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Interventions in the political geographies of walls

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Walls, resurgent sovereignty and infrastructures of peace

Karen E. Till

Walls are symbolic and material manifestations of political boundaries. This Intervention builds upon recent work in political geography that considers borders as sovereign sites of security as well as mobile places of encounter (Johnson et al., 2011; Jones, 2012; Mountz, 2011). Walls may fulfill divisive state agendas through "conflict infrastructures" as Wendy Pullan describes in her Intervention; at the same time they may be used by borderland inhabitants to create "infrastructures of peace" as Charis Psaltis, Chara Makriyianni, Rana Zincir Celal, and Meltem Onurkan Samani argue. Through our focus on walls, we pay attention to new forms of state power, such as "resurgent sovereignty" (Butler, 2006), but also to what Lorraine Dowler describes as "place-based sovereigns" and their embodied practices, such as acts of witnessing that Juanita Sundberg portrays.

Walls "are historically contingent and characterized by contextual features and power relations" (Paasi, 2011, p. 62). In past and present, walls have designated configurations of state power. The paradigmatic Cold War case is the Berlin Wall. Established in 1961, this state surveillance system – maintained through minefields, watchtowers, walls, "no man's lands", and checkpoints – ran 124 miles around three western sectors, and between East and West Berlin. This material infrastructure was a symbol of the communist "security blanket", identifying political differences between an "us" and "them", an East Bloc and West Bloc.

As state wall building has become more, rather than less, pronounced following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, scholars have revisited literatures on borders, walls, and state power at multiple scales (Kaplan & Häkli, 2002; Silberman, Till, & Ward, 2012). Brown (2010) understands "new" walls as indicative of an era of post-Westphalian "waning sovereignty". Although walls still function symbolically and materially in ways similar to their historic counterparts, for Brown new walls are a state response to "the ungovernability by law and politics of many powers unleashed by globalization and late modern colonialization" (p. 24). The new global landscape of blockading is evidence of state-perceived threats from the transnational flows of the "political economy and religiously legitimated violence" (p. 23) that "lack political form or organization" and have no clear "subjective and coordinated intentionality" (p. 24). Brown argues that the new walls demonstrate that state borders are blurred, and divisions between "us" and "them" are no longer clear.

While the conflation of military, police, and civilian surveillance border tactics do indicate a change in the nature of state sovereignty, state borders have long been selectively porous. Does this "new" global landscape of walled states and cities indicate a "loss" of sovereignty in response to globalization as Brown argues? Butler's (2006) arguments about "resurgent sovereignty" offer a different understanding regarding the changing nature of state power and borders in recent years. Resurgent sovereignty is a strategy of governmentality that suspends and deploys the law "tactically and partially to suit the requirements of a state that seeks more and more to allocate sovereign power to its executive and administrative powers" (p. 55). Drawing upon Agamben, Butler notes that the sovereign exception, as an exercise of prerogative power, is used to limit the jurisdiction of law within and beyond state borders. Resurgent sovereignty seeks "to neutralize the rule of

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law in the name of security" (p. 67). When the state claims the right to suspend the law and disregard international accords, it extends its power to decide what humans are no longer eligible for basic human rights (including the right to life) in the spaces and times of its own choosing. The state of exception, now the norm, becomes the *space-times* of exception. While extra-territoriality is not new, Butler argues that the mechanisms used by the state to restructure "temporality itself" are novel: the "problem of terrorism is no longer a historically or geographically limited problem" (pp. 64–65). Further, resurgent sovereignty indicates a state desire "animated by an aggressive nostalgia that seeks to do away with the separation of powers" (p. 61).

The building of new walls and their effects can be understood as technologies of resurgent sovereignty. First, the suspension of the law to manage populations moves through the intra-territorial pathways of wall infrastructures. As Sundberg describes in her Intervention, a new type of U.S.–Mexico border region has been created that justifies the retrenchment of existing civil rights, a process that she describes as "walling up democracy". The authority given to the Department of Homeland Security by the U.S. Congress to waive existing laws – in order to prevent "terrorists" from traveling and "bolster" state border security – has produced a "constitution-free zone" within and beyond the U.S.–Mexico border. Her Intervention demonstrates how the wall works to produce a new kind of "zone of exception" within a state to deny its own citizens basic rights.

Second, wall "conflict infrastructures" work through the space-times of "strategic confusion" as Pullan describes for Israel–Palestine in her Intervention. The wall's political infrastructures date back to the period just following the 1967 war. They now tactically connect Israeli neighborhoods through settlement and transportation planning. Pullan argues that the spatial depth associated with strategic anti-/planning ensures that even if the wall were removed division would remain. A related process of "infradestructure" (Azoulay, 2011) has resulted in the destruction of Palestinian schools, hospitals, homes, and neighborhoods in the name of "national security".

