

Technologies of Suspicion and the Ethics
of Obligation in Political Asylum

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Introduction

Negotiating Suspicion, Obligation, and Security in Contemporary Political Asylum Regimes

BRIDGET M. HAAS AND AMY SHUMAN

Asylum seekers are increasingly the focus of global debates surrounding humanitarian obligations on the one hand and concerns surrounding security and border control on the other. Asylum seekers are at turns portrayed as innocent victims in need of humanitarian protection and as “queue jumpers” or threats to the body of the host nation. Recent coverage of the European migration crisis illustrates these competing representations of asylum seekers.

On September 2, 2015, newspapers across the globe carried the sobering image of the lifeless body of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian boy who had washed up on a beach in Turkey. He, along with his mother and two siblings, had died fleeing their homeland in search of safety in the European Union (EU). This incident served to reframe the narrative of the migrant crisis that had started earlier that year and had reached immense proportions by this time. The view of migrants, and Syrian ones in particular, began to shift from suspicious Other or potential terrorist to humanitarian victim.

If coverage of Kurdi's death represented a shift in the narrative of the migrant crisis, it was short-lived. On November 13, 2015, a series of coordinated terrorist attacks in Paris transfixed the world. It was soon revealed that one of the terrorists held a fake Syrian passport and had entered France through the migrant trail that flowed from the Middle East, passing through Greece, Macedonia, and Serbia and into Western Europe. The global response to the Paris terrorist attacks was swift: borders closed and the processing of refugees was slowed or temporarily ceased at EU countries' borders.

The shifting public narratives and policy responses concerning the EU migrant crisis represent a new iteration of tensions between humanitarian ethics and security concerns that are generated by international migration. This tension between humanitarian obligations and the security of the state have been evident since the inception of international refugee policy, though events such as the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the November 13, 2015, attacks in Paris bring these tensions to the fore, as they are acutely experienced and debated. Indeed, in a post-9/11 landscape (and now reinvigorated after 11/13), volatile debates have taken place pitting humanitarian ethics against notions of security and border control.¹ To be sure, at the time of completing this introductory chapter, US president Donald Trump issued an executive order barring refugees and immigrants from seven predominantly Muslim countries from entering the United States. The travel ban, quickly dubbed a "Muslim ban" by media and opponents of the measure, was soon met with widespread protests and legal challenges across the country. Months later, in October 2017, Trump laid out a new immigration strategy that focused on overhauling the US asylum system, including narrowing the standards required to gain asylum and imposing penalties on asylum seekers who file claims deemed to be "fraudulent." The strong divisiveness of the debate surrounding these measures speaks to the enduring and entrenched nature of the tensions between humanitarian obligations and concerns over national security.

The "paradoxical preoccupation with globalization and domestic security" manifests in an increase in the circulation of goods and technologies with the simultaneous attempt to constrain human mobility (Fassin 2011; Muller 2004, 52). The asylum seeker emerges as a central figure in this debate, exposing the fragility of modern sovereignty (Muller 2004) and challenging "both the norms and the exceptions of the state" (Squire 2009, 3).

As Giorgio Agamben (2000) asserts, “If the refugee represents such a disquieting influence in the order of the nation-state, this is primarily because, by breaking the identity between the human and the citizen and that between nativity and nationality, it brings the originary fiction of sovereignty into crisis” (20–21). Yet, as Nyers (2003, 2006) reminds us, the state is still a powerful entity, and it is through the construction of “the refugee” that “the citizen” is simultaneously created and maintained.

Indeed, it is the liminality of the asylum seeker, as a figure “betwixt and between” (Turner 1967)—neither fully included in nor fully excluded from a host country—that offers a critical lens into the workings of the state. Close attention to contexts of liminality and marginalization can provide important observations into larger political and cultural forces (Das and Poole 2004; Fassin 2015, 3). In providing fine-tuned analyses of political asylum systems and the adjudication of asylum claims across a range of sociocultural and geopolitical contexts, this volume offers critical insights into the processes by which tensions between humanitarianism and security/border control are negotiated and enacted at the local level.

Although asylum seekers have vastly different situations, political asylum is a global policy, requiring the collaboration of nations with different resources and different attitudes toward both refugees and economic migrants. Research on political asylum has always relied on in-depth understanding of the complex situations people are fleeing, including the particular forms of persecution and corruption. In this book, we integrate the particulars with the larger issues of policy. We are writing at an important moment in time in terms of forced migration and increasing numbers of asylum seekers. This particular cultural historical moment is defined by a global war on terrorism, in which suspicion has supplanted compassion and trust in many cases. The rise of an ethos or culture of suspicion as a defining characteristic of asylum regimes is evidenced, for example, by an increase in the rates of denial of asylum claims in the United States (TRAC 2016), the closing of borders to asylum seekers in the EU, and the rise of anti-immigration—particularly anti-asylum seeker—sentiments and rhetoric across the globe.

