



# Rethinking Borders Beyond the State<sup>1</sup>

William Walters

Department of Political Science, Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1S 5B6.  
E-mail: wwalters@ccs.carleton.ca

This paper explores three ways of imagining borders in Europe. The first is the most common. It sees borders in relation to an emergent European region-state or polity. The second looks beyond conventional political figures and uses the gated community to think about the complex political affects and social identities that invest the border. The third also breaks with standard political images, but this time by drawing upon the realm of information technology. Here I thematize the firewall — a non-geographical, non-territorial figure, and non-linear form of border. My second and third images are closer to Foucault's idea of a diagram. The point of the exercise is not to establish which is the most accurate. If borders are multiplicities then we need a plurality of concepts to think their different dimensions and changing functions.

*Comparative European Politics* (2006) 4, 141–159. doi:10.1057/palgrave.cep.6110076

**Keywords:** borders; frontiers; power; European Union; political imagination; spatiality

---

If the fortified town is an immobile machine, the military engineer's specific task is to fight against its inertia. 'The goal of fortification is not to stop armies, to contain them, *but to dominate, even facilitate their movements*.'<sup>2</sup>

## On the Borders of Europe

For a long while the study of state borders and border regions was quite marginal to the discipline of political science. Largely confined to specialist sub-disciplines like political geography (Prescott, 1965) and the realm of diplomatic know-how (Curzon, 1908), when questions of borders did arise within political science it was typically in relation to nationalist projects of territorial acquisition and interstate conflict.

This is clearly no longer the case. If political science has begun to confront what Agnew has called the 'territorial trap' (Agnew, 1994) — the set of geographical assumptions that have combined to obscure the historicity and mutability of political space and territory within international relations and comparative politics — then one consequence has been to move the border from the periphery of the study of politics and international relations and to accord it a more prominent location within research agendas (Ruggie, 1993;



Albert *et al.*, 2001; Migdal, 2004).<sup>3</sup> This is especially true for researchers of European politics, perhaps because it is in Europe that experimentation and readjustment in the relationship between governance, political space and bordering has arguably gone furthest. There is now an emerging and highly promising field of studies which has made European space a laboratory for the study of new forms of territoriality (Berezin and Schain, 2003) and more specifically the changing geography, function, ideology, symbolism and politics of borders in Europe (Anderson and Bort, 2001; Balibar, 2002; Zielonka, 2002; Groenendijk and Guild, 2003).

This literature has seen a lively debate ensue concerning the changing nature, spatiality and function of borders in Europe today. Two themes can be briefly mentioned, though by no means do they exhaust the range of issues currently under investigation. For one line of thought European integration is resulting in 'fuzzy borders' due to the fact that scales and political functions are becoming disaggregated (Waever, 1997; Axford and Huggins, 1999; Christiansen, 2000). Functions of taxation, production, law and security no longer cluster around the same (national) space as once they may have under the 'westphalian' model of the state, prompting Ruggie's (1993, 171) oft-cited observation that we are witnessing nothing less than the 'unbundling of territoriality' in its modern form.

A second line of analysis focuses particularly on the cross-border policing of mobile people and things and finds its impetus in the EU's emerging role in the regulation of migration, asylum and other questions of 'justice and home affairs'. This has explored the various ways in which the 'securitization' of migration (Huysmans, 2000), and projects of counterterrorism are reshaping the borders of Europe. While some maintain that global market forces ultimately militate against any attempts to tightly control movement (Favell and Hansen, 2002), or point to the impossibility of strict border control (Bigo, 1998), a significant body of work highlights the 'hardening' and 'thickening' of 'external' borders (Grabbe, 2000; Guiraudon, 2003). Of particular interest to comparative politics is research which has placed this renewed political obsession with border control in a wider context, comparing European processes with the somewhat longer history of securitization and militarization at the US/Mexico border (Andreas and Snyder, 2000; Andreas and Biersteker, 2003), not to mention the more recent idea of 'homeland security' (Pease, 2003). Andreas speaks of 'rebordering', a useful term that emphasizes that the economic and military functions of borders may be declining, but at the same time borders are becoming more important in the policing of what he calls 'clandestine transnational actors' (Andreas, 2003). Consequently, 'it may be more accurate to say that the importance of territoriality is shifting rather than simply diminishing' (Andreas, 2000, 3).



## Political Imagination

These and other lines of analysis have certainly been responsible for deepening our understanding of the politics of borders today. Yet I want to argue that the political study of borders would benefit from a greater engagement with a theme I want to call political imagination. To think about borders in terms of political imagination would be to pay closer attention to the changing topography, landscape and political field of the border. Susan Buck-Morss (2002; cf. Neocleous, 2003) offers an important interpretation of the concept of political imagination which she borrows from the Russian philosophers Valerii Podoroga and Elena Petrovskaia. While the imaginary is an important concept within discourse analysis, and especially Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, Buck-Morss notes that in Russian ‘the concept takes on a representational concreteness lacking in contemporary western discussions’. The Russian word for political imaginary is *Politicheskoe voobrazhenie*, where *obraz* ‘signifies “form” or “shape” as a graphic representation, and is used to mean “icon”’. Understood in this way, political imagination suggests ‘a topographical concept in the strict sense, not a political logic but a political landscape, a concrete visual field in which political actors are positioned’ (Buck-Morss, 2002, 12; cf. Neocleous, 2003, 1–2).

