

Politics of walled territories: A critical analysis of space, politics and security

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Abstract

We live in a world of borders and walls. In the 23 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, 27 new walls and fences have gone up on political borders around the world. These walls are built by both totalitarian regimes and democracies, including India, Thailand, Israel, South Africa, and the European Union. Invariably, the barriers are justified in the language of security the country must be protected from the terrorists, drug cartels, insurgents, or suicide bombers lurking on the other side.

Despite the external focus of these justifications, in most instances these walls and fences are actually the result of internal reasoning, from establishing sovereignty over ungoverned or unruly lands, to protecting internal wealth, to preserving cultural practices from the influence of other value systems. The decision to build the 664-mile barrier along the U.S.–Mexico border, although often presented as primarily in response to drug-related violence and terrorism, is largely due to these internal factors. Borders constitute the international system of states. Accordingly, states will, from time to time, take assertive measures to secure the border, with among the most aggressive strategies being the construction of physical barriers, which we refer to as “border walls”. Using original data on man-made border wall construction from 1800 to 2013, we theorize and find that in many cases wall construction is about economic-security. Significant economic disparities between the states will create incentives to illegally transport people or move goods readily available in the poorer country but highly regulated in the richer country.

We find that economic disparities have a substantial and significant impact on the presence of a physical wall that is independent of formal border disputes and concerns over instability from civil wars in neighbors. We employ the case studies (On the basis of empirical studies) of the Apartheid Wall in Israel–Palestine and the US–Mexico border security wall to inform my analysis, giving particular attention to the engagement of border security walls in processes of racialization.

Keywords: Walled territories; space; politics; security

An overview of the study

Walls are symbolic and material manifestations of political boundaries. This Intervention builds upon recent work in political geography that considers borders as sovereign sites of security as well as mobile places of encounter (Johnson et al., 2011; Jones, 2012; Mountz, 2011). Walls may fulfill divisive state agendas through “conflict infrastructures” as Wendy Pullan describes in her Intervention. Throughout history, walls and fences have served to secure and defend populations by re-configuring the political-economic and security space. The objective of this manuscript is to identify and examine the various functions of border security walls in the contemporary solidification of capitalist social relations. It seeks to demonstrate how walls, as a part of a spatial strategy of governance and security, construct conditions for exploitation and the accumulation of wealth. Economic violence and oppression under capitalism have given rise to expressions of resistance, and it is upon this backdrop that I posit border security walls as techniques of pacification.

The overviews of Minghi and Prescott clearly paid significant, if not primary, attention to the question of the where. Where is the border located, how did it come about, evolve, change over time, become the topic of (military) disputes and what are the political consequences of its (changes in) location. These were the central questions of the debate in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century and hence of their overview. As argued above, the balance in the present boundary/border studies, is now leaning towards border studies. More precisely, boundary studies (where the border is) and border studies (how the border is socially constructed) have in fact grown apart, have become detached from each other to become separate subfields. Both subfields have their own institutional expertise centres, their own journals and their own leading figures.

There is hardly, and much to my regret, any overlap between the two sub-fields anymore. Re-reading Minghi and Prescott’s works, I believe, it would be a shame, if the many possible synergies

that could emerge from an open discussion between the two subfields, were not sought after more. The knowledge of both subfields is needed to understand the historical context and critical evolution as well as conflict management of a border, the societal The Geopolitics of Borders and Boundaries structural and (im)moral consequences and representations of that border, and a possible (land-artistic) re-visioning of the border(land). The synergy could also inspire the ontological and epistemological discussions on borders and boundaries. It could lead to fresh debates on what lines in spaces mean for human beings, and how we attach to, and can break away from geometry and it could invoke what is often lacking in the current border debates, that is, an alternative vision on the b/ordering of space.

On a more subtle level, bordering is about a politics of difference. Border narratives, for example, have always, consciously and sub-consciously, thrown up the notion of difference which exists on both sides of the border. In the classic chicken and egg situation, either borders are created to reflect existing differences between groups and cultures and are thus imposed upon the landscape (be it geographic or social) to institutionalize and perpetuate that difference, or borders are imposed upon 'virgin' uninhabited spaces and, in deterministic fashion and are thus responsible for the evolution of difference on either side of the line of separation (which is equally a barrier to communication and movement). However, a closer analysis of cross-border narratives would indicate that the opening of borders highlights, rather than diminishes, notions of difference Looking back on the history of cross-border co-operation within the EU, multilevel institutional mechanisms for transboundary co-operation in South Asia appear to have contributed significantly to the development of new interregional and trans-national working relationships (Perkmann 2002). The popularity of the SAFTA, SAARC and ASEAN concept is undeniable. These associations are now a ubiquitous feature along the EU's external borders as well in many non-EU European contexts (Bojar 2008).

In recent years, borders have taken on an immense significance. Throughout the world they have shifted, been constructed and dismantled, and become physical barriers between socio-political ideologies. They may separate societies with very different cultures, histories, national identities or economic power, or divide people of the same ethnic or cultural identity. As manifestations of some

of the world's key political, economic, societal and cultural issues, borders and border regions have received much academic attention over the past decade. This valuable series publishes high quality research monographs and edited comparative volumes that deal with all aspects of border regions, both empirically and theoretically. It will appeal to scholars interested in border regions and geopolitical issues across the whole range of social sciences

Research highlights of the manuscript

- The human' is a political stake that is produced through struggles to de/value people, spaces and politics.
- Cross-border conflict is associated with unhappiness of the people, society and generations and at the same time co-operative cross-border attitudes are associated with happiness among the citizens of the both the nation.. Cross-border ties have both adverse and protective effects on mental health.
- We investigate whether lending by the United States' political interests based on political affinity using panel data for over the 1970-2010 period.

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