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Walls as a Space of Pacification

Prof. Francesco Del Sole

Department of Cultural Heritage, University of Salento, Lecce, Italy

E-mail: francesco.delsole@unisalento.it

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5024-2951>

Abstract

Today we live in a world that daily erects walls on the most delicate borders between countries. Over the centuries, the walls have acquired a dual significance for the city. They make the city an island, creating a feeling of unity as well as security. The city and its citizens were one with the walls. But the walls are also the only contact that the city has with the outside world, thus representing the point of passage between inside and outside, between the foreigner and the citizen. This paper attempts to analyze the key role that the walls must play in these border areas. The choice to erect a wall, if in the beginning it was born to propose an *element of separation*, can instead become a *privileged element of connection* with the outside. In this regard, I will analyze the project of the architect Charles Tzu Wei Chiang, the *Bi-National Community Skyscraper*, which proposes a reinterpretation of the walls erected on the border between the USA and Mexico by building a skyscraper on them where the two communities meet and merge together.

Keywords: Walls; Borders; Connection; Architecture and Society.

1. Introduction

The walls are the architectural element that establishes a border. It is fair even to say that they are the true materialization of the border's idea. The wall is to be identified as a sign which, by delimiting a territory, divides two places, taking on a more abstract meaning as a term and limit. Establishing a border means founding a space, defining a fixed point from which to start. The borders, thus marked, circumscribe controlled, measured and recognizable environments. The borderline can be physical or imaginary, defined by architectural elements or invisible lines drawn on maps. It is not important that it is a border between states, between regions, between private and public spaces, because the feeling you get when you cross a border is always that of a change caused by the difference in the appearance of the two places due to the different rules, uses and customs of the opposing territories. The main effect of the border is to sanction diversity. As La Cecla says "[the border is] the space in which cultures explain and confront each other, discovering themselves different. The misunderstanding is the border that takes shape" (La Cecla, 2009, p. 162). The tracing of border lines for state organizations has been done in history either by following the lines established by natural barriers or, when these were not present, by erecting walls, defensive ramparts or building ditches. (Albrecht, Benevolo, 1994).

2. The pomerium and the Roman limes

The furrow deriving from the plough's trace on the land that the founder wants to delimit in order to establish his domain was the original sign of the idea of foundation. It identified, on a free field, the limit that founded the city space and defined the urban horizon. The internal area was cleaned and the furrow gradually became a wall, composed of stones removed from the ground and placed at the edges. The wall had two precise meanings: on the one hand it was a sign of possession of a space in which precise rules were applied by the owner; on the other it was the way in which the shape of the occupied internal space was defined. Zanini recalls that "a boundary exists only in function of a center and often the center is established in a much more precise way, and has a greater importance than the signs that delimit its margins, which are thus blurred" (Zanini, 1997, p. 43). The size of the borders of Greek cities, rather than the first Roman districts (Carandini, 2003) was functional to allow all family groups to share the centre and its power, the government of the community. "To exclude, literally keep out of the border, means to keep away from the centre" (Zanini 1997, p. 55). The desire to shelter from external dark forces also identifies in the primordial act of birth of the ancient city a very important religious significance: the site was not chosen by men, but was signalled by the gods and the limit assumed the role of sacred perimeter, the Roman pomerium, within which the gods could not act in a negative way causing adverse events: "Its construction does not only protect against the dangers that can come from outside, from the disorder that can bring havoc inside the freed space; the margin that is thus created becomes inner shelter, limit to the anxiety caused by the darkness, by the uncertain" (Zanini, 1997, p. 9). Rykwert's description of this process appears very detailed: "after placing the hold obliquely so that the loose earth would fall inside the fence, [...] the founder traced the furrow marking the boundary of the city. If clods of earth were to fall outside the fence, the followers would pick them up and throw them inside. Where the doors were to open, the founder would lift the plough and carry it across the full width of the door" (Rykwert, 1981, p. 61). Formed the pit and the wall, the sacred perimeter was placed behind these two elements and was considered the starting line of the city, within which civil and military functions were carried out. Therefore, all the design of the internal space of the city derived from this sense of sacredness of the founding rite: the center of the city, as well

as the boundary wall, have the approval of the gods and both are the first elements that characterize the city. The rite of inserting the stick in the center, symbol of the Axis Mundi, divided the area into four parts separated by two main axes that defined the cardinal points: the thistle that had the direction of the celestial axis, north-south, and the decumanus that followed the course of the sun, east-west. The walls as pomerium, therefore, gave the city a sense not only political, but also religious, which distinguished it from fortified cities where the wall had only military significance. In this regard, the margin of military character owes its definition to the original term, *limes*, which represented all the fortified lines built by the Romans on the border of the empire.

