

# Tear Down These Walls! - Security and the War on Terror

Friday 31 May 2013, by [JOHNSON Jimmy](#) (Date first published: 1 May 2012).

***Border Walls: Security and the War on Terror in the United States, India, and Israel.* By Reece Jones. London: Zed Books, 2012, 224 pages, \$29.95 paper.**

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BRAZIL, INDIA, ISRAEL, Saudi Arabia, the United States and several other nation-states are constructing or have constructed barriers near their claimed borders. Their concurrence cannot be dismissed as coincidence, although there is no coordinated international effort of nation-state border fortification (the European Union's Frontex agency partially to the contrary).

University of Hawai'i at Manoa geographer Reece Jones offers an intervention with his new *Border Walls: Security and the War on Terror in the United States, India, and Israel*. Jones examines the U.S. border fortification with Mexico, Israel's Apartheid Wall, and India's barrier with Bangladesh, their official justifications and the human consequences.

The question driving Jones is, "Over twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, why are these leading democracies building massive barriers on their borders?" (1) The resulting comparative study is recommendable and interesting, but uneven.

Jones organizes his book in eight sections plus a brief introduction and appendix. The first and eighth sections are broader examinations, with the other six chapters looking at each case study twice, first in the context of discourse and the "war on terror" and again looking at border enforcement practices.

Jones first discusses borders and the war on terror, importantly contextualizing the modern state's border interventions in a historical trajectory of increasing state enclosure rather than a rigid boundary fixed since the establishment of a nation-state. (9, 17) He couples this with the "slow creep of government into everyday life" that brought about the "modern citizen who is documented as soon as they are born, educated in the state's schools, provided for through social services, and protected by its police, judges, and military." (17)

Jones points to a broader trend of states building border fortifications and contrasts this with "the idea of free trade through the removal of trade barriers at borders." He locates this accelerated border fortification mostly after the United States' declared "War on Terror" in 2001, though noting that "the 1990s saw almost as much border fencing globally as the previous four decades" combined. (6)

It's true that 2001 did mark an escalation of some authoritarian state processes. But the Reagan

Administration's earlier declaration of "war on terrorism" laid a discursive and legal basis for many "anti-terror" interventions that followed.

Edward Herman and Gerry O'Sullivan's 1990 volume *The Terrorism Industry: The Experts and Institutions That Shape Our View of Terror* made the case persuasively of an economic and rhetorical industry stemming from Israel, the United States and South Africa. The latter in particular had already engaged in extensive border fortifications based around anti-terrorism, not to mention its 1967 Terrorist Act which allowed for, amongst other things, indefinite detention.

The U.S. Congress passed the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, arguably as dangerous to basic rights as the 2001 USA PATRIOT Act. Other examples abound. All of these, like the greatly accelerated border fencing in the 1990s noted by Jones, point to an earlier starting point for the processes associated with the 2001 "War on Terror." So 9-11 is an important marker, but less fundamental than commonly asserted.

The introduction fails to make a compelling case why India, Israel and the United States make for a good comparative study, a vital need when comparing two Global North settler societies (one a small regional power and client state of the other) and a (for now) Global South postcolony. Perhaps the walling of geopolitical boundaries of self-described democracies (the three have notably different regimes) warrants a comparative study but I'm not convinced, at least not in the way Jones carries it out.

Jones' brief discussion of colonialism in the introduction is generally unsatisfying, but offers an insightful lineage between terra nullius doctrines of discovery ("land belonging to no one") and the attacks by powerful states on "failed states" and other places asserted to be insufficiently or incorrectly governed. (13-15). He also cleverly ties terra nullius to the continuing claims by Israel and its apologists that the West Bank and Gaza Strip cannot be considered occupied territory because they had no internationally recognized sovereign at the time of Israeli conquest in 1967.

## **Security and Barricading Borders**

The next three chapters look at the discursive and political frameworks that led to the construction of the U.S. barrier on its southern border with Mexico, India's northeastern barrier with Bangladesh, and Israel's wall throughout the West Bank. He begins by noting the shift in U.S. discourse that started to blend public images of drug trafficking and terrorism.