Recent work at the intersection of political theory and comparative politics has explored the utility of political imagination in relation to theories of the state. Central to the project of understanding how the power of the state is legitimated, according to Mark Neocleous, is ‘to take seriously the ways in which the state has been imagined as having a particular “shape” or “form”’. In English the word is “figure”’ (Neocleous, 2003, 4). Hence he makes it his aim ‘to “figure out” the state by exploring ways in which it has been imagined as an artificial representation of the human’, a subject that is believed to possess its own body, mind, personality and home. While James Scott does not use the term, his investigation of ‘seeing like a state’ might also be read as relevant to this theme of political imagination (Scott, 1998). Scott’s concern is nothing less than the changing ways in which states map their own societies, with this mapping being a constitutive element of the state’s power in relation to society. This mapping is not a mental or merely ideological exercise. For Scott it is a matter of understanding the concrete practices through which states make their spaces visible, calculable and amenable to control; their employment of particular ‘tools of legibility’, instruments as diverse as the cadastral survey, the property register and mortality statistics.

Such approaches offer us rich accounts of the political imagination of the state. Yet as more studies begin to grapple with the phenomenon of ‘governance without government’ (Rosenau and Czempel, 1992), it is becoming increasingly clear that not all power, not all forms of governance



are captured by the figure of the state. Growing interest in phenomena such as cosmopolitics and multilevel governance point to the need to understand the exercise of 'political power beyond the state' (Rose and Miller, 1992). It is here that Foucault's 'analytics' of power can be useful. In one of the more important of the vast range of commentaries on his work, Deleuze has described Foucault as a 'new cartographer' of power relations. What does he mean?

### Diagrams of Power

Foucault develops a new understanding of power, Deleuze argues, in the course of writing his studies of the regulation of criminality and sexuality. It involves a 'new functionalism' that consists in abandoning the idea that states or classes are the origins or repositories of power. This new approach shifts the focus from power as a property won by a class to power as strategy, and speaks of power in terms of its 'dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings' (Foucault cited by Deleuze, 1988, 25).

This new functionalism or functional analysis certainly does not deny the existence of class and class-struggle but illustrates it in a totally different way, with *landscapes, characters, and behaviour* that are different from those to which traditional history, even of the Marxist variety, has made us accustomed (Deleuze, 1988, 25. my emphasis).

This new approach to power is profoundly spatial, involving a 'new topology' (26). Foucault does not seek to understand power as something abstract or universal. He does not propose a 'theory' but rather an 'analytics of power' which works 'toward a definition of the specific domain formed by relations of power' as well as 'the instruments that will make possible its analysis' (Foucault, 1990, 82). The most famous of these is perhaps his discussion of 'panopticism', 'a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use' (Foucault, 1977, 205), and a tactic that 'called for multiple separations, individualizing distributions, an organization in depth of surveillance and control, an intensification and a ramification of power' (1977, 198). However, his work discloses other diagrams as well. For instance, he contrasts the tactics of panopticism with that approach to governance that finds dramatic expression in the medieval treatment of leprosy. Here we see 'rituals of exclusion' and 'a practice of rejection, of exile-enclosure'. Unlike the meticulous separations, classifications and distributions of panopticism, with leprosy the subject 'was left to his doom in a mass among which it was useless to differentiate' (Foucault, 1977, 198).

Foucault's idea of diagrams is a useful one for studies of power and political imagination. It offers us a way to think about governance not in institutional or



structural terms, nor in ways limited to the image of the state, but in terms of concrete practices, schemes and spaces. It suggests that we may be able to produce new insights about the character and the power relations embedded in borders and frontiers if we relax the assumption that the border is a necessary property of the state. For bordering is a social function that is enacted through diverse means, in various settings and for different purposes. By thinking of (re)bordering as a contingent social practice, I argue, we can shed new light on the changing nature of borders in Europe.

In the remainder of this paper, I explore three ways of imagining borders in Europe. The first is perhaps the most conventional: to see borders in relation to an emergent European region-state or polity. The second looks beyond conventional political figures and uses the gated community to think about the complex political affects and aspirations that invest the border. The third also breaks with political images, but this time by drawing upon the realm of information technology. Here I thematize the firewall — a non-geographical, non-territorial form, and non-linear form of border. My second and third figures are closer to Foucault's idea of a diagram. The point of the exercise is not to establish which is the most accurate. If borders are multiplicities then we need a plurality of concepts to think their different dimensions and changing functions.

## Imagining a New Frontier

### Region-state

As part of his exploration of the political imagination of the modern state, Neocleous notes how the word 'frontier' (*frontière*) originally referred to the façade of a building or the front line of the army. Sometime in the 16th century it 'came to mean the boundaries or borders of a particular space and has been associated with state borders ever since' (Neocleous, 2003, 99). This is the modern idea of the border: a continuous line demarcating the territory and sovereign authority of the state, enclosing its domain and protecting its population. The line where the jurisdictional authority of one state ends and that of its neighbour begins. It corresponds most closely with the historical spatiality of political power which Agnew calls the 'field of forces': a geopolitical world of 'rigidly defined territorial units in which each state can gain power only at the expense of the others and each has total control over its own territory' (Agnew, 1999, 504).

For some observers, the fact that the EU now possesses an 'external frontier', and guarantees freedom of movement behind that frontier to EU citizens, is an important sign that it is becoming more like a state. In other words: find a frontier and following close behind you'll find a state. This



argument is made with some force by Timothy Snyder who notes that border control is the ‘unplanned but irresistible shortcut’ by which the EU is taking on ‘state-like functions’, assuming ‘state-like (sic) roles’, and acquiring ‘state-like capacities’. Involving itself in the activity of border control has, more than other aspects of European integration, demanded that ‘the EU behave like a territorial state’ (Snyder, 2005, 2). To emphasize his point, Snyder cites the increasing tendency for decisions regarding immigration to be taken by national governments at the level of the European Council, as well as the birth of European systems of data collection and surveillance.

