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# The State is the Secret. For a Relational Approach to the Study of Border and Mobility Control in Europe

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- **Research objective.** This chapter will help researchers who want to experiment with a relational, performative, immanent approach to research in technopolitical security contexts
- **Research Puzzle:** The puzzle the chapter addresses in relation to Secrecy and Method concerns the gap between accountability requirements posed on democratic states, on one hand, and technopolitical decisions often taken apart from public scrutiny, on the other hand, in contexts in which the state engages in transnational multi-actor and multi-level relationships

## **Introduction: States and secrecy in technopolitical contexts**

Secrecy is deeply intertwined with state actions, surveillance technologies and international politics when it comes to border control, migration policies and the management of international mobility. Border and mobility control belong to the central tasks states are concerned with. In order to be held accountable, states have to provide the public – consisting of citizens as well as travellers and migrants from other countries – with relevant information concerning their actual policies, including their technical means of implementation. However, the details of mobility partnerships between the EU and third countries are often not publicly shared, the role of private industries in promoting surveillance technologies is misty, the consequences of all kinds of border control technologies and surveillance policies are far from clear, when they are not hidden in the dark, and the exact number of the migrants who lose their lives on their way to Europe is covered in clouds. Policies requiring public consent often arise in the midst of so-called “crises” that necessitate “extraordinary measures”, as EU-president Donald Tusk stated in his address to the European Parliament on the European

Council of 15 October 2015 on the migration and refugee crisis. This enables extraordinary decision-making procedures such as the EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016.

How is the relationship between states and secrecy to be understood in this multi-actor and multi-level technopolitical context and how can this relationship be studied? In this chapter, we suggest the relationships between states and secrecy is constituted by co-production (Jasanoff 2004), a simultaneous development of institute, objects, actions and techniques. The resulting configurations of states and secrecies deploy all kinds of politics and policies via a diversity of methods, tools, instruments and techniques, based on ways of knowing, ways of representing, ways of observing and ways of intervening. We will explore this co-production of states and secrecy by engaging with two related examples, namely the EU's so-called "Hotspot approach" and the European Surveillance program *Eurosur*. According to the European Commission,

"A 'Hotspot' is characterized by specific and disproportionate migratory pressure, consisting of mixed migratory flows, which are largely linked to the smuggling of migrants, and where the Member State concerned might request support and assistance to better cope with the migratory pressure."<sup>i</sup>

The Hotspot approach is closely related to the Eurosur program: the European Commission memo of 29 November 2013 announcing Eurosur's launch also mentioned the option of installing "Hotspots." The European Commission in a memo describes Eurosur as follows:

The establishment of a European Border Surveillance System ("EUROSUR") is necessary in order to strengthen the exchange of information and the operational cooperation between national authorities of Member States as well as with the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union".<sup>ii</sup>

The Hotspot approach and the Eurosur program are exemplary cases of the intermingling of multi-level and multi-actor policies with technopolitics. Our analysis of the cases aims to show how the techno-policies in the context of European border control, mobility and migration should not be conceived as programs that are enrolled by political agents, policymakers and professionals as a clear means to a clear end. Instead, we argue that the

variegated nature of these policies and politics can be analysed by applying a specific set of methods – underpinned by the concepts of performativity, immanence and networks. Such a set of methods can even display the plurality of relations these programs need to establish with local actors, citizens, social organizations and migrants; and the kinds of materialities, spaces, instruments and things they need to produce. By doing so, the chapter will deploy a relational perspective on the connection between states and secrecy.

## **Objectives**

This chapter aims to provide methodological and conceptual tools to researchers interested in unpacking the relationship between states and secrecy in the context of border control, migration policies and international mobility.

Methodologically, we suggest that the study of the various secrecies involved in these domains of international state politics can benefit from a particular approach that takes into account the situated and performative character of secrecy. Therefore, the chapter will set out some principles that – we suggest – should inform the study of secrecy in the context of migration policies, mobility management and border control, surveillance technologies and international politics. Namely, these principles refer to a (1) performative stance, (2) the notion of immanence and (3) a set of methods to follow actors.