Following September 11, 2001, "This shift resulted in a profound rethinking of borders in the United States, particularly the US-Mexico border." To show this, Jones "analyzes the representations of the border, and the threatening 'other' on the other side, that justified the rapid expansion of border security on the US-Mexico border." (26, 27)

Jones lays out the history of illegal U.S.-Mexico border smuggling. He notes Confederate cotton smuggling to Mexico, Prohibition-era alcohol smuggling from Mexico, and present day drug smuggling from and arms smuggling to Mexico. (29) The two-way history of smuggling subverts the hegemonic image of Mexico as a source of illegal goods for the U.S. market and not also the other way around.

Through examinations of policy statements and field interviews, primarily though not exclusively with parties supporting border fortification, Jones describes the discursive shift from Mexico as a wild and fun place (college spring breaks in an exotified Cancún and gambling and sex workers in Tijuana) to a wild and dangerous place (drug traffickers, terrorists, corruption) and the legislative

and material consequences of the shift like the 2006 Secure Fence Act. (26-52)

He follows a parallel track looking at how Indian representations of Bangladesh have changed since the 1970s. Jones points to two shifts as producing West Bengal border fortification.

“The first is the simultaneous territorialization of the enemy-other as being from particular places that foster terrorism and deterritorialization as anomie that is outside the boundaries of modernity. The second shift is the framing of the terrorist threat as global and interconnected.” Jones follows this change through the growth of the Hindu nationalist right wing: “[D]espite the Congress Party’s public opposition to the [Bharatiya Janata Party’s] position on terrorism, it maintained or expanded most of the BJP’s security measures.” (55, 57)

Still, he focuses overwhelmingly on the rightist BJP and Hindu nationalists. This is analogous to (mis)locating the U.S. “War on Terror” and border discourse solely in the Republican Party despite the Obama administration’s escalation of both drone strikes and deportations.

Jones shifts methodologically in the Palestine section, where the field interviews are mostly with Palestinians (the targeted populace) and not Israelis (the deploying populace). He does not explain this shift but as a reader, I favor this approach. Understanding any organization or deployment of power — such as a militarization or fortification of a border — is best done through the voices and analyses of those targeted who can express best what is actually being done.

Jones follows Zionist colonization of Palestine from early days to the present looking at political discourse and spatial relations. He shows how Palestinians — long considered the target of a clash of civilizations of sorts by Israel — were folded into the “other” targeted in the renewed U.S.-led War on Terror after 2001.

The Palestine section contains factual errors and mischaracterizations. For example, after the creation of the Israeli state there was indeed a large influx of Jews from Europe, but a significant number, at times a clear majority, during the time period in question (1948-1958) came from Southwest Asian and North African countries, a fact which is unmentioned. Jones writes that in “late August 2001, the IDF made its first formal incursion into Palestinian Authority-controlled territories,” a gross mischaracterization since in fact that it was already the occupying power. (88)

Another problematic assertion is that the “terrible events of WWII settled the question of whether there should be a separate homeland for Jewish populations” (80). Settled for whom? The only thing “settled” after the shoah (Nazi genocide—ed.) was Palestine.

## **Bodies at the Borders**

Jones next examines what this discourse means to the targeted bodies in the border regions (border enforcement, as he notes, often extends quite far from the border). He begins with the increasingly reality of partition at borders that were, until recently, somewhat hypothetical with little enforcement of border lines. He follows this into the idea of the border as an exceptional space where rights are suspended for certain populations: Palestinians near the Apartheid Wall, Bangladeshis (and Indian Muslims to a degree) near the Indian border wall with Bangladesh, and Mexicans (and other Others) near the U.S.-Mexico border, including its unwallled portions.

