



Book Review

Rajaram, PK. and C. Grundy-Warr, eds. 2007. *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota

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Borders are contestable, permeable spaces and are often sites of bloody conflict. Citizens watch political leaders ignore borders in order to prosecute unwinnable wars, while hoping that their own borders might be inviolate and protected by those self-same leaders. It is not simply an invading force that is feared, but the possibility of the border being breached by migrants and refugees. Borders both include and exclude and it is this binary function which this new volume explores in great detail.

The book's twelve chapters are derived from papers presented at a conference held in Thailand in 2004, and the book represents "a cross-disciplinary conversation between scholars of Asian and European borders" (Rajaram & Grundy-Warr: x). Almost inevitably, given the source of these chapters, the book has a preponderant focus on Thailand and its neighbours. This extensive coverage, notwithstanding some unnecessary overlap between chapters, is something of a strength in light of the failure of much of the Western media to cover and explain regional conflicts in the Pacific Basin. Reading those chapters makes the present turmoil in Thailand more understandable. Likewise, the chapters focusing on Australia (respectively by Perera and Rajaram), although also having considerable overlap, offer disquieting testimony as to how former Prime Minister John Howard cynically excised parts of Australian territory to avoid taking responsibility for unwanted refugees.

Many of the authors situate their analysis in the tradition of the work of Agamben and Rancière. Didier Bigo offers a challenging view of the "banopticon" as it exists in Europe. His view of the "banopticon" differs from Foucault's interpretation of the panopticon in that it "deals with the notion of exception, and the difference between surveillance for all but control of only a few" (2007: 6). Centring his argument on the detention camps dotted across Europe, he argues that such detention "creates zones of uncertainty with new legal parameters established by government [and that] [t]hese parameters destabilise existing rights and the common judicial understanding of the rule of law" (2007: 4). The chapter sets the standard for following contributions and offers a welcome discussion of how the border helps define external groups as dangerous to the internal security of the nation state. Guild builds upon earlier work by Bigo, particularly "as regards the construction of the enemy who is both external and internal at the same time," causing the state to develop a "security continuum" which challenges the authority of judges to act in matters involving "foreign and security policy" (2007: 65, 66). Her tightly argued chapter illustrates the importance of the European Convention on Human Rights and questions the "claims to exceptionalism by the [UK] security forces" (2007: 87).

Dean's discussion of the Sino-Burmese and Thai-Burmese borders makes the important point that local practices (such as consistent cross-border trade by locals) "resist the conceptual meanings of an international boundary and sovereignties" (2007: 193), irrespective of whether or not these borders are

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contested. People move backwards and forwards, giving borders a fluidity which maps do not capture. Nah provides a disquieting account of life for asylum seekers in Malaysia, where “undocumented immigrants” face imprisonment and possible whipping, as well as prohibitions on seeking medical attention in government hospitals, taking jobs and renting accommodation (2007: 36). Similar points are made by Toyoto (Chapter 4) in the Thai context. Soguk chronicles the desperate plight of those migrants who resort to extreme measures, such as stowing away in the landing gear of planes, in order to circumvent the demands of the border imposed by “Fortress Europe” (2007: 290). His eloquent discussion of the plight of present-day refugees – “they are at once visible as bodies yet imperceptible as human beings” – and the elegant theoretical framework in which it is situated, provides a fitting conclusion to the book (2007: 294).

Yet, there are aspects of *Borderscapes* which remain perplexing. The decision to have a dialogue focused on Asian and European borders – while explicable in terms of a conference – cannot be defended so readily in the context of a book. The states of exception underpinning all these regional tales have been hugely influenced by global events post 9/11, even if sovereign countries might not make this case specifically when defending their own borders. The perceived need to maintain secure borders is nowhere more apparent than at ports of arrival within the United States (with the airport being a form of “borderscape”), where Haddad’s Chapter 5 description of the “polluting” refugee in Italy (and now the “polluting” Roma) can easily be applied to many new arrivals. Discussion of this re-ordering of security, and the consequent requirements imposed upon other countries by America’s Department of Homeland Security, would have offered further context (although it is implicit in some of the chapters).

The book would have benefited from tighter editing, in order to avoid some of the duplication of material. Such editing would also have thought better of the inexplicable decision to refer to the UK’s Home Office as the Home Department in Guild’s chapter (I assume this was not Guild’s own choice of words). The adopted terminology might have been an attempt to clarify this major department of state for a non-UK readership but, instead, suggests that readers are unable to make these distinctions for themselves.

These criticisms aside, the book expands our understanding of what constitutes a border and “borderscapes.” It shows how the body of the migrant/asylum seeker/refugee becomes the object of a state’s authority and oppression, while also demonstrating that the notion of citizenship heavily determines how individual states treat the dispossessed. *Borderscapes* provides a clear and unhappy picture of the overwhelmingly exclusionary impact of borders and how we, as citizens, collude in those exclusions.