The Future in Security:
ethnographies of security at the edge of tomorrow
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Information

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This paper is an ethnographic approach to the socio-technical dynamics that are part of risk perception in the process of calculate 'secure futures'. I analyze what my interlocutors from EMSA points out as information in their practices of image production for surveillance of seas and shores.

Long abstract:

-The European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) offers its eyes to European maritime safety bodies: fisheries control, borders, customs, pollution, law enforcement. Its constellation of satellites, UAVs, sensors, algorithms and radars produce the images that mediate the tasks of surveillance of seas and shores, but are these images just targeting the ocean surfaces? As they are synthetically calculated, they are able to point to the future as well, anticipating events that may affect European Security. In this context, image is a word that is linked to- information.

Image and information are articulated in the different services offered by EMSA (detection, tracking, identification and characterization) in a double sense: making it possible to imagine and code images of real or potential situations (coding a radiometric spectrum or anticipating the position of a ship) and interpreting and classifying images at a scale and speed impossible for human operators (interpretation algorithms). To understand the relationship of this niche of images and information together with native categories like 'risk perception' and 'security' in this paper I analyze the dynamics where signals, reflectances and data-sets, that is, information, become calculated images of illegal migrants or smugglers as possible futures.

This is an ongoing project currently being developed through fieldwork at EMSA's headquarters in Lisbon. In this paper I take my interlocutors' multiple references to information and visual inputs (expert readable capabilities, signal coding, sensor tuning) as an ethnographic insight to understand current surveillance practices and dynamics of future in the field of European maritime safety.