While we opened up this introduction with a discussion about the perceived threat of terrorism that underlined global fears of the asylum seeker, the contributions to this volume do not focus on asylum seekers as terrorist

threats. Rather, we use this description of the contemporary political landscape to highlight two key themes, or aims, of this volume. First, recounting the shifting narratives surrounding asylum seekers in the EU and United States illustrate both the constructed nature of suspicious subjects and the fluidity and malleability of these constructed categories. This volume provides detailed ethnographic analyses of how categories of suspicious asylum subjects are produced in disparate locally and culturally specific ways. This framing turns our attention to how migrants are often produced as suspicious subjects by the very asylum regimes to which they appeal for protection. Second, a focus on the widespread tensions between protection and control, between humanitarian obligations and national security, brings to the fore the dominance of a lens of suspicion regarding asylum at this particular moment in time and place. Our contention in this volume is that this broader ethos or lens of suspicion comes to bear in powerful ways on the everyday adjudication of asylum claims, albeit in uneven and locally contingent ways and very often with deleterious consequences for those who claim a need for protection.

ASYLUM SEEKER: VICTIM VERSUS THREAT

Part of the recent fear of refugees fleeing the Syrian, Iraqi, and Afghan conflicts is attributed to the possibility that terrorists are mingling with refugees and crossing into Europe with them. Many of our discussions in this book address the consequences resulting from the more general suspicion of refugees for people seeking asylum. These issues are not new, and as many political asylum scholars have observed, what we are calling a lens of suspicion has been part of the assessment of disparities in the asylum system since its inception (Macklin 2009), often described in terms of questions of credibility determinations (Daniel and Knudsen 1995; Einhorn 2009). In her discussion of lesbian political asylum applicants, Claire Bennett (2014) describes a “culture of disbelief” by decision-makers. She writes, “Questioning a person’s credibility is a legitimate line of enquiry as stipulated under Section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants) Act of 2004. This clearly states that suspicion should be raised if individuals fail to answer specific questions, hide or provide misleading information, produce false documentation, or file an asylum application later than is reasonably expected” (Bennett 2014, 151).

Asylum seekers are refugees who are fleeing their homelands and whose cases have not yet been assessed by national systems designed to consider whether or not they qualify for protected status. At the end of 2016, there were 2.8 million asylum seekers worldwide (UNCHR 2017).² To qualify for asylum, one must prove he or she meets the definition of a refugee under international law, as outlined in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. Article 1A of the convention, as amended by the 1967 protocol, defines a refugee as

a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (UN General Assembly 1967)

In addition to meeting the definition of refugee as specified in international law, one must also meet the requirements of the particular domestic asylum laws of the country within which one is seeking asylum. While the refugee convention undergirds domestic asylum laws, the postconvention development of asylum bureaucracies took different forms, and there is a lack of uniformity in asylum adjudication across national boundaries.

When focusing specifically on asylum claims and asylum systems, scholarly attention has been primarily on the adjudication of asylum cases that occur in countries where national asylum systems are in place, namely within the forty-four “industrialized countries” of first asylum identified by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR 2015). These are the nations of Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the Republic of Korea (with Western European countries, the United States, and Canada receiving the highest proportion of asylum claims and also much scholarly attention). There is sometimes a theoretical and empirical distinction made between refugee status determination (RSD) hearings conducted by the UNCHR in settings where asylum systems are not in place and the adjudication of asylum claims that are lodged within and processed by individual nation-states.

In this volume, the majority of contributors analyze the adjudication of asylum claims by various individual nation-states, though some address RSD processes in contexts where a national system of asylum is nonexistent. We consider these under the same analytical lens because both sets of processes engage in the assessment of legitimacy of migrants and rely, in theory, on similar criteria. Moreover, we see the tensions between humanitarian imperatives and security concerns as central to all asylum-adjudication contexts. We are interested in the situated practices and logics that are variously deployed in the assessment of these claims, as these tensions are negotiated in locally contingent ways.

The ways in which asylum seekers have been understood and acted upon, in both academic and policy arenas, has shifted over time. Scholars and activists who have held an interest in human rights have focused on asylum seekers as rights-bearing individuals within the context of international law (Edwards 2005; Hathaway 1991). Yet this human rights framework has been increasingly supplanted by the discourse of humanitarianism, whereby participating actors increasingly appeal to compassion and moral sentiments (Fassin and Rechtman 2009; Feldman 2007; Ticktin 2006, 2011). In this framework, the asylum seeker is reconfigured, moving from a strictly rights-bearing individual to that of humanitarian victim.

This deployment of humanitarianism has been complicated, however, by a rise in the criminalization and securitization of asylum and asylum seekers, particularly in the Global North (Adamson 2006; Anderson 2013; Bigo 2002; Coutin 2011; Gibney 2004; Kerwin 2005; Squire 2009). Indeed, migration, and asylum in particular, is increasingly seen as foremost an issue of security. Victoria Squire (2009) has examined the exclusionary politics of asylum in Europe and the United Kingdom, arguing that the state, in constructing the asylum seeker as a threat to be managed, “effectively generates the ‘problem’ or ‘threat’ to which it is opposed,” thereby engaging in an endless cycle of restriction and control (3). The increasing dominance of the securitization paradigm of asylum has produced “the ‘criminal/terrorist’” as “another figure along the refugee-migrant spectrum” (Holmes and Castañeda 2016, 18).

