

BEYOND 'BORDERISM': OVERCOMING DISCRIMINATIVE B/ORDERING AND OTHERING

HENK VAN HOUTUM*,**

* *Nijmegen Centre for Border Research, Radboud University Nijmegen. Email: h.vanhoutum@fm.ru.nl*

** *University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, Finland. E-mail: h.vanhoutum@fm.ru.nl (Corresponding author)*

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ABSTRACT

Now, 20 years after our article "Bordering, Ordering and Othering", the editorial team of *TESG* has asked me to look back on its formation, and to comment on the appraisals of its continued relevance and influence offered by Anssi Paasi, Bastian Vollmer, James Scott and Chiara Brambilla in this Forum. To this end, I will first explain what the inspiration was for our essay and will shortly revisit the geopolitical triadic frame that we proposed; then, I will discuss the reflections of the commentators while briefly analyzing how the field of border studies has developed; and lastly, I will look ahead and offer, also using their reflections, a brief research agenda to address present and upcoming b/ordering and othering challenges.

Key words: b/ordering; othering; borderscaping; borderism; vanity walls; paper borders

A BIG, FAT, BEAUTIFUL WALL

'It is going to be a big, fat, beautiful wall!' former president Donald Trump infamously shouted at a rally in San Jose some years ago (Finnegan 2016). Although he obviously knew that there was already a huge border fence present in the accessible areas, which was already heavily patrolled (Boedeltje & Van Houtum forthcoming), his excitement on how swell 'his' wall was going to be should be understood as more than the wild roar from the underbelly from a single, populist leader. On the contrary.. Elsewhere all kinds of border enforcements have been put up recently as well. From Brazil, India, China, North Korea, Turkey, Russia, and the US to countries like Italy, Greece, Hungary, and Poland, we have seen an increasing desire to further strengthen the border in the name of protection and purification of a self-declared id/entity. And arguably one of the biggest new fence makers has been the EU as a whole. Maybe it communicates its fences in a less glorifying way than a populist leader like Trump

has been doing, but the EU has over the last two decades or so significantly invested in all kinds of new border fences and (externalized) border fortifications (Van Houtum and Bueno Lacy 2020). So, in sum, globally, there has been a steady growth of the number of, what often is being shortened as, walls (Vallet & David 2012). Surely, there was a small dip in the number of such fortified borders after 1989, when *The Wall* fell, and when for a short moment in time the mantras of 'global village' and 'borderless world' became popular, but that fall in the growth of walls, because of the further opening up of borders (debordering) and the global utopian spirit of a borderless world (disbordering), was only short-lived. Especially those entities that use most of the global resources and hold the highest share of the worlds' income, such as the US, Australia, and the EU only further fortified the borders around their territories. And especially after 2001, the attacks in the US, the number of walls to keep certain others out, have skyrocketed. So, 'big, fat, beautiful' walls abound.

When reflecting on this bordering trend further, it could be argued that it is quite remarkable that in the 21st century, the age of technology and speedy online interaction, the classic reaction is still to fall back on the archetype of walls, as if countries were medieval castles or Roman cities. Plus, in terms of security, as much terrorism is home-grown, a wall clearly will not be sufficient. It would certainly be remarkable if it were brick or concrete walls indeed or only. Yet, the term wall is, in fact, misleading.

First, in general, the new border fortifications are typically not made of bricks or stones, but are mostly fences of steel and/or barbed wire, often complemented with high-tech (biometric) scanning technology, especially in the case of airport borders. Also Trump, when talking about the wall, imagined and desired it to be simply made of concrete, but the border patrol convinced him that it would be more effective to keep the same construction as it largely already was, namely a bolder fence of steel pillars with see-through space and scanning technology to check the movements of those who irregularly would want to cross the border (Finnegan 2016). So, to equate (new) border barriers and fortifications simply with walls would be missing the local, contextual variations of its architecture and (violent) aesthetics, and is, in fact, only contributing to the false (populist) idea that borders would still be concrete, fortress walls.

