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Bordering Practices across Europe: The Rise of “Walls” and “Fences”

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Abstract

This article explores the recent bordering practices across and around Europe, with a specific focus on the construction of walls and fences. Since the outbreak of the Syrian war in 2011, thousands of refugees fleeing persecution have risked their lives crossing dangerous maritime and land borders while attempting to reach Europe. In the face of this intensification of refugee movements and the subsequent mass death around the borders, European countries have decided to erect more walls and fences instead of offering protection to refugees. Rather than a novel theoretical and conceptual framework, this article seeks to subject these bordering practices and their material and discursive underpinnings to critical-analytical scrutiny, drawing on the frameworks offered by critical border studies. Concomitantly, it reflects on the detrimental impacts these practices are having on the rights of refugees and problematizes the approaches of European countries vis-à-vis present-day refugee movements.

Keywords: critical border studies; bordering practices; walls and fences; Europe; refugees.

Introduction

In the wake of the geopolitical changes that have roiled the globe since the 1980s—notably the fall of the Berlin Wall—a “borderless and deterritorialised world” discourse rose to prominence (Newman 2006). Pioneered by the advocates of globalization, this discourse envisaged a new era in which the world would see the free movement of capital, goods and people. This discourse has also become a dominant theme in analysing the European integration process. The so-called “borderless” Europe debate emerged with the introduction of the Single Market and Schengen area which called for the free movement of capital, goods and people within the European Union (EU). Within the process of the EU enlargement, nationals of EU member states (and of some privileged non-member countries belonging to the Global North) enjoy this freedom without much interruption. However, at the same time, we have witnessed that same Europe has become characterised by a hardening of existing borders and the construction of new ones for certain groups of people, especially for those migrants coming from poor and Muslim countries, refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented immigrants. As widely discussed in the literature, this hardening of borders has become more evident following the September 11 and subsequent attacks, which provided a useful pretext to justify the introduction of more sophisticated and draconian measures for border policing (see Vallet and David 2012).

These claims have been ratified once more in the wake of the spike in refugee movements since 2010, which undoubtedly form the largest since World War II. Following the outbreak of the Syrian war in 2011, millions of people were forced to flee their homes, initially to neighbouring countries

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and from there to Europe. Using mainly Turkey and Libya as transit routes, these refugees have risked their lives in search of safety and better life opportunities in Europe. In the face of their suffering, European countries' restrictive policies have increasingly attracted a great deal of criticism from the international community. Even though in the beginning some countries, such as Germany and Sweden, did grant protection—especially to Syrian refugees—this support has remained limited in the face of ever-increasing numbers fleeing the region. In the name of the fight against uncontrolled migration and terrorism, European countries have adopted stringent measures which are likely to prevent people from seeking protection. Most notably, when Europe saw a rising number of arrivals, especially from Syria, from 2015—“the most deadly year of to date for would-be asylum seekers braving Europe’s border” (De Genova, 2016: 135)—walls and fences returned as key instruments for the control of refugee movements. These instruments have been built to “separate EU nations from states outside the bloc, but some (have been erected) between EU states, including members of Europe’s passport-free zone” (Baczynska and Ledwith, 2016).

In the light of these developments, this article discusses these recent bordering practices across and around Europe with a special focus on the construction of walls and fences. Drawing on critical border studies, the article engages first with the pre-existing theoretical and conceptual discussions on the bordering practices in general and walls/fences in particular for better comprehending the current debates. Shifting from a traditional understanding of “borders” to a broader notion of “bordering practices, critical border studies have shed much-needed light on the way “borders” are constructed, reproduced—as well as circumvented—by different players at multiple scales and the many and varied types of actors involved in this process, as well as the various kinds of “borders” thus produced. In line with these discussions, the article focuses on the material and discursive underpinnings of these practices and explores how they are justified as strategies to control, contain and filter unwanted mobility while being, at the same time, contested/challenged by various state and non-state actors. To do so—and to uncover the discursive and non-discursive interventions of both states and non-states actors in bordering practices—I have collected data through archival research of statements of state agencies and politicians, reports from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and newspapers. Concomitantly, the article also reflects on the detrimental impacts of these practices on the rights of refugees and problematizes the approaches of European states vis-à-vis current refugee movements.

