

Harsha Walia, *Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2021. ISBN: 9781642594065 (cloth); ISBN: 9781642592696 (paper); ISBN: 9781642593884 (ebook)

The week I finished Harsha Walia's new book *Border and Rule*, state violence at the borders of Belarus and Poland, and the UK and France reached a macabre extreme. While UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson blamed the death by drowning of 27 migrants near Calais on "human trafficking gangs" (BBC News 2021), Poland fortified its Belarusian borders with 15,000 soldiers (Al Jazeera 2021). Meanwhile, images of refugees, including children as young as three, warming themselves over open fires in freezing temperatures were aired to homes across the world – homes we are made to believe are under existential threat due to "invading" foreign bodies, and therefore "protected" by borders, floating barriers, guard dogs, and the military.

Harsha Walia opens with a simple but compelling assertion: systems of power that create migrants cannot criminalise migration (p.2). She ends with another:

Considering that millions of people are differentiated and managed under border imperialism, we *can* and *must* embrace a basic yet expansive vision: no human being is illegal. (p.215)

In between, she offers a breathtaking account of nationalist border regimes' chokehold on our planet, over land and sea and air, securing a "fortress" of barely 14% of the world's population enjoying 73% of its wealth (p.213) from the swarming rest. Primarily working through racist othering and fear mongering, proprietorial ownership (particularly, ownership of people), and hyper exploitation of the planet, the ruling mechanism of border intensification needs unconditional dismantling. The book distributes the key building blocks of this argument across 11 chapters organised into four sections.

Part 1, "Displacement Crisis, Not Border Crisis", contextualises contemporary US border controls within historic and ongoing domestic and imperial wars, namely, the genocidal Indian

Wars, the anti-Blackness of the state's foundational border policies, and legalised exclusions of early migrant labour (Chapter 1). The Cold War, with its unending aggression on the Central American states of Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador, and the wars on drugs and terror with their virulent anti-migrant logics and rhetoric form the bulk of Chapter 2. Chapter 3 zooms out to the neoliberal economic policies of the 1970s onward as root causes of the so-called migrant crisis. Drawing extensively from the example of economic restructuring in Bangladesh, and also Central America and the Sahel region in Africa, Walia re-articulates the rhetoric of the migrant crisis, as a crisis, instead, of displacement and immobility. The section is a skillful weaving of racism, anti-communism, and neoliberalism as symbiotic processes.

Part 2, “‘Illegals’ and ‘Undesirables’: The Criminalization of Migration”, is most valuable for understanding the contemporary nationalist regimes of detention, deportation, and border walls. The border, Walia reminds us, “is elastic, and the magical line can exist anywhere” (p.84). Chapter 4 offers a detailed analysis of four bordering tactics. First of these is “exclusion through illegalisation”. 70 border walls across our world and a border security industry working in tandem with the prison and military industries, generating hundreds of billions dollars, are but a few mechanisms for the criminalisation of migrants as foreign invaders. The second is “territorial diffusion” through which the border can appear far beyond its physicality, such as when teachers, nurses, and doctors turn into welfare police. Next is “commodified inclusion”, or the inclusion of only disciplined workers into the nation state. Borders and deportation here do double duty as union busting mechanisms. Finally, “discursive control” over the international legal order that allows the richer nations of the EU and USA to form random categories such as the “bogus refugees” or “escapees” from communism is also a form of bordering tactic. Chapters 5 and 6 then show the deadly operationalisation of these tactics across the Australian Pacific, dotted with offshore detention centres, and the various refugee routes to the EU, with particular focus on the militarisation of the central and Mediterranean routes.

Part 3, “Capitalist Globalization and Insourcing of Migrant Labor”, discusses temporary migrant labour programmes, a form of *ongoing* insourcing of politically vulnerable and circular labour. Walia's critique is succinct and scathing: “While migrant workers are temporary,

temporary migration is permanent” (p.8). Using the USA (Chapter 7), Canada (Chapter 9) and, rather uncommonly, the Gulf states (Chapter 8) as her case studies, she narrates the plight of a gendered and racialised labour force made unfree by law, legalised wage theft, and constant threat of deportation. While excellent theorising has placed such state-sanctioned indentured worker programmes in relation to a manufactured shortage of labour (a permanent condition under capitalism) and racialised citizenship in Canada and the USA, Walia does the important work of bringing the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE) into the orbits of such carceral immobility. Further, by tying Gulf capitalism to “the continuum of migrant worker programs exploding worldwide” (p.148), she also launches a critical challenge to a culturalist analysis that pins the kafala system of bonded migrant labour on Arab or Islamic authoritarianism.

