

Introduction

“But how can you say gentrifiers aren’t welcome when you believe no one is illegal?” asked a caller to a conservative radio talk show on which I appeared, against my better judgment. Discussing an anti-gentrification rally planned by women in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Canada, I was outlining the lived experiences of escalating displacement, homelessness, and police violence when a caller hopped on and referenced my migrant justice organizing against detentions and deportations. I was being baited, of course, but the question nagged at me for months. Anti-gentrification struggles push back against the forces of racial capitalism and the entitlement of those seeking to solidify their power, as they profit from and police neighborhoods already under siege. Confronting gentrification is about opposing those who represent and reproduce structural and spatial injustice, not about preventing the movement of oppressed people seeking safety and dignity. People *do* move into the Downtown Eastside every day, in search of better services, hoping to secure social housing, care for their aging family, and knit kinship networks in a vibrant oasis of low-income residents, Indigenous matriarchs, Chinese Canadian seniors, artists, drug users, sex workers, and cacophonous dissidents. Migrants and refugees have much more in common with these humble residents than they do with rapacious hipster colonists.

While the caller was blatant and opportunistic in conflating gentrifiers with migrants and, conversely, anti-gentrifiers with border agents, the conclusion was unsurprising. Even though bordering and gentrifying regimes work to hoard wealth, displace people, and police racial segregation, the popular characterization of migrants and refugees as “foreign invaders” turns the border into a purportedly anticolonial architecture. The border, however, is less about a politics of movement per se and is better understood as a key method of imperial state formation, hierarchical social ordering, labor control, and xenophobic nationalism.

Following Vivek Shraya, who raises the compelling question “Why is my humanity only seen or cared about when I share the ways in which I have been victimized and violated?” this book refuses anthropological consumption.¹ Numerous stories and photographs circulate about dead migrants and refugees attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea, the Pacific Ocean, the Rio Grande, and the Sahara and Sonoran Deserts. Media images of the drowning deaths of toddlers Alan Kurdi and Angie Valeria went viral to invoke shock and sympathy, yet the same media outlets depict the world’s remaining seventy million refugees as swarms, floods, invaders. One refugee may summon pity, but large groups are painted as a threat. Instead of romanticizing migrants and refugees as either poor victims or heroic survivors, totalizing their experiences, I turn our gaze away from varied subjectivities to the systems of power that create migrants yet criminalize migration. Classifications such as “migrant” or “refugee” don’t represent unified social groups so much as they symbolize *state-regulated* relations of governance and difference.

I have previously theorized “border imperialism” to depict the processes “by which the violences and precarities of displacement and migration are structurally created as well as maintained,” including through imperial subjugation, criminalization of migration, racialized hierarchy of citizenship, and state-mediated exploitation of labor.² While *Undoing Border Imperialism* is a contribution to movement organizing, this book is a modest endeavor to more deeply interrogate the formation and function of borders as a spatial and material power structure. Borders are an ordering regime, both assembling and assembled through racial-capitalist accumulation and colonial relations. By looking at various jurisdictions around the world, I also intend to break through methodological nationalism—specifically US exceptionalism—and unearth transnational trends. Many on the left believe the cruelties of US immigration policy are homegrown and then exported, when, in fact, most repressive technologies of border rule are perfected elsewhere. *Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism* examines a number of seemingly disparate geographies with shared logics of border formation—displacing, immobilizing, criminalizing, exploiting, and expelling migrants and refugees—to divide the international working class and consolidate imperial, racial-capitalist, state, ruling-class, and far-right nationalist rule.

Conservatives and liberals alike conceive of US immigration policy as an issue of domestic reform to be managed by the state. Language such as “migrant crisis,” and the often-corresponding “migrant invasion,” is a pretext to shore up further border securitization and repressive practices of detention and deportation. Such representations depict migrants and refugees as the *cause* of an *imagined* crisis at the border, when, in fact, mass migration is the *outcome* of the *actual* crises of capitalism, conquest, and climate change. The border crisis, as I argue in the first part, is more accurately described as crises of displacement and immobility, preventing both the freedom to stay and the freedom to move. American liberals may demand an end to excessive violence against Latinx migrants and refugees, exemplified in their opposition to concentration camps or family separation, but they rarely locate immigration and border policies within broader systemic forces. A long arc of dirty colonial coups, capitalist trade agreements extracting land and labor, climate change, and enforced oppression is the primary driver of displacement from Mexico and Central America. Migration is a predictable consequence of these displacements, yet today the US is fortifying its border against the very people impacted by its own policies. Analyzing the border as part of historic and contemporary imperial relations, hence the term “border imperialism,” forces a shift from notions of charity and humanitarianism to restitution, reparations, and responsibility.

