'WALLS' AS POLITICAL METAPHORS

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Abstract:The article offers a theoretical model of 'walls' as signs of human deictic location in (urban) political space . Reference to (political) history with special emphasis on 'The Berlin Wall' and 'The Nicosia-Lefkosia Wall' reveals that they function not only as basic elements of self-protection (because they isolate our 'we' from 'the rest as a hostile unknown'),but also as elements of imanent desire to destroy them. The cognitive basis of the theory of the embodied mind is referred to, to prove that constructing 'walls' in the urban- political world is relevant to the creation of myths as imaginary boundaries between humans and an 'omnipotent and magic/scary unknown'. One may assume that the binary opposition between the 'we' and 'the rest' operates as an opposition between /+known/:/-known/.The conclusion is that 'walls' signify a constant human desire for 'limited space' as a secure (mainly urban) political *locum* for the self-identity of the 'ego'as well as desire for breaking its boundaries .

Key words:

Semiotics of urban-political space;Political Interaction; Archetype;Myth; Embodied Mind; Identity; Antagonism

'Walls' as Political Metaphors

Constructing 'walls' in urban planning for the sake of protection as a domestic political issue is not a new event.All around the world there are plenty of 'city-walls' that are believed to have been built to protect the citizens of a *polis* from a potential threat coming from outside. The political connotation of 'walls as metapors' is discovered when historical examples of the type of The Great Chinese Wall are taken into consideration.

The reason for the construction of the wall of China was prevention from foreign arrays.It is,may be, the first historically famous example of a deliberate 'literal use' of a metaphor for protection(security).

The city wall of ancient Constantinople that was built as many others around the World is a political metaphor that gives explicit knowledge about the history of the city itself, the Ottoman invasion to Europe and the establishement of the Ottoman state.The etymology of the place name *Istanbul* from Byzantine Greek: ***eis tēn polin*** meaning 'going into the direction of the *polis*(the city of Constantinople)' implies a certain spatial dichotomy 'outside':'inside' with the wall itself as a demarcation line between the two.

The Israeli capture of the Old City of Jerusalem during the six-day-war in 1967 is an example of 'wall destruction' for the achievement of military goals and national ambtions.After a couple of days of hesitation,encouraged by the successful resistance to the attacks of Egypt,Jordan and Syria, the Israelis captured the Old City, i.e. 'demolished' a political (and metaphorical) frontier bewteen modern and ancient Israel, and finally managed to obtain the most significant Jewish shrine – the Wailing Wall.

From a more recent perspective the 'Fence' between USA and Mexico,planned by Bush' administration reveals a political model that aims at protection of the US from 'imposition' coming from outside.

'Gated communities' and ghettoes represent a more recent option of the everlasting desire of humans for security(or: a feeling of security!),depending on who is considered to be in 'need of protection' and who should 'be protected'.

One can assume that in their political (and social and cultural as well) activities humans have always been in need of 'walls' to sperate/protect them from the impact of a real or fictional superior power. Moreover, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish 'real walls' from 'the concept of wall as political metaphors' because of the the very essence of this 'power' as an

expression of human natural perception and knowledge acquistion of understandable and non-understanable reality.

Wall-Metaphors and Urban-Political Life

In his research on 'Old and New Walls in Jerusalem', Menachem Klein (2005) refers to a theoretical analysis,made by Lyman and Scott where territoty is classified into four categories:private, home, public, and platform of interaction.Inasmuch this calssification resembles the classical ancient conflict bewteen an *oikos* and a *polis* what is new about it is the emphasis on the 'platform of interaction' in which:

different social groups come into contact

(Klein 57)

and,further:

A platform of interaction is fragile because it is not homogeneous, but is rather a base for interaction among the different groups that pass through.The borders of this kind of territoty are porous and mutable

(Ibid.)

On the other hand, by following the models,suggested by Marcuse, Ashley and Passi, Klein comes to to the conlusion that:

By excluding the 'other' through a border the powerful state can institutionalize identities.In other words, border construction is an expresssion of both physical and normative power relations

(Ibid.)