Second, in contrast to popular belief, today's most dividing and callous walls are actually not made of these robust and muscular materials of concrete, steel, and the like. Instead, the fiercest borders are made out of paper (Van Houtum & Bueno Lacy 2020). For, what distinctly defines and categorizes the inside residents from the outside world is the *paper* 'walls' of visas. A visa is a conditional permission to travel to a certain country. It is through these *pre*-borders of visas that people are blocked entrance first and foremost, and often from afar, so dislocated from the actual *in situ* border fence or wall, at a consulate or embassy in their home country (Van Houtum & Bueno Lacy 2020; Van Houtum & Van Uden forthcoming). So, much of the discretionary decisions of entry, decisions that literally can be lethal, as we are seeing in the case of the US and the EU mostly, have geographically been taken out of direct sight, adding to the 'non-spectacle'

of paper borders. The permission to travel to a country is based on a discriminative taxonomy, as it is principally determined on the basis of the national origin (place of birth) of the would-be traveller. The people from states on the self-constructed 'negative' list have to acquire a visa before traveling which then, especially by rich entities like the EU, Australia, and the US, often is denied (Mau *et al.* 2015). Even when one has to migrate for life-threatening reasons, there is often no other way then to travel *sans papiers*, irregularly, without the ease of taking a plane and safe route. It is because of this existence of irregular travel, which is thus a self-produced category and which creates a market for smuggling and criminality, that many states feel the need to further fortify their *in situ* borders with physical obstacles. To only look at the concrete and iron 'walls' without preceding and wider context and to see them as the manifestation and a synonym for state's borders would be a mistake, therefore. For, rather than concrete walls or fences guarded with guns, it is the externalized paper 'walls' guarded by pencils and computers that are the first and most consequential line of defence of states (Van Houtum & Van Uden forthcoming).

Third, what is usually not taken into consideration when a reference is made to walls is the people. A wall is merely a physical impediment for linear movements, but in itself that does make not a border yet, it is people who give a specific border its context and meaning. A border has to be internationally (legally) recognized by others that it is a border. And it is the people living behind the border who have to accept it and internalize it. Furthermore, it is the guards who are authorized by law to guard and patrol the wall, that enforce it and turn the morphological object of the wall into an actual and practical jurisdictional threshold (Van Houtum 2010b, 2019). In a similar vein, it is the amalgam of the people living close to the border barriers, the borderlanders as well as the people crossing it, the business people, commuters, tourists, and migrants who together construct and shape the significance and interpretation of the border. So, it is not the lines on the map and in the sand that we need to focus on only when studying power geometries, but also how, when and where spatial power differentials are given meaning and being translated in daily practices by

people (Van Houtum 2010b). A border is thus much more than a protection wall alone. It is a means of saying, representing, glorifying, or resisting a *here*, a *we* and a *them*. Hence, in order to understand the why and how of borders, it is important, apart from zooming in, also to zoom out from the linear hegemony and morphology of borders as well as from the postulated, yet crude dichotomy of the debordered vs rebordered world, and understand a border as a constant, contextual work in progress, dependent not only from its material set-up but also from the everyday social construction of the here, we and them.

It is this latter perspective of looking beyond the visible lines in order to train our eyes on the social production and contextual meaning of borders, that my now retired colleague Ton van Naerssen and I wanted to bring to the fore, 20 years ago. Below, I will first revisit as well further expand the triad of bordering, ordering, and othering we proposed to study border constructions. Then I will briefly discuss the development of border(ing) studies after the paper, in which I will include the comments of the four commentators in this Forum. I will end by focusing on the dangerous rise of what I would term *borderism*, the discriminatory, nativistic politics of b/ordering and othering.

REVISITING THE TRIAD OF BORDERING, ORDERING, AND OTHERING

Typically, a state has borders, but borders are not a state. On the contrary, they are a continuous and dynamic production. A border's perseverance (of a state, city, region or any other demarcated territory) is dependent on its everyday legal empowerment, performative production, and the balance between internalization and opposition by concerned actors. To emphasize this making aspect, the dynamic and multilayered construction process of borders, we framed a border in our *TESG* article of 2002 not as a noun, but as a verb, thus denominalizing it into an active *-ing* form: *bordering*. And to stress that the never-ending, (trans)formative process of bordering inevitably entails an ongoing co-shaping and co-demarcating of a

socially ordered identity (a we) and a constitutive outside (a them), we combined it with the words *ordering* and *othering*. The triad of geopolitical bordering, ordering, and othering should not be understood as sequential, but as a contextual, interrelated process that continuously and dynamically operates at all three levels at the same time and with various degrees of intensity, inclusivity and openness.

