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# Borderization in Georgia: Sovereignty Materialized

Edward Boyle\*

## Abstract

This paper shall examine the process of borderization that has been proclaimed as occurring along the Georgian-South Ossetian boundary. This boundary is one that remains largely unrecognized, as the claims of the Georgian state to sovereignty over South Ossetia are accepted by the majority of the international community. The crucial exception to this is Russia, under whose aegis this process of borderization is occurring. The result is the creation of a physical barrier around the territory of South Ossetia, one that seeks to materialize what was previously an administrative fiction on the ground, halting the movement of people and goods across this border and dividing people from their livelihoods. The paper shall consider what meaning this fencing has within the context of Georgia's borders, and reflect upon the larger lessons that can be drawn for the concept of sovereignty and the status of borders in the contemporary world.

## Reporting the Border

On April 15, 2014, three crew members of a Tbilisi-based television station were detained by Russian forces close to the village of Adzvi bordering South Ossetia. TV3 announced that its reporter Bela Zakaidze, cameraman Vakhtang Lekiasvili and broadcast technician Mikheil Mikhoev had been detained while working on a report about the shifting of the boundary between South Ossetia and Georgia deeper into Georgian-controlled territory. RES, South Ossetia's official news agency, citing the South Ossetian Special Envoy for Post-Conflict Issues, Murat Jioev, reported that "three Georgian citizens were detained in the vicinity of South Ossetia ... for violating the state border."<sup>1</sup> Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement that Russian border guards, protecting the boundary between Georgia and South Ossetia as per the agreement between the governments of Russia and South Ossetia, had arrested three Georgian journalists and that, "According to the rules the detainees were transferred to the South Ossetian authorities. Reports say the border violators knowingly and blatantly went from the village of Adzvi to the nearby South Ossetian settlement and shot video footage of the border infrastructure there."<sup>2</sup> The Russian and

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<sup>1</sup> "Murat Jioev: Georgian Journalists Are Detained for Border Violation," *Pirveli TV*, April 16, 2014. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://1tv.ge/en/news/view/67505.html>

<sup>2</sup> "Russia's Official Statement about Detention of Georgian Journalists," *Georgian News TV*, April 16, 2014. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.georgianews.ge/politics/26930-russias-official-statement-about-detention-of-georgian-journalists.html>

Georgian Foreign Ministries proceeded to trade accusations of “provocations” preceding the following day’s meeting in Prague of the Georgian Special Envoy for Relations with Russia, Zurab Abashidze, and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Grigory Karasin. In the event, although the issue was raised, this meeting passed off peacefully<sup>3</sup> and, after having been detained for slightly more than 24 hours, the journalists were returned to the Georgian side at the boundary crossing in Ergneti, a small village near Tskhinvali on the administrative boundary line that separates South Ossetia from Georgia.

The issue that these journalists went to report on, and that they ended up as participants in, has been dubbed “borderization.”<sup>4</sup> This borderization process as seen from Georgia consists of two related issues; one is the materialization of the previously theoretical boundary along the ground in the form of border markers, barbed wire, and the increased prevalence of border patrols, while the second is that this materialization frequently results in the advance of the Georgian-South Ossetian boundary line deeper into previously Georgian-held territory. Attention began to be brought to this process of borderization over the course of 2013, with Georgian interior ministry officials briefing foreign diplomats and international organizations regarding the “installation of fences by Russian troops” in June of that year, and inviting them to view this activity near the villages of Ditsi, Didi Khurvaleti and Gugutiankari.<sup>5</sup> Further fencing over the summer separated residents in the village of Dvani from the source of their irrigation water, while the population of Adzvi was separated from its farmland and church by barbed wire erected in September 2013. The following month Maya Panjikidze, Georgia’s then-Foreign Minister, announced that around 35km, or a tenth of the total length of the Georgia-South Ossetia boundary, was now fenced as a result of the “intense illegal actions” of Russian forces since January 2013.<sup>6</sup> Following a lull over the winter, borderization then resumed at the village of Atotsi in late-February 2014, where residents were separated from both the source of their irrigation water and some farmland by the fence being shifted a further 400 meters into previously Georgian-controlled territory, adding a further 11 families to the 65 affected “as a result of the installation of barbed wire and fences” highlighted by Panjikidze the previous autumn. Further incidences of fencing over the subsequent two years have meant that the Georgian government has recently been reporting that “the total length of artificial barriers along the occupation line in Tskhinvali Region is nearly 51 km.”<sup>7</sup> Coupled with this extension of the fencing

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“Georgian Journalists Have Violated the Border of South Ossetia with the Purpose of Provocation: Russian Foreign Ministry,” *RES*, April 16, 2014. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://cominf.org/en/node/1166501603>

<sup>3</sup> “Meeting of Georgian, Russian Diplomats in Prague,” *Civil.ge*, April 16, 2014. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27143>

<sup>4</sup> For ease of reading, this article will drop the use of scare quotes around the term.

<sup>5</sup> The “Russian troops” reported were likely Border Security Forces rather than the Russian military. “Interior Ministry Briefs Diplomats on ‘Borderisation’,” *Civil.ge*, June 14, 2013. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26144>

<sup>6</sup> “Russia’s South Ossetia Fences Now Stretch 35 km,” *Democracy and Freedom Watch*, October 10, 2013. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://dfwatch.net/russias-south-ossetia-fences-now-stretch-35-km-38895>

<sup>7</sup> “Second Quarterly Report (April–June 2016) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia on the Human Rights Situation in the Occupied Regions of Georgia,” available from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia

are increasing incidences of detention along the boundary, although predominantly of locals rather than journalists, on the basis of what Tskhinvali and Russian Border Forces insist are “violations of the border.” Between 2009 and 2015, 840 people have been detained along the boundary, with 162 of those detentions occurring in the latter year, the highest annual total to date.<sup>8</sup> Usually the detainees are taken to Tskhinvali for a few days and then released after being fined.