From the US–Mexico border’s early formation—entangled in the terrors of territorial expansion, Indigenous genocide, anti-Black enslavement, and racialized expulsion—to the more recent hemispheric war on drugs and the global war on terror, the first two chapters detail how bipartisan US immigration policy is a linchpin in synchronous domestic and global warfare. US border rule reveals seamless relations between the carceral administration of genocide and slavery at home and imperial counterinsurgency abroad, domestic neoliberal policies of welfare retrenchment and foreign policies of capitalist trade, and local and global regimes of race. This is unmistakable in the deployment of US Border Patrol Tactical Unit (BORTAC) to train border guards in Iraq and Guatemala, while engaging in SWAT-style operations to grab protestors off the streets of Portland in unmarked vehicles at the height of Black-led uprisings against police violence in 2020. This synergy between the local and global is also evident in President Donald Trump’s proposal to classify all irregular, economic migrants as “enemy combatants” and incarcerate them at Guantánamo Bay.³ The pattern of constructing migrants as enemy aliens emerges worldwide, examined in [chapter 3](#). Mainstream narratives of a “global migration crisis” depict migrants as threats without implicating the crises of forced dispossession, deprivation, and displacement. Capitalist dispossession and imperialist subordination manufacture bordered regimes of export processing zones in Bangladesh, land enclosures in Mozambique, and militarized settler occupation in Palestine. Border crises are, therefore, not merely domestic issues to be managed through policy reform. They must, instead, be placed within globalized asymmetries of power—inscribed by race, caste, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and nationality—creating migration and constricting mobility.

Border panics blasted in newspaper headlines take migrant “illegality” for granted, and the criminalization of migration is the focus of [part 2](#). Displaced people become “illegal” because of multiplying technologies acting as a wall to migration, including visa restrictions, safe third country agreements, offshore detention, deportation, interdiction, militarization of maritime space, and an empire of externalization, detailed in [chapter 4](#). Such state restrictions force people to undertake irregular, and often fatal, migration journeys. Erik Prince, operator of the world’s largest mercenary training facility and the dirty Black-water business spanning from Iraq to New Orleans, is now peddling the idea of a public–private partnership via the burgeoning border security industry to further militarize the Mediterranean, already the world’s deadliest border.⁴ While corporate elites and politicians outdo one another to see who can build the tallest wall as an edifice to xenophobic nationalism and state sovereignty, borders are actually elastic. I explain how borders function through four primary modes of governance beyond walls: exclusion, territorial diffusion, commodified inclusion, and discursive control.

Most maps do not conceptualize the shifting cartography of borders. Bordering regimes are increasingly layered with drone surveillance, interception of migrant boats, security controls, and boots on the ground far beyond territorial limits. This is illustrated by White Australia’s exported geography of offshore detention, turning resource colonies into penal ones, surveyed in [chapter 5](#), and Fortress Europe’s externalization of border security across waterscapes, charted in [chapter 6](#). US, Australian, and European subordination of Central America, Oceania, Africa, and the Middle East compels countries in these regions to accept external checkpoints, offshore detention, migration prevention campaigns, and expelled deportees as conditions of trade and aid agreements. Countries in these regions including Libya, Mali, Mexico, Nauru, Niger, Papua New Guinea, Turkey, and Sudan have become the new frontiers of border militarization. These countries are further dispossessed of their resources and their lands are now being used to build externalized infrastructures of migration control under racial imperial management. Imperialism is already a root cause of global migration, and now the management of global migration through outsourcing is also becoming a means of preserving imperial relations. Migrants and refugees, meanwhile, become bargaining chips for authoritarians like Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey and General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti) in Sudan. To economic dependency, climate debt, and military domination, as theorized by movement giants like Walter Rodney and Edward Said, we can also add the soft power of immigration diplomacy as a central pillar in the maintenance of our colonial present.

We are told that immigration policy is about law and order, not racial exclusion in an allegedly post-racial society. But there is no objective fact of migrant illegality; as Catherine Dauvergne maintains, “Illegal migration is a product of migration law. Without legal prohibition, there is no illegality.”⁵ While borders are hierarchically organized and permeable for white expats, a handpicked immigrant diaspora, and the rich investor class, they form a fortress against the millions in the “deportspora,” who are shut out, immobilized, and expelled.⁶ The global turn toward deportation and detention as the central means of immigration enforcement is attendant to the rise of neoliberalism. The consolidation of spatial carcerality through prisons and borders correlates with wealth concentration, dismantling of public services, and the simultaneous manufacturing and disciplining of surplus populations. Contemporary Black-led abolitionist uprisings in response to the cold-blooded police murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless others expose the crisis of legitimacy for the state, capitalism, and carceral regimes. Police, prisons, and borders operate through a shared logic of immobilization, containing oppressed communities under racial capitalism. Notably, the word “mob,” a criminalizing vocabulary used to link large groups of poor, racialized people to social disorder, including in inner cities and at the border, derives from the word “mobility.”⁷ Even as explicitly racist prohibitions on people of certain races or national origins have been removed from most states’ immigration policies in an era of alleged “color blindness,” mobility continues to be restricted and contained along color, class, and caste lines. Discourses of climate security,

which merge the climate crisis with the migration crisis to entrench eco-apartheid, escalate this immobilization. Amid apocalyptic invocations of the climate, austerity, and migration crises, European Commission president-elect Ursula von der Leyen, for example, suggested renaming the migration policy portfolio “Protecting Our European Way of Life.”⁸

