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Teichopolitics: Re-considering Globalisation Through the Role of Walls and Fences

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This article considers the trend in many countries towards securitised immigration policies and “hardening” of borders through the construction of walls or fences. In contrast the borderless world of globalisation, it identifies these attempts to strengthen control of borders as teichopolitics: the politics of building barriers. This article analyses the different types of hardened borders that exist today and proposes a typology of frontlines, fences/walls, and closed straights. Then the article maps the locations of these barriers and argues that although other justifications ranging from smuggling to terrorism are often put forward, these barriers are mostly connected with managing immigration flows. Indeed, many of these barriers are located on important economic or social discontinuity lines, precisely where the system reveals its underlying logics. These walls and fences symbolise the emergence of a privileged few who actually live the promise of globalisation and defend its privileges through teichopolitics.

INTRODUCTION

The events of the first decade of the new millennium upended two common assumptions about the process of globalisation: first that it generates a “borderless world” where walls and fences would become increasingly anachronistic and second that it promotes the free flow of capital, goods, and people around the world.¹ From the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 to

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violence of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, borders were mainly studied through the prism of globalisation. According to many of these theorists, the most important facts were the disappearance of borders and the retreat of the state as it was replaced with new regional and global political, social, and economic configurations.² During the 1990s, borders were studied as a laboratory of globalisation and mostly considered as a remainder of an old territoriality even if, as Newman and Paasi (1998) sagely put it, “not all authors agree with ideas that suggest the disappearance of boundaries”.³

This view, of course, was proven correct. Far from the optimistic representations of many scholars, the contemporary world is characterised by the increasing enclosure of territories *between* sovereign states through the construction of walls and fences on international borders and *within* sovereign states through the development of various methods of sustaining inequality such as gated communities. Even beyond the construction of physical barriers, this reality is underlined through new restrictive immigration laws that have been put in place around the world from Italy to the United States.⁴ Rather than welcoming flows of people, these symbolic and physical barriers institutionalise privilege through legal exclusions and the blunt force of barriers.⁵

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 totally changed the academic landscape as well, and the process of “opening” of borders turned, more or less, to a process of “hardening” of borders.⁶ “Hardening” refers to building any kind of closure system – we consider here the word “barrier” as a neutral term (even if no word is intrinsically neutral), including all kind of walls or fences – to prevent undesired entrance or immigration flows. Hardening does not mean completely closing, but rather the attempt to control all cross-border movements and to direct them to appropriate check-points. This hardening process generates an asymmetric space; “asymmetric because of the power to decide upon the separation, which is monopolised by the most powerful party, while the other becomes *de facto* separated”.⁷ This hardening attempts to filter out bodies and goods that are marked in some way as unacceptable through new systems that give priority access to preferred travellers. These increasingly sophisticated biometric systems utilise the data on millions of cross-border movements to identify an unusual pattern that signals an unwanted flow.⁸ However, the securitisation of airports, check-points, and passport systems relies first on the attempted closure of the vast stretch of border in between these sanctioned crossing points.⁹

The contemporary world is now characterised by the massive development of barriers on international borders. The total length of such systems is variously calculated and not precisely known, as such information is often considered secret to protect national security. The French geographer Michel Foucher estimated that roughly 18,000 km (11,184 miles) of the world’s terrestrial borders were actually “closed” by walls or barriers. This figure matches the 20,000 km estimated by the scholars of the *Chaire Raoul*

Dandurand of the University of Québec in Montréal.¹⁰ Following a different method of calculation, Ballif and Rosière estimated the total of 41,000 km of terrestrial “closed borders” (including marches, frontlines, fences and walls actually built up, or in the planning stage – which of course increases the total length of ‘barriers’).¹¹ Hassner and Wittenberg point out the immediacy of these changes by calculating that “three quarters of all post-World War II barriers were initiated after 2000”.¹² (See Figure 1.)

