

Sponge Borders

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Preface

The latest expansion of the European Union (EU) towards the East has once more modified its borders, demonstrating yet again the intangibility and flexibility of the latter.

The very definition of 'border' acquires different meanings depending on which theme is being discussed: an impenetrable barrier – once against migratory flows and the introduction of goods – transforming itself into a strainer for the exporting of national products. The new proposed Internal Affairs Commissioner for the EU, Rocco Buttiglione (destituted before his official nomination), affirms on the one hand that migratory flows cannot be blocked *manu militari*, although he also paradoxically believes that Europe decides who can enter and who cannot.

Even within Europe, and despite the Schengen Agreements, borders are taking shape in concrete situations, reminding us that their disappearance is not definitive. The militarisation of borders is becoming stronger, making it increasingly difficult to defend



▲ started: sig. V a.c.ended: 1368
6.500 Km

▲ started: 13 august 1961

107 Km

ended: 9 november 1989 ▲

↑↑ more than 100

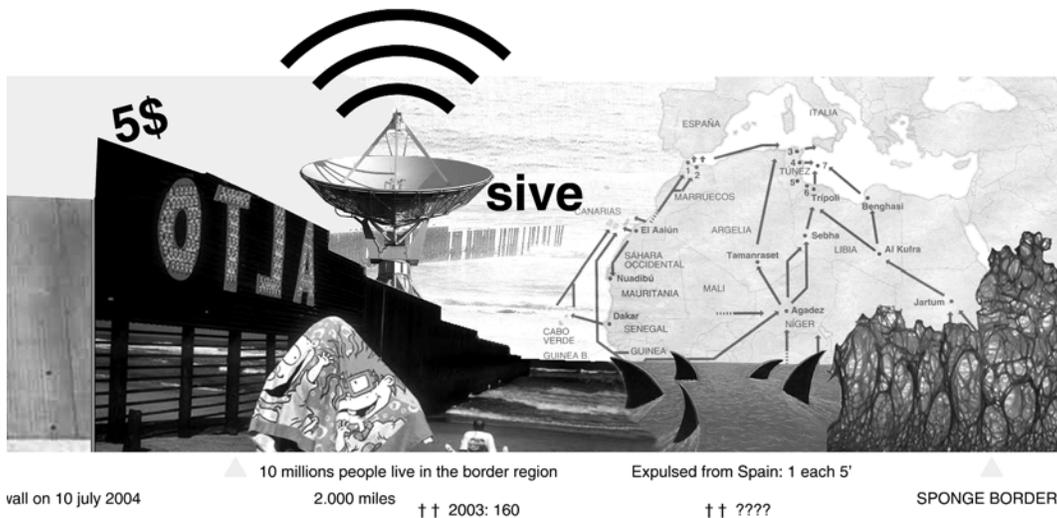
ICJ declared illegal Israel's v

people *sans papiers* in conditions of legality. Examples that come to mind include the strong development of the Integrated Vigilance System (SIVE)¹ in Spain, the conversations between Italy and Libya on establishing a system of integrated vigilance of Libyan territory, and the even stronger militarisation of US borders. These remind us that that if in the future we forget about of internal borders, exterior ones will acquire more importance; these mechanisms of discrimination can only end in violence.²

A Short Reflection on Borders

We should differentiate between natural borders and those erected by man. In the context of the latter we will focus on walls, such as the one no longer standing in Berlin or the boundary illegally erected by Israel in the Occupied Territories, scoffing at the international bodies dedicated to the defence of human rights and freedoms. Referring to natural borders, in direct contrast to those made by man, and due to the dramatic events that are taking place, we should not forget the oceans, true black holes in which the dreams of immigrants come to a tragic end. The absence of man-made elements can be more powerful than the presence of constructed barriers.

The interesting thing about the Berlin Wall is its slow but deliberate transformation from Cold War symbol to souvenir, and finally its disappearance altogether in favour of urban exploitation. The best analysis of this changeable condition resides in its situational consideration as a permanent evolution in space and time, rather than considering it as an element (architectural, symbolic, etc.). As R. Koolhaas³ stated, it is paradoxically the free West sector that is encircled (by the wall) to be liberated, leaving the enclosed city (the east side) outside; the importance of the wall as an object is marginal, and its dematerialisation is not affected by its power.



It seems unfathomable that after the disappearance of one wall someone could construct another, especially under considerations as oppressive as those carved out by Israel.⁴

Epilogue, or a Proposition for Borders of the Future

In agreement with J. Derrida⁵, although arbitrarily applying his thinking to our reflections, we propose that there is constant questioning of the relevance of the limit/boundary, rendering equal the pressure between interior and exterior, as if the border were a permeable membrane. That way we recognise that marginality and discrimination is not on one side, but rather on both, inside and out. The objective is to expand boundaries from mere vertical objects into permeable strips that would be enriched by their own state of attractors of multicultural flows: no longer a militarised soil of anyone, but rather a place in constant state of redefinition, in agreement with existing pressures. In essence, a sponge that absorbs and repels human demands depending on its capacity (unlimited), and becoming a meeting place instead of a limit to be crossed.

NOTES

1. Tomás Bárbulo. "Interior Invertirá 130 Millones en Cuatro Años para 'Blindar' las Costas de Andalucía y Canarias". In *El País*, 11 October 2004, sec. España, p. 30.
2. José Vidal-Beneyto. "Un Mundo con-sin Fronteras". In *El País*, 24 July 2004, sec. International, p. 8.
3. Rem L. Koolhaas. "Field Trip". In *S,M,L,XL* (Monacelli Press) pp. 215-231.
4. PLO Negotiations Affairs Department. "Frequently Asked Questions: Israel's 'Security' Wall: Bad Fences Make Bad Neighbours", 12 September 2004 (accessed 9 December 2004). See <http://www.jmcc.org/new/03/aug/unilateral.pdf>
5. Jaques Derrida. *Margini della Filosofia* (Biblioteca Einaudi, 1997, Torino).