Critical Border Studies: From “Borders” to “Bordering Practices”

As mentioned, in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall many theorists assumed that globalization would produce a “borderless” world and/or Europe “where walls and fences would become increasingly anachronistic” and “the free flow of capital, goods, and people around the world” would be the order of the day (Rosiere and Jones, 2012: 217). Contrary to these assumptions, what has been witnessed across the world is the introduction of new border control practices and the transformation of existing ones against the movement of people. As Andreas (2003: 79) has rightly noted, increasing investment in law enforcement and surveillance technologies, adoption of stricter visa and border control regimes, enhanced cooperation with third countries as well as the increasing resort to military personnel and devices prove this tendency. These developments have been clearly visible in Europe, which is now “characterized by a proliferation of borders (both in the territorial sense of borders between an increasing number of EU member states in addition to an array of new and shifting European borders, but also in the sense of diffuse institutional, legal, economic, social borders)” (Rumford, 2006a: 135). Hence, as Rumford says, “we are not living in a ‘borderless Europe’: we are living in a Europe made up of borders and borderlands” (2006a: 135).



Closely tracking these empirical realities, a burgeoning literature on “borders” and “bordering practices” has emerged. Of those, critical border studies, which question and challenge the traditional state-centric understanding of borders, developed fundamental insights into the transformation of “borders” and “border controls” (see among others, Balibar 2004; Brown, 2010; Walker 2010; Jones, 2016; Paasi 1998; Rumford 2006a, 2006b; Walters 2004; Rosiere and Jones 2012; Vaughan-Williams 2012). With a specific focus on the EU as well as on the U.S.–Mexico border zone, they cast light on various aspects of bordering practices including the operation, technologization and militarisation of bordering practices as well as the role of multiple actors engaging in these practices. Their contribution can be summarized under three rubrics. The first is the transformation of the meaning of the border and the dynamics of bordering practices. The second is the proliferation of actors in bordering processes. The last is the selectivity and symbolic function/value of border controls.

Regarding the first point, rather than treating borders as fixed lines at the edges of states’ territories, critical approaches analyse them as “processes, practices, discourses, symbols, institutions or networks through which power works” (Johnson et al., 2011: 62). As Rumford argues: “Borders are no longer seen only as lines on a map, but as spaces in their own right (as in the idea of ‘borderlands’) and as processes; in short, there has been a shift from borders to bordering (or rebordering, on some accounts)” (Johnson et al., 2011: 67). In this respect, contemporary walls and fences are interpreted as sites, spaces or borderlands signifying “the production of difference in space” (De Genova, 2016: 4) that seek to contain, control, and filter population movements. Those following a Foucauldian approach treat them as security barriers dividing “not land, but populations” (Buur et al., 2007: 6). Concomitantly, these studies also shed light on how these bordering practices are supplemented by the process of technologization and militarisation “for achieving the subjugating of bodies and the control of population” (Foucault, 1978:140).¹

The second point underlines that border control issues should not be seen as fields under the exclusive authority of nation-states. Recent studies, especially those focusing on EU-level developments, illustrate that not only states and official agencies but private bodies –IT companies, citizens, migrants, smugglers as well as NGOs—are increasingly involved in the business of bordering, which Rumford has termed “borderwork” (Rumford, 2008:). According to Rumford, “borders can be created, shifted, and deconstructed by a range of actors (...) borderwork is no longer the exclusive preserve of the nation-state (...) Citizens as well states, have the ability to shape debordering and rebordering” (Rumford, 2006b: 164–165). This is an important break from the traditional state-centric thinking underestimating the role of the agency of other actors in shaping and challenging states’ bordering practices. As the “conflict model of migration” developed by Sirkeci eloquently puts it, the bordering practices and the transnational space, in which these practices operate, are “constantly transformed by conflicts and migrations” (Sirkeci, 2009: 8). For Sirkeci, “the continuous conflict between the regulating and migrating human agency forces changes in migration regulations (e.g. tightening admission rules) and in response to these changes, migrating human agency changes his or her strategies, mechanisms, routes, and pathways of international migration” (Sirkeci, 2009: 11).

