

# Chaar López's The Cybernetic Border: Drones, Technology, and Intrusion

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## Book Review

**Review of Chaar López, Iván. 2024. *The Cybernetic Border: Drones, Technology, and Intrusion*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.**

248 pp. US\$26.95. Paperback. ISBN: 9781478030034.

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Iván Chaar López's *The Cybernetic Border: Drones, Technology, and Intrusion* (2024) focuses on not only the technology of borders but also the cultural and racialized logics that are enacted through the implementation of these technologies. Chaar López works to historicize the US border patrol communication and practices that are used to uphold settler colonial structures and have created narratives of "intruders" and, consequently, a cybernetic border to keep these "criminal intruders" out of the US. The book sets out to track how border enforcement relies on the creation and identification of threat in creating and maintaining the nation. The main argument is focused on how the cybernetic border is central to this objective and marks a shift in how we discuss borders. The author describes the cybernetic border as "a regime centered on data capture, processing, and circulation in the production and control of the boundaries of the nation" through the use of "smart walls, virtual walls, and smart fences" (3). Ultimately, Iván Chaar López, an Assistant Professor at The University of Texas at Austin, successfully expands discussions on the racialized logic used in border technologies. The author argues that, along with the use of racialized border technologies, there is a simultaneous creation and sustainment of border narratives depicting foreigners, intruders, and criminalized "others" that then need to be surveilled and policed. *The Cybernetic Border* will be helpful for anyone thinking through borderlands, border technologies, and the use of racialized logic to create and sustain borders and border enforcement.

Chaar López writes, "The matter of 'the border' is as much a technological question as it is a cultural one" (1). The book links these two approaches—cultural and technological—to thinking through borders, and throughout, Chaar López argues that race is not only used as a technology of distinction, but it is subsequently these racial ideas that are used to control and enforce border logics of incarceration and detention. The linking of these foci lends a unique perspective on borders and border technology that is essential to anyone thinking through borders, citizenship, and race.

The book opens with an overview of how governments use different military, defense, and border technologies to gain control of the borderlands. It does so by analyzing corporate and government records, promotional documents and films, technical reports, news reporting, and surveillance footage for how they constitute the border and the people that are subjected by them. The start of the book is dedicated to tracing different biopolitical theories, such as social death, racialized assemblages, and Frontier biopolitical scripts,

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and linking them to ideas of sovereignty and borders as a way to enact this sovereignty. The book follows up by tracing how different people are deemed “intruders” and how the electronic fence was used by Border Patrol in managing these targets. The author continues by outlining how the border is a networked platform and how “smart borders” were created, historicizing and marking a shift in border technology and how we view borders. This concept of a cybernetic border is then built upon to describe how it is used as a set of enforcement technologies that give the Border Patrol plausible deniability by shifting blame to the technologies and the borderlands themselves for claiming lives. The book finishes by tracing how activists and artists challenge the subjectifying cybernetic border and the racialized violence enacted through border logics.

One highlight of this text is the focus on smart border and border technologies as a way to divert blame for the deaths of border crossers. It showcases Iván Chaar López’s ability to think through border technology and link it to racialized violence. With three chapters dedicated to how governments gain control of the borderlands and the final chapter dedicated to activists and artists challenging this control, I could not help but desire more content on resilience. Although the objective of the text was not focused on this, the last chapter felt like an introduction to a second text that would think through resilience and opposition to the control of the borderlands. Readers interested in borders, technology, and race can pick up where this book leaves off and build on Iván Chaar López’s contributions. Overall, this text is a significant contribution to the research on borders, border technologies, and racialized violence.