Snyder’s argument has certain resonances with the famous ‘frontier thesis’ advanced by Frederick Jackson Turner. For Snyder, the EU ‘as a state-like entity, is in the process of *being born at its borders*’ (2005, 2; my emphasis). Recall that a defining feature of Turner’s famous thesis was that the settlement of the American frontier was also a constitutive and generative process. It was the zone where something new, a genuinely ‘American’ identity and subjectivity, founded upon settlement, expansion and pioneering, was brought into existence. ‘Little by little’, Turner observes, the pioneer ‘transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe, not simply the development of Germanic germs... The fact is, that here is a new product that is American’ (Turner, 1920, 4). Turner’s depiction of the American frontier as an uncivilized wilderness, despite the lengthy inhabitation of these lands by Native Americans, betrays, of course, the Eurocentric and racialized lens through which he viewed the westward expansion of the United States. Nevertheless, Turner does provide us with a figure of thought in which frontierization is linked to state- and people-formation.

Snyder’s argument is helpful since it identifies the moment of EU frontier creation not just as a policy but a point of transformation in the political rationality of European integration, that is, as an ‘event’ (Foucault, 1991). However, taking the birth of the external frontier as evidence for the constitution of the EU as a new kind of region-state is not without its problems. Not the least of these is a tendency to read the figure of the region-state into a complex situation that might be better characterized in other terms. Snyder’s search for signs of an emergent state rather obscures the presence of forms of rule that are not adequately captured by the vocabulary of the state. As Chris Rumford has argued, the EU presents us, among other things, with a complex blend of ‘pan-European governance, harmonization of regulatory structures, and empowerment of multiple, state and non-state agencies’ (Rumford, 2003, 14). In such a situation the challenge is perhaps better understood as one of identifying the ‘forms of rule at work within the EU rather than looking for evidence of state-building’ (14). Gaining a better appreciation of how the EU constructs particular spaces of rule — within which problems can be defined as distinctively ‘European’, and, therefore,



requiring ‘European’ solutions — is, as Delanty and Rumford (2005, 146) have insisted, critical here.

As Rumford has noted, ‘reflexive government’ is one concept that might help us understand the nature of these spaces of rule, and think about forms of European governance in ways that avoid inscribing them within a telos of state formation (Rumford, 2003). While nearly all forms of modern government incorporate an element of reflexivity (e.g., as embodied in the practice of policy studies), for Dean, reflexive government means something more specific. It highlights the tendency in contemporary political practice whereby ‘government begins to conceive its task as operating upon existing forms of government rather than governing either things or processes’ (Dean, 1999, 211; cf. Rumford, 2003, 14). Reflexive government pertains to a relatively novel political landscape, a terrain that is increasingly populated by complex entanglements of public and private, state and NGO, subnational, supranational and transnational governmental agencies. As political-administrative space becomes more pluralized, governmental practice is less about directly managing things like the economy, and more about governing other governmental systems. Reflexive government operates upon and through the terrain of the benchmark, the performance indicator, the best practice, the audit, the league table, budgetary and accounting mechanisms and countless other little political technologies. It confers a new kind of visibility on state and non-state agencies that encourages them to account for themselves and to compete with one another in terms of their ‘performance’.

What does reflexive government bring to our understanding of borders in Europe? How does it modify the view of the EU’s external frontier as something enclosing, and symbolizing an emergent region-state? The point is that if the EU has become increasingly associated with aspects of ‘internal’ security, with the policing of the external frontier, with the so-called ‘combat’ against terror, illegal immigration, organized crime and other transnational dangers, it has done so not by becoming a supranational policing-state. It is true that the EU has, not without controversy, created new policing capacities such as the recent European border guard. However, while such initiatives are politically symbolic, they are relatively minor in terms of their institutional capacity and scope. In the bigger scheme of things the EU’s method of promoting internal security and border control is less about building new European agencies and more a matter of finding ways to govern which link the different national systems, but also weave private authorities (e.g., through carrier sanctions policies aimed especially at airlines (Guiraudon, 2003, 201–206), into a European ensemble.

Here it is important to read carefully the documents in which the idea of governing Europe as an ‘area of freedom, security and justice’ is elaborated (CEU, 1999a, b). It is a matter of taking terms like ‘external frontier’ and ‘area’



seriously, of working out what kind of governance they embody, and not just regarding them as repetitions of an older process of state formation. These documents reveal a project which aspires to assemble an extended European zone of security not in the image of a vast territorial state, but through various mechanisms which plug the gaps, interstices and holes between the different migration, legal and policing systems of member-states. Something similar could be said of ‘actors in the chain’, a concept which features prominently within EU proposals for an anti-illegal immigration policy (CEC, 2001), and which implicates not just member-states but those territories named as ‘countries of transit’ and of ‘origin’ in its strategies of migration control. The performance of national border guards, customs agencies and the like must be held up to common standards and rules since ‘the common security system is only as strong as its weakest point’ (CEC, 2002, 26).

Seen from the point of view of reflexive government — that is, from the perspective of tactics of rule that govern not by absorbing existing agencies into something bigger, but linking and working through them — certain features associated with the Schengen agreements acquire their full significance. For instance, there is the central function that the Schengen formula accords to ‘information exchange’ among national authorities. This function is institutionalized in hard forms by information systems pertaining to unauthorized migrants and criminal activities (SIS) and asylum claims (Eurodac), but also softer practices, such as networks and exchanges of liaison officers. These can now be seen as practices that aspire to create a smooth space of knowledge and surveillance without creating a new centralized authority. Likewise, the vast exercise of scrutinizing and auditing the performance of accession countries appears not just as the bureaucratic aspect of the enlargement process, but the reflexive government of other governmental mechanisms *par excellence*.<sup>4</sup> Even relatively mundane artefacts like the Schengen Catalogue and technical manuals acquire a new significance. Conveying norms, standards and recommendations pertaining to the actual conduct of border management, the appropriate layout of airport terminals and much else, such inscription devices enable the extension of European governance over time and space, despite the absence of a European superstate (Walters, 2002a).

