Si Somos Americanos, Revista de Estudios Transfronterizos
ISSN: 0718-2910
sisomosamericanos@unap.cl
Universidad Arturo Prat
Chile

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TEICHOPOLITICS: THE POLITICS OF BORDER CLOSURE
Si Somos Americanos, Revista de Estudios Transfronterizos, vol. XI, núm. 1, -, 2011, pp. 151-163
Universidad Arturo Prat
Santiago, Chile

Available in: http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=337930339008

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Si Somos Americanos. Revista de Estudios Transfronterizos
Volumen XI / Nº 1 / 2011 / pp. 151-163

TEICHOPOLITICS: THE POLITICS OF BORDER CLOSURE

Teichopolítica: la política de cierre de la frontera

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Recibido: mayo 2009. Aprobado: julio 2010.

RESUMEN

Las representaciones dominantes de la globalización sugieren que, desde noviembre de 1989, hemos entrado en una era sin fronteras ni muros. Sin embargo, en el conjunto del planeta se erigen nuevas barreras (término genérico que designa cualquier frontera cerrada). Este artículo propone analizar la lógica de las "teichopolíticas" – neologismo basado en el griego antiguo *teichos* (el muro de la ciudad)– estas políticas e cierre. La dimensión de seguridad de estos edificios es obvia (ciertos "muros" datan de la guerra fría). Sin embargo, la mayor parte de estas nuevas barreras son muros migratorios que separan los países del norte (que se transforman en fortalezas) de los países del sur. El diferencial de desarrollo creciente entre norte y sur genera flujos migratorios cada vez mayores. Y, por falta de cuestionamiento de los mecanismos globales de la economía, las teichopolíticas parecen ser las únicas opciones. La construcción de barreras la impulsan los Estados, pero sobre todo las firmas especializadas, muchas veces norte-americanas, para quienes las barreras representan una importante fuente de lucro. Así es como los ciudadanos, los gobiernos y las empresas tienen sus propias estrategias que contribuyen a la proliferación de las barreras.

PALABRAS CLAVES: Barrera, Frontera, Globalización, Migración.

ABSTRACT

Contemporary common sense would say that globalisation means the end of walls and the disappearance of borders. Nevertheless new systems of fenced boundaries are built all around the world and the global length of walls is longer now than it was in November 1989. This paper aims at analyzing the logic of "teichopolitics" – this new word finds its origin in the ancient greek *teichos* which meant "city wall" – pointing out to the politics of building walls. The security issue seems obvious to understand "teichopolitics", the most

ancient existing walls were built during the cold war, new war walls are erected (around Irak, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Bangladesh); but migratory walls seem to be the real newness of the period: south borders of developed countries are slowly turning to fortresses (USA and European Union especially). The growth of social and economical unevenness generates huge migratory flows and teichopolitics appears to be the only solution. In fact, the economical dimension of "teichopolitics" seems more important than the efficiency of wall erection. In the "Risk society" (Beck 1992) building walls represents a source of profit for security and construction firms. So, governments and large companies have their own strategies which contribute to the proliferation of walls and the triumph of "teichopolitics".

KEYWORDS: Barrier, Border, Globalization, Migration.

I. INTRODUCTION

A present commonplace about globalization implies that it generates a 'borderless world' (Ohmae 1990), as the fall of the Berlin's wall on the November 9th 1989 suggested it, and the rise of an 'open society' as Henri Bergson (1959) or later Georges Soros suggested[1]. Nevertheless, far from this image of reconciliation between nations and the emergence of a fearless world, the up-to-date society is paradoxically characterized by the creation of barriers all over the world. Using the word 'barriers' I propose here a generic term including all forms of closure systems: fence, walls, frontlines and so on (this point will be discussed below). New barriers are built in many parts of the world: some of them became very famous, especially the barrier built on the USA-Mexico border and the one on the 'green line' demarcating Israel and Palestinian territories. Moreover walls and fences are erected at all scales: inside cities where 'gated communities' are more and more numerous (Blakely y Snyder 1997), or around concessions or free trade zones. Consequently, a meshing of various barriers is expanding.

