

**Elisabeth Vallet, ed. *Borders, Fences and Walls: State of Insecurity?*** Border Regions Series. Ed. Doris Wastl-Walter. Farnham, Surrey, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2014. xii, 286 pp. Illustrations. Tables. Index. Cloth.

**T**he era of wishful thinking about the emergence of a borderless world is over. Instead, perceived insecurity—caused by immigration or terrorism—is conducive to the building of walls and fences that impede human mobility. The volume edited by Elisabeth Vallet is, therefore, a timely treatment of the causes, functions, and effects of these physical barriers. With the aim of going beyond single case studies and a purely “local lens” (2), Vallet unites various case studies from different scholarly disciplines in a single volume. However, like many other collections, this volume lacks an overarching theoretical framework or agenda, although most of the contributors take a constructivist approach. The result is “only” a decent collection of sixteen thematically grouped stand-alone articles, which vary in analytical depth and conceptual clarity.

The topics that structure the book are: 1) case studies from North America and Europe; 2) theoretical perspectives on the resurgence of border walls; and 3) case studies from different scholarly perspectives. However, these three parts of the book are not really distinct; most of the articles could be placed within any one of these subject groups.

The volume is distinctive for its topicality. All of the case studies are studies of fences and walls after the 11 September 2001 attacks (9/11). The book should be well received within the scientific community, because many of its articles tie in with current prevailing approaches and research topics within the field of border studies. They touch upon current issues, such as the portability of borders (e.g., chaps. 1, 2 and 4); or the recent technical enhancement and militarization of border control, including related interests by the security industry, which, at the same time, influences politics and technological research (e.g., chaps. 9 and 11). The overall dominant constructivist approach manifests itself in chapters that argue, and demonstrate how, physical walls and fences are symbolically invested and supported by state regulations, discourses, and practices (e.g., chaps. 3, 6 and 9).

As Vallet emphasizes in the introduction, barriers to human mobility at national borders are a global phenomenon. However, the book’s case studies are confined to Israel/Palestine, the US southern and northern borders, and the EU’s southern border. Still, many of the issues raised are relevant to contemporary Ukraine, which not only plays a significant role in the EU border regime, but also has border issues with the Russian Federation and with the self-declared People’s Republics in the Donbas. In the following

paragraphs, I will concentrate on those contributions in the book that can potentially elucidate the Ukrainian case.

Dealing with the EU, chapters 1, 2, and 4 emphasize that borders are felt outside of the borderline and become multiplied. Prior to entering the EU, many people get a sense of the EU border in their home countries through visa applications and selection processes—an experience not unfamiliar to countless Ukrainians. Moreover, the EU externalizes its borders via agreements with third countries, such as Libya and Morocco—or Ukraine. Owing to its strategic geographic location, a largely unsecured border with Russia, visa-free travel for citizens of CIS states, and lack of effective readmission agreements coupled with insufficient law enforcement, Ukraine has become a transit country for (undocumented) migrants. EU visa facilitations for Ukrainians were only granted in exchange for the conclusion of a readmission agreement (2007), which applies both to Ukrainian citizens and third-country nationals who cross Ukraine on their way to the EU. At the same time, Ukraine was formally enabled to accept refugees according to the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951)—and, thus, is considered a safe third country and no longer functions solely as a transit state but also as a receiving country.

Another issue raised in several contributions refers to the fact that borders are both symbols of national sovereignty and identity markers. Nation states see the ability to control state territory and national borders as a key component of state capacity and sovereignty. After 1991, Ukraine's institutional and, especially, symbolic delineation from Russia was only partially successful—and unevenly so across Ukraine. Borders remained open, both physically and in the minds of people. But particularly since the beginning of the current conflict with Russia, the control of national territory and borders has become an issue, and receives growing political attention, in Ukraine.

As the article by Denis Duez (chap. 3) shows, securitization of border discourses feed an insider-outsider dichotomy. As a demarcation between “us” and “them,” borders play a significant role in identity creation. The classification of “others” (as a security threat) attempts to overcome internal societal divisions. In Ukraine, we can observe a symbolic delineation from the Russian “other.”

Most of the authors in the volume are critical toward the building of fences and walls, pointing out the negative consequences, especially with regard to human rights, such as freedom of movement, and the deterioration of cross-border relations. The latter is especially felt at the local level. Dealing with border communities between the US and Mexico or the US and Canada, chapters 5, 12, and 15 demonstrate that the strengthening of security discourses at the national level and related policies (fortification of borders,

building of physical barriers) harm border communities because they impede cross-border cooperation. People in border regions often hold multiple identities but are increasingly forced to choose one side. Therefore, the new physical barriers are often challenged at the local level, which is an expression of, or results in, a conflict of interest between the border communities and the national level. Similarly, the West Bank barriers in Israel (chap. 13) create an additional distance between individuals and national groups. As personal contacts diminish, “others” are no longer perceived as people, but as parts of collectivities. Barriers and checkpoints do not solve or freeze the conflict, but reproduce it. The physical fortification of Ukraine’s border with Russia will doubtless affect the border regions. Moreover, a possible future fencing off the People’s Republics will not solve the conflict, but will perpetuate it by being a constant reminder of it, both symbolically and in practical terms. To prevent negative consequences of new borders and barriers, open public discussions and prudent policies are indispensable.

Overall, this volume is a rich source for those seeking instructive case studies and single conceptual approaches. One should not expect a general overview or synthesis of border studies.

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