

## Book Review: Beyond Walls and Borders: Prisons, Borders, and Global Crisis

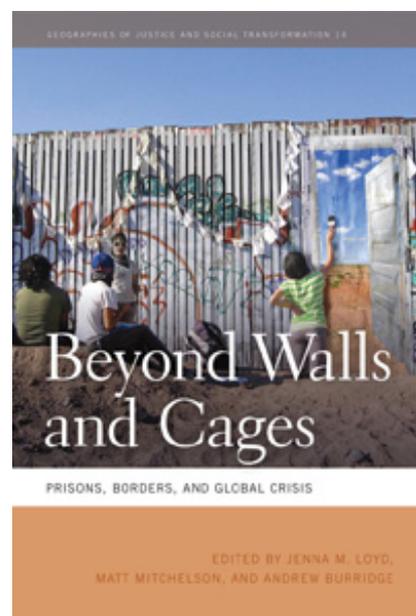
Blog Admin

*The crisis of borders and prisons can be seen starkly in statistics. In 2011 some 1,500 migrants died trying to enter Europe, and the United States deported nearly 400,000 and imprisoned some 2.3 million people—more than at any other time in history. International borders are increasingly militarized places embedded within domestic policing and imprisonment and entwined with expanding prison-industrial complexes. **Beyond Walls and Cages** offers scholarly and activist perspectives on these issues and explores how the international community can move toward a more humane future. A resounding ‘must-read’ for any activist, scholar, or those straddling worlds between, writes **Ulises Moreno-Tabarez**.*

**Beyond Walls and Borders.** Jenna M. Loyd, Matt Mitchelson and Andrew Burridge (eds.). University of Georgia Press. December 2012.

### Find this book:

The interconnections between prisons and borders—walls and cages—are not often readily apparent. This book helps to map out these crucial connections across space and time. Editors [Jenna M. Loyd](#), [Matt Mitchelson](#), and [Andrew Burridge](#) assemble a diverse group of activists and scholars and those in between to unpack the complex ways in which borders and prisons are intertwined. What links them inextricably is the proliferation of criminalisation discourse and practises around the globe, particularly in relation to transnational capital. This critical stance gives Loyd, Mitchelson, and Burridge traction to document the violent ways in which these technologies are deployed and to help strengthen coalitions between anti-prison and immigrant justice movements. These coalitions in themselves constitute an imperative and indispensable tool in abolitionist praxis. Their efforts result in a comprehensive, useful, and accessible contribution to radical analytics and practises that work toward building a world ‘beyond walls and cages’.





*Beyond Walls and Cages* is divided into six parts. The I and II parts frame the historical trajectory of walls and cages on a global scale with particular attention to contemporary remnants of colonialism, imperialism, slavery, capitalism, and nationalism. Part III focuses on the United States, as the ‘world’s largest purveyor of state violence’ (p. 3) by way of border militarisation and the expansion of its prison system. The contributors in Part IV focus on Arizona’s anti-immigrant legislation and its influence on the rest of the country. Parts V and VI provide detailed examples of local struggles and the intricate negotiations required when theory meets practise. The three articles reviewed herein, authored by [Joseph Nevins](#), Jenna M. Loyd and [Ruth Wilson Gilmore](#), and [Joshua M. Price](#), focus on the global perspective, the scholar-activist dichotomy, and on-the-ground organising, respectively.

Global apartheid is a major theme throughout the book and Nevins's article compliments it by documenting the violent effects of nation-states shoring up nationalist support using vitriolic anti-immigrant rhetoric. He begins with the fatal anti-immigrant pogroms in 2008 that took place in South Africa. In Malaysia, continues Nevins, civilian militias like Rela operate with government support to 'hunt down' unauthorised migrants from Bangladesh, Burma, India, Nepal, and Vietnam. He goes on to describe labour conditions in the United Arab Emirates where the flashy opulence conceals rampant labour-rights abuses, such as deceitful labour contractors who lure workers into debt thus entrapping them into bonded labour in a foreign country.

