

## The Walls Have Eyes: Surviving Migration in the Age of Artificial Intelligence. By Petra Molnar, New Press, 2024, 277 pp.

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# The Walls Have Eyes: Surviving Migration in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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## BOOK REVIEW

Petra Molnar. *The Walls Have Eyes: Surviving Migration in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*. New Press, 2024, 277 pp. ISBN: 9781620978368 (hardcover).

HISTORY Published 2025-05-05

**The Walls Have Eyes** compellingly grapples with the complicated nature of bordering technologies while urging for a new narrative and collective politics of hope to end the social exclusionary binaries that thrive at borders. With the ferocity of a well-seasoned journalist and the analytical mind of a human rights and immigration lawyer, Petra Molnar captures readers' hearts while presenting a cohesive picture of the violence and exclusionary politics of global borders. Molnar argues that border technology is designed to "solve" migration rather than address the root causes that force people to move. The fundamental issue uncovered by Molnar is that the technological solutions are created by and for stakeholders already in a privileged position, the state, or private companies, and do not include the needs of the primary populations affected by solutions: people on the move. By reframing the debate on technology at the border, Molnar explores that the push to make "smart" borders—those supported by technology—is built upon legacies of criminalization and

exclusionary policies. As people are forced to take more dangerous and precarious journeys to the border due to the increasing visibility facilitated by technologies, accountability for human rights declines.

A book for academics and non-academic audiences alike, **The Walls Have Eyes** will leave every reader with a clearer picture of the global border regime that is underpinned by technologies ranging from discriminatory algorithms, interconnected databases, and surveillance towers to non-digital tools like the weaponization of vast landscapes. Some of the technologies discussed may be more expected by readers, such as surveillance cameras or drones. Molnar illustrates that the expansive nature of borders has led to the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) with the use of automated decision-making systems, lie detection, voice printing, mobile phone data extraction, and sound cannons. She argues that techno-solutionism has violent and deadly impacts on vulnerable populations.

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Molnar draws on detailed descriptions of technology products, fieldwork with people on the move, and interviews with activists and reporters, and she unearths the networks of Big Tech companies profiting from the development of digital border tools. Each chapter of **The Wall Have Eyes** is based on a particular region where Molnar conducted fieldwork. These different geographical regions offer the foundation for the exploration of a range of themes emerging at the intersection of borders and technology. Not only will readers gain a broad scope of the global deployment of border technology, but they will be guided through a complex theoretical debate on the violence, exclusionary nature, and permutation of immigration control in everyday spaces.

**The Walls Have Eyes** contains an honest and raw description of the questions of humanity that are continuously re-examined when one is working on resisting violent bordering practices like pushbacks, unjust visa policies, and inhumane living conditions for refugees. Molnar conveys not only the illegality of these practices but also the different technologies and actors that contribute to the border industry while reiterating the harm of technological solutions to people on the move. The author names and makes visible the global regime of actors, ranging from those in Silicon Valley, like Anduril and Palantir, to the European border agent Frontex, with seemingly limitless budgets, making visible the invisible strings connecting the third-party actors selling a more "secure border." This book proves that the combination of the lack of regulation and growing budgets into bordering practices continues to reinforce and perhaps normalize violence being perpetuated against people globally. Molnar asks if algorithms are becoming the "new jailors" (110) and demonstrates how bias can sneak into the

mathematical equations that become an extension of deciding entry into a sovereign territory. Experimentation of surveillant technologies often occurs in spaces of vulnerable populations or is justified through racialized logics of security.

Molnar illustrates that technology companies' access to border zones reinforces power asymmetries between oppressive states and their citizens. She argues that the moral suspension area of the border permits developers to experiment and market tools as "battle tested." Molnar's fieldwork in Palestine conveys the urgency of uncovering the practices of technology working every day to dehumanize and criminalize populations. Border technology uses can become fluid as political contexts shift; the constant surveillant infrastructure in Gaza is a stark example of this creeping function of technologies presented. Molnar traces the ties between international agencies like UNHCR and partnerships with experimental biometric technology in refugee camps. Grounded in better-known examples of experimentation on vulnerable populations, like that of IrisGuard, piloting retinal recognition in refugee camps in Jordan, Molnar emphasizes the human cost of these systems.

Throughout the depictions of "smart" borders are stories of individuals joining together. Examples of resistance range from people opening their homes to others who need supplies while crossing border zones, to a journalist who continues to show up and document the illegal practices of border agents, to the people on the move who are reshaping and countering borders daily. Readers are reminded that resistance cannot come only from existing structures like law but must involve a new social imaginary that recognizes the personhood and common humanity of all people. Borders exist within the mind. Molnar highlights the mountains

in our minds regarding whom we consider “worthy,” as well as the inequity in sympathy for people on the move.

From a grounding in our shared personhood, the author concludes that a recalibration is needed to reshape technology in order not to privilege the few and punish the many. Hope is a powerful technology. Molnar, both in her writing and actions (she leads collective called the Migration Technology Monitor that uses technology to document border violence), illustrates the importance of tools that ethically consider the complexity of human stories and movements. **The Walls Have Eyes** calls for readers to bear witness to the violence, dehumanization, and stories of people on the move as counter-technology

to the fictional notion of the surveillant regime of borders. Molnar bluntly argues that the attempt to make borders “smart” or technologically enforced kills. She states, “As the fears grow, so does the border” (177). To counter the fear, there must be more modes of witnessing and acts of solidarity.

## REFERENCES

Molnar, P. (2024). *The walls have eyes: Surviving migration in the age of artificial intelligence* (277 pp.). New Press.



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