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Tracing the border: Excursus on the wall

INTERSTICES 20

Introduction

In June 1989, as Cold War tensions were in decline, authorities in Budapest began dismantling the electrified fence on the border with Austria, inspiring thousands of East Germans to seek refuge in Hungary in the hope of migrating to West Germany. Soon after, Czechoslovakia also opened its borders, placing increasing pressure on East German authorities to follow suit. People began protesting all over East Germany, with an estimated 300,000 gathering in Leipzig and another half a million in Berlin to demand democratic reform (Judt, 2010: 613).

Exasperated by the government's inaction, the full East German cabinet resigned. In an attempt to stabilise the situation, Gunter Schabowski, the Socialist Unity Party chief in Berlin, held a press conference where he inadvertently announced the immediate removal of travel restrictions for all East German citizens (Sarotte, 2014: 127-128). Evening protests were by now a regular occurrence, but the announcement served to send thousands more demonstrators into the streets and to the wall. Overwhelmed by the sheer size of the crowd, the guards stood down and on 9 November 1989, the wall was breached for the first time in 28 years (1961-1989) as thousands of East Germans flooded into the west. In celebration, Germans climbed atop the wall and took to it with sledgehammers in what is now a symbol of the collapse of communism in Europe.

Schabowski later explained that authorities saw opening the border as a "relief valve" that might potentially secure more time for authorities to propose reform and secure some popularity amongst East German citizens (Moulson, 2015: 56). As historian Tony Judt appositely identified, "The Wall was opened for much the same reason that it was erected and closed a generation earlier, to staunch a demographic haemorrhage" (2010: 615). In 1961, the wall was erected to keep East German citizens from leaving for the more economically prosperous West Germany. However, in 1989, a western vision of freedom and economic well-being abetted eastern desires for modernisation, so the German Democratic Republic gambled that a taste of liberalisation and token economic reform would be enough to maintain the status quo. Instead, what resulted with the demise of the Berlin Wall, was the principle catalyst for the collapse of East Germany.

Three decades ago, it was believed that the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reconfiguration of international relations would open an age of globalisation, ushering a new age of freedom of movement, free trade, and borderless states. Instead, we are witness to the emergence of border walls and barriers, to an extent not heretofore seen; razor-wire fences, concrete security walls, offshore detention centres, security checkpoints and surveillance systems at airports, roadways, or anywhere that crosses international lines (Nail, 2016). Yet the advent of soft border controls in the early twentieth century, such as passports, visas, and customs, provided the means for effectively regulating civilian movement (Zimmermann & Vernon, 2019). As a consequence, solid forms of border control in the period leading up to and during World War 2 were not seen as effective means for preventing immigration, but rather were built primarily as defence against invasion. Between World War 2 and end of the Cold War (1945-1989), a further nineteen border barriers were built, with their main purpose to prevent citizens from escaping, like the Berlin Wall or barriers between Hungary and Austria, Czechoslovakia and West Germany, as well as between North and South Korea. (see Table 1)

Even in the decade that followed the collapse of European communism, walls did not significantly increase, with only ten constructed mainly due to rising tensions in the Middle East (Table 1). However, in the wake of the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, the implementation of surveillance and security proliferated, and legal measures were established allowing for illegal immigrants to be detained and treated like criminals (Parker & Fellner, 2004), while borderlands became a theatre for violence and war (Gregory, 2011). At the same time, soft forms of border control, like e-borders and e-passports embedded with biometric information such as facial, fingerprint, and iris recognition, have become a normalised part of international travel (Graham, 2003). Although largely ineffective, solid borders have become a visible means for governments to be seen to be in control. In fact, in the two decades following September 11 and the ensuing conflict in the Middle East, which triggered a flood of refugees seeking asylum in the West (Cammack & Dunne, 2018), 81 border walls or security fences have been built and many more planned (Table 1) (Vallet, 2017: 2). The refugee crisis in Europe (2015) has seemingly justified the erection of an ever-increasing number of electrified barbed wire fences and virtual walls, equipped with high-tech surveillance systems, drones, and weaponry, presenting an image of division many hoped had disappeared at the end of the Cold War. Walls and fences reinforce borderlines all over the globe, demarcating boundaries that were once cartographic in nature as closed, solid barriers.

Walls are not simply about security and keeping immigrants out, they are not even very effective or, in many cases, visible to the general public. Nevertheless, their presence provides a symbolic effect in favour of preserving identity, which explains why governments are so quick to build walls as a solution to unwanted people movement as opposed to tackling issues at their source (Jones, 2016). The “war on terror” provided justification for increased securitisation, and although this event may have sanctioned wall building as a political instrument, their rapid proliferation suggests the existence of an underlying predilection or fear that authorities were able to leverage in their favour (Aly & Green, 2010). While border security might provide some sense of protection from the outside world, their effects are tokenistic, rather, they seek to reinforce differences and construct an image of national identity by casting outsiders as dangerous, drug smugglers, and terrorists, and a threat to traditional ways of life (Brown, 2010).

Table 1.**Border walls between the world wars (1918–1945)**

Dates denotes construction and demolition dates. Absence of a second date means the wall still exists as at the time of writing.

1920-1940 Finland constructed two lines of fortified defence on the Soviet border. The Mannerheim Line built with fallen trees and boulders, and the Salpa Line, which consisted of 3-ton rocks.

1929-1938 France constructed the 380km Maginot Line comprising bunkers, tunnels, tank obstacles, artillery casements, and machine gun posts along the German and Italian borders.

1930-1942 Italy built the Alpine Line, a system of defence fortification along its borders with France, Switzerland, Austria, and Yugoslavia.

1935-1938 Czechoslovakia built border fortifications with infantry blockhouses and antitank obstacles.