¹ Different from the past, under the process of technologization, contemporary bordering practices are equipped with high-tech and costly equipment, including “fixed radars, ground sensors, remote control barriers and software linking border agents to control towers” (Rosiere and Jones, 2012: 226). Besides, as Lutterbeck notes, contemporary bordering practices also reflect a process of militarization characterized by an “increasing mobilization of both paramilitary police and military security forces, as well as a resort to a growing amount of military-style hardware in preventing irregular immigration and cross border crime” (Lutterbeck, 2006: 61).



Similarly, in her extensive field works on walls and fences, Pallister-Wilkins also draws the attention to the relationship between the agency of non-state actors and bordering practices by arguing that “walls work to govern populations through their relationship to mobility. Populations and their capacity for mobility are the logic that bind walls across spatio-temporal scales” (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015: 443). For example, rather than being only “victims” as portrayed by the public, migrants (together with smugglers) challenge states’ bordering practices and force them to enact new measures and control techniques. In this context, it is widely argued that walls, fences and other border control practices can only divert the movements rather than eliminating and controlling them, as migrants and smugglers are continuously developing new strategies and finding new routes en route to the developed Global North. Hence, bordering practices are structured by multiple actors ranging from governmental authorities to the very people on the move (Jones and Johnson, 2016).

Under the third rubric, first, in terms of selectivity, bordering practices in general (and walls/fences in particular) must not be understood as lines seeking total closure of a certain space, but as “biopolitical architectures concerned with regulating circulation” (Pallister-Wilkins, 2016a: 156), filtering and categorizing wanted/desirable and unwanted/undesirable as well as worthy and unworthy of protection. In this respect, as security barriers, border control practices in general (and walls/fences in particular) aim at “stabilizing centres from undesired flows from the periphery (...) and creating an efficient system of selection that determines which types of mobility to allow” (Pallister-Wilkins, 2016a: 231–232). About this selectivity of borders, Rumford points out that “spaces and borders are not necessarily experienced in the same way by all (people). What forms a common space of freedom justice and security for some can constitute a threat to others” (Rumford, 2006a: 135). In short, as the securitization literature highlights, for certain group of migrants—including refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants and those coming from poor and Muslim countries, who are being administered as a security threat and linked to various security problems ranging from criminality and cultural/religious threat to terrorism—borders are more real and selective in nature (Bigo, 2002).

In addition to the selective nature of borders, these scholars further point to the symbolic function/value of bordering practices. They argue that these instruments have a deterrence effect for those seeking to cross borders and send the message that “governments are doing something” (Vallet and David, 2012: 114–115). Hence, other than material functions, such as “protection, separation and even segregation”, walls and fences offer a clear image of a fortified and controlled border (Vallet and David, 2012: 114–115) and have a “symbolic role (...) in reaffirming the power of state and its old, but still strong, territoriality” (Rosiere and Jones, 2012: 226).

