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Walled States, Waning Sovereignty

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Z O N E B O O K S • N E W Y O R K

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CHAPTER ONE

**Waning Sovereignty,
Walled Democracy**

Fortification as the defense of places ended for all practical purposes with the breaching of the Atlantik Wall in 1944. Thereafter, formal fortifications as a principal means of defence, even on the most extensive scale, were obsolete.

—Paul Hirst, *Space and Power*

We need soft borders, not rigid impermeable ones.... At the threshold of the twenty-first century, we do not need to reinforce sovereignty.

—Shimon Peres, *The New Middle East*

I told them: don't build fences around your settlements. If you put up a fence, you put a limit to your expansion. We should place the fences around the Palestinians and not around our places.

—Ariel Sharon, quoted in Neve Gordon, *Israel's Occupation*

It is not the wall that has created the camp, but rather the strategy and reality of encampment which has led to the construction of the wall.

—Adi Ophir and Ariella Azoulay, "The Monster's Tail"

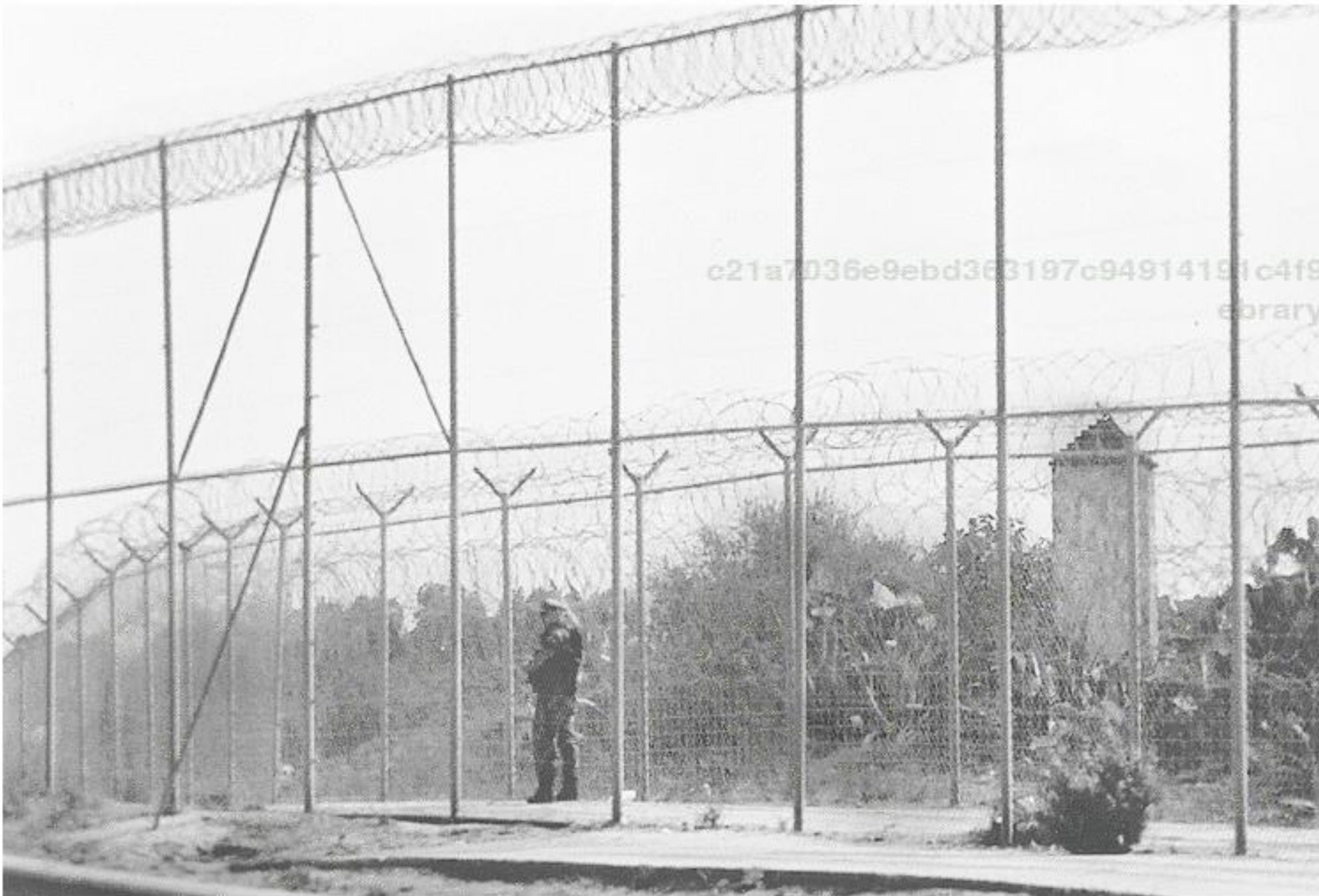
Fortresses are generally much more harmful than useful.

—Niccoló Machiavelli, *The Discourses on The First Ten Books of Titus Livius*

What we have come to call a globalized world harbors fundamental tensions between opening and barricading, fusion and partition, erasure and reinscription. These tensions materialize as

increasingly liberalized borders, on the one hand, and the devotion of unprecedented funds, energies, and technologies to border fortification, on the other. Globalization features a host of related tensions between global networks and local nationalisms, virtual power and physical power, private appropriation and open sourcing, secrecy and transparency, territorialization and deterritorialization. It also features tensions between national interests and the global market, hence between the nation and the state, and between the security of the subject and the movements of capital.

One place these tensions nest is in the new walls striating the globe, walls whose frenzied building was underway even as the crumbling of the old bastilles of Cold War Europe and apartheid South Africa was being internationally celebrated. Best known are the United States-built behemoth along its southern border and the Israeli-built wall snaking through the West Bank, two projects that share technology, subcontracting, and also refer to each other for legitimacy.¹ But there are many others. Post-apartheid South Africa features a complex internal maze of walls and checkpoints and maintains a controversial electrified security barrier on its Zimbabwe border. Saudi Arabia recently finished constructing a ten-foot-high concrete post structure along its border with Yemen, which will be followed by a wall at the Iraq border, which in turn Saudis say may be followed by walling their whole country. To deter refugees from its poorer neighbors, to stake its side in a land dispute, and to suppress the movement of Islamic guerillas and weapons across its Pakistan border, cruder barriers have been built by India to wall out Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Burma and to wall in disputed Kashmir territory.² The crudeness should not deceive: India has mined the land space between double layers of barbed and concertina wire along the Indo-Kashmir border. Also in the context of a land dispute, but officially built in the name of interdicting “Islamic terrorists,” Uzbekistan fenced out Kyrgyzstan in 1999 and Afghanistan in 2001, but Turkmenistan is now fencing out Uzbekistan. Botswana initiated the building of an electric fence along its border with



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ebruary Barrier around the Spanish enclave of Melilla in Morocco (Chiara Tamburini).



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ebruary U.S.-Mexico border (David McNew/Getty Images).