1936-1941 Greece built the 155km Metaxas line to protect against Bulgarian invasion.

1938-1945 Sweden built the Skane Line on its borders and coastline with barbed wire and concrete bunkers.

1942-1944 Germany built the Atlantic Wall equipped with batteries, artillery, and positioned troops along the coast to protect against invasion.

Border walls from the end of WW2 to the collapse of the Berlin Wall (1945–1989)

1945-1991 The “Iron Curtain” was a self-imposed physical, legal, and informational barrier between the Soviet Union and the West, intended to prevent trade and stop immigration. It also included 240km of electrified fencing between Hungary, Austria, and West Germany. Other walls to come down at the collapse of communism in Europe include Hungary-Austria, Czechoslovakia-West Germany, Russia-Finland, and Russia-Norway.

1953 North Korea-South Korea: The Korean Armistice Agreement made provision for a buffer zone or demilitarised zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea, which is still heavily fortified.

1957 France built the Morice Line, an electric fence with minefields to prevent the rebel guerrillas from entering Algeria from Tunisia and Morocco.

1961 Cuba-US Guantanamo Bay: Cuba built a barbed wire fence with landmines to prevent Cubans from escaping to the US naval base.

1961-1989 East Germany-West Germany: The Berlin Wall built by East Germany was a 150km long system with sensors, barbed wire obstacles, anti-tank ditch, access road for vehicles, 186 guard towers, a control strip of raked sand, and a 3.6m high concrete wall. 140 people lost their lives attempting to cross.

1962-2018 Hong Kong-China: Consisted of barbed wire strung into a maze. The wall was removed in 2018 as Hong Kong has transitioned to Chinese rule.

1967 Israel built a 150km defence system known as the Bar Lev Line, a massive sand embankment supported by a concrete wall along the Suez Canal.

1969 Northern Ireland: The “Peace Wall” is a separation barrier keeping Catholics separated from protestant neighbourhoods in Belfast.

1973 Oman built a 50km mined Hornbeam line against guerrilla insurgents.

1974 Cyprus—between the Turkish and Greek halves: a 2m high wall dividing the city of Nicosia.

1975 South Africa-Mozambique: During apartheid South Africa erected a 3,500-volt electric fence that is said to have killed hundreds of people.

1980 Morocco-Western Sahara: The structure is a 3m high sand wall or berm with bunkers, fences, and landmines built to prevent the movement of guerrilla fighters.

1985 South Africa enforced border controls against illegal refugees and guerrilla infiltration by installing a 2,800-volt electrified fence on its borders with Zimbabwe and Lesotho.

Border walls from after the collapse of European communism to 9/11 (1990–2001)

1990 US-Mexico: Construction began in 1990 on a section of the border. However, barriers had commenced as early 1910 and have been continuously added to throughout the Bush, Clinton, and Obama administrations.

1990 Iran-Afghanistan: Iran commenced construction of a physical barrier to stop the transportation of narcotics into the country.

1991 Kuwait-Iraq: Post-Gulf War, the UN established a demilitarised zone to separate the two countries. The border barrier is 4.6m high, consisting of an electrified fence, concertina wiring, and an earth berm.

1993 India-Bangladesh: India constructed a 3m high, barbed-wire electrified fence along its 3,406km border with Bangladesh to deter illegal immigration, smugglers, drug couriers, and human trafficking.

1994 Israel-Gaza Strip: A security barrier intended to control the movement of people between Gaza and Israel and to stop the entry of arms into the territory. In 2019, Israel began construction on the third and last phase of a new barrier. President Netanyahu said the fence is to "protect ourselves from wild beasts". The wall is constructed of three layers of galvanized steel barriers, sensors, and underground walls.

1998 Spain-Morocco: Spain constructed border walls at Ceuta and Melilla adjoining Morocco, which is seen as a gateway for African migration into Europe.

2001 Uzbekistan-Afghanistan: Uzbekistan built a barrier along the Afghan border consisting of barbed-wire fence and a second taller 380-volt electrified fence, and mines and armed patrols over fears of Taliban insurgency.

2001 Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan/Kazakhstan: The Turkmenistan President ordered completion of a border fence to keep out illegal migrants and smuggling.

2001 Israel-Lebanon: Started constructing a 9m high concrete security wall on its Lebanon border.

Border walls since 9/11 (2002–2020)

2002 UAE-Oman: The UAE announced that it was installing a 4m high barbed-wire fence along the Oman border to curb the flow of illegal migrants, illicit drugs, and terrorists into the country.

2003 Bagdad Sunni-Shiite Barrier security wall. Built by the US military to prevent suicide bombers and death squads from launching attacks across sectarian lines.

2003 China-North Korea: Chinese authorities began building wire fences on major defection routes along the Tumen River, and in 2006 added 20km of concrete and barbed-wire fencing, 4.6m high, near Dandong. In 2007, North Korea started building its own fence along the Yalu River. More walls have been built on either side over the past decade.

2003 Botswana-Zimbabwe: Botswana started erecting an electrified fence on part of its border with Zimbabwe to stop an influx of humans and livestock.

2003 Saudi Arabia-Yemen: After the deterioration of security on the border with Yemen, base of al-Qaeda, the Saudis built a "giant" razor-wire fence from the Red Sea to Oman.

2005 UAE-Saudi Arabia: The UAE erected a fence along its border with Saudi Arabia to block extremists from entering the country.

2006 Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan: Kazakhstan announced the commencement of work on a 2.5m high barbed-wire fence along the Kazakh border with Uzbekistan, to keep smugglers out of the towns and villages.