In order to conceptualise this new paradigm of long stretches of closed borders and the hardening of crossing points this article introduces the term *teichopolitics*. This neologism, coined by Ballif and Rosière (2009), is linked to notions of biopolitics and biopower proposed by the French philosopher Michel Foucault. These connected notions refer mainly to the practice of modern states and their regulation of individual lives and populations through “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations.”¹³ In the case of teichopolitics, biopower is manifested in the denial of the right to move although this right is proclaimed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹⁴

The word teichopolitics is coined from the ancient Greek word $\tau\epsilon\iota\chi\omicron\varsigma$ (*teichos*) meaning “city wall”. Teichopolitics is, in short, the politics of building barriers on borders for various security purposes. The next section

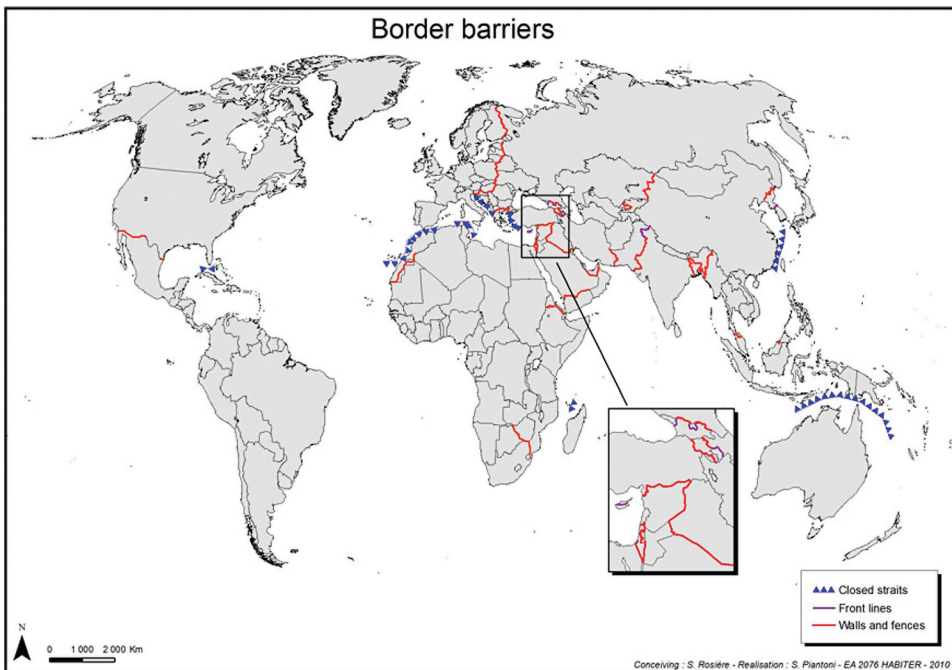


FIGURE 1 Border barriers: A world map (color figure available online).

Source: Habiter laboratory, 2010.

of this article expands on the concept of teichopolitics by focusing on the global trend towards hardened borders. We emphasise, however, that there are various degrees of “closed” and different methods for attempting this closure. Not only do we identify walls and fences on territorial borders, as Hassner and Wittenberg (2009) do, but also expand the analysis to include other types of hardening and other sites of bordering including coastlines. In order to conceptualise the multiple landscapes and methods of border securitisations employed in teichopolitics, we propose a typology of Frontlines, Fences and Walls, and Closed Straights. The second half of the article analyses where these new barriers are located and it finds a strong correlation between the logics of teichopolitics and the protection of privilege. Each new barrier is constructed on a border that is meant to differentiate between two different spaces of economic, cultural, or political privilege. Most examples of teichopolitics reflect an asymmetrical situation: a strong wealth discontinuity. Therefore, teichopolitics is best understood as the antithesis of the borderless world of globalisation. As barriers are put up, both symbolically and literally, they institutionalise and expand inequality at a regional and global scale.

THE EMERGENCE OF TEICHOPOLITICS

The most efficient means for demonstrating authority and establishing control over an area is through the use of boundaries.¹⁵ The key innovation that resulted in the emergence of the sovereign state system was the simple idea of mutually recognising boundaries between separate territories and this idea of bounded territorial states remains the cornerstone of the contemporary state system (i.e., the ‘Westphalian’ order).¹⁶ However, the precise role these boundaries have played has changed fundamentally over the past three hundred years from defensive military lines to markers of sovereignty to enclosures of privilege.

Initially most boundaries were military lines that marked the extent of a defended territory. Prior to the modern era, it was not yet possible to map large territories and the Westphalian notion of the mutual recognition of sovereignty had not been adopted. Instead, barriers were primarily constructed at strategic sites to prevent the forward movement of an opposing army. The use of barriers for military purposes is evident in the Great Wall of China or the city walls of European cities in the medieval period. However, these were only isolated uses that were not part of a larger system of organising the space of the world into bounded political territories.

