



# Securitizing Berlin: The Legacy of the Iron Curtain

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## Abstract

Since the Cold War, the city of Berlin has experienced profound forces of globalization, facilitated by the movement of people, capital and ideas across its borders. Richard Weizsaecker once said, "...in good and evil, Berlin is the trustee of German history, which has left its scars here as nowhere else."<sup>1</sup> The city is ground zero for some of the most influential conflicts of the 20th century, and it is this complicated history that gives Berlin its unique global identity. Through a literature review, this paper will analyze how the Berlin Wall affected the way in which the city of Berlin participated in the process of globalization. The securitization of Berlin by means of the Wall was responsible for uneven flows of capital, people, and ideas into the two halves of the city. Even long after German Reunification, the peculiar geographic legacies of the Berlin Wall perpetuate an informal division between East and West Berlin that persists to this day.

## I. Introduction

To fully understand Berlin as a globalized city requires an examination of the securitizing influence of the Berlin Wall. The Wall was constructed by the Soviets at the height of the Cold War in 1961, separating the Allied forces in the West from the Soviet forces in the East. This barrier bisected Berlin and was heavily securitized with guard towers, trenches and death strips\*, resulting in a splintering of the city centre.<sup>2</sup> Berlin was marked by a "concrete physical scar four metres high" that partitioned the city into East and West.<sup>3</sup> Berlin had morphed into a division between two ideologies: capitalism and communism. The Wall was dismantled in 1989, and although the city has been officially unified for a quarter of a century, the legacy of the Berlin Wall persists to this day. The securitization of the city by way of the Berlin Wall has resulted in a legacy of uneven geographies of globalization due to the different ways East Berlin and West Berlin experienced the global flows of capital, people and ideas. Uneven Flows of Capital

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<sup>1</sup>Ladd, Brian. *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape*. (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago. 1997). 3.

\*Aside from the symbolic concrete fence of the Berlin Wall, the area adjacent to it called the "death strip" contained electric fences, trenches, beds of nails, and was constantly patrolled by border guards.

<sup>2</sup>Coaffee, Jon. and Murakami Wood, David. "Security is Coming Home: Rethinking Scale and Constructing Resilience in the Global Urban Response to Terrorist Risk." *International Relations*. 20(4). (2006). 509.

<sup>3</sup>Saunders, Anna. "Remembering Cold War Division: Wall Remnants and Border Monuments in Berlin". *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*. (2009). 17:1. 10.

## II. Uneven Flow of Capital

The securitized separation of Berlin by way of the Berlin Wall is responsible for uneven global capital flows, which privileged the economic development of West Berlin. East Berlin was under the socialist regime of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), who rejected Western models of market economies.<sup>4</sup> West Berlin, however, existed under a system of market capitalism, profiting from a 30-year head start that allowed for the establishment of a strong corporate presence and integration into the globalizing economic market of the 20th century. Come reunification in 1990, eastern industries had to compete with their more efficient and established western counterparts, in which many eastern German companies went bankrupt<sup>5</sup>, while some disappeared completely.<sup>6</sup> To this day, very few company headquarters are located in the East, as it lacks the global functioning capabilities, such as trade and financial influence that global corporate headquarters require.<sup>7</sup> Government subsidies worth hundreds of billions of euros have not been able to successfully alleviate the disparity<sup>8</sup>, further perpetuating East Berlin's isolation from the globalized economic system of capital flows compared to West Berlin. Capitalism proved to be a better system for creating wealth and raising living standards than Soviet communism<sup>9</sup>, but even post-reunification, East Berlin's wages and pensions are significantly lower than in the West.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the unemployment rate in Berlin is not evenly spread, with the former West experiencing far better employment levels than the East.<sup>11</sup> Although securitizing the city limited global capital flows and economic prosperity in East Berlin, the city has made efforts to improve economic inequality. In fact, since reunification, West Berlin has dedicated more than \$2 trillion in economic aid in an attempt to help the East<sup>12</sup>, and East Berlin has made some progress in catching up to the per capita income of the West.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, the securitization of Berlin and the uneven capital flows have created a polarized landscape of economic prosperity that

continues to informally divide the city along East-West divisions.

