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The language of walls

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The language of walls
Inclusion, exclusion, and the racialization of space

Ruth Wodak

Introduction: some functions of walls

In his important book Steinzeit. Mauern in Berlin (2011), the cultural theorist Olaf Briese describes the multi-layered foundations—including various remains of walls—on which the city of Berlin has been built over the centuries. Walls, he claims, have many functions: First and most importantly, walls protect the citizens inside from invaders trying to destroy the walls and capture the respective cities during wartimes (ibid. 316ff.). Briese thus traces the protective intention behind the construction of walls from the fortresses of ancient times to the castles and citadels of the Middle Ages. Second, walls also serve to protect cities and villages from floods and other natural catastrophes (ibid. 69ff.). Third, they allow trading while regulating the access of people and goods. In this way, walls function as distinct borders though the latter are, however, not set in stone, as they can be renegotiated, closed, and opened according to various political interests (De Chaine 2012; Lehner 2019). As Vollmer (2017b) rightly argues, borders (and walls) distinguish those people who are considered to be deserving to enter cities and countries from those who are—usually quite arbitrarily—defined as not deserving.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent advent of an international system whereby the principle of state sovereignty seemed bound to wane “left little reason to expect a return of the wall” (e.g. Briese 2011: 369ff; Vallet & David 2012: 111). However, the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the huge migration flows since 2013 and 2014 sparked a dramatic surge in wall-building around the world, mostly undertaken by liberal democratic governments which have employed and continue to employ a range of legitimation strategies to substantiate their ever stricter politics of exclusion. Thus, it appears as if wall-building has been re-established and sanctioned as a legitimate strategy to control state borders. As Sicurella (2018: 60) maintains in his analysis of Croatian and Bosnian debates about borders and walls in 2015:

although current deterritorialization discourses have enabled us to interpret borders in a less deterministic way than in the past, it has become clear that the “hard” and
often coercive nature of their material embodiment cannot and should not be underestimated; [...] an epistemological shift has taken place in the way borders are theorized.

Borders can be conceptualized as social constructions, historically contingent, embedded in their sociopolitical contexts; they express power relations and have a material reality—potentially resemiotized as walls—as well as a symbolic meaning (Paasi 2012). Unlike previous conceptualizations of walls and borders as historical, factual, stable, and material entities, recent approaches highlight their various (in)visible manifestations (Konrad 2015) and their capacity to (re)produce social orders, inequalities, inclusions, and exclusions as well as differentiations. Following Van Houtum (2010), processes of differentiation and constructions of a dangerous Other are crucial to imaginations of symbolic and material walls and borders, regulating who is allowed to enter a given territory and who is not (Bickham Mendez and Naples 2015a: 24). Walls in their function as borders are material and social constructions; thus, bordering must be understood as a practice involving those who decide on and implement exclusionary and inclusionary practices (e.g. politicians, border guards, or soldiers) (Bickham Mendez and Naples 2015b: 375).

In ancient times, walls defined and preserved important sites of public discussion for some and not for others (for example, slaves and women were excluded from democratic deliberations and decision-making in the ἄγορα ( agora; market-place); e.g. Camp 1989; Briese 2011: 29). City walls also used to protect the healthy from the ill (e.g. leper colonies constructed outside of city walls, ibid. 139ff). Walls surrounding cemeteries guard the dead and separate them from the living, i.e. the “pure” space from the “impure” (in Judaism for example), in ritualized ways as prescribed in a range of religions (ibid. 293–295). Moreover, walls encircling prisons and prison camps (such as labor camps, the Stalinist gulags, the Nazi concentration camps, and the US high security prison Guantanamo) served and continue to serve to keep prisoners inside and to make them invisible for citizens living outside of these walls.

Hence, walls exist inside cities, outside and around cities; they define specific areas where distinct groups and communities are allowed to live or choose to live. As the anthropologist Setha Low (2001: 46) illustrates through her extensive fieldwork in US cities, the rich and wealthy sometimes choose to live in gated communities which provide security from unwanted outsiders:

Adding walls, gates, and guards produces a landscape that encodes class relations and residential (race/class/ethnic/gender) segregation more permanently in the built environment. (ibid, 45)

Borders (and walls understood as materially resemiotized borders) have thus become the contingent manifestation of highly dynamic processes and institutions that need to be constantly managed, maintained, and socially reproduced. This chapter elaborates and discusses the revitalization of walls and borders in the many hegemonic debates in EU member states and the US in spite of our ever more globalized and globalizing world and the communication channels and options which necessarily transcend borders and walls. As Newman and Paasi (1998: 201) maintain:

The study of narratives and discourse is central to an understanding of all types of boundaries, particularly state boundaries. These narratives range from foreign policy discourses, geographical texts and literature (including maps), to the many dimensions of formal and
informal socialization which affect the creation of sociospatial identities, especially the notions of “us” and the “Other,” exclusive and inclusive spaces and territories.