The criminalization and securitization of migration has also meant the emergence and implementation of an array of restrictive border-control measures, ranging from the collection of biometric data to detention, interdiction, and deportation (Bigo 2007; Broeders 2007; De Genova and Peutz

2010; Fassin 2011; Huysmans 2006; Mountz 2010, Schuster 2003). The discourse of national security has been mobilized by states to repress the rights of migrants or to justify the infliction of violence upon them (Carens 2003; Fassin 2011; Mountz 2010; Schuster 2003; Squire 2009).

If the asylum seeker as potential terrorist represents one kind of threat that needs to be addressed through the adjudication of asylum claims, then the asylum seeker as economic siphon or threat to cultural identity represents another iteration of security threat (Innes 2010; Mountz 2010; Schuster 2003). To be sure, media representations of transnational migrants as “queue jumpers” or otherwise “bogus” asylum seekers abound, so much so that the dominant public perception of asylum seekers is that the majority of them are not truly humanitarian victims but rather those (illegitimately) seeking economic opportunity (Anderson 2013; Kmak 2015). The “bogus” asylum seeker has become a central figure in the debates surrounding security, migration, and humanitarian ethics (Zimmerman 2011). The putative distinction between the economic migrant and the humanitarian/political refugee lies at the heart of asylum adjudication. While the distinction between these two categories of migrants has been shown to be untenable, it remains a cornerstone of policies and discourses surrounding asylum seekers (Bohmer and Shuman 2010; Dauvergne 2004; Essed and Wesenbeek 2004). The presumptive distinction between proper (humanitarian/political) and improper (economic) reasons for mobility becomes a way of “morally delineating the deserving refugee from the undeserving migrant” (Holmes and Castañeda 2016, 13).

The fear that political asylum seekers might actually be economic migrants, that they might overtax fragile economic systems, or that they might be terrorists is not new (Gibney 2002). Some asylum and refugee scholars have argued that the system has always been vulnerable, that it was designed initially to offer safe haven to people fleeing Soviet countries rather than to refugees from the Global South and the Middle East (Pirouet 2001, 124–26). The association between asylum seekers and terrorists, however unfounded, was intensified after 2001, and these concerns have been applied not only to people seeking asylum in Europe, Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States but also in East Africa, where, Monica Kathina Juma and Peter Mwangi Kagwanja (2008) write, “Refugees, generally perceived as a liability, are likely to become pawns in a wider geopolitical game in which they are redefined as agents of insecurity

and terrorism" (225). Whether seen as a threat to the nation-state, the welfare state, and/or liberal democracies (Schuster 2003), asylum seekers often bear the brunt of public and political anxieties.

ASYLUM ADJUDICATION AS CRITICAL LENS

If asylum systems produce migrants as legitimate (humanitarian refugees) or illegitimate (unqualified or fraudulent) applicants, then we must understand the mechanisms by which this production happens. As this volume underscores, it is of vital importance to more fully understand *who* becomes understood as a threat, *how* they emerge as suspicious (or not), and how these categories of inclusion and exclusion shift, temporally and spatially.

In this volume, we emphasize an understanding of asylum systems as not solely political-legal institutions but also ones that comprise systems and practices that are inherently sociomoral. That is, in declaring—and thus producing—an asylum seeker as either an illegitimate/"bogus" asylum seeker or a legitimate "true refugee," asylum systems confer a moral standing for these particular individuals. Asylum seekers, like other precarious subjects managed by state institutions, can "easily slip from one side of this moral line to the other, from the role of suspect to the status of victim and vice versa" (Fassin 2015, 2). Is an asylum seeker a suspect and dangerous Other—a terrorist posing as a vulnerable figure or a fraudulent malingerer trying to siphon the economic and social resources of the host country? Or is the asylum seeker a "true refugee," a victim of political persecution who deserves protection and care?

This volume posits in-depth anthropological attention to multiple sites of asylum adjudication as a critical lens in which to interrogate the broader sociocultural, historical, and political-economic forces shaping refugee and asylum policies and practices. It is in these microlevel contexts—courtrooms, offices of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) interviews—that asylum seekers are produced as either legitimate or illegitimate subjects and their fates are decided. By providing an array of accounts of how global and national discourses and policies regarding asylum are "locally reckoned" (Willen 2012), the contributors to this volume add to our understanding about the disparate and uneven nature of asylum adjudication. That is, while it is not new to

recognize the inequitable and uneven outcomes of asylum and RSD systems both across and within borders (Einolf 2001; Hamlin 2014; Legomsky 2009; Ramji-Nogales et al. 2007; Schoenholtz 2005), the mechanisms, technologies, and everyday interactions that produce such uneven outcomes warrant more attention (Jubany 2011, 2017).