His section on the U.S. ends with a series of pertinent questions. “Does the United States begin in Juárez with the enforcement practices there? Or at the river? Or the barrier? Or at the fixed checkpoints? Or at the edge of the 100-mile [border enforcement] zone? The border is an

exceptional space where enforcement and violation of the law blend together into a state of indistinction.” (125)

This indistinction is partially achieved when, “as the first line of defense against terrorism, the Border Patrol agents are reminded every day that they have to assume every person they encounter in the borderlands is possibly a terrorist until they determine are not.” However, Jones puzzlingly asserts that “(w)hile the other extreme policies of the war on terror no longer seemed worth defending, border security alone retained the necessary legitimacy.” (124). From drone strikes to contrived terrorism charges against Muslims, this simply isn’t true.

Revisiting the India-Bangladesh border area, Jones argues that “at the intersection of the state of exception at the border and in the exclusionary narratives of the global war on terror, Muslims specifically, are targeted for state-sanctioned violence.” (128) Through interviews and policy analysis he shows that “the actions of the [Border Security Force] suggest that they are unable, or unwilling, to distinguish whether an individual in the borderlands is a legitimate farmer, an illegal smuggler, or a terrorist who intends to carry out an attack. Consequently, the border guards appear to treat many individuals who enter the space of the border as if they are ‘waging war against the government’ and carry out the sentence of death accordingly.” (139)

The U.S.-Mexico and India-Bangladesh sections offer compelling descriptions of how persons are “excepted” in border areas (though an examination of how the U.S. wall partitions indigenous land would make the comparison more apposite with Israel’s wall). But the second Palestine section is again plagued with numerous problems. Some are minor, like calling Bir Nabala “Deir Naballa” (161) but many are severe.

Jones writes, “Around Jerusalem/Al-Quds, the imposing concrete wall leaves little doubt where the divisions between the Israeli and Palestinian areas are located.” (146). While there are some such areas (between Pisgat Ze’ev and Anata for example), much of the wall in the Jerusalem separates Palestinians from Palestinians - not from Israelis — as is quite clear from the map in the chapter.

Further, “Jerusalem/Al-Quds” doesn’t make sense in the way Jones uses it. “Al-Quds” refers to the Old City and some very immediate environs. “Al-Quds” in reference to the Municipality of Jerusalem (including East Jerusalem) is only found on Israeli road signs, not in Palestinian historical and geographic discourse.

Jones also calls Palestinians in Jerusalem with blue ID cards “Arab-Israelis.” (165) Virtually no one refers to Palestinian residents of Jerusalem as “Arab-Israelis”. Most importantly, Palestinian resident of Jerusalem do not refer to themselves as Arab-Israelis.

The chapter’s conclusion about “the faceless enemy” (166-169) is wholly misguided, reading as if the increasing segregation were the cause of conflict, locating this lack of understanding of “the other” on “both sides.” It embraces the “face to face” approach to conflict resolution, and the organization of power disappears altogether. This really poor conclusion undermines the preceding and insightful reading of colonization, dehumanization and ungoverned spaces.

Jones concludes with the “enduring significance of borders” (170-181) where he discusses the increasing state enclosure embedded in border fortifications. It’s a fine contrast to the still (surprisingly) hegemonic discussing of globalization and the “flat world” of Thomas Friedman and ilk. He offers a few starting points to critique security discourse and ends the book on a high note. Yet questions remain.

Israel and India also constructed other border fortifications that do not quite meet the parameters of

Jones' thesis. The lineage for Israel's barrier throughout the West Bank is not just the discourse led by Prime Ministers Rabin, Netanyahu, Barak and Sharon (88-95), but also the 1994 walling off of the Gaza Strip which is unmentioned in the text.

India also constructed a barrier on the Jammu & Kashmir border with Pakistan that is as much to fix occupied Kashmir to India — independence-minded Kashmiris not being thought of too fondly by the same folks who demonize Bangladeshis — as it is define an otherness to Pakistan. Other border walls, like Apartheid South Africa's, too fall outside his program.

The book remains recommendable for its strengths. For a better recent look at border walls as a phenomenon, see Wendy Brown's 2010 *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* from Zone Books.

**Jimmy Johnson**

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\* From Against the Current n°164, May/June 2013.