1. The Case of the Berlin Wall

The Berlin Wall was a match between the literal and the metaphorical meaning of the division of two political systems.Since its conctrsuction until its fall it functioned as a border between the US and USSR sectors of the German city and symbolized Cold War antagonism.

In 1961 East German Communist authorities built the wall with the intention to stop East Germans from fleeing Communist regime.West Berlin was surrounded by 'The Wall' and was an example of how the 'threatening side' was isolated from the one in need of 'protection' .

More specifically: By constructing 'The Wall', the East Germans/Soviets imposed on the whole 'Eastern Bloc' the metaphorical burden of 'The Iron Curtian' with a twofold intention:

a) to leave the East Germans with the impression that the 'Drueben' is aggrerssive,dangerous,threatening and, hence,have to be protected; and,

b) to mask the failure of Communist political economy in the eyes of the DDR/Eastern Bloc-citizens

In fact, the symbolic meaning of 'The Wall' turned into a 'platfrom of interaction' in the metaphorical sense of Klein's term: it intesified the 'identity narrative' of East Germans to the extent of:

'*We: the poor and oppressed by Communism*'

vs.

'*They,the free and successful*'

that when finally 'The Wall' fell down they were bitterly disappointed to discover that West Berlin and West Germany were not at all the 'Eden' that they imagined...

One can assume,therefore,that 'to build a wall',no matter whether understood literally,or metaphorically does not function just as a means of isolation.It affects the 'identity narrative' of the separated population, based on the principle of the binary oppostition:

/+ known/ vs. */-known/*

I claim elsewhere (Anastassov 2009) by means of the rhetorical question: 'What is Behind that Wall?' that 'the unknown' is not only the subject of potential threat:it could also trigger out the primordial desire of *Homo Politicus* for challenging that'threat': an assumption that

goes beyond the trivial understanding of borders as means of protection from an imanent invasion coming from the neighborhood and develops into a desire for crossing the barrier between the existence of the 'ego' and his own body and exploring the 'unknown' with its mythical magic.There is no doubt about the 'Magic of The Berlin Wall',considering the numerous attempts to go over it,the nuemrous victims that turned it into a matter of martyrdom,no less sginificant than the Wailing Wall of Jerusalem.

The 'Wall Aftermath' supports that assumption:nowadays the architecture of the area where it stood marks a certain urban policy that aims at forwarding a sign of the same semiotic value as the sign that appeared after 'La Bastille' in Paris was demolished: *ici on dance...* The 'Manhattan-type' of skyscraper skyline demonstrates a certain 'platfrom of interaction' that integrates the two urban unities: West and East Berlin into a symbol of a new urban- political reality.

   2.   The 'Nicosia-Lefkosia' Wall*

(* In fact it is not a real 'wall';it is a street divided by barb-wire.A friend with whom I visited Cyprus made the following comment:'Look at the barb-wire that separates two different worlds.And loook at the balconies and the same type of underwear hanging on each side...)

Klein (Ibid.) refers to the following quote from Passi:

   Boundaries between 'us' and 'others' are critical elements in establishing 'us' and excluding 'others'. Therefore he (Passi) highly evaluates a great importance of examining how boundaries become part of everyday life and an identity narrative.Secondly,he sees a link between boundaries both as symbols and as a specific form of institution, and state power.By excluding the 'other' through a border the powerful state can institutionalize identities.On oher words, border construction is an expansion of both physical and normative power relations

The 'Cypurs Wall' symbolizes yet another element of the 'identity narrative'. The long period of Ottoman domination on the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean left as a legacy a huge

population of Turkish origin struggling for such a narrative.The political situation on the island that lead to the events in 1974 and the decision to isolate its Northern part and the Northern part of Nicosia-Lefkosia threw the European and the Global World into a heated debate on its legal validity. The 'Cyprus case' along with the political situation on the Balkans that followed in the 80s put on the agenda in the most possible painful way the issue of Balkan/Mediterranean-Turkish identity narrative.

