

Borders as the cause of crisis?

British Columbia writer explores history of country borders

Maybe you've seen world maps that put north at the bottom and south at the top. For those of us who have grown up in the U.S. during this blip in time when the country is a dominant world power, such maps can challenge our perceptions.

Similarly, a new book, "Border & Rule," also turns the world on its head — possibly along with our ingrained notions. The book's author is Harsha Walia, an immigrant rights organizer in Canada who lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.

"Border & Rule" is about world geography, and economic, political and social systems around the globe. These systems have developed over time, both theoretical and practical frameworks that have been codified into laws. These laws impact — and sometimes determine — a broad range of humanity's daily activities: where we live, how we gain access to water and food, how we educate children, what medical services are available to us and how we treat one another.

Walia considers all of this through the lens of migrant and refugee crises that are happening worldwide. She covers massive displacements and global migrations — the Rohingya from Burma to Bangladesh; Africans to Europe and Australia; Central Americans and Mexicans to the U.S.; Asian migrant workers to the oil-rich Gulf states — at the feet of "systems of power that create migrants yet criminalize migration." This, she says, is capitalism.

Walia asserts that having borders "simultaneously monetized and militarized —

This Week's Book

'Border & Rule' by Harsha Walia

Haymarket Books — 320 pp — \$19.95

open to capital but closed to people" is no accident. In a capitalist system, migrant worker programs are "carceral regimes" where workers have limited rights and are expected to work for substandard pay.

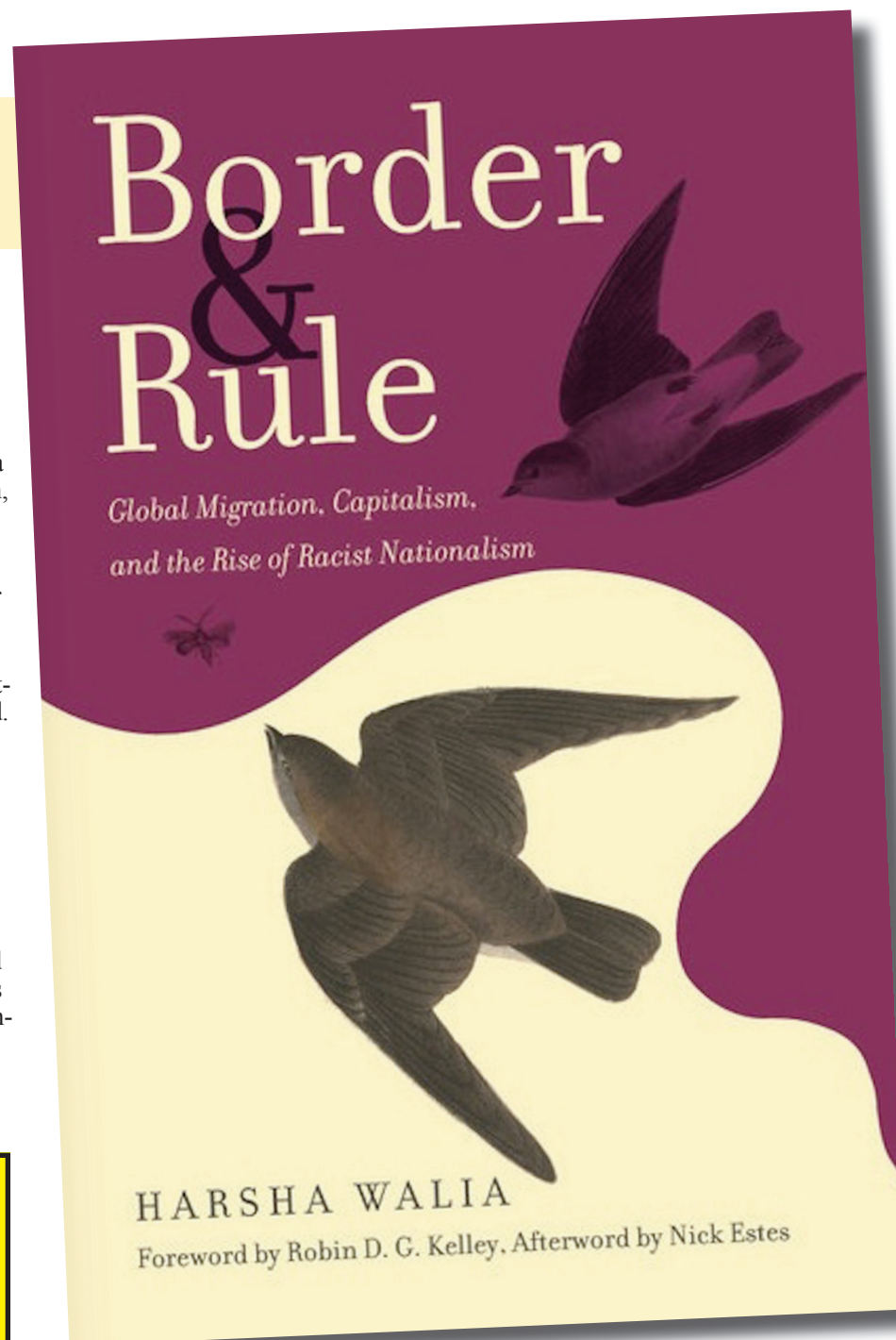
This situation didn't happen overnight. Walia traces how this is a consequence of a long history of violent territorial expansion, which often had race-based implications, including the elimination or subjugation of native populations and in some cases — such as the U.S. — the prolonged use of enslaved labor.

Walia ties these histories to the rise of racist-based nationalism, which is manifesting in different forms throughout the world.

Climate change is a new and exacerbating factor in this ongoing story of dangerous inequality and destabilized populations. From sea level rise to increasingly extreme weather events, unprecedented numbers of people are forced to abandon their homelands.

"Decarbonizing would necessarily require demilitarization, decarceration, and decolonization because the climate crisis is a symptom and not the cause of our existential crisis," Walia writes.

Lay readers may find the language in Walia's vigorous critique to bog down



sometimes into verbose anti-capitalist rhetoric but "Border & Rule" offers many provocative views worth serious consideration. Still, it's interesting that in this far-ranging analysis, China and Russia get a pass. Granted, they are decidedly not paragons of capitalism, which is one of the targets of Walia's argument. But in any dis-

cussion about the problems of borders, rules and labor, how can these two aggressive players on the world stage be overlooked?

The BookMonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlinc.com

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