

# Border Walls and Borderlands

## Security, Environment and Resistance

International Conference organized by the Raoul-Dandurand Chair  
at the University of Quebec in Montreal

May 19-20, 2021  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada



The fall of the Berlin Wall and the following redefinition of international relations were meant to signal an age of globalization in which states and sovereignty were to become obsolete and borders irrelevant. However, in the wake of 9/11, borders gained renewed prominence and new ones were drawn. With this trend, border barriers, fences, and walls that were expected to be an historical symbol of a collapsed bipolar system were erected at a pace that defied all predictions. Border barriers are now



heavily armored, cemented, monitored, filmed, and patrolled. In this new environment, walls, razor wire, sensors, helicopters, barriers, (wo)men, border guards and drones have become the accessories of hard borders in an open world, complemented and reinforced by policies oriented towards the double movement of externalization and internalization of borders and the hardening of visa and asylum policies. Furthermore, borders are impacted by ever-evolving technologies. Biotechnologies have become central to border security apparatus. Through the dual process of internalized borders and implementation of biotechnology practices, individuals became security threats and sites of control, reinforcing the individualized experience of borders. This redefinition of borderlands goes beyond the geographical border zone, impacting the regional system through the modification of political ties, economic relations and socio-cultural exchanges. Transborder flows, both commercial and human, are now front and center in international relations and interstates negotiation. Border walls shape the interaction between states, organizations and individuals.

Border walls, though, trigger quasi automatically a circumvention reflex, from a form of resistance through art, border projects, civil disobedience to the digging of tunnels and smuggling strategies. With their bodies, through their presence, migrants resist as well. Walls simply lead to redrawn migration routes; they don't deter crossings as shown by data from humanitarian and government agencies. Walls are not impermeable: there are no fortresses, solely control *points*. Their efficiency lies more within the building country and their power is more symbolic, creating a perception of security in an "Us vs Them" narrative. However, walls do not hold much when migrants fear so much that nothing discourages them anymore, or when the economic disequilibrium between two neighboring countries works as a magnet for underground economy.

Often represented as a way to gain security, border walls also impact daily life in the borderlands, redefining the surroundings and the lives of borderland communities, from the economic relations to the environment and wildlife. As structures, walls scarify



the environment, altering wildlife migration and biodiversity, and increasing urban and rural pollution at a time where impacts of climate change are increasingly visible and tangible. They simultaneously pose threats to conservation efforts in the borderlands, when the wall is constructed in a preserved environment, and a space of opportunities, when allowing for the expansion of wildlife in buffer zones.

It is now clear that border enforcement, through walls or other forms, have become a normalized response to insecurity. We only need to look at how quick states were to close their borders to all movements in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Mobility has been particularly hampered in an unprecedented way for Western populations, where free movement of people was previously taken for granted, while in the Global South, closures added to the insecurities created by limitations of response to the health crisis and threaten circular movements, especially in the world of agriculture and care.

Border walls redefine borderlines around the world, sealing and hardening what used to be porous soft borders. Thus, if globalization is blurring borders, walls emphasize them. These infrastructures need to be assessed in terms of efficiency, economic, environmental and humane costs. Why build border barriers if they do not solve the issues they have been erected for? What should be done instead? What is the role of academia and border scholars? And where does civil society come in? How will borders be conceptualized, lived and experienced after the pandemic? Border walls' tangible impact on local societies, economies, and ecosystems, on world migrations, on national policies will be assessed too.

**Fields:** Political Science, Geography, Anthropology, Sociology, Law, Economics, Art, Design, Biology, Environmental studies, Area Studies, Gender studies, Zoology, Medical studies (this list is intended to be suggestive rather than inclusive).



### **Organizers / Scientific Committee:**

Élisabeth Vallet (Raoul-Dandurand Chair, UQAM – Canada), Andréanne Bissonnette (Raoul-Dandurand Chair, UQAM – Canada), Anne-Laure Amilhat-Szary (Geography, Université Joseph Fourier – France), Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly (Borders in Globalization, University of Victoria – Canada), Naomi Chi (Public Policy, Hokkaido University – Japan), Irasema Coronado (School of Transborder Studies, Arizona State University – USA), Jussi Laine (University of Eastern Finland – Finland), Christine Leuenberger (Science and Technology, Cornell University – USA), Matthew Longo (Political Science, Leiden University – Netherlands), Rodrigo Nieto-Gomez (National Security Affairs, Naval Postgraduate School – USA), Said Saddiki (Law, Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University – Morocco), James Scott (Regional and Border Studies, University of Eastern Finland – Finland), Margath Walker (Geography, University of Louisville – USA), Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman (Institute for Chinese Studies – India)

**Students** are encouraged to submit a proposal.

**Theme 1. Impacts of border walls**

**Theme 2. Legal aspects of border walls**

**Theme 3. Costs and economies of border walls**

**Theme 4. Violence of border walls**

**Theme 5. Alternatives to border walls**

**Theme 6. Border walls and borderlands**

**Theme 7. Border walls and international relations/regional systems**

**Theme 8. Biotechnology, biopolitics and walls**

**Deadline for abstract submission: November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020**

(for both paper and art installation submissions)

Please note that papers may be considered for panel sessions, roundtables AND poster sessions.



**Proposal: please include the following information**

- Name of authors / contributors
- Institutional affiliations, titles
- Contact: telephone, fax, email, mailing address
- Title of the paper
- Abstract: subject, empirical frame, analytical approach, theme (**approx. 300 words**)

**Languages:** Proposals can be submitted in French, English and Spanish. However the conference will be held in English and French.

**Conference Dates and Deadlines:**

- November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020 : deadline for submitting abstracts and proposals
- December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 : proposals selection and notification sent to presenters
- April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021 : submission of papers to discussants
- May 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>, 2021 : Conference to be held in Montreal.

Send your proposals via email in Word format to Élisabeth Vallet and Andréanne Bissonnette at : [BordersandWalls@gmail.com](mailto:BordersandWalls@gmail.com)