Furthermore, regardless of actual legal immigration status, racialized others are cast as cultural outsiders in shallow and essentializing multicultural discourses. Borders and the notions of belonging they engender are not simply demarcated by towering walls experienced equally by all; they rely on and reproduce racism within the spaces they establish. A vicious cycle has developed: legal routes to migration—family sponsorship, asylum claims, and permanent residency—are limited, thus increasing irregular border crossings, which in turn become a centerpiece of dog-whistle politics about “illegals” and “too many immigrants” to justify further racist migration controls. Finally, state-centric taxonomies like “unauthorized arrival” and “asylum seeker” are only possible because of a prevailing assumption of the border as a legitimate institution of governance. Even liberals arguing for more humane immigration policies presuppose the border is natural without explaining who it serves or how it functions. Nicholas De Genova probes, “If there were no borders, there would be no migration—only mobility.”⁹ Most ironic, the migration crisis is declared a *new* crisis with *Western* countries positioned as its victims, even though for four centuries nearly eighty million Europeans became settler-colonists across the Americas and Oceania, while four million indentured laborers from Asia were scattered across the globe and the transatlantic slave trade kidnapped and enslaved fifteen million Africans. Colonialism, genocide, slavery, and indentureship are not only conveniently erased as continuities of violence in current invocations of a migration crisis, but are also the *very* conditions of possibility for the West’s preciously guarded imperial sovereignty.

Borders are not fixed or static lines; they are productive regimes concurrently generated by and producing social relations of dominance. In addition to migration being a consequence of empire, capitalism, climate catastrophe, and oppressive hierarchies, contemporary migration is *itself* a mode of global governance, capital accumulation, and gendered racial class formation. Radhika Mongia writes, “The very development of the nation-state occurred, in part, to control mobility along the axis of the nation/race,” which we see in the early organization of passports to regulate movement within the British empire, foreshadowing the modern state.¹⁰ Contrary to common analysis, borders being simultaneously monetized and militarized—open to capital but closed to people—are not contradictory juxtapositions. The free flow of capital *requires* precarious labor, which is shaped by borders through immobility. International talk of “managed migration” and a concerted shift toward “temporary labor migration” in high-income countries unambiguously proves this requirement. Insourced labor from labor migration programs and outsourced labor in free trade zones represent flip sides of the same coin. This is a bifurcation and segmentation of the global labor force, made precarious through bordering practices.

Part 3 of the book details the function and expansion of temporary labor migration. One of the five key features of temporary labor migration programs, described in chapter 7, is the legal tying of immigration status to employment. This turns migrant workers into a state-sanctioned pool of unfree, indentured laborers. The state differentiates these workers as *migrant* laborers, whose labor power is first captured by the border and then manipulated and exploited by the employer. Impoverishment is a consequence, not a coincidence, of capitalism. Temporary labor migration is a crucial method of accumulation, helping to facilitate the holding of more than \$9.1 trillion of global wealth by 2,200 billionaires, while the world’s poorest 3.8 billion people hold \$1.4 trillion.¹¹ Migrant workers are kept compliant through threats of termination and deportation, dangled in tandem as union-busting mechanisms, thus revealing the crucial connection between their migration status and precarious labor position. The commodified inclusion of migrant workers is “in a continuum with exclusion, rather than in opposition to it,” as border controls channel irregular migration into temporary labor migration.¹²

As the current phase of advanced capitalism, neoliberal globalization facilitates the movement of capital and militaries but restricts the mobility of impoverished racialized people *unless* they agree to inclusion as migrant workers with deflated labor power and no legal or social citizenship. We must not mistake this commodified inclusion for free migration. Migrant worker programs are carceral regimes, where many workers have their identification confiscated, are held captive in their place of employment, and are traded between employers like goods. Thus, like those of undocumented and irregular migrants and refugees, the experiences of legally authorized migrant workers are foundationally organized through immobility.

Migrant worker programs shape and are shaped by racial capitalism, where land and labor are appropriated but people are disenfranchised. Coming from Mexico and Ghana, for example, indebted farmers and peasants, displaced from their own lands and livelihoods by capitalist trade liberalization, become bonded laborers for agribusinesses in the US and Italy. Because these distinctly racialized migrant workers are categorized as “foreigners,” a material and ideological differentiation is produced between them and citizens. This distinction further conjoins race to the nation-state, buttresses racialized and nationalized working-class identities, and exacerbates the legally constructed and state-sanctioned vulnerability of migrant workers. Migrant workers are segregated from citizen workers in a divergent labor pool and are unable to access labor protections or public services. They typically cannot bring their families and, in the case of domestic workers, perform the gendered labor of caring for others’ families while forcibly separated from their own. This gendered racism is not secondary to, but rather is constitutive of, bordering practices, especially given the connection between feminization of labor, poverty, and migration. There is nothing

inherently low-skill or low-wage about domestic work, but it is intentionally devalued by the workings of gendered racism through capitalism and bordered care chains.