As the state system of mutually recognised territories developed over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the military significance of political borders waned as they became lines that increasingly marked the distinct

spaces of legal sovereignty. The establishment of the United Nations after World War II played a crucial role in this transition because the UN charter obligates all member states to refrain from expansionary wars and to recognise, and pledge to uphold, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of every other member.¹⁷ In practice, the recognition of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other member states institutionalises the current political map. Once each state recognises the authority of other states in their defined territories, the threat of an invasion wanes, and borders are no longer militarily significant. Instead, borders play a larger role in defining the internal system of laws and economic regulations that differentiate neighbouring states. Rather than an army or a wall at the border to prevent an invasion, during this era, a passport and visa regime emerged to classify people within the system of nations.¹⁸ The border seemed to be a remnant of an old age that financial and economical flows were supposedly erasing. The creation of the World Trade Organization in 1995 symbolised this aim and the spatial dynamic of economic integration taking roots into the Bretton Woods system.

The period of relative stability in the state system, ushered in by the UN and the mutual recognition of sovereignty and territorial integrity, also resulted in a dramatic rise in global economic inequality. Baldwin et al. estimate that at the end of the nineteenth century, the wealthiest countries were 900 percent wealthier than the poorest, by the end of the twentieth century it was 4,500 percent.¹⁹ This inequality, coupled with the increasing awareness globally of how others live, has produced a new wave of migrations all over the world including national flows (for example the 200 to 300 million internal clandestine migrant workers moving from rural areas to main cities in P.R. of China) and international flows across borders. The mechanical effect of these migrations brings migrants to places with more wealth, higher wages, and better services. In this era, the purpose of borders has shifted again to become a site where privilege is protected and undesirable movements are prevented. Indeed most of the new borders barriers are erected to fight against illegal migrations, even if this dimension is often mixed with other concerns such as terrorism and security. Mass migration continued to grow despite policy restrictions. The total number of international migrants has increased over the last ten years from an estimated 150 million in 2000 to 214 million persons in 2008 (3.1 percent of the world population),²⁰ and the basic hypothesis of this article is that contemporary teichopolitics is primarily linked with controlling migrations.

The use of walls against migration is not new: China's Great Wall and the Roman Empire's *Limes* were both military and anti-immigration systems. In the modern era, the Soviet bloc tried to retain its citizens through the construction of walls (in Europe: the 'Iron Curtain' after 1945 and Berlin Wall in August 1961). As this system failed in 1989, the world expected the end of most barriers. Nevertheless, in the 1990s the US began construction of a

discontinuous barrier on short sections of the Mexico border.²¹ The purpose was not to prevent people from leaving the US (as with the Soviet Bloc barriers), but rather to prevent foreigners from entering the territory. This structural difference was often underlined to justify why the barriers erected by Western countries were very different from Soviet “walls.” Nevertheless, the control of migration/movement remains a strong common point between these barriers.

In the past decade, the dual fear of migration and terrorism often justifies the new attention to security at the border. For example, after the 11 September attacks in the US and a series of bombings in India, the Indian government accelerated the construction of a barrier on the Bangladesh boundary.²² Curiously, terrestrial borders are hardened after these events even though the link between the terrestrial border and terrorist attacks seems weak or nonexistent. In many of the cases the perpetrators came through ports of entry and with valid documents. Nevertheless, these security concerns resulted in the construction many new barriers worldwide (Table 1).

Although advocates of border security in many countries tend to describe past borders as being predominately closed, with today’s open borders as the exception, the opposite is more accurate. In previous eras it was never necessary to have a completely closed border. Indeed, in 2012 we estimate that fully 13.2 percent of the world’s borders are marked with a barrier of some kind (32,891 km of 248,000 km).²³

TYPOLGY OF BORDER BARRIERS

Teichopolitics is not simply about building walls or fences. Instead, it encompasses the whole range of barriers that limit the movement of people and goods across borders including administrative measures and military installations which often support the barriers. Here we consider four types of border closure, which together capture the broader trend towards securitised borders.