Bordering Europe Through Walls and Fences

Bordering through walls and fences has a long history, dating back to the building of the Great Wall of China and the Roman Limes, which are the most prominent examples. These barriers were constructed against foreign invasion as well as unwanted migration. In the twentieth century, the tradition has remained alive and well. From the end of World War II to the end of the Cold War, nineteen walls and barriers were erected (Vallet and David, 2012: 113). Especially during the Cold War, “the borderlines dividing Western and Eastern Europe were intensively patrolled and marked by barbed wire fencing, watchtowers, land mines, and automatic weapons” (Andreas, 2003: 100). As mentioned, the end of the Cold War—especially the fall of the Berlin Wall—was perceived as “an end to the process of separation through fencing and walling” (Pallister-Wilkins, 2016b: 65). However, since then European countries have erected or started 1,200km (750 miles) of anti-immigrant walls and fences at the cost of at least €500 million (\$570 million) (Baczynska and



Ledwith, 2016). Especially those member states located on the geographical periphery of the EU have fortified their borders through walls and fences.²

This bordering process through walls and fences has reached its peak following the Syrian war in 2011 but especially in the face of the increasing attempts of refugees to reach Europe in the year 2015. Against these arrivals, growing tensions among European countries have emerged, and Europe has experienced rising support for anti-immigrant parties, and the weakening of “Europe’s passport-free travel zone” (Tasch and Nudelman, 2016). To control refugees attempting to enter Europe through Greece, Italy, and Hungary, the European Commission proposed refugee quotas to distribute the burden between the member states. However, this proposal led to a contentious debate and many Balkan states refused to adopt this system (Dzenovska, 2016). After being approved by the European Parliament in September 2015, this system was initially supposed to resettle 120,000 refugees (Dzenovska, 2016). Yet, rather than follow this plan, both the EU and non-member European countries have reacted by hardening their bordering practices by constructing walls and fences.

First, Balkan countries fortified their borders from mid-October 2015, as around 180,000 migrants have entered Europe through the Balkans, from Turkey via Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia via Slovenia and into western Europe (Oliveira, 2015). Hungary has become the leading country closing and fencing its borders against the arrivals of refugees. It first sealed the border with Serbia in September 2015 with a 109-mile-long, barbed-wire border fence and then later in October 2015 the Croatian border with a 175-kilometre fence equipped with razor wire (Taylor, 2015). Prime Minister Orbán—known for his tough anti-immigrant stance—further announced that “his government is also ready to extend the fence to Romania” (Deutsche Welle 2016). Finally, in 2016, Hungary decided to upgrade border security with a new and even “more massive” fence (Dearden, 2016). Orbán stated: “Technical planning is under way to erect a more massive defence system next to the existing line of defence, which was built quickly last year” (Dearden, 2016). He defended the new plan as a response to a “greater need for security” and continued with his securitarian discourse framing migrants as a security threat by saying that:

Immigration and migrants damage Europe’s security, [they] are a threat to people and bring terrorism upon us [and] this was caused by allowing the uncontrolled entry of large numbers of people from areas where Europe and the Western world are seen as the enemy (Dearden, 2016).

He further securitized Muslim migrants by arguing that the door would be closed to them in order to defend “European Christianity against a Muslim influx” (Traynor, 2015). This statement not only signifies the selective approach justified by securitizing certain group of migrants through linking it with terrorism, but also what De Genova (2016: 137) says:

people on the move across state borders are not in fact considered to be the genuine bearers of any presumptive (purportedly universal) ‘human right’ to asylum but rather are always

² For example, the border fences constructed around Ceuta and Melilla, the two Spanish enclaves located in North Africa. After having become one of the main destinations for unauthorized migrants attempting to enter the EU, the Civil Guard—the Spanish national paramilitary police—upgraded its policing efforts in these two cities and constructed a double fence around them from the beginning of the 1990s (Pugh, 2000: 39). Similarly, becoming another major point of entry for unauthorized migration following the hardening of border controls along the Spanish coast, Greece also constructed a 10.5 km-long and 4 meter-high, barbed-wire fence that cost more than €3 million along its border with Turkey in 2012. As in the Spanish case, this border fence has been continuously upgraded and supplemented by watchtowers, thermal vision cameras and other night vision devices.



under suspicion of deception and subterfuge, produced as the inherently dubious claimants to various forms of institutionalized international protection.