Processes of inclusion and exclusion, of racialization and culturalization, therefore often involve conflicting discourses, narratives, and related identities about bordering, about access and rejection, that are consistent with fundamental claims of critical discourse studies (CDS)—that is, that discourses and social realities are mutually constitutive and that discursive practices may have major ideological effects, helping to produce and reproduce unequal power relations (Wodak and Meyer 2016) and legitimate inclusion and exclusion, particularly in regard to ethnic and religious minorities, refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers.²

In the next section, I discuss the securitization and moralization of borders via specific discursive forms of argumentation and legitimation of exclusion, and then turn to one example: I briefly summarize Donald Trump’s argumentation for building a wall in order to keep Latin American (primarily Mexican) migrants out of the US. In the conclusion, I reflect on the resemiotization of discourses about exclusion via borders and walls, and their continuous reinforcement via a politics of fear.

Walls, ghettos, and borders: inclusion and exclusion

The view that borders have social, cultural, and political significance has become a central tenet within critical scholarship focusing on the ambivalences underlying border (and bordered) subjects and identities. More generally, there is now widespread agreement among geographers, sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists, and discourse analysts alike that borders (and walls) are inevitably loaded with (often contested) symbolic, cultural, historical, political, and ideological meanings and that such meanings may arise from a variety of social practices, discourses, and narratives.³

As mentioned above, migration is increasingly constructed as a “problem” that needs to be regulated, whereby “the border” has become a key discursive icon and manifestation of controlling migration” (Vollmer 2017a: 3). Similar meanings are attributed to walls, for example in the US context (see Section 3, below). Border controls and their fortiﬁcation are discursively linked to national security and the control of movement (see economization and securitization in Rheindorf and Wodak 2018). Concomitantly, borders are being increasingly militarized (Schwenken and Ruß-Sattar 2014: 6), with huge and insurmountable walls symbolizing inaccessible borders, with people being prevented from climbing over them via different technical means such as barbed wire and broken glass (Paasi 2012: 2306). In addition to fortiﬁcation, we observe restrictive border regimes which, inasmuch as they are proposed or implemented in the EU, are controversial and discussed under the label of “Fortress Europe.” Indeed, the term “Fortress Europe”, which was once used by the Nazis and since 1945 has carried a negative meaning, has been recontextualized since the refugee movement in 2015 (i.e. “protecting the European Union from refugees”) (Pinos 2009; Wodak 2018).

Moralization, mediatization, and securitization

Increasing processes of securitization and militarization can be noticed not only at political levels but also at normative levels in what Vollmer (2017a: 4) terms the moralization of bordering.
Moralization of bordering takes place when considering the balancing act of excluding a selection of people but at the same time standing on the high moral ground for which the EU and its Member States stand for. This exclusionary practice has been morally legitimized over the years by an array of policy frames [...] but also by a narrative of deservingness, that is, by following the principle that “some people do not deserve to be treated equally or in the way we (the ‘host’ society) treat human beings.”

The moralization of borders thus requires a range of legitimacy strategies (e.g. Van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999: 104; Wodak 2018; see below). Territorial borders have become more than a means of providing security and control, moreover symbolizing social meanings that cut to the core of human life (e.g. Lamont and Molnar 2002). In this vein, most migration control regimes were transformed—especially in the so-called age of terrorism—into securitization regimes and attended by debates about distinctions between who is a migrant and who is a refugee and, even more significantly, about who is a “genuine” asylum seeker and who is a “bogus asylum seeker” (e.g. Wodak 2015). These developments have caused migration- and border politics to be increasingly framed as body politics, constructing nation states as bodies that have to be protected from “invasion, penetration, infection or disease” (Musolff 2004: 437–438). In close connection with mediatization effects (Forchtner, Krzyżanowski, and Wodak 2013; Rheindorf and Wodak 2018; Triandafyllidou, Krzyżanowski, and Wodak 2018), a “securitization of migration” in relation to terrorism has been observed in post-9/11 migration policies and in the Schengen agreements and the gradual dismantling of national borders within the European Union (Bigo 2002; Scheibelhofer 2012: 325). In this context, mediatized politics can be understood as politics that actually depends upon the mechanisms and reach of mass media, which is therefore ineffective without them (Strömbäck 2008; Preston 2008). Hence, migration is being constructed as a “risk to the liberal world […] normalizing the view that immigrants are a threat” (Ibrahim 2005: 163). These meanings are captured in the notion of securitization.