Frontline

The first type of closure border refers back to the older military purpose of boundaries and is characterised by the existence of an empty space (no man’s land [*sic*]) separating two zones of military installations. This type of border closure has become increasingly rare as the vast majority of states have been integrated into the sovereign state system and have joined the UN which condemns the use of force in bilateral relations.²⁴ Most of the contemporary frontlines were primarily erected during the Cold War period and have been in place for many years. They often mark a disputed area

TABLE 1 World border barriers: Location, length and typology (all lengths in kilometres)

Country 1	Country 2	Walls-fences	Front lines
World Border Barriers (alphabetically, with name of decision-maker first)			
Abkhazia	Georgia		80
Botswana	Zimbabwe	813	
Brunei	Malaysia	21	
China	North Korea	1416	
Cyprus (green line)			180
Ethiopia	Eretria		912
European Union (Schengen area)	Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova	4278	
Greece	Turkey	206	
India	Bangladesh	4053	
India	Pakistan (Line of Control)		740
India	Pakistan (without LOC)	2172	
Iraq (US administration)	Jordan	238	
Iraq (US administration)	Syria	605	
Iran	Pakistan	909	
Israel	West Bank	785	
Israel	Gaza strip	51	
Israel	Egypt	266	
Israel	Jordan	238	
Israel	Lebanon	79	
Israel	Syria		76
Karabakh	Azerbaijan		220
Kazakhstan	China	1533	
Korean DMZ			239
Kuwait	Iraq	240	
Morocco 'sand wall'			2720
Russia	North Korea	19	
Saudi Arabia	Iraq	814	
Saudi Arabia	UAE	457	
Saudi Arabia	Yemen	1458	
South Africa	Mozambique	491	
South Africa	Zimbabwe	225	
South Ossetia	Georgia		100
Spain	Morocco	17	
Syria	Turkey	818	
Thailand	Malaysia	506	
Turkey	Armenia	267	
United Arab Emirates (UAE)	Oman	410	
United States	Mexico	3140	
Uzbekistan	Kyrgyzstan	1099	
subtotal		27624	5267
total			32 891
%		83.9	13.1

where two states continue to claim territory on the other side and a peace treaty has not yet been negotiated (Korea, Cyprus, Israel/Palestine, Kashmir). The longest example of a frontline is in Western Sahara where Morocco built 2,700 km of fortified sand walls, which represent 51.6 percent of existing frontline on Earth. Nevertheless, frontlines still represent roughly 13 percent of hardened borders in the world (Figure 2).

TYPE	FENCE	WALL	FRONT	CLOSED STRAITS
Spatial organisation				
Barrier Morphology	Fence	Wall	No man's land and front lines	Sea
Cross-border relations	Low to high	Low to high	Null (or low)	Low to high
Examples	Kazakhstan / China	USA / Mexico	Kashmir (India/Pakistan)	Gibraltar (Marocco/Spain)

Legend :

- International boundary
- Fence
- Wall
- Synapse / gate road

- Low density region
- No man's land / Sea
- Military settlement
- Town
- Flows

Realisation : S. Rosière
Cartography : . Piantoni - 2009

FIGURE 2 Types of border-barriers.

In addition to the demilitarised zone that separates the two Koreas, the other prominent remaining example of a frontline is the *Line of Control* (LOC) that runs through the mountains of Kashmir between Pakistan and India.²⁵ When the British partitioned South Asia and created the new states of India and Pakistan in 1947, they allowed Princely States, which technically had sovereignty over their territory, to decide which country they wanted to join. The princely state of Kashmir had a majority Muslim population and was expected to join Pakistan. However, the Maharajah was Hindu, and after determining that independence was impossible, opted to join India. Immediately the armies of both India and Pakistan entered Kashmir to gain control over the territory. The Line of Control marks the frontlines where the armies met. Despite the imposing terrain (which includes the highest battlefield in the world on the Siachen Glacier at over 6,400 metres above sea level) neither country is willing to make a territorial concession, and the Line of Control has remained militarised ever since. Despite being

an unrecognised boundary, the frontline is well fortified including 550 km (340 mi) of double-row fencing on the Indian side.

Fences and Walls

The second and third types of barriers are fences and walls, which are the most emblematic artifacts of teichopolitics. Despite the stigma associated with building walls after the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, since 2000 many countries around the world have initiated or expanded these barriers (Figure 1 and Table 1). In most cases, the barriers had been under consideration for some time and the underlying cause was often immigration, smuggling, or defining the state's population or territory. However, the overt justifications often revolve around the immediate threat open borders pose in terms of terrorism and security.²⁶ In total, fences and walls represent roughly 87 percent of contemporary terrestrial border barriers.

Although similar in their spatial organisation (Figure 2), there are some important differences to consider between fences and walls. Semantically, the term wall has a pronounced negative connotation while the word fence, in relation to wall, is much more positive. The term wall suggests total closure and echoes the Berlin Wall (August 1961– November 1989) and dictatorship while the term fence evokes notions of agriculture or even the white picket fences of suburbia that produce 'good neighbors' as Robert Frost wrote facetiously in *Mending Wall*. Consequently, simply analysing the language used to describe a particular project can demonstrate the speakers view on it. For example, in Israel the West Bank barrier is referred to as the 'security fence' or the 'anti-terror fence', while in the West Bank it is the 'wall' or the 'Apartheid wall'.