2006 Italy Padova: Constructed a 3m high "ring of steel" to divide African immigrants from other areas of the city.

2009 Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan: After Islamic militant incursions 1999, Uzbekistan sealed its border and commenced constructing a barbed wire fence along its border with Kyrgyzstan. In 2009, authorities decided to strengthen security on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border by digging 3m deep ditched and 5-7m high walls.

2009 Russia-Georgia: Facing political unrest, border guards from Russia began constructing a fence to demarcate the "international border" with Georgia. The territorial line has since been in dispute.

2009 Egypt-Gaza: With support from the US, Egypt started building a steel wall along its Gaza border. In 2020, Egypt started construction on another 7m high steel wall equipped with electronic sensors and another concrete wall 8m away.

2010 Israel-Egypt: Israel built a barrier along its Egyptian border aimed at stemming the flow of African immigrants into the country.

2010 Myanmar-Bangladesh: Construction began to prevent illegal entry. Tensions have increased at the border due to the treatment of the Rohingya.

2011 Pakistan-Iran: Pakistan commenced construction in areas of the border with Iran, to stop human trafficking, smuggling, and cross-border militancy.

2012 Greece-Turkey: Greece completed a 4m high fence to stop immigrants from entering.

2012 Israel West Bank barrier: The Israeli government claims the barrier's purpose is to prevent violent attacks by Palestinians in Israel. Land for construction inside the West Bank was requisitioned from Palestinian landowners and impedes access to many services and resources, disrupts family and social life, undermines livelihoods, and compounds the fragmentation of Palestinian territory. The structure consists of a multi-layered fence system with pyramid-shaped stacks of barbed wire on the two outer fences and lighter-weight fence with intrusion detection equipment in the middle, an anti-vehicle ditch, patrol roads on both sides, and a smooth strip of sand for intrusion tracking. On average the wall contains a 60m wide exclusion area. The width of exclusion zones is 3m in urban areas where there is an 8m high concrete wall.

2013 Israel-Syria: Israel constructed a border defence system with Syria to protect from military insurgents.

2013 Oman-Yemen: The Omani government stated it would initiate a project to build a fence along the border with Yemen to deter the possible treat of conflict.

2013 India-Myanmar: India commenced construction of a border fence with Myanmar to counter insurgents.

2013 Namibia-Botswana: Namibia proposed the erection of a border fence with Botswana to prevent spread of disease in livestock.

2013 Brazil announced its border protection programme to create a virtual wall with all ten of its shared borders (Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, French Guiana, Guyana, Peru, Paraguay, Suriname, Uruguay, and Venezuela) to prevent illegal immigration, drug smuggling and other illicit activities. The virtual border, which will consist of satellite technology, electromagnetic signalling, tactical communication, drones, and increased army presence, was chosen because of the difficulty of the terrain. A pilot project began along the Bolivian and Paraguayan borders in 2007.

2014 Ukraine-Russia: Ukraine announced a defence border with Russia, but lack of funds prevented completion, with only 15% completed in 2018.

2014 Turkey-Syria: Turkey commenced construction of a 3m high concrete and razor-wire wall on their Syrian border as part of measures to increase border security and combat illegal smuggling and illegal border crossing. The wall consists of an electronic surveillance system, thermal cameras, land surveillance, remote controlled weapons systems, line-length imaging systems, and seismic and acoustic sensors.

2014 Turkmenistan-Afghanistan: Turkmenistan's government clarified its border policy, with Afghanistan adopting the same approach as its neighbours and sealing the border to keep out the Taliban.

2014 Tajikistan-Afghanistan: Security fence to keep out Taliban insurgents.

2014 Turkey-Iran: Turkey built a concrete wall on the Iranian border to secure its border against smuggling, illegal immigration, and militant infiltration.

2014 Saudi Arabia-Qatar: Border tensions between the Saudis and Qatar has resulted in the construction of a barbed-wire fence to prevent immigrant workers entering the country.

2015 Austria-Slovenia: Border fence to stem the flow of refugee migration through Slovenia.

2015 Slovenia-Croatia: Erected a razor-wire fence to stem flow of migrants.

2015 Latvia-Russia: Started construction on a steel fence for protection against illegal immigrants.

2015 Estonia-Russia: Estonia announced construction of a 2.5m high barrier on the border with Russia for security and protection from illegal border crossings, smuggling, and human trafficking.

2015 Hungary-Serbia: Electrified fence barbed wire divides Hungary from Serbia to stop immigrant flow.

2015 Hungary-Croatia: Hungary finished building a fence along its border with Croatia to shut out migrants moving across Europe.

2015 Hungary-Romania: Hungary started construction on a razor-wire fence on its Serbian boundary across the main land route for migrants from the Middle East.

2015 Macedonia-Greece: The Macedonian army constructed a fence on the border with Greece to control the flow of migrants.

2015 Saudi Arabia-Iraq: Saudi Arabia built a combined fence and ditch to separate the country from Iraq, with five layers of fencing, night vision cameras, and radar cameras, as well as 30,000 troops positioned at the border to prevent raids by Islamic State in Saudi territory.

2015 Israel-Jordan: Israel began construction of a security fence along its border with Jordan as part of Israel's "national security interests".

2015 Algeria-Libya: Amid heightened security Algeria announced it would build an electrified fence with its northern neighbour, Libya.

2015 Kenya-Somalia: The Kenyan government announced construction of 700km long wall along its border with Somalia to put an end to terrorist infiltration. After three years only 8km had been built.

2015 Namibia-Angola: Namibia proposed erection of a border fence with Angola to prevent spread of disease in livestock.

2015 Argentina-Bolivia: Argentina proposed construction of a giant dirt mound along the border with Bolivia to prevent the flow of illicit drugs.