Conceptually, the chapter claims that secrecy can be understood as a relational notion. With this, we mean that states and their constituencies do not exist in a vacuum, but in relation to each other. Secrecy in the context of border and mobility management constitutes a variety of *political relationships, modes of knowing and ways of seeing*, not only between the state and its traditional constituencies (i.e., individual citizens, organizations, businesses), but also between states and trans-national polities and actors (including migrants, travellers, European agencies, NGOs and researchers), as well as among the aforementioned actors in non-state relationships.

The “real secret” – we will argue – does not concern the specific actions, justifications, intentions or interventions by states but the nature of the state itself. What kind of political entities are emerging in the development of Europe’s migration, mobility and border policies, which transcend the state? The methodology we outline is likely to unveil the contours of

very mobile and infrastructural entities partially overlapping with what is formally known as “the state”.

In short, the objectives are:

- To develop a relational, performative and immanent methodology and conceptual approach so as to study the relationship between secrecy and the state in the context of border control, surveillance practices and migration.
- To emphasize that in order to study secrecy, the “matter of concern” at stake, i.e. “the state”, has to be unpacked and opened up.

## **A situated methodology for secrecy in migration, mobility and border policies**

The chapter is grounded on Science and Technology Studies (STS) and International Political Theory, and relates to many neighbouring sub-disciplines such as Border Studies, Migration Studies, Mobility Studies, Surveillance Studies and (Critical) Security Studies. We mainly engage with examples that relate to the monitoring of migrants and the translation of their identities into legible knowledge. The focus will be on situations, practices and policies in Europe but the insights of this chapter are likely to be applicable elsewhere.

Before presenting two excerpts of case-studies of the Hotspot approach and Eurosur, we will address three principles that we suggest can inform the study of secrecy in the context of migration policies, mobility management and border control, surveillance technologies and international politics, namely (1) the performative stance, (2) the notion of immanence and (3) a set of methods to follow actors.

### *Performativity*

The particular angle we would like to elaborate on in this chapter proposes performativity of state and supra-state institutions as a key methodological principle to address the study of secrecy in the context of migration policies, mobility management and border control. Originally developed in the philosophy of language as a theory of speech acts by Austin (1955/1962), the notion of performativity has been elaborated in a more material way by various scholars (e.g. MacKenzie 2006; Callon 2007). It refers to discourses and practices

which not only describe, explain or justify situations, but enact them, bring them into existence while representing them.

Following the late Foucault (2007), some authors have pointed out that states and their political bodies are performed, instead of assuming they exist as monolithic units (Passoth and Rowland 2010). Historical studies of state formation have developed accounts of how technopolitical practices brought nation states into existence. For example, the practice of counting populations has enabled the distinction between citizens and aliens. The drawing of maps has allowed the conceptualization of the state as a territorial entity (Carroll 2006; Mitchell 2002) and in some cases the creation of a central administration (Mukerji 2011). More recently, studies have argued that technopolitical practices can even *de facto* perform alternative orders of the state (Pelizza and Hoppe 2018). These studies show that states do not exist in abstract terms, but become visible when they are “performed”: when frontiers are built, diplomacies invoked, soldiers sent abroad, territories measured and bounded by procedures, infrastructures deployed and human bodies labelled as citizens or aliens. Embracing the theory of performativity, such studies emphasize the materially-embedded and knowledge-related activities of state formation.

Which kind of state is thus performed through current datafied bordering, migration and mobility management practices? Broeders and Dijstelbloem (2015) argue that the datafication of border regimes enacts the state as a mediator whose goal is to transform data into reliable facts. Pelizza (forthcoming 2019) suggests to broaden the state perspective by addressing how the informational governance of borders, migration and mobility enacts multi-level and multi-actor polities, of which contemporary Europe is the most notable example. With bordering, migration and mobility management practices, we should not assume that the state is performed as a whole. Some branches of the state (e.g. the Ministry of Interior) are more and more involved in security activities in strict coordination with non-state actors (e.g. European agencies, humanitarian actors, IT companies supplying software solutions). On the contrary, other state bodies witness their role shrinking (e.g. Ministry of Health, Ministry of Welfare).