On a more material or technical level, the difference between fence and walls suggest different costs, purposes, and perceived effectiveness. Fences sound more temporary as they can be erected quickly, they do not completely block the vision of the other side, and are less expensive. Walls seem more finalised, eliminate the line of sight across the border (and the danger of snipers), and are more expensive. Fences characterise many underdeveloped countries' barriers (Botswana/Zimbabwe for instance) while walls are currently more likely to be erected in developed countries. One kilometre of the Israeli barrier along West Bank costs around \$2 million to construct. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the 500 km long (in 2004) 2.4 m high 220-volt electrified fence on the Botswana/Zimbabwe border resembles a fence at the edge of pasture more than an international border.²⁷ In total, it cost \$3.14 million (in 2004)²⁸ or about \$6,330 per kilometre. This is approximately 316 times cheaper than the high-tech Israeli barrier.²⁹ Many countries compensate for the lack of high-tech means by an overinvestment in troops. India is an example of this, with its enormous Border Security Forces which number 240,000 men and women divided in 186 battalions.³⁰

However, even these distinctions in terms of efficiency are becoming less clear. The role of technology is increasingly important in border barriers as concrete or wire elements are only the visible part of a broader system.³¹ These barriers include fixed radars, ground sensors, remote control cameras and software linking border agents to control towers. One of the more costly programmes ever launched is the Saudi Arabian border barrier system with Iraq at an estimated cost of \$3 billion.³² It is an example of a recently constructed fence that is much more sophisticated with multiple layers of barbed wire, roads to facilitate the movement of border guards, and various high-tech devices that sense movement in the area. These technologies result in the efficiency of the fence increasingly being comparable to a wall.

A strong literature already exist about these “smart borders,” the aim of which is to be as efficient as possible in terms of control and as quick as possible in terms of waiting (time to wait to cross the border). Louise Amoore proposed the concept of the

biometric border . . . in order to signal a dual-faced phenomenon in the contemporary war on terror: the turn to scientific technologies and managerial expertise in the politics of border management; and the exercise of biopower such that the bodies of migrants and travelers themselves become sites of multiple encoded boundaries.³³

These high-tech barriers including biometric control systems at the checkpoints that symbolise the cost some countries are ready to pay for security – if the efficiency of the ‘virtual’ fence is effective.³⁴ Furthermore, their visibility in the landscape plays a symbolic role and participates in reaffirming the power of the state and its old, but still strong, territoriality. The border barrier is indeed a typical form of the hard power that is increasingly a good way for politicians to gain support and they consequently represent a growing market for international security companies.

The US-Mexico border barrier exemplifies the new logics of teichopolitics. Prior to 2000, only a few kilometres of the 3,169-km border was fenced, but there was a growing discussion of how to manage the large volume of people and goods that crossed the border illegally every year.³⁵ After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the management of illegal migration and drug trafficking was paired with the security threat of terrorism to produce a deep rethinking of the border policy.³⁶ After 11 September, the US PATRIOT Act in 2001, and later the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act (HR 3525) in 2002, gave a prominent role to border security in both the incipient war against terrorism and the ongoing struggle against illegal immigration. In 2005, the Department of Homeland Security established the Secure Border Initiative (SBI), a comprehensive multi-year plan to secure America’s borders. The mission of SBI “is to lead the operational requirements support and documentation as well as the acquisition efforts

to develop, deploy, and integrate technology and tactical infrastructure . . . to gain and maintain effective control of U.S. land border areas".³⁷

The Secure Fence Act, enacted on 26 October 2006, symbolises this political trend. This act, which passed both the US House of Representatives and Senate with bipartisan support including then Senators Joe Biden, Hilary Clinton, and Barack Obama, partially funds the "possible" construction of a 1,125-km barrier along the Mexican border. It was nevertheless rapidly constructed, and as of January 2010, 80 percent of the fence project was complete. The barrier varies in different landscapes with many sections consisting of a fence that is 6.5 m tall (21 feet) and 1.8 m (6 feet) deep in the ground, cemented in a 0.9 m (3 foot) wide trench with concrete. In addition to physical barriers, the US also experimented with a virtual fence. In 2006, after the vote of the Secure Fence Act, the Boeing Company was chosen by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to build the virtual fence in a contract projected to be worth more than \$2 billion. Boeing set up a consortium with various partners including Kollsman Incorporated, the American-based subsidiary of Elbit Systems Ltd., based in Haifa, which is the largest non-governmental defence company in Israel and which had worked extensively on the Israeli barrier. Despite the substantial funding, the virtual fence failed many early tests and, at present, has been put on hold.³⁸ The result is a massive security project on the US-Mexico border, but nevertheless, still two-thirds of the border is unfenced, which raises continued questions about the feasibility of completely securing such a long border through difficult terrain.