Humankind has lived, for years, in groups, hostile to each other , in the division of a larger territory:

> ...the 'establishment of group identity' is often achieved 'by means of differentiation from other group identities (..) , so that often 'the notion of *alterity* becomes synonymous to that of *antagonism.* Internal cohesion, in the ideal nation-state model, required not only cultural, and if possible, linguistic unity, but also the referent 'foreign' as a screen to reflect that cohesion....This is how the concept of 'cultural identity' became consecrated over a long period as a synonym of 'national identity'. ...living together, cooperation and cultural interaction increase the possibilities and the creativity of each people, and they do not cause changes to any culture, let alone threaten any language, nationality or culture with extinction'....It is evident, that where there are contacts, dailoque, interchange, there can be change. But not every change means risking the loss of identity. Because 'identity' is a more flexible and multi-level entity, and not a monolithic one in which different elements are unable to co-exist.

(Banus 2002)

Historically, both average Turk and average Cypriot Greeks (as well as all Balkan and Mediterranean Turks) have always lived together,each side respecting the specific identity of the other one. The Turks stuck to the 'Jus Soli' rule, maintainig their right to be equally the children of the same land where they were born. The had agreed to be part of a society that

treated them as equals, because they believed in their right to be treated so. At the same time they respected their own ethnic identity, sharing the same social environment with the rest of the population of the 'nation-state'.Once this feeling disrespected, they resisted, because their right to be different witihin the borders of the common 'habitat' was abused, still considering themselves as part of the same land where they were born.

All this triggers out the isssue of 'territory' as part of the way to establishment of an 'identity narrative',based on the limits of 'contrainers'.

Wall-Metaphors and The Theory of the Embodied Mind

It has recently become quite fashionable to criticize Lakoff's and Johnson's cognitive model of metaphors,especially after Pinker's attack on the theory,without reference to the fact that the idea of the 'human body as a barrier between the human mind and the outside world' has intrigued thinkers at all times, to start with the philosophy of Vijniana-Vada and the work of Patanjali and end up with recent sudies on semiotics of space.

Lakoff's and Johnson's claim that:

> Just as the basic experiences of human spatial orientation give rise to orientational metaphors, so our experiences with physical objects (*especially our own bodies*, emphasis added) provide the basis for an extraordinarily wide variety of ontological metaphors,that ,is ways of viewing events, activities, ideas,etc., as entities and substances
>
> (Ibid.)

is not essentially different from Elliot Gaines' argument concerning froniters of space :

> that begin with the body of an individual subject.The physical limits of the body and its means of conscious perception,thought,sight,sound,smell,taste,touch and the reasoning mind, all engage in identifying the meanings the things in the world of experience

(Gaines 2006)

Further reference to Lakoff and Johnson support the idea that with what they call 'container metaphors' :

> We are physical beings, bounded and set off from the rest of the world by the surface of our skins, and we experience the rest of the world as outside us

(Lakoff,Johnson, ibid.)

Moreover, the two American scholars argue that the human body as a 'container' imposes the concept of 'barrier'(or 'wall') onto the human mind as a natural symbol of protection of its existence:

> But even where there is no natural physical boundary that can be viewed as definig a container, we impose boundaries – marking off territory so that it has an inside and a bounding surface – whether a wall, a fence, or an abstract line or plane

(Ibid.)

This research builds on the assumption that the Lakoff/Johnson theory of the embodied mind can be successfully applied in analysis of:

The Political Connotation of 'Walls' as *Signs*

because they are relevant to the issues of semiotics of space:

> The semiotics of space is a descriptive process enquiring into the relevant significance of the relationships between objects and their spatial contexts

(Gaines,ibid.)

In this respect the emboddied mind theory contributes to the understanding of the wall-metaphor as a 'demarcation line' in the relationships between groups and communities (individuals, social institutions/families included) sharing neighboring territory.

A closer investigation of this 'territorial' principle reveals that humans are naturally predisposed to be attached to their 'own space'and to perceive members of the 'neighborhood' as a source of a potential danger.