Analyzed in these terms, the effects of this borderization process appear to primarily revolve around the access of individuals to territory and resources and prohibitions on the freedom of movement, emphasizing the intensely individual and local impacts that stem from this materialization of the boundary. It is this very localness that dictates responses to them, with Georgia’s President Giorgi Margvelashvili calling the Russian’s erecting of barbed wire fences “completely senseless” actions.<sup>9</sup> Yet as there is to every fence, there are two sides to every story, and this borderization must be seen as being central to the expression of South Ossetia’s disputed sovereignty. Within this materialization of claims to sovereignty being made through the fencing off of South Ossetia, there exists another global issue of increasing importance. The initial optimism of the immediate post-Cold war era promised to herald an age of globalization that would sweep away all fenced and walled borders as it had the Berlin Wall.<sup>10</sup> It was a belief in a world becoming smaller, with advances in transportation and communications and the triumph of liberal democracy bringing economic, cultural and political relations closer.<sup>11</sup> As a result, the loci of political and economic power would no longer be embodied within the sovereign nation-state, which would consequently be swept away. Yet almost as soon as it was made, this claim was undermined by examples of the uneven border effects that developed, such as the apparent disconnect between the signing of NAFTA and the beginning of ‘Operation Gatekeeper.’<sup>12</sup> These contradictory trends revealed a number of paradoxes, between visions of a world without walls and the need for them, between the existence of segregation within universal political forms, and between networked and virtual forms of power running into physical barriers. For Wendy Brown, the paradoxes reveal that, “Rather than resurgent expressions of nation-

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website. Accessed October 4, 2016: [http://www.mfa.gov.ge/getattachment/Occupied-Territories/%E1%83%A7%E1%83%9D%E1%83%95%E1%83%94%E1%83%9A%E1%83%99%E1%83%95%E1%83%90%E1%83%A0%E1%83%A2%E1%83%90%E1%83%9A%E1%83%A3%E1%83%A0%E1%83%98-%E1%83%90%E1%83%9C%E1%83%92%E1%83%90%E1%83%A0%E1%83%98%E1%83%A8%E1%83%94%E1%83%91%E1%83%98/second\\_report\\_2016.pdf.aspx](http://www.mfa.gov.ge/getattachment/Occupied-Territories/%E1%83%A7%E1%83%9D%E1%83%95%E1%83%94%E1%83%9A%E1%83%99%E1%83%95%E1%83%90%E1%83%A0%E1%83%A2%E1%83%90%E1%83%9A%E1%83%A3%E1%83%A0%E1%83%98-%E1%83%90%E1%83%9C%E1%83%92%E1%83%90%E1%83%A0%E1%83%98%E1%83%A8%E1%83%94%E1%83%91%E1%83%98/second_report_2016.pdf.aspx)

<sup>8</sup> “Georgian Citizens Detained by Russian Occupational Troops in 2015,” *Institute for Development of Freedom of Information*, January 21, 2016. Accessed October 4, 2016: <https://idfi.ge/en/georgian-citizens-detained-by-russian-occupational-troops-in-2015>. On September 17, 2016, it was reported that 109 people had been detained so far in 2016, see “Tskhinvali Releases 17-Year-Old, Detained for Allegedly Crossing Administrative Border,” *Civil.ge*, September 17, 2016. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=29449>

<sup>9</sup> “President Condemns ‘Borderization’,” *Civil.ge*, February 26, 2014. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26981>

<sup>10</sup> Kenichi Ohmae, *The End of the Nation State: The Rise of Regional Economies. How New Engines of Prosperity are Reshaping Global Markets* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamilton, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper: the Rise of the “Illegal Alien” and the Making of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* (London: Routledge, 2002).

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.”<sup>13</sup> This piece is aimed at considering such a claim, examining the borderization of South Ossetia as a sovereign act by a non-sovereign state in order to consider if, indeed, such efforts to shore up the sovereignty of the state are futile. When borders have come to be seen as existing “everywhere,”<sup>14</sup> this conscious effort to materialize a “bounded space” can appear as curiously anachronistic, and worthy of further reflection.<sup>15</sup>

## Placing Borderization

The location of this process of borderization is the contested boundary line delimiting the territory of the Republic of Georgia from the entity most commonly referred to as “South Ossetia”, which is known within official Georgian discourse as the “Tskhinvali district” and has received official recognition from the Russian Federation as the “Republic of South Ossetia.”<sup>16</sup> Academically, outside of Georgia this latter entity is generally understood as being an “unrecognized” or “de-facto” state, although there is also little conceptual consensus regarding what such terms mean,<sup>17</sup> shown in the “terminological profusion” that surrounds them (as “de facto, quasi-, unrecognised, para-, pseudo-, shadow-, phantom-, self-proclaimed, -in waiting, -in all but name”).<sup>18</sup> However defined, the entity of South Ossetia is widely acknowledged as one of the four “statelets” that emerged within post-Soviet space as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup> All four of these entities had seen increasingly ethnocentric local politics amidst the growing nationalism of the late-Soviet period<sup>20</sup> and

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<sup>13</sup> Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone, 2010), 25.

<sup>14</sup> Etienne Balibar quoted in Corey Johnson, Reece Jones, Anssi Paasi, Louise Amoore, Alison Mountz, Mark Salter and Chris Rumford, “Interventions on Rethinking ‘the Border’ in Border Studies,” *Political Geography* 30:2 (2011): 61–69.

<sup>15</sup> Stuart Elden, “Land, Terrain, Territory,” *Progress in Human Geography* 34:6 (2010): 799–817.

<sup>16</sup> Following the majority of commentators, this article will use South Ossetia, without scare quotes.

<sup>17</sup> James Harvey and Gareth Stansfield, “Theorizing Unrecognized States: Sovereignty, Secessionism and Political Economy,” in *Unrecognized States in the International System*, ed. Nina Caspersen and Gareth Stansfield (London: Routledge, 2011), 11–26, 14.

<sup>18</sup> Laurence Broers, Alexander Iskandaryan and Sergey Minasyan, “Introduction: The Unrecognized Politics of de facto States in the post-Soviet Space,” *Caucasus Survey* 3:3 (2015): 187–194, 189.

<sup>19</sup> The others are Abkhazia, Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh. Abkhazia is another breakaway territory from Georgia, Transnistria from Moldova and Nagorno-Karabakh an Armenian breakaway state from Azerbaijan. See Sergey Markedonov, “The Unrecognized States of Eurasia as a Phenomenon of the USSR's Dissolution,” *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 20:2 (2012): 189–196; Georgiy I. Mirsky, *On Ruins of Empire: Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Former Soviet Union* (London: Greenwood Press, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Jones, “Georgia: Nationalism from under the Rubble,” in *After Independence: Making and Protecting the Nation in Postcolonial and Postcommunist States*, ed. Lowell Barrington (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

have been characterized by interethnic conflict and ethnic cleansing since the latter's collapse.<sup>21</sup> Together with Abkhazia, Georgia's other breakaway territory, South Ossetia sought to secede from the larger entity prior to independence, fearing being outnumbered and dominated by the titular nationality within a Georgian "mini-empire."<sup>22</sup> In both cases the post-independence period saw largely low-level but continuous civil and ethnic conflict, which culminated in the war of August 2008, and subsequent recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states by the Russian Federation. In this sense, the process of borderization within South Ossetia can be seen as the culmination of a two-decade long struggle to resolve a problem common to post-Soviet space, that of seeking to bring political and ethnic boundaries into alignment<sup>23</sup> in what had previously been a unified political space whose administrative boundaries had largely existed as lines on the map.<sup>24</sup>