3. “Urbs ipsa moenia sunt”: the walls and the importance of the city gate

The city walls, with the historical evolution, acquire more and more complex meanings from the religious or military one, becoming the real symbol of the power of the urbs. In fact, the Lords of the cities identified their authority with the magnificence of the walls, making them so imposing and grandiose that they were perfectly comparable with the cathedrals. The walls became a source of city pride for the lords of that territory. “The wall, in particular, with its outer moat, makes the city an island. It, however, was not only a military device but a symbol, as important as the spires of the churches. The medieval mentality found comfort in a universe of clear definitions, solid walls, and limited views; even heaven and hell had circular boundaries. Walls of tradition surrounded the economic classes and kept them in their place. Definition and classification were the essence of the age [...]. We must not forget the psychological importance of the walls. At sunset, when the doors were closed, the city was isolated from the outside world. These enclosures helped to create a feeling of unity as well as security” (Mumford, 1963, pp. 384-385). The city and its citizens recognized each other with the walls: “The walls and defence requirements bring the idea of the city back to the original unassailable microcosm. The iconography of the oldest medieval cities shows nuclei reduced to the essential [...] The extra-municipal space coincides with the defensive need for isolation [...] Urbs ipsa moenia sunt”. (Sica, 1970, p. 82). The boundary of the walls is not only an impassable barrier and closed to the outside. Contacts and exchanges with the world took place thanks to the city gates, fundamental breaches that acted as a filter. The city gates represent the point of passage between inside and outside, the only link between the rural and the urban world, between the foreigner and the citizen. “One cannot close the discourse on the walls without forgetting the particular function of the city gate, which was not simply an opening, but a meeting place between two worlds, the urban and the rural, the inside and the outside. The main gate gave the first greeting to the merchant, the pilgrim, the wayfarer in general; it was at the same time a customs house, a passport office, a control centre for immigrants and a triumphal arch: its towers often competed, as in Lübeck, with those of the cathedral or the town hall” (Mumford, 1963, p. 385). The concept of the city gate opens up a new interpretation of the idea of walls which, besides being a separating element, is above all an element of connection with the outside. The city gate reminds us that a limit is not only the end and closure of a world, but also the beginning and the opening towards what is outside. It represents the transit threshold between spaces, the intersection between outside and inside because it includes both. The act of opening a door in the walls makes the border a place of crossing as a meeting space with the other.

4. New visible and invisible walls

Even in the contemporary world the idea of walls has undergone a further evolution: “Today’s great metropolis is crossed by a myriad of boundary lines, barely recognizable by uncertain and changing signs [...]. These invisible borders trace a strange and sometimes dangerous geography, cutting through streets, neighbourhoods, crossroads in an apparently senseless way. They also divide the inhabitants of the day from the inhabitants of the night. They delimit territories of hunting and robbery and places of respite and quiet, where hunters and prey eventually rest restlessly, waiting for a new escape and a new pursuit” (Rella, 1984, p. 67). The margin as the boundary between two worlds is also that given by the invisible walls that create social divisions within the city (Augé, 2007). Assigning people to a certain category is therefore a way of establishing social boundaries. Before raising physical barriers, man constructs dividing lines through behaviour and principles that lead a community back to a defined and opposed identity. The division of the city into communities grouped according to ethnicity, customs or religion is present in all the cities of the world: “Only by increasingly widening the space of the border, having the other in front of us, can we hope to work out a path to cross the disorder we are facing” (Zanini, 1997). According to Zanini’s opinion, the new walls, visible and invisible, can be the place where a set of principles to be shared among the different social groups develops, which through these boundaries can reform and evolve, establishing relationships with other identities. “Interaction in such a social system does not lead to its liquidation through change and acculturation; cultural differences can coexist despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence” (Zanini 1997, p. 114). The survival of an identity derives from the social walls, not intended as a place of separation, but as a place where we can recognize the other and overcome each other’s particularisms. The study on the theme of boundaries from this social point of view opens up to an interdisciplinary dimension because the construction of boundaries, both symbolic and physical, characterizes urban architecture and the way people live spaces and the city (Salvatici, 2005).