## III. Uneven Flow of People

As a measure of securitization, the Berlin Wall was largely meant to control the inward and outward flow of people. The legacy of the Berlin Wall resulted in distinct patterns of migration and settlement in the city, which continue to perpetuate the informal divide between East and West. The most evident contrast is in the ethnic composition of migrants. Of the one million migrants living in Berlin today, West Berlin is home to approximately 300 000 Turkish migrants who arrived in West Germany as guest workers.<sup>14</sup> To this day, Turkish immigrants distribute themselves unevenly across the city, clustering in enclaves that are historically localized in West Berlin. These isolated groupings tend to function as parallel societies that find social and economic support networks within their own ethnic communities, creating "self-organized living environments that avoid communication with the majority society."<sup>15</sup> These parallel societies of Turkish migrants experience increasing impoverishment and alienation<sup>16</sup>, which results in pockets of socioeconomic disparity throughout the city, along with the development of massive class inequalities in employment, education, security, housing and the right to the city.<sup>17</sup> Conversely, the Berlin Wall isolated East Germany from everyone but the Communist Bloc, which is why approximately 500 000 Russian, Polish and Vietnamese migrants are found concentrated in East Berlin.<sup>18</sup> The distinct demographic compositions and spatial organization of migrants has turned these ethnic enclaves into "diasporic spaces"<sup>19</sup> that boast distinct cultures, norms and institutions in both East and West. In order to fully understand the history, patterns, and implications of migration in both East and West Berlin, it must be explored as both a multicultural and securitized city. Although the Wall tore through the heart of Berlin, it planted the seed for its complex multicultural identity.

<sup>4</sup>Hardt, John. "East-Central European Economies in Transition". (1995). ISBN 1-56324-612-0

<sup>5</sup>Noack, Rick. "The Berlin Wall fell 25 years ago, but Germany is still divided." *The Washington Post*. October 31, 2014. Accessed October 10, 2015. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/the-berlin-wall-fell-25-years-ago-but-germany-is-still-divided/>. 2.

<sup>6</sup>Kratke, Stefan. "City of Talents? Berlin's Regional Economy, Socio-Spatial Fabric and 'Worst Practice' Urban Governance." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. (2004). 28:3. 514.

<sup>7</sup>Beaverstock, Jonathan. "A Roster of World Cities." *Cities*, 16(6). (1999). 469.

<sup>8</sup>Dick, Wolfgang. Germans still have 'walls in heads'. *Deutsche Welle*. March 10, 2013. Accessed October 10, 2015. <http://www.dw.de/germans-still-have-walls-in-heads/a-17131880>, 3.

<sup>9</sup>Matthews, Chris. "Poor Germany: Why the east will never catch up to the west." *Time Inc: Fortune*. November 9, 2014. Accessed October 10, 2015. <http://fortune.com/2014/11/09/germany-east-west-economy>. 4.

<sup>10</sup>Kratke, 515.

<sup>11</sup>Noack, 3.

<sup>12</sup>Matthews, 4.

<sup>13</sup>Noack, 3.

<sup>14</sup>Kil, Wolfgang. "From Kreuzberg to Marzahn: New Migrant Communities in Berlin." *German Politics and Society*. (2006). 81:24. No. 4. 99.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid, 99.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, 100.

<sup>17</sup>Balibar, Etienne. "Uprisings in the Banlieues". *Constellations*. 14(1). (2007). 57.

<sup>18</sup>Kil, 113.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid, 97.

Nevertheless, it is potentially limiting to conceptualize the securitization of Berlin and the flow of people in a strictly binary manner. Although the Iron Curtain is arguably one of the most commanding symbols of the 20th century, it is crucial to understand that it was not an impermeable membrane, and that the experiences of easterners and westerners were not completely separate. Countless documented cases exist of people crossing the border in both directions. While three million East Germans may have crossed into the West as refugees, there were still more than half a million West German idealists who crossed into the East, believing in the promises of communism.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, the Berlin Wall's securitizing force regulated the global flows of people, facilitating a reshuffling of Berlin's population according to ideologies, and creating distinct patterns of migration and ethnic segregation that exist to this day.

#### IV. Uneven Flow of Ideas

When people move, so do ideas, which is why the Berlin Wall's securitizing legacy extends past the uneven flow of migrants, to facilitate uneven manifestations of ideologies. The Berlin Wall affected the way both halves of Berlin experienced global flows of ideas. East Berlin, for example, was limited to media, literature and propaganda largely from the Communist Bloc.<sup>21</sup> The Wall operated as an ideological checkpoint that restricted the flow of certain ideas and policies from one half of the city to the other. For example, the environmental civil movement in the late 20th century only penetrated the West, which is why West Berlin still has more environmentally friendly infrastructure and policies than the East.<sup>22</sup> Despite West Berlin being free to consume ideas and information globally, since the city of Berlin was entirely located in East Germany, West Berlin was an "island of freedom"<sup>23</sup> located in the middle of the GDR. In fact, West Berlin's physical connection to West Germany, and subsequently the rest of the world, was limited to a handful of rail tracks and air corridors.<sup>24</sup> Rather than experiencing a time-space compression facilitated by technological innovations that seemed to condense spatial and temporal

distances during the rapidly globalizing 20th century, the securitizing influence of the Berlin Wall facilitated a time-space decompression that slowed the global flow of ideas into the East along with the West. The movement of ideas as a function of globalization forms the foundation of Berlin's identity as it is known today. The notion of a modern, unified Berlin is one that implies the victory of capitalism over communism – it is the infiltration of Western ideals into what once was a largely socialist city.<sup>25</sup>

