

## Fence, Wall, Wire

Iva Pleše, Mojca Piškor, Tea Škokić

Fence, wall and wire are words used in the context of illegal migration for physical obstacles at the borders. These objects, simple or complex, are used or built primarily to block the passage, entrance or exit from one place to another, and which in the modern high-tech age, although its origins are in the distant past, form elements of a wider system of control and monitoring of movement. This system, in addition to barriers at national and supranational borders, also includes barriers, perhaps less obvious, located within a certain territory. All these obstacles, both those **within a territory**, which form internalized borders, and those **along its borders**, but also outside them, related to the **externalization of borders**, can be seen as a spectrum or a series of obstacles that are interconnected in numerous ways (cf. **movable fences**).

In addition to the fact that, from this perspective, the firm boundary between *internal* and *external* barriers is erased, the boundary between the terms used for these barriers is also erased in a certain way. Fence, wall and wire are often used as synonyms in the sense of a physical barrier, regardless of their material composition, for instance, in the phrases Hungarian wall or Hungarian fence and Slovenian fence or Slovenian wire. However, the use of a single one of these terms can signal that the barrier in question is of a specific type. In that case, a wall would be an obstacle that is made by masonry, i.e. built of solid material: brick, stone, concrete, etc., a fence would be a metal or some other barrier that is not made by masonry, and a wire would refer to an obstacle that consists only or primarily from the material from which it got its name: barbed or razor wire. However, these are often combinations of several materials and methods of construction, and an example would be one of the numerous internal fences, the one erected for the Ježevu detention center near Zagreb. Also, from a diachronic perspective, we can talk about the evolution of barriers: wire (in the narrow sense) is replaced by a fence (e.g. on the Slovenian-Croatian border) which becomes stronger and more impenetrable, in some cases by adding another barrier (stronger and smarter) to an already existing one (weaker), so that together they form a whole which is also patrolled by the police (on the Hungarian-Serbian border). The barrier on the Hungarian-Serbian border is also called a wall, with associations to the Berlin and other walls, which evokes greater strength and impermeability compared to a fence.

Physical characteristics, such as types of materials, height and width of barriers, their upgrades of various types, etc., do not only point to the degree of strength and impenetrability of both external and internal barriers and their appearance in the wider environment, but also to the different levels of financial resources spent on their construction and erection, which is often connected with suspicions of **corruption**. Fences, walls and wires, together with various highly sophisticated technological and other solutions for border surveillance, **detention** and so-called reception centers and other **facilities**, are part of a growing and profitable industry (cf. Akkerman 2019) associated with **securitization** and border militarization (cf. **migration industry**). Although the European Union is very committed to such securitization, it **refuses**, at least for now and at least for more recent external barriers, to finance “barbed wires and walls” from its funds, certainly in part due to their symbolic effect (cf. Sicurella 2018). At the same time, the funds very generously finance (cf., e.g., Akkerman 2019) every other possible means and method for defending and monitoring different types of borders, in addition to political and other means of support for such endeavors.

Modern border fences, walls and wires, as well as those that almost immediately preceded them, from the Cold War period, are a kind of continuation of ramparts and other fortification obstacles in a peacetime context, and, although outside the military and war context, are connected with concepts from so-called defensive construction, used by various anti-immigrant campaigns in their presentations, such as the one called the Hrvatski bedem (Croatian Rampart). In public discourse, we can even see the use of terms with associations to the bulwark of Christendom, such as **antemurale migrantis**, or calls for **barbed wire** and machine gun nests as a defense against illegal migrants, where they are not present. Following the pompous announcements of the disappearance of borders at the global level, connected with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the promise of a global future without borders, this region – whose experience of the fall of the Wall, and due to its overlap with war and the emergence of new divisions, was different and more complex (cf. Čolović 2009) – can also be the grounds for a discussion on new borders and their constructions, and, on a global level, about the “new age of walls” (Leuenberger 2019) or, in analogy with the “new world order”, about a “new wall order” (Novosseloff, according to Vallet 2019).

Although the basic function of physical barriers in the migration context is the prevention of illegal crossings, entry and exit, i.e. movement, they are presented in critical literature less often, or not at all, as an effective means of stopping migration, and more as a means used in internal and external political, economic, financial, sovereignty,

identity and similar, national and post-national disputes (cf. Brown 2017; Korte 2022; Vallet 2019). Moreover, their ineffectiveness in preventing migration is often emphasized: They do not stop but redirect movements that find new, often more dangerous, routes and paths and also encourage and strengthen smuggling activities and networks (Vallett 2019; cf. Beznec et al. 2016: 50; 54). Nevertheless, from a narrow homeland-territorial and time-limited point of view, certain barriers have been shown to be effective, evident, for example, in the case of closing the Hungarian border shared with Serbia by constructing a fence in 2015, when the movement of migrants from Hungary was redirected to Croatia. Also, even though border regimes may be ineffective overall, material barriers have a real, physical effect, from cuts on bodies and broken legs, to **deaths** caused by dangerous new routes forced on people on the move (cf. De León 2015), but also to death on the obstacles themselves. Unlike, for instance, the fences around the EU enclaves on the African continent, which are also directly fatal, the barriers on the Balkan route have been shown to be indirectly fatal – when people on the move avoid them and die in rivers, on mountains or in trucks. Those apparently less dangerous obstacles in the interior of a territory can also be deadly, even directly: “In Velika Kladuša, a young Moroccan, Ahmed H., tried to enter the Miral reception center (because he wanted to take a shower), and he suffocated and died while trying to pass through the fence erected around the center” (Perić 2021). In this light, the presentation of modern borders and other fences, walls and wires as *defensive* elements seems particularly grotesque. By defending territory from the entry of undesirables, outside the context of military and war, fences, walls and wires, in combination with other securitization and militarization means and practices, expose those who seek refuge to unfavorable conditions and suffering and thus push them to their death (cf. **weaponized landscape**) by which, instead of being defensive, they in fact function as offensive means.

16/1/2023

## Literature

Akkerman, Mark. 2019. *The Business of Building Walls*. s. l.: Transnational Institute, Stop Wapenhandel i Centre Delàs.

Beznec, Barbara, Marc Speer i Marta Stojić Mitrović. 2016. *Governing the Balkan Route. Macedonia, Serbia and the European Border Regime*. Beograd: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Southeast Europe.

Brown, Wendy. 2017. *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*. New York: Zone Books.

Čolović, Ivan, ur. 2009. *Zid je mrtav, živeli zidovi. Pad Berlinskog zida i raspad Jugoslavije*. Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek.

De León, Jason 2015. *The Land of Open Graves. Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*. University of California Press.

Korte, Kristina. 2022. „'Who is the Animal in the Zoo?'. Fencing In and Fencing Out at the Hungarian-Serbian Border. A Qualitative Case Study”. *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 37/3: 453-474.

Leuenberger, Christine. 2019. „Crumbling Walls and Mass Migration in the Twenty-First Century”. U *Open Borders. In Defense of Free Movement*. Reece Jones, ur. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1177-190.

Perić, Ivana. 2021. „Sveto trojstvo ograde, žilet žice i granice”. *Kulturpunkt.hr*.

Sicurella, Federico Giulio. 2017. „The Language of Walls Along the Balkan Route”. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*.

Vallet, Elisabeth. 2019. „Border Walls and the Illusion of Deterrence”. U *Open Borders. In Defense of Free Movement*. Reece Jones, ur. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 156-168.