While migrant workers are temporary, temporary migration is permanent. Temporary migration has become a modality central to state formation, citizenship regulation, labor segmentation within national labor markets, and segregated social ordering. I investigate the kafala system in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries in [chapter 8](#) and the Temporary Foreign Worker Program in Canada in [chapter 9](#). I chose these two programs because while the kafala is habitually dissected and condemned, Canada's program is labeled the "Rolls Royce" of labor migration. The far-right Alternative für Deutschland party, for instance, calls for German immigration policy to be based on the Canadian model.¹³ Instead of using a liberal dichotomy to position one program as "modern-day slavery" and the other as a "best practice," I suggest both are perfected systems of labor discipline and racialized exclusion. The misogynist criminal charge of absconding in the Gulf countries and the ableist issue of medical deportation in Canada provide two of the most striking examples of migrant workers' commodification and expendability. Worldwide, as we witness escalating anti-immigrant xenophobia, fearmongering about racial demographic change, and panics about job losses due to austerity, border imperialism produces migrant workers as a pool of cheapened and disposable labor without disturbing the racial social order. Labor migration thus shapes the state and capital's ability to coerce labor and manage citizenship, dovetailing perfectly into racist nationalisms.

In summary, border imperialism produces mass displacement, while immobilizing migrants through oppressive technologies that prohibit and criminalize free migration, alongside policies expanding indentured migrant labor pools, all entwined in reactionary nationalisms, the focus of [part 4](#). In [chapter 10](#), I trace the connection between anti-immigrant racial violence and mounting right-wing racist nationalisms. Although far-right murders are often characterized as acts of "lone wolves," a coordinated network of groups and governments, especially in the US, Israel, India, the Philippines, Brazil, and across Europe, are escalating fascistic hatred against both migrants and subjugated citizens. I explore how they mobilize the interlocking ideologies of ethnonationalism, penal populism, welfare nationalism, and imperial gendered racism, operating together to solidify the relationship between the state, capitalism, and racism.

Racial citizenship is a universal motivating factor for far-right voters. Anti-migrant xenophobia is mapped onto enduring racial warfare against Indigenous, Dalit, Black, Muslim, Roma, and Latinx communities, as well as social warfare against rural peasant and urban poor communities. This architecture of racist nationalism, scaffolded by xenophobia against migrants, is most evident in the unfolding crisis of statelessness. I sketch the practices of turning already-subjugated citizens into stateless noncitizens in their own countries of birth in India, Myanmar, Dominican Republic, and the Arab Gulf region. These mass disenfranchisements maintain a hierarchical social order by ensconcing exclusionary racial citizenship and are as vital to producing racist nationalism as anti-migrant xenophobia itself.

Right-wing demagogues are making rising populist appeals about "foreigners" stealing *our* jobs, draining *our* services, ruining *our* environment, infecting *our* neighborhoods, and tainting *our* values. This rhetoric deflects responsibility from the underlying systems producing mass inequality, impoverishment, and misery by conveniently scapegoating "foreigners." Right-wing populist appeals uproot class struggle from capital accumulation and elite control and, instead, overlay it with entitled and exclusionary projections of who rightfully constitutes the nation-state. Anti-immigrant sentiments underwrite this demographic racism and supplement reactionary nationalism. This manifests in working-class struggles animated by race and nationality or eco-fascist trends in environmental movements, described in [chapter 11](#). But right-wing nationalism—pitting whites against racialized people, migrant workers against unionized workers, refugees against citizens, the West against the rest—is a ruling-class ideology. It breaks internationalist solidarity, lowers the wage floor for all workers, and maintains extractivism and exclusion in a warming world. Right-wing nationalism purports to defend the working class but is vehemently anticommunist.

The politics of fear is a distracting cover for inequality and is a material basis for the disenfranchisement of racialized communities and exploitation of racialized workers. White supremacy within the working class is not simply misdirected rage about economic anxiety, nor is gendered racism extricable from class formation. Interpellations such as "white working class" or "national working class" exist at the expense of *all* working people, especially racialized immigrant women workers who comprise the working-class majority. Racialized women are overrepresented in the underpaid care sector, currently a front line in the struggle for a new green economy and whose value as an essential service socially reproducing life is crystal clear during the Covid-19 pandemic. Nurses, cleaners, teachers, domestic workers, grocery clerks, service workers, single mothers, and land defenders leading political struggles during the pandemic, and well before it, trenchantly assert that inequality is a product of austerity *and* also of differences made through nationality, race, gender, sexuality, and ability, which are co-constituents of class relations. As interdependent and interwoven societies, our fiercely internationalist struggle is not against "foreigners" but against any oppressors.