It is in order to fix these boundaries of polity and ethnicity that the current process of seeking to territorially demarcate a border between two distinct entities of Georgia and South Ossetia is required. While this seeks to separate South Ossetia from Georgia, and proclaim the autonomous existence of the former, much of the responsibility for the construction of the fence as well as patrolling it resides with the Russian Federation's Federal Security Service (FSB) rather than the de-facto authorities in Tskhinvali. In the short-term, this stems from an agreement signed between the two governments on April 30, 2009, that established their joint authority to secure South Ossetia's borders, which was renewed in another decree on state borders concluded in early 2015. This was just prior to the signing of the Treaty on Alliance and Integration by Presidents Vladimir Putin and Leonid Tibilov on 18 March, and is indicative of the degree of South Ossetian dependence upon Russia necessary for its survival as a separate polity from Georgia.<sup>25</sup> The territorial extent of South Ossetia and the fencing of its edges is justified by reference to the administrative boundaries of the South

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<sup>21</sup> Julie George, *The Politics of Ethnic Separatism in Russia and Georgia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Monica Duffy Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> Soviet academic and dissident Andrey Sakharov's 1989 characterization of Georgia, relocating the illegitimacy of empire from the Soviet state to the Georgian nation, quoted in Lawrence Broers, "Mirrors to the World: The Claims to Legitimacy and International Recognition of De Facto States in the South Caucasus," *Brown Journal of International Affairs* 20:2 (2014): 145–159, 149.

<sup>23</sup> Which is part of a much longer history particularly associated with nationalism and the fracture of Imperial formations, for example the post-World War I "unmixing of peoples" in Eastern Europe or the "territorialization of the millets" in post-Ottoman space. See Rogers Brubaker, "Aftermaths of Empire and the Unmixing of People," in *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-building: The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires*, ed. Karen Barkey and Mark Von Hagen (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997); Inga Brandell, "Whose Borders? Some Empirical and Theoretical Afterthoughts," in *State Frontiers: Borders and Boundaries in the Middle East*, ed. Inga Brandell (London: IB Tauris, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Without downplaying other factors or the question of responsibility, the occupation of Crimea and current conflict in Ukraine are also aspects of this issue.

<sup>25</sup> Leonid Tibilov has been the President of the Republic of South Ossetia since 2012. The Decree on State Borders was signed on February 18 2015, with the Treaty concluded exactly a month later, being labelled by some as Russia "swallowing" the smaller entity (see e.g. Thomas de Waal, "Swallowing South Ossetia," *Carnegie Moscow Center*, January 14, 2015. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/?fa=57706>).

Ossetian Autonomous Oblast (SOAO). This entity had been proclaimed by the Soviet Union in 1922, established so that the separatist demands of Ossetian Bolsheviks that resulted from violence between them and Georgian Menshevik forces in the period 1918–1921 could be accommodated within the Soviet state.<sup>26</sup> The Republic of South Ossetia is therefore understood to possess borders identical with those of the SOAO's administrative boundaries, which Russia and South Ossetia allegedly define according to a 1984 Soviet general staff map of the territory. Russia continues to respond to criticism of the borderization policy by noting that “only a short segment of the many kilometers of border is fenced, and merely for the purpose of showing where the border is,”<sup>27</sup> but there seems little consensus over whether and to what degree this map, the current administrative borderline, and the fence's actual route resemble one another.<sup>28</sup>

In Georgia, by contrast, it is generally argued that, historically-speaking, “South Ossetia was an artificial formation in that the definition of its borders was almost impossible”<sup>29</sup> because of the absence of a compact territory inhabited solely by Ossetians, and that the creation of the oblast was another manifestation of a Soviet policy of “divide-and-rule” towards its various nationalities.<sup>30</sup> Following the South Ossetian Soviet's declaration of independence in 1990, Georgia officially obliterated the SOAO and divided its territory between four Georgian provinces, although this administrative reorganization never found expression on the ground.<sup>31</sup> The Republic of Georgia, therefore, considers the territory of South Ossetia as “occupied,” officially refers to the division between territory under the control of Tbilisi and that falling under Tskhinvali's sway as an Administrative Boundary Line (ABL), and rejects any notion of this boundary as being a state or national border.

The more material aspects of this borderization process, consisting of the use of barbed wire, border markers and patrols as the means of determining on the ground where this ABL or border is

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<sup>26</sup> Arsene Saparov, “From Conflict to Autonomy: The Making of the South Ossetian Autonomous Region 1918–1922,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 62:1 (2010): 99–123.

<sup>27</sup> “Statement by Mr. Andrey Kelin, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation, at the 993<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the OSC Permanent Council,” April 4, 2014. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.osce.org/pc/117312?download=true>

<sup>28</sup> Different members of the EUMM appear to have divergent opinions over whether Russia's fence actually does follow the administrative boundary detailed on this map. Matters are made more confusing by the fact that in some places, the fence is not considered the borderline, as Georgians are detained for “violating the border” despite seemingly being on the Tbilisi-controlled side of the fence. This author was told in October 2015 that portions of the fence certainly extend beyond the SOAO's boundaries, and that the South Ossetian authorities' response to protests is to invite the Georgian authorities to negotiate the demarcation of the border directly with them, which the latter refuses to do.

<sup>29</sup> Igor Bondeyrev, Zurab Davitashvili and Yijay Singh, *The Geography of Georgia: Problems and Perspectives* (London: Springer, 2015), 30.

<sup>30</sup> Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History* (Harlow: Longman, 2001); Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (London: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> This, rather than any homogenous territory called South Ossetia, is what you will see on Google Maps when viewed from within Georgia, for example. The abolishment of the territory of the oblast was a return to the pre-1922 situation. However, Tbilisi also supported a loyalist South Ossetian administration prior to 2008.



**Figure 1:** Administrative map of Georgia, indicating the breakaway territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While the boundaries of Abkhazia conform to the Soviet-era Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, South Ossetia finds no existence as a territorial entity within Georgia’s current administrative structure, with its territory divided between four Georgian provinces. Toponyms follow Georgian orthography, except for ‘South Ossetia’. Map by Megumi Sasaya.

located, is of more recent vintage, although it was underway in fits and starts by at least 2009, in the aftermath of the comprehensive defeat of Georgian forces in the area in August 2008 and subsequent expulsion of the vast majority of the remaining ethnic Georgians from South Ossetia. Georgia views this Russian policy of borderization as a creeping form of territorial annexation, one that both serves to divide communities and people from their livelihood, and which goes against the 2008 ceasefire agreement which called for the return of Russian troops to their pre-conflict positions, a position which western actors, rhetorically at least, support. From the other side, of course, and seemingly at odds with the increasing materialization of the border actually visible, the process is presented as the result of security considerations, and destined to be a merely temporary expedient, for as the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov explained, “wires will not be needed as ‘hotheads’ cool down.”<sup>32</sup> Both the increasing permanence visible in the structures being put in place and the manner in which the fence continues to advance into previously Georgian-held territory suggest that this will not occur any time soon.