5. Walls as a separating element: the “Walls of Shame”

Today in the world there are many walls built to prevent and hinder the passage of civilians between different territories. “Wall of shame” is a phrase used to define these structures with a critical meaning. Shame refers, depending on the case, to those who took care of their construction, the people who suffered the consequences or the circumstances that led to their construction. In 1961, W. Ulbricht, leader of the SED and president of the GDR National Defense Council, gave the order to block the road that marked the border between the East and West sectors of Berlin. A few days later, the Berlin Wall was born. For 28 years, it was the symbol of the Cold War, which had politically divided the world into two hemispheres: eastern and western; it was above all a symbol of hostility, segregation and incommunicability. However, despite that wall has fallen, others remain standing. Walls that break families and entire peoples, that shatter identities, that deny hope. Starting with the one more than a thousand kilometers long, known as *the wall of Tijuana*, a metal sheet which covers a third of the border between the USA and Mexico (Rael, 2017). It was erected against the citizens of Central and South America, who are trying to reach the U.S. through the Mexican border to escape from hunger and misery still widespread in the Mexican state. No less famous is the mighty wall, 4 km wide, erected by the South Koreans, which divides Korea in two. This wall was created in 1977 and extends for 240 km, for the total width of the peninsula. Not to be forgotten is the 27 km long Malaysia/Thailand wall, built by the Thais on the border with Malaysia, to counter the arrival of weapons intended for the Muslim and separatist guerrillas in the south of the territory. The Zimbabwe/Botswana wall, an electrified barrier created, according to official sources, to prevent wild animals from passing from one country to another, but in reality it was built to prevent refugees, escaping the ethnic massacres of Zimbabwe, from entering Botswana, a small nation with one of the highest incomes in Africa. And then, many small “Gaza Strips”: villages of the African communities San and Herero, cut in two or deprived of water access roads, where bloody guerrillas are constantly taking place. On the one hand, the villagers trying to remove that intolerable barrier, on the other, the army of Botswana committed to enforce the demarcation of the border. In Central Asia, on the other hand, there is a wall, equipped with sensors and video surveillance, erected by Uzbekistan to assert sovereignty over certain territories disputed with Kyrgyzstan. Between India and Pakistan there is one of over three thousand kilometers that divides the two countries. Pakistan has built a 2,400 km barrier to control its border with Afghanistan. While the Iranian government is completing the construction of a wall on the border with the Pakistani Republic. After six years of hard work, the wall that will divide India and Bangladesh has also been inaugurated: an iron curtain 4,000 km long with the aim of curbing immigrants, stopping terrorists, drug traffickers and arms dealers. Morocco, too, is not free of walls, around whose Sahrawi region extends for almost 4,000 km a great bastion also known as the “safety belt”. Its function is to protect the country from the attempts of infiltration by the Polisario Front into the territories militarily occupied by Morocco. In the Middle East, Saudi Arabia has been no less: since 2003, it has been separated from Yemen by a belt made of reinforced concrete and equipped with electronic control apparatus, with the aim of blocking the illegal immigration of the Yemeni population. Another ultra-modern barrier 900 km long was created by Saudi Arabia in 2006 on the border with Iraq. And then there is the Kuwait/Iraq wall. Kuwait has reinforced the already existing 215 km long wall on the border with Iraq. And, again, the fence of the United Arab Emirates, built along the entire border line with the Sultanate of Oman. Also around the Gaza Strip there is a barrier that surrounds it completely. A long and painful story of the conflict between Israel and Palestine, effectively rendered in the film “The Lemon Garden” by Eran Riklis (2008), all played along a fence that separates two worlds: the one where the Israeli minister’s villa and the lemon garden owned by Salma, the Palestinian protagonist. The “Walls of Shame” are also present in Europe. For example, the walls that divide Protestants and Catholics in Ireland (the so-called *Peace Lines*). When they were erected in the 1970s, they caused the deportation of entire families between the two areas. Between the Middle East and the West stands the electrified barrier that Spain has erected to block the passage of Moroccan or sub-Saharan immigrants. A double barrier, from 4 to 6 meters high around the city of Ceuta and Melilla, where the pressure of millions of men on their way from sub-Saharan Africa is concentrated.