2015 Brunei-Malaysia: Brunei built a security fence along its Malaysian border to control illegal immigration.

2016 US-Mexico: In his presidential campaign Trump promised the construction of a "big beautiful wall" on the southern border to keep out illegal immigrants and drug smugglers. To date, 177kms have been completed. In 2020, Trump stated he wants the wall to be black and covered in spikes..

2016 UK-Calais: The British government announced a 4m high wall in the French port city to prevent migrants stowing onboard trucks crossing the English Channel.

2016 Sweden-Denmark: Border rail fence built to prevent illegal immigrants attempting to avoid security checks by crossing the tracks at railway stations.

2016 Norway-Russia: 4m high steel fence built to tighten security and prevent illegal immigration.

2016 Finland-Russia: Agreed to temporarily close border restrictions due to illegal immigration. The border is patrolled by guards and electronic surveillance.

2016 Austria-Hungary: Border fence built to prevent people claiming asylum.

2016 Austria-Italy: Austria announced plans to erect a fence at its Alpine border with Italy (South Tyrol) to prevent the flow of immigrants. Troops gathered at the border in 2017 to stop migrants from crossing.

2016 Bulgaria-Turkey: Bulgaria constructed a 3.5m high razor-wire fence to prevent migrants trying to cross from Turkey.

2016 Czech Republic-Slovakia, Hungary and Poland: Began discussion to construct border fences to keep illegal immigrants out during the refugee crisis.

2016 Bulgaria-Greece: Bulgaria constructed a 1.5m high razor wire fence due to concerns that other border closures could force migrants entering the EU through Bulgaria.

2016 Tunisia-Libya: Tunisia announced completion of barrier along its border with Libya, designed to deter Islamic militants, consisting of water trenched and sand banks.

2016 China-Mongolia: Border is entirely fenced to prevent the flow of people and sex trafficking. It presents a significant barrier for the movement of large herbivores.

2016 Thailand-Malaysia: Thai leaders agreed to boost security by building a border wall to combat transnational crime and smuggling.

2017 Lithuania-Russia: Steel fence built to prevent Russia from conducting military exercises on Lithuanian territory.

2017 Lithuania-Belarus: Lithuania announced it would reinforce its Kaliningrad border with a static barrier, a 3m high fence built alongside the barbed wire Russian fence built five years previously to deter smuggling.

2017 Turkey-Iraq: Same wall as the Iran border.

2017 Iraq-Syria: Built to prevent jihadists and smugglers from illegally entering the country from Syria.

2017 India-Pakistan: India commenced construction of a new steel fence along its border with Pakistan, employing Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS) that entails deployment of smart fences, advanced surveillance, and anti-infiltration alarms.

2017 Ecuador-Peru: Ecuador built a 1km long 4m high concrete wall alongside a canal on the Peruvian border, which they say is to protect against flooding.

2017 Malaysia-Indonesia: Reports surfaced that Malaysia planned to build a wall on its border with Indonesia in Sabah to ensure its borders are secure.

2018 Latvia-Belarus: Officials in Latvia said they would construct a 120km 2m high barbed-wire fence along the border with Belarus to deter the smuggling of illegal immigrants from Afghanistan.

2018 Poland-Belarus: Poland decided to build a wall on its border with Belarus, which they claim is to restrict the movement of disease-carrying animals.

2018 Poland-Ukraine: The Polish government is building one of the largest fences in the world to protect against disease-carrying wild boar.

2018 Bosnia-Serbia: Border police setup a fence to stop migrants and refugees entering the EU.

2018 Jordan-Syria: US funded, Jordan built an electrified fence to stem the flow of refugees and stop ISIS.

2018 Jordan-Iraq: US funded barrier wall.

2018 India-Bhutan: the Indian government decided to erect a barbed wire fence along "sensitive" sections of the Bhutan border to control insurgent and militant groups.

2018 Algeria-Morocco: Algeria announced it had deployed a barbed-wire fence along its border with Morocco, equipped with surveillance cameras and control towers, as well as mobile radars and drones to protect against extremist groups inside Morocco.

2018 Costa Rica-Nicaragua: Costa Rica commenced construction on a "containment wall" in response to an increase in migration

2018 Belize-Guatemala: Belize announced the commencement of works to improve border security with Guatemala.

2019 Denmark-Germany: Denmark erected a 1.5m high border fence to prevent the movement of wild boar carrying swine flu. However, many have suggested that the fence is to appease the growing anti-immigrant sentiment.

2019 Croatia-Bosnia: Croatian authorities raised a high metal fence on the border with Bosnia to prevent illegal immigrants from entering the country.

2019 Pakistan-Afghanistan: Built in response to increasing concerns about the security situation, to stop militants and drug traffickers from entering Pakistan.

2019 Mexico-Guatemala: Mexico has deployed forces at its southern border to prevent migrants entering after Trump threatened tariffs if it did not prevent migrants from crossing through the country from Central America.

2020 South Africa-Zimbabwe: South African authorities said they will build a fence along its border with Zimbabwe to prevent undocumented migrants from entering and spreading coronavirus.

2020 South Africa-Mozambique: South Africa commenced construction on a concrete wall along its Mozambique border in an effort to curb theft and the movement of illicit goods across the border.

2020 Bosnia-Srpska: The Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina Inter entity boundary declared that the Republic of Srpska could use border instead of boundary

I argue that border walls are the consequence of liberal markets: despite the evocation of global mobility and economic prosperity, the state has ceded control to multinational corporations and thus turned its focus to identity politics and the securitisation of territory to maintain the vestiges of sovereign power. The aims of privatising government existed well before 11 September 2001, but the attacks on the World Trade Centre accelerated the process and further weakened government control by outsourcing surveillance, security, and warfare to the private sector (Klein, 2007). For example, the Australian government privatised offshore detention centres for asylum seekers on Nauru and Manus Island to international security companies like Serco and G4S. These multinational corporations, based in Britain, were not able to be held accountable to the Australian parliament, despite their failure to achieve adequate standards of care for detainees and thus relieved the Australian government of responsibility for mistreatment of asylum seekers (Loewenstein, 2015: 277).