Recently the Greek border has attracted much of the attention, as the Greek islands emerged as the key entry point for majority of refugees from the beginning of 2015. After this time, Orbán called for a fence on the northern-border of Greece to block this route (Deutsche Welle, 2016). Another contentious step was taken in March 2017, when the Hungarian Parliament passed a new law allowing the detention of all asylum seekers in camps built from shipping containers at the country's borders while their applications are being processed. This law will be applied to "all adult asylum-seekers regardless of gender, age and vulnerability, as well as children traveling with adults and unaccompanied minors above the age of 14" (Amnesty International, 2017). Gauri Van Gulik, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for Europe, commented that:

Plans to automatically detain some of the world's most vulnerable people in shipping containers behind razor wire fences, sometimes for months on end, are beyond the pale. This new border detention package is just the latest in Hungary's aggressive crackdown on refugees and migrants (Amnesty International, 2017).

However, it should also be mentioned that despite the securitarian discourses and policies of the Hungarian government toward refugees, it has kept the door open for those migrants with enough money under the Hungarian residency bonds program introduced in 2012 (Korkut, 2017). According to this program, resident permits and a path to citizenship are granted to foreigners who invest at least €300,000 in Hungarian government securities (Korkut, 2017). Initially, Chinese traders and later investors from the Middle East have purchased bonds (Korkut, 2017). This once again confirms the selective nature of bordering practices.

Hungary's move led other Balkan countries to take similar measures. For example, complaining about the mass entry of migrants trying to get through its territory into Austria and Germany after Hungary sealed its border with Croatia, Slovenia decided to harden border control measures in 2015. Militarisation of the bordering process sped up with new legislation passed in October 2015 that grants the army extensive power to support the police force in protecting borders following thousands of arrivals from Croatia after the closure of the Hungarian border (NBC News, 2015). In particular, the army can now "take part in patrols along the 670-kilometre border, detain people, hand them to police and issue orders to civilians" (Chadwick, 2015). Second, the government also decided to build some temporary technical obstacles on the border with Croatia. Prime Minister Miro Cerar explained that: "These obstacles, including fences if needed, will have the objective of directing migrants towards the border crossings. We are not closing our borders" (Telegraph 2015). In the end, metal fences were erected at its border crossing of Sredisce ob Dravi, "which forced refugees to wait for around 14 hours on the border, without food or shelter" (Webb and Squires, 2015). Besides, Slovenia has also adopted a selective approach in its bordering process as well by admitting only people from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan and excluding other nationals seen not as worthy of protection (Deutsche Welle, 2015a).

In 2015, Macedonia also started to erect a border fence—similar to the one constructed by Hungary—along its southern border with Greece to control and contain entry of unauthorized migrants. Criticizing the Hungarian justifications of fences as a way to protect European wealth and Christian values against migrants, the government spokesman Aleksandar Gjorgjie said the fence was constructed only to "to direct the inflow of people toward the controlled points for their



registration and humane treatment” and the border would remain open to refugees (Deutsche Welle, 2015b). However, this “humanitarian” justification was followed by a selective approach toward refugees. Similar to Slovenia, refugees from countries other than Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq have been denied entry into Macedonia (Deutsche Welle, 2015b). In response to this selective approach, Greek authorities stated that this selective policy “has led to some 800 migrants of other nationalities being stranded in Greece at the Macedonian border. Iranians, Pakistanis, Moroccans and others have held days of protests, and several migrants broke through a flimsy barrier into Macedonia” on November 2015 (Deutsche Welle, 2015b). It is further reported that:

More than 10,000—a third of them children—are camped in flimsy tents near the fence. Many families have refused to leave the border, waiting instead for it to open, as respiratory infections spread and frustration mounts (Baczynska and Ledwith, 2016).