What we framed as *bordering* signals the ongoing geopolitical claiming, appropriating, and demarcating of a territorial *here* that is being differentiated in space from an imagined *there*. The means to produce and mark the ending of the appropriated territory can and will be multiple (see also Vollmer 2021). Manifest border power tools, such as laws, fortifications, barriers, fences, visa, and (biometric) scanning, and the like, which are guarded, patrolled, and otherwise enforced are perhaps the most obvious means. But popular geopolitical and iconological studies have made convincingly clear how performative communications and representations like maps, flags, murals, symbols, mythologies, and (historical) narratives, and other kinds of banal spatial fetishisms (see also Paasi 2021) also play a significant role in the marking of a here and there. The visual appearance and narrative communication of a territorial claim are vital elements in the process of bordering. Trump's domestic electoral shout of 'a big, fat, beautiful wall' is a prime, populist illustration of such performative power claim (Boedeltje & Van Houtum forthcoming).

What we framed as *ordering* stands for the continuous social construction of a We-community and identity in the bordered space. The self-constructed We is defined to be the norm against which typically then abnormalities and exceptions are being defined (Van Houtum 2010a). The newborn, the '*natives*', in this self-defined We are dominantly seen as 'natural' *members* of the community by virtue of soil or blood ties (*ius soli* and *ius sanguinis*), who are constructed to be a historically and spatially homogeneous people different from the imagined equally historically and spatially stable non-natives. From an early age onwards 'fellow citizens' are taught to internalize the identity and knowledge of the political order. The homogenization,

standardization and prescription of the 'own' space, population, and culture (Scott 1998) is done through, for example, territorially defined language politics, education, demography, topography, geography, and history (Paasi 1997; Scott 1998; Schimanski & Wolfe 2017). Through selective historical remembering, glorification, and monumentalizing of the imagined community (Anderson 1983), those who 'fight' or 'fought' for the We, even if the spatial make-up of that We is an anachronism, are typically labelled heroes, depicted as flawlessly moral, courageous, and good, and set as an example for the 'character' of the self-constructed identity, which together forms a collective knowledge that is passed on to new natives and newcomers.

The third element involved in the continuous construction of a spatiopolitical id/entity we distinguished concerns *othering*. Through a set of power mechanisms, such as *chronopolitics*, *geopolitics*, and *biopolitics*, the fabricated markers of difference are antagonized with certain others, in which the categorized others will vary over time and space (Sibley 1998; Mouffe 2000; Van Houtum 2010a; Paasi 2021; Vollmer 2021).

Via *chronopolitical* othering (i.e. the politics of time), claims about the development of the b/ordered entity will be compared with others – often leading to either worshipping ('progressive best practices') or antagonizing, sometimes even discriminative, labels such as 'less modern', 'lagging behind', 'traditional' or even as 'backward', lesser people (Wolf 1982).

Geopolitical othering compartmentalizes native vs non-native memberships and identities. Non-natives who wish to become a member, especially if it is a nation-state, are typically subjected to integration policies, citizenship tests, and in the case of full membership, a 'naturalization' (as if it is a re-birth) procedure and ritual. If people are imagined to be the 'natural' inhabitants of the imagined geopolitical community where they were born, it follows that Others are implicitly *unnatural*, which potentially is a breeding ground for all sorts of xenophobic prejudices, including fearmongering and scapegoating discourses expressed in words, images, numbers, and maps (De Genova 2018; Van Houtum &

Bueno Lacy 2019; 2020; Vollmer 2021). With regard to the latter, we have recently referred to the intertwining of cartography and geopolitics as *cartopolitics* (van Houtum 2012; Bueno-Lacy & Van Houtum 2015; Van Houtum & Bueno Lacy 2020): a political b/ordering and othering through the geographical imagination of maps.

In the case of states, *biopolitical* othering further refines the procedures of exclusion by imposing test procedures on the body to verify membership (such as through the use of modern biometrics and biosecurity technologies, see also Paasi 2021) and by constructing imaginations and/or even vilifications of non-member phenotypes. Spatially and temporally, biopolitical othering is often exacerbated by the creation of *waiting* lines at the border or even waiting camps as semi-temporal storage spaces of the excepted, lowered Others (Agamben 2005; Van Houtum 2010a; Van Houtum & Bueno Lacy 2020).

