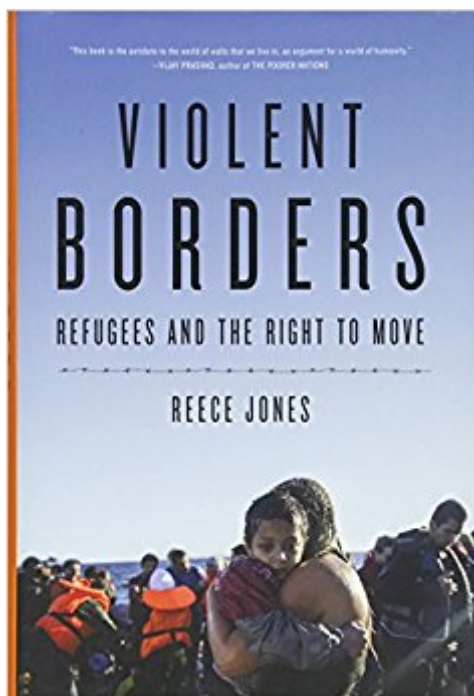


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# Violent Borders: Refugees And The Right To Move



## Synopsis

A major new exploration of the refugee crisis, focusing on how borders are formed and policed. Forty thousand people died trying to cross international borders in the past decade, with the high-profile deaths along the shores of Europe only accounting for half of the grisly total. Reece Jones argues that these deaths are not exceptional, but rather the result of state attempts to contain populations and control access to resources and opportunities. "We may live in an era of globalization," he writes, "but much of the world is increasingly focused on limiting the free movement of people." In *Violent Borders*, Jones crosses the migrant trails of the world, documenting the billions of dollars spent on border security projects and their dire consequences for countless millions. While the poor are restricted by the lottery of birth to slum dwellings in the aftershocks of decolonization, the wealthy travel without constraint, exploiting pools of cheap labor and lax environmental regulations. With the growth of borders and resource enclosures, the deaths of migrants in search of a better life are intimately connected to climate change, environmental degradation, and the growth of global wealth inequality.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"I'd like an endless supply of Reece Jones' *Violent Borders* to hand out to all the people I meet who flirt with an anti-refugee sensibility. This book is the antidote to the world of walls that we live in, an argument for a world of humanity." —Vijay Prashad, author of *The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South* "A much-needed counter to a thousand newspaper columns

calling on us to secure our borders, Reece Jones's *Violent Borders* goes beyond the headlines to look at the deeper causes of the migration crisis. Borders, Jones convincingly argues, are a means of inflicting violence on poor people. This is an engaging and lucid analysis of a much misunderstood issue.

• "Arun Kundnani, author of *The Muslims Are Coming: Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror* — From early modern land enclosures through Westphalian state formation to the current fortification of the US-Mexico frontier, Reece Jones explains what a boundary is, and how national sovereignty is being reinforced, in an age of capital mobility, by the crackdown on human movement across borders.

• "Jeremy Harding, author of *Border Vigils: Keeping Migrants Out of the Rich World* — In an era of terrorism, global inequality, and rising political tension over migration, Jones argues that tight border controls make the world worse, not better.

• "Boston Globe (recommended books for fall 2016) — A fierce polemicist.

• "Rowan Williams, *New Statesman* — Promise[s] to take your arguments from the general to the specific — The United States is one of a few countries whose immigration philosophy is *jus solis* or right of land, which means that if you spend enough time on US territory you have a right to citizenship. But who has that right and if it matters how they entered is our all-consuming question. In *Violent Borders*, Jones provides plenty of examples of how these semantic arguments lead to inequality, isolation, racism, and institutional loss of liberty for entire groups of people.

• "Ingrid Rojas Contreras, *KQED* — With the building of border walls and the deaths of migrants much in the news, this work is both timely and necessarily provocative.

• "Kirkus — The breadth and spread of Jones's historical examples and empirical case studies make for stimulating and engaging reading.

• "Nando Sigona, *Current History* — Reece Jones believes that borders are essentially tools of violence used to constrict and sometimes entirely stop flows of humanity. And Jones has the facts to back up this radical assertion — This book is a valuable antidote to the xenophobia sweeping the privileged nations of the Northern Hemisphere.

• "East Bay Express — *Violent Borders* goes beyond most considerations of refugee history to consider how new borders are formed and policed, and how state attempts to contain and control populations and allocate resources have resulted in many limits to peoples' movements around the world — A powerful survey that should be a must for any social issues collection.

