

4. Fences and Walls: Materializing and Contesting Everyday Borders (Roundtable)

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Building fences, constructing walls – these are common practices of asserting and defending material and social status. Only scarcely have they been discussed in anthropological scholarship thus far. This workshop will focus on enclosures of private and public buildings/terrains in rural and urban spaces. Fences and walls can be understood as interfaces regulating sight and accessibility, facilitating enclosure and simultaneously shaping the space “outside” visually and materially. Walls and fences are border objects in a very immediate sense; by the same token, they are important elements of place-making. They materialize feelings of uncertainty, visibly fix knowledge about differences and – despite their purpose of securitizing space – are liable to transgression. Fences and walls correspond with class-related tastes and ideas of “having” and “belonging”. Therefore, their absence, presence and functions are highly contested at all levels of social interaction. In this workshop, we seek to explore notions of demarcation, property, control over access, privacy and protection. Concomitantly, we want to discuss social practices of constructing, maintaining, trespassing and contesting barriers.

Living in one’s own walls: housing and the making a living in northern Benin

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Housing, made by multiple relations within and between households, is shaping, making and transforming individual selves. In urban Benin, parcels surrounded by high walls indicate middle class households, created by the purchase of land, the construction of the house and the settling down by the owner and his (sometimes: her) kin. However, the household is only complete if the wall is constructed as well. – In my paper, I reflect how living in one’s own walls is creating autonomy for the owner who becomes household head, which is realized by relating to others, within and outside the household. Following a case study of a young family and their way towards autonomy and new relatedness having achieved full adulthood, I reflect the meaning of walls, windows, doors and floors for middle classers in Benin.

Meanings of caste relations in and around walls of Dalit Slum

Rupali Bansode, University of Pennsylvania

When walls are built around a dalit slum, small physical avenues to access and offer services outside the slums are often created by breaking the wall. Building on ethnographic snippets, this paper will discuss the nature of access and social interactions between the dalits living in the walled slum and gated housing society of upper-castes employees of an Indian multinational company. Although the story of the forceful shifting of lower-castes, lower-class people outside the city remains true, it often hides the layered harmonious, affectionate, subsistence-based relationships built between these two worlds of haves and have-nots. This paper will delve into encounters between upper-castes and dalits, who live in adjacent walled habitations and create social interactions (a division of labour, endogamy) consistent with the caste society. Still, compared to rural settings, these interactions are more egalitarian. Thus, it reveals that, although a spatial division exists between dalits and upper-caste in rural as well as urban areas, unlike the former, in the latter space, it is possible to build supportive emotional, social, and economic) networks for both groups.

Walls for change – activist engagements with urban forms in Durban, South Africa

Jeannine Madeleine Fischer, Universität Konstanz

The long history of oppression in South Africa has inscribed itself into the urban fabric of cities, characterized by securitization and spatial segregation. Local activists contest these material conditions and symbolic divisions that shape everyday experiences and routines of action. In my presentation, I will explore how activists creatively alter the semantics and visuals of urban walls in Durban. Based on my empirical material, I will discuss the disruptive practices of a graffiti artist who visually redefines urban space and a performance artist who pushes the imaginary boundaries of urban safety and the walkable. They both focus on the semantic and experiential layers of public walls, which are always tied to power. By activistically engaging with urban forms, they reconceptualize walls as connecting platforms and “in-betweens” that provide opportunities for (re-)linkage, creativity and alternative visions for living together. In doing so, they challenge what is considered common knowledge about public space, opening up new embodied experiences and ways of navigating through and relating to the fissured city. At the same time, their activism is not free of friction and brings with it the challenge of renegotiating inclusion and exclusion in one of the most unequal countries of the world.