Of course, this short paper will not discuss all these matters but emphasizes the question of 'closed' international borders. First of all, I will discuss the neologism 'teichopolitics', then I will concentrate my argumentation on international borders and present a typology of 'closed' borders underlined with examples. Finally, I will emphasize the role of economics agencies which are decisive into the up-to-date process of border closure and the rise of what we can call a 'teichoeconomy'.

[1] The *Open Society Institute* was created by George Soros in 1993, soon after the disappearing of the soviet block.

II. 'TEICHOPOLITICS': NEW POLITICS REQUIRE NEW TERMS

Focusing on the international borders closure systems this paper aims at analyzing the logic of 'teichopolitics' – this new word, coined by the author, finds its origin in the ancient greek τειχος (*teichos*) which meant "city wall". It points to the politics of building 'barriers'.

Teichopolitics includes all kinds of closure systems, whose aim is to control movements – to prevent the unpredictable consequences of the 'liquid modernity' that characterize this 'Age of Uncertainty' sketch by Zygmunt Bauman (2000, 2007). Mobility is a paradoxal dimension of our societies: it is supposed to reveal the dynamism of the economy and signing our transnational age (the 'global village'). But, at the same time, it remains the nightmare of governments and all security systems and administrations.

In a world of flows, the 'barrier' appears to be a simple and rather efficient mean of control. Furthermore, its appearance – its visibility in landscape — plays a symbolic role and participate in reaffirming the role of the state and the remnant of an old (and 'hard') territoriality. Barriers appear to be logical devices in a 'risk society' (Beck 1992). Into the mind of Ulrich Beck, the universalization of risk and its new perception deeply modified the representations of political and social agencies, the new barriers erected all over the world symbolized this new perception dominated by fear and desire of control (Ceyhan 2006).

Why teichopolitics? The main reason explaining teichopolitics is security. To protect from which threat? We can define two major threats: military and migratory. The military concern is ancient (as Chinese great wall or Roman *Limes* suggest it). The migratory concern seems much more contemporary (even if it existed a t the time of Roman empire). Our society is supposed to promote flows and movements. But which flows, which movements? Money, industrial goods, foods are more or less welcome all over the world. It is at least the goal of the World trade organization (WTO) to develop international trade by any means (and particularly in driving down the 'trade barriers').

But what about people and individual movements? Matthew Sparke suggested that the right to move is now in fact reserved to a small '*business class civil citizenship*' (Sparke 2006) living in the 'North'. This privileged 'class' (including businessmen and tourists) is allowed to travel wherever it wishes when the huge majority of the world's population is confined into the periphery of the world system – and expected to remain there… In the 'South' the freedom to move is very uneven. It exists in a privileged upperclass (a *bourgeoisie*, the *compradores* dealing with the North), while poverty and undemocratic systems restrict movements. For the poorest, illegal migration is the only solution and the aim is the 'North'.

Teichopolitics are precisely bound with this differential mobility generates by the uneven development and it must be understood as a way to protect territory from undesired migrations. More precisely, teichopolitics aspires to control all crossing border flows but not necessarily to remove all of them: we must keep in mind that the US/Mexico border is the busiest land crossing in the world. Teichopolitics aims at stabilize centres from undesired flows from the periphery. It is quite rare that the reason for a barrier is to suppress all crossings and to isolate totally a territory. The barrier and the control are the ways to carry out an efficient selection of candidates to migration.

III. A 'CLOSED' PLANET?: THE CLOSURE OF INTERNATIONAL BORDERS

At the end on October 26 2006, United States President Georges W. Bush signed in Washington the *Secure Fence Act*. This act allowed for over 1,100 kilometers of double-reinforced fence to be built along the border with Mexico and authorized the installation of more lighting, vehicle barriers, and border checkpoints, while putting in place more advanced equipment like sensors, cameras, satellites and unmanned aerial vehicles in an attempt to watch and control immigration into the USA. Officials say that it will help cut down on the number of illegal vehicles that go across the border bringing illegal drugs.