In this fluid landscape, we might even ask whether the state is not performed when negotiations are conducted, about what is meant by “secret” . As we will see with the first example below, different institutional actors can have different understandings of what should count as a secret. This insight brings about the role of the researcher, who is not a mere

observer, but enters the security context with a “position”, and can contribute to unpack what should be regarded as secret.

### *Immanence*

Surveillance has become a key concept in border, migration and mobility studies to describe the variegated nature of borders and their control. Although the notion of surveillance captures the non-site-bounded nature of control, one disadvantage is that it might overstate the consistency and coherence of monitoring. Instead of creating an all-seeing eye or a seamless web, the coupling of different technologies has led to a combination of powerful systems with many gaps in between, what Latour (2005: 181) has called “oligopticon.”

The notion of the oligopticon exemplifies an immanent perspective, i.e. a perspective that, contrary to a transcendent point of view, acknowledges there is no independent position from the outside available to oversee the whole. In that sense an immanent perspective is well in line with the situational methodology as sketched in the above. According to Latour, oligoptica are exactly the opposite of panoptica, the “all-seeing” systems and architectures of control, such as penitentiary houses, Bentham suggested that were famously theorized by Foucault as exemplary for forms of surveillance that discipline people and create particular kinds of subjects. Oligoptica, according to Latour the opposite of panoptica, “see much too little to feed the megalomania of the inspector or the paranoia of the inspected, but what they see, they see it well.” Latour considers parliaments, courtrooms and offices as examples of oligoptica. “From oligoptica,” writes Latour (2005: 181), “sturdy but extremely narrow views of the (connected) whole are made possible, as long as connections hold. Nothing it seems can threaten the absolutist gaze of panoptica, and this is why they are loved so much by those sociologists who dream to occupy the center of Bentham’s prison; the tiniest bug can blind oligoptica.” Oligoptica “provide the way to localize the global” (de Vries 2016: 97). Like “centers of calculation” in science, coordination centers in the field of border surveillance “provide *forms, standards, metrologies* that allow connecting activities and sites by formatting translations and ‘acting at a distance’, to bring about effects far beyond the normal reach of humans” (De Vries 2016: 96).

This oligoptic picture strongly resembles what Donna Haraway (1988: 581) has famously called “situated knowledges”. The notion of situated knowledge recognises the impossibilities of the “god trick of seeing everything from nowhere.” Instead, the study of



states, borders and infrastructures starts in the middle of things without having a view from above. This is in agreement with what Latour stated in the opening lines of *Paris: Invisible City*, Latour (2006) i.e. that “no single control panel or synoptic board brings all these flows together in a single place at any one time. ... No bird's eye view could, at a single glance, capture the multiplicity of these places. ... The total view is also, literally, the view from nowhere” (Latour 2006: 32).

In the technopolitical landscape of border and mobility control in Europe, reality is fragmented, a complete picture of it is impossible, let alone an appeal to a position from which that overview can be obtained. What remains is a variety of visions and viewpoints, perspectives that do not take their meaning from their foundation, but from their interplay of forces.

As a consequence, methods in security research need to take immanence into account. First, as we suggest in what follows, researchers should not consider themselves on a different position than those they observe. “Following the actors” and “positionality” are tools developed in ethnography and science and technology studies to provide researchers – also in security contexts – with reflexive tools. Second, if a complete overview is not possible, then the source of actions should enter the research equation, and always be contextualized.

But then how is it possible that actors arrive at pictures of their environment? And how is it possible for the analyst, the writer, the scholar, to describe these actors and their interactions? In the following we will show some specific methodological tools that have been developed to acknowledge the notion of immanence and its consequences in the study of actors.