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ebrary U.S.-Mexico border (Marc Silver).



c21a7036e9ebd363197c94914191c4f9
ebruary The Israeli Wall in the area of Qalandiya, North Jerusalem (Sebastian Bolesch).



c21a7036e9ebd363197c94914191c4f9
ebruary The Israeli wall enclosing Bethlehem (Musa Al-Shaer/AFP/Getty Images).

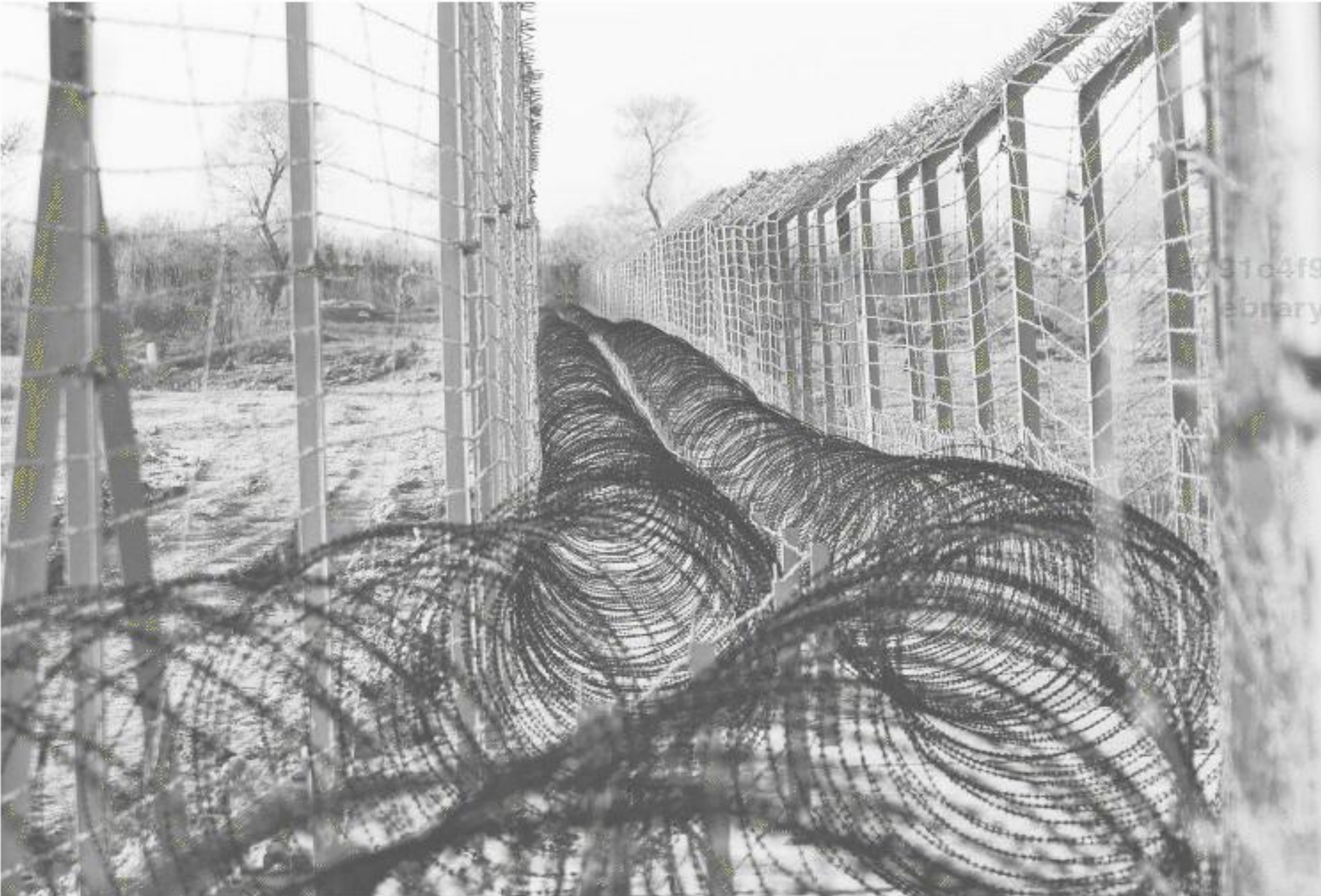
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ebruary India-Bangladesh border fence (Veronique de Viguerie/Getty Images).

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ebruary India-Pakistan border fence (Ami Vitale/Getty Images).

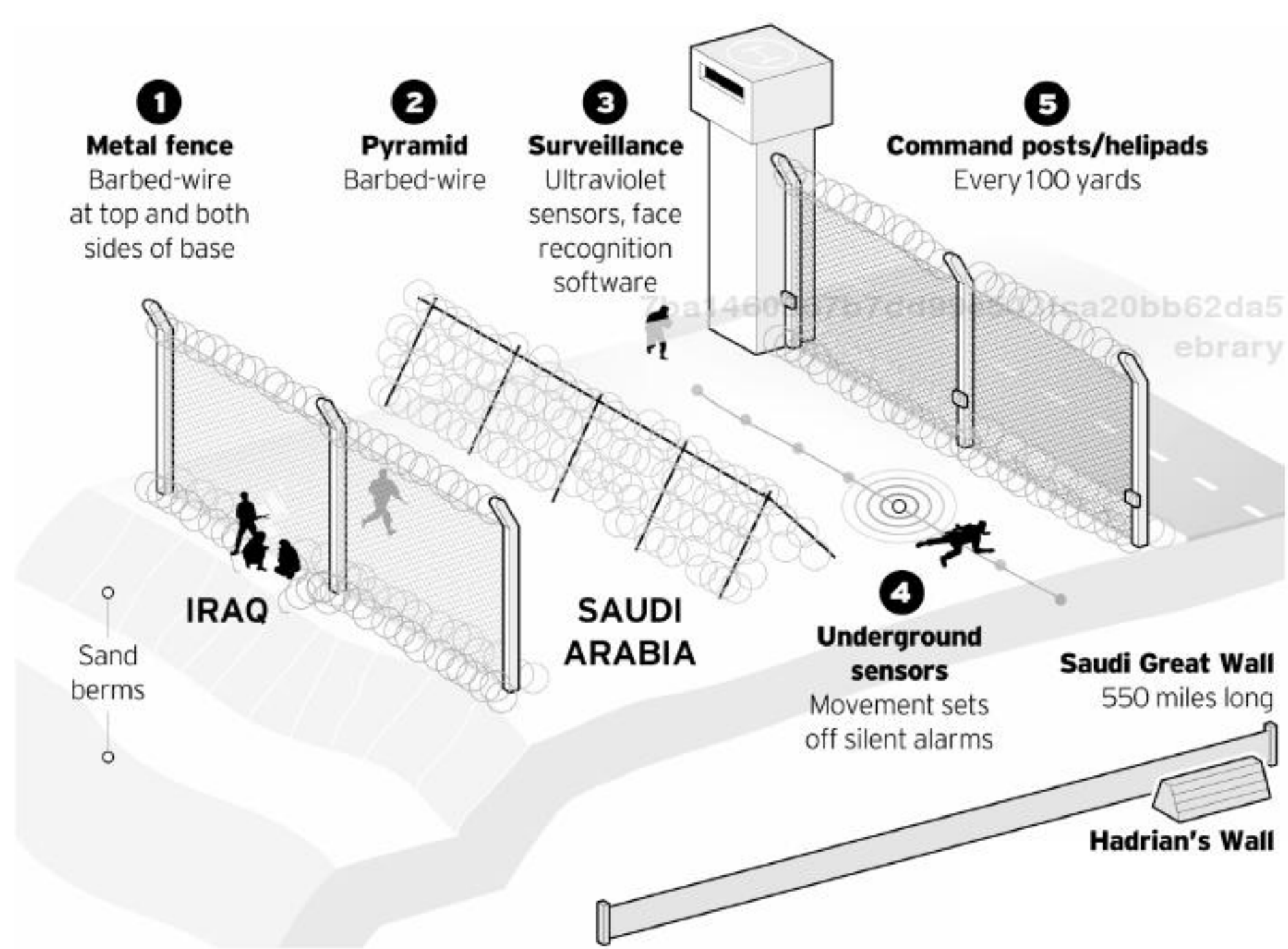
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c21a7036e9ebd363197c94914191c4f9
ebruary Saudi barrier at the border with Yemen (Khaled Fazaa/AFP/Getty Images).