The Berlin Wall was not just a physical barrier that partitioned the city; it marked the division between capitalism and communism, who "rubbed against one another like seismic plates at the flashpoint."<sup>26</sup> This clash can still be felt today, due to the construction of particular geographical imaginations from both sides that continue to alienate one another. East Germans still see West Germans as arrogant, materialistic, bureaucratic and superficial<sup>27</sup> while westerners see easterners as sour, mistrustful and anxious<sup>28</sup>, hypothesized to be a product of a lack of friendship and contact between the East and West.<sup>29</sup> These prejudices persist as "the Wall in peoples heads"<sup>30</sup>, which is why they still do not feel like they belong to one nation.<sup>31</sup> Many East Germans even go as far as to say that they feel like second-class citizens because they continue to live under discriminatory conditions.<sup>32</sup> The securitization of Berlin via the Berlin Wall caused an uneven flow of ideas, policies, and even psychological divides between easterners and westerners that still exist to this day.

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However, this rhetoric is problematic because understanding the Berlin Wall simply as a barrier between two worlds creates polarizing narratives that do not accurately depict historical complexity.<sup>33</sup> Popular rhetoric states that the East was an evil, communist

<sup>20</sup> Saunders, 9.

<sup>21</sup> De Wijs, Christophe. "Media and Transition in central and eastern Europe A comparison between the German Democratic Republic and Hungary". *Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*. (2009).10.

<sup>22</sup> Noack, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Brown, S. "West Berlin recalls 'island' of freedom that vanished with Wall. *Reuters*. November 7, 2014. Accessed October 10, 2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-wall-westberlin-idUSKBN0IR1EX20141108>

<sup>24</sup> Richie, Alexandra. *Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin*. (New York: Basic Book, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> Bader, Ingo. "Berlin's waterfront site struggle". *City: Analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*. 13:2-3, (2009). 12.

<sup>26</sup> Richie, 15.

<sup>27</sup> Dick, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Saunders, 11.

<sup>31</sup> Dick, 4.

<sup>32</sup> Noack, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Segert, Dieter. "The GDR Intelligentsia and its Forgotten Political Role during the Wende of 1989." *Debatte, Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*. (2009). 17:2. 145.

dictatorship, while the West was democratic, capitalist and free. However, this kind of binary thinking is inaccurate and dangerous as it creates competing narratives that depict the East enveloped by the victory of western democracy.<sup>34</sup> This belief transforms the Berlin Wall into an apparatus whose sole purpose was to secure the West from the corruption of the East. Even before Berlin was reunified, these morally absolute narratives construct a dichotomy of right and wrong of first and second-class citizens. The narrative of western superiority invalidates the experiences, wisdom and unique expertise of millions of individuals in East Berlin.<sup>35</sup> Not only does this narrative overlook problematic realities in the West, such as the fact that many ex-Nazis were found in positions of political power there<sup>36</sup>, but it also perpetuates the informal divide and alienation of East and West. It must be stressed that historical narratives are “continually constructed as the result of the politics of history”<sup>37</sup>, and to comprehend how the securitization of Berlin resulted in uneven flows of ideas, we must view the past as a historically open situation to avoid oversimplifications and misrepresentations of history.<sup>38</sup>

## V. Conclusion

The Iron Curtain may have fallen 25 years ago, but its influence is as strong as ever. The Berlin Wall, which marked a feat of economic, social and political securitization, partitioned Berlin into two halves. Due to the securitizing nature of the Berlin Wall, the ways in which the globalizing flows of capital, people, and ideas manifested themselves in the city was largely uneven, and has created informal divisions between East and West that persist to this day. The Wall created disparities in economic prosperity, clashes of ideologies, and distinct ethnic segregation in the East and West. The uneven global ties contribute to Berlin’s peculiar polarized urban landscape, which is an integral part of the city’s contemporary identity. However, the Wall is not a life sentence, nor is it a permanent blemish that Berlin must bear; its legacy is a mere ripple effect of stigma and historical precedence. As a new generation steps up to the plate – a generation of young adults who have never experienced a divided Berlin – the aggressive significance of the Wall will dissipate, and they will no longer brand themselves as easterners or westerners, but simply as Berliners.

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<sup>34</sup> Jarausch, Konrad. *Shattered Past: The Landscape of Lost Narratives*. *Oxford Journals of German History*. (2003). 978-0-691-05936-5. 14.

<sup>35</sup> McFarlane, Colin. “Governing the Contaminated City: Infrastructure and Sanitation in Colonial and Post-Colonial Bombay.” (2008). *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. 32(2): 420.

<sup>36</sup> Segert, 144.

<sup>37</sup> Delaney, David. “The Political Construction of Scale.” *Pergamon: Journal of Political Geography*. Vol. 16. (1997). 0962-6298/97. 21.

<sup>38</sup> Jarausch, 16.