do not have access to the instructions that would allow them to interpret the database fields and the questions they are asked. In other words, metadata is not shared with them.

As a consequence, applicants must rely on alternative metadata, based on rumors and unverified information about R&I procedures and data use. Such rumors are anticipated well before reaching European coasts: already at departure from home countries, at detention centers in North Africa, or



during sea crossing. As an international organization officer has reported, “what they are told during sea travel to tell once disembarked is crucial. Migrants are very aware that the data they give at the early stages are vital for their future.” In blunter terms, an officer has stressed the temporal contingency of such rumors: “at this moment (i.e., August 2017) the average Nigerian man is gay, fifteen days ago he was persecuted by Boko Haram.” Contingent rumors also explain the apparent paradox of unaccompanied minors declaring to be adult and adults pretending to be minors.

Rumors can be conceived of as metadata because they constitute the grid, the rubric on the basis of which data are produced. This is not to say that applicants “lie” but to recognize data-related dynamics that software developers know quite well: data are designed retroactively, depending on the algorithmic use that is foreseen for it. By foreseeing how their data will be cross-checked against authorities’ (alleged) ideas of the “intended migrant,” applicants prompt their alternative metadata.

We suggest that this evidence does not only show how applicants undergoing R&I procedures adapt to alleged European ideas of the ideal migrant. Rather, applicants acknowledge the constraints and possibilities designed in data infrastructures and procedures and challenge them by proposing chains of actors, data, and metadata that are more meaningful to them. If categories implemented in information systems tend to enact them as members of small parental families, they challenge the European category of “family” and propose an enlarged one. If administrative databases require a reason for reaching Europe, then they put forth what Europe *should* care about: protecting minorities (e.g., the homosexual, the political persecuted, the minor).

## Conclusions and Further Directions of Research

This article has introduced the concept of “alterity processing” to account for the simultaneous enactment of individual “Others” and European politics in the context of informational and bureaucratic migration management. It has provided some examples of how co-construction takes place, arguing that different R&I procedures compete to legitimize different chains of actors, data, and metadata as more authoritative than others. Different procedures have governance implications, as well, with some actors being included and others being excluded from priority procedures and regimes of legibility. Furthermore, there is evidence that applicants themselves propose alternative chains of actors, data, and metadata.

All in all, evidence suggests that the concept of “alterity processing” has the potential to substantially contribute to the emergent debate on Hotspots,

to the scholarship about the infrastructural construction of Europe, and to political sociology's conceptualization of "citizenship enactment."

With its requirements for transnational high-quality data sharing, the introduction of Hotspots has prompted adaptation of intranational procedures and infrastructures to transnational technobureaucratic orders. At the same time, data control at ministerial level has entailed a renewed role for national authorities as data keepers reasserting their jurisdiction over population data in the moment when transnational procedures threaten to overwrite intranational processes. Similar evidence questions binary arguments about the construction of a European superstate at the expenses of member states, as suggested by the emerging literature on Hotspots. Painter et al. (2017, 259), for example, have hypothesized that: "[i]f successful, the hotspot approach will then be pointing at a model of territorial administration and governance that supersedes the national in favour of hybrid, super-national governance: a model whereby security and population management are dealt with above the national level." Differently, with Sassen (2006), we suggest that, if any, seeds of nation-state disassembling are sown *inside* national bureaucracies, for example, in adapting and controlling internal procedures for population management, rather than *despite* them.

In addressing the teleological limits of the literature on state formation and asking whether and how data production and circulation in the context of alterity processing shape emergent transnational orders, we have to avoid dualistic interpretations. More than an integration of functions at the super-national level, our evidence suggests that European construction rather proceeds by reordering the relative weight of diverse epistemic resources. This has governance implications, entailing that some chains of actors, data, and metadata for the production of specific resources (i.e., administrative knowledge) are legitimized as more authoritative than others (i.e., those for the production of health-care knowledge).

As the bracelet-coding system shows, in this reordering, it is not only the individual Other that is enacted but also different understandings of Europe. As people on the move can be enacted as individuals or as populations, so privacy rather than collective health can act as primary European values. This evidence supports the insights of infrastructural studies on European formation and suggests that infrastructural practices for third countries' population management can enact multiple, conflicting "Europes." Each Europe privileges some values and includes some actors at the expenses of others. All in all, alterity processing promises to be an ideal field of investigation for studies focused on how different Europes are (per)formed.

Lastly, the last section prompts a discussion about the role of non-European actors in European formation. People on the move toward Europe propose their own chains of actors, data, and metadata, as well. These attempts could be seen as acts of “citizenship enactment” carried on by “those who are ‘in but not of’ the EU, [. . . of] groups that enact themselves as European citizens” (Isin and Saward 2013, 9). As Isin (2017, 505, our emphasis) has put it, “[a] performative perspective on citizenship enables researchers to study various acts of making rights claims in societies and states before, during, and after colonization *without making prior assumptions* about the presence or absence of that which might be called citizenship.” We suggest that in proposing their own chains of actors, data, and metadata, applicants enact themselves as political subjects by doing what they are not supposed to do: claim how Europe should be enacted.

It is crucial to note that such acts take place in interaction with R&I procedures and not in a vacuum: in alternative documents proposed for registration, in alternative understandings of what should count as data, and in alternative instructions for data interpretation. In other words, enactment does not only materialize in speech acts but crystallizes in technosocial acts. “Different ideas of Europe, or different parts of a more complex European institutional assemblage, might be [not only discursively] invoked by claimants” (Isin and Saward 2013, 14), but enacted in a variety of micro-level, sociotechnical bureaucratic procedures, which may challenge taken-for-granted understandings of Europe.

