

Antipode

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Gregory Feldman, *The Migration Apparatus: Security, Labor, and Policymaking in the European Union*, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2011. ISBN: 9780804761062 (cloth); ISBN: 9780804761079 (paper); ISBN: 9780804779128 (e-book)

In *The Migration Apparatus*, Gregory Feldman examines the harmonization of migration policy and management in the contemporary European Union. This has moved migration from being mainly a national concern to being a part of the EU's responsibility, a process that began with the signing of the Schengen Agreement in 1985. Feldman argues that the EU's migration policy and management are characterized by social indifference and disconnection from migrants. He further suggests that EU migration policy is mediated between the ideologies of neoliberals and neo-nationalists.

The EU's migration apparatus is a network produced by and mediated through discourse, laws, scientific statements, and physical arrangements. The Schengen Agreement, Frontex, EURODAC, the Dublin Convention, I-Map, and the European Migration Network are just some of the major institutions of this apparatus. The 'technostrategic' and quantified language of these institutions objectifies migrants and harmonizes migration management. The organization of migrants and travelers into categories in an attempt to control and normalize the mixed flow of migrants has the effect of objectifying them. The harmonization of migration management takes place in order to create an image of EU as a coherent "area of justice, freedom, and security" (p. 57) where labor, capital, and goods can move freely within the interior borders. However, multiple countries in Europe have experienced a rise of nationalist parties who are skeptical of this free movement. These neo-nationalist parties aim to secure and protect national interests and to prevent national identities from being swept up in a multicultural neoliberal Europe.

Feldman's analysis is centered on the commonalities and negotiations between neoliberals and neo-nationalists. Many people would argue that these two political blocs have very little in common. Free trade, high mobility of labor, and a minimal state are elements which characterize the neoliberal bloc, whereas the neo-national bloc is interested in protecting the

national interests such as its national identity, its labor force, and its sovereignty. However, Feldman argues that the political blocs share a common exclusion. Both fail to incorporate migrants' own perspectives and seek to avoid letting migrants speak for themselves in a way that can change migration policy. Hence, each participates in an objectification of migrants.

In his careful examination of different programs of the EU migration management, Feldman demonstrates that “the function of today’s (neo)liberalism is not to undermine nationalism but only to temper its worst excesses by insisting on human rights, on sensible immigration integration programs, on humane procedures to facilitate labor migration, and on the rule of law rather than state decree” (p. 55). The program Circular Migration is one of the management tools through which the different interests of the two political blocs are negotiated. On one hand, this program secures the interests of neoliberals because it gives access to cheap and mobile temporary labor. On the other hand, neo-nationalists’ interests are secured because migrants are prevented from staying permanently. Circular Migration provides a common factor of EU’s migration policy in that it celebrates mobility while discouraging settlement. The program reduces migrants to circulating labor objects whose value is dependent on their productivity.

Further, Feldman shows how biometric information systems and electronic travel documents serve to identify and monitor travelers as they move between countries. According to Feldman, this biometric system creates vertical hierarchies based on class. Wealthy travelers can move with relative ease through the identification checks if they have submitted biometric data to the program. In this sense, the European biometric system accommodates neo-nationalism by imposing tight security controls, while also facilitating neoliberal goals by letting labor circulate easily.

In order to develop his arguments about social indifference and disconnection, Feldman conducts what he terms “a non-local ethnography” (p. 17). Feldman argues that new methods are needed because the Western world is increasingly marked by the disconnection between people, as local practices and direct connections have been replaced by indirect relations that are mediated through third agents such as policy representations, social norms, money, and bureaucracies that objectify people. His “non-local ethnography attempts to account for more durable (less tangible) rationales, discourses, and processes that help to generate an apparatus, rather than account for more tangible (but less durable) objects and social relations, which are

effects of an apparatus (for example, the holding center)” (p. 18). Feldman’s non-local ethnography illustrates how a particular production of knowledge concerning migration - including manageable categories - emerges in conferences, risk analysis, visual representation (I-Map), and the European Migration Network. Policy makers, public administrators, and scientists are just some of the actors who participate in the production of harmonized migration knowledge. Feldman states that these people are not directly connected to each other, and that they are particularly disconnected from migrants. Knowledge production and practices circulate virtually and are often available to anyone who has an internet connection. Therefore, says Feldman, the knowledge practices are unbounded; we cannot locate them in one particular place.

From a geographic perspective, Feldman’s argument raises the question of whether places remain significant to the production of knowledge. It is here that some of the limitations of Feldman’s otherwise rich analysis emerge. His focus on policies and the processes that produce and reproduce the apparatus - processes that Feldman argues are not necessarily geographically locatable - limits the scope of his analysis. Feldman is not interested in the consequences of the apparatus as it affects people’s experiences when they travel or migrate. However, migrants’ and travelers’ experiences are shaped as they encounter ‘knowledge practices’ in particular places such as check-points or, worse, holding centers (see Luibhéid 2002; Martin 2011). For example, Lauren Martin (2011) demonstrates how children get stuck in detention centers and experience an apparatus which spatially excludes them and deprives their political agency. A non-local ethnography does not account for such experiences. Furthermore, Feldman’s focus on non-local ethnography runs the risk of further objectifying migrants - here as the object of scholarly analysis that is similarly disconnected from everyday lives and places.

Overall, *The Migration Apparatus* is an informative and innovative book, despite a few shortcomings. The book gives a good understanding of EU’s migration policy and management, and demonstrates that it is not a uniform neoliberal project; instead, it is produced in conjunction with neo-nationalist interests. With his non-local ethnography, Feldman challenges us to think differently about how to study networks and the production of knowledge. For critical geography, an essential lesson from this book is Feldman’s argument that EU’s migration policy and management is highly disconnected from the migrants themselves. As critical geographers we must continue to demonstrate that the migrants affected by the restrictive migration apparatus are not represented in the knowledge circulating within the apparatus. I recommend this book to

students and scholars who are interested in migration, the European Union, apparatuses of security, networks, and non-local ethnography.

References

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