Closed Straights

The final type of border barrier is the closed (or hardened) maritime strait. This kind of barrier is often forgotten by scholars but is very important for the purpose of controlling undesired migration flows. Straits are hardened if they coincide with strong wealth or political discontinuities (developed/less developed countries or free country/dictatorship) and are characterised by important undesired immigration flows. Examples include the Strait of Florida between the West Indies and the USA, the Gibraltar strait between North Africa and the EU or the Arafura and Timor seas between Indonesia and Australia). Such straits consist of a virtual fence implemented on the immigration side (the wealthy coast) and are organised around control towers to which various alarm systems, satellite, radar, and airplane reconnaissance are connected. These systems aim to detect the arrival of unauthorised boats and allow police vessels to be deployed to intercept them before they make landfall.

One of the best examples of an increasingly 'closed' straight is the Mediterranean Sea, particularly at the strait of Gibraltar. The Spanish system of coastal surveillance called *Sistema Integrado de Vigilancia Exterior*

(SIVE) – “integrated system of external alert” – was launched in 1999 for the purpose of detection, identification, tracing and interception of illegal migrants and it is today one of the more ambitious ‘liquid walls’ existing in the world, which is placed under the supervisory control of the European FRONTEX agency. This surveillance system, originally only deployed in the strait of Gibraltar, aspires to prevent all illegal migration from Africa. To be more efficient, it was extended to include the entire southern Spanish coastline from Portugal to Almeria.³⁹ Implemented in Algeciras in 2002, the SIVE was extended from that time to Tarifa and Malaga and to the Canaries (Fuerteventura and Lanzarote) in 2003, Cadiz and Huelva (2004), Ceuta and Melilla (2005) and Almeria (2005). Further expansion of SIVE to the Baleares and Valencia regions is already planned (the decision was to be made in 2009 but the harsh financial situation of Spain obliged it to postpone the scheduled plan). In spite of financial difficulties, if such a trend goes on the SIVE could include all Mediterranean Spanish littoral (and even all of the European Mediterranean coast) in the future.

The SIVE system is already efficient enough to push away the illegal migratory routes, which results in a logic of bypass and which increases death rates among immigrants, a result similar to the US-Mexico border where immigrants are forced to cross increasingly harsh and dangerous sections of the border.⁴⁰ As the French scholar Guillaume Le Boedec showed, after the erection of the SIVE system, the Gibraltar route was cut and a decline of total arrests on the Gibraltar Strait is discernible after 2000 (but stabilised after 2004). But the number of arrests increased in the Canary Islands and more peripheral sites as a consequence.⁴¹ Rather than preventing immigration, the closed straits pushed immigration to maritime routes that are longer and potentially more lethal.

A STRICT HIERARCHY OF FLOWS

Mobility is an increasingly paradoxical dimension of our societies. Communication and trade implicate flows, and flows are not only an aspect of globalisation but the *sine qua none* of its existence. They are supposed to reveal the dynamism of the global economy and signify the transnational age. Transnational corporations rely heavily on these connections and international organisations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) promote global trade by easing the movement of particular types of goods and people. At the same time, global flows remain the nightmare of governments, administrations, and security agencies, as the expansion of the world economy produces extreme imbalances of power and wealth. The border barriers of teichopolitics are therefore instructive because they demonstrate that all mobilities and flows are not valued, but rather that globalisation implies a strict hierarchy of flows which can easily be sketched. Financial

flows and raw material are always welcome; finished products are unevenly welcome (depending on how these produces compete with national ones); and human beings are very unevenly welcome (the ‘brain drain’ focuses on the attractiveness of qualified persons while poor unskilled workers are nowhere welcome). This (simplified) hierarchy implies a selection of flows and specifically a selection of individuals at border checkpoints.