This costly program is emblematic of the contemporary closure of international borders, as the *Secure Fence Act* is not an isolated program but takes place in a world-wide systemization of such 'closed' boundaries.

As the following map shows (fig. 1), the number of closed borders is quite important. It is even more important than it was on November 9th 1989, when the 'iron curtain' fell down. Following my own estimation on this matter I calculated that the total length of closed borders represents approximately 39,692 kilometers (already closed or planned to be) on a total length of 248,000 kilometers. This figure represents approximately 16 per cent of world boundaries — a higher than 20 years ago when the 'cold war' ended…

The geography of 'closed' borders roughly underlines the 'arc of crisis' that Zbygniew Brzezinski (who served as National Security Advisor during the Carter administration) underlined in the 1970's stretching from the Horn of Africa to the India subcontinent, through the Near and Middle East. Otherwise, it also underlines the invisible border between North and South: from San Diego to Texas, around Ceuta and Melilla, at the Greece/Turkey border or Finland/Russia, a barrier is slowly erected around the rich northern countries to stop the flow of undesired migrants coming from the South. Developed countries are slowly turning to fortresses (USA and European Union especially,

while Japan is protected by the sea). As the French writer Jean-Christophe Rufin observed at the beginning of the 1990's: the 'Empire' is erecting a new *Limes* against the 'new Barbarians' (Rufin 1991).

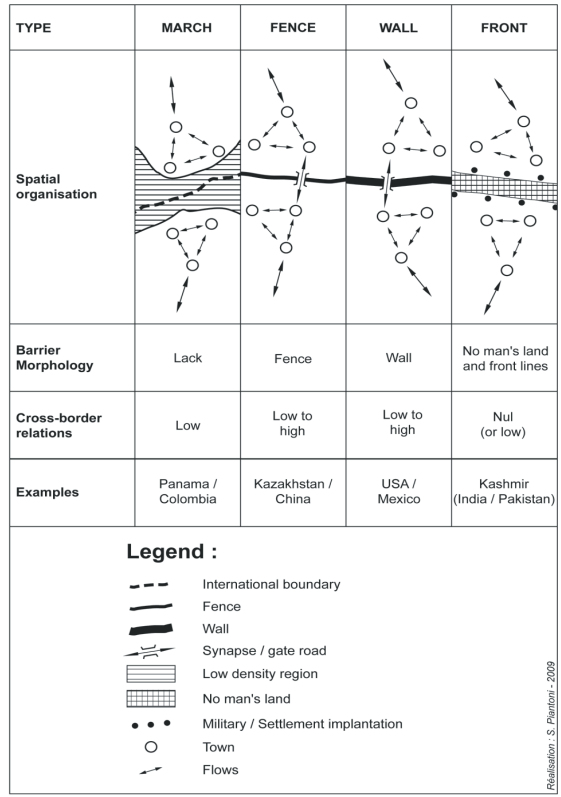
Figure Nº 1
Mapping closed international borders

Source: Rosière, 2009.

IV. TOWARD A TYPOLOGY OF 'CLOSED' BORDERS

The notion of barrier or 'closed' border is rather imprecise. Teichopolitics implies the build up of various kinds of obstacles. It is in fact possible to define four different types of such boundaries (figure 2).

