

PREFACE

This book aims for two goals. The first goal is to capture how the European Union's emerging migration management apparatus interfaces with the contemporary global political and economic order. The book's operative questions are how the apparatus's various parts articulate without a centralized authority, and how a normative policy subject is conjured up in its whirlwind of disparate policy processes. It focuses less on the questions of how well the apparatus works "on the ground" and whether migrants "really" conform to the demands pushed upon them. While crucially important, these questions do not necessarily point the investigator to the myriad routines of scattered technocrats whose work enables this apparatus, synergistically and perhaps unwittingly. Regardless of the degree of the apparatus's success, literally millions of migrants and travelers around the world must deal with its convergent strength, generated from the otherwise unrelated effects of external border control, biometric information technologies, and circular migration programs. Though large, it would be misleading to describe such a social construction as "large-scale." This tag suggests that it rests loftily above real people and acts independently of them. It does neither. Rather, it results from the situated practices of technocrats, officials, and experts who often do not know each other and conduct much of their work virtually in cyberspace. If local rituals organize people by establishing *direct connections* between them, then apparatuses destroy those mechanisms, individualize people, and create *indirect relations* between them so that they, or their labor power, can be processed to an enormous degree. Grand moral statements make up for the social breakdown. They integrate policy experts, policy targets, and the apparatus that relates them into a common, if vacuous, ethical frame: "A migration policy that works for everyone," as EU officials are known to say. Put starkly, however, the strange effect of this social situation is that there is no "social" in the substantive sense of the term.

The book's second goal is to deploy a suitable ethnographic methodology for achieving the first goal. Like globalization, an apparatus poses obvious challenges to participant-observation, anthropology's signature field method, which was designed to map direct social and ecological connections. Ethnographers' responses to the shattering of fixed place share a commitment to tracing tangible connections across the globe, establishing an in situ presence in as many nodal points as possible, and filling in the gaps with keen theoretical insights. This book offers a vital complement to these important responses: specifically, a methodology for studying highly mediated social relations and the veritable absence of connections between actors who are nevertheless absorbed in the same processes, though often from radically different positions. If alienation, estrangement, and objectification are hallmarks of mass capitalist society, then we should consider a nuanced understanding of "connections" as a methodological and theoretical construct. How do we study amorphous systems of population regulation—under which we all increasingly live—that rely on countless educated laborers who lack serious influence as particular individuals, ongoing ties to each other, and direct contact with the masses of people whom their labor indirectly regulates? I hope that what I call "nonlocal ethnography" will help us to examine how these (non)connections specifically take their shape, and their toll. It also acknowledges another hallmark of mass society, whether one is a poor Southern migrant or a wealthy Northern citizen, or any combination thereof: as we lack control over the most important conditions of our lives, so these conditions are rarely formulated in our midst. This point does not require us to abandon in situ field research, which places the ethnographer "there" in the actor's midst. Rather, it requires us to continue to complicate how we identify and access the elusive "there" where we need to be to understand what made that actor's midst possible.