While having previously followed a liberal stance toward refugees and criticized the construction of the walls and fences, Austria also announced its plan of sealing off its borders at the Spielfeld border crossing with Slovenia and started constructing a 2.3-mile metal fence on November 2016 after Germany’s announcement about reintroducing border checks Austrian border (Jamieson, 2016). The previous Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann claimed that the fence would not close the border totally but would provide better control of movements of migrants on its border with Slovenia (BBC 2015, October 28). The government justified this plan with the following words: “Austria was being overwhelmed ‘because Germany is taking too few’ migrants” (Graham-Harrison, 2015). It was further stated that the fence was necessary for “crowd management” (Baczynska and Ledwith, 2016). Miki-Leitner, from the center-right Austrian People’s Party, also stated that “This is about ensuring an orderly controlled entry into our country, not about shutting down the border” and further argued that:

We know that in recent days and weeks individual groups of migrants have become more impatient, aggressive and emotional. If groups of people push from behind, with children and women stuck in between, you need stable, massive measures (Dallison, 2015).

On the other hand, it is claimed that such a short fence has only a symbolic effect rather than a material one by delivering “a clear message: the doors to Austria are closed and migrants are no longer welcome” (Granados et al., 2016). This move can also be regarded that “a fence had been built inside Europe’s border-control-free Schengen Area” (Taylor, 2015).

Another contentious bordering process has been taking place around the port of Calais “home to a controversial makeshift camp known as ‘the jungle’ where thousands of displaced people live in squalid conditions” (Britton, 2016). Being a hot spot for the entry of unauthorised migrants from France to the UK, Calais has been continuously fortified through security barriers. In 2014, the UK devoted £ 12 million over three years to control and contain migrants from the port and “built a 15ft fence along the motorway leading to the port” which was supported by “detection technology such as the heartbeat and carbon dioxide detectors” and (dog searches)” (BBC, 2016a). The fence was justified not only with reference to controlling and containing unauthorised migration but also to blocking the entry of “foreign jihadists” into the UK by the former Minister of Integration James Bronkenshire (Ross et al., 2015). Concerning the stopping of jihadists, he said: “the public can be assured that it is the government’s highest priority to protect Britain from attack” (Ross et al., 2015). This symbolic message was replicated in his further statements arguing that “erecting the fences is



part of a bid to send a message that the UK is ‘no soft touch’ for migrants” (Perrin, 2014). The port has also come to be militarized by armed French and British forces following the August 2015 agreement between the two sides (BBC, 2016a) As the fences have not been able to stop migration through Calais, the UK (in cooperation with France) decided to build a wall—dubbed the “Great Wall of Calais” by some media—along both sides of the main road to the Calais port in 2016 (BBC, 2016b). Goodwill, the Immigration Minister, said that “People are still getting through. We have done the fences. Now we are doing the wall” (York, 2016). He further justified the wall to ensure security at the port and stated that:

We are going to start building this big, new wall as part of the £17m package we are doing with the French. There is still more to do. We have also invested in space for 200 lorries at Calais so that they have somewhere safe to wait (Britton, 2016).

He also criminalized migrants and framed them as a threat to the UK’s own well-being, by adding that: “It would be a negotiating objective of the UK to remove people working and living there, making a contribution to our health service, to our agriculture, to all other areas that they do” (York, 2016). Some supported these measures and argued for their effectiveness. For example, Eurotunnel—one of the firms operating the tunnel between France and the UK—stated that “since a major security upgrade around its French terminal last October [2015], migrants have ceased to cause troubles (Baczynska and Ledwith, 2016). Eurotunnel spokesperson John Keefe further claimed, “There have been no disruptions to services since mid-October 2015, so we can say that the combination of the fence and additional police presence has been highly effective” (Baczynska and Ledwith, 2016). However, strong criticisms were also raised by different sections of society within the UK and France. For example, British truck drivers complaining about the jumping of migrants on trucks in their attempt to cross the French–UK border, interpreted the wall as a “poor use of taxpayers’ money”. The head of the Road Haulage Association Richard Burnett argued that “it is imperative that the money to pay for a wall would be much better spent on increasing security along approach roads” (Travis and Chrysalis, 2016). On the other hand, human rights organizations draw attention to the negative impacts of the walling practices on the rights of migrants. François Guennec of Auberge des Migrants—a French aid group in Calais—criticised the wall by arguing that:

When you put walls up anywhere in the world, people find ways to go around them. It’s a waste of money. It could make it more dangerous people, it will push up tariffs for people smugglers, and people will end up taking more risks (Travis and Chrysalis, 2016).