State responses to the global Covid-19 pandemic have blown off the lid on border and rule practices and exposed the fault lines in our societies. "Corona is the virus, capitalism is the pandemic," rings out loudly as millions of people endure devastating job losses, appallingly inadequate healthcare, collapsed social safety nets, cruel evictions and foreclosures, and fatal working

conditions from grocery stores to meatpacking factories. As Whitney N. Laster Pirtle articulates, “[R]acial capitalism is a fundamental cause of the racial and socioeconomic inequities within the novel coronavirus pandemic.”¹⁴ While the right-wing “anti-lockdown” movement is a palpable refraction of the settler-colonial logic of frontier freedom, the most under-protected are the most overpoliced by the overlapping racial-capitalist state forces of, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore depicts it, organized abandonment alongside organized violence.¹⁵ Refugees and migrants are bearing a disproportionate distribution of risk and violence. Despite no directive from the World Health Organization to do so, and in violation of the legal principle of non-refoulement forbidding states from returning a person to a country where they may face persecution, a staggering fifty-seven countries have shut their borders to people seeking safety.¹⁶

The pandemic, like every global crisis before it, provides a perfect excuse to hasten in the vision of securitized borders and usher states of emergency into permanency. The government of Malta abandoned several boats carrying refugees and migrants in the Mediterranean, claiming it was too overwhelmed by the pandemic. In one instance, Malta ignored distress calls from passengers on a boat filling up with water. Maltese officials let the boat drift for five days, during which time seven people died of dehydration and another seven people were presumed dead from drowning. Then the Maltese government clandestinely and illegally paid private vessel operators to forcibly return the boat to Libya.¹⁷ Similarly, Italy blocked ships carrying refugees rescued in the Mediterranean from entering its ports, Bangladesh and Malaysia refused to dock trawlers with five hundred Rohingya refugees stranded at sea for months, and Hungary indefinitely suspended admission of all migrants and refugees along its border with Serbia by alleging a connection between the virus and “illegal immigration.”¹⁸

The global health crisis also provides a pretext for further internalization of the border, with policing of the pandemic escalating the carceral containment and immobilization of migrants and refugees within states. Governments continue to incarcerate migrants and refugees in horribly overcrowded and filthy detention centers, and refugee camps and housing centers are locked down with orders imposing severe restrictions on movement. Syrian refugees in Lebanon, for example, are subjected to discriminatory restrictions, such as lengthier curfews that do not apply to Lebanese citizens, and are threatened with revocation of their identity documents for any violations.¹⁹ African migrants in Guangzhou, China, are being subjected to mandatory testing, arbitrary quarantine, mass surveillance, forced evictions, and prohibitions on entering hospitals, stores, and restaurants.²⁰

Elsewhere, police checks to enforce public health orders are a funnel for immigration enforcement, and migrants are increasingly terrified to enter highly surveilled public spaces, including when requiring access to healthcare, out of fear of being turned over to immigration authorities. In one operation in Malaysia, under the guise of preventing the spread of the virus, 586 migrants were arbitrarily rounded up and forced into immigration detention.²¹ Homeless migrants and refugees are particularly impacted by the structural distribution of vulnerability. Unable to meaningfully shelter in place, they are among the most at risk of contracting the virus, while also subject to heavy state enforcement. More than three thousand homeless migrants and refugees on the outskirts of Paris live in overcrowded tent encampments within which physical distancing is not feasible. In March 2020, approximately seven hundred homeless migrants in the Aubervilliers encampment were evicted by police, who cited a risk to public health and enforcement of a national lockdown.²² Platitudes such as “We are all in this together” are obnoxious in the face of such glaring inequality and hierarchies of rights to safety, dignity, and well-being.

While the pandemic has resulted in bans on most cross-border movement, including the essential movement of refugees seeking safety, deportation flights are violently expelling people *out* and exporting the virus to countries with weaker health and sanitation systems. In April 2020, nearly one-fifth of all known coronavirus cases in Guatemala were deportees from the US.²³ Meanwhile, parallel flights bringing migrant workers *in* remain a high priority for racial-capitalist state interests. Workers in the US agricultural and food industry have been categorized as an “essential” group of workers during the pandemic. Even though almost all other immigration and refugee processing has been brought to a halt, H-2A migrant farmworker visas are being churned out to maintain a steady supply of cheapened labor for food supply chains. Government officials are also seeking to reduce wage rates for migrant farmworkers in a relief measure for agribusinesses.²⁴ Though the commodities migrant farmworkers produce are deemed essential, the workers themselves are underpaid and disposable, unprotected and deportable—revealing not a contradiction but rather a *central* function of border imperialist rule. Millions of migrant and undocumented workers across the country endure impoverishment and lethal work conditions in overcrowded and unsanitary farms, meatpacking plants, and grocery stores. Without valid social security numbers, many are ineligible for federal relief stimulus checks or adequate health insurance,²⁵ trapped in the American dream of choosing to sell one’s labor for a wage under deadly conditions or death by unemployment and destitution. Meanwhile, the US billionaire class has experienced a wealth surge of \$434 billion during the coronavirus pandemic.²⁶