To sum up this section, a focus on reflexive government, and the many little practices that compose it, promises new insights about the relationship between governance and borders in Europe today. Not only does it avoid the temptation to deduce the emergence of a European region-state from the fact of the EU’s recent acquisition of an external frontier. In addition, it brings into focus many of the ways in which this is not the repeat of an earlier process of state formation, but an experiment with new forms of rule. That said, reflexive government remains a rather dry and aspatial concept. It tells us little about



the play of affect, about the political imagination of the border. For this reason we turn to a second figure: the gated community.

### **Gated community**

One of the more critical metaphors for the new borders of Europe is, of course, that of Fortress Europe (Klein, 2003). Sometimes used in relation to the prospect of European protectionism in the area of trade, this term has become most closely associated with criticisms of attempts to ‘harden’ the EU’s borders against the movements of refugees and impoverished migrants. In a particularly imaginative short essay, van Houtum and Pijpers have proposed a more contemporary metaphor and spatial figure — the EU not as a fortress but a gated community (van Houtum and Pijpers, 2003). Gated communities are one of the more striking features of the social, urban and suburban landscapes of highly-divided societies like Brazil, South Africa and the United States. Paradoxically, they are less common in Europe. In the gated community, or, more euphemistically, ‘defended neighbourhood’, varying combinations of CCTV, gates, private security patrols, architectural design and the careful scrutiny of would-be members assure the wealthy resident that they can enjoy their home and ‘neighbourhood’ alongside similarly positioned people while secure from the turmoil and social dislocation beyond the gate.

A big part of the promise of these urban enclaves is the protection and defense of a certain way of life in the face of great social inequalities. The gated community gives the idea of ‘home insulation’ a new meaning! As Mike Davis comments in his vivid account of life in some of the most affluent areas of Los Angeles, ‘the defense of luxury lifestyles is translated into a proliferation of new repressions in space and movement, undergirded by the ubiquitous “armed response”’ (Davis, 1990, 223). Security comes in many forms. Recall how the project of welfarism offered the national citizen a *social* form of security founded upon an extended conception of solidarity, and produced by such political technologies as social insurance and progressive income taxation. The gated community offers the homeowner-citizen a marketized conception of security which operates through the strategic, and defensive organization of space and enacts an ‘architectural policing of social boundaries’ (Davis, 1990, 223). It is precisely this interplay of desire and insecurity, this coupling of lifestyle-promotion and aggressive strategies of social defense, which, according to Van Houtum and Pijpers, makes the gated community a suitable concept to think the EU’s present immigration and border policies, not to mention its protection of certain industries and sectors at the expense of developing countries.

The advantage of the gated community as a figure for thinking about Europe’s borders is that it moves us away from a purely institutional account.



It emphasizes that the border is never reducible to a set of policies, or even the expanded view of reflexive governance practices already mentioned. It captures the fact that borders are always embedded in social, cultural and symbolic fields. It reminds us that borders are invested with particular functions and that they crystallize particular geopolitical and socioeconomic relations. With the gated community the border is called upon to regulate global poverty, to address the twin failures of developmentalism and neoliberalism to effect an adequate and humane strategy of global governance and population management.

However, the figure of the gated community also reminds us that the production and maintenance of borders cannot be dissociated from complex flows and interplays of mass-mediated, commercialized images and experiences of desire and fear, order and chaos, citizen and alien/terrorist, the domestic and the foreign. In the case of the gated community, I want to argue that we are faced with circuits and relays of desire-insecurity-abjection. These relays operate between the psychic and material investment in the idea of home, family, neighbourhood and community — those warm, intimate, privileged spaces of desire — and the mass-mediated image of abject subjects, of wandering, rootless, *home-less* peoples; subjects that we might at most pity, and afford ‘humanitarian’ assistance, but beings who do not belong *here*, in *this* community. As *Kilroy*, a discontinued BBC TV talkshow, framed one particular audience discussion: ‘asylum-seekers — why in my neighbourhood?’<sup>5</sup> However, the point is this is not just an interplay of images or ideas. In as much as particular national and European bordering strategies resonate with and draw upon these circuits of desire and insecurity, in as much as those same policies contribute to a situation where desperate people wash up on beaches in dangerous rusty boats, or sneak into the Channel Tunnel in a bid to reach the UK, then these circuits are actually producing abject subjects. They are producing the very same endangered identities that underpin the circulation of fear and insecurity within the public sphere.

This leads me to a second point, one that concerns the social construction and ‘repositioning’ of citizenship. As I understand it, the gated community is not something fixed but a relatively flexible and mobile network of affects, technologies, identities and space. Following Foucault (1977), it might be regarded as a diagram. The point is not to represent the EU as one vast gated community with the external frontier as its perimeter, anymore than Foucault sought to portray industrial society as one giant prison. However, it is to suggest that different political projects seek to tap into these networks and draw upon their energy. As Paul Veyne (1997) has insisted, the governed is not an eternal object. On the contrary, there are multiple identities and rationalities under which we are governed. With the gated community it’s a matter of identifying the moment when governance seeks legitimation by appealing to



the image of the home (or perhaps the homeland), when it seeks to connect itself to the warm sentiments associated with the domestic world — the moment I have elsewhere called ‘domopolitics’(Walters, 2004). If the EU has for some decades now been mindful of a legitimation problem and a citizenship ‘gap’, if it has expressed a repeated aspiration to move itself ‘closer to the citizen’, my point is that today the gated community provides a terrain for this endeavour. Citizenship can be defined and enacted in multiple ways, for instance in terms of deliberative and civic activity. When citizenship and subjectivity is represented in discourses about Europe as an area of freedom, security and justice, as often as not it is the domopolitical version of citizenship that is at stake.