Below we discuss three overarching themes that inform contemporary political asylum systems and the analyses of the contributors to this volume: obligation, suspicion, and security. These thematic domains are not discrete and should not be taken to be clearly delineated areas of inquiry but rather constructs with which to think, as applied to various ethnographic and textual material. Indeed, these domains are intersecting and interdependent, and most contributions to this volume speak to more than one of these themes.

Obligation

We posit obligation as a central concept to our analyses of political asylum. More specifically, we borrow from Nadia El-Shaarawi (this volume) the idea of an “ethics of obligation,” by which we mean to underscore the moral character and implications of claims to protection and obligations to protect. While El-Shaarawi explicitly offers the ethics of obligation as her primary intervention, many other contributors to this volume—Ili Benjamin, Bridget M. Haas, John B. Haviland, and Charles Watters—highlight the ethical relationships involved in the struggle over the meaning of the “obligation to protect.”

It is not sufficient on either a theoretical or a policy level to merely claim that states are obligated to protect refugees and asylum seekers. Rather, this claim is our point of departure—it is the assertion of the obligation to protect asylum seekers that the contributors to this volume interrogate. For example, while the decisions of states and other institutions to adjudicate and admit asylum seekers are legally based upon the Geneva Convention, the issue of whom to admit and the processes for assessing this are issues that are locally and subjectively negotiated and informed by moral assumptions. “In order to substantiate obligation,” Claudia Tazreiter (2004) asserts, “the moral standing of a person or people must be articulated” (29). In asylum adjudication, institutional actions have direct implications for human suffering. Asylum seekers, as opposed to refugees, pose a different kind of ethical challenge: “What gives asylum seekers a vital moral claim, however, is

the fact that their arrival involves the state directly and immediately in their fate” (Carens 2003, 101).

Ultimately, asylum is about states’ obligations to protect certain categories of persons deemed vulnerable. But *to whom* states are obligated emerges as a contentious, shifting, and muddy question. The question of to whom states and other institutions are obligated is also a matter of geopolitical interests and ideologies, which shape which groups are seen as deserving of protection at a particular place and moment in time (Coutin 2011; Holmes and Castañeda 2016). Attention to circulating discourses and authoritative claims concerning asylum politics can offer critical insight “about how the responsibility for suffering is shifted; how fears of cultural, ethnic, and religious difference are mobilized; and how boundaries of social categories are made and unmade,” thereby creating a “hierarchy of deservingness” (Holmes and Castañeda 2016, 13, 19).

Yet, as the contributions to this volume elucidate, the question of who deserves protection is just as much a matter of locally specific factors as it is larger geopolitical factors. Asylum is a socially and culturally shaped process and set of institutions, and conceptions of legitimate subjects (those deserving asylum status) are always historically and socioculturally contingent. Asylum adjudication, while informed by broader discourses and ideologies, is also a thoroughly intersubjective and interpersonal process, and the collision of logic systems—between the culture of asylum adjudicators and the culture of asylum seekers—has been well documented (Blommaert 2001; Bohmer and Shuman 2007, 2008, 2018; Jacquemet 2009, 2011; Rousseau et al. 2002). The local, as much as the global, is key here. For example, categories of deservingness are often highly contingent on affective and narrative performance within adjudication arenas (Bohmer and Shuman 2008; McKinnon 2009), what El-Shaarawi (this volume), drawing on Jarret Zigon, deems “local moralities.”

States’ obligations to its own citizens must simultaneously be privileged in asylum politics and practices. As the opening discussion of responses to the current EU migrant crisis illustrated, the very question of who is under threat is far from clear and often lacks consensus. Asylum seekers are at turns constructed as the threat and the threatened (Innes 2010).

It is important to acknowledge the multiple stakeholders and myriad actors involved in political asylum systems. While asylum adjudication sometimes involves simply a claimant and an adjudicator (asylum officer, UNCHR

official, immigration judge), it is more often the case that asylum claims involve the participation of many mediating actors. Thus, legal aid advocates, immigration attorneys, and human rights or other NGO members often play an integral part in asylum systems and processes. Given these different stakeholders, it is essential to consider the competing conceptions of asylum seekers that may be at play at any given time during the adjudication of asylum claims. The role of NGOs in the asylum process is framed as one of asylum claimant advocacy, though on the ground their effects appear more complex (Cabot 2013, 2014; Ticktin 2011). Naomi Millner (2011), for example, challenges the view that NGO refugee advocates can subvert dominant, pejorative representations of asylum seekers by enacting an ethos of hospitality precisely because these humanitarian actors are drawing on the same discursive and conceptual logic of the state, thereby reproducing the same categories of belonging and exclusion as the state. She describes these moments of categorization as “ethical framings which invest such governmental orders with legitimacy” (Millner 2011, 321). Ilil Benjamin’s essay in this volume vividly illustrates the complexity of the relationships between aid workers and asylum claimants—a context in which obligation to protect is by no means straightforward.