Seeking new markets, the private sector, looking to step in where government failed, has also sought to fund and build sections of the US/Mexico wall (Schwartz & Trevizo, 2020: 3). Through this lens, this paper locates the current political climate, with its penchant for the theatrics of border walls, as the consequence of globalisation and neoliberalist regimes making for the rise of what has been given varying labels; the populist (Müller, 2017), authoritarian (Sunstein, 2018), autocratic (Gessen, 2020), fascist (Stanley, 2018), or mafia state (Magyar, 2016).

Liquid modernity

Globalisation was supposed to inaugurate an era of unprecedented physical and virtual-electronic mobility: free trade and personal freedom were supposed to grow together. Instead, the global triumph of neoliberal capital has stimulated the greatest wave of wall building and border fortification in history. (Davis, 2005: 88)

Timing the publication of his book, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, with the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1989) contends that the Holocaust was only possible in modernity. He argues that modern society generates an ambivalence to suffering that occurs almost on a daily basis, to the point where genocide becomes conceivable. Here, the use of the term modernity, which Bauman subsequently labels as “liquid modernity”, signifies society’s transition from solid structures to fluidity and fragmentation. In other words, from state-sanctioned systems to privately owned corporatised systems of governance. Modernity, therefore, sustains a system where the ability to act freely within the global community is only available to those who can afford it. This highlights the dichotomy between the fluidity of capital and its proponents, the wealthy elite who are unbound by territorial constraints, and the settled majority who have limited capacity for movement. By extension, the world’s poor and those seeking asylum are least afforded extra-territorial mobility, making their exclusion, via means of securitisation, detention, and border walls, permissible.

In a study on the language of populist leaders, in particular Hungarian Premier Victor Orban, the international relations expert Bruno Mendelski (2019: 1-24) argues that Orban deliberately misrepresents complex issues by defining them within a bipolar discourse of inside vs. outside. Outsiders are typically immigrants, or the “EU left-liberal elite”, who represent all that is threatening to

Hungarian identity. Orban describes these people as anti-nation, in the sense that they “hate Hungary” and anti-border, because they are willing to allow “terrorists and criminals” into the country (Mendelski, 2019: 6). The outside is an anathema to the establishment of Hungarian identity as Christian and peaceful. Thus, Orban presents himself as the protector of the Hungarian people, shielding them from the outside and whose xenophobic policies affirm Hungarian sovereignty by closing its borders to outsiders. This language, displayed by Orban, has much in common with other populist leaders, such as Trump, Bolsonaro, Erdogan, and Johnson, all of whom have border security as one of their main platforms. Reading from the same playbook, Hungary in 2015 commenced construction of security fences on the borders of Croatia, Serbia, and Romania in order to stave off immigrations from its southern neighbours and further isolate itself from the EU.

For Bauman (1998), the apparent insecurity brought about by globalisation is reduced to issues of “law and order” in which personal safety is overwhelmed by anxieties generated by the other. Globalisation is thus negative, in that it seeks to extinguish barriers relating to global capital, the movement of goods, information, and privacy, while at the same time placing greater restrictions over individuals through the deregulation of privacy laws and increased surveillance of daily activities. Making things worse, the traditional political and judicial establishment is not equipped to deal with the range and consequences of globalisation, essentially allowing the market to prioritise its own interests as opposed to more humane yet unprofitable considerations. Indeed, early acolytes of globalisation anticipated wealth and prosperity stemming from the free circulation of capital via deregulated markets or the decentralisation of the internet (Ferdinand, Souch, & Wesselman, 2020: 4). However, the economic prosperity as forecast by trickle-down economics has not eventuated (Byttebier, 2019: 54). Instead, the type of anxiety associated with globalisation today has emerged as the consequence of inadequate government regulation and the potential of global economic collapse, like the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2008 and the Coronavirus Pandemic of 2020 (Judge, 2020). Major corporations, like Australia’s banks, were given taxpayer funds by the government to guarantee record profits during the GFC (Johnston et al, 2010). The sense of insecurity in times of crisis has its apotheosis in border security, which is supported by multinational corporations looking to profit from the commodification of personal information and *surveillance capitalism* (a term coined by Shoshana Zuboff). Take, for example, the Syrian refugee crisis in which multinational companies, such as European Homecare (a German housing company exporting shelters to refugee camps) or ORS Services (a Swiss company running the migration reception centre), disguise expansion opportunities into new markets as contributing to humanitarian aid (Loewenstein, 2015a). The World Bank has been enticing Western companies to launch “new investment” opportunities in Jordan and Syria, in order to profit from the labour of stranded refugees (Lazare, 2016). Speaking of the Zaatari Syrian refugee camp in Jordan, a spokesperson for the Overseas Development Institute proudly declared: “There is a new breed of corporate involvement in humanitarian work targeting refugees where they realise there is a real potential for profit” (Gavlak, 2014). A London-based private equity firm also touted a new opportunity with “promising organic acquisitive growth potential” by investing in the management of refugee camps (Troianovski et al, 2015: 1-13). These multinational companies argue that refugees benefit from having access to services

like mobile phones, money transfers, social media, and other commodities, but it also renders their behaviours and digital footprint increasingly susceptible to surveillance and therefore more predictable and easier to control, while companies profit from these so-called new markets (Kaplan, 2018).

