

In a world dominated by the trend of globalization wherein the globe is interlinked by criss-crossing networks of communication, trade, transportation, and finance, borders seem to instinctively matter less and less. However, due to globalization, borders are paradoxically coming to matter even more than they have in the past. In a post-9/11 world, Western governments have actually intensified their measures in keeping unwanted immigration (such as refugees) out of their countries. These policies stretch from the patrol of physical borders, to the use of biometric technology, and the outsourcing of migration control to the private sector.¹ In this context, international borders arguably matter in today's world more than ever and will remain so for years to come.² By analyzing the economic, socio-political, and national security aspects of the European Refugee Crisis, this paper argues that the maintenance of borders are and will continue to be a central consideration in international geopolitics.

To begin, a brief summary of the EU Crisis is essential in establishing the context in which the importance of borders in today's world is analyzed. Between 2015 and 2016, the European Union was engulfed by waves of refugees fleeing from the war-torn MENA (Middle East and Africa) region. In this context, globalization arguably amounts to something of a 'Catch-22' for the countries of the Global North (North America and Europe) in that "open trade networks [(which require porous borders)]...are potentially the conditions of possibility of a catastrophic breach to national security, in the form of terrorists (a term used

¹ Jennifer M. Welsh, *The Return of History: Conflict, Migration, and Geopolitics in the Twenty-First Century* (Toronto, ON: House of Anansi Press, 2016, Apple Books), 241-242.

² Alexander C. Diener and Joshua Hagen, "Theorizing Borders in a 'Borderless World': Globalization, Territory and Identity," *Geography Compass* 3, no. 3 (2009): 1196-1216, 1198.

interchangeably with 'stowaways' and 'illegal aliens') and/or weapons of mass destruction."³ Suddenly, the porous borders the Schengen states have prided themselves on as a hallmark of modern globalization pose serious issues.⁴ Ironically, "the world has become more open to flows of goods and capital but more closed to the circulation of human bodies."⁵ This led to several Schengen states like Hungary and Poland reintroducing temporary border controls multiple times.⁶

In 2015, the EU made a deal with Turkey wherein Turkey would act as a buffer state in helping curb the stream of refugees into Europe-proper.⁷ In fact, a favourite tactic of the EU in dealing with the refugee crisis was to increase aid to the countries hosting the most number of refugees and migrants.⁸ They were also forced to increase their rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea, which was a key crossing point for migrants coming into Europe.⁹ Ibrahim and Howarth cut to the heart of the matter in this case, pointing out that: "Internationally, there has been a shift from the discourses of protection and rights to discourses of threat and risk depending on the perceived scale of migration and on whether

³ Mathew Coleman, "A Geopolitics of Engagement: Neoliberalism, the War on Terrorism, and the Reconfiguration of US Immigration Enforcement," *Geopolitics* 12, no. 4 (2007): 607-634, 612.

⁴ Peter Nedergaard, "Borders and the EU Legitimacy Problem: The 2015-16 European Refugee Crisis," *Policy Studies* 40, no. 1 (2019): 80-91, 80.

⁵ Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, Or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013, e-Duke Books Scholarly Collection 2013), Chapter 1, 19.

⁶ Nedergaard, "Borders and the EU Legitimacy Problem," 84.

⁷ Welsh, *The Return of History*, 222.

⁸ Welsh, 222.

⁹ Welsh, 223.

the migrant is labelled a refugee, trafficker or terrorist.”¹⁰ In this context, the ‘threat’ refugees present to the countries of the European Union can arguably take three different aspects.

Firstly, in terms of economic security refugees theoretically can pose severe disruptions to the local economy. Diener and Hagen point out that control over natural resources are inextricably intertwined over control with territory, therefore, it is practically impossible to disassociate the control of land from power.¹¹ In sense, the integrity of a country's borders and territory are integral to the security and stability of its economy. Building on this point, Nedergaard argues porous borders undermine welfare systems since countries with weak borders are quickly overrun by people from countries who are not as fortunate (i.e., refugees).¹² In this context, refugees are seen as a burden on public services and a threat to the livelihood of the local citizens of host nations.¹³ Without adequate demand, refugees can be economically viewed as a labour supply shock, reducing the wages of local residents in refugee-hosting countries.¹⁴ Because of this portrayal, refugees and other asylum seekers are categorized as ‘other’ or innately different from legal citizens and residents of the host countries. These differing social categories are defined by the legality and legitimacy of presence in a defined territory. Ultimately, this fear of the ‘other’ is

¹⁰ Yasmin Ibrahim and Anita Howarth, “Communicating the ‘Migrant’ Other as Risk: Space, EU and Expanding Borders,” *Journal of Risk Research* 21, no. 12 (2018): 1465-1486, 1470.