### **Firewall**

Despite their differences, both the region-state and the gated community imagine the border as a line enclosing a contiguous geographical space. However, ours is a time when the actual work of border security is arguably better characterized not as the defence of lines and fronts but as the surveillance of key nodes, such as ports and airports, that are today interconnected in global webs of transportation (Heyman, 2004); when programmes of ‘remote control’ combine visas, carrier sanctions, employer sanctions, and readmission and ‘safe third country’ agreements to relocate border controls away from the borders of the EU and as close as possible to the places of origin and transit of unwanted migrants (Zolberg, 1999; Guiraudon, 2003; Zolberg, 2003); when these same ‘safe third country’ agreements between EU states and the so-called ‘countries of origin’, not to mention the spread of refugee detention centres, make it increasingly difficult to draw a distinction between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ of Europe (Bigo, 2000; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2003); and when biometric technologies and other forms of scanning and surveillance have made information processing and information exchange integral to the routine conduct of migration control and border security (van der Ploeg, 1999; Verstraete, 2001; Salter, 2004; Sparke, 2004). For these reasons we need new metaphors and figures to capture the character of borders today. The last figure I want to discuss is one that breaks with geographical space, just as it breaks with state space, and moves us closer to the digital, the informational. This is the firewall.

In the world of computing, a firewall programme is something that regulates the connection between a PC or local network and the wider network environment. The task of the firewall is to perform a kind of traffic control at the interface between what network security language calls different ‘zones of trust’. Typical zones include the internet, where there is zero or very low trust, and the internal network of a business or university where there is high trust.



The firewall scans the flow of information entering and leaving the system. It provides a single ‘choke point’ where flows of data can be audited and logged, producing a record of traffic. Malicious packages are blocked, returned or perhaps ‘quarantined’. Like antivirus software, the firewall operates quietly in the background, scanning, filtering, checking the torrents of data that traverse the network. Its promise is to generate safe interiors and ensure high levels of trust so that those inside can go about their business, safe in the knowledge that their exchanges are not corrupted or compromised. Moreover, the firewall addresses the fear that a given environment can be infiltrated, turned into a base for illegal operations. For it seeks to ensure that if worms, trojans or viruses do manage to infiltrate a PC or local network, they will not be in a position to use it as a node for their own purposes.

Several things make the firewall a particularly suitable figure for thinking about borders today. First, the firewall captures the fact that the border is not a wall designed to arrest all movement but more of a filter that aspires to reconcile high levels of circulation, transmission and movement with high levels of security. Critics of the Fortress Europe thesis have argued that the reality of the EU’s borders is not one of greater restriction: ‘The emerging governance of economic and geographical factors over state-territorial ones suggests that the borders of the new Europe will continue to be fuzzy and porous rather than fortress-like’ (Favell and Hansen, 2002, 596). Perhaps it is not so much a question of walls *vs* markets and porosity but of systems that aspire, albeit frequently with mixed results, to produce and distribute both mobility and immobility.

Second, better than the other two images we have explored, the firewall expresses something of the way in which border control is embedded within social relations of power and resistance, tactics and counter-tactics. Challenging the conventional view of migration as an objective force, a flow almost blindly ‘pushed’ and ‘pulled’ by greater forces, an important line of research is developing which insists on the autonomy of migration. It is nicely articulated by Sandro Mezzadra who insists that one should focus not only on the social contexts in which migrations occur, but also ‘highlight the elements of subjectivity which permeate the migratory movements and which must be kept in mind if one wants to produce an image of these movements as *social* movements in the full sense’ (2004, 270). In a similar vein, Nestor Rodriguez (1996) has argued that what states and officials call ‘illegal immigration’ can be understood more fruitfully as ‘autonomous international migration’. Shadowing the transnationalization of capital, the unauthorized border crossings and migratory strategies of poor families, peasants and workers, often facilitated by third parties, he argues, constitutes nothing less than a form of transnationalization from below. Autonomous international migration is challenging not just the borders of the nation-state but the borders of



citizenship (Nyers, 2003). There exists in migration ‘an autonomous space of subjective action that can force significant institutional change’ (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2003, 22). Autonomous migration is calling into question the right and the capacity of sovereign state to determine who can reside, work, live and on what terms. Seen from this perspective, it is possible to venture a different view of border controls and state strategies. They can appear not as structures of sovereign power that migrants resist, but the reverse. Once the autonomy and subjectivity of migration is emphasized, border control and the politics and discourse which frame it appear as reactive — as attempts to contain and resist transnationalization from below in the name of a national model of citizenship whose limitations in the face of new patterns of work, culture and political life are increasingly exposed.

To compare the border to a firewall is to register the fact that the force of autonomous migration means border control cannot be static. It is not a question of putting in place a system, building a wall once and for all time. More than ever, border control has become a dynamic, agonic process, a field of permanent social struggle in its own right. If border control can be understood as a practice, the logic is that of the ‘update’ and the ‘patch’. What Andreas (2000) calls ‘rebordering’ is truly an ongoing process. No sooner is one ‘smuggling route’ closed down and another crystallizes somewhere else. Every advance in control technology is haunted by the prospect that it too could be hacked open. Hence it should be emphasized that to liken the border to a firewall is not meant to imply the technological perfection of border control, even if political authorities do indeed look to new technologies as a non-political ‘fix’ for political questions of community, poverty and citizenship (Muller, 2004; Bigo and Carrera, 2005). Instead, it is to make the point that resistance is already *inside* the border.