The contributors to this volume examine the ways in which the concept of obligation is engaged both directly and indirectly, bringing to the fore the complex ways in which a dominant ethos of suspicion works on both a global and local level to reshape questions of *to whom* we are obligated and how that obligation is determined and legitimated. The chapters by Haviland and Watters, drawing on very different ethnographic material, shed light on how the construction of particular categories of migrants mobilize a sense of obligation over other categories of migrants.

Security

Political asylum and national and international security have always been intertwined, but the connection has intensified in recent years. In essence, asylum adjudication is the negotiation of two sets of anxieties about security: the asylum seeker’s quest for physical or existential security and anxieties about the economic, physical, and/or cultural threat that asylum seekers pose to national security. We have emphasized throughout this introduction the tensions between humanitarian obligation and national security / border control. As Daniel M. Goldstein (2007) has pointed out, rights can be revoked in the name of security.

Yet security and obligation are inextricably linked, in that fulfilling an obligation—be it to asylum seekers or the state—is a prerequisite for security. On the one hand, meeting humanitarian obligations to protect deserving refugees is necessary to ensure asylum seekers' personal and existential security. Indeed, the life-or-death stakes of asylum decisions are recognized not only by asylum claimants and their advocates but also by asylum adjudicators who wrestle with making these decisions, as the ethnographic data presented in Haas's chapter reveals. On the other hand, recognizing the obligation to protect citizens from outside threat is seen as essential for national security. Put differently, getting obligation "right"—protecting those who need protection and denying those who do not—is framed as necessary to security on a broad level.

Security always incorporates and references its inverse: insecurity. Matthew Gibney (2002) underlines the irony in viewing asylum seekers as a threat since by definition they are victims of insecurity. Jef Huysmans (2006) highlights the inequities regarding security that arise in political asylum processes. Framing asylum seekers' claims as "alternative security claims," Huysmans notes that the asylum seekers' requests for protection "often remain subordinated to the security of the State and its citizenry" (6). Thus, a central question in asylum adjudication is, *whose* security matters? The shifting and contextual definitions of who is deemed morally deserving expose the fact that security (and insecurity) itself is socioculturally and historically constructed. As Claudia Aradau, Jef Huysmans, Andrew Neal, and Nadine Voelkner (2014) note, "For something to become a security concern, institutional, political, technological, and various other work is performed that makes it a matter of insecurity" (3; see also Huysmans 2006). Security and insecurity, therefore, must be understood as situated practices that require the anticipation and subsequent control of perceived risks (Amoore 2013; Goldstein 2007). These threats and perceived risks are themselves social constructions, often reflecting broader ideological and political agendas, as several of the essays in this volume make clear (Rachel Lewis, Sara McKinnon, Watters).

This volume examines the struggle over claims for security and protection as they are deployed in contexts of political asylum. We consider how the idea of security or insecurity comes into play on many levels in political asylum. We ask: Whose security is at stake, and how is the security of asylum seekers measured against the security of the state? Who needs

protection? Who gets to decide this? Further, we ask how insecurity is configured, especially in the expectation that asylum seekers will articulate their vulnerability as a central part of their claims. In fact, the articulation of vulnerability could be considered the primary “currency” in asylum adjudication (James 2004, 2011). Many of the contributions to this volume attend to the struggle over claims for protection—between adjudicators and claimants (El-Shaarawi, Lewis, McKinnon, Amy Shuman, and Carol Bohmer), between aid workers and asylum seekers (Benjamin), and between “objective” sources of evidence and “subjective” narratives of asylum seekers (Haas, Marco Jacquemet, Benjamin N. Lawrance). The contribution from Haviland is particularly noteworthy in this regard in that he turns the problematic of “a politics of protection” on its head and asks what happens when those who do not understand themselves in need of protection get defined as such by the state.

Suspicion

Though we are framing suspicion as its own conceptual domain here, this is, as the volume’s title indicates, an overarching theme of the book as a whole. Indeed, suspicion is the primary point of organization for this volume. The ethical quandaries and challenges that underlie the control of borders have long been recognized by scholars (Carens 1992; Gibney 1988). However, in this volume, we argue that the rise of suspicion as the dominant ethos of asylum adjudication—the stance that asylum seekers are “always already untrustworthy”—is reconfiguring notions of who can claim protection and who is obligated to protect (Holmes and Castañeda 2016, 19; see also Bohmer and Shuman 2007; Griffiths 2013; Jacquemet 2011; Maryns 2006).

Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman (2009) describe refugees as “objects of suspicion,” tracing their emergence as perceived competitors in the labor market. Asylum policy, then, was subordinated to the economics of migration (256). Following this, they argue that the “hunt for bogus refugees became a leitmotif in public discourse, used to justify the increasing harshness of adjudications” (256). Our discussion of suspicion examines both the larger conceptual framework of suspicion and particular, localized discourses of suspicion in the political asylum process. Though the adjudication of asylum is an individualized process, its effects are much greater:

“the discredit of asylum seekers as individuals signifies the delegitimation of asylum as an institution” (Fassin 2011, 220).