As Van Schendel and Abraham argue, the effort to regulate and define practices at the border “constructs conceptual barriers between illicit bad-guy activity (trafficking, smuggling) and state-authorized good guy activities (trade, migration) that obscure how these are often part of a single spectrum.”⁴² Despite the continued rhetoric of connections through globalisation, the evidence suggests that only a few types of flows are sanctioned and promoted. Matthew Sparke argues that increasingly the right to move is now in fact reserved for a “privileged business class civil citizenship” living in the Global North.⁴³ This privileged class is allowed to travel wherever it wishes when the huge majority of the world’s population remains in poorer countries – and are expected to remain there.

The barriers of teichopolitics, therefore, attempt to gain control over these other potentially unregulated movement of goods and people across the border. Smuggled goods can include items that are illegal in one or both states, such as drugs and many weapons, or items that are heavily taxed and are smuggled to avoid paying these high costs.⁴⁴ Moreover, the majority of the world’s population does not fit into the desired categories of wealthy travellers and businesspeople. Particularly singled out are unskilled workers, people without formal education, and the poor. Often the sorting out happens well before these undesired classes of people reach a fortified border or a checkpoint, as immigration documents such as passports and visas represent insurmountable barriers. Obtaining these documents requires relatively large sums of money for the application and a basic education that includes literacy and, often, some proficiency in English or other non-native languages.

A tension exists between the message of openness and fusion of ‘globalisation’ and the fear of this privilege disappearing (‘ethnic submersion’ as Jean-Marie Le Pen, the extreme-right French politician, said). Wendy Brown summed it up:

What we have come to call globalization harbors fundamental tensions between opening and barricading, between fusion and partition, between erasure and reinscription Globalization also features a host of related tensions between global networks and local nationalisms, between virtual power and physical power, between private appropriation and open sourcing, secrecy and transparency, territorialization and deterritorialization. One place that these tensions nest is in the new walls striating the globe.⁴⁵

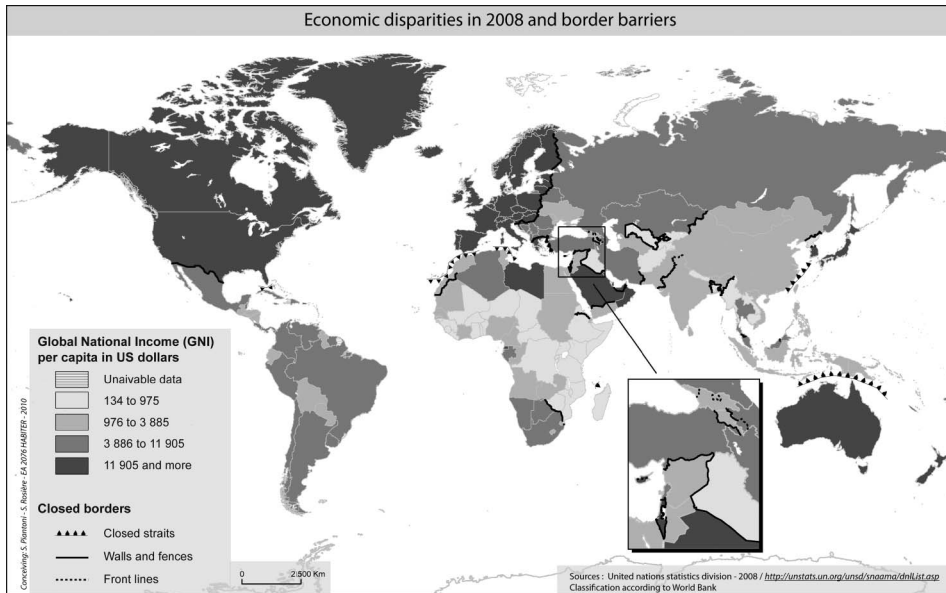


FIGURE 3 Walls and fences in relation to wealth discontinuities (GNI per capita in 2008).

Despite these impediments, migration remains the only hope for many people born in less wealthy countries around the world.

As Figure 3 indicates, the main border barriers are built on borders that mark major wealth discontinuities. Hassner and Wittenberg (2009) quantified the differences between states building barriers and the neighbouring state on the other side and found that, on “average GDP per capita for builders is \$7,704 versus only \$1,968 for target states.”⁴⁶ Consequently, a crucial aspect of why a particular country engages in teichopolitics is the economic, political, or social discontinuity the border has come to represent. Rather than pursuing changes to the global economic system that might address these inequalities, many countries choose teichopolitics to maintain their advantages – but the influence of big enterprises/firms may be underlined. Indeed, the construction of walls and fences on boundaries generates a strong “teichoeconomics” which is, per se, a cause of dynamism.