The last point I want to make about the firewall concerns the relationship between borders, technology and space. It could well be that we are witnessing a growing informationalization of borders — a process that is reflected, for instance, in the North American context in policy talk about a ‘smart border’ (Salter, 2004). Yet it would be mistaken to interpret this increased reliance on networks of data sharing and surveillance as the demise of the old land and sea borders and their checkpoints. For in both the European and North American contexts one sees a massive effort involving civilian and military agencies to police coastlines and seas, to track smugglers and close their routes. In many ways migration control has become more not less located in geography, in territory, in a kind of control that seeks to insinuate itself into the very contours of the land.<sup>6</sup>

We should not overlook this renewed, intensely geographical character of borders. Nevertheless, the advent of digital technology and new systems of communication is transforming the architecture of borders, just as it is



reshaping and rescaling social relations in other domains. The precise nature of this transformation is highly complex and context-dependent. Still, there are two remarks that should be made. First, it is important to study new technologies in their social context. What Latham and Sassen (2005) call the ‘socio-digital’ is a matter of avoiding a kind of techno-determinism and recognizing that even the same technology can have multiple applications. Social outcomes and power relations cannot be simply read-off technologies. The point is well-illustrated by van der Ploeg (1999) in her study of biometric identification. Typically this is being used to target marginal groups — criminals, recipients of welfare, migrants and refugee-claimants — and to regulate their access to certain socio-economic goods. However, biometrics can also regulate the conferment of advantage, as is the case in many airports and fast lanes where ‘members of the club’, once assessed as ‘low-risk travellers’, are given the privilege of jumping the queue and avoiding time-consuming security checks (Sparke, 2004).

Second, and related to this point, where these new technologies are applied to the regulation of movement, they are serving to reconfigure the social experience and distribution of space itself. Van der Ploeg examines the case of Eurodac, an information system introduced in the EU that uses biometric identification — specifically fingerprinting — to control border crossing by ‘illegal immigrants’ and ‘asylum-seekers’. Eurodac, she argues, enacts a kind of obligatory marking of the suspect, a compulsory inscription of the mark of suspicion and illegality upon the body. ‘Once a person is enrolled in the system, wherever in the European Union he or she travels, the appropriate machines will be able to “read off” their body their status as refugee or illegal person’ (1999, 301). This means that if a person is caught in Belgium, and found to have fingerprints matching an asylum case in France, they can be expelled from Belgium. What this starkly illustrates is that not all subjects inhabit ‘Europe’ in the same way. Space is not simply a matter of inside and outside but composed of multiple strata. With an EU passport and enough money, a person can experience the smooth Europe of transportation networks and interlinked cities. This is the borderless Europe long affirmed in official EU discourse, and familiar from the glossy literature of business-travel and tourism. But for those branded by Eurodac, space is jagged, uneven and fragmented. National and other jurisdictional segmentations remain as, or even more salient than ever. As ethnographic investigations of the world of trafficking are starting to show (Andrijasevic, 2004), the border-crossings of the unauthorized can be hugely time consuming and fraught with danger. Future research will no doubt want to explore how unauthorized migrants, and the agents who facilitate their dangerous passages, are having to trace out an alternative European space through their autonomous movements.



## Conclusion

This paper has surveyed three ways of imagining borders in Europe today. Each reveals a distinctive relationship between governance, space and bordering. The first figure — that of the region-state — imagines the border as an external frontier tracing a line around, and giving a territorial dimension to the EU. It likens the external frontier to the borders of the modern state: as a kind of threshold or façade delimiting a territory and home within. I argued that there are several reasons why we should not read the external frontier as a sign of coming EU statehood. On closer inspection the external frontier is a unique formation whose specificities demand careful attention and further theorization. This might proceed by asking: just what is an *area* of freedom, security and justice; is this ‘area’ a new kind of territory and how does an area differ from a national territory?

Nevertheless, while the external frontier is not necessarily a sign of region-statehood, as an event it does raise questions for any history of European integration. The project of building a European Community began, following World War II, as an attempt to overcome territorial rivalries in Europe. Within Jean Monnet’s political imagination of Europe, borders were an ‘artificial’ division which he ascribed to the distorting force of nationalism; an obstacle to peace and social progress. The institutionalization of common markets and ‘European’ agencies to govern them represented a path beyond the bordered and bloody Europe of the past. Within the early imagination of European integration borders often carried a negative connotation, something that was to be carried over into the single market programme of the 1980s. Something has obviously changed today. While the EU may still define its identity against economic borders, the creation of an external frontier, and the imperative of policing it, means that perhaps for the first time borders have a positive identity and relationship to security within EU discourse.

If an official understanding exists today that borders are necessary to the project of European governance, and productive of security, our second figure — the gated community — can help us understand the political and spatial logic of this security. As critical studies of security have shown, ‘security’ is not a natural object or a generic attribute but always the effect of specific practices and discourses. By mobilizing the figure of the gated community I have tried to suggest that there are resonances and linkages between the way in which the security of homes and neighbourhoods is currently imagined, marketed and mediated, and the ways in which security is imagined at the level of states and other political formations. If future research might profitably concentrate on the construction of the EU as an area, it might also interrogate more fully the meaning of justice and *home* affairs, that is, the construction of the EU as a space of home.



In proposing the firewall as a third way of imagining bordering processes, I seek to push the idea of political imagination in new directions. The figures of the region-state and the gated community capture certain ways in which official and scholarly discourses already think about Europe's borders. But are our existing forms of political imagination capable of expressing the changing nature of borders? Elsewhere I have argued for the importance of understanding borders historically (Walters, 2002b). In proposing the firewall I have implied that we need new concepts, new acts of imagination to map contemporary transformations. The diagram of the firewall captures in a provisional and heuristic manner the moment when bordering and the governance of territory enter into new relationships; when borders no longer coincide neatly with state frontiers; and when border control becomes a highly dynamic process, a site of struggle over the forms, means and terms of international mobility.

## Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this paper was presented as a keynote address at Rethinking European Spaces, Royal Holloway, University of London, April 2005. I am very grateful to the organizers and participants for their comments.
- 2 Virilio (1986, 12). The quote comes from Vauban and is taken from a course in permanent fortification at the School for the Application of Engineering and Artillery, 1888.
- 3 It is somewhat paradoxical that this growing interest in borders and frontiers should, in the broadest sense, coincide with the strengthening of what Zacher calls the 'territorial integrity norm' — 'the growing respect for the proscription that force should not be used to alter interstate boundaries' (2001, 215). For Zacher, World War II is something of a turning point after which one sees the embedding of this norm within international affairs. (I am grateful to Simon Dalby for this reference).
- 4 See, for example, Brown (2004) who provides an overview of border management capacities on the EU's periphery. Such work can be read as a commentary on the EU's own review process since it draws heavily on the EU's periodic reports of candidate and neighbour states. However, given that it presents its own recommendations for improving governmental performance, such work might also be read as an element of reflexive government in its own right.
- 5 See the video captures at <http://www.bag2002.co.uk/newstv.htm>, accessed 29 October 2005.
- 6 This parallels the epic nature of the journeys that many, so-called 'irregular' migrants make — typically assisted and exploited by smugglers — as they cross the EU's frontiers not through the official routes but often by crossing mountain ranges, rivers, and forests. These dangerous journeys can last days or even months. See the vivid testimonies of 'trafficked' women in Andrijašević (2004).

## References

- Agnew, J. (1994) 'Timeless Space and State Centrism: The Geographical Assumptions of International Relations Theory', in G. Rosow, N. Inayatullah and M. Rupert (eds.) *The Global Economy as Political Space*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.



- Agnew, J. (1999) 'Mapping political power beyond state boundaries: territory, identity, and movement in world politics', *Millennium* 28(3): 499–521.
- Albert, M., Jacobson, D. and Lapid, Y. (eds.) (2001) *Identities, Borders, Orders: Rethinking International Relations Theory*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Anderson, M. and Bort, E. (2001) *The Frontiers of the European Union*, New York: Palgrave.
- Andreas, P. (2000) 'Introduction: The Wall After the Wall', in P. Andreas and T. Snyder (eds.) *The Wall around the West: State Borders and Immigration Controls in North America and Europe*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Andreas, P. (2003) 'Redrawing the line: borders and security in the twenty-first century', *International Security* 28(2): 78–111.
- Andreas, P. and Biersteker, T. (eds.) (2003) *The Rebordering of North America*, New York: Routledge.
- Andreas, P. and Snyder, T. (eds.) (2000) *The Wall around the West: State Borders and Immigration Controls in North America and Europe*, Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Andrijasevic, R. (2004) *Trafficking in women and the politics of mobility in Europe*, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Utrecht.
- Axford, B. and Huggins, R. (1999) 'Towards a Post-national Polity: The Emergence of the Network Society in Europe', in D. Smith and S. Wright (eds.) *Whose Europe? The Turn towards Democracy*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Balibar, E. (2002) *Politics and the Other Scene*, London: Verso.
- Berezin, M. and Schain, M. (eds.) (2003) *Europe without Borders: Remapping Territory, Citizenship, and Identity in a Transnational Age*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Bigo, D. (1998) 'Frontiers and Security in the European Union: The Illusion of Migration Control', in M. Anderson and E. Bort (eds.) *The Frontiers of Europe*, London, Washington, DC: Pinter.
- Bigo, D. (2000) 'When Two Become One: Internal and External Securitisations in Europe', in M. Kelstrup and M.C. Williams (eds.) *International Relations Theory and the Politics of European Integration*, London: Routledge.
- Bigo, D. and Carrera, S. (2005) 'From New York to Madrid: technology as the ultra-solution to the permanent state of fear and emergency on the EU', *Centre for European Policy Studies*, 11 October. Available at [http://www.ceps.be/Article.php?article\\_id=314](http://www.ceps.be/Article.php?article_id=314), accessed 28 October 2005.
- Brown, D. (2004) 'Defending the fortress? Assessing the European Union's response to trafficking', *European Security* 13: 95–116.
- Buck-Morss, S. (2002) *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Council of the European Union (CEU) (1999a) 'Action plan of the council and the commission on how best to implement the provisions of the treaty of Amsterdam on an area of freedom, security and justice', *Official Journal of the European Communities C* 19: 1–15.
- Council of the European Union (CEU) (1999b) Presidency Conclusions — Tampere European Council (Special issue, 1999, 800) Brussels: CEU.
- CEC (2001) *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the Parliament on a Common Policy on Illegal Immigration Com(2001)672*, Brussels: CEC.
- CEC (2002) 'Proposal for a comprehensive plan to combat illegal immigration and trafficking of human beings in the European Union', *Official Journal of the European Communities C* 142: 23–36.
- Christiansen, T. (2000) 'Fuzzy politics around fuzzy borders: the EU's near abroad', *Cooperation and Conflict* 35(4): 389–416.
- Curzon, L. (1908) *Frontiers (The Romanes Lectures 1907)*, Oxford: Clarendon.
- Davis, M. (1990) *City of Quartz*, London: Verso.
- Dean, M. (1999) *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, London: Sage.