The borderization policy visible between Georgia and South Ossetia has consequently been seen from Georgia’s perspective as emblematic of a larger process “directed against de-escalation of the conflict and directed towards preventing people from finding common language.”<sup>33</sup> Yet it is also a

<sup>32</sup> “Lavrov on Ties with Georgia, ‘Borderisation’ and NATO Expansion,” *Civil.ge*, December 4, 2013. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26759>

<sup>33</sup> “President Condemns ‘Borderization’,” *Civil.ge*, February 26, 2014. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26981>

part of a spate of wall and fence building projects around the globe.<sup>34</sup> That this is an observable trend strongly suggests that contrary to being “senseless,” the erection of fences in order to secure sovereign claims to territory makes a great deal of sense within the contemporary international environment. Rather than merely representing the acts of a state authority aimed at the maintenance of security, the very ubiquity of such practices suggests they are reflective of wider trends within global politics. Here, borderization will be examined within a context provided by increased incidences of boundary fortification worldwide, before being considered in relation to the wider political landscape.

## Fencing the Earth

The fall of the Berlin Wall symbolized the end of the Cold War, and the toppling of such a potent representation of the barriers to free movement appeared to herald an era of unprecedented openness. It proved illusory, and by the turn of the millennium the increase in rhetoric around security was already leading to an expansion in state efforts to wall off their borders, a process that has dramatically accelerated in recent years. As a report in a major British newspaper put it recently, “mankind is building separation barriers at a rate perhaps unequalled in history – at least 6,000 miles in the last decade alone.”<sup>35</sup> Somewhat ironically, while state fences appear to symbolize all that is opposed to globalization, their construction is undergoing a globalization of its own. Increases in scale have led to increased investment, and a consequent increase in the sophistication of these structures. The specific technologies associated with these walls, as well as their more general manifestations, are coming to be globalized, with the award of contracts along the U.S.-Mexico border to the Israeli contractor building Israel’s own wall.<sup>36</sup> These two locales remain the most emblematic of the recent examples of walling, but there are many others, from countries as varied as South Africa, Saudi Arabia, India, Uzbekistan and North Korea. While the Great Wall of China or Hadrian’s Wall show us that the connection between the building of walls and state security is hardly a new one, and the supposed novelty of this global practice of walling should not be exaggerated, it is certainly clear that the world is not in any danger of becoming “flat,” “deterritorialized” or “borderless” anytime soon.<sup>37</sup>

The combination of walling and globalization pointed to above may appear counter-intuitive, but a recent study has highlighted that “borders remain both relevant and contentious despite increases in the volume of goods and people moving across them. In fact, the border wall trend

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<sup>34</sup> Stéphane Rosière and Reece Jones, “Teichopolitics: Re-considering Globalisation through the Role of Walls and Fences,” *Geopolitics* 17:1 (2012): 217–234.

<sup>35</sup> Mark Rice-Oxley and Guardian correspondents, “Our Walled World,” *The Guardian*, November 19, 2013. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2013/nov/walls#intro>

<sup>36</sup> Brown, *Walled States*, 137 n.1.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Globalized World in the 21st Century* (London: Allen Lane, 2005); Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Ohmae, *The End of the Nation State*.

suggests that aggressive border management strategies are on the rise because of the increases in the volume of goods and people moving across them.”<sup>38</sup> Since the year 2000, there are increasing incidences of states erecting what have been termed “fortified boundaries.” In an article that focuses attention on these “barriers to entry,” Hassner and Wittenberg define such structures as being “distinguished from conventional interstate boundaries by virtue of their physical appearance, which is designed to enhance border control,” yet argue that they should also be distinguished from “militarized boundaries because of their asymmetrical origin and intent.”<sup>39</sup> The ragged layers of fencing and barbed wire snaking across the Caucasian countryside should certainly be considered as forming a “fortified boundary,” and the control being imposed at the boundary line itself remains asymmetrically enforced by Russian border security forces and their South Ossetian allies.<sup>40</sup>

Researchers have offered a number of reasons for the construction of these walls and fences, and this study shall break them down into three, admittedly overlapping, categories.<sup>41</sup> The first of these is where the process of fencing serves as a clear and unambiguous symbol of the authority of the state over particular stretches of its sovereign territory. Such displays are common in situations where disputes over territory exist, such as India with Pakistan, or Uzbekistan with Kyrgyzstan, and these efforts to symbolize state control could also incorporate displays of military force as well as fortified boundaries to emphasize border control.<sup>42</sup> The second, as the paradoxical expansion of both globalization and border securitization suggests, relates to economic factors, and to the presence of a poorer country on the other side of any boundary fortifications. The fencing of such boundaries is used to prevent economic migration, as in the recent response of both the EU collectively and a number of European countries to the current refugee crisis (irrespective of whether these people should be classified as “economic migrants”). Fencing also serves to prevent the passage of goods deemed inimical to the state and its population, either because they are competing with domestically-sourced goods, or because they are illicit or otherwise undesirable.<sup>43</sup> A third, related point concerns the human security of the population, and the requirement that this population be protected from the prospect of mass immigration altering the cultural or ethnic composition of the state, or to prevent

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<sup>38</sup> David Carter and Paul Poast, “Why Do States Build Walls? Political Economy, Security, and Border Stability,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2015). Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://jcr.sagepub.com/content/early/2015/08/31/0022002715596776>

<sup>39</sup> Ron E. Hassner and Jason Wittenberg, “Barriers to Entry: Who Builds Fortified Boundaries and Why?” *International Security* 40:1 (2015): 157–190.

<sup>40</sup> Georgian police and military forces are located close to the boundary in places, but Georgia’s own border security force (the Border Police of Georgia, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs) are not involved at the ABL, because Georgia refuses to recognize it as an international border.

<sup>41</sup> Largely adapted from Hassner and Wittenberg, “Barriers to Entry” and Reece Jones, *Border Walls: Security and the War on Terror in the United States, India, and Israel* (London: Zed Books, 2012), see also Brown, *Walled States* and Rosière and Jones, “Teichopolitics.”

<sup>42</sup> Corey Johnson and Reece Jones, “Where is the Border?” in *Placing the Border in Everyday Life*, ed. Corey Johnson and Reece Jones (London: Ashgate, 2014): 1–11.