To conclude, we suggest that the conceptualization of alterity processing sketched in this article can provide insights on ways to analytically read and proactively engage with the simultaneous enactment of people and European orders. Alterity processing aims to provide a consistent framework to account for how data practices and infrastructures for the management of unknown populations perform “us” and “them” in inextricable ways.

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### **Notes**

1. Eurodac’s underlying Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) database stores the digital fingerprints of every person claiming asylum in one of the European European countries. Despite its original focus on asylum procedures, in 2005, the European Commission proposed to extend it to irregular migrants and to provide Eurodac access to member states’ police authorities investigating ordinary crimes. A 2013 regulation provided for this extension (EU Parliament and Council 2013), then implemented in July 2015.
2. Given the importance of the notion of performativity to this article, the reader will forgive us a short introduction of the concept. According to Barad (2007), “performativity” is a concept introduced by science and technology studies and critical social theory to overcome both representationalism and social constructivism. According to Callon (1986, 2010) and Latour (2005), performativity refers to discourses, artifacts, and practices that not only describe or explain phenomena but bring them into existence through “translation” (note that “existence” can be both material and discursive). In dissonance with Callon (2010), Butler (2010) has identified two understandings of performativity: one (i.e., illocutory) which claims that theoretical models ontologically bring the phenomena they describe into existence; a second one (i.e., perlocutory) according to which acts can be performative when they trigger effects that cannot be foreseen in advance. It seems to us that Butler’s distinction raises the problem of the ontological

existence of discourse, not only as speech act but as materialized in articles, notes, and—crucial to this article—code. In this article, the notion of performativity is closer to “translation” and refers to the enchainment of utterances and artifacts, discourses and practices that bring actors and political entities into existence. In this sense, “Europe” or “state” do not exist per se, in abstract, but only in actual treaties, fences, databases, and written laws. Recurring to performativity allows describing what things do: this is what we mean when saying that Eurodac’s interconnected end points do not only represent cross-European collaboration in data sharing but actually do it. Throughout the text, the reader will be presented with many more examples of artifacts doing things.

3. Given this performative stance, in this article, populations on the move to Europe won’t be univocally identified as “migrants” nor “refugees.” Such legally codified labels are given to individuals as the result of the procedures that this article intends to describe. Therefore, individuals undergoing registration and identification procedures will be named “applicants,” in this way stressing their role as part of those procedures.
4. “Processing Citizenship” project funded by the European Research Council (2017–2022, Grant Agreement No. 714463, principal investigator Annalisa Pelizza). Available at <http://processingcitizenship.eu>.
5. With “European actors,” we refer to those actors, formal and informal, who receive, register, identify, accommodate, and integrate people who move claims to Europe as an imagined community of (short or long) destination. In this light, European actors can be member states’ agencies, as well as international organizations and nongovernmental organizations. In other words, we do not adopt a reductionist understanding limiting European actors to agencies of the European Union nor to bodies whose jurisdiction is strictly linked to European territory. Crucially, as we suggest that such actors are themselves enacted, providing a list or a definition beforehand would contradict the basic epistemological take of this article.
6. It is unfortunately not among the goals of this article to discuss such emerging literature in depth. A similar goal would require a dedicated focus on the legal and political rationale of European Hotspots. Differently, the leading focus of this article looks at how infrastructures and procedures for alterity processing de facto simultaneously enact individuals and emergent, hybrid European orders of governance.
7. Multinational IT contractors are key actors as they are outsourced the development of fingerprinting software, biometric databases, protocols, and interoperability standards. They are thus delegated key decisions about what constitutes an individual’s identity. Given its importance, this issue will be the object of a further article.

8. That the attitude toward infrastructures for alterity processing is changing is revealed by the title (i.e., “Borders and Technology”: <http://8toe2017.phs.uoa.gr/>) of the 8th Tensions of Europe conference. The conference was organized by the network that has pursued infrastructural studies of European formation.
9. According to the substrand in technology studies named “sociology of translation” (Callon 1986; Latour 2005 among others), enactment takes place through a chain of translations or “delegations” in which artifacts, animal, or humans can act as “spokespersons” of previous actors in the chain. For example, this article acts as spokesperson of field notes collected in textual computer files.
10. This temporal sequence is often forgotten by readings of the Agenda as a response to the “migration crisis” (e.g., Campesi 2018, 51). Actually, the Agenda was issued almost four months before the massive crossing of third-country nationals in September 2015.
11. For example, Eurodac-compliant fingerprinting scanners used at Greek Hotspots are produced by a multinational corporation based in Florida and use FBI-compliant AFIS software.
12. This is one of Latour’s most brilliant insights, deeply indebted to semiotics and literary theory. On top of semiotics’ delegation of action to the characters of a story (i.e., débrayage or shift-out) or back to the narrator (i.e., émbroyage or shift-in), he identified two further forms of delegation of action: one from words to extrasomatic artefacts (i.e., shift-down), the opposite from artefacts to intrasomatic knowledge (i.e., shift-up; Latour 1992).
13. The reader can find an exhaustive explanation of the notion of “translation” in Callon (1986). As Callon explains, the fourth moment of translation—“mobilization”—entails the emergence of “spokespersons” as representatives of actors which precede in the chain of action. See also note 9.
14. Metadata are usually described as data about data. They create connections between data and their context of production (e.g., data and venue of collection) or interpretation (e.g., library catalogs, tables of content, rubrics).
15. Similar evidence has been collected by the author during observation at Greek registration and identification facilities, as well as by Annalisa Bacchi conducting interviews with migrants on Greek islands in the context of the “Processing Citizenship” project. We wish to thank Ms. Bacchi for our team discussions, in which evidence across different research sites was compared.
16. This statement builds on data collected by A. Bacchi and E. Frezouli, in addition to data collected by the author.

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