Suspicion generates technologies to measure and assess deservingness and, more specifically, credibility, and several essays in this book discuss these various “technologies of suspicion” (Campbell, 2004), including chapters by Haas, Jacquemet, Lawrance, and Lewis. This volume’s contributors ask: What are these technologies of suspicion? How and when are they deployed and by whom? What are the effects, both intended and unintended, of these technologies? While recognizing suspicion as a dominant ethos of asylum systems, contributors also attend to its slippages, ambivalences, and indeterminacies.

While asylum adjudication and RSD processes are putatively concerned with “getting *at* the ‘truth,’” the contributions to this volume underscore the ways in which asylum systems actually engage in the production of truth (Fassin 2013). Thus, technologies of suspicion are simultaneously “technologies of truth” (Merry and Coutin 2014). For example, in many cases, as Lawrance’s chapter demonstrates, outside expert witnesses or state-produced country condition reports are granted ultimate authority over the testimony of the asylum seeker herself (see also Good 2007; Lawrance and Ruffer 2015). Our contention in this book is that asylum systems are not just contexts in which certain categories and performances are rewarded and legitimated but also contexts in which these very categories of personhood are themselves produced.

A key effect of these technologies of suspicion is a narrowing of the lens of who can be considered morally deserving. That is, if states are obligated to protect “true refugees” who are worthy of protection, then by narrowing the criteria by which this deservingness is met also serves to limit the number to whom the state is obligated. This allows for states to restrict migration while keeping their claim to humanitarian obligation intact. This is reflected in the assertion by asylum institutions that a rise in asylum denials reflects a rise in “bogus” asylum seekers. We agree with Fassin (2015), who suggests that this instead reflects a rise in the *production* of suspicious subjects rather than a rise in their presence (see also Kmak 2105, 396). Indeed, numerous essays provide fine-grained analyses of the production of suspicious subjects across a variety of settings (Haviland, Lewis, McKinnon, Shuman and Bohmer, Watters).

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

All of the contributors to the book engage with concepts of obligation, security, and suspicion, albeit from different theoretical, geopolitical, and methodological perspectives. As we have been elaborating in this introduction, these concepts shift across time and space, and the essays in this book investigate their localization and their impact on the security and well-being of asylum seekers.

The essays that constitute part I, “Asylum and Protection as Contested Categories,” lay important groundwork for the volume and the subsequent chapters. These three chapters address different cultural and geographical contexts but cohere around an engagement with the ways in which asylum as a category can be murky and contested. Each of these chapters richly illuminates disparate examples of disconnection between asylum bureaucracies’ claims to protect and migrants’ experiences of these bureaucratic procedures. They show that asylum regimes and their associated notions of obligation and protection are often at odds with migrants’ experiences of the asylum process and of migrants’ conceptions of themselves, including their desires, goals, sense of agency, and understandings of dignity. The contributors to the chapters in part I focus on how politics of suspicion mediate culturally complicated—and often conflicting—notions surrounding asylum on the ground. Moreover, these chapters reveal important insights surrounding the sociocultural, political, and experiential consequences of these contestations.

Part I opens with Nadia El-Shaarawi’s chapter focusing on the politics of obligation as it relates to US refugee policy toward Iraqi refugees in the wake of the Iraq War. As she notes, the RSD of Iraqi refugees was informed by an explicitly moral framework whereby preferential access was given to those whose persecution could be traced directly to their association with the American forces or other allied organizations in Iraq. El-Shaarawi urges us to think about how questions of moral responsibility intervene in tensions between humanitarianism impulses and security concerns and further trouble the category of asylum. Though notions of moral responsibility, as other essays illustrate, are not usually as explicitly outlined in asylum policies, El-Shaarawi’s emphasis on obligation as a necessary category of analysis is highly instructive. Her data reveal the multiple and conflicting ways in

which obligation is imagined and experienced within a broader politics of suspicion—a theme that resonates across essays in this book.

Charles Watters's essay examines the moral economy of deservingness that is at play in the management of asylum seekers broadly, as well as within the specific research site of Zeebrugge, a port city in Belgium through which migrants seek to pass en route to the United Kingdom. Watters importantly attends to how refugees themselves interpret and respond to institutional and/or governmental tensions between protection and control as they creatively navigate "problem spaces." The disconnect between migrants' understandings of themselves and their institutional categorization can result in the effacement of particular aspects of refugees' narratives and experiences. For instance, articulations of aspiration or agency are viewed as suspect and delegitimated, as such characteristics fail to conform to the role of the passive refugee, deemed most deserving of protection within asylum regimes.