5.1 The “Walls of shame” in post-World War II memorial architecture

The definition of “Wall of Shame” has sometimes been used also to define those cases in which the wall was used as a tool for the public denunciation of facts or persons, as a support for the posting of photographs or names, which were thus publicly exposed. A striking example is the Memorial of the fallen partisans in Bologna, Italy. The Memorial is composed of photographs of those killed during the Resistance and is located in the place where, during the summer of 1944, the fascists carried out public shootings and displayed the bodies of some anti-fascists killed as a warning and threat to the population. On the wall was written “partisans' resting place”. After the liberation of the city on 21 April 1945, citizens, acquaintances and relatives of all the fallen partisans began to spontaneously deposit photos and flowers on Palazzo d'Accursio's wall in a pilgrimage that in the following days took on impressive dimensions. Later, also to give prominence to the popular initiative, the municipal administration provided for the construction of the memorial. Today the Memorial collects more than 2000 panels with the portraits or names of the fallen and 16 larger ones reproducing photos of the time. (Fig. 1-2)

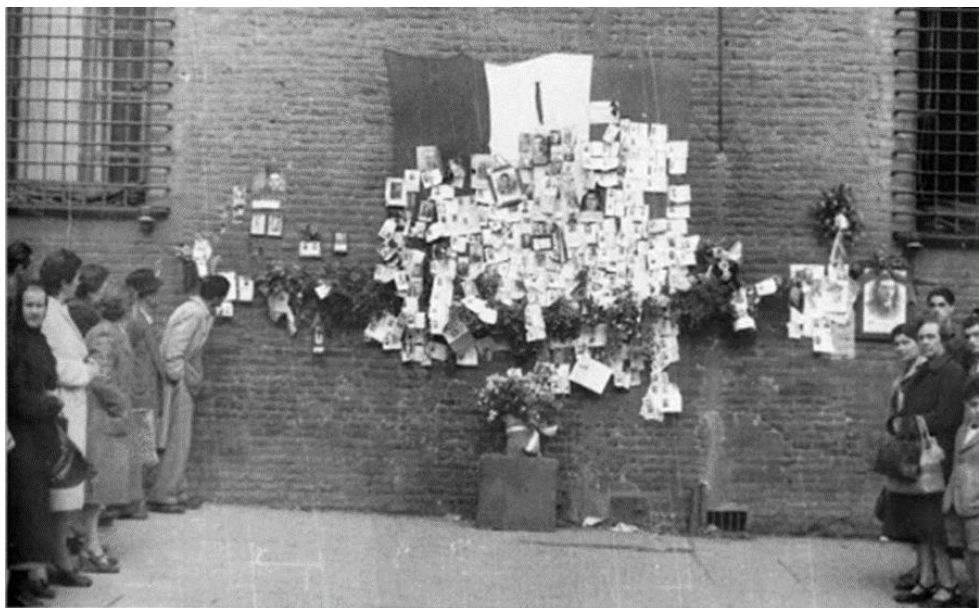


Figure 1. Photograph of Palazzo d'Accursio's wall covered with photos of the fallen partisans



Figure 2. Photograph of today's *Memorial of the fallen partisans* of Bologna, Italy

In post-World War II memorial architecture, the high and imposing wall is increasingly a symbol of oppression and denial of individual freedom. It therefore becomes a warning to the visitor, who finds himself oppressed in a restricted space with no way out. See the case of the Monument of the *Risiera di San Sabba* in Trieste, the only lager built in Italian territory. When the architect Romano Boico is called to create a memorial to commemorate the atrocities committed in the Risiera, he states: "this total, widespread squalor can become a symbol and become a monument itself" (APB, Boico 1966, 4), clearly expressing the desire to build an evocative space, more than philological, through an architectural language full of metaphors. The monument expresses the sovereign idea of the pain and anguish felt by the prisoners, which transpires from the moment they enter the building. It consists of a long and narrow straight path, a corridor suffocated by two imposing concrete walls. Boico attempts to emphasize the sense of closure and isolation that the lager arouses in those inmates and, to highlight the concept, the entire area is enclosed by a mighty wall 11 meters high, which encloses within it a microcosm of anguish and prostrate hope. (Figg. 3-4)