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Diagram of a 550-mile barrier being built by Saudi Arabia on its border with Iraq (Ciaran Hughes).



Barrier separating Shiite and Sunni neighborhoods of al-Shula and al-Ghazaliyah in Baghdad (Ali Al-Saadi/AFP/Getty Images).

Zimbabwe in 2003, ostensibly to stop the spread of foot-and-mouth disease among livestock, but aimed at interdicting Zimbabwean humans, as well. In response to the south Thailand insurgency and to deter illegal immigration and smuggling, Thailand and Malaysia have cooperated to build a concrete and steel border wall. The wall between Egypt and Gaza was brought to the world's attention when it was breached in January 2008 by Gazans seeking food, fuel, and other domestic goods. Iran is walling out Pakistan. Brunei is walling out immigrants and smugglers coming from Limbang. China is walling out North Korea to stem the tide of Korean refugees, but parallel to one section of this wall, North Korea is also walling out China.

There are walls within walls: Gated communities in the United States have sprung up everywhere, but are especially plentiful in Southwestern cities near the wall with Mexico. Walls around Israeli settlements in the West Bank about the "security barrier," and walls around the disputed Museum of Tolerance site in Jerusalem nestle next to walls partitioning that city. Bethlehem has been completely sealed off from Jerusalem with towering concrete walls. The European Union sponsors triple-layer walls around Spanish enclaves in Morocco even as Morocco itself maintains a lengthy "berm" aimed at securing the resources of the long-disputed Western Sahara. And in the name of preventing what he termed "French situations," the socialist mayor of Padua recently built the Via Anelli Wall to separate white middle-class neighborhoods from the so-called "African ghetto" where most new immigrants live.

Still more walls are coming: Notwithstanding the dustup in 2007 over a proposed Baghdad wall, the United States military still hopes to wall the territory marked by the Green Line in that city. It has already built controversial walls around Sunni neighborhoods such as Adhamiya and Azamiya, modeling the beginning of Iraqi urban "gated communities" in response to the bloody sectarian violence unleashed by the U.S. occupation.³ Brazil plans to build a steel-and-concrete wall along its border

with Paraguay, Israel plans to replace an old fence with a security barrier across its Sinai Desert border with Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates is designing a wall for its Oman border. Kuwait has a fence, but wants a wall in the demilitarized zone approximating its border with Iraq. Serious proposals have been floated to follow completion of the U.S.-Mexico wall with one along the Canadian border and also to find a means of barricading the islands that provide conduits to Europe from would-be North African migrants.

If these walls vary in what they aim to deter—poor people, workers, or asylum seekers; drugs, weapons, or other contraband; smuggled taxable goods; kidnapped or enslaved youth; terror; ethnic or religious mixing; peace and other political futures—there are surely common dimensions to their proliferation at this moment in world history. Let us start with a series of paradoxes. First, even as those across a wide political spectrum—neoliberals, cosmopolitans, humanitarians, and left activists—fantasize a world without borders (whether consequent to global entrepreneurship, global markets, global citizenship, or global governance), nation-states, rich and poor, exhibit a passion for wall building. Second, within the ostensibly triumphant universal political form, democracy (heralded by European post-Marxists, Islamic secularists, or American neoconservatives, even if each inflects democracy differently), we confront not only barricades, but passageways through them segregating high-end business traffic, ordinary travelers, and aspiring entrants deemed suspect by virtue of origin or appearance.⁴ Third, in a time featuring capacities for destruction historically unparalleled in their combined potency, miniaturization, and mobility, from bodies wired for explosion to nearly invisible biochemical toxins, these deadly but incorporeal powers are perversely answered by the stark physicalism of walls. So, three paradoxes: one featuring simultaneous opening and blocking, one featuring universalization combined with exclusion and stratification, and one featuring networked and virtual power met by physical barricades.

What is also striking about these new barriers is that even as they limn or attempt to define nation-state boundaries, they are not built as defenses against potential attacks by other sovereigns, as fortresses against invading armies, or even as shields against weapons launched in interstate wars. Rather, while the particular danger may vary, these walls target nonstate transnational actors—individuals, groups, movements, organizations, and industries. They react to transnational, rather than international relations and respond to persistent, but often informal or subterranean powers, rather than to military undertakings. The migration, smuggling, crime, terror, and even political purposes that walls would interdict are rarely state sponsored, nor, for the most part, are they incited by national interests. Rather, they take shape apart from conventions of Westphalian international order in which sovereign nation-states are the dominant political actors. As such, they appear as signs of a post-Westphalian world.

To speak of a post-Westphalian order is not to imply an era in which nation-state sovereignty is either finished or irrelevant. Rather, the prefix “post” signifies a formation that is *temporally after but not over* that to which it is affixed. “Post” indicates a very particular condition of afterness in which what is past is not left behind, but, on the contrary, relentlessly conditions, even dominates a present that nevertheless also breaks in some way with this past. In other words, we use the term “post” only for a present whose past continues to capture and structure it. Thus did “post-War” characterize much of the second half of the Euro-Atlantic twentieth century, just as “post-Communism” identifies political, social, and economic challenges and predicaments set by the former Soviet bloc, while “post-Marxism” gathers contemporary diverse strands of left philosophy and analysis working in the long shadow of Marxist intellectual paradigms and political attachments.