Even as far (chronologically backwards) as the ancient classical philosophy of Plato and Aristotle the term *oikos* (home, household) is inseparable from *polis* (the state). The *hic/nunc* deictic principle which attaches me to *my home*, attaches me to *my community* as well. Hence: the popular metaphor 'birthplace = home'.

Throughout time this 'attachment to the native land' undergoes different types of modifications until it finally emerges on the stage of history as 'nation-state'. The idea of the 'land/nation- as-home-where-I-belong-to' flourishes, as it is well known, during the nineteenth-century with the development of European 'romantic nationalism'. The process of 'nation-building' upon linguistic, cultural, historical and religious unity became so intensive that finally it grew into fierce antagonism, which, on its turn prepared the ground for the catastrophic events of the twentieth century.

This is what evokes Ross Poole's confusion when he exclaims:

> Many people have been prepared to sacrifice, not only themselves but those dear to them, and have put claims of the ahead of the demands of religion, political commitment and morality. We need to ask: What is it about national identity which has rendered these claims and sacrifices so terribly plausible?

(Poole 2003:271)

In the search of an appropriate answer to this question Poole suggests the following argument that seems to support my previous claim, namely:

> Another aspect of the strength of a national identity lies in the richness of the cultural resources which are employed in forming the conception of national community. This identity provides with a land in which we are at home, a history which is ours, and a privileged access to a vast heritage of culture and creativity. It not only provides us with the means to understand this heritage; it also assures us that it is *ours.*

(Ibid.272)

In the case of 'home as *locum* where *I* belong to' it is apparently the decitic *hic* which motivates the emotional attachment to it, according to the above quoted statements. Another type of explanation, leading towards an archetypal model is the perception of 'my land' as *property*:

> If we say 'This is my property, I shall control it', that affirmation call out a certain set of responses which must be the same in any community in which property exists. It involves an organized attitude with reference to property of which is common to all the members of the community. One must have a definite attitude of control of his own property and respect for the property of others

(Mead 2003)

The last sentence from the quote above suggests a certain balance between the notion of '*my* property' vs. *your* property' which, fortunately or unfortunately sounds far too idealistic and can be supported by the following statement, made by Enrique Banus:

> The strength of... nationalism stems from a very potent mixture: *the atavistic fear of losing what is one's own when it comes in contact with what is someone else's*...Thus, the 'establishment of group identity' is often achieved 'by means of differentiation from other group identities (..) , so that often 'the notion of *alterity* becomes synonymous to that of an*tagonism.* Internal cohesion, in the ideal nation-state model, required not only cultural, and if possible, linguistic unity, but also *the referent 'foreign' as a screen to reflect that cohesion....*

(Banus 2004, emphasis added)

It can be generalized that humankind has lived, for years, in groups, hostile to each other , in the division of a larger territory. This is how the antagonism between 'We' and the 'Other' often develops into serious conflicts that leads to need of a clear 'distinction' between *my* and *your* property, i.e. the 'walls' in question.

The Walls,The Enbodied Mind and Identity Narrative

Scholars do not have basic disagreement as to human desire for knowledge of self by

contrasting it with the rest of the 'ego's' where our own one belongs to.

As Herbert Mead argues:

> Among primitive people,…, the necessity of distinguishing the self and the organism
>
> was recognized in what we term the 'double': the individual has a thing-like self that is
>
> affected by the individual as it affects other people and which is distinguished from the
>
> immediate organism in that it can leave the body and come back to it. This is the basis
>
> for the concept of the soul as a separate entity.

(Mead 2003 : 34)

And further:

> We find in children something that answers to this double, namely the invisible,
>
> imaginary companions which a good many children produce in their own experience.
>
> They organize in this way the responses which they call out in other persons and call out
>
> also in themselves.