### *Following actors and things*

One of the most applied and discussed methodologies in Science and Technology Studies and in related fields is the so-called Actor-Network Theory approach (ANT), originally known as the “sociology of translation”. This approach, developed in the 1980s at the *École des Mines* in Paris by scholars like Madeleine Akrich, Michel Callon, Antoine Hennion and Bruno Latour, aims to set out a consistent way to pursue an immanent perspective. This approach has indeed opened up innovative ways to study performativity, namely the interactions and transactions that take place in the encounter between institutions, technologies and people, including researchers.

Actor-network theory is actually at the same time a theory and a method which aims to analyse how actors and organizations come into being – are performed, instead of postulating them *ex ante*. The key notion of “translation” refers to the work of making equivalent two things which are not the same (Latour 2005). Translation is at the same time a linguistic act (i.e. to translate across two languages) and a geometrical move (i.e. to create a chain of equivalences). In a chain of equivalences, the actor which emerges at each step of the chain of translation is said to “speak for” the previous actor. For example, a retina scanned image “speaks for” the human retina, it translates it into a different form of materiality. Following the chain of equivalences through which actors – both human and non-humans – are translated and so materially performed is what ANT calls “following the actors”. What makes ANT and its “following actors and things” perspective particularly interesting from a methodological point of view is that it suggests operative questions and an epistemic attitude to analyse the object of our interest (i.e. migration, international mobility and the movements of states and technologies). We might ask *who speaks for* migrants, other actors and the state in the context of border control, migration policies and international mobility. Such an approach – which could be framed as following actors through their chains of translations – promises to open up new analytical perspectives in the field, as we are going to show in what follows.

Furthermore, “following the actors” suggests a precise epistemic attitude by the researcher, who is aware of never being a mere observer. As followers, researchers too have a role in bringing situations into existence (Latour 2005). Researchers have a “positionality”, given by their social characteristics (e.g. gender, class, race, nationality), but also by the specific ways they use to enter the security domain, as we will see in the first case below.

### **Textbox on the three principles introduced**

In short, the three principles we have set out inspire us to study:

1. How states and broader polities emerge – are “performed” – in various practices and situations. For example, physical border building is a way to perform the state as a territorial entity.
2. How the study of security contexts can benefit from a method oriented to analyse oligoptica and situated knowledges. For example, researchers can focus on a

specific set of technologies used in a given context by specific actors, instead of trying to grasp the whole infrastructure.

3. How “following the actors” can suggest operative questions and an epistemic attitude to analyse migration, international mobility and the movements of states and technologies. For example, the police officer at the border “speaks for” the state.

And to acknowledge that when studying these issues:

- There is no all-knowing perspective or view from above from which these studies can be conducted.
- Researchers themselves are involved in making things happen, in performing their objects of study.

[end of textbox]

## **Secrecy in action: border control in Europe**

In the following, we will present two examples of contemporary technopolitical border control in Europe. While controlling the external borders of the European Union was a common task from the outset, the legal order that developed in the legislation and policies of border surveillance did not provide a blueprint for installing border infrastructures. Rather the opposite, the legal order of the EU and the states participating in the control of the external border developed from the inside out, from the very construction of these border infrastructures. In this sense, border infrastructures have been performative of new legal orders. The introduction of the so called “Hotspot approach” and the Eurosur program are exemplary points in case. They provide empirical discussion of the methodological principles up to now introduced related to the issue of secrecy and the state. Underpinning both discussions is an understanding of secrecy as a relational notion that constitutes a variety of political relationships and modes of knowing, not only between the state and its traditional constituencies (i.e., individual citizens, organizations, businesses), but also between states and trans-national polities and actors.

