

Laura Penney, Book Review of *Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move*, *Ameriquests* 14 (2017)

Reece Jones. *Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move*. London: Verso, 2016. 212 pp. \$11.52 (Paperback). ISBN 978-1-78478-471-3.

Members of Western society tend to view national borders as inevitable and immutable. Without question, we accept the restricted flow of people and resources across them. However, in *Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move*, Reece Jones challenges our basic assumptions regarding the meaning and consequences of borders. Through powerful anecdotes, alarming statistics, and historical accounts, Jones presents a compelling argument that borders, as we understand them, are neither necessary nor beneficial to the global community. In fact, he asserts, borders are fundamentally violent.

The book opens with an account of Jones' own encounter with several would-be refugees on a bus ride to a Moroccan port. He witnessed a group of young boys climbing onto the back and underside of the bus, where they clung for the duration of a twenty-minute ride at a speed of 100 kilometers per hour. At the port, a guard knocked several of the boys off the bus with a baton. Afterward, border agents conducted an X-ray of the bus and removed five more of the boys; they brought in dogs to track down the last two. "Why," the author recalls wondering, "did these boys take such a risk with so little chance of success?" (3). He answers his own question later: "For many migrants, there is no real choice." (28).

Jones repeatedly lavishes the reader with anecdotal evidence of the risks and sacrifices involved in migration. These anecdotes underscore the incredible risks that migrants take throughout the world to rebel against the established system of borders. The stories Jones relays are made more engaging by his personal connection to those involved. Rather than tell stories through a media lens, he interviews participants and utilizes their perspective. For example, the author spoke with several members of the Abu Rahma family to learn their story of resistance against the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Of the family of activists, two members have been killed for their efforts at resistance, and two others have been arrested. Jones' narration of his interactions with the Abu Rahmas humanizes their struggle, relaying information in a far more compelling way than bare facts and statistics ever could.

Throughout the text, Jones emphasizes that sovereign states and borders emerged relatively recently and are defined less rationally than one might assume. For example, he describes how distinct national cultures in Europe resulted from – rather than influenced – the definition of borders. Furthermore, European colonists drew the borders of many African countries with no regard for cultural groups, resulting in artificial states that lack political and social unity. As Jones puts it, "[B]oundaries do not mark the edges of already existing things; the thing comes into being by placing boundaries."

Despite their tenuous connection to pre-existing realities, borders have very real effects: namely, restricting the outflow of resources and the inflow of people. (167). Chapter 1 focuses on the European Union's overall mishandling of the current migration crisis. In addition to criticizing those who have hardened their borders and failed to rescue migrants at sea, Jones points out inadequacies in the policies countries employ when they do admit migrants. Chapter 2 discusses the United States-Mexican border, where border patrol has become unnecessarily synonymous with militarization; thousands of migrants have died at this border for having the audacity to seek a better life. In Chapter 3, Jones shows that border violence is not limited to wealthy, Western states. Citing the diverse examples of Israel, India, Bangladesh, and Australia, the chapter demonstrates that states throughout the world engage in violent practices to exclude migrants. Each country mentioned in the chapter uses different tactics; while India has the most

kilometers of border fences and walls in the world, Australia's strategy focuses on preventing boats from reaching its shores in the first place. Still, the strategies employed by each country are violent and exclusionary. Chapter 4 discusses the relationship between poverty and migration. Jones describes the rags-to-riches migration story of Andrew Carnegie and explains how today's concept of citizenship precludes such success. Chapter 5 emphasizes the relative newness of enclosing resources and demonstrates that human existence did not always consist of the countless bounded spaces that define the world today. Chapter 6 explains how corporate globalization has contributed to migration violence: While Western nations are responsible for a great deal of poverty throughout the globe, they reject those who attempt to flee said poverty. Finally, Chapter 7 discusses how climate change intersects with migration. Wealthy Western states have made the greatest contributions to climate change, but poor nations bear the greatest costs. Of course, due to the violence of borders, the majority of those most heavily impacted by climate change have no escape available.

Each chapter promotes the idea that borders function violently to maintain the power of arbitrarily defined "insiders" and to prevent "outsiders" from gaining access to power. Much of this takes the form of what Jones terms "direct violence," or intentional, overt infliction of physical harm. For example, the book describes Israel's frequent use of tear gas to disperse peaceful protests by Palestinian nationals. While Westerners may feel comfortable associating direct violence with far-off developing countries, the concept is perhaps epitomized by the United States-Mexico border, where officers routinely employ military-grade strategies and weapons against civilians. The book provides numerous accounts of direct violence perpetrated by states against individuals striving to obtain better lives for themselves and their families.

In another powerful anecdote, Jones describes an incident of direct violence that hits closer to home for Western readers: the 2010 shooting of fifteen year-old Sergio Hernandez Guereca at the United States-Mexico border. Accompanied by three friends, Sergio brazenly ran across a narrow, shallow portion of the Rio Grande in broad daylight. The youths were met by an armed border patrol agent as soon as they reached the United States side of the border. While Sergio and two of his friends managed to retreat to the Mexican side, the guard detained the fourth member of their group. The other boys – angry, frightened, and young – responded by throwing rocks at the border agent from where they stood on the other side of the border. Despite the distance between the boys and the agent – twenty or thirty meters – and the relative harmlessness of the boys' weapons – rocks, compared to the agent's gun – the agent fired two shots across the border. Sergio did not survive. Jones' style in relaying this and other anecdotes drives home the senselessness of the brutality perpetrated against migrants. He describes the events leading to Sergio's death matter-of-factly but expertly utilizes quotes from witnesses to convey the horrifyingly gratuitous nature of the shooting.

Jones also views borders as characterized by "structural violence," which is "built into the structure [of sovereign states] and shows up as unequal power and consequently unequal life chances." (8). In addition to direct violence, structural violence abounds at the United States-Mexico border, where increases in border enforcement have funneled migrants into hostile desert terrain, resulting in hundreds of deaths per year. Structural violence also includes policies that seem harmless or even benevolent, such as the European Union's recent focus on Syrian refugees. While the crisis in Syria certainly warrants attention, member states have used it as an excuse to delegitimize and exclude migrants fleeing harsh conditions in other countries. Other forms of structural violence discussed in the book include the exploitation of factory workers and the disproportionate contributions of Western countries to climate change.

Laura Penney, Book Review of *Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move*, *Ameriquests* 14 (2017)

Jones concludes by making a bold but persuasive case for opening borders throughout the world and offers several strategies for doing so. In his view, continuing to cross borders – despite the dangers inherent in doing so – is a rebellious act that is crucial to uprooting the persistent global system of border violence. While acknowledging that his stance is controversial, he argues that it is no more radical than resisting slavery or colonialism. Regardless of whether one ultimately agrees with Jones' proposed solutions to border violence, this provocative book will challenge readers' sense of normalcy and leave them better informed about the significance of national borders.

Author Information: Laura Penney, Vanderbilt University Law School