

Knocking down walls and defending the right to migrate
Migreurop network members meeting, 27th and 28th November 2009, Paris

The fall of the Berlin Wall was a liberation, but it sounds today as an appeal, an appeal for all of us to fight oppression, to knock down the walls which still divide cities, lands, people across the world.¹

Nicolas Sarkozy

No podemos perder de vista que hay otros muros en el mundo que deben caer²

José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero

Since it was set up in 2002, the Migreurop network³, a collection of more than forty organisations on both sides of the Mediterranean, has been denouncing the imprisonment of migrants, the militarisation of the European Union's borders and its policies of control and repression of emigration. Understandably, therefore, we wish to see in official declarations calling for walls to be knocked down, like Nicolas Sarkozy's 'Berlin appeal', signs of a turning away from what is in effect a war being fought against migrants⁴. For too long, this war has shaped European Union migration policies, and it has caused thousands of victims.

Many of the more than 40,000 kilometres of closed borders (nearly 18,000 kilometres of which are 'walled') came into being after 1989. Not all of these are alike: physical similarities can hide differences of function. But there are sometimes overlaps. Anti-migrant barriers are often nearly indistinguishable from some front lines, or from walls designed to render occupation permanent (as in the case with the border between India and Bangladesh). But they are also the most unusual in the long history of geopolitical walls and the most symbolic of modern globalisation. They mark an evolution in the use of walls. In the years of conflict between East and West, walls stopped people leaving. Now they stop people getting in, the child of relations between North and South increasingly determined by the migratory policies of wealthy countries. But as the emblematic case of the wall between the United States and Mexico shows, this distinction is often inadequate to describe the diplomatic stakes of borders that are often closed twice over: Mexico is the United States' policeman when it comes to migration from Central America, and it is both the timid defender of its own emigrant citizens and the jailer of a part of its population.

On the 'frontline' between Europe and Africa, of course, physical walls only exist at a few of the European Union's entry points, in the (post-) colonial enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, on Moroccan soil. But these are only one element of a general policy of closing down what are increasingly dematerialised and externalised European borders, a policy based on undermining the fundamental right - recognised by article 13 of the Universal Declaration of

¹ La chute du mur de Berlin sonne aujourd'hui comme un appel à combattre les oppressions, à abattre les murs qui, à travers le monde, divisent encore des villes, des territoires, des peuples

² We should not forget that other walls have to fall in the world.

³ For more information about the network: <http://www.migreurop.org/rubrique54.html>

⁴ Migreurop, *Guerre aux migrants. Le livre noir de Ceuta et Melilla*, Syllepse, 2007.

Human Rights⁵ - to leave one's own country. France's agreements on the 'coordinated management of migratory flows', Italy's bilateral agreements, Spain's REVA: all require southern countries to participate in controlling the movements of their own citizens (going as far as criminalising emigration in certain countries like Morocco and Algeria) and to accept 'readmission clauses' for citizens of theirs in an irregular situation in European Union countries⁶.

As the nets around migrants trying to cross the fortified borders of Europe tighten, so a key mechanism of anti-migratory globalisation - camps for foreigners in transit, awaiting expulsion or a respectful 'welcome' for their rights - grows in number. Shape-shifting and multi-functional⁷, these camps, like the new walls of shame, are a symptom of an evil which did not disappear with the fall of the Berlin Wall: the privileging of (flawed) national interest over respect for human rights.

⁵ See analysis and illustrations in Migreurop, *Atlas des migrants en Europe. Géographie critique des politiques migratoires*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2009.

⁶ See programme for the international meeting, « Readmission agreements or expulsion blackmail ? », 27th Novembre 2009, Paris : <http://www.migreurop.org/article1481.html>

⁷ See maps of camps in Europe and in Mediterranean region : <http://www.migreurop.org/rubrique266.html>