### *Case 1. The European Hotspot approach: Defining the Secret*

The Hotspot approach to third-countries citizens’ registration and identification has been established by the European Commission in 2015 with the goal to “swiftly identify, register and fingerprint incoming migrants” (EU Commission 2015a). Hotspots are meant to provide

coordinated on-the ground operational support by European agencies – namely European Asylum Support Office (EASO), Frontex and Europol – to frontline Member States in dealing with the immediate challenge of large-scale arrivals of migrants (EU Commission 2015b; EU Council 2015). As a consequence, the Hotspot approach implements highly codified processes, in which Standard Operative Procedures (SOPs) are established to deal with almost every aspect of migrant population management.

What characterizes this approach is its rather loose policy framework. Technologically mediated activities of identification, screening, sorting, debriefing, fingerprinting, accommodation and relocation undertaken by EU agencies in collaboration with national staff perform a *de facto* multi-level and multi-actor governance of European borders. Multi-level, because both national and trans-national actors collaborate in registration and identification activities tasked with translating unknown identities into European-legible ones (Pelizza forthcoming 2019). Multi-actor, as humanitarian non-state actors are increasingly involved in population management activities that used to be conducted by states (Painter et al. 2017; Pallister-Wilkins 2015). All in all, the form of the state that emerges from Hotspot arrangements is very different from accounts in political theory manuals.

In such a heterogeneous yet securitized Hotspot landscape where vulnerable people are identified and their movements restricted, researchers are rarely admitted. When they are, they have to adhere to so strict confidentiality, privacy, spatial and security constraints, that their view cannot be but partial, situated, oligoptical. Furthermore, they have to be aware of their positionality. Here, in order to be precise it is necessary to bring a situated example, like the case of one of the authors of this chapter, who negotiated access to Hotspots in the context of a major European-Commission-funded research project.

As a white, European, middle-class female scholar, the researcher expected she did not constitute a major threat to authorities granting access to Hotspots. However, being a researcher, she might be seen representing other knowledge actors, i.e. she might be seen as *speaking for* categories like journalists, human-rights activists or lawyers. Furthermore, acting as leader of a European-Commission-funded project might even position her towards state authorities in the uncomfortable position of a European controller. For the researcher, addressing these dead-locks entailed by her position required unpacking what should be regarded as secret, and what not.

As a matter of fact, during negotiation the researcher and the research assistants had to preliminarily share with authorities what they were planning to observe at Hotspots, and the type of questions they wished to ask officers. On their side, authorities agreed on some questions and observations, and asked to redefine others, thus creating oligopticon conditions. In particular, both researchers and authorities agreed that migrants' personal data were to be regarded as secret, while registration and identification procedures were not to be considered as such, as long as the researchers did not record migrants' answers, but only officers' questions. In other words, researchers and authorities negotiated over what was (not) to be known, over what should count as "secret". In this negotiation, secrecy was a situated, contingent relationship between the researchers and the authorities.

Furthermore, it should be noted that different institutional actors can have a different understanding of what should count as a secret. Neither the state nor the European Union are monolithic bodies, and what is regarded as secret by some agencies might not be so for others. For example, database ontologies – i.e. the categorizations and categorical values through which migrants are classified – were not initially shared in written form by the police who developed the information systems used at Hotspots. They were however orally discussed by registration officers who encounter daily challenges in finding the best categorical values for highly heterogeneous personal data. In this case, it was not documents, but registration officers who "spoke for" ontologies. In other words, "following the actors" methods brought about by researchers enabled elements of the state to see themselves in relation to other parts of the state (e.g. police developers realizing missing values for registration officers) (see also Wissink chapter, this volume). In this regard, we can say that the state itself is performed as a secret, not only for migrants and researchers, but also for diverse parts of the state.

### *Case 2. Eurosur: Establishing connections between ways of seeing and ways of knowing*

From the start, Eurosur could be conceived as merely a "systems of systems", or, more in line with our angle, a "network of networks" than as a panoptical all-encompassing surveillance program. Its main goals of establishing *interoperability* between all kinds of variegated local, technical, professional and policy systems as to arrive at *situational awareness* of

international mobility, migrant movements and critical border situations have resulted in a patchwork of instruments, organizations and interventions.