John B. Haviland's essay, which concludes part I, likewise considers the tensions that arise when subjects are recognized in ways that are at odds with their own self-understandings. It is unique to this volume in two ways. First, Haviland richly draws on his complex role as both ethnographer and interpreter in immigration cases involving Tzotzil speakers. This dual role allows Haviland a rare opportunity to observe the multiple actors and "different orders of engagement" involved in the construction of suspicious subjects, which he presents via deep analyses of transcripts between multiple actors (himself, a migrant in US custody, a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent, a social worker). Second, as noted earlier, Haviland sets out "to stand the notion of 'suspicion' upside down," focusing on migrants who did not identify as refugees or asylum seekers but instead found themselves as objects of what he terms "coerced asylum." He examines the consequences for migrant minors from Central America and Mexico as they become the subjects of American "ideologically driven legal resolutions" whereby the US government positions itself as morally obligated to protect vulnerable and victimized (Other) children.

Having established asylum as a contested and cumbersome category, part II, "Technologies of Suspicion," looks more specifically at forms of knowledge production within asylum systems. The contributions in this section provide critical analyses of new and dominant technologies of putatively getting at the truth of asylum claims. Whether conceived of as "technologies of suspicion" (Campbell 2004), "technologies of truth" (Merry and

Coutin 2014), or “technologies of morality” (Kmak 2015), these new forms of assessing truth, legitimacy, and deservingness—and their flip sides of disbelief and illegitimacy—are reconfiguring not only *how* one becomes seen as worthy of protection but also *who* becomes worthy of protection. While many other contributors in this volume address various technologies of suspicion deployed within asylum adjudication, the three essays of this section take specific and/or emergent technologies of suspicion as their primary focus.

Bridget M. Haas’s chapter ethnographically explores asylum officers in the United States and the ways in which these adjudicators wrestle with the dual imperative to protect both the state and legitimate, deserving asylum seekers. Asylum officers, who conceive of themselves as “moral gatekeepers,” are acutely aware of the humanitarian imperative facing them and of the life-or-death stakes of their decisions. Yet concerns over and commitments to national security are also seen as moral issues. Thus, asylum officers must weigh their obligation to the state against their obligation to a foreign, unknown Other. To do this, asylum officers engage various technologies of truth in their adjudication of claims, including credibility assessments, the use of corroborating material or other “objective” evidence, and the evaluation of psychological affidavits. Haas traces the unevenness of the implementation of these technologies and the ambivalence with which asylum officers approach them. Such ambivalence, along with the fact that asylum officers rely on their own emotions to make asylum decisions, reveals the fissures in these technologies of truth. Haas also underscores the adjudication process as one that constructs particular categories of personhood and deservingness, challenging the putative notion that categories such as “humanitarian victim,” “security threat,” or “bogus” asylum seeker are self-evident or exist prior to one’s involvement with the asylum process.

Benjamin Lawrance, in his chapter on magical African asylum claims, argues that the politics of suspicion that characterize political asylum results in the increasing emphasis on the importance of empirical research in establishing asylum claimant credibility. In particular, Lawrance examines the use of country of origin information (COI), such as State Department reports and reports crafted by other national and international organizations. Adjudicators view COI as authoritative, thus offering legitimacy to cases that can effectively use these data sources to support their claims. Lawrance uses case examples from West African women refugees who invoked various forms

of witchcraft in their persecution narratives to illustrate that that claims of magic and witchcraft were unable to find support in COI. Consequently, lawyers recrafted these women's testimonies, reformulating witchcraft asylum claims into claims of gender violence, which could be more suitably supported by expert evidence and COI. While Lawrance acknowledges that this legal strategy may serve to increase the chances of a successful outcome, he pushes us to consider the human and social costs of this legal move, framing it as an example of bureaucratic violence. Lawrance's chapter urges consideration of which technologies and information get understood as authoritative and why, as well as how this production of knowledge shapes who gets recognized (or not) as deserving of protection.

The final chapter in this part addresses emergent digital and Web-based technologies that are transforming asylum systems. In his examination of the affordances and limitations of asylum going digital, Marco Jacquemet describes the technologies used in asylum hearings, including on-site immediate examinations of Google Earth websites, search engines, and machine translation to corroborate or dispute applicants' assertions. While on the surface these new techniques may seem benign, even beneficial, to asylum adjudication, Jacquemet suggests that they are in fact power technologies that serve to implement the ideology of suspicion in the asylum process. Although these new technologies may help "speed things up," they also carry the "risk of communicative breakdown and bias against asylum seekers." Along with the other contributions to this volume, Jacquemet's essay allows for an understanding of asylum systems and their associated technologies as both producing suspicion and governing suspicious subjects. Thus, asylum systems work to bring into existence the very suspicions that they then presumptively need to control and manage.

The chapters in the third and final part of the volume, "Enacting and Navigating Suspicion," offer analyses of the micropolitics of asylum adjudication, with particular attention to how these technologies mediate interactions between adjudicators or advocates and asylum claimants. These chapters shed light on how asylum seekers navigate the technologies of suspicion introduced in the previous section and how broader global and national discourses, ideologies, and policies come to be locally enacted in varied and complex ways. Contributors highlight how notions of deservingness are both performed and assessed within arenas increasingly characterized by an ethos of suspicion.