Given the vigorousness with which states still assert sovereign power and their importance in constituting global order and disorder, what is meant by the claim that state sovereignty is waning?⁵ This will be explored in Chapter 2. Here, we may simply

note that a composite figure of sovereignty drawn from classical theorists of modern sovereignty, including Thomas Hobbes, Jean Bodin, and Carl Schmitt, suggests that sovereignty's indispensable features include supremacy (no higher power), perpetuity over time (no term limits), decisionism (no boundedness by or submission to law), absoluteness and completeness (sovereignty cannot be probable or partial), nontransferability (sovereignty cannot be conferred without canceling itself), and specified jurisdiction (territoriality).⁶ If nation-state sovereignty has always been something of a fiction in its aspiration and claim to these qualities, the fiction is a potent one and has suffused the internal and external relations of nation-states since its consecration by the 1648 Peace of Westphalia. However, over the past half century, the monopoly of these combined attributes by nation-states has been severely compromised by growing transnational flows of capital, people, ideas, goods, violence, and political and religious fealty. These flows both tear at the borders they cross and crystallize as powers within them, thus compromising sovereignty from its edges and from its interior. Nation-state sovereignty has been undercut as well by neoliberal rationality, which recognizes no sovereign apart from entrepreneurial decision makers (large and small), which displaces legal and political principles (especially liberal commitments to universal inclusion, equality, liberty, and the rule of law) with market criteria, and which demotes the political sovereign to managerial status. Nation-state sovereignty has also been eroded by the steady growth and importance of international economic and governance institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization. And nation-state sovereignty has been challenged by a quarter century of postnational and international assertions of law, rights, and authority that sometimes openly aim to subvert or supersede the sovereignty of states.⁷

While it is no news that nation-state sovereignty is challenged by global movements of capital and the growing power of transnational legal, economic, and political institutions, the other forces

mentioned above are less often recognized as part of political sovereignty's contemporary undoing. These include the political rationalities of neoliberalism, transnational moral and legal discourses, along with activations of power related to, but not reducible to capital—those that traffic under the sign of culture, ideology, and religion. Meanwhile, forces sustaining or shoring up nation-state sovereignty are few and tend to be backward looking—for example, nationalism, despotism, and imperialism.

The effect of these combined developments is not to eliminate sovereignty from the political map or to enter either a postsovereign or poststate era. As nation-state sovereignty wanes, states and sovereignty do not simply decline in power or significance, but instead come apart from one another. States persist as non-sovereign actors, and many characteristics of sovereignty (though not its intact theological form) appear today in two domains of power that are, not coincidentally, the very transnational domains of powers that the Peace of Westphalia emerged to contain within or subordinate to nation-states: political economy and religiously legitimated violence. Thus, in contrast with Michael Hardt's and Antonio Negri's claim that nation-state sovereignty has transformed into global Empire, and in contrast with Giorgio Agamben's thesis that sovereignty has metamorphosed into the worldwide production and sacrifice of bare life (global civil war), I argue that key characteristics of sovereignty are migrating from the nation-state to the unrelieved domination of capital and God-sanctioned political violence. Neither capital nor God-sanctioned violence bows to another power; both are indifferent to and/or tacticalize domestic as well as international law; both spurn or supervene juridical norms; both recuperate the promise of sovereignty: *E pluribus unum*. As for decisionism, the signature characteristic of sovereignty identified by Carl Schmitt, both capital and theological governance have the capacity to be decisive without being decisionist, suggesting that it may be only in sovereignty's specifically political instantiation in states that a "decider" (as George W. Bush referred to himself, perhaps intimating the

parodic element of a form in its death throes) is essential. Certainly if Schmitt is right that political sovereignty derives from a theological version, it is significant that God's sovereignty is not decisionist—it simply *is*.

In sum, in a post-Westphalian order, sovereign nation-states no longer exclusively define the field of global political relations or monopolize many of the powers organizing that field, yet states remain significant actors in that field, as well as symbols of national identification. This book argues that the new nation-state walls are iconographic of this predicament of state power. Counterintuitively, perhaps, it is the weakening of state sovereignty, and more precisely, the detachment of sovereignty from the nation-state, that is generating much of the frenzy of nation-state wall building today. Rather than resurgent expressions of nation-state sovereignty, the new walls are icons of its erosion. While they may appear as hyperbolic tokens of such sovereignty, like all hyperbole, they reveal a tremulousness, vulnerability, dubiousness, or instability at the core of what they aim to express—qualities that are themselves antithetical to sovereignty and thus elements of its undoing.⁸ Hence the visual paradox of these walls: What appears at first blush as the articulation of state sovereignty actually expresses its diminution relative to other kinds of global forces—the waning relevance and cohesiveness of the form.

Rather than iterations of nation-state sovereignty, the new nation-state walls are part of an ad hoc global landscape of flows and barriers both inside nation-states and in the surrounding postnational constellations, flows and barriers that divide richer from poorer parts of the globe. This landscape signifies the ungovernability by law and politics of many powers unleashed by globalization and late modern colonialization, and a resort to policing and blockading in the face of this ungovernability. These are powers that possess discernible logics, but that lack political form or organization, let alone subjective and coordinated intentionality.⁹ Indeed, insofar as the new walls at the edges of

nation-states articulate with other barriers and forms of surveillance, private and public, they signal the existence of a corrupted divide between internal and external policing and between the police and the military. This, in turn, suggests an increasingly blurred distinction between the inside and outside of the nation itself, and not only between criminals within and enemies without. (Such blurring is emblemized by the growing movement in the United States to criminalize and imprison, rather than deport undocumented migrants.) Thus, one irony of late modern walling is that a structure taken to mark and enforce an inside/outside distinction—a boundary between “us” and “them” and between friend and enemy—appears as precisely the opposite when grasped as part of a complex of eroding lines between the police and the military, subject and *patria*, vigilante and state, law and lawlessness.

Seen from a slightly different angle, as responses to contested and eroding state sovereignty, the new walls project an image of sovereign jurisdictional power and an aura of the bounded and secure nation that are at the same time undercut by their existence and also by their functional inefficacy. Notwithstanding their strikingly physicalist and obdurate dimensions, the new walls often function theatrically, projecting power and efficaciousness that they do not and cannot actually exercise and that they also performatively contradict. To literalize walls as pure interdiction occludes their production of an imago of sovereign state power in the face of its undoing, and it occludes the walls’ consecration of the corruption, contestation, or violation of the borders they would fortify. It also misses their staging of sovereign powers of protection, powers radically limited by modern technologies and paths of infiltration and by the dependence of various “national economies” on much of what walls purport to lock out, especially cheap labor. It misses, in short, the Wizard of Oz quality in the new walls, the way they echo coded (yellow/orange/red) security threat levels that stage an image of state intelligence and control in the face of the opposite.

This theatricalized and spectacularized performance of sovereign power at aspirational or actual national borders brings into relief nation-state sovereignty's theological remainder. If walls do not actually accomplish the interdiction fueling and legitimating them, if they perversely institutionalize the contested and degraded status of the boundaries they limn, they nevertheless stage both sovereign jurisdiction and an aura of sovereign power and awe. Walls thus bear the irony of being mute, material, and prosaic, yet potentially generative of theological awe largely unrelated to their quotidian functions or failures.