The horrific exploitation of migrant and undocumented workers and the cruel expulsion of migrants and refugees is justified through dehumanizing far-right rhetoric scapegoating racialized bodies as “infectious” and “diseased.” Trump referred to coronavirus as “the Chinese virus,” ignoring the web of capitalist industrial food production extending from China to the US; he

also linked the need for a border wall to the threat of disease transmission from migrants.²⁷ Trump's racist fearmongering echoes a long and xenophobic history of vilifying Irish, African, and Asian people for outbreaks of cholera, Ebola, and SARS. In March 2020, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a sweeping order suspending the entry of noncitizens from countries where an outbreak of a communicable disease exists and justifying the immediate deportation of migrants and refugees at the border on public health grounds.²⁸ Characterizing the US nation-state as a vulnerable and pure body to be protected from foreign contagions is offensive, particularly as migrants experience deadly and dangerous conditions that leave them more susceptible to contracting the virus; ahistoric, given that European settlers introduced diseases to the US and used biological warfare to commit genocide against Indigenous people; and untrue, since the initial spread of the coronavirus is more closely associated with luxury and business travel by the upper classes of rich countries than the movements of migrants and refugees.²⁹

The spread of the novel coronavirus across borders unearths another truth: flattening the curve requires flattening all inequality. To keep any one of us safe, we must keep every single one of us safe. Yet most discussions about immigration tend to emphasize seemingly neutral and technocratic questions of quotas and legality. Liberal centrism tries to convince us the best solution to right-wing revanchism and its entanglements with anti-migrant xenophobia is a superficial antiracism, exemplified through the refrains of "racism is bad" and "hate is a virus." Liberal antiracist analysis, obsessed with superficial representation and flag-waving, purposefully fails to interrogate the material structures upending racism. Instead, we are offered the shallow politics of humanitarianism, such as "Welcome refugees," or liberal multiculturalism proclaiming "We are all from somewhere," or commodifying platitudes such as "Immigrants build our economy." Such moralizing discourses emphasize generosity toward "good" immigrants and refugees, for whom "buying power, respectability, assimilation, and nationalism are the price of welcome" into neoliberal citizenship.³⁰ People from the professional class, proximate to the dominant race and caste, cisheteronormative, and without criminal records are selected and welcomed as an act of benevolence to serve racial-capitalist political economies.

In the face of the far right's overt racism, liberal centrists defend a hollow multiculturalism, even though its essentialized framings of culture animate racial violence. Liberal multiculturalists and racist nationals share an assumption that racialized communities are "bearers of difference,"³¹ and, as such, state multiculturalism is organized to subtend, not dismantle, racial power. Sara Ahmed explains, "Strangers are not simply those we do not recognise but those we recognise as strangers."³² While liberalism may challenge negative stereotypes attributed to the "stranger," it still assumes and imbues meaning in this recognition of immigrants *as* strangers. The categorization of immigrants as strangers and outsiders, whether tolerated through commodified inclusion or marked for exclusion, consolidates racial state governance.

Our movements must refuse *both* the vicious far right and the banal liberal center. Status-quo liberalism upholding neoliberal capitalism is interwoven with right-wing nationalism inflected by class, race, caste, gender, sexuality, ability, and citizenship. Both anti-refugee xenophobia and liberal gestures of charity fail to challenge the root causes of displacement and colonial-capitalist complicity in order to maintain global asymmetries of power. Racist ethnonationalism and liberal multiculturalism both serve to uphold racial regimes through a social organization of difference. A proclamation like "Immigrants steal our jobs," and its rejoinder, "Our economy needs immigrants" treats immigrants as commodities to be traded in capitalist markets and discarded if deemed defective. Migrant justice must not endorse categories of desirable or undesirable, expectations of gratitude or assimilation, gestures of charitable humanitarianism, tropes of migrating to modernity, the commodification of labor to benefit capital accumulation, or state borders and other carceral regimes as legitimate institutions of governance.

A prevailing assumption, even among some progressives, is that while blatant immigration restrictions are racist, *too much* immigration would "taint" cultural values and "flood" labor markets. This is apparent in the founding of Aufstehen, a German leftist organization opposed to open border policies, as well as the surge of Blue Labour during and after the 2019 UK election calling for "conservative socialism" in opposition to Jeremy Corbyn's migration platform. But borders do not protect labor; the border is a bundle of relations and mode of governance acting as a spatial fix for capital to segment labor and buffer against the retrenchment of universal social programs. Simply put, borders manufacture divisions within the international working class. Borders are exploited by the class-conscious ruling class through outsourcing and insourcing to weaken collective bargaining rights and working-class resistance to transnational capital and its austerity measures. The social, political, and economic conditions simultaneously cultivated and weaponized by the far right can only be confronted by a radical and unabashed internationalist left.

