
Reviewed by Anne Mulhall

As has always been apparent to the global majority, the racial state’s policy of migration management by death, quick or slow, is unevenly distributed. “Embedded in the language of ‘migration crisis’,” Walia explains, “is the anti-Black idea of a certain kind of inherently undesirable movement”—the movement of racialized, impoverished, “displaced and immobilized” people who are subject to the worst violences of border imperialism (Beckett 2021). In March 2022, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Fortress Europe’s response to the millions of people who have fled has been in stark contrast to its reception of those fleeing war and displacement in the so-called “global south.” On Twitter, Walia commented on the “surreal” contradiction apparent in Poland’s response (to take one key example), on the one hand “setting up welcome centres for Ukrainian refugees” while simultaneously spending hundreds of millions of euros on a border wall, detention centres, and border guards to block the entry of “mostly Yemeni, Egyptian, Syrian, Palestinian, Afghan refugees” (Walia 2022a). In line with the apartheid logic of the border, reports proliferated online of black and brown refugees trying to make their way from Ukraine to the Polish border being pulled off buses and trains and forced to the back of the processing line. Of course, this response is not confined to Poland but has been replicated in nation-specific but structurally similar ways across the EU. As Walia notes, the racial logic at play clearly demonstrates the anti-Blackness, Islamophobia, and global apartheid that structures and is structured by Fortress Europe and the imperialist past and present that have shaped it (Walia 2022b).

What has been framed as a “migration crisis” is, as *Border and Rule* makes clear, neither new nor a crisis visited upon the West by people arriving from elsewhere. Walia demonstrates that what has been represented as a “migration crisis” is, in fact, a crisis of displacement and immobilization created by and for the interlocking systems of racial capitalism and racial citizenship that have maintained and are maintained by the global apartheid of border imperialism. Contemporary displacement and bordering practices are part of the long history of settler colonialism, the genocide of indigenous peoples, the stolen labour and lives of the transatlantic slave trade and the coerced labour of indentured workers. The violence of contemporary border regimes is the continuation of centuries of anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, and anti-migrant violence. Although “crisis” discourse suggests that migration is inherently dangerous, this is of course not the case; with the right
passport and the privilege that wealth and whiteness bring, people move unimpeded across borders. Migration is made dangerous by border policies and practices that differentiate “good” from “bad” migrants, operating limited inclusions alongside mass immobilization and multiple forms of “deterrence”—a sanitized euphemism that covers over the reality of what Walia calls the “deathscapes” to which the majority of people on the move are consigned. Walia foregrounds the historical continuities of these deathscapes: “so much of this migration is the result of ongoing colonialism and imperial displacement, underwritten by anti-indigenous and anti-Black violence: whether military occupations, land thefts, resource extraction, capitalist trade agreements, labour exploitation or climate change” (Walia 2021b). Walia is a long-time organizer in anti-capitalist migrant justice movements, including “No-One Is Illegal,” which she co-founded. Her first book, *Undoing Border Imperialism*, combines “academic, movement, and experiential” perspectives with an emphasis on knowledge grounded in “the praxis of organizing” and “lived realities and resistances” (Walia 2013: 17). Drawing on extensive research and experience, *Border and Rule* shows how racial hierarchization and “the expropriation of land, labour and life” is constitutive of capitalism, and how the logic of border imperialism is not specific to one jurisdiction but is shared across disparate transnational locations. Walia’s book offers a strong critique of both a centrist liberal response to the “migration crisis” and the left nationalist position that the border is a necessary to protect the national working class—imagined by default as white citizens—and to counter neoliberal globalizing capitalism. Both of these positions either fail to recognize or refuse to interrogate what the border is and how it functions. For whose benefit and for what ends is the border constituted? These are urgent questions to which *Border and Rule* provides trenchant, compelling responses.