Cultural theorist Mckenzie Wark (2019) argues that globalising technologies produce a specific kind of apparatus that farms people's information so that it can be used to control, measure, and predict what they will do, how they behave and what they consume. Wark revises Marx's thinking by arguing that the ruling class no longer maintains power through ownership of the means of production, but rather through the control of information (2019: 79). Globalisation, deindustrialisation, and outsourcing have allowed capital to expand beyond the constraints of the labour market and create a new kind of production facilitated by the financialisation of everyday life. In this framework, all aspects of everyday life have value so long as they can be monetised, for example, social relations have become mediated through social media, which enables behaviours to be observed, analysed, and commodified. This information is essential for what might seem less nefarious, on the one hand, like targeted advertising, but on the other, a threat to democracy, as demonstrated by Cambridge Analytica's influence over numerous elections. Similarly, for social psychologist Zuboff, *surveillance capitalism* encompasses market-driven processes that commodify personal data that is captured and produced via the mass surveillance of the internet (2019). Zuboff also revises Marx's outmoded image of capitalism as the exploitation of labour, instead arguing that we are now faced with a new economic order that exploits every aspect of the human online experience, including social media, internet search history, purchases, and emails. Commonly the image of surveillance is overt and coercive, like Orwell's *Big Brother*, however, instead of using violence and fear, *surveillance capitalism* distracts us from any sense of exploitation by having us voluntarily hand over our personal information. It does not require human labour, but rather, access to our private data, so that it can nudge us in the direction of its predictions.

Thus, *solid* forms of border barriers are not the only means employed for border security. More successful but less overt strategies identify illegal immigrants via tracking digital data and other forms of social media. A recent *New York Times* article shows the extent to which, just like so much else in the modern sphere, the citizenry is defined by surveillance and data collection for the specific purpose of immigration control (Funk, 2019: 1-15; Graham, 2003). Journalist McKenzie Funk (2019) claims that ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement), like other federal agencies not only in America but throughout the world, has access to information from hundreds of disparate databases, from government to private brokers and social networks, in order to create a complex profile of individuals in a particular area. The article reveals the monitoring of mobile phones as well as the use of facial recognition technology for determining a person's legal status and whether they should be detained and/or deported from the US. Here, the control of information and the collection of data are used not only to influence consumerism, but to determine the composition of society, the type of people who are permitted to live in a community, and who should be excluded. Strict border security reconciles the effects of capital with the working class because it works to determine the individual's rights to mobility and social inclusion. Specifically, *surveillance capitalism* through commodification of personal data



Fig. 1 Justin McIntosh (2004). Israel West Bank Barrier [Photograph]

prevents disruption to market growth as it regulates people's conduct by developing ways to reward good behaviour and punish bad (Zuboff, 2019a: 2). This kind of capital is derivative of what is perhaps best described as *authoritarian neoliberalism* (a term coined by Wendy Brown) and remains unregulated by government and therefore exploits surveillance, security, and border control to predict and control human behaviour. These activities disadvantage the most vulnerable. Most people, through their active participation and use of "smart" technologies, are unwitting participants. Liquid modernity, as defined by Bauman, creates inequality whereby the most defenceless, those affected by poverty and conflict, become the subjects upon which governments might implement strict measures of population control and surveillance in order to be seen as self-guarding national identity and individual freedom. Wall building and border security play a significant role in attempts to invoke and justify a sense of lawlessness and insecurity in times of crisis. However, this combined with neoliberal ideologies of privatisation, deregulation, and the free market, has resulted in the rapid rise of multinational corporations, in particular tech giants like Google, Facebook, and Amazon (Kari & Rushe, 2020: 1-4), at the expense of governance and democracy, placing the interests of profit making over that of the people.

Waning sovereignty

The work of political theorist Wendy Brown provides useful commentary on how the rise of multinational corporations, aided by neoliberal regimes, have engendered a narrowing sense of national identity, inducing insecurity in the interest of self-preservation. Brown (2010) argues that traditional views of sovereignty have been eroded as a consequence of the removal of representative control over the market, due to deregulation and privatisation. Accordingly, the nation-state is placed in the role of "entrepreneurial decision maker", which she argues, "displaces legal and political principles (especially liberal commitments to universal inclusion, equality, liberty, and the rule of law) with market criteria, and

demotes the political sovereign to managerial status” (Brown, 2010: 22). Writing after the attacks of 9/11, philosopher Giorgio Agamben argues that politics has been steadily neutralised due to the gradual surrender of traditional roles typically carried out by the state. For Agamben (2002), security has quickly become a state priority and the sole criterium for political legitimacy. The role of the state is therefore relegated to the creation and protection of conditions that produce the most effective political climate for capital growth. Typically, this involves the implementation of laws that advantage profit-oriented, market-mediated accumulation, with the capacity to stamp out unfair competition. Such favourable conditions are contingent on being able to maintain economic stability and social cohesion, yet as neoliberalism mutates into authoritarianism, the state deprioritises social cohesion over profit-making (Jessop, 2019).

This one-sided emphasis on profit inevitably leads to financial crisis, as the 2008 GFC demonstrates, following which the state invoked exceptional powers to bail out companies *too big to fail* rather than letting them go into administration, as the standards of capitalism would normally dictate. During this time, the population should have (rightfully) focused their resentment on CEOs and the corporate elite. Instead, the people facing low wages, job insecurity, inequality, and exclusion were persuaded by wealthy media owners to impugn immigrants, Muslims, and other externalities for the loss of jobs and decreased wages (Monbiot, 2020: 1). In many cases, technology companies and media outlets stoke anxieties and fears by perpetuating misinformation as justification for tougher border security, the construction of walls, and even military intervention. In this scenario, distrust in expertise grows because it potentially contradicts the economic interests of the market (Nichols, 2017). Thus, misinformation perpetuated by otiose media and foreign governments enters the popular rhetoric, promoting conspiracy theories and extremist movements. At the same time, politicians create chaos as a distraction from their failures to serve people.