B/ORDERING AS RESOURCE

The above-suggested triad could be seen as a contingent frame, a guiding script in analyzing and deconstructing border and id/entity productions (Paasi 2021). It is rewarding to see that it has, as the commentators in this Forum are arguing, played a role in helping liberate and proliferate the theoretical perspective of seeing borders as sociopolitical, dynamic fabrications liable to multiple interpretations rather than as immovable grid lines (e.g., Paasi 1997; Van Houtum 2005; Wastl-Walter 2011; see Paasi 2021). At the same time, I feel, in many ways, that our attempt to help ignite and further the debate on borders with our paper, should be seen as a collegial spirit and effort to work on a new agenda in border studies in those days of the late 1990s and early 2000s (see also Paasi 2021). And I should add that the encouraging 'Zeitgeist', that floated among the still comparatively few border scholars at the time, to refresh the long-standing dominantly statist and rather static view of borders (Van Houtum 2005) was not in the least also inspired by the seminal social-constructivist take on borders Paasi had written down in his book of 1997 (Paasi 1997),

a book that I remember to have read in one go with a mix of excitement, recognition, and gratitude.

Shortly after our publication on b/ordering and othering in 2002, we elaborated our ideas in a volume we consequently termed B/ordering Space (Van Houtum *et al.* 2005). In this volume, we asked a range of interesting scholars to reflect on how space is being b/ordered in various contexts and in various spatial cases, including states, regions, and cities. Around the same time, Barbara Hooper, post-doc at the Nijmegen Centre for Border Research at the time, described the everyday undertaking that is involved in the producing and internalizing of borders powerfully as 'borderwork', which she defined as 'the selective suppression and deployment of difference and identity' which can be executed by 'any socius or society as a regulatory body' (Hooper 2004, p. 212). This notion of borderwork has later been picked up by, among others, Chris Rumford (Rumford 2008), who sadly passed away a few years ago, in his attempt to emphasize that also non-state actors are co-producers, and that the production of borders is not confined to the edges of nation-states (Kramsch 2020). So, rather than 'seeing like a state' (Scott 1998), in studying the making and suppressing of sociospatial differences, Rumford argued, we should learn to 'see like a border' (Rumford 2012, p. 896; see also Parker *et al.* 2009). From a different angle, philosopher Étienne Balibar, who also denounced the idea of fixed territorial borders, argued that a border should rather be considered as a *borderland* than a *borderline* (Balibar 2004; see also Eker & Van Houtum 2013). In a similar vein, Zygmunt Bauman had earlier coined the term 'planetary frontierland' (Bauman 2000). Later, others have used powerful terms like *multiplied*, *diffused*, *impalpable*, *omniverse*, *networked*, *iborder*, *mobile*, *multiple*, *polysemic*, and *polymorphic* to emphasize and describe this dispersed social construction and influence of borders (see, among others, Parker *et al.* 2009; Amilhat-Szary & Giraut 2015; Cuttitta 2015; Pötzsch 2015; Jones 2016; Burridge *et al.* 2017).

In her contribution, drawing, among others, on the earlier work of Appadurai (1996), who had initiated the use of the suffix -scape for various social domains, and Rajaram &

Grundy-Warr (2007), who had coined the term *borderscape* to express that borders are 'perspectival, relational, and mobile', Chiara Brambilla suggests to frame the border indeed as a borderscape (Brambilla 2021; see also Brambilla & Van Houtum 2012; Brambilla *et al.*). For Brambilla, this term has enabled to insert in border studies, what Appadurai (2013) has called, a 'politics of hope' – that is to say, a politics of possibilities to come (Brambilla 2021). In his seminal work on the suffix -scape, which etymologically comes from 'schaffen', 'scheppen', to create (Brambilla & Van Houtum 2012; Van Houtum 2015), Appadurai stressed that -scapes 'are not objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision but, rather, that they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors: nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities, as well as subnational groupings and movements and even intimate face-to-face groups, such as villages, neighborhoods, and families' (Appadurai 1996, p. 33; see also Rajaram & Grundy-Warr 2007; Mezzadra & Neilson 2011; Gielis & Van Houtum 2012; dell'Agnese & Amilhat Szary 2015; Schimanski 2015; Van Houtum 2015). For Brambilla, the term borderscapes makes it possible to critically open up an arena of construction possibilities, to humanize the borders and give attention to the multiple and diverse experiences of those who constitute the border(land), including migrants and refugees, as well as civil society, groups, and individuals involved in the process (see also Gielis & Van Houtum 2012). And in so doing to have a key eye for the inclusive productive nature of the (trans)formation of places (Brambilla 2021; Brambilla *et al.* 2016).