The striking popular desire for walling today, considered in light of recent pejorative historical associations with walling and with contemporary walling's general inefficacy vis-à-vis its putative aims, can be traced to an identification with and anxiety about this sovereign impotence. The popular desire for walling harbors a wish for the powers of protection, containment, and integration promised by sovereignty, a wish that recalls the theological dimensions of political sovereignty. If the fiction of state sovereignty is the secularization of the fiction of divine power, the deteriorating viability of this political fiction generates understandable popular anxiety, an anxiety addressed in part by the theological effect and affect of walling. The detachment of sovereign powers from nation-states also threatens an imaginary of individual and national identity dependent upon perceivable horizons and the containment they offer. Thus, walls generate what Heidegger termed a "reassuring world picture" in a time increasingly lacking the horizons, containment, and security that humans have historically required for social and psychic integration and for political membership.

In the remainder of this chapter, I argue for the validity of conceiving the new walls as a single historical phenomenon, despite their formally disparate purposes and effects. Chapter 2 offers an account of the relationship of sovereignty and enclosure in modern political theory and opens up the predicament of power signified by eroding state sovereignty. Chapters 3 and 4 then develop

the ways in which walls address the mutually imbricated threats to the identity and powers of states and subjects consequent to declining state sovereignty in late modernity. Chapter 3 focuses primarily on political examples and discourses for this work; Chapter 4 makes a turn to psychoanalysis.

Contemporary nation-state walling may be nameable as such, but does not emerge or appear in the world this way. With their distinctive political and economic contexts, varied histories, various stated purposes and effects, and disparate building materials and appearances, the new walls are not generally considered as a coherent or even common event. Thus, the claims I am forwarding assert connections among undertakings rarely recognized as kin.¹⁰ What does it mean to treat nation-state walling as a theoretical object when it does not emerge and exist in the world as such?

Each of the new walls can be seen to issue from certain pressures on nations and states exerted by the process of globalization. All generate significant effects in excess of or even counter to their stated purposes; none really “work” in the sense of resolving or even substantially reducing the conflicts, hostilities, or traffic at which they officially aim; each is built as provisional while taking shape as permanent; and each is expensive, yet strikingly popular. These things can be said of every wall built by nation-states in the past two decades. Moreover, the walls themselves are increasingly linked by a diverse ensemble of circuitries, including border-fortification technologies, contractors and subcontractors, protest murals and graffiti, and, of course, legitimation. The global proliferation of walling itself increasingly legitimates walls, especially in Western democracies, where we would expect such legitimation to be hard won.

And yet, the differences among these barriers add up to an equally lengthy list. Some walls are little more than crude fences through fields, while others are mammoth, imposing structures heavily adorned with contemporary surveillance technology. They would also seem to address a diverse array of problems. Most South Asian nation-state walls, for example, target immigrants,

while most of the walls of the Middle East are built in the name of security from terrorism. The Uzbekistan wall against Kyrgystan was prompted by border conflicts, while the Ceuta and Melilla walls in Morocco seek to prevent these Spanish enclaves from becoming staging grounds for Asians and Africans seeking to get to Europe. The berm across Morocco's Western Sahara aims to appropriate disputed territory and some also regard the Israeli wall as a land-grab.

Perhaps nowhere are these differences in purpose and effects sharper than in the two largest, most expensive, and most notorious of the new walls—Israel's "security fence" and the U.S. "border fence." The Israeli wall issues from the evolving architecture of settler colonialism and occupation. It constitutes a new strategy of separation in that context. The U.S. barrier responds mainly to U.S. popular anxieties about the effects of an impoverished Global South on the American economy and culture. Why and how to think about them together? Why harbor both under the aegis of eroding nation-state sovereignty in a post-Westphalian world?

The Israel Security Fence, a.k.a. "the Wall"

Sovereignty is at issue in a number of ways in the Israel-Palestinian conflict. There is the struggle for Palestinian sovereignty, the question of sovereign occupation, and the internally, mutually as well as internationally contested sovereignties of Israel and Palestine. There is also an open question about whether a political solution to the conflict would feature one or two sovereignties, perhaps even spatially overlapping sovereignties.¹¹ However, the global erosion of state sovereignty is not usually considered a factor driving the building of the Israeli wall in the West Bank. Like its predecessors on the Israeli and Egyptian borders of Gaza, the Wall is part of a specific development within the forty-year-old occupation of Palestine, a development broadly characterizable as a shift from colonial domination through administration and control of Palestinians to domination achieved through the

separation and deprivation of this population.¹² The barrier is one element in an arsenal of technologies and strategies for physically disentangling and spatially dividing two intimately entwined populations to create a future of what Prime Minister Ehud Barak defined pithily as “us here, them there.”¹³

The Wall is simultaneously an architectural instrument of separation, of occupation, and of territorial expansion mandated by the twinning of state-sponsored and outlaw extensions of settler colonialism. As is well known, in the course of separating Palestine from Israel, the Wall responds as much to the problem of the Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories as to security threats posed by Palestinian terrorists or mass uprisings such as those of the two intifadas. While successive Israeli regimes overseeing the Wall's construction have determined to protect and incorporate the settlements, state sovereignty cannot be said to have established the historically contingent character of the Wall's jurisdiction, nor is the Wall ever officially defended as a sovereign jurisdictional border. Rather, it appears as a technology in a shifting state approach to a globally unique condition of mingled peoples, mangled sovereignties, colonial and anticolonial violence, appropriated and contested lands.

Given its singular context, multiple purposes, and the geographic, political, and military complexity of managing the occupation, what possible kinship does the Wall have with others around the globe? These affinities appear in some of its legitimization strategies, performances, and supplemental technologies, in its inconsistent textures, even in some of its effects and failures. If, for example, in certain places along its route, the Israeli barrier constitutes a technique of strategic land appropriation that poses as an antiterrorist technology, elsewhere, the Wall appears as an offensive political military technology, posing as a pacification structure, yet effecting economic disruption, social deracination, and psychic humiliation.¹⁴ In places, the Wall produces garrisoned Israeli settlements akin to “gated communities” in the United States, except that, as land appropriations, these

communities might be more appropriately compared to the Spanish enclaves in Morocco. In other places, the Wall segregates the ethnic quarters of Jerusalem, divides a university, cleaves a Palestinian town, family, orchard, or transportation route . . . ruptures and divisions that are repeated, sometimes lightly by comparison, at the sites of other walls. The Indo-Kashmir wall separates farmers from their lands. The U.S.-Mexico wall sunders a university in Brownsville, Texas, truncates family contact at the California and Arizona borders with Mexico, divides and desecrates Native American lands, and disrupts markets in labor and consumption long vital to communities on both sides of the border.¹⁵

But doesn't the purpose and trajectory of the Israeli wall remain singular? The Wall veers from the 1967 Green Line to wrap around settlements deep in the West Bank interior and includes a series of "depth barriers" accompanied by "sterile security zones" penetrating even further into Palestinian lands. These are among the features that make it not a mere border wall or security fence, but a technology of separation and domination in a complex context of settler colonialism and occupation. "The wall," Eyal Weizman writes, has "become a discontinuous and fragmented series of self-enclosed barriers that can be better understood as a prevalent 'condition' of segregation—a shifting frontier—rather than one continuous line cutting the territory in two."¹⁶ It twists, turns, and frequently doubles back on itself as it wraps around hilltop settlements and divides Palestinian communities while establishing tiny strips of connection between pockets of Israeli Jewish existence in the West Bank. Also facilitating these connections across the field of separation is a growing network of roads and tunnels (respectively designated "Jewish" or "Palestinian," depending on what they connect and who has access to them) arching over and under the Wall and each other.