Thus, in an attempt to maintain authority, the nation-state places increasing emphasis on the demarcation of territory, strict border control, and the exclusion of those considered a threat to its perceived *way of life*. The Berlin Wall, however, provided an obvious demarcation of East German territory through strict border control by preventing its citizens from escaping, in order to preserve the body politic from the globalised free market. By contrast, Brown (2010: 42) argues that border walls post the collapse of the Berlin Wall are an illusory projection, or at the very least, a bid at securing the very power that eludes the state due to the ungovernable forces of globalisation. Paralleling Brown’s work, sociologist Saskia Sassen (1996) also proposes that the state is being destabilised by globalisation. Sassen claims that sovereignty is being decentred and redistributed to other entities, particularly multinational corporations, international accords, and human rights commissions that limit state autonomy. Neither Brown nor Sassen suggest that states do not continue to play a significant and powerful role in world affairs, but rather, that the role and status of states in domestic and international politics have been transformed as a consequence of “denationalised economic space and renationalised political discourse” (Brown, 2010: 66). As the sovereign comes apart from the state, it begins to prioritise its own interests, despite its obligations to the international community. For philosopher Jacques Derrida, this status constitutes the “rogue state”, in that it neither “respects its obligations as a state before the law of the world community nor the requirements of international law,

a state that flouts the law and scoffs at the constitutional state or, state of law” (Derrida, 2005: xiii). Under this framework, the state may renege on its commitments to human rights and international treaties on refugee in order to detain undocumented arrivals and turn back boats using armed naval vessels as exemplified by Australia’s Operation Sovereign Border under the Abbott government in 2013.

As sovereign political power deteriorates, states indulge in the theatrics of wall-building, as political expert Joan Cocks reminds us, so that people who feel threatened can identify with its possible strength and fortitude (2014: 27). Indeed, border walls endeavour to project an image of sovereign jurisdictional power and the appearance of a bounded and secure nation. Yet, as opposed to the physical manifestation of the nation-state’s strength, border walls are icons of its attrition. Indeed, walls are a theatrical display of sovereign power that conceals the racialised violence they intend to inflict (Denman, 2020). Ultimately, border walls define both conceptually and materially their contradictions, like defence and safety, and globalisation and nationalism. Still, border walls are not always physical. As urban theorist Stephen Graham (2010, XI) argues, “e-borders” too signal the “militarisation of civil society” as much as concrete border walls do. Much like surveillance capitalism and the commodification of information, border security represents the sovereign’s dramatic attempt to transmute long-standing aspirations of dominance and control into a high-tech program for governing modern society in competition with the free market.

Without digital technologies, surveillance, and the militarisation of the border, walls would not be nearly as effective, for these barriers are not necessarily a successful means of preventing border crossings as they have always been breached. Outsiders do not get in because borders are lax, rather they simply find another way through, often increasing their risk of fatality by doing so. Despite inherent dangers of migrant journeys, millions of people continue to cross borders all over the globe without authorisation. The fact that this continues to occur, despite the plethora of new walls, suggests walls are not necessarily a practical prevention. Borders are often very long and extremely difficult to fence as well as requiring the necessary maintenance for their continued upkeep. As at February 2020, only one-third of the US-Mexico’s 3,170km border had been completed (Miroff & Blanco, 2020). Even the heavily fortified 708km Israeli-West Bank barrier was only two-thirds finished after 15 years of construction (Jones, 2016: 4). In addition, border barriers are not effective because terrorists or drug smugglers do not enter through the land border, but rather, a significant share of unauthorised arrivals in OECD countries enter with a valid visa and never leave (Krishnadev, 2019: 1-9). Likewise, illegal goods enter through shipping ports and airports as well as through tunnels built underground. To this end, Israel has started construction of a subterranean wall along the Gaza strip to prevent people from tunnelling under (Estrin, 2018: 1-6). In fact, the tunnels into Gaza supply everything from building materials to food, clothing, computers, and livestock, as well as weapons. Work in and around the tunnels is believed to sustain 15,000 workers, and trade through the tunnels is estimated to raise as much as \$750 million a year in taxation alone for the Hamas government (Verini, 2012: 42). Given these barriers are designed to prevent, but ostensibly to deter, smugglers and immigrants from attempting entry into the country by making their journey as difficult as possible, the deterrence effect has ostensibly failed, as the number of

people embarking on migration journeys has not declined. In fact, the number of people risking their lives in dangerous journeys has been increasing. Between January 2014 and October 2019, the Missing Migrants Project recorded 33,686 migrant fatalities around the world (Migration Data Portal, 2020). These deaths are not accidental but directly related to the construction of border walls and implementation of high-tech border security to not only physically prevent potential crossings, but also deter people from attempting in the first place.

Fig. 2 Mani Albrecht (2019). US-Mexico Border Wall, Construction on the Replacement Wall, Tecate [Photograph]



State of exception

Writing on border walls, geographer Reece Jones (2012) argues that neighbouring countries are portrayed as ungoverned spaces with uncivilised populations where modern sovereign-state practices of order and stability are essentially non-existent. He states: “The borders of the state come to be seen as the margins of modernity, as the last place to mark the boundary between the modern, civilised world and the perceived barbarity on the outside” (2012: 2). Although borders have always been in place in some way, shape, or form, growing fear and uncertainty has provided legitimation to sovereign-states to accelerate the securitisation process of their borders. Jones further speculates that not only is sovereignty waning, but also, the mass movement of people globally who have no option but to defy border restrictions represents a transition of the old order and potentially the beginning of a new system; a world without borders at all (Jones, 2019: 2). However, in the wake of Covid-19, such optimism appears grossly misplaced, and for good reason, as global movement has ground to a halt. Following multiple travel bans from China and other countries around the world, Agamben published his reaction in February 2020, and received heavy criticism for wrongly declaring the epidemic to be a fabrication designed to spread panic and to invoke a state of exception. He writes: “in a perverse vicious circle, the limitation of freedom imposed by governments is accepted in the name of a desire for security that has been prompted by the governments themselves who now intervene to satisfy it” (Agamben, 2020: 1). Although Agamben’s remarks understated

the gravity of the virus, his broader point raises the question of just how many of the limitations placed on the daily lives of individuals during the pandemic were necessary to stop the spread of the virus. For example, the inability to peacefully protest, and keeping safe distancing, might be seen as serious infringement of democratic rights, of which their prevention serves to render authorities less accountable.