• "Midwest Book Review — *Violent Borders* puts questions of movement and intrastate inequality in a historical perspective that once glimpsed cannot be unseen. It firmly, and convincingly, maintains that borders are nothing more than state tools for maintaining control of resources and populations, the beneficiaries of which are often the rich while those who suffer its intrinsically violent wrath are the poor who seek safety within its walls — An excellent read.

• "Arab Weekly

Reece Jones is a Professor of Geography at the University of Hawaii in Manoa, and the author of *Border Walls: Security and the War on Terror in the United States, India, and Israel*.

An example of geographical studies at its best. It's one of those books that manages to cover both the specific events happening on the ground and the broader issues of theory and policy that underlie them. It would be an understatement to say that it's a wideranging study: the field of view ranges from (for example) the experiences of a single family in the West Bank to an overview of the world-wide effects of globalization, including NAFTA, the TPP, and other developments. And the book covers both the historical and the present-day situation: as the author explains, the concept of a state with control of movement within and across a fixed boundary is actually relatively recent, within the last few hundred years, and the building of walls and other barriers is largely a phenomenon of the last few decades. One of the most interesting parts of the book is a discussion of how borders interact with economic theory: both the Chicago School (on the right) and the Keynesians (on the left) fail to properly take account of the role of borders. We have a world today where capital and goods now move freely across borders but people cannot, and the results of that are discussed in detail. I learned a great deal from this book.

This book is thought provoking on an important topic that easy to be blind to if you live in most of the US. The first several chapters specifically drive home the point that no one does dangerous border crossings unless they have to, and he does an excellent job of drawing you into the plight of refugees. He does a good job questioning policy assumptions and pointing out flaws in policies and political moves made to skirt the issue. On other other hand, I wasn't totally comfortable with his premise that rich nations only want to maintain their wealth and that's why they keep immigrants out. I'm not sure it's so cut and dry and I am inclined to think there are more factors at play than wealthy white nations keeping poor people out. It seems to me that wealthy nations tend to be more stable and that an influx of refugees could certainly cause chaos and civil unrest. I don't have a degree in this and haven't read much about it so I could be wrong, but I wasn't convinced that the premise was right and therefore wasn't entirely convinced that the borders should just be opened and everyone allowed freedom of movement either. I did appreciate his perspective, I just didn't find it completely convincing.

The author "disputes the idea that borders are a natural part of the human world" and believes that

"the existence of the border itself produces the violence that surrounds it." Political borders "are not the result of a transparent sorting of historical peoples into their own territories" but rather "an efficient system for maintaining political control of an area through agreements and documents that are backed up with the threat of violence." He sees borders as fundamentally violent, and thus embraces and employs a "broader and more nuanced definition of violence" than many people will find intuitive. Much, then, depends on the author's presenting a clear and persuasive account of what 'structural violence' is and how it is (and is not) morally equivalent to 'direct violence.' To cut to the chase, I don't think he does it. He is not entirely at fault for that: It is an ambitious claim, and does not lend itself to short discussion on the way to making other points. But it is the fulcrum nonetheless. I certainly approached the book with a lot of sympathy for the view that the current response of the affluent western nations to the 'refugee crisis' (a troubled and tendentious way to describe the predicaments of the people who are fleeing their native lands to seek refuge from war, persecution, or crippling poverty). And I certainly think that the heavy militarization of the US border has been, and remains, a tragic misdirection of policy. So I wanted to be persuaded by this book to see borders as the author does. I wasn't. The author's premises and assumptions are contestable, the arguments are thin, and the history he presents is so synoptic as to raise serious questions about the omissions, which casts doubt on the soundness of the author's overall narrative, and his frequent invocation of doubtful analogies. The idea that there is such a thing as a 'transparent' sorting of people strikes me as naive, and doubtful. Who gets included in a group and who gets excluded from it is, and no doubt always has been, contestable. And the idea that there is clarity (and thus defensibility?) in saying who it is that is a 'historical people' and what their 'own territory' was is no better. The human population has increased vastly (and unevenly), and many more people have married across categories (to put it politely). There would be pressures and tensions about whose territory is whose--and thus, 'structural violence'--even if one believed that one could sort humans into 'historical people' categories. I think that the best parts of the book are the largely descriptive ones (chapters one and two). Here the author's evident sympathy for the people caught up in border violence is powerful, and moving.

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