Figure Nº 2
The different types of closed borders



Source: Ballif and Rosière 2009

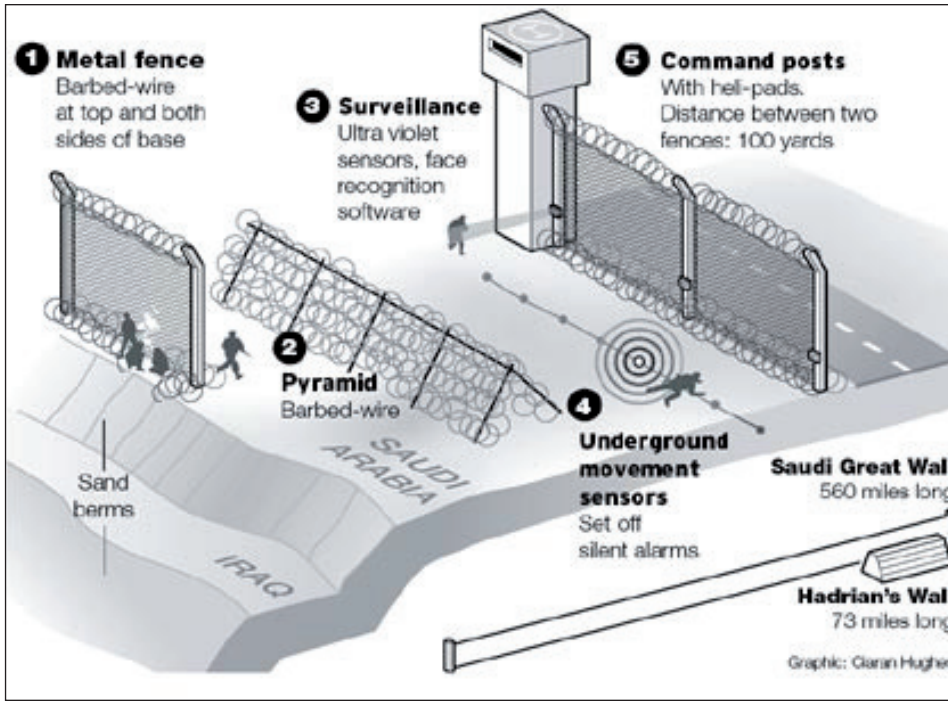
The first type of 'closed' border we can define may be called the 'march' (from the old German word *Mark*), this somehow outdated word means military frontier or military borderland. In this type, the borderland is not closed by an artifact, but the frontier is not open as there is no road, no connecting link between two contiguous states. Such a situation has nothing to do with natural conditions but results from the desire of (at least) one State not to create any communication with the contiguous State. Such 'marches' are quite rare on the world's map but not inexistent. Two of them may be located in South America: between Panama and Colombia (where the Darien jungle plays the role of 'barrier'), and between Venezuela and Guyana. Most of the others Marches take place in South Asia: for instance around Myanmar or at the India/China border. This type of closed border represents approximately 5520 kilometers (14 per cent of the total world borders length).

The second type of barriers is made of what I call the 'security' barriers. This aim is rather imprecise as I underlined in my introduction: security includes different kinds of threats or dangers. Most of these barriers are erected to prevent illegal entries on a territory, so can we call them migratory barriers? This is more specifically the case of the USA/Mexico, the south borders of European borders (Ceuta and Mellila) and the eastern ones (even if they are not 'fenced' continuously).

Some of these security barriers may include more specific goals, i.e. they are more obviously linked to violence or wars. The Israeli 'security fence' perfectly illustrates this category. The idea of creating a physical barrier between Israel and Palestinian territories was first proposed by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1992, the Israel government built the Israeli Gaza Strip barrier as early as 1994 and, following a Palestinian violence outbreak (second *Intifida*) in 2002, it began the construction of a barrier in 2002 to separate most of the West Bank from Israel. The goals of the 'security fence' are numerous, and territory annexing and cutting of illegal migrations also play a certain role in the construction of this controversial barrier (the International Court of Justice condemned Israel in 2004).