Finally, we cannot allow the state and elites to become the arbiters of migration and, in doing so, to characterize migration as a crisis while hypocritically presenting themselves as the victims of migrants. Ghassan Hage observes that colonial domination is necessarily shaped through imagined victimhood: "A feeling of being besieged by the very people whom one is actually colonising."³³ Millionaire Jason Buzi has proposed one of the most offensive solutions to the global migrant and refugee crisis, pioneering "Refugee Nation," a scheme to relocate the world's displaced people to one island state. Framed as a humanitarian gesture, Buzi argues it is "a country which any refugee, from anywhere in the world, can call home."³⁴ Buzi's ideas are vague, including building a new island in international waters or buying an island-state like Dominica, but he is certain English would be

the national language and everyone would be trained to work with no welfare handouts. Harry Minas correctly calls it a “hair-brained idea” and “analogous to not long ago when we used to have leper colonies.”³⁵

There are other similarly wonky ideas. A billionaire wants to buy an island from Italy or Greece on which to stash refugees away, an architect wants to build a new city-state on the Tunisian Plateau, and two academics have proposed a network called Refugia. These proposals share a desire to isolate migrants and refugees, perfect for our current system of global apartheid, where displaced people are racially ordered and segregated as superfluous, capitalist techno-solutionism pretends to solve what it has created by trading in a market of dispossessions, imperial states spuriously claim to care about refugees without sullyng their own heavily guarded sovereignty, and elite humanitarianism is positioned as more pragmatic than meaningful justice.

Instead, migrants and refugees—a constitutive outside to bordering regimes whose journeys are largely an accounting of debts, reparations, and redistribution long due—must be the authorities of our own emancipatory movements. In 2018, as many as 164 land defenders were killed protecting their land from invasive industries like mining, logging, and agribusiness.³⁶ The same year, border controls killed 4,780 people worldwide.³⁷ Freedom is always in excess of capitalist economies, hierarchical orderings, and bordered sovereignties; the freedom to stay and the freedom to move are thus intertwined, and the most urgent and ethical responses to the asymmetries of power generating mass displacement and immobility today.

Conclusion

The world was born yearning to be a home for everyone.

—Eduardo Galeano, “Through the Looking Glass: Q & A with Eduardo Galeano”

Calls for nationalist protectionism against neoliberal globalization have only emboldened the far right and heightened anti-migrant xenophobia. Far-right organizations are even weaponizing resistance to fascism as a nationalist cause. In France, anti-immigration and Islamophobic forces present themselves as a new Resistance, a direct reference to forces fighting Nazi occupation. Similarly, Italian resistance to Nazi occupation is being memorialized and shaped by far-right forces in that country as a white patriotic movement—nationalist at its core—fighting *foreign* occupation. This conveniently erases the more than fifty nationalities, including thousands of migrants in Italy, represented in the internationalist Resistance against the Nazis and Mussolini’s fascism.¹ The anticolonial dimension of the Resistance is also omitted, as are those who fought Italian fascism in the colonies.

In the US, white nationalists deploy the trope of the “vanishing Indian” and appropriate Indigenous struggles to position themselves as victims of and defenders against an imagined migrant invasion. That white supremacists spuriously claim an affinity with Indigenous nations is a disgusting conflation of the nation-state with Indigeneity, particularly abhorrent in contexts where Indigenous people are resisting the weight of centuries of genocidal settler colonialism. Racist nationalism in the US and other colonial states is built upon Indigenous nations and tethered to coercive power, not relationships to place or land. Trump’s fascination with Andrew Jackson illustrates how settler colonialism is the most violent form of far-right nationalism and stands in sharp contrast to Indigenous articulations of place, nationhood, kinship, and economies of reciprocity. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson imagines Indigenous futures as ones that “reject dispossession and settler colonialism and the violence of capitalism, heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and anti-Blackness that maintains them.” To her, “Indigenous nationhood is a radical and complete overturning of the nation-state’s political formations.”² In assessing anticolonial movements, Adom Getachew asserts that African, African American, and Caribbean nationalists were not primarily concerned with the building of nation-states. “Against the standard view of decolonization as a moment of nation-building,” Getachew writes that Black anticolonial nationalism of this period was actually a global anticolonial “worldmaking” rooted in the principles of internationalism, nondomination, and redistribution.³ Simpson and Getachew point to a vision of the future beyond state formations, which uphold social control.

Anti-migrant xenophobia, immigration enforcement, detention centers, migration controls, and border securitization are ultimately the tentacles of a much-larger ideological monster: the rule of racist, nationalist borders. I align with a leftist politics of no borders, since the borders of today are completely bound up in the violences of dispossession, accumulation, exploitation, and their imbrications with race, caste, gender, sexuality, and ability. A no borders politics is not abstract; it is grounded in the material and lived impacts of our world, scarred by warfare and warming. Like the regime of private property, borders are not simply lines marking territory; they are the product of, and produce, social relations from which we must emancipate ourselves. The borders of advanced capitalist and imperialist states, including Australia, Canada, the EU, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, and the US, demarcate a fortress hoarding 73 percent of global wealth and only 14 percent of the world’s population, and passports from these regions guarantee the most mobility worldwide.⁴