¹¹ Diener and Hagen, “Theorizing Borders in a ‘Borderless World,’” 1202.

¹² Nedergaard, 89.

¹³ Ibrahim and Howarth, “Communicating the ‘Migrant’ Other as Risk,” 1468.

¹⁴ Matthias Luecke and Claas Schneiderheinze, “More Financial Burden-Sharing for Developing Countries that Host Refugees,” *Economics: The Open-Access, Open-Assessment E-Journal*, 2017, 4.

epitomized in their transgression of international borders, which are seen as boundary markers that define the safety of a country and its economy.¹⁵ Unfortunately, this fear often leads to sometimes irrational fear and hatred of refugees, which may pose a social threat in the minds of some.

Socially, the construct of refugees as the feared 'other' leads them to be seen by the citizens of host countries as a threat to the very "social cohesion and national culture" of a state.¹⁶ This threat is often linked to Islamophobia in the context of the War on Terror in the current post-9/11 world. Zunes highlights the fact that there has been "an alarming growth in xenophobia and Islamophobia throughout Europe," evidenced by the British electorate's dedication to leave the EU (arguably rooted in anti-immigrant sentiment).¹⁷ Dalakoglou aptly terms this phenomenon "Fortress Europe", referencing how the border securitization regime protects Europe by denying others the right of mobility.¹⁸ Border securitization has, in this way, arguably extended from the protection of the economy, to the protection of the very social, cultural, and political fabric of a European nation.

In terms of the maintenance of borders, biometric technologies have come to play a key role. Tied closely to what is conceived to be the infallible verifier about the real identity of a person, biometric technologies are seen as the solution to ensuring security in the

¹⁵ Ibrahim and Howarth, 1467.

¹⁶ Ibrahim and Howarth, 1468

¹⁷ Stephen Zunes, "Europe's Refugee Crisis, Terrorism, and Islamophobia," *Peace Review* 29, no. 1 (2017): 1-6, 181.

¹⁸ Dimitris Dalakoglou, "Europe's Last Frontier: The Spatialities of the Refugee Crisis," *City* 20, no. 2 (2016): 180-185, 180-181.

context of the War on Terror without having to forsake the benefits of globalization.¹⁹ As Amoore puts it: "The war on terror not only separates 'our war' from 'their terror', but also 'our globalization' of legitimate and civilized business and leisure travel from 'their globalization' of trafficking and illegal migration. The distinction is, of course, a feigned divide."²⁰ When refugees are dehumanized in this way – portrayed as an abstract, illegitimate 'other' – they arguably come to manifest the phantom figure of some elusive, unknown threat; making them seem all the more of a peril for society.

Furthermore, the social concept of people and identity (associated with Foucault's concept of 'biopolitics') is a key consideration of the social/political security aspect. Refugees, as a group, have a fluid statistical identity, which makes it necessary to utilize advanced biometric and information technology in order to track them.²¹ However, this has the effect of "inscribing the border onto migrants' bodies" – integrating issues of race and ethnicity into the way border regimes are operated globally.²² Collectively, the means through which borders are secured (technology, physical barriers, legal structures, etc.) creates boundaries intertwined with the racialization of refugees. This has the effect of "making Europe legible as a social imaginary."²³ Overall, international migration flows is

¹⁹ Louise Amoore, "Biometric Borders: Governing Mobilities in the War on Terror," *Political Geography* 25, no. 3 (2006): 336-351, 343.

²⁰ Amoore, "Biometric Borders," 348.

²¹ Mezzadra and Neilson, *Border as Method, Or, the Multiplication of Labor*, Chapter 6, 173.

²² Mezzadra and Neilson, Chapter 6, 173.

