

BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTES RENDU

Prem Kumar Rajaram and **Carl Grundy-Warr**, eds., *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge*. Borderlines Series. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007, 344 pp. \$25.00 paper (978-0-8166-4926-6), \$75.00 hardcover (978-0-8166-4925-9)

With national borders regaining saliency in recent years, after decades of increasing openness to the movement of goods, money, and people, it is not surprising to see social scientists turning their attention to "territory's edge" as the subtitle of this collection puts it. Many of the essays in this book make a number of worthwhile contributions to emerging debates about the social and political significance of borders. The volume introduces for instance the notion of "borderscape," meant to convey the meaning that borders are not simple, instrumental devices, but changing zones of conflict and negotiation. Many of the studies indeed confirm that borders are continually being redefined by rival claims and competing visions of social justice and security. One of the greatest virtues of this book is its presentation of a number of case studies of Asian countries, in addition to a review of some of the better-known exclusionary practices of Europe (camps, etc.). Malaysia's approach to border management is, for instance, analyzed in some detail. While in some ways more chaotic and drastic than Europe or North America, Malaysia also treats illegal immigrants and asylum seekers as persons who occupy an indeterminate, fluctuating, and unprotected social position, not unlike what prevails in the Western world.

Less appealing is the frequent and sometimes overindulgent use of woolly and not-so-new post-structural semantics, as in this excerpt from the introduction: "The border is a zone in between states where the territorial resolutions of being and the laws that prop them up collapse. It is a zone where the multiplicity and chaos of the universal and the discomfits and possibilities of the body intrude." To be fair, some of the more interesting contributions of poststructuralism are often used to very good effect and with poise and elegance. The Foucauldian ruminations on space and utopia are, for instance, particularly appropriate and actually enlightened this reader rather than discomfited his body into a zone of intruded chaos. And many of the contributions only gloss over

these largely theoretical notions, while their empirical material is solid and clearly analyzed.

Though this partly boils down to a language debate, it can also do a disservice to some of the more grounded conclusions the volume points toward. Many of the contributions in this volume for instance make it clear that the only barrier to borderland violence is often the insufficiently funded and frequently disregarded local offices of the UNHCR and related international organizations. As imperfect as they are, there seem to be few concrete alternatives to strengthening and broadening the ability of multinational organizations to protect the very basic human rights of the displaced. Many countries are not even signatories to the agreements that legitimize these organizations. That this should be clearly and unequivocally pointed out would seem to be a good place to start. The same is true of the European Court of Human Rights, which, according to one of the chapters in this work, has been one of the bulwarks against the wanton extension of state powers against noncitizens within and outside many states' own borders. The goal of contributing to an "insurrectionary politics" that stretches the limits of belonging is commendable, but institutional advancement and reform, while not quite as thrillingly rebellious, may also be a worthwhile objective.

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