(Ibid)

In terms of the embodied mind theory this simply means that our bodies function as a barrier

between our own self and the other 'selves'. Mead supports his thesis by comparing the co-

existence of different individual 'ego's' in a community with the rules of a game:

> The attitudes of other players which the participant assumes organize into a sort of a
>
> unit, and it is that organization which controls the response of the individual

(Mead 2003:36)

One can assume, in other words, that what attaches different individuals in a community with

its own parameters is a kind of a convention *à la* Rousseau, where separate members of this

community have to know and play 'the rules of the game' in order to survive. In a community

where *I* can discover my own self by contrasting it to the '*selves of the rest'* it is collective co-operation for the sake of survival that makes *me* stick to *them* against the 'angers of the unknown'. The process starts with the attempts to reconcile my own self that is blocked into my own body with the 'rest of the bodies in the community'. It is based on the self-knowledge that I acquire by recognizing this 'rest' as an indirect (and twisted) projection of my 'ego'. This assumption makes possible a certain extension of reference of the metaphor that is discussed here towards the political connotation of:

The Wall -Metaphor as an Archetypal Mythological Element

 As George Lakoff claims:

> Like metaphors, myths are necessary for making sense of what goes on around us. All cultures have myths, and people cannot function without myth any more than they can function without metaphor. And just as we often take the *metaphors* of our own culture as truths, so we often take the *myths* of our own culture as truths.

(Lakoff 2003 : 185-186)

It can be claimed that by 'myths as truths' we should understand a cognitive model of location of self in (political) space.

It is commonly accepted among scholars that the 'walls' or 'barriers' in ancient myths occur as typical elements in many different belief systems and vary in the specific details, but not in the basic structure of the model. From this point of view, it can be argued that a 'wall' or a 'barrier 'separates humans from a certain hostile unknown by marking the borders of the space where they are basically located. In the 'Odysseus-Type' of myths for example, the hero *reluctantly* leaves his home, afraid of the 'journey' that marks a clash between his 'ego' and the 'hostile unknown' out of the borders of the 'home community'. The 'Messiah-Liberator-Type' (Prometheus, Jesus , Beowulf), on the other hand, needs to cross a certain

real or fictional barrier (most often *water* as a symbol that separates a world of safety from a world of unknown, scary, hostile power).

In his "The Structural Study of Myth," Claude Levi-Strauss is fascinated by the astounding similarity among so many myths from so many widely separated cultures.He argues that their similarities are based on their structural sameness sharing the following characteristics with language:

a)they are made of units that are put together according to certain rules.

b)these units form relations with each other, based on binary pairs or opposites, which provide the basis of the structure.

(Levi-Strauss 202-212)

Hence, in the explanation of bi-lateral political antagonism one can argue that there exists a certain cognitive model of conduct that combines the 'embodied mind' theory with:

The semiotic function of the 'wall-metaphor'

All the equally structured myths in the history of human culture (Propp, Levi-Strauss), all the 'metaphors we live by' (Lakoff), even the common capacity of humans for syntactic structures (Chomsky) reveal a 'universal' way of understanding and explaining the world.

As it has already been stated humans stick to each other on the basis of convention: the human body itself naturally separates individuals from individuals. In order to survive they agree on certain 'games rules' which they organize in systems of social, political, religious and language order. These rules are applied to specific territories that are different for the different communities. Hence the attachment to a 'territory as property' which, as a concept, is relevant to the idea of 'my body'/'my skin' as the border of 'my mind'.

One can assume then that the 'wall/barrier' metaphor is naturally 'embodied' in the human mind and is an inseparable part of his type of relationship with other individuals, who, living in a community expand the model onto other communities.

From a semiotic point of view the proposed model can be regarded as a binary opposition between: *my space* and *the other space* which suggests a very structuralist attitude towards human treatment of space in the sense of 'black and 'white, 'good and evil' or 'right and wrong'.

Politically speaking, it can be concluded that humans have always had the 'embodied' mentality of 'own space' defended from an antagonistic 'other'. In this respect the 'wall' is simply a sign of a set of typically human characteristic features, such as search of security and protection against fear from the unknown. Historically recent examples like The Cold War or Bush' 'War on Terror' support the above idea in the sense that politics is often based on manipulation of human's capacity of dividing the world into bi-polar antagonism for the sake of dominance of power.

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