Part 4, “Making Race, Mobilizing Racist Nationalisms”, is a complex overview of the entangled forces of ethnonationalism, penal populism, and welfare nationalism. In the opening section of Chapter 10, Walia articulates the contradictory forces of racist and anti-Semitic white nationalism in the USA, Zionism in Israel, and Hindutva in India under the unifying ideology of ethnonationalism. Subsequently, she draws from Brazil and the Philippines to discuss the anti-poor/landless ideology of penal populism. Finally, she offers a sweeping review of how the far-right in the EU draws fodder from and bolsters European welfare states’ anti-poor, anti-migrant, and Islamophobic ideologies. Following from these, Chapter 11 rightfully focuses on the failure of economic redistribution as a counter to reactionary nationalisms. Walia argues that the working class has been long animated along the lines of racialised nationalism. It has been imagined more systematically as “national” as opposed to “international”. Indeed, territorial nationalism is one way the political right appropriated left labour protectionist organising. Manifest in Trump’s trade wars, the “Vote Leave” campaign during Brexit, and the growing lament for diminishing white power, territorial claims typically cast the “foreign” as the problem instead of predatory capital and corporate crimes. Walia calls for a “robust and internationalist struggle” to dismantle these conjoined forces of capitalism, racism, and nationalism:

A political and economic system that treats land as commodity, Indigenous peoples as overburden, race as a principle of social organization, women's caretaking as worthless, workers as exploitable, climate refugees as expendable, and the entire planet as a sacrifice zone must be dismantled. (p.211)

Throughout, Walia draws from impressively rich and diverse trajectories, e.g. that of poets, organisers, academics, activists, legal historians, journalists, and migrants themselves, making a densely argued book evocative and accessible. Her project is not entirely novel, as she humbly acknowledges: "Everything I have written has been said before" (p.xii). As a scholar/researcher of migration and nationalism, I am familiar both with the argument and much of the array of evidence she marshals. Yet, following Robin D. G. Kelley (in the Foreword), I consider this book to be a much-needed "shock to the system". And it is a rather comprehensive shock, both to the white supremacist vigilante nationalism of the "vicious far-right", and the multicultural racism of the "banal liberal centre" (p.14), a "welcome" Walia steadfastly refuses. Her work further stands apart in a number of other, more important respects.

First, *Border and Rule* is a powerful rejoinder to dominant policy and popular thinking that turns migration into a problem and borders a solution, a position that only strengthens exclusionary nationalist investment in commodified inclusion or marked expulsion of migrants. Walia's archives are heavily drawn from temporary migrant pathways, various border crossings, and refuge/asylum seeking, indeed those acts of reparation that are criminalised by state policies. I do consider it important to challenge her assumption (coming across throughout, but most clearly in Part 3) that permanent migration could possibly alter the racial order of our world. However, it is a problem in the larger body of literature on temporary migrant/"foreign" labour. Border, in this scholarship, is a site of violent expulsion, often of an overtly physical nature. The symbolic, somewhat less explicit but nevertheless exclusionary boundaries laid by the rhetoric of settlement and integration of so-called permanent, economic immigrants, thus, are lost sight of as another key modality for racialised nation formation. I remain curious as to what would have

been possible if Walia brought permanent labour migration into the orbit of her otherwise fantastic analysis. Alternately, what does a critical border studies lens such as hers offer to the study of permanent labour migration? These are questions I am committed to asking and invite my colleagues to ask.

Secondly, while critical border scholars have long theorised the nation as transnational, and conceptualised national borders beyond the mere linearity and physicality of walls (see Bauder 2011; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Sassen 2007; Sharma 2006, 2015), Walia attends to these issues at a register that is nearly unprecedented in its geopolitical and scalar reach. Tracing the linchpin states and their expansive regimes – across the Americas, Sahel region, EU, Pacific Islands, the Gulf states, Kashmir and Comoros, to name but a few – was necessary for her argument that the border is a “tool of population management and racial ordering that is at once domestic and global” (p.37). However, critiquing as fierce a status quo as national borders and patterns of their entanglements across a vast diversity of empirical sites (including those with unfolding dynamics, e.g. Bidoons in Kuwait, Haitians in the Dominican Republic, and Rohingyas in Rakhine State) is no simple task. *Border and Rule* ran the real risk of falling apart under the sheer weight of the methodology of a global history, a limitation most obviously haunting Part 4 of the book. Walia achieves thematic unity via a clear line of commitment to international solidarity of the working class in the face of imperial racism, anti-communism, anti-migrant terror, and anti-labour red-baiting. It is this entangled analytic that allowed her to reveal the border as both historic and contemporary, and domestic and transnational – a tool that immobilises labour to free capital. Indeed, the book offers rich details of how migrant labour – a contingent category across times, spaces, and the spectrum of liberal and conservative ideologies – is consistently considered “illegal” while “the surplus value they create is never deemed illegal” (p.85).