<sup>43</sup> The trafficking of drugs or humans, see for example Willem van Schendel and Itty Abraham (eds.), *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things: States, Borders, and the Other Side of Globalization* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

those opposed to the state from gaining passage through its borders.<sup>44</sup>

The recent spate of fortified boundary construction is frequently motivated by a mixture of all three these considerations, such as is visible in the democratic trio of recent fence constructors focused on by Reece Jones in his *Border Walls*, namely the United States, Israel, and India. It is worth considering South Ossetia in terms of this typology. While the fences' role in "securing" the territory is beyond doubt, its relevance to the human security of the population of the region seems questionable at best. Getting accurate information regarding South Ossetia's population (or anything else) is difficult, but it appears that the official estimate of its population as being close to 60,000 is far too high.<sup>45</sup> This would mean that the Ossetian population of the territory has remained almost unchanged since 1990, when the population of the SOAO was about 100,000, consisting of 66,000 Ossetians and the vast majority of the remainder identified as ethnically Georgian. According to Toal, researchers in North Ossetia have indicated that in reality it is between 35,000 and 45,000 people, while the Georgian government has claimed that it is now as low as 12,000 residents.<sup>46</sup> While Ossetians remain present in Georgia, the direction of migration from South Ossetia since 1990 has been to North Ossetia and elsewhere in Russia, rather than to Georgia.<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, following the destruction of Georgian villages and expulsion of the Georgian population together with military and militia forces that was accomplished by October 2008, incidences of Georgians looking to cross the ABL are largely limited to the Georgian inhabitants of Ossetian territory seeking to move back and forth. This could be due to both daily necessity, which, according to the European Union Monitoring Mission, in the initial years involved 500 to 1,000 crossings a week, although this number has declined as the effects of borderization have made themselves felt, or because of exceptional events such as elections.<sup>48</sup> As the earlier section made clear, the fencing and associated border patrols are

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<sup>44</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

<sup>45</sup> Recently they appear to have accepted that some decline in the population, but note that, "The South Ossetian website *Nog Uasamonga* (loosely: "the new fortune teller") published an article in which the author argues that the result of the recent census putting South Ossetia's population at almost 52 thousand people is highly unrealistic and the surplus may be used by the ruling élite to rig the 2017 elections," in "Storm in a Teacup: South Ossetian Referendum on Joining Russia," *Democracy & Freedom Watch*, August 11, 2015. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://dfwatch.net/storm-in-a-teacup-south-ossetian-referendum-on-joining-russia-38890>

<sup>46</sup> Gerard Toal and John O'Loughlin, "Inside South Ossetia: A Survey of Attitudes in a De Facto State," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 29:2 (2013): 136–172; Gearóid Ó Tuathail "Russia's Kosovo: A Critical Geopolitics of the August 2008 War over South Ossetia," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 49: 6 (2008): 670–705.

<sup>47</sup> There are no accurate figures available here. Census data showing the Ossetian population in 'Georgia-proper' is unreliable as they are required to self-identify, and outside of Ossetian-speaking villages this is uncommon. Migration from South Ossetia to the rest of Georgia is certainly possible, and anecdotally appears to have occurred. Similarly, it's impossible to say how far the seemingly vast numerical decline in the Ossetian population of Georgia visible since 1990 actually represents outmigration, as those who might be identified as such have frequently adopted Georgian names. See also Giorgi Sordia, "Ossetians in Georgia: In the Wake of the 2008 War," *ECMI Working Paper* 45 (2009).

<sup>48</sup> "South Ossetia Blocks Georgians from Crossing in Order to Vote," *Democracy & Freedom Watch*, January 9, 2014. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://dfwatch.net/south-ossetia-blocks-georgians-from-crossing-in-order-to-vote-48331>

claiming previously Georgian-controlled territory, hampering movement in the area and restricting the population's access to fields and resources it previously utilized. For Georgians, it is borderization that is impacting upon their human security. However, there is little sense that this fencing is aimed at preventing any putative large-scale population movement, as there is no prospect of this occurring within the current political settlement. Human security for Ossetians within South Ossetia has undoubtedly improved for the remaining resident population,<sup>49</sup> but to the extent that this can be attributed to the fence, rather than the expulsion of Georgians from most of South Ossetian territory that preceded it, is debatable.

Neither does this borderization process appear to be particularly driven by economics. As far as can be ascertained, South Ossetia is poorer than Georgia, with 90% of the state budget having to be provided directly by the Russian Federation. The dominant form of economically neoliberal logic would suggest that it is surprising that the more impoverished side of the boundary is willing to restrict any opportunities for the movement of people and goods, which appears to confirm the dominance of larger geopolitical questions within this borderization policy. With that said, however, the construction of the fence from the South Ossetian side has mirrored earlier policy prescriptions that were previously pursued with vigor by the Georgian state, such as the demolition of the Ergneti market by the Georgian government in 2004,<sup>50</sup> that had already severely restricted the possibilities for the maintenance of extensive ties between the Georgian and Ossetian populations. The result of over a decade of these policies has been the disengagement of the two sides economically, which has been mirrored socially and culturally as well. The fencing involved in the borderization process, then, should be understood as being a symbol of this disengagement, rather than as the means to bring it about. The actual material effects of the borderization policy remain at the level of the local and small-scale, but it is the symbolic nature of the way it is presented that accounts for the focus granted the issue and, indeed, the reason reporters from Tbilisi TV stations are sent to film it in action. It is the continued (re)production of the border through this borderization policy that grants it such performative power.

This symbolic nature is of course a reflection of the state's sovereign authority over territory. The non-recognition by Georgia of the Republic of South Ossetia, a stance openly backed by the United States and EU's member countries while being tacitly supported by most of the rest of the world,<sup>51</sup> and Georgia's constant appeals to its own sovereign authority and territorial integrity, means that the continued construction of these fences and the Georgian state's inability to support its population's access to what it considers its own territory and resources persistently belie these same

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<sup>49</sup> As even those critical of Russia there note, now "we sleep peacefully." See Olesya Vartanyan and Ellen Barry "If History Is a Guide, Crimeans' Celebration May Be Short-Lived," *New York Times*, March 18, 2014. Accessed October 4, 2016: [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/19/world/europe/south-ossetia-crimea.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/19/world/europe/south-ossetia-crimea.html?_r=0)

<sup>50</sup> Theresa Freese "Story: Smuggling to Survive." Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.eurasianet.org/georgia/shida/story.html>; "Ivanishvili Wants to Reopen Ergneti Market," *Democracy & Freedom Watch*, July 16, 2012. Accessed 4 October, 2016: <http://dfwatch.net/ivanishvili-wants-to-reopen-ergneti-market-72720>