While apartheid may sound like an inappropriate term due to its geopolitical specificity, Nevins aptly points out that such conditions can be analysed on a global scale due to the similarities in the racist, classist, and nationalist rhetoric governments deploy to delimit humans' ability to move. He advocates for the elimination of mobility restrictions and 'formal geopolitical rights for all' which will 'create the space to struggle for far greater levels of socioeconomic justice' (p. 25). And though one can lament the scarcity in detail in the examples, Nevins packs a pithy argument that takes seriously the inequalities induced by the uneven organisation of capital across geographic divides.

Loyd's piece is an interview with Gilmore, a long time anti-prison activist and scholar who co-founded [Critical Resistance](#). Critical Resistance is a US grassroots organisation working to dismantle the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC). The PIC is a term that points to structural interconnections between courts, prisons, capital, industry, and the state, which work in concert in a complex system that criminalises working class, people of colour, and undocumented migrants. Gilmore points out that the PIC is growing at staggering rates that 'one out of one hundred' adults is incarcerated right now in the United States (p. 43). These rates are fuelled by privatisation, which include the incentivising of communities to build or expand jails in their counties so that the government has a place to cage detained migrants.

Different moments of brilliance pour forth in this interview including the connections Gilmore makes between the expansion of prisons and the busting of unions, which can be traced back to the late 1970s, especially in California. Another important point Gilmore makes is the possibilities for coalitions between anti-prison and environmental justice organisations, like in California's Central Valley where groups worked together to have safe working conditions free of toxicity, regardless of the workers' legal status. In his article, Price offers another example of coalition building possibilities, which highlights key moments of a community-led effort to advocate for people held in county jail in Binghamton, New York. Price focuses on local jails because they signal the PIC's 'convergence between militarization, immigration policy, penal policy, and multiple economic dislocations' (p. 241). As a 'deindustrialized working-class town', Binghamton is contracted by the federal government to hold migrants in local facilities. Price set out to document health care abuse in Broome County jail. This effort became a collaborative project consisting of people with different goals and ideologies ranging from legal or pragmatic to radical abolitionists. In a key moment during this project, which lasted from 2004 to 2007, Price notes the sheriff relishes in the *business* of prisons, never mind law-and-order as a justification for expanding their jail.

Price posits two important conclusions to be drawn from his experience. The first is the notion that the focus on a local jail kept the participants in tune with the lifeblood of the town. The single-issue focus can, however, lead to solipsistic organising instead of engaging broader structural issues. The former gives way to the 'divide and conquer' imperialist strategy; the latter ostensibly means coalitional thought and practise are important. The second piece of wisdom Price shares is that there is an inevitable tension that exists between what Gilmore calls the 'reform v. revolution' debate in which some group members will advocate working *against* and other advocate working *with* government entities. Price encourages moving beyond 'provincialism', or the idea that a local struggle, especially in relation to walls and cages, is unique to a specific locality. Though Price's point is well taken, one can also argue that 'provincialism' is a problematic metaphor notably because it reiterates colonialist and imperialist histories where the provincial or the rural is made abject through discourse.

Abolitionist praxis is utopic in that it works for a future where the need for mass incarceration and the corresponding bordering practises are eradicated. The overall message this book sends is that such a future and the work required is already active, diverse, and critically informed. One should hope similar work continues in academic and activist circles and that these interconnections are examined thoroughly outside a US-centred context. In conclusion, *Beyond Walls and Borders* is a resounding 'must-read' for any activist, scholar, or those straddling worlds between.

---

**Ulises Moreno-Tabarez** is a recipient of the LSE PhD Scholarship (2012-2015). He holds a B.A. and M.A. degree in Communication Studies with emphasis on performance, rhetoric, and social change from California State University, Los Angeles (CSULA). His previous research focused on issues of representation of migratory bodies/texts in the Mexico/US borderlands. Shifting geographies, his current research project looks at the role of official holidays on mobilities in Beijing, China. His doctoral project seeks to produce interactional and collaborative "mappings" of the ways in which cityscapes expand and contract as a consequence of state-sanctioned temporalities. [Read more reviews by Ulises.](#)