Furthermore, rights groups contend that these security barriers prevent people from seeking asylum, thereby infringing the very basic principles of European law (Baczynska and Ledwith, 2016).

As stated before, bordering practices are not likely to stop migration, but divert it to more dangerous routes as well as the so-called border work involves various actors including migrants, smugglers and citizens who can challenge and transform the states’ bordering practices. This is well ratified by the fact that migrants living in the “Jungle” and not being able to pay for the smugglers have already attempted to “hide on trucks and other vehicles by using makeshift barriers to block traffic and climb board” (Breedon, 2016).



Northern European countries including Norway and Sweden have also introduced new security measures on their borders. For example, Norway—part of the Schengen zone but not the EU—established border checks at popular land crossing points with Sweden as a response to the growing number of refugees entering the country from the latter (Tasch and Nudelman, 2016). Norwegian officials were also authorised to check all ferry arrivals from Sweden, Denmark, and Germany (Tasch and Nudelman, 2016). Besides, in the face of the arrival of Syrian refugees starting from 2015, it was planned to erect a fence at its so-called Arctic border with Russia in August 2016. The fence is to be about 200m (650ft) long and four meters high and equipped with CCTV (Johnson, 2016). Deputy Justice Minister Ove Vanebo supported the fence as a “responsible measure” (Osborne, 2016).

Similarly, having previously stood with Germany in support of refugees, Sweden also announced it would introduce border controls with Denmark to prevent migrants from entering the country in early January 2016 (Tasch and Nudelman, 2016). The country fenced off the platforms at Copenhagen’s Kastrup rail station to control the entry of migrants through Malmo from Denmark across the Oresund Bridge (Economist, 2016). Just after this decision, Denmark decided to adopt similar measures at its border with Germany (Tasch and Nudelman, 2016).

Concluding Remarks

This article demonstrates that contrary to the arguments pioneered by the supporters of globalisation about the emergence of “borderless and deterritorialised world” (Newman 2006), the European case tells another story signifying the hardening of bordering processes through the walls and fences. With the intensification of refugee movements especially since 2015, European countries have been building walls and fences to control, contain and filter the movements of people coming from the “underdeveloped” part of the world. Rather than as means of demarcating territorial borders or as strategies against military/foreign invasion, current walls and fences as a part of bordering processes have emerged as the means or institutional frameworks “for the production of space, or indeed, the production of difference in space” (De Genova, 2016: 4) that seek to eliminate the perceived dangers of uncontrolled mobility of certain group of migrants. In this respect, rather than being fixed material constructs, walls and fences imply “processes, practices, discourses, symbols, institutions or networks through which power works” (Johnson et al., 2011: 62).

However, refugees with their own political agency together with other non-state actors continue to challenge these state policies and force governmental authorities to implement new measures including more walls and fences. In other words, borders have been transformed, de- and re-constructed by various actors and have only been able to divert (rather than stop) population movements. To put it differently, the conflict between “regulating agencies—border patrols, visa officers, etc. and migrating individuals” has continuously forced European countries to implement new measures and erect walls and fences across and around Europe (Sirkeci, 2009: 12).

To conclude, instead of solving the structural problems, wars, and poverty that produce refugees in the first places, these border control mechanisms have only resulted in human rights violations and, paradoxically, legitimisation of more barrier constructions. It is likely that states continue to dwell upon these border controls instruments, especially on their symbolic power to assert their sovereignty and send a message to the “undesirable” migrants and the public that they are securing their borders against mobile “risks” or security threats. Hence, more academic and public voices must be raised, and more empirical research has to be done about these bordering practices, which produce intensified suffering and death for migrants.



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