Next, and perhaps most crucially, Walia’s book can be read alongside the lively debate that a politics of place, or “people of a place”, even when mobilised for decolonial aims such as in contemporary Indigenous movements, cannot but produce a “people out of place” (see Braganza 2021; Mamdani 2012, 2021; Sharma 2015, 2020, 2021). That is, autochthonous

movements, regardless of their political purpose, reproduce the colonial ideology of the migrant/mobility as a problem, and thereby merely “delive[r] us ... into globally operative systems of ruling relations” (Sharma 2015: 39; see Walia’s reference to right-wing nationalists claiming borders as an “anticolonial architecture” against foreign invasion). Firmly placed within the lineage of “no border” advocacy, *Border and Rule* shows similarly fierce commitment to a borderless world. Walia has no misgivings about political decolonisation, seeds of whose structural failure were sown into the transition from imperial to the nation-statist order of the world. However, migrant/mobility justice for her seems achievable while centring Indigenous dispossession as primary violence. In other words, her vision of internationalism, justice, and freedom does not contradict “place-based stewardship” (p.207), nor does she conflate freedom with territorial sovereignty, or emplacement with mere stasis. How this may appear in practical politics – especially where liberal invitations to join the terms of the nation states often overdetermine the contours of justice (as is evident in the recognitive and reconciliatory politics in Canada where Walia works/writes from) – will generate, I hope, much robust conversations across scholarly and activist circles.¹ I personally remain hopeful about generative conversations around, on the one hand, how resistance to colonial capitalist nationalism could be organised and launched except through holding grounds, and on the other, what political losses do we incur if/when neglecting the curious imagination and organisation of societies as fiercely local even as capital is organised as global (see Geschiere 2009).

Last but not the least, Walia keeps climate displacement/dispossession and subsequent climate refuge on her political radar. While this connection could have been more systematic in the book, she does manage to marshal enough consistent examples to not let climate justice become a mere afterthought. Her work throws an important challenge to environmental protection movements that neglect issues of race and racism and therefore are easily susceptible to eco-fascist arguments of border control. Her discussion of climate displacement and armed

¹ In this regard, her intellectual affinity and indebtedness lie equally strongly with Indigenous critiques of postcolonial scholarship for “transiting” (i.e. rendering insignificant) Indigenous histories systematically (see Byrd 2011).

conflict in the Sahel region, the impact of climate change on Indigenous communities in Tuvalu, the Marshall Islands, and Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts, and her concluding critique of eco-fascist individualism, are useful cautions for liberal environmental rights activists, not to mention deeply resonating with an era of growing climate catastrophes.

In conclusion, *Border and Rule* is a testimony to Walia's formidable understanding of carceral capitalist regimes across the globe. It is scaffolded by a foreword and an afterword by two leading anti-empire thinkers of our times (Robin D. G. Kelley and Nick Estes, respectively), and has already garnered a dizzying list of praise from scholars, poets, comedians, activists, etc. I, however, recommend you let Walia speak for herself first. With the precision, dedication, and rage befitting a grassroots organiser who sees it all up close, Walia shows the suffering inflicted in the name of securing nations purportedly under siege. But she does this while staying committed against the usual "anthropological consumption" (following Vivek Shraya; p.2) such exercises typically generate. Every dead and violated body – be it of Soumayla Sacko, migrant labour organiser in San Ferdinando in Calabria, the unnamed garment workers in the collapsed Rana Plaza in Bangladesh, the Nepalese cooks working for Halliburton in Iraq, or of the toddler Angie Valeria and her father Óscar Alberto Martínez Ramírez floating on the Rio Grande – is traced back to the violence of imperial aggression and racist nation making. Each also offers another building block to her impassioned argument for a world without borders. If the book is an account of human suffering, it is also one of human insight and defiance, captured powerfully in Palestinian poet Suheir Hammad's soulful lines (see Chapter 2's epigraph):

I will not
dance to your war
drum. I will
not lend my soul nor
my bones to your war
drum. I will
not dance to your

beating. I know that beat.
It is lifeless. I know
intimately that skin
you are hitting ...

The vivid image and bodily sensor of skin being hit stays long after you have put the book down. Harsha Walia has delivered a magnificent and dreadful account of a lost world, “born yearning to be a home for everyone” (Eduardo Galeano; p.212), and yet, where mobility and search for home are criminalised. No wonder the legendary Toni Morrison’s *Home*, with its “doorway never needing to be closed” (p.216), is a key influence on the book. Students of migration, nationalism, and welfare state policies across the disciplines of Geography, Environmental Studies, Sociology, Education, and Social Work; migrant justice organisers working locally and transnationally; and anti-racist educators working with students and policy makers will all find this work insightful, chilling, and also hopeful – a mirror for our times.

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