We studied this variegated landscape by conducting (1) a genealogy of the historical technopolitical background of the emergence of Eurosur (2) a network analysis of the ways coordination of knowing and seeing takes place between local, regional and transnational actors and organizations and (3) ethnographic research at specific locations at which various streams of information, knowledge, images, representations, and know-how tend to come together, such as patrol boats, coordination centers and local offices of border guards (Dijstelbloem, Van Reekum and Schinkel 2017; Van Reekum 2018).

Eurosur's goal of achieving situational awareness is a means to bridge the gap between vision and action so as to enable critical border interventions in real time. Its history can be traced back to previous surveillance programs in Spain and North Africa, while US and Israeli security systems and border surveillance technologies have influenced EU policies. Another factor is the growing role of the transnational security industry, with private companies promoting the integration of various systems to gather, interpret, use and transport data and information for multiple applications.

Eurosur not only adds an extra layer of instruments and data traffic but "Europeanizes" surveillance by extending the chains of associations between patrol boats, regional authorities, headquarters and Frontex officials. In doing so, Eurosur also emphasizes Europe's infrastructural lay out. Instead of being a coherent and all-encompassing program, Eurosur connects and selects, mediates representations, things and people, relates observations and interventions of different sorts to each other whilst excluding other, just like many other cooperation and integration processes in Europe.

We studied the development of Eurosur, its local applications and impact and the way connections are – or refrain from being – established. The goal was to follow the relation between observations from border guards at sea to regional coordination centers to the headquarters of Frontex in Warsaw and vice versa. To do so, we aimed to unpack the technopolitical networks of Eurosur at the Greece Aegean islands of Chios and Lesbos in the period 2014-2016 (see for instance Dijstelbloem, Van Reekum and Schinkel 2017; Van Reekum 2018).

One of the insights of this research was that Eurosur not only aims to connect different places, actors, technologies and bits of information but also very different territories (land, sea, air) and variegated ways of seeing and knowing that tend to be situated and relational (e.g. Haraway 1988). A technopolitical project such as Eurosur not only relates all kinds of existing policies, actors and instruments (or fail to do so) but also performs novel political relationships, between people, territories, and ways of knowing and seeing.

In order to reveal these relationships, as part of our research to gain insight into these entanglements, a series of interviews with various Greek authorities, coast guards, representatives of Greek and international NGOs, grassroots organizations and local volunteers were conducted on the Aegean Islands of Chios and Lesbos. One interview that turned out to be striking in particular was with a Union representative of the Hellenic Coast Guard. As a kind of mediator between the Guards and the State, as well as between the Guards and the local community and their home villages, the interviewee vividly described the gap between the goals, ambitions and pretensions of Eurosur to arrive at “situational awareness” and the daily practices at land and at sea. Of importance to us was not only the interviewee’s account, but also the way we, as researchers, arrived at the interviewee by following the chain of conversations of events and the different representations of the border control landscape people provided us with.

This, and many other interviews, emphasized how Eurosur exemplifies the aforementioned oligoptica that “provide the way to localize the global” (de Vries 2016: 97). As Follis (2017: 1016) argues, “transterritorial vision such as that produced by Eurosur likewise may offer the illusion of transparent surveillance at what one document describes as a ‘non negligible’ distance (European Commission JRC 2015). And yet, the picture it delivers is always already compromised by the oligoptic characteristics of its own infrastructure and by the culturally and politically mediated preconceptions of its embedded actors.”

The three notions of the situated methodology we outlined previously (i.e. (1) the performative stance, (2) the notion of immanence and (3) a set of methods to follow actors) proved to be helpful as they keep the researcher aware of the impossibility of arriving at a view from nowhere or reaching a full overview. This concerns the object (Eurosur) as well as subject (the researcher) of the study and is much in line with our previous discussion of

positionality. One of the consequences is that the development, implementation, application and meaning of Eurosur is highly dependent of very specific *events*. Instead of being a well-connected system of systems Eurosur often tends to have more in common with a *border bricolage* in which improvisations, provisional arrangements and ad hoc decisions are as important as the implementation and extension of European programs.