Ilil Benjamin's chapter addresses the complex yet highly influential roles that NGO advocates play within asylum regimes. Using data collected at a refugee legal aid organization in Israel, Benjamin explores the difficulties that confront NGO workers as they try to help refugees reframe their asylum testimonies to fit the requirements of the asylum system. Benjamin's analysis reveals multiple iterations of the tension between suspicion and responsibility. Within the Israeli asylum regime, there are particular categories—economic migrant, for example—as well as certain national affiliations or kinds of narrative performances that are deemed more suspicious than others. Benjamin argues that while asylum advocates try to mediate these factors, over time they often “parted with many illusions of honesty and good faith in the asylum system.” And as Benjamin shows, they too are sometimes confronted with their own suspicions about particular asylum seekers, posing personal moral dilemmas for these NGO workers.

The essay by Sara McKinnon keenly illustrates an analytic tacking between macro- and microlevel politics of asylum. Important to her project is her assertion that a close examination of local-level responses to new forms of incorporation—here, transgender asylum claimants—reveals much about US anxieties and aspirations. In particular, McKinnon considers shifts in the framing and language of asylum claims for transgendered women, noting a rhetorical separation of gender and gender identity. As McKinnon explicates, this microlevel shift produced significant (negative) changes in outcomes of these claims and served “to create boundaries around a suspicious and fearful figure in US law and politics—the figure of the reproductive brown woman.” McKinnon's chapter reveals not only the geopolitical shaping of who can be considered “incorporable as an immigrant subject” but the highly gendered and racialized aspects of this process as well.

The final two chapters shed important light on how the complexities and contradictions of asylum systems are navigated by asylum seekers themselves. Rachel Lewis's chapter deftly examines how particular groups of subjects—in her case lesbian asylum claimants—are configured as suspect. Her analysis critically connects local practices of credibility assessment to larger discourses surrounding gender, sexuality, race, and class. Lewis demonstrates the mechanisms by which these larger cultural and discursive forces are locally enacted to construct queer asylum seekers as deportable subjects, echoing McKinnon's observations of the gendered and racialized

nature of the construction of suspicious subjects. The issue of credibility and its local negotiation on which Lewis reflects is a key theme in other essays as well. For Lewis, accounting for the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality as they shape credibility assessments for gay and lesbian asylum claimants is a necessary step in conceptualizing effective forms of queer antideportation activism.

The final essay of part III, by Amy Shuman and Carol Bohmer, continues the investigation into credibility assessments and the enactment of suspicion in their examination of the tensions between asylum seekers' trauma narratives and asylum officials' cultural expectations of narrative performance. Beginning with an analysis of the case of Rwandan Paul Rusabagina, Shuman and Bohmer highlight the highly contested nature of claims to protection, obligation, and security. Continuing with the observation that political asylum hearings are both interrogations and narrative performances, Shuman and Bohmer investigate three dimensions of narrative that are used as tools in asylum claimant credibility assessments: orientation, positioning, and narrative logic. Through a detailed narrative analysis of an asylum case, they demonstrate the incompatibility of interrogation and trauma narratives. Shuman and Bohmer pay particular attention to the fact that asylum seekers' experiences are saturated with contradictions. Of necessity, asylum seekers often occupy multiple and contradictory subject positions in order to survive, and they must create a coherent narrative to persuade asylum officials of their credibility. These "narrative failures" can have devastating results, ranging from the delegitimation of personal and collective suffering to the forcible removal of migrants back to situations of existential insecurity.

We close with a conclusion in which we reflect on the contributions of the volume, especially as they relate to ongoing and emergent discourses and practices surrounding asylum. In particular, we examine the insights gleaned from the volume's essays on the relationship between credibility and legibility. Further, we reflect on the role of ethnography, cultural analysis, and the positionality of scholars in the study of asylum regimes.

Ultimately our intent in this volume is to emphasize the very human stakes involved in the adjudication of refugee and asylum claims. That the contemporary landscape of humanitarian crises and forced migration described in the opening pages of this introduction is increasingly dominated by an ethos of suspicion does not just provide a case for theoretical inquiry.

The tensions and slippages between humanitarianism and border control surrounding political asylum, whereby suspicion often supplants protection, has profound human and social consequences. A more robust understanding of how these broader forces and tensions come to be locally enacted in ways that differentially shape the lived experiences of those fleeing persecution and claiming the need for protection is essential if we are to compassionately respond to the scope of suffering and mobility in the contemporary moment.

NOTES

1. According to Marisa Cianciarulo (2006), political asylum has become “a lightning rod for the national immigration debate, forcing the country to balance the traditional humanitarian interests against weighty security concerns” (110). See also Hamlin (2014, 5).

2. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that at the end of 2016, there were 65.6 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide. Of this total, 22.5 million were refugees, 40.3 million were internally displaced people, and 2.8 million were asylum seekers (UNCHR, 2016).

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