Still another feature of the Wall's seeming global uniqueness pertains to its temporally and spatially ad hoc and provisional qualities. Consequent to various constituencies that have shaped and reshaped its route, including the Israeli Supreme Court,

anti-Wall protestors, settlers, environmentalists, and realtors, the Wall's path has been repeatedly altered over the course of its construction. Moreover, it has never been formally anointed as a separation barrier, but rather has been built in the name of a "temporary" state of emergency constituted by Palestinian hostilities. It is officially declared removable and rerouteable as the security situation requires or as a political solution permits.¹⁷ Critics Ariella Azoulay and Adi Ophir call this aspect of the Wall "a suspended political solution," cousin to the "suspended violence" they claim the Wall represents as it substitutes "insinuation and deterrence" for the material contact of conventional violence.¹⁸ In addition to the abrogation or postponement of political agreements and settled sovereignties, the notion of "suspended political solutions" underscores the literal suspending of law, accountability, and legitimacy and the introduction of arbitrary and extralegal state prerogative that occurs in states of emergency. Thus, argue Azoulay and Ophir, "suspended violence in the territories preserves not the law but its very suspension, and it constitutes not a new law but a no-law situation...law has not been abolished altogether but merely suspended."¹⁹ The invocation of an implicitly temporary "state of emergency" to legitimate lethal violence is not unique to the contemporary period in Israel, but is part of a larger and older discursive economy holding Palestinians responsible for soliciting each violent element in the Israeli arsenal and adducing reaction to these elements as justification for more Israeli violence. What is new is the paradox of the enormous and hugely expensive barrier in this context—the very building of which graphically challenges the idea of temporariness by which it is legitimated.

If the ad hoc and formally impermanent status of the Wall is sometimes part of its discursive legitimation, at other times, the Wall appears as a more straightforward border marker, an ordinary thing in an age of border walls and necessitated by ongoing hostilities. In Weizman's words, the wall "attempts to display the reassuring iconography of...a contiguous political border"

even as it actually marks “the violent reality of a shifting colonial frontier. Notwithstanding the constant shifting of its route, in its massive physical presence that has made it the largest and most expensive project in the history of the state, the Wall seeks to appear as a heavily fortified border.”²⁰

Weizman’s argument about the difference between barriers and borders is aimed at the specificity of the Israeli wall, but it is important for understanding many nation-state walls today. “Barriers,” he writes, “do not separate the ‘inside’ of a sovereign, political or legal system from a foreign ‘outside’ but act as contingent structures to prevent movement across territory.”²¹ The Israeli wall is not unique in signifying alternately as barrier and border, sometimes fusing and sometimes separating the two, depending on legitimacy requirements or challenges. Most walls constructed by nation-states today draw on the easy legitimacy of sovereign border control even as they aim to function more as prophylactics against postnational, transnational, or subnational forces that do not align neatly with nation-states or their boundaries. Some therefore include variations on the Israeli “depth barrier,” for example, the highway checkpoints fifteen miles north of the U.S. boundary with Mexico. Others appear as national boundary markers, but are actually driven by postnational investments in barriers to global immigration. Such is the case with the European Union contribution of more than 40 million Euros to fortify the Ceuta and Melilla walls in Morocco to deter Asian and African migration to Europe. The shifting fortification of Europe against immigration from the east, a task left to the easternmost nation recently added to the EU, is another instance of a postnational barrier appearing as a national border. Most walls continue to draw on the idea of nation-state sovereignty for their legitimacy *and* serve performatively to shore up nation-state sovereignty even as these barriers do not always conform to borders between nation-states and are themselves sometimes monuments to the fading strength or importance of nation-state sovereignty.

Moreover, notwithstanding their often exorbitant costs, elaborate theaters of construction, and significant effects on geopolitical and ecological landscapes, few of the recently constructed walls have been undertaken or promulgated as permanent. To the contrary, the model for legitimating the new walls is exemplified by the barricades composed of “Texas barriers” (outsized versions of the “Jersey barriers” conventionally used as roadblocks) planted around Baghdad in efforts to secure certain neighborhoods from sectarian violence. The walls come down when this violence provisionally recedes or relocates, a moment that the Western mainstream media often eagerly reports as a sign that the war and occupation are succeeding.²² The putative impermanence of the new walls, their participation in the “suspended violence” legitimated by a state of emergency as theorized by Azoulay and Ophir, is of particular importance in liberal democracies, where walls risk offending whatever remains of commitments to universal inclusion and openness. Such commitments, of course, are fading. In the discourse of civilizational struggle that has superseded Cold War discourse in organizing the global imaginary of liberal democracies, two disparate images are merged to produce a single figure of danger justifying exclusion and closure: the hungry masses, on the one hand, and cultural-religious aggression toward Western values, on the other. This merging is abetted by the West’s newly felt economic vulnerability to quarters of the world it has hitherto dominated or ignored. Civilizational discourse combined with this new economic landscape renders ever more acceptable to Western democrats the walling out of economic desperation *and* “foreign” or “inassimilable” cultures.²³

In sum, while the Israeli wall has singular purposes and effects, many of its distinct features can be found in other walls in other parts of the world, although nowhere else in the same combination or with the same intensity of effects. If Israel’s plight stems in part from having been established as a settler colony precisely when colonialism across the globe was being condemned and dismantled, if it is in this regard cursed by a globally rejected past in

its present, Israel also seems to have the strange honor of honing the demographic and political-military tactics and technologies of the global future.²⁴ In this regard, the Israeli wall concentrates all the diverse performative functions, legitimating strategies, and technologies of modern spatial control, as well as all the contradictions found in contemporary walling projects. The Israeli wall, like the others, both performs and undoes a sovereign boundary function, just as it performs and undoes sovereign stability, legislative power, decisionism, and endurance. The Israeli wall, like the others, features a complicated dependence on an ideal of nation-state sovereignty whose very deterioration the Wall redresses, yet whose historical eclipse the Wall also consecrates. If the Wall is a bid for sovereignty, it is also a monstrous tribute to the waning viability of sovereign nation-states. From certain angles, it appears as an eerie monument to the impossibility of nation-state sovereignty today, even if there are unique dimensions to this impossibility in the Israel-Palestine context.