<sup>51</sup> In that only five states followed Russia's lead in recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two of whom have since retracted that recognition, see "Tuvalu Retracts Abkhazia, S.Ossetia Recognition," *Civil.ge*, March 31, 2014. Accessed October 4, 2016: [http://www.civil.ge/eng\\_old/article.php?id=27093](http://www.civil.ge/eng_old/article.php?id=27093)

claims to authority and integrity. For the South Ossetians, this situation is reversed; the fences represent the separation of their territory from that of Georgia and consequently both their supremacy over their own state and autonomy from interference by the Georgian government. Here the fence serves its traditional function in demarcating sovereign states' territorial limits and impeding free movement, seemingly impervious to the structural changes that came with globalization that were deemed to have greatly altered the modern border. This suggests the fundamental relation of the border with the sovereignty of the state is in need of reexamination to avoid sovereignty serving more as "a background assumption than as a central theme of analysis."<sup>52</sup>

### **Bordering Sovereignty**

The relation of this borderization process with sovereignty is rendered more opaque in the Caucasus than for most of the examples examined by Hassner and Wittenberg, because, according to most of the world, the fence is not being constructed on the border between two sovereign states. Certainly for the Republic of Georgia, as well as the EU and U.S., the fence is simply an illegal act that can only impinge upon Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, one stemming from the Russian Federation's blatant disregard for the norms of international law. The fence, as with any infrastructure investment in South Ossetian territory, is funded by the Russian state and manned by FSB troops, and thus serves to confirm the dependence of a much-reduced population upon Russian largesse. Yet the history of the conflict within South Ossetia suggests a definition of sovereignty as the realization of authority over population and territory, patterned on the classic narrative of the emergence of sovereignty where control gained over people, achieved with the expulsion of the Georgian population, is followed by control of the state's territory.<sup>53</sup> The assumptions of the "territorial trap" highlighted by Agnew, with states serving as fixed units of space with a clear distinction between the domestic and the foreign that serves to "contain" society within its territorial borders, are the same ones that motivate this borderization.<sup>54</sup> Whether recognized or not, the fence-building in South Ossetia is clearly a materialization of the "bordered power container" of the state.<sup>55</sup>

That the building of the fence is by Russia is in this sense irrelevant in that is firmly in line with public opinion in South Ossetia, which continues to display overwhelming support for the continued Russian military presence.<sup>56</sup> The severing of any links across this boundary serves to confirm the integrity of South Ossetia and grant sovereignty over not only this territory but its history as well, pushing to align the boundaries of the putative Republic of South Ossetia with those of the former South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast and thus creating it as sovereign in both space and time.

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<sup>52</sup> John Agnew, *Globalization and Sovereignty* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 26.

<sup>53</sup> In accordance with classic narratives regarding the emergence of sovereignty, as moving from people to land.

<sup>54</sup> John Agnew, "The Territorial Trap: The Geographical Assumptions of International Relations Theory," *Review of International Political Economy* 1:1 (1994): 53–80.

<sup>55</sup> Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism: vol. 2, The Nation-state and Violence* (Cambridge: Polity, 1985).

<sup>56</sup> Toal and O'Loughlin, "Inside South Ossetia."

While this South Ossetia may be considered controlled by Russia, it cannot be reduced to it, which is demonstrable in Russia's behavior, shown in their response to the fact that for virtually all political parties in South Ossetia as well as the general population "the prospect of annexation by the Russian Federation would likely be welcomed by ... the overwhelming majority of those remaining in South Ossetia."<sup>57</sup> Russia has been reluctant to sanction this referendum on the union of South Ossetia with North Ossetia and the former's entry into the Russian Federation, pouring cold water on the idea in both 2014 and 2015,<sup>58</sup> with President Tibilov's desire to hold one in August 2016 again scuttled in May of that year.<sup>59</sup> Were South Ossetia to be satisfied in its desire to be incorporated into the Russian Federation, the meaning of this borderization policy would be considerably altered, but there appears to be little prospect of this occurring at present.

Currently, the fence serves as the result rather than the cause of this situation, one that represents this South Ossetian sovereign order on the ground. The fence forms a classic instrument of sovereign authority precisely because it demonstrates the externalization of disorder associated with a state's exercise of sovereignty that provides the flip side for the domestic order being enforced. From the South Ossetian perspective, such disorder was associated with the Georgian ethnic population and with that population's expulsion, the authority of the Georgian state was effectively thrown out. There was nothing primordial or timeless about this South Ossetian territory or the de facto state that represents it, for the "boundary and the nation were not imposed on these people; they pushed for its enforcement" through the presence of state institutions that provided the framework to handle their local conflicts and ideology,<sup>60</sup> but the result of this "contested process" has been the fencing of this fixed geographical space. It forms the barrier between those two bases of sovereignty that so frequently come into conflict, that of the "inviolable right to territory" and of the "right of every people to self-determination," with these sovereign claims both provided with institutions. This institutional expression allowed those in the dispute to appeal beyond the nation in question, out into the international order of sovereign states where the ultimate locus of sovereign authority is no more certain than in the contested process it normatively orders. The fence forms such a powerful symbol precisely because it manifestly seeks to order both of these sovereign bases, the land and the people.

In that sense, it is a classic expression of power and freedom from outside interference, even as this challenge is considered illegitimate by the majority of the state's making up the global political structure. Yet this claim of illegitimacy is ineffective precisely because of the character of sovereignty itself. Georgian claims that the territory of South Ossetia is under Russian occupation still serve to

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<sup>57</sup> Gerard Toal and John O'Loughlin, "How People in South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transnistria Feel about Annexation by Russia," *The Washington Post*, March 20, 2014, Accessed October 4, 2016: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/03/20/how-people-in-south-ossetia-abkhazia-and-transnistria-feel-about-annexation-by-russia/>

<sup>58</sup> "South Ossetian Opposition Calls for Referendum on Unification," *RFE/RL*, January 8, 2014. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.rferl.org/content/south-ossetia-unification/25224202.html>

<sup>59</sup> "South Ossetia Postpones Referendum on Accession to Russian Federation," *RFE/RL*, May 30, 2016. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-russia-south-ossetia-accession-referendum-delay/27766068.html>

<sup>60</sup> Peter Sahlin, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1989).

effectively demarcate this territory, distinguished as it clearly is from the rest of the Russian Federation. The regular flows of people and goods between the sovereign states of Georgia and Russia are turned back by the boundary between Georgia and South Ossetia, bordering off the territory as separate. While the EU and U.S. have continuously criticized Russia's role in the borderization in South Ossetia on the grounds that "Alleged concerns for security cannot be used as an excuse for consolidating an illegal and illegitimate situation on the ground,"<sup>61</sup> they ignore that this consolidation is a material "performance" driven by a symbolism that makes any claims to illegality and illegitimacy irrelevant. This should not necessarily be a surprise, as sovereignty is a doctrine with "no internal essence," standing for autonomy, self-preservation and self-sufficiency while actually being a completely dependent and relational property,<sup>62</sup> dependent in this case on the denial of Georgian sovereignty over the territory and population. It is a "political theater piece" demonstrating domestic order and the externalization of disorder, one represented in walls and fences. It is explicit materialization of a de-facto sovereignty which is "all there is."<sup>63</sup>

