

The interview between the research team of BROKEN and Professor Christine Leuenberger took place outside Geneva in

Professor Leuenberger, you've written extensively on walls and barriers between nations in the world, let me ask you first, how many of these are there?

Well, that's an interesting question. There were actually less than five walls at the end of World War II and there were 15 walls around the globe when the Berlin wall fell in 1989. Now there are over 63 border barriers separating different countries, and that number is increasing! Now we have, for instance, the US President who has promised to build a new wall between Mexico and the United States, and Ukraine is building a wall to keep the Russians at bay, and Hungary is building a wall to keep the Syrian refugees out. There are also walls being built in the Middle East and in Asia. Of course, we know about the wall/barrier being built between Israel and the West Bank. There is also a wall between Saudi Arabia and Yemen, as well as between India and Pakistan. So, the building of more walls also known as "hard borders", has been increasing ever since the 1990s. The trend has only accelerated since the attack on the Twin Towers in 2001.

Why are governments increasingly building more and more walls?

There are many reasons for why governments are increasingly building what we call "hard borders". Some argue that it has to do with the rise of global capitalism after 1989, which has produced stark economic inequities and inequalities and has also produced uneven economic development between countries in the North and Global South. This in turn has increased the refugee flows from the Global South to the North. But there also has been a lot of political instability in different countries in the Middle East and Africa. For instance, most recently, we have the political instability in Syria which has increased the refugee flow from Syria to Europe, which has contributed to a global refugee crisis. As a result, some people have therefore increasing security concerns and politicians have tried to address these concerns by proposing to build new walls, as it is generally assumed that such walls are effective measures to counter terrorism and to stop illegal immigration. But it also has to be noted that the construction of "security barriers" and their infrastructures has become a growth industry. For instance, in Western Europe and the United States, the annual market growth in the security construction industry has doubled in recent years.

Do you believe that walls discourage terrorism?

Well, you will find that different stakeholders will answer the question differently. So, for instance, the Israeli government would argue that: yes, terrorism attacks went down after the building of the wall. On the other hand, others would say, actually it wasn't the wall that was crucial. The wall to this day isn't even finished yet, rather, some would argue that it was actually the security checkpoints inside the West Bank that was the place where they mainly caught people with ill intentions. So, generally, it has to be said, that most terrorist incidences are essentially statistically more likely to be committed by people inside a country, and not actually

by refugees or immigrants who come from the outside. But the media often focuses on isolated terrorist incidences committed by others from outside the target country and then this can lead to a sort of social panic about the fact that all these refugees and immigrants are importing terrorism into these different countries, but if one looks at the statistics that is not actually the case.

You've written that in some ways the West Bank Wall is a paradigmatic example of a wall and in other ways it's singular. What do you mean by that?

Yes, the West Bank Wall is a paradigmatic example of the changes in the security in border enforcement mechanisms ever since 2001. For instance, Israeli military contractors have an edge in the business of the constructing borders. They, for example, have provided all sorts of smart border technology for the construction of the US-Mexico border that is being built between Mexico and the United States. But the West Bank barrier is also paradigmatic in another way, in that it is justified through various political arguments such as that it inhibits terrorism and counters illegal immigration. But it is also singular, because it is not built on the internationally recognized border between the West Bank and Israel, so it is not built on the Green Line, but instead often runs deep into West Bank territory and incorporates various Israeli settlements inside the West Bank and into Israeli territory.

You've written an article on [The Rhetoric of Maps: International Law as a Discursive Tool in Visual Arguments](#) on how different protagonists made human rights claims. So, do you have any answers to this question with respect to the Palestinians and the West Bank Wall?

Yes, the ICJ basically declared the Wall to be illegal under International Law and this is very crucial for Palestinian stakeholders. So, for instance, Palestinian cartographers, tend to draw maps in line with International Law because if they do so that gives their argument, which they embed within their cartographic products, a rhetorical appeal, and also, it gives the map international legitimacy and credibility. So, having international law on your side is a very, very powerful rhetorical tool.

What are the psychological consequence of building walls?

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, people discovered that 28 years of separation had produced what the Germans call "die Mauer in the Köpfen" – a mental wall between "Ossis" (East Germans) and "Wessis" (West Germans). The West Bank Wall has also increasingly produced a mental wall between Palestinians and Israelis as it has basically halted interaction between Palestinians and Israelis. Yet, policy makers tell us that cross-border interaction is crucial for cooperation and peace-building. Also, the Wall has increased distrust between Palestinians and Israelis and stories about them - the others - being different to us - over here - have increased. Also if you don't see the other - over there - because you have no access to them, it increases negative stereotypes about people on the other side.

What have we learnt about the effects of walls?

Historians have studied walls and barriers throughout history and some studies have examined walls that go as far back as Hadrian's wall as well as the Great Wall of China. Such studies have found that these walls and barriers have a range of short-term advantages for the wall-building nations, but in the long term, they are detrimental for neighborly relations and for prospect of peace and reconciliations between neighbors.