The concept of borderscapes is open to diverse interpretations. Perhaps too open, Dina Krichker (2019) recently argued. Going through the literature, she found at least seven rather diverse conceptualizations. She makes the point that the term in its current understanding is ontologically so broad and unspecified that it lacks pragmatic and methodological relevance. Its 'irresistible vagueness' is perhaps its charm, but also its pitfall, she argues (Krichker 2019). She suggests to concretely spatialize the concept with the help of Lefebvrian notions on the production

of space (Lefebvre 1991), like Rajaram & Grundy-Warr (2007) had done as well, in order to concretely analyze how a borderland is spatially interpreted, experienced, and imagined. In a similar vein, focusing on the concrete designing and drafting of border-scapes, Alice Buoli turned the term 'scapes', following the spirit of the denominalization of the term borders as discussed above, into '*borderscaping*' (Buoli 2015). Somewhat later this term was further given a concrete, methodological, and cross-border collaborative touch in the dissertation of Vincent Pijnenburg, in which he, together with a range of local actors, collectively scaped future scenarios for the borderland of the Netherlands and Germany (Pijnenburg 2019; see also Eker & Van Houtum 2013).

A similar stimulating discussion on how bordering concepts keep on developing themselves is going on in another direction. The idea of seeing a border as a collective, potentially emancipatory construction and design, rather than merely a fixed, static line of defence, has namely also led to interesting studies on cross-border cooperation in (urban) border regions and in intra-urban settings, something James Scott in his commentary pays significant attention to (Scott 2021). I am thinking especially, but there is more in this line of thinking, of the work done on seeing borders not merely as barriers or obstacles but to fully embrace the Janusface of borders, that is, to see borders also as enabling, as *resourceful thresholds*, and the constructed differences not necessarily as a hindrance or something that needs to be harmonized and wiped away but as a base that can also be used as attractive input for cross-border development (Van Houtum & van der Velde 2004; Eker & Van Houtum 2013; Sohn 2013; Van Houtum & Eker 2015; Pijnenburg 2019). Because bordering as well as othering is not intrinsically and necessarily morally bad, but is, as both Vollmer and Scott convincingly argue, an ontological human practice that can also be critically and productively used as input for collaboration, as elements of negotiation and dialogue as well as of exciting encounter and attractive connectivity (Van Houtum & Eker 2013, 2015; Vollmer 2021; Scott 2021).

Yet, what is vital then in this discussion is to have a keen eye for spatial morality, as also Paasi argues (Paasi 2021), that is, to normatively assess the differences made in b/ordering and othering politics, and to incessantly critically study how the continuum of openness and closure is collaboratively constructed and is playing out for whom, why and when, as we have attempted to make clear in our original article of 2002 and which also Bastian Vollmer emphasizes in his commentary in this Forum (Vollmer 2021). This is also something that Amilhat-Szary & Giraut (2015) have pointed to in their book on *borderities*, which focuses on the governmentality of territorial limits and the differentiated b/ordering and othering in terms of power, access, and mobility. And in a similar vein, Sarah Green has suggested that it is necessary to get a sharper sense of the variability of the border, what she refers to as *borderness*, in to understand the expressions of borders in different places and at different times, and how classification systems are generated that 'distinguish (or fail to distinguish) people, places, and things in one way rather than another' (Green 2012, p. 580).

LOOKING AHEAD: ON VANITY WALLS AND OTHER BORDERISMS

Looking back, 20 years after our paper, I am excited to see how the field of border studies, which was only a scarcely populated terrain and relatively, still a side issue in academia at the time we wrote our article, has mushroomed and has, arguably, turned into a dynamic and multidisciplinary discipline in itself, in which many rich ideas have been developed and insights have been gained (see also Paasi 2021). And I am equally appreciative to see how our b/ordering concept, as the commentators in this special issue have argued, has been helpful in shaping the way for border studies to look beyond the directly visible and performative power manifestations and to emancipate and humanize the concept of borders rather than merely understanding them as hegemonic and/or top-down lines in the sand. And yet, at the same time, as I discussed above, there clearly is a

rise of a populist glorification of borders, a penchant to 'own country and people first', ethno-nationalistic and nativistic borders (Van Houtum 2010b), narcissistic *vanity walls* (Boedeltje & Van Houtum forthcoming), and even of consciously violent borders (Jones 2016). So, while academic border studies may be working with a rich and largely emancipatory agenda, and have sought inspiring paths to enrich the classical static view on borders with post-modern and post-foundational research on bordering (Van Houtum 2015; Paasi 2021), in contrast, in daily politics, we seem to witness the revenge or renaissance of largely grounded borders, spectacularized, and shouted through the narrow and narrow-minded tubes of social and biased traditional media (Van Houtum 2009; Vollmer 2021).