Other continuities between the Israeli barrier and those elsewhere in the world include the Wall's role in displacing Israeli domination onto the figure of a threatening and violent subordinate, its symbolic and psychological turning of the inside out. The Wall also shares with other walls the literal rerouting of danger that the wall purports to block, its intensification of enmity and incitement of new tactics and forms of aggression against what it would protect. It also shares the targeting of enemy populations not precisely commensurate with states or nations. And like all contemporary walls, the Wall generates (and sustains tensions between) theatrical, theological, and material effects.

Finally, it is important to note the policy architects of the Israeli wall legitimate it internationally both by claiming Israel is like other democracies that are fortifying their borders and through claims of Israeli exceptionalism. The Wall is built in the name of Israel's need to secure its population, as any "democracy" must, and also in the name of Israel's singular history and context. The Wall thus simultaneously places Israel in the company

of civilized nations and speaks to its unique nature as a Jewish state surrounded by enemies. However, the discourses legitimating most nation-state walls today feature some version, even if a less dramatic one, of this Janus-faced positioning between the generic (“everyone is doing it”) and the unique (“this is why *we* need this wall”).

The U.S.-Mexico Border Barrier

Like the Israeli wall, at first blush, the U.S.-Mexico border barrier appears distinctive in purpose, function, and construction among the many walls being built around the world. Dividing the Global North from the Global South and aimed primarily at northward flows of illegal drugs and immigrants, it is a spectacularly large and expensive endeavor, one that also varies extensively along its route, ranging from sections that feature triply reinforced sixty-foot-high concrete and steel barriers, to lengths of “virtual fencing” composed of sensors, surveillance cameras, and other detection technology, to desert stretches consisting only of cement posts spaced to obstruct all-terrain vehicles.

The U.S. Border Patrol undertook the building of the first piece of the barrier, the “San Diego fence,” in 1990. Extending from the Pacific Ocean fourteen miles inland and completed in 1993, the fence was constructed of air force landing mats remaindered from the Vietnam War, which turned out to be eminently climbable and lacked the visual awe of what was soon to come. In 1994, the Clinton administration launched Operation Gatekeeper to supply additional fortification and enforcement resources to this part of the border, the main effect of which was to reduce crossings and crime in the urban areas while driving immigration eastward and bulking up the smuggling industry. Operation Hold the Line and Operation Safeguard, established at the major crossing points in Arizona and Texas (and extended into New Mexico), had similar effects. However, as popular sentiment quickened for “doing something” about illegal immigration, politicians across the political spectrum vied with each other for reputations of

toughness on the border. Meanwhile, as neoliberalization stripped protections from North American producers and proliferated global production of cheap goods and services, U.S. employers (especially, but not only in agriculture and construction) relied ever more heavily and openly on illegal immigrant labor. Thus, the walling project was born out of a tension between the needs of North American capital and popular antagonism toward the migration incited by those needs, especially their effect on wages, employment, and the demographics and cultures composing and in some eyes decomposing the nation.

In 1996, Congress passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act to authorize an extension of the U.S.-Mexico barrier and a secondary layer of fencing and security roads intended to buttress ineffective primary fencing. However, environmental challenges raised by the California Coastal Commission and uncooperative owners of property abutting the border soon stalled construction. These and other legal challenges were eventually overcome by the 2005 Real ID Act and the 2006 Secure Fence Act, which rode the wave of post-9/11 security concerns to waive impeding laws and require the construction of 850 miles of fencing in five separate stretches of the Mexico border with California, Arizona, and Texas. The Real ID Act has broad scope, authorizing the waiver of *all* legal impediments to the construction of the barrier and permitting judicial review only for constitutional claims.²⁵ To date, thirty-six laws have been set aside in the course of construction, including statutes concerned with water and air pollution, endangered species protection, animal migration, historic preservation, farmland protection, and Native American sacred lands provisions. In setting aside such legal statutes, these two acts situate the U.S. walling project as a response to a “state of emergency,” bidding to protect a vulnerable nation under siege and relating it to the “suspended political solution” orchestrating the building of the Israeli wall.

Sentiment about the border fence runs high in American politics, both for and against, although those in favor have the ears of

the mainstream media and politicians. Support for the barrier in communities nearest the border is surprisingly weak; proximity tends to breed greater appreciation of its limited effectiveness in stemming as opposed to rerouting illegal immigration, and border communities are also where economic interdependence with Mexico may be most deeply felt.²⁶ That said, there is still plenty of organized support for the wall in border states, areas that are also home to the vigilante groups devoted to patrolling the border and hunting down illegal crossers.

The cost of the wall is difficult to establish. Much federal expenditure of bureaucratic and manual labor related to planning, building, maintaining, and analyzing the effectiveness of the wall is excluded from calculations. Predictions and budgets for the barrier have also varied substantially over the two decades of its emergence, and the estimates still range widely, both for original construction and for maintenance and repair over time. More of the construction has been outsourced to private contractors than was originally planned, and early estimates of sections priced at \$3 million per mile have come in at as much as seven times that. Excluding the costs of land acquisition and labor, the Army Corps of Engineers now predicts that the twenty-five-year life-cycle cost of the 850-mile barrier mandated by the Secure Fence Act will range from \$16.4 million to \$70 million per mile, depending on the nature of the barricade in various areas and on the amount of damage it sustains from smugglers.²⁷ Completion and maintenance of the barrier mandated by the act could cost up to \$60 *billion* over twenty-five years, a figure that excludes federally funded labor and remuneration to private-property holders whose land is used for fencing or patrolling the barrier.

What makes these figures even more remarkable is the limited effectiveness of the barrier in actually deterring, as opposed to rerouting, the flow of illegal immigration. Proclamations of the wall's "success" refer only to reduced illegal crossings and apprehensions in urban areas and not to illegal immigration and drug smuggling rates as a whole.²⁸ While it is easier for the

Border Patrol to catch illegal border crossers in open areas than in urban ones, where they can quickly disappear into neighborhoods, mountain, desert, sea, and tunnel smuggling operations have grown more sophisticated in response to the barrier. These operations and the counterresponses by the Border Patrol in turn increase the general level and geographical reach of violence and criminality at the border, including in previously peaceful remote regions.²⁹ Moreover, by shifting migration to more geographically challenging areas, the barrier has dramatically increased both migrant deaths and the rate of permanent, rather than temporary migration into the United States.

In short, the U.S.-Mexico barrier stages a sovereign power and control that it does not exercise, is built from the fabric of a suspended rule of law and fiscal nonaccountability, has multiplied and intensified criminal industries, and is an icon of the combination of sovereign erosion and heightened xenophobia and nationalism increasingly prevalent in Western democracies today. The state of emergency out of which the wall's construction is authorized also gives it political standing independent of its material functions.