As of writing this paper, Australia's second largest city, Melbourne amid a resurgence of the coronavirus has enforced strict lockdown measures in suburban areas with outbreaks in new cases. In one public housing tower, home to some 3,000 people, mainly immigrants of African descent, 500 police were deployed to prevent anyone from leaving their home. However, outbreaks in more affluent areas have not been met with the same restrictive policing measures, with residents saying they are being targeted and "treated like criminals" (Murray-Artfield, 2020: 1-6). Here, the invocation of the state of exception to prevent the spread of the virus has resulted in never seen before levels of state-sanctioned surveillance and control, which, despite the attempt to contain the virus, contributes to the perception of the public housing system in which residents have been neglected and stigmatised by the government and media for decades (Kelly, 2020: 1-5). To make things worse, the populist political figure Pauline Hanson, appearing on morning television, claimed that most social housing residents are drug users and alcoholics, "from war-torn countries who know what it's like to be in tough conditions" (Yussuf, 2020: 4). This sentiment suggests that these individuals and families should be treated differently from those from predominantly white *English*-speaking neighbourhoods, thus, warranting the police presence and the strict quarantine of these already stigmatised people.

By contrast, populist administrations like the US and Brazil seemingly bear little regard for the health of their citizens, preferring to downplay the threat of the virus in preference of *reopening* the economy. Considering this, journalist Masha Gessen is concerned with our inability to adequately communicate such inconceivable events, even though they appear to have become part of daily life. Gessen asserts that the difficulty with absorbing this kind of information comes down to the limitation of words, "which have a way of rendering the outrageous ordinary" (2020: 6). Similarly, sociologist Balint Magyar, who while attempting to describe the rise of the national conservative party after the collapse of communism, realised that the language used by the media and intellectuals alike was not sufficient to appropriately describe what was happening. He argues that after the fall of the Berlin Wall, political commentators adopted a language of liberal democracy and assumed that concepts such as free elections, legitimacy, the rule of law, and public opinion had meaning to those who had never experienced them (Magyar, 2016). At the end of the Cold War, it seemed inevitable that Eastern Bloc countries would become like Western states. However, Hungary's representative form of government is under threat, leading the EU to describe the state as a "systematic threat to democracy" (Lehotai, 2020: 3). Drawing similarities with other authoritarian nations like Russia and Israel, Gessen notices that there is not necessarily one single event to explain such a turn, but rather, the rise of authoritarianism in Hungary occurred through the gradual disintegration and failures of government institutions. Similarly, in the US, government institutions have been slowly undermined by the neoliberalist didactic, resulting in growing distrust in politicians and the consequential rise of a *strongman*, whose status is

built on the cult of personality and absolute contempt for government processes.

Regarding this scenario, one might invoke Brown's notion of the "theological remainder" (Brown, 2010: 26) and a merger of Carl Schmitt's "state of exception". The "exception", a concept introduced by political theorist and Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt in the 1920s, is, he posits, not part of the existing legal order, but best described as a case of extreme peril and a danger to the existence of the state. The exception exists outside the law and since the rise of the modern state, it provides relevance to the question of sovereign authority (Schmitt, 1985). Liberalism disguises who the real sovereign is and allows for the allusion of freedom so long as "others agree with us" (West, 2019). The hope of liberalism, Schmitt declares, is to eliminate the sovereign and undermine the community's political existence, making for a constant state of exception. This is no more evident than in the United States, where the declaration of a state of emergency has triggered exceptional presidential powers to redirect military funding to the construction of the southern border wall.

To conclude, despite their pretensions, walls do not result in a more secure and safer environment (as those who seek to legitimise them claim). Rather, they are the apogee of declining sovereignty in comparison to the ever-increasing economic control of multi-national corporations. Border walls and tough border policy, and all that it entails, so it is assumed, provide legitimacy to the sovereign at a time when its ability to govern wanes. While walls propound a physical demarcation between us and them, as well as security and protection, they only serve to dichotomise division and promote a discourse of exceptionalism and national unity that projects sovereign strength. Ultimately, border walls are a physical manifestation of authoritarian trope and largely ineffective at preventing immigration, but perhaps more successful at solidifying national identity. Walls do not quell violence and criminal behaviour, but serve to cause harm and stoke political unrest, as in the case of the Hungarian border walls, the Israeli-West Bank barriers or the US-Mexico southern border wall discussed in this paper. Border control can be a complex proposition, as there is need to balance contradictory issues of openness and transparency with security and protection. Therefore, I acknowledge that some form of border control is necessary in certain situations, like during a pandemic, in order to prevent the human transmission of the virus between states. However, the prospect of improved international relations as a consequence of cross-border cooperation due to globalisation, post the demise of the Berlin Wall, has not eventuated. In the wake of September 11, surveillance and security have proliferated, and governments have managed to perpetuate irrational fears in order to stay in power. Border walls reinforce division wherever they are located, transforming an arbitrary line between states into a closed, solid border wall.

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