Such military barriers are now often erected where violence breaks out: all around Iraq for instance. Saudi Arabia generated a not so famous but impressive wall along Iraq to block terrorists from crossing its 900 kilometers border. Decided in September 2006, the Saudi barrier, which will be equipped with ultraviolet night-vision cameras, buried sensor cables and thousands of miles of barbed wire, will snake across the vast and remote desert frontier between the countries (figure 3). Saudi Arabia built other walls at the Yemen and Oman borders and remains a silent but good example of the actual triumph of teichopolitics.

Figure Nº3
The Saudi barrier along the Iraqi border



Source: De Quedeville 2006

The security barrier takes two main forms: the fence and the wall. The differences between these two types are mostly semantic, economic and linked with their efficiency.

On a semantic point of view, it is obvious that the word 'wall' has a negative background while the word 'fence' can be seen as more positive or at least more neutral. The wall echoes to the 'iron curtain' and the Berlin wall, it suggests a dictatorial power and the use of strength against civilians. Conversely the word 'fence' echoes more neutral, it suggests an industrial environment or refers to the good meaning of the security: the protection as wall refers to the 'dark' side of it: the coercion. In discourses, the use of these words is very meaningful. The name you give to a barrier often reveal your opinion about it. How do you call the Israel barrier? '(Security) fence' (you agree) or '(apartheid) wall' (you condemned it). Geographers themselves are confronted to the problem of the

vocabulary which explains that I use the less employed word 'barrier' to designate all these closure artifacts…

Beyond the word remains the reality of the artifact. On an economic point of view, the fence is obviously less costly than the wall and may be built quickly. On the contrary, the wall (made of reinforced concrete elements) is a costly and 'heavy' construction. Indeed, most of contemporary walls are not only made of concrete elements (like around Jerusalem) but include various segments made of wire (or barbed wire). Above all, the role of technology is more and more important in the 'security' barriers. As I already said, all kinds of warning devices go with physical barriers. Along the USA/Mexico border a so called high-tech 'virtual fence' is being implemented including fixed towers, radars, ground sensors, remote control cameras and software linking border agents. So, it is a high-tech barrier (for instance in Arizona) which symbolizes the cost that developed countries are ready to pay for security — if the efficiency of the 'virtual' fence is effective (Richey 2007).

Such security barriers are of course very expansive and 'southern' countries can't afford the cost of them. For instance, the Botswana/Zimbabwe border offers a good example of 'low-cost' security fence. This 500 kilometers long fence is 2,4 meters high, and 220-volt electrified (Mukumbira 2004). The artifact is more rudimentary than 'high tech' barriers of the northern world... Of course, the efficiency of fence is globally lower than that of wall — especially if it is reinforced by high-tech equipments. Regarding the price of the barrier it is possible to simplify and say that Wall is 'North' and fence is 'South'…

In total, fences and walls -whatever the name we give to them- represent roughly 66 per cent of contemporary barriers. They symbolized the contemporary teichopolitics'.

The third type of barrier is the frontline. This type is characterized by the existence of a no man's land separating two zones of military installations… The most ancient frontlines existing in the world were erected during the 'cold war': The Pakistan/India border built after 1947 and especially the Line of control that runs through the mountains of Kashmir, the Korean DMZ built after 1953, or the Ethiopian/Erythrean borders. The Israel/Palestine barrier could be included into this category – which underlines the difficulty to build up a typology… However, the frontlines are less numerous than the security 'barriers' but still represent roughly 20 per cent of 'closed' borders in the world.

V. THE ACTORS OF THE TEICHOECONOMY

Teichopolitics is not a State policy, or not only. The example of contemporary cities underlines, for instance, the role of property developers in the erection of barriers and it is obvious that private agencies (firms) play a great role into the building of such artifacts. In the 'Risk society' building walls represents a source of profit for security and construction firms. The demand of security from the citizens and societies and the desire of benefits from the private agencies stimulated the construction of walls, it generates a strong 'teichoeconomy' which stimulates the erection of barriers. Indeed, this barrier building process is deeply integrated into the neo-liberal logic.