While the Israeli wall issues from and deepens contradictions generated for sovereignty by expansionist colonial occupation, the U.S. barrier issues from and deepens contradictions generated for First World sovereign integrity and capacity by neoliberal globalization. The walls respond to and externalize the causes of different kinds of perceived violence to the nation, and the walls themselves exercise different kinds of violence toward the families, communities, livelihoods, lands, and political possibilities they traverse and shape. However, both are ultimately ineffective bulwarks against the pressures and violences generated in part by the power and resources of the political entities building them. Both are nonetheless extremely popular. Both intensify the criminality and violence they purport to repel, and hence, both generate the need for more fortifications and policing. Yet both are heralded for producing peace, order, and security. Both stage

a sovereignty that the barriers themselves undermine. Both mobilize sovereign jurisdictionality, both confound barricades and borders, and both articulate a border on confiscated lands. Both walled democracies are justified as state necessity in protecting the people, both draw upon the xenophobia they also exacerbate and project, both suspend the law in the name of blockading outlaws and criminals, and both build a “suspended political solution” in concrete and barbed wire. In sum, the differences between the new walls matter, but should not blind us to the shared predicaments of power they respond to and articulate.

If there are common fields and predicaments of power generating diversely placed and purposed new walls, are there also continuities between the new walls and their many predecessors in history? This book argues for a post-Westphalian distinctiveness to contemporary walls, a distinctiveness inhering in the reaction they represent to the dissolving effects of globalization on nation-state sovereignty. This distinctiveness appears in the fact the new walls are built to blockade flows of people, contraband, and violence that do not emanate from sovereign entities and in the fact that they perform an increasingly troubled and unviable sovereign state power. The new walls iterate, in this regard, a vanishing political imaginary in a global interregnum, a time after the era of state sovereignty, but before the articulation or instantiation of an alternate global order.

But there have been political walls before. Indeed, there have been fences since the Beginning, and despite the new walls’ distinctive global context, there exist certain continuities between contemporary walls and older walls. Political walls have always spectacularized power—they have always generated performative and symbolic effects in excess of their obdurately material ones. They have produced and negated certain political imaginaries. They have contributed to the political subjectivity of those they encompass and those they exclude. Medieval walls and fortresses dotting the European countryside, for example, officially built against invasion, also served to overawe and hence bind and pacify

the towns they encircled.³⁰ More generally, all walls defining or defending political entities have shaped collective and individual identity within as they aimed to block penetration from without. This is as true of the Great Wall of China as of contemporary gated communities in the U.S. Southwest. Even the infamous walling projects of twentieth-century Europe combined these functions and effects. The Maginot Line, which stood for the defense of France's eastern border against German invasion, was conceived to produce the image of an "impenetrable fortress France," yet was never intended to be built *in toto*. The rhetoric of the wall vastly outran the bits and pieces of its construction.³¹ The Atlantik Wall built by the Third Reich against an anticipated Allied invasion launched from Great Britain was also designed as a graphic symbol of Nazi-controlled Europe. The Berlin Wall, retrospectively signifying the imprisonment of a population presumed desirous of escaping Soviet domination, was originally conceived as a protective cordon around a fragile new society, a society based on work, cooperation, and egalitarianism, rather than individualism, competition, and hierarchy. The architects of the new Communist society believed the laboratory of social and psychological experiments out of which it would be born required insulation from a corrupting and decadent outside.³²

Like the Berlin Wall, contemporary walls, especially those around democracies, often undo or invert the contrasts they are meant to inscribe. Officially aimed at protecting putatively free, open, lawful, and secular societies from trespass, exploitation, or attack, the walls are built of suspended law and inadvertently produce a collective ethos and subjectivity that is defensive, parochial, nationalistic, and militarized. They generate an increasingly closed and policed collective identity in place of the open society they would defend. Thus, the new walls are not merely ineffective in resurrecting the eroding nation-state sovereignty to which they respond, but they contribute new forms of xenophobia and parochialism to a postnational era. They abet the production of subjects defended against worldliness, but also, ironically,

subjects who lack the very sovereign capaciousness that walled democracy would protect as its prize.

German historian Greg Eghigian has given the name “homo munitus” to the conformist, passive, paranoid, and predictable creature that is the walled nation or subject.³³ Drawing on the Latin *munire*, which means to fortify, secure, defend, protect, or shelter, Eghigian examines both Western mythology and the actual production of East German subjectivity behind the Berlin Wall. While contesting the Western (liberal democratic) norm by which this subjectivity is measured, he corroborates the popular image of the personality produced by the wall, an image that comports in striking ways with Western contemporary imaginings of obeisant and deindividuated theocratic subjects cast as the enemy or at least the opposite of Western individuals.³⁴ Thus, the kinds of subjects that Western nation-state walls would block out are paradoxically produced within by the walls themselves—yet another way in which walls inadvertently subvert the distinction between inside and outside that they are intended to mark, a distinction also underscored by contemporary walling advocates eager to disassociate our walls from the Berlin Wall or to distinguish between walls that limn free and unfree societies.

The recognition that walls do not merely protect but produce the content of the nations they barricade permits us to ask not only what psychological needs and desires fuel their construction, but what contingent effects they have in contouring nationalisms, citizen subjectivities, and identities of the political entities on both of their sides. It permits us to consider whether and how contemporary walls work as symbols of collective and individual containment, as fortifications for entities whose real and imagined borders globalization places under erasure. It allows us to ask whether they are containing as well as defending, indeed, whether all defense entails containment and all containment entails defense. When do the new walls become like the confining walls of a prison, rather than the comforting walls of a house? When does the fortress become a penitentiary?

During the Cold War, the Euro-Atlantic left posed this question routinely about the civil defense shelters touted by Western political and civic leaders as vital in the contest between East and West. The shelters, even unused, contributed to a widespread bunker mentality amid the nuclear arms build-up, a mentality that itself reinforced rather than questioned the assumptions and strategies undergirding American defense and foreign policy in the 1950s and 1960s. Stockpiled nuclear weapons in bunkered silos were mirrored by stockpiled subsistence supplies in bunkered shelters; defending against Armageddon became a mutually reinforcing way of civilian and political life, one that also obscured the American contribution to this deadly standoff. Left Israelis today pose a similar question as the project of walling in West Bank and Gaza residents not only decreases the possibilities for a political solution, but intensifies the militarization and bunker mentality contouring Israeli life.

Walls built around political entities cannot block out without shutting in, cannot secure without making securitization a way of life, cannot define an external “they” without producing a reactionary “we,” even as they also undermine the basis of that distinction. Psychically, socially, and politically, walls inevitably convert a protected way of life into hunkering and huddling. In this respect, the Berlin Wall, whose tearing down twenty years ago is still internationally celebrated and whose imprisoning functions are contrasted by contemporary walling advocates with the task of protecting free societies, is not quite so opposite to twenty-first-century walls as such advocates would suggest.