Figure 3. Photograph of the entrance to the *Risiera di San Sabba Memorial* in Trieste, Italy



Figure 4. Photograph of the high walls that the visitor must cross to reach the *Risiera di San Sabba Memorial* in Trieste, Italy

6. Walls as an element of peacemaking: *The Bi-National Community skyscraper* by C. Tzu Wei Chiang and A.M. Guerrero

The walls, which over time have taken on the role of visible and invisible barriers, can be rethought as a real threshold, a place destined to meet and open up to the different in order to overcome the crisis caused by the closure of borders: "But can a new form of citizenship become the frontier that allows the cohabitation between different identities while safeguarding the confrontation with them?" (Zanini 1997, p. 86). An exemplary project, in this sense, is the *Bi-National community skyscraper* by architects Charles Tzu Wei Chiang and Alejandro Moreno Guerrero of Taiwan, presented in 2019 at the "eVolo skyscraper competition". Established in 2006, the annual Skyscraper Competition is one of the world's most prestigious awards for high-rise architecture. It recognizes outstanding ideas that redefine skyscraper design through the implementation of novel technologies, materials, programs, aesthetics, and spatial organizations; along with studies on globalization, flexibility, adaptability, and the digital revolution. It is a forum that examines the relationship between the skyscraper and the natural world, the community and the city. In 2019, one of the projects that received the honorable mention was the *Bi-National community skyscraper*. The recent American governments intents to enhance the construction of border between Mexico and U.S. to reinforce control. There are many stories regarding how such border separate family members who hold different citizenship, or work and live on different side of border. This proposal aims to transform perception of political border from boundary of separation to gathering for connection. *Friendship Park* located next to border between San Diego and Tijuana, as one of the location where many separated families will meet from both side of border. In 1900s, there is no well defined border but only patrols to control for access. Many travel back and forth to meet their family during weekend. Later, metal fence was constructed to establish the border. In 1990s, additional metal mesh had been applied to prevent physical contact for illegal activities. Despite seeing each other through metal mesh almost like seeing prisoners in jail, families still willing to travel far to reunite on border. This proposal suggests an "In-between zone" above border fence, which based on temporary scaffolding structure and can be expended or reduced in size according to the needs. With respect to legal regulation and political situation, such zone can be accessed with control of shafts of staircase and allows families not only to meet up but huge and touch each other to share their moment together. As it serves as the platform for opportunities of interaction and communication, it enhances interpersonal relationship and encourages community like gathering space with bi-national identity. As

nationality or working and living status should not be the reason for restriction of family reunite, this project intends to help for the situation for separation of many families, as well as to provide more humanize gathering space to meet on border. Instead of construct obstacle structure like wall to reinforce control, situation might be altered if better architectural system can be provided and better control method can be employed. A better outcome such as bi-national community can be expected and encouraged to form. (Fig. 5-6)



Figure 5. *Bi-National community skyscraper's* project realization hypothesis (<http://www.evolo.us/bi-national-community-skyscraper/>)



Figure 6. *Bi-National community skyscraper's* project realization hypothesis (<http://www.evolo.us/bi-national-community-skyscraper/>)

7. Conclusions

As a meeting space, the wall as a frontier can become the place of diversity, where different social groups and different ethnic groups meet and try to find a common *modus vivendi*, accepting each other. The frontier as a “space between two spaces” takes on positive and proactive characters and meanings, since it offers itself as a place of opportunities to undertake new experiences and new activities beyond the boundaries of tradition. Architecture, understood first of all as an instrument of measurement, is the ideal means to advance a semantic shift, proposing projects aimed at making habitable a place, the border, marked by walls. Rethinking the boundary walls and, looking to the future, entire border towns, nowadays, means making people understand that there is a mutual advantage in recognizing the values of both sides (Zanini 1997, p. 154). The border would become not only a place, but a real instrument to keep the dialogue open, beyond the respective ideological, religious or cultural schemes.

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