### **Conclusion: The State is the Secret**

The conclusion that can be drawn from our research, based on the situated methodology we presented, is that states and secrecy are co-constructed. Instead of considering the state as a well-defined entity and secrecy as a mere attribute, or, conversely, foregrounding the notion of secrecy as a clear concept and questioning the idea of the state, we suggest states and secrecies are co-produced. Instead of being each other's cause or consequences they emerge in mutual interaction. And instead of being well-defined objects from the start, they develop as entities and attributes, in different circumstances. States nor secrecies have clear boundaries - they are mediated via each other. As a consequence, secrecy can be understood as a relational notion. It constitutes a variety of political relationships, modes of knowing and ways of seeing, not only between the state and its traditional constituencies, but also between states and trans-national polities and actors. Unpacking multi-actor and multi-level technopolitics of border control and migration and mobility management in Europe allows for a re-evaluation of the notion of the state as well as the notion of secrecy. The methodological and conceptual issues we have outlined suggest the contours of very mobile and infrastructural entities partially overlapping with what is formally known as "the state". In the Hotspot approach as well as in the Eurosur program, the state arises out of the intermingling of policies, agencies and technologies, and something is considered a secret always in a specific situation, and not in a vacuum. In this, who or what is "speaking for" the secret is relevant, as well.

The state in the context of border infrastructures is not just the next phase in the development and exercise of state power. States may increasingly apply infrastructural power to organize and penetrate society but the thesis here holds that states themselves are increasingly entangled in infrastructures. Border infrastructures are not just the result of human design or political will. The technopolitics of border infrastructures generates configurations in which states are neither the sole nor the final architects.



Although European surveillance programs have often been typified in term of panoptica and all-seeing apparatuses, our research (and that of many others) suggests technopolitical infrastructures in the context of border control and migration policy ought to be conceived as highly constructed and composed complex networks. Instead of depicting realities and existing critical border events, policy programs such as the Eurosur project and the Hotspot approach tend to multiply the nature and amount of political relationships. They perform the relationships between migrants, state officials, professionals and policymakers in various configurations at multiple locations.

Our three methodological angles of performativity, immanence and following actors and things proved to be helpful in detecting the various associations and transformations that take place in the interaction and transaction between people, institutions and technologies that constitute the novel political relationships and the conditions of secrecy.

### **Textbox with examples and tips**

- Transform your questions into research questions.

If after thorough analysis you do not succeed in separating your concepts because they seem too related, then study this relationship and turn it into a research question. For instance, in our studies we found secrecy is not just an object states are concerned with or a characteristic or quality of a state. There is an intimate relationship between states and secrecy in many cases. Continuing from that proposition proved to be very productive.

- Methodology is not mere methods.

The research we undertook for our various studies is empirically grounded in semi-structured interviews (individual as well as on group level), observations, and the analysis of various documents. Throughout the chapter however our methods were part of a methodological and conceptual endeavour that favoured the three guiding principles of (1) performative stance, (2) the notion of immanence and (3) the imperative to follow the actors. Methods have to be applied thoroughly, correctly and consistently but the same applies to methodologies and conceptualizations.

- Expect the unexpected

Taking the imperatives of “performativity” and “following actors and things” seriously also means one has to be willing to arrive at unexpected locations and to end up with unannounced guests. Tracing chains of associations and following connection of peoples, institutions and technologies leads the researcher through a myriad of networks.

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<sup>i</sup> European Commission, Fact Sheet “The hotspot approach to managing exceptional migratory flows,” 8 September 2015 at [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-wedo/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/2\\_hotspots\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-wedo/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/2_hotspots_en.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> [http://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Legal\\_basis/Eurosur\\_Regulation\\_2013.pdf](http://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Legal_basis/Eurosur_Regulation_2013.pdf) (24 June 2017).