### **"Europe Starts Here"**

The theatrical nature of the fence and the characters involved in its construction has been demonstrated in reactions to it. Rather than as a result of the separation of political visions between Georgian and South Ossetian leaderships, within Georgia the fence is presented as their cause, as when Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili notes that borderization is "definitely directly against the people—against those people who want to see and meet each other beyond barbed wire fences."<sup>64</sup> While an emotionally powerful narrative, it flies in the face of the available evidence. Even the proposals made during the Georgian election campaign by the victorious Bidzina Ivanishvili for the reopening of the Ergneti market have received no support on the South Ossetian side of the border, with Boris Chochiyev, then South Ossetia's de-facto prime minister, warning that resuming cross-border trade with Georgian-controlled territory would bring "great harm to the republic of South Ossetia".<sup>65</sup> Given this situation, the prospects for any sort of reconciliation across the fence are bleak, despite the more conciliatory approach that the new government pledged to adopt.<sup>66</sup> "Nice talk" of "confidence building measures" sounds, according to South Ossetia's Ambassador in Moscow, "like

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<sup>61</sup> "EU Statement on the 27th Round of the Geneva International Discussions," April 3, 2014. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.osce.org/pc/117310?download=true>

<sup>62</sup> Brown, *Walled States*, 53.

<sup>63</sup> Agnew, *Globalization and Sovereignty*, 7.

<sup>64</sup> "President Condemns 'Borderization'," *Civil.ge*, February 26, 2014. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26981>

<sup>65</sup> Paul Rimple and Justyna Mielnikiewicz, "Georgia: Officials See Trade as Way to Promote Ossetian Peace," March 14, 2013. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66691>

<sup>66</sup> "State Ministry for Reintegration Renamed," *Civil.ge*, January 2, 2014. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26842>

the Soviet slogans about friendship of peoples – it is yesterday.”<sup>67</sup>

This presentation of the borderization process as fencing off both territory and flows, no matter how incomplete, is greatly at odds with recent understandings, which like to create a binary opposition between the fixity of territory and the networks of flows often designated as more fundamental in a world characterized by globalization and time/space compression. The temptation to ascribe political problems to territorial fixity, and find solutions in calls for mobility, is one the Georgian government is not immune to. Georgia is currently making a great play of the promise of a shared future of greater mobility with its breakaway territories, as “For the population of the Occupied Territories, living in European Georgia will be more interesting than living on the other side of barbed wire fences ... Citizens of Tskhinvali will be able to travel, without any visa, to Vienna, Berlin and Rome...”<sup>68</sup> This “visa-free travel” comes as part of the EU’s Eastern Partnership Agreement, through the conclusion of the Visa Liberalization Action Plan (VLAP) by Georgia and the EU, which would grant visa-free access for Georgian citizens to Schengen countries in exchange for cooperation on a range of immigration and border-control issues, extending the EU’s law enforcement buffer zone far beyond the member states. Key provisions included “more secure documentation, including biometric passports; ‘integrated border management’; and prevention of organized crime.”<sup>69</sup> This externalization of the EU’s domestic control functions extends an already controversial “punitive model of migration management,” and “the EU is ensuring that countries aspiring to membership but far beyond its borders are becoming the new frontiers of ‘Fortress Europe’,”<sup>70</sup> With Georgia having for most of a decade maintained the most open visa regime in the world,<sup>71</sup> Georgian Tourism’s former slogan that “Europe Starts Here” became a reality through stricter border control functions.<sup>72</sup> In December 2015, it was announced that Georgia has fulfilled the requirements of the VLAP and would be granted visa-free travel to the Schengen area in early 2016,<sup>73</sup> and while at the time of writing this has still not materialized,<sup>74</sup> it is still anticipated that the

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<sup>67</sup> “Commonspace Exclusive Interview with South Ossetia’s Envoy in Moscow,” *Commonspace.eu*, August 7, 2013. Accessed October 4, 2016: [http://commonspace.eu/index.php?m=23&news\\_id=2743](http://commonspace.eu/index.php?m=23&news_id=2743)

<sup>68</sup> “President: Russia Proved a Loser by Recognizing South Ossetia,” *Tabula.ge*, December 4, 2013. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.tabula.ge/en/story/77769-president-russia-proved-loser-by-recognizing-abkhazia-south-ossetia>

<sup>69</sup> Guy Edmunds, “Georgia’s New Law on Aliens: Drawing up the Bridges?” *Civil.ge*, March 12, 2014. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27029>

<sup>70</sup> Gavin Slade “Georgia and Migration: A Policy Trap,” *Open Democracy*, December 23, 2013. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/gavin-slade/georgia-and-migration-policy-trap>

<sup>71</sup> With visa-free entry for 118 countries at its greatest extent.

<sup>72</sup> “Georgia Changes its Tourist Image,” *Georgia News*, July 07, 2011. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.georgianews.ge/business/5390-georgia-changes-its-tourist-image-.html>

<sup>73</sup> “Georgian Leaders Welcome European Commission Report on Visa Liberalisation,” *Civil.ge*, December 18, 2015. Accessed 4 October, 2016: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=28867>

<sup>74</sup> Eka Janashia, “Georgia’s Visa Liberalization with the EU Remains Opaque,” *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, July 10, 2016. Accessed October 4, 2016: <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/field-reports/item/13381-georgias-visa-liberalization-with-the-eu-remains-opaque.html>

agreement will implemented this year.<sup>75</sup>

While the EU project is frequently associated with globalization and promotion of the sort of cross border flows that are indicative of the decline in nation state sovereignty, the external borders of the Union are no less hard than their internal predecessors, and indeed have become fairly “sharp” markers of difference.<sup>76</sup> A connection is frequently drawn, in fact, between a Georgia being made the outer reaches of a fenced-off Europe and the fencing being conducted across its “integral territory”, such as when John Kerry announced “additional assistance by the United States to help support Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic vision, specifically to help Georgia achieve visa-free travel with the EU and to mitigate the hardships by borderization along the occupied territories.”<sup>77</sup> Georgia’s future incorporation into this European zone of movement not only positions it in opposition to the reliance of its breakaway territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia on Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union, but serves to emphasize both the continued territorial ontology of international politics and thus the vital salience of borders. This remains true irrespective of whether the boundary between Georgia and South Ossetia is recognized as a border, or indeed whether we choose to locate that sovereignty in Georgia, South Ossetia, or Russia. These claims ultimately rest upon a territorial definition of sovereignty, which in any case results in the demarcation of a South Ossetian space and consequently the materialization of this space’s limits.