Flexible walls: Openings and closures in one of Buenos Aires' popular malls

Franziska Reiffen, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz

Especially in Latin-America, cities have been described as increasingly 'fragmented', divided by walls that separate the wealthy living in their private condominiums from the shantytowns of the poor. However, many places in these cities are less exclusive than generally assumed. In my presentation, I will look at one such place, a popular mall in central Buenos Aires, where international migrants and other locals with few economic resources find the possibility to work, spend time, and socialize. Drawing from ethnographic research conducted between 2017 and 2020, I understand the mall as characterized by flexible and permeable walls. Flexibility is one key characteristic of the shops' specific design, whose walls can be both fixed and removed. At the same time, it is also a characteristic of the entire building, as large parts of the external walls are constituted as portals, allowing entry and transit, but eventually also being closed with shutters. I will explore instances of openings and closures for inquiring into the ambivalent character of these highly flexible places, and trace how these devices enable encounters and emplacements between different social strata, while also constituting the grounds of social exclusion that reify society's lines of alienation and displacement.

Fences for subsidies: On unfencable pasture commons and seeing like the AMA (AgrarMarkt Austria)

Lisa Francesca Rail, Universität Wien

On the collectively used summer pastures in Salzkammergut, in central Austria, fences are usually erected not as signs of property demarcation, but as temporary tool to guide animal movement on cattle drives up or down mountain slopes. The terrain is rugged, wooded in most places, swampy in some. Fencing would require expensive material and immense inputs of labor time. The borders of the territories that each alpine pasture collective is entitled to stock (based on use-right contracts issued in the 19th century) are clearly defined on paper. As long as members of neighboring collectives know these borders' course in the abstract and keep their animals roughly in check, why should there be a need for physical fencing? However, this general agreement has recently been challenged. In some places, collectives have started to newly GPS-measure and materially mark their alps' boundaries during the last decade. This is due to regulations of the AMA, the agency overlooking the audited flows of EU subsidy money to farmers in Austria. Based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork on pasture commons in Austria, I

investigate the nexus between bureaucratic state control, the powerful image of unambiguous property boundaries, and current fencing practices formerly deemed unnecessary.

Fence in Time: Decay and material ecologies of governance and knowledge

Luděk Brož, Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague

Annika Pohl Harrison, Aarhus University

In 2007 African Swine Fever (thereafter ASF), a lethal viral porcine disease, reached Georgia. Ever since it has been spreading throughout Eurasia. A particularly engaging depiction of that advent are animated maps that visualize the epidemic advances in time such as <https://images.app.goo.gl/GNbGvcd1fzmVPEUu9>. Imagine a different map. One that instead of colouring chunks of territory in which an ASF case was first recorded, county by county, would feature lines popping up over time. Some long, some short, some straight some circular. These lines would depict fences that were intended, erected and taken down (of course using a different colour for each) in reaction to the ASF spread. This thought exercise, we believe, is a useful starting point. In lay and scholarly discourse alike, a fence is understood as a technology that organizes, secures, re-structures and manipulates space in order to govern life. Based on ethnographic fieldwork on veterinary fences in Denmark and the Czech Republic, we wish to emphasise the temporal rather than plainly spatial dimension of such 'material elements of place making'.

Revindicating the substantive landscape: Emplacement and custom as forms of contestation in the Spanish dehesa

Maike Melles, Frobenius-Institut an der Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main

Concepts of landscape can be seen as "the other side of a form of practice" (Graeber 2015). Landscapes cannot be reduced to being natural environments but are shaped by ownership structures, land use and meaning-making. Highly materialised land ownership may provoke collective claims to access or be met with mere resignation. The Spanish *dehesa* in two regions perfectly illustrates its "historical semantic divide" (Guzmán Álvarez and Guimarães 2022): In the Andalusian research area, the primarily visual definition of the *dehesa* as an oak-layered pasture enclosed by fences is underscored by an aesthetic preoccupation

with cleanliness that naturalises the predominantly private ownership of large estates. In an Extremaduran village, by contrast, the *dehesa* represents a substantive landscape (Olwig 1996, 2008) identified by its communal ownership. In both regions, contestations can be observed: Within overlapping processes of meaningful emplacement and possessive demarcation, land workers counter ephemeral property boundaries with ancient place names. Moreover, the right of use of the abandoned trails of the *cañadas* is revindicated by customary perambulatory practices to reconnect communities and demonstrate their collective sense of entitlement. Through these embodied forms of knowing landscape as a public good, people belong to the *dehesa* rather than the other way round.