The ongoing injustices, violent dehumanization, and discriminations present in some of the current practices of b/ordering and othering are shameful and should be called out (Van Houtum & Boedeltje 2009; Paasi 2021). For this, profound normative and justice theorizations are needed that not only deconstruct the how of the bordering but also critically analyze the (narrative) arguments of the why (see also Scott 2021) in order to formulate emancipatory alternatives for, what could be termed '*borderism*', defined as the discriminatory politics of b/ordering and othering that essentializes and politicizes the value of human beings on the basis of the bordered (id)entity they are born into, reside in, and/or travel from (Van Houtum & Van Uden forthcoming). When someone born on the 'wrong' side of the border, refuses that his/her life and opportunities are determined by the place of birth, and wishes to migrate or needs to flee from a country on the negative list, the world of legal possibilities is severely more limited and significantly more dangerous than someone born on the other side of the border (Gemenne 2020). As discussed above, it is notably paper borders that create what could be termed a double trap, the territorial trap that locally b/orders people in terms of cradle, creed, and circumstances and the immobility trap that imprisons people from afar, by depreciating their territorial origin. To b/order, taxonomize, and even suppress and penalize human beings based on

a global lottery of birth is neither just nor sustainable (Van Houtum & Van Uden forthcoming). Hence, I would argue that we not only need more critical studies on the renaissance of classic borders and its antagonistic *biopolitics* and shameful *necropolitics* (the politics of letting die), but also, arguably, evocative counter studies that discuss the way forward towards globally more just borders (*idem*).

In addition, I would argue, we also need to further theorize on and raise (public) awareness of the *paradoxes* that borders inherently represent. How borders can be markers of a hopeful dream for some and a repressive nightmare for others, how b/ordering rejects as well as erects othering (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen 2002, p. 126), how benign forms of othering can also be potentially positively creative and productive (Scott 2021), how borders can be sovereign, nostalgic 'markers of belonging' as well as emancipatory 'places of becoming' (Eker & Van Houtum 2013; 2015; Brambilla 2021), how bordering of the self in order to protect freedom, welfare and/or an imagined (comm)unity can also lead to auto-bordering, and, similarly, how border politics focusing on biopolitical and geopolitical immunity can lead to auto-immunity (Van Houtum & Bueno Lacy 2020).

Lastly, in our methodological and empirical focus, we should, arguably, be vigilant to avoid falling into a potentially populist and essentialist wall trap, that equates borders with walls (see also Brambilla 2021), as if it is indeed (mediagenic) morphological walls that are being constructed or we should only focus on, *quod non*. The ontological presence (see also Brambilla 2021; Scott 2021) and the morphological make-up and architecture today is too diverse to categorize all new border barriers merely as walls. What is more, as explained above, a wall trap ignores the more invisible, yet as discriminative and consequential *pre*-borders (visa paper borders), outsourced borders, and *post*-borders (camps) (Van Houtum & Bueno Lacy 2020). Furthermore, what a narrow focus on walls hides is the every day, intersectional bordering by a multiplicity of actors (hospitals, schools, police, work places, etc.; Yuval-Davis *et al.* 2019), often far away from the actual borderline. This multiplicity and multilocality of borders make the border

desires and experiences (see also Scott 2021), border imaginaries (see also Brambilla 2021), and feelings of (in)security ('vernacular security', Vollmer 2021) more contingent and disputed and less self-evident than the concrete, binary *in-situ* border wall seems/aspires to suggest. In fact, our idea of b/ordering has precisely been suggested in order to emphasize that rather than (only) a noun or an object, a border should be seen as a verb, that is, as a practice, a relation, an imagination, and a desire. So, what is important, is to interpret such border walls not as military defences alone, there for eternity, as populists would have it, hence their desire perhaps to express them in terms of concrete, steel, and stone, but rather as power exclamations of a (narcissistic) belief, of which the 'walls' are functioning as the performative pillars of the imagined power temple. These insights and more, have richly been exchanged, discussed, and developed in border studies the last 20 years or so. Which is a huge comfort and richness to take into the future. And we will need it. For, although all borders in the end may be transitory (Van Houtum 2020), and populist shouters come and go, as we have seen, meanwhile, the imprint and impact of the 'big, fat, beautiful walls' of our time can be severe and long-lasting. So, clearly, there is work to do, also in the coming 20 years.

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