A no borders politics is more expansive than an open borders one; it calls on us to transform the underlying social, political, and economic conditions giving rise to what we know as “the migration crisis.” A meaningful no borders politics requires an end to forced displacement caused by the brutalities of conquest, the voraciousness of capital, and the wreckages of climate change. We must wage resistance to displacement and immobility in all its forms: drone warfare, military occupations, policing agencies, mass incarceration, reservations, ghettos, gentrification, capitalist trade agreements, special economic zones, sweatshops, land grabs, resource extraction, and temporary labor programs. Dismantling borders requires that we abandon capitalism, which has only given us the merciless expropriation of land and exploitation of labor. We need to urgently jettison regimes of private property, reject dispossessive forces of colonialism, forsake extractive labor markets, and abolish carceral regimes. To fully undo the rule of borders, we must also undo the apartheid racial-social organization subtending the criminalization of migration and upholding ethnonationalism as citizenship. A no borders politics, then, is a politics of refusal, a politics of revolution, and a politics of repair.

Revolutions stretch our imaginations and manifest our desires. Political struggle is a purpose and a practice. In between utopic romanticism and demobilizing fatalism—both of which foreclose the future as a process *we* generate—is our collective commitment to revolutionary struggles blossoming around us and ushering in a different world. Our profound planetary crisis has propelled groundswells of resistance to racial-capitalist, border imperialist, and far-right nationalist rule. Following a surge of

xenophobic violence in South Africa in 2019, hundreds of refugees and migrants, mainly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Zimbabwe, occupied the streets and buildings of Cape Town for six continuous months. Many migrant domestic workers, most from Indonesia and the Philippines, joined the 2019 democracy movement in Hong Kong and organized migrant union affiliates within the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions. In the US in 2019, thousands of “Close the Camps” mobilizations, demanding closure of detention facilities incarcerating migrant children and families, swept across the country. On May Day of the following year, mostly immigrant and racialized retail, warehouse, and food service workers at Amazon, Target, Whole Foods, and Instacart led protests and strikes for higher pay and better safety protections during the Covid-19 pandemic, while also refusing a return to pre-pandemic “normalcy.” Around the same time, tens of thousands of jobless and desperate mostly caste-oppressed migrant workers and day laborers in India’s major cities defied a national lockdown, thousands of them battling with police as they attempted to make their way home to their villages.

In Bosnia in early 2020, seven hundred refugees broke through the fence surrounding the Miral camp and proceeded to blockade the road leading to the Croatian border. In February 2020, on the Greek hotspot of Lesbos, over two thousand refugees revolted against their confinement on the island and the horrific conditions of malnutrition, lack of sanitation, and exposure to the cold in the camp. Though they faced riot police who fired tear gas, they chanted “Freedom! Freedom!” and marched on foot toward the capital of Lesbos. In a brilliant stroke of metaphor, the undocumented migrants’ organization Black Vests (Gilets Noirs) in France and the refugee group Black Sardines in Italy are loudly asserting their presence within the working-class Yellow Vests and anti-Salvini Sardines social movements. Through visible protests, defiant occupations, and viral manifestos, the Black Vests and Black Sardines are revealing the real underbelly of austerity, racial capitalism, and far-right populism in Europe, just as incendiary Black-led rebellion is pushing forward abolitionist struggle in the US.

While power is omnipresent, shaping every aspect of our lives, these and other movements remind us that injustice is not ordained to determine our future. Empires crumble, capitalism is not inevitable, gender is not biology, whiteness is not immutable, prisons are not inescapable, and borders are not natural law. We *can* abolish the organization of difference, through citizenship, race, caste, gender, sexuality, ability, and neoliberal atomization, which underwrites relentless state and social violence despite hollow proclamations of tolerance. We *can* narrow the schisms between the international working class and reimagine the working class as the capacious global proletariat, and labor—beyond the confines of accumulation and extraction—as feminist economies of care and Indigenous land stewardship. We *can* weave solidarities through the lens of abundance, rather than scarcity, and celebrate the interdependence of the particularities of our humanities. We *can* reconstruct egalitarian social ecosystems, where we cultivate depropriated, de commodified, decarceral, decolonial, and democratic relations. 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.

Even as bordering practices fragment internationalist solidarities and exert seemingly totalizing power over who migrates and under which conditions, the mere existence of autonomous “illegal” migration—an expression of revolt, redistribution, and reparation—defies attempts to control it. This is our starkest reminder that man-made borders shall never fully thwart human movements compelled by the upheavals of our era. This book against borders is ultimately a book about “worldmaking” as a process of homemaking, and I close with the prophetic words of Toni Morrison: “In this new space one can imagine safety without walls, can iterate difference that is prized but unprivileged, and can conceive of a third, if you will pardon the expression, world ‘already made for me, both snug and wide open, with a doorway never needing to be closed.’ Home.”⁵ The freedom to stay and the freedom to move are revolutionary corollaries refusing imperial bordered sovereignties, with home as our shared horizon.