Of course, we may consider that regarding international boundaries, States and administrations are the main agencies involved in teichopolitics, but private agencies play an important role. This fact is a consequence of the 'retreat of the State' (Strange 1996) that delegates many of State's traditional power to firms and enterprises in the context of neo-liberalism (or Libertarianism) impulsed by the Chicago School of Economics (Nelson Friedman and so on) — whose aim is to minimize or abolish the State. Of course to build a barrier at the border of the State is not abolish it, but to reinforce it. Contemporary teichopolitics only shows that private agencies may substitute themselves to State in the core of its traditional action field. In neo-liberal context, the government's main role is to stimulate private enterprises into a field that is traditionally linked to the action of the State. The newness of teichopolitics is linked with this important role of private agencies.

For instance, on the USA/Mexico border, the *Secure Border Initiative*, or SBInet, (decided in 2006 after a vote of the Secure Fence Act) the Boeing Company has been chosen by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for the Secure Border Initiative (SBI) to build a 'virtual fence' in a contract projected to be more than $2 billion. Boeing set up a consortium with various partners including: L-3 Communications Holdings Inc., Unisys Corp., Perot Systems Corp., DRS Technologies, Elbit unit Kollsman Inc., Lucent Technologies, Centech and USIS. Kollsman Incorporated is quite interesting in this matter. This company's expertise:

> Includes enhanced vision systems, flight displays, head-up displays, thermal imaging systems, fire control systems, and advanced security and surveillance solutions (…) Elbit was selected because of its ability to bring together global resources with decades of technological experience and capabilities securing borders in extreme cold, mountainous regions, as well as hot, desert terrains (Goldman 2006).

This company is in fact the American-based subsidiary of Elbit Systems Ltd. Based in Haifa, Elbit is the largest non-governmental defense company in Israel and it played a key role in the construction of the Israeli security fence. Today "Sixty percent of Elbit's

customers are international. The UK's Ministry of Defense awarded the Watchkeeper program to a consortium that included Elbit Systems" (Goldman 2006).

Raytheon, the US Arms/Defence giant established since the 1960's in Saudi Arabia participate in building the barrier on the Saudi/Iraq border -an artifact that, following comentators, "makes the Berlin Wall look like a picket fence"[2]. Saudi government plans to spend up to $7 billion to build this wall. Other occidental firms are involved into these huge market: EADS for instance plays a leading role into the Saudi *Border Guard Development Program* that plans to secure all Saudi kingdom borders.

This examples underline that the know-how is very important. North World companies, and mostly North-american companies, play a leading role. This role does not integrate only in the construction but, also, in a lobbying process which aims to persuade civilian powers of the validity of teichopolitics. It is not easy to estimate the financial volume of contemporary teichopolitics but as the cost of the 'virtual fence' on the USA/Mexico border suggests, it must be about hundreds of billions dollars.

With this short example we can underline that governments and large companies have their own strategies that, in the same way, contribute to the proliferation of barriers and to the triumph of teichopolitics. For governments the walls underline their ability to protect their citizens, if not their strength: the physical barrier is a political proof of efficiency (even if the real efficiency of such artifact may be discussed and is discussed). For the economical agencies, the barriers are a new market, a huge source of profits… a paradoxal *new frontier*.

VI. CONCLUSION

As this paper underlines, the closure border movement is not at all marginal but is a widespread and global logic affecting unevenly all continents (Latin America and European core being less affected). The emergence of migratory barriers and the decisive role of private companies and agencies seem to be the two major oddness of contemporary teichopolitics as the barrier is usually seen as a marginal and military installation built by States authorities.

These elements oblige us to reconsider the real face of globalization: its real aims and consequences. In this analysis, geographers have their own and relevant analysis to contribute to the debate and show that beyond positive (if not unrealistic) slogans remains the field reality: unequal development, imprisonment, concrete and barbed wires…

[2] http://www.mediacynic.com/cgi-bin/mediacynic.pl?cynic=1004061

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