²³ Synnøve K. N. Bendixsen, "The Refugee Crisis: Destabilizing and Restabilizing European Borders," *History and Anthropology* 27, no. 5 (2016): 536-554, 550.

sometimes portrayed as a threat to the very sovereignty of a state (and by extension its social, cultural, and political fabric), challenging the very core principle of a territorial state as an entity with clear boundaries and an easily identifiable population.²⁴

Finally, the xenophobic-centred social fear of refugees feeds directly into national/physical security concerns in the EU. Adamson observes that “[s]ince the September 11 terrorist attacks, questions relating to migration and security are increasingly viewed through the lens of international terrorism. This is true not just in the United States but also in Europe and other states.”²⁵ In the wake of these attacks, even the European Union, seen as the forerunner for a borderless world, was noted to have strengthened its borders with Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, in addition to the Mediterranean and Atlantic (key pathways for refugees).²⁶ This is because weak borders can arguably allow political non-state actors (i.e., extremist Islamist groups) to influence population groups within states to engage in political action on their behalf.²⁷ Even before the drastic security reform the 9/11 attacks triggered, borders have always been an unavoidable consideration, even for the purportedly ‘borderless’ EU. Diener and Hagen point out that the EU “requires states seeking membership to settle their external borders before joining.”²⁸ Clearly, despite its advocacy for free trade and the increased economic productivity gained by globalization and open

²⁴ Fiona B. Adamson, “Crossing Borders: International Migration and National Security,” *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2006): 165-199, 175.

²⁵ Adamson, “Crossing Borders,” 195.

²⁶ Diener and Hagen, 1197.

²⁷ Adamson, 177.

²⁸ Diener and Hagen, 1201

borders, the EU is still very much concerned with keeping those whom they deem 'undesirable' out.

It is true that many countries within the EU (the most prominent being Germany) have taken in refugees, but the policies the EU have collectively enacted regarding development aid for the middle- and low-income refugee-hosting periphery countries bordering the EU core (e.g., Turkey) are aimed at keeping the majority of refugees out of the Global North.²⁹ There has been a clear shift within Western society from welcoming refugees, to keeping them at bay.³⁰ Again in terms of national security, as seen earlier in the protection of social/political security, biometric security measures are key in the modern movement against refugees. Amoore aptly argues that:

[T]he problem becomes one of isolating the legitimate 'inside' transborder activities of the global economy, and securing them from the illegitimate 'outside' of those who would exploit the possibilities of open borders...Far from seeking to minimize or limit the risks of a globalizing society, the new techniques of 'targeted governance' in the war on terror rest upon an 'embracing of risk' made possible by the global integration of information technologies.³¹

Albahari builds on this, labelling the current international immigration mechanism as "neo-feudal" in that it is predicated on a rise in surveillance, among other security techniques.³²

Ibrahim and Howarth cite the example of commercial freight transports being subjected to intensified screening with the use of advanced biometric technology meant to detect

²⁹ Evan Easton-Calabria, "The World Bank, International Loans, and a Brief History of Refugees and Development," *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, 37, no. 2 (2017), 5.

³⁰ Welsh, 250.

³¹ Amoore, 339.

³² Maurizio Albahari, "Europe's Refugee Crisis," *Anthropology Today* 31, no. 5 (2015): 1-2, 2.

hidden people. In this, they rightly argue, 'hard' borders are now synonymous with securitization.³³

To conclude, it is clear from the recent increase in border security by the European Union that borders continue to hold a great amount of importance in today's post-9/11 world, characterized by the globalization 'Catch-22' – the dilemma between free trade (symbolized by open borders) and the economic, social, and national security threats posed by refugees (instinctively necessitating closed borders). The Global North, including the EU, have come to circumvent this paradox through the use of advanced biometric security. The maintenance of physical borders to keep 'undesirables' out is necessary for ensuring economic and national security. Furthermore, the importance of borders have also attained an abstract, social construct state, where keeping the 'other' out is seen as necessary to protect the very social and cultural heart of a country. This case study of the EU Refugee Crisis is only part of a bigger, overarching theme of border securitization all over the world. Ultimately, all three aspects of a nation that refugees seem to threaten – economic, socio-political/socio-cultural, and physical national security – are inextricably intertwined in the context of the EU Refugee Crisis, bringing the importance of borders to the foreground of international geopolitics in a way that has not been seen since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Word Count: 1,825

³³ Ibrahim and Howarth, 1480.

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