The space-times of conflict infrastructure mean that even when border crossings in divided states become possible, facilitating contact across borders, and creating shared narratives and spaces remain pressing challenges. As Psaltis et al.'s Intervention describes, years after some checkpoints opened up along the Green Line in Nicosia in 2003, most residents continued to live in separate social spaces. In such a divided context, the establishment of a bicommunal Home for Co-operation (H4C) in 2011 has created a new "infrastructure for peace". Through "transformative knowledge", civil society transnational networks, and the material possibilities enabled through the borderlands, the H4C offers a safe space of encounter *because of* its "neutral" location in a demilitarized zone. In a system of states of exception, this model of an alternative "third space", created by and producing new epistemologies, meshworks and social imaginaries, also illustrates "*a life* in potentiality, a surprising and unanticipated life that has capacity to interrupt the border line" (Amoore, 2011, p. 64).

According to Jones (2012), while people may accept the existence of state borders, "at other times they continue to think and live in alternative configurations that maintain connections across, through, and around sovereign state territoriality" (p. 697). Dowler's Intervention about the historical and living actors in Belfast offers a rich set of examples of what Jones calls "spaces of refusal", including a local neighborhood "people's festival", feminist peace demonstrations, and political tourism practices. "Place-based sovereigns" can be locals, residents, or even tourists; they reject, ignore, or rework the behaviors required by states to create "doors" in physical boundaries intended to be solid. Their bodies, movements, and stories work beyond and through walls to enable scholars to see the possibilities of cohabitation rather than of division only.

Whereas physical walls may be the most obvious symbols of conflict infrastructures, these Interventions attempt to make the other space-times of walls more visible. Sundberg's emphasis on witnessing offers new understandings of how democracies create exclusionary zones of exception that 'wall up' civil rights and rights to shared environments. Pullan's map (Fig. 4) brings to view otherwise known, but not often visible, wall infrastructures that divide cities and peoples and may ultimately last even longer than a material boundary. At the same time, the legacies of division, including "no man's lands" and abandoned structures, may be used to create "infrastructures of peace" that may connect residents years after physical violence subsides as Psaltis et al. discuss below. Finally, as Dowler's Intervention highlights, because new and old doors may be kept open in walls by place-based sovereigns, these lived practices offer a different perspective into the ways that borders move.

Delimiting democracy: witnessing along the US–Mexico borderlands

Juanita Sundberg

In 2006, former U.S. President George W. Bush signed the Secure Fence Act, mandating the construction of 850-miles of fencing along the 1954-mile boundary dividing the U.S. from Mexico. The vociferous and active opposition to the construction of border walls in south Texas drew me to the Lower Rio Grande Valley – homeland of border studies scholar Gloria Anzaldúa – in the hot summer months of 2008. Together with members of No Border Wall, a grassroots coalition organized to articulate dissent in the valley, I set out to witness the implementation of the Secure Fence Act. Though initially drawn by debates about identity and national security prominent in border studies (Ackleson, 1999; Kaplan & Häkli, 2002; Meinhof, 2002; Paasi, 1996), bearing witness to the daily, place-based practices involved in walling the border revealed profound concerns about democratic process. I argue that wall building in the southern U.S. is implicated in walling up democracy. The suspension of law at the edges of the nation's territory has numerous implications that have yet to be fully considered by political geographers.

I make this argument at a moment of renewed interest in sovereignty, in part spurred by studies inspired by Agamben's work on sovereign power and state violence (Gregory, 2006; Jones, 2009). While Brown (2010) suggests that the proliferation of border walls around the world indicates the waning of state sovereignty in the face of globalization and powerful non-state actors, other scholars emphasize the continuing and, indeed, increasing power of states to draw boundaries between inside and outside, legal and illegal, as well as "politically qualified life and merely existent life" (Gregory, 2006, p. 406). While much of this literature has focused on the U.S. government's so-called war on terror (Butler, 2006; Gregory, 2009), I draw attention to legislation that produces the U.S. borderlands as a space of exception in the name of building border infrastructure. By weaving together narratives drawn from witnessing the construction of the border wall in the Rio Grande Valley, I capture the daily excursions of No Border Wall activists to document the progress of construction. The concept of witnessing honors Anzaldúa's (1987) evocative and deeply personal writing about identity and life in the borderlands. No Border Wall witnessing practices are meant to inform a geographically distanced public about the actual practices of wall building; I further their practice by suggesting that the judicial and legislative processes meant to protect citizens are instead used strategically to wall up democracy.

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