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PREFACE

## At Home with the Global Ethnographer

The Global Ethnography project emerged in the fall of 1996 from a dissertation group working with Michael Burawoy in the Sociology Department at the University of California, Berkeley. This was not, at first sight, a writing group with a clear natural affinity. Our shared relationship with Michael reflected no unity of subject matter. The dissertation research we brought in for discussion ranged across countries, social groups, movements, and theoretical and political agendas. Our very research choices reflected to some extent our scattered origins. Only half of us are native born North Americans, the rest immigrants—Hungarian, Irish, Keralan, English.

What we did have in common in those early days was a broad commitment to “soft,” hermeneutic sociology: participant observation, open-ended interviewing, ethnography. The one exception, Joe, was working on a historical study of labor relations in the ship-building industry. Michael persuaded him that his twenty-five odd years as a welder in San Francisco shipyards constituted invaluable sociological data that Joe could work into a side project. As with the rest of us, this supposed side project took on more and more weight.

Our initial dissertation discussion group taught us that most of our cases were in some way caught up by that great mishmash of migrations, capital flows, hostilities, and opportunities jostling within the hot signifier of globalization. Was the extended case method used by Michael Burawoy and the other authors of *Ethnography Unbound* flexible enough to link everyday life to transnational flows of population, discourse, commodities, and power? Michael proposed that this question could generate enough common threads to be the basis of a collective writing project. The rest of us were intrigued by the idea, but felt that our understandings of globalization were