While this is represented most obviously at the level of the fence, which is frequently employed to provide arresting visual images of the conflict,<sup>78</sup> the boundary it demarcates is also a more fundamental geopolitical one, providing a hard marker between respective political visions defined by either Russia or Europe and the West. While the latter, in particular, represents itself as a universal model of political practice, it ultimately remains grounded upon the particular territorial claims made by national sovereignty. Events in Europe over the last few years have made it painfully clear that the dream of providing a model of governance that is at once both expanding and borderless remained dependent upon the sovereignty of the national states with which it was associated. Any expansion or contraction in this zone of governance, either out beyond the boundaries of the state or through returning to its limits, necessitates the representation of borders. These borders of the state remain bound up with the control of physical space and demarcation of its edges, which serves to both justify the state’s claims and enables them to be enforced.

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<sup>75</sup> “Hahn Confident on Ukraine, Georgia Visa Liberalization in 2016,” *RFE/RL*, September 3, 2016. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.rferl.org/a/hahn-confident-ukraine-georgia-visa-free-2016/27965380.html>

<sup>76</sup> James Wesley Scott and Henk van Houtum, “Reflections on EU Territoriality and the ‘Bordering’ of Europe,” *Political Geography* 28:5 (2009): 271–273.

<sup>77</sup> “Kerry Pledges Assistance to Georgia to Aid Visa-Free Travel to EU,” *Reuters*, February 26, 2014. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.businessinsider.com/r-kerry-pledges-assistance-to-georgia-to-aid-visa-free-travel-to-eu-2014-26>

<sup>78</sup> Shown in particular through the level of domestic and international media attention granted to Dato Vanishvili, who lives on the South Ossetian side of the boundary near the village of Khurvaleti, see for instance Andrew North “Russian Expansion: I went to Bed in Georgia – and Woke Up in South Ossetia,” *The Guardian*, May 20, 2015. Accessed October 4, 2016: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/20/russian-expansion-georgia-south-ossetia>

This is because sovereignty and statehood are ultimately relational properties, only comprehensible through other states. Sovereignty is defined by relations *within* and *between* constituent units, in which each unit's sovereignty serves as a claim to being both taken-for-granted and logically prior to the relations that constitute them.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, while the territory of a state, and the fence that encompasses it, have appeared to symbolize a form of anti-globalization, a pole of fixity in a world supposedly characterized by movement, flows, and networks, this fixed territory serves as the surface atop which such phenomena are held to move. The sovereignty of the state is related to its capacity to both manage and channel such flows, reminding us that movement is only relational, can only be seen to occur in contradistinction to that which is fixed. It is this fixity that appears to provide the conditions for movement, both in theory and, unfortunately, in practice too. Wendy Brown's focus on the "functional inefficiency" of wall and fence construction is ultimately beside the point, as it is the representation of the border's materialization through which the state's sovereignty is written on the ground. Therefore, while the fence, and the fixity of the notion of Ossetian territory that it appears to represent, seem diametrically opposed to the age of globalization, this is an illusion.

### Conclusion – Stating the Border

The three-man TV crew that was seized at the boundary marking off Tskhinvali-controlled territory from that administered by Tbilisi claimed they had been trying to shoot footage of the border sign at Adzvi when they were seized by Russian border forces, while their captors insisted that they had "violated" the border. The absence of agreement between the two sides is indicative of the ambiguity that characterizes these border spaces, where many of those detained at the border claiming to have been seized a long way from the putative territory of South Ossetia. The fencing taking place as part of borderization means that this is a border at once able to represent the fixity of the notion of South Ossetia while also capable of "advancing" into territory previously accessible by local villagers on the Georgian side,<sup>80</sup> an advance which is then extended by the activities of the Russian and South Ossetian authorities in the area. The results for those on the Georgian side have been catastrophic, with lost farmlands, abandoned orchards, inaccessible grazing areas and reduced supplies of irrigation water, together with the disruption of traditional activities like visiting graves at Easter or collecting *jonjoli* to pickle.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Anthony Giddens, among others, has noted that the sovereign state border and relations between states must have emerged with the sovereign state, for the latter was not possible without the former, see Giddens, *The Nation-state and Violence*.

<sup>80</sup> As noted above, because the boundaries of the SOAO had been an administrative convenience, although ones with real political effects, they had never been demarcated, making it difficult to decisively conclude whether the shifting of fences represents a land grab or, as South Ossetia argues, a demarcation of its true borders.

<sup>81</sup> "Tskhinvali Closes So-Called Border with Georgia for Easter," *Agenda.ge*, April 12, 2015. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://agenda.ge/news/33097/eng>; Tamar Svanidze, "'Delicacy' Capers and Series of Detainments at South Ossetia Administrative Border," *Media.ge*, May 28, 2015. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.media.ge/en/portal/articles/302771/>

The fence being erected along the border provides the illusion of linear predictability to what is a contested zone of authority involving a number of actors – Georgian, South Ossetian, Russian and the EU. While this contested zone is also present in Georgia’s other breakaway region of Abkhazia, where detentions and sporadic violence at the boundary similarly mar the daily lives of those resident in the region,<sup>82</sup> its impact around South Ossetia is arguably greater, because the effect of the 2008 war and its aftermath on both territory and population, the twin bases of sovereignty, was more significant.<sup>83</sup> While the Enguri River provides a natural boundary where the more populated parts of Abkhazia and Georgia rub up against one another, in the case of South Ossetia this dividing line has to be written into the earth, where the inscription of the border and indeed the state requires the constant deployment of resources: the writing of the border, the state, and the world again and again.<sup>84</sup> While in recent years this border writing has been found both out away from and within the state’s borders,<sup>85</sup> it also clearly occurs at the border itself, where the sovereignty-based territorial logic remains intact. Through this writing, South Ossetia literally grounds its existence in opposition to Georgia, while Georgia in its turn opposes its European and Western identity to Russia’s support of its breakaway regions. Such geopolitical imaginings appear to operate at a level far removed from the “technical landscapes of control and surveillance” being utilized in the borderization process,<sup>86</sup> but they are a part of the same border nevertheless.

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<sup>82</sup> “Fatal Shooting at Abkhaz Administrative Border,” *Civil.ge*, May 20, 2016. Accessed October 4, 2016: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=29164>

<sup>83</sup> The boundary of Abkhazia did not shift as a result of the war, although Tbilisi’s forces were expelled from the Kodori Gorge area they had previously held.

<sup>84</sup> R.B.J. Walker, *After the Globe, Before the World* (London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>85</sup> Chris Rumford, “Theorizing Borders,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 9:2 (2006): 155–169.

<sup>86</sup> Anssi Paasi, “Bounded Spaces in a ‘Borderless World’: Border Studies, Power and the Anatomy of Territory,” *Journal of Power* 2:2 (2009): 213–234.