The book is structured in four parts, each bringing together extensive research to map historical and transnational aspects of contemporary bordering practices while also homing in on specific illustrative contexts in detail. Walia refuses to trade in spectacles of violence and suffering, and every chapter emphasizes collective resistance and the importance of transformative grass-root movements and the “wins” that people organizing in solidarity can and have achieved, in spite of the powerful forces ranged against them. Part 1, “Displacement Crisis, not Border Crisis,” maps the co-extensive structures of racial capitalism and racial citizenship, constituted by and through the entanglements of settler colonialism, genocide and dispossession of Indigenous peoples, anti-blackness, and border imperialism. Beginning with an analysis of the processes of border formation through the illustrative case of the making of the US/Mexico border, Walia clarifies the ways in which anti-migrant, anti-Indigenous and anti-Black violence are not separate but entangled and mutually articulated. Following US invasion, conquest,
and annexation, the imposition of the border entailed the violent dispossession and forced assimilation of sovereign Indigenous nations whose tribal lands, appropriated first by Mexico, were then confiscated and carved up by the US. The border is also steeped in anti-blackness. In the wake of the 1851 Fugitive Slave Act, militias (precursors of the Texas Rangers and US Border Patrol) were established to prevent Black people from escaping across the border to Mexico. As Walia notes, “border agents patrolling alongside military in Iraq and Afghanistan, policing black neighbourhoods in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, repressing Indigenous water protesters at Standing Rock, and using counterinsurgency tactics including snatching of protesters in Portland in July 2020” demonstrate the entanglements of past and present bordering practices (Walia 2021a: 57).

Part 2 enumerates the key areas through which bordering practices operate across transnational contexts: exclusion, territorial diffusion, commodified inclusion, and discursive control. Looking at the key cases of White Australia and Fortress Europe, Walia shows how border imperialism operates through the use of “visa restrictions, safe third country agreements, offshore detention, deportation, interdiction, militarization of maritime space, the empire of externalization” (2021a: 4). Highlighting the growing significance of offshoring and outsourcing of the border, Walia clarifies how these increasingly dominant techniques are a continuation of imperial relations. The Australian state operates a particularly punitive system of offshore detention, with the former colonies of Papua New Guinea and Nauru now transformed into penal colonies that, as Walia notes, derive a large proportion of their GDP from border outsourcing agreements with Australia. Fortress Europe outsources border control to Turkey and countries across the Sahel including Libya, Mali, Niger, and Sudan. Australia, the EU, and the US make trade and aid agreements conditional on outsourced border governance, including operating external checkpoints, migration prevention campaigns, detention, and accepting expelled deportees.

Part 3 focuses on the long-standing and increasing use of temporary migrant worker programmes to provide a disposable, cheapened pool of labour for capital, while simultaneously upholding hierarchized racial citizenship for the racial state. Walia outlines the common features of temporary work programmes (TWPs) transnationally before focusing on two systems, the Kafala system that operates in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, and Canada’s much-vaunted Temporary Foreign Worker Program. Such programmes are one of the clearest demonstrations of how the border is a method for capital. Creating a separate category of “migrant worker,” one who works alongside citizen workers but under deeply unequal terms, TWPs segment the working class and create a fund of cheapened labour populated by people who are, by virtue of their precarious and dependent
legal status, hyper exploitable and hyper precarious. With legal status tied to the
employer, movement, and autonomy restricted, little or no access to social sup-
ports and services, deprived of labour rights including the right to equal pay and
conditions and barred from union membership, and facing termination and depor-
tation for any infractions, TWPs are in effect contemporary systems of indenture-
ship. While the Canadian system is often held up as a shining example of
successful inclusion, Walia argues that this is commodified or predatory inclusion.
It reduces people to their labour value alone, as the broad use of “medical deporta-
tion” in the Canadian system demonstrates, whereby people can be deported if
they become ill or incapacitated. The connection between contemporary systems
of indentureship and the displacements, dispossessions, and theft enacted through
neoliberal trade agreements, export processing zones (EPZs), debt, land grabs, and
privatization is clear. One of the great strengths of Walia’s book lies in articulating
and analysing these multiple and complex techniques, contexts and histories as
parts of a networked system.

Part 4 examines “the rise of reactionary nationalisms,” outlining the coordi-
nated global networks of groups and governments on the far right while also criti-
quing left nationalist positions that support the border and limited migration as
bulwarks against neoliberal global capital. Walia describes and analyses the inter-
nalizations of the border that consign targeted populations (for instance, Muslims
in India, the Rohingya in Myanmar, Palestinians at the hands of Israel) to necropo-
litical deathscapes of statelessness. The book ends with a clear account of what a
“no borders” politics (as distinct from an “open borders” politics) entails and a
galvanizing call to collective action and international solidarity across move-
ments. Liberal centrist calls for reform of a system that is fundamentally violent
and death-bringing can do nothing to change the capitalist, racist, imperialist, cis-
heteronormative, and ableist logics and structures that are inseparable from the
border. For Walia, the abolition of the border can only be achieved through the
dismantling of capitalist systems and global apartheid between “north” and
“south.” It calls for nothing short of a remaking and reimagining of the world and
how we make it a home for all.

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References

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