

(B)ordering Britain: Law, Race and Empire by Nadine El-Enany

By Georgie Wemyss

When David Lammy MP tells parliament that the Windrush scandal is inextricably linked to Britain's role in the enslavement of Africans or when he tweets that the government's hostile environment reforms are a "colonial hangover" of legislation that "abused and violated black British citizens", anonymous Britons bombard him with vile letters and tweets. At this point sections of the mainstream media and twitterati may call out the racism of the tweeters but what they don't do is fill the gaps that would explain that the Windrush scandal is only one visible outcome of immigration laws that are a continuation of the British Empire.

Through drawing together critical legal studies and postcolonial scholarship, Nadine El-Enany systematically maps out how the law has been put to work in both bordering and racially ordering Britain over centuries of colonial expansion. Viewing Britain and its colonies together, *(B)ordering Britain* details how past and present laws result in the spoils of British colonial power being located within the borders of Britain, evidenced by infrastructure, welfare provision and future opportunities for citizens. Immigration legislation ensures that these assets are increasingly inaccessible to most descendants of Britain's colonial subjects. The author cites legal cases and contextualises successive immigration and nationality acts to show how the borders that are created and policed via immigration laws maintain a global racialized order that was established by colonisation.

Post-Brexit government announcements about the UK introducing a so-called Australian "points-based system" echo early immigration legislation. The 1905 Alien's Act grew out of laws that governed the movement of British subjects within the Empire. In a series of examples from different times and colonial spaces El-Enany exposes the deceit through which intentionally discriminatory legislation is made to appear race-neutral. In 1897 The government of the British colony of Natal passed legislation that required entrants to have £25 and knowledge of a European language. An English-speaking Indian who was the target of the control could be "presented with a form in German" to ensure their exclusion. In 1947 the Home Secretary stated that the planned labour voucher scheme "can be presented as making no distinction on grounds of race or colour ...its restrictive effect is intended to and would operate on coloured people almost exclusively".

(B)ordering Britain details how ignoring historical injustices has led to the depoliticising of refugee debates and reminds us that about EU integration being built on inequalities created by European empires. However, in tackling a subject so consistently ignored it cannot cover all histories of exclusionary colonial legislation. Missing is detail of maritime laws that prevented the settlement of working-class Indian seafarers in Britain and its white settler colonies. Their invisibility in British history-telling stokes common understandings that south Asian communities are 'recent arrivals', low down a mythological hierarchy of belonging. For them "jumping ship" to escape the exploitative conditions on board was an act of resistance as they crossed the border to enter Britain illegally. El-Enany concludes that contemporary irregular migrations from the Global South should be viewed as similar acts of "anti-colonial resistance" against a Britain that looks like an island soaked in imperial

nostalgia but whose violent Empire legacies continue to be experienced across the world.

Georgie Wemyss is senior lecturer in sociology at the University of East London. She is the author of *The Invisible Empire: White Discourse, Tolerance and Belonging* (2009) and co-author with Nira Yuval-Davis and Kathryn Cassidy of *Bordering* (2019).