- Delanty, G. and Rumford, C. (2005) *Rethinking Europe: Social Theory and the Implications of Europeanization*, London: Routledge.
- Deleuze, G. (1988) *Foucault*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Favell, A. and Hansen, R. (2002) 'Markets against politics: migration, EU enlargement and the idea of Europe', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28(4): 581–601.
- Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, London: Allen Lane.
- Foucault, M. (1990) *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction*, New York: Vintage.
- Foucault, M. (1991) 'Questions of Method', in G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller (eds.) *The Foucault Effect*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Grabbe, H. (2000) 'The sharp edges of Europe: extending Schengen eastwards', *International Journal* 76(3): 519–536.
- Groenendijk, K. and Guild, E. (eds.) (2003) *In Search of Europe's Borders*, The Hague: Kluwer Law International.
- Guiraudon, V. (2003) 'Before the EU Border: Remote Control of the "Huddled Masses"', in K. Groenendijk, E. Guild and P. Minderhoud (eds.) *In Search of Europe's Borders*, The Hague: Kluwer.
- Heyman, J.M. (2004) 'Ports of entry as nodes in the world system', *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 11: 303–327.
- Huysmans, J. (2000) 'The European Union and the securitization of migration', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 38(5): 751–777.
- Klein, N. (2003) 'Fortress continents', *The Guardian*, London.
- Latham, R. and Sassen, S. (eds.) (2005) *Digital Formations: IT and New Architectures in the Global Realm*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Mezzadra, S. and Neilson, B. (2003) 'Né qui, né altrove — migration, detention, desertion: a dialogue', *Borderlands e-journal* 2(1) Available at [http://www.borderlandsjournal.adelaide.edu.au/vol2no1\\_2003/mezzadra\\_neilson.html](http://www.borderlandsjournal.adelaide.edu.au/vol2no1_2003/mezzadra_neilson.html); accessed 6 December, 2005.
- Migdal, J. (ed.) (2004) *Boundaries and Belonging: States and Societies in the Struggle to Shape Identities and Local Practices*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Muller, B. (2004) '(Dis)Qualified bodies: securitization, citizenship and "identity management"', *Citizenship Studies* 8(3): 279–294.
- Neocleous, M. (2003) *Imagining the State*, Meidenhead: Open University Press.
- Nyers, P. (2003) 'Abject cosmopolitanism: the politics of protection in the anti-deportation movement', *Third World Quarterly* 24(6): 1069–1093.
- Pease, D. (2003) 'The global Homeland State: Bush's biopolitical settlement', *Boundary 2* 30(3): 1–18.
- Prescott, J.R.V. (1965) *The Geography of Frontiers and Boundaries*, Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co.
- Rodriguez, N. (1996) 'The battle for the border: notes on autonomous migration, transnational communities, and the state', *Social Justice* 23(3): 21–37.
- Rose, N. and Miller, P. (1992) 'Political power beyond the state: problematics of government', *British Journal of Sociology* 43(2): 172–205.
- Rosenau, J. and Czempiel, E.O. (1992) *Governance without Government: Order and Change within World Politics*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ruggie, J.G. (1993) 'Territoriality and beyond: problematizing modernity in international relations', *International Organization* 47(1): 139–174.
- Rumford, C. (2003) 'Rethinking the state and polity-building in the European Union: the sociology of globalization and the rise of reflexive government', *Centre for European Political Communications*, Working Paper Series, Vol. 4, no. 3: 3–27.
- Salter, M. (2004) 'Passports, mobility, and security: how smart can the border be?', *International Studies Perspectives* 5: 71–91.
- Scott, J. (1998) *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed*, New Haven: Yale University Press.



- Snyder, T. (2005) 'The wall around the west', *Eurozine*, January 6 Available at <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2005-01-06-snyder-en.html>; accessed December 5, 2005.
- Sparke, M. (2004) 'Belonging in the PACE Lane: Fast Border Crossing and Citizenship in the Age of Neoliberalism', in J. Migdal (ed.) *Boundaries and Belonging: States and Societies in the Struggle to Shape Identities and Local Practices*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Turner, F.J. (1920) *The Frontier in American History*, New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- van der Ploeg, I. (1999) 'The illegal body: "Eurodac" and the politics of biometric identification', *Ethics and Information Technology* 1: 295–302.
- van Houtum, H. and Pijpers, R. (2003) 'Towards a gated community', *Eurozine*, January 6 Available at <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2005-01-12-houtumpijpers-en.html>.
- Verstraete, G. (2001) 'Technological frontiers and the politics of mobility in the European Union', *New Formations* 43: 26–43.
- Veyne, P. (1997) 'Foucault Revolutionizes History' in A. Davidson (ed.) *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Virilio, P. (1986) *Speed and Politics*, New York: Semiotext(e).
- Waever, O. (1997) 'Imperial Metaphors: Emerging European Analogies to Pre-nation-state Imperial Systems', in O. Tunander, P. Bayev and V.I. Einagel (eds.) *Geopolitics in post-Wall Europe: security, territory and identity*, London, Thousand Oaks [CA]: SAGE Publications.
- Walters, W. (2002a) 'The power of inscription: beyond construction and deconstruction in European integration studies', *Millennium* 31(1): 83–108.
- Walters, W. (2002b) 'Mapping Schengenland: denaturalizing the border', *Environment & Planning D: Society & Space* 20(5): 561–580.
- Walters, W. (2004) 'Secure borders, safe haven, domopolitics', *Citizenship Studies* 8(3): 237–260.
- Zacher, M (2001) 'The territorial integrity norm: international boundaries and the use of force', *International Organization* 55(2): 215–250.
- Zielonka, J. (ed.) (2002) *Europe Unbound*, London: Routledge.
- Zolberg, A. (1999) 'Matters of State: Theorizing Immigration Policy', in C. Hirschman, P. Kasinitz and J. DeWind (eds.) *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience*, Russell Sage, New York.
- Zolberg, A. (2003) 'The Archaeology of "Remote Control"', in A. Fahrmeir, O. Faron and P. Weil (eds.) *Migration Control in the North Atlantic World*, New York: Berghahn.