Teichopolitics is not only a state policy. Although it is beyond the scope of this article, in contemporary cities, for instance, the role of property developers in the erection of barriers is obvious. In cities or on borders, private agencies (firms) play a great role in the building of such artifacts. In the “Risk society” sketched by Ulrich Beck, building barriers represents a source of profit for security and construction firms.⁴⁷ The demand for security from citizens and societies and the desire for benefits from private agencies stimulates the construction of walls, which generates a strong ‘teichoeconomy’. Indeed, this barrier-building process is deeply integrated into the neo-liberal

logic. Teichopolitics requires large amounts of money: the *Secure Border Initiative*, or SBInet, cost more than \$2 billion; the Saudi border barrier system has an estimated cost of \$3 billion; even in smaller projects the financial issue is important: for instance the contract signed in 2003 between Amper Sistemas, a Spanish firm located in Madrid, and the *Guardia Civil* raised \$0.24 billion.⁴⁸

Consequently, despite other narratives about security and terrorism that often justify these projects, teichopolitics must be understood first and foremost as a way to protect privilege and to develop economic advantages. In a world of flows, and especially of uncontrolled flows, these barriers appear to be a rather efficient means of control. Put simply, the border barriers of teichopolitics mark the beginning of the new coercive stage of globalisation.

TEICHOPOLITICS: THE NEXT STAGE OF GLOBALISATION?

If we consider, as Fernand Braudel did, that the modern era is characterised by three different periods or ages, we can now sketch the opening of a new fourth era.⁴⁹ Braudel's first age of colonialism ranged from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries as European influence spread all over the world. The second age, from the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, was the industrial revolution that established an economic and territorial competition among powers and generated world wars. The third age is what Edward Luttwak calls the age of geoeconomics,⁵⁰ which was characterised by decolonisation and the triumph of soft power as a new economic and political order began with the Bretton-Woods agreements after World War II. This third age of globalisation produced massive wealth inequalities as the dual myths of developmentalism and neoliberalism resulted in interconnected and interdependent, yet deeply unequal, economies.

The fourth age of teichopolitics would be characterised by a coercive turn towards hard power and symbolises the failure of development and neoliberalism – at least from the perspective of the Global South – as most of the world population remains poor and on the outside of the promise of development. The enclosure systems institutionalise and protect the privileges that were accumulated over the preceding three phases of the modern era. As Figure 3 demonstrates, the wealthy areas of the world can increasingly be viewed as “off-shore” islands of development protected by walls and fences in an ocean of poverty.

Nevertheless, the paradox of teichopolitics is that some flows are essential to the existence of the global economy. To overcome this main contradiction, teichopolitics aspires to control all cross-border flows but not remove them; we must keep in mind that the US-Mexico border is increasingly a hardened and securitised border but is also the most crossed borderline in the world. Contemporary teichopolitics aims at stabilising

centres from undesired flows from the periphery, but it is quite rare that a barrier attempts to suppress all crossings. Instead, the effectiveness of these barriers is linked not to preventing movement but rather to creating an efficient system of selection that determines which types of mobility to allow.

Twenty years after the optimism that emerged from the fall of the Berlin Wall, the veneer is off the neoliberal practices of globalisation which failed to spread development all around the world. In its place, fences and walls symbolise the emergence of a privileged few who actually live the promise of globalisation⁵¹ and defend its privileges through teichopolitics. Unequal development generates an asymmetric global space that is separated into areas of enclosed privilege, with the remaining world kept out. Nevertheless, the world on the outside is still open to capital and trade flows while the developed area remains closed to mass migration and human mobility generated by the polarised economy.

The tensions inherent in the uneven flows of globalisation may rise to such a point that it could be understood as some form of an “endless war” against immigrants on borders – echoing the end of the Roman Empire. This is not a classic war, but a long-term low intensity conflict located on the major global wealth discontinuities. Indeed, we should perhaps consider border barriers as a preemptive first step in these “migration wars”. Border barriers are not epiphenomenon, or marginal items. On the contrary, they are located precisely where the system reveals its underlying logics. The spreading of teichopolitics exposes the deep tensions and contradictions of the globalisation process and obliges us to reconsider the optimistic vision of our world as a shared space of economic, cultural, and political practices.

NOTES

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