Securitization occurs when an issue is presented as posing an existential threat to a designated referent object—that is, the state, incorporating government, territory, and society. According to Buzan, de Wilde, and Waever (1998: 21), a state representative can traditionally, by declaring a state of emergency, claim the right to use whatever means are necessary to counter a threatening development; in the US case, this actually implied categorizing migration in the same way as—for example—a natural catastrophe such as Hurricane Katrina when Donald Trump sent troops to the Mexican border in October 2018.4 The special nature of security threats can be invoked to justify the use of extraordinary measures to handle them (ibid. 21–24)—that is, governmental acts of power such as forced registration of refugees, militarization, use of police and military force, constructing walls, and so on. This is a securitizing move insofar as threats are discursively constructed in the sense that they do not simply “exist” independently of our knowledge and representations of them (Peoples and Vaughan-Williams 2010: 5–6). Securitization, moralization, legitimation, and mediatization are thus all interlinked in intricate ways when political actors depend on mass media to construct a referent as an existential security threat.

Walls and segregated spaces

Debates about walls are, as mentioned in the first section, not new. The history of the Jewish ghetto is a case in point. Jews in early-modern Europe were for the most part not
allowed to own land and were often forced to live in specific areas surrounded by walls—ghettos—and had to pay rent to landowners who lived outside the ghetto. In the oldest European ghetto in Venice (dating back to 1516), Jews would leave behind the world of the ghetto each morning—their clothing marked with a yellow (!) circle (for men) or yellow scarf (for women)—to work or to shop among gentiles and then return to the ghetto each evening before sundown. The enclosure of the Jews came, it is reported, after an outbreak of syphilis assumed to be linked to the arrival of the so-called Marrano Jews from Spain. With an act of the Venetian Senate on March 29, 1516, some 700 Jewish households were forced to move into the Ghetto Nuovo, with entry controlled by two gates that were locked at sundown. At that time, while the ghetto developed as an urban space isolated from the outside world, it also provided the Jewish community with some protection from regularly occurring pogroms. Thus, Hayley (2008: 348) maintains that

we must view the ghetto as a space between expulsion (in Spain and France) and incorporation (in the Muslim world). While segregation from the outside world brought an oppressed community together, it also turned the oppressed inward in new ways.

This example relates to the racialization of urban space across many dimensions. Racialization in this instance began with the forced relocation of a group of persons distinguished as (morally) different and identified by a particular ethnic feature—their religion—to a physical space that was isolated from other areas of the city. Indeed, this very space of the city became identified with the stigmatized Jews and was instrumentalized for many stereotypes against Jews. As Sennett (1994: 248) argues, “the space of the Ghetto reinforced such beliefs about the Jewish body: behind the Ghetto’s drawn bridges and closed windows, its life shut off from the sun and the water, crime and idolatry were thought to fester”. Of course, during the Nazi era and the Shoah, the specifically created ghettos in many cities and villages in occupied Poland became sites of forced exclusion, preparing deported Jews from across Europe for extermination in the Nazi concentration and extermination camps.

The racist rhetoric employed by the Austrian extreme-right populist Freedom Party (FPÖ), the junior partner in the national conservative government coalition since the beginning of 2018, provides a salient current example of such exclusionary practices which most probably draw on the Nazi nativist discourses: Their slogans recontextualize antisemitic and racist appeals of the 1930s which excluded Jews from council housing and other apartments, schools and professions. For example:

The slogan must be: No more Muslim migrants in municipal housing in Döbling [the nineteenth district of Vienna, a wealthy area, RW]¹⁵,⁶

(SOS Mitmensch 2019: 34)

Such blatant anti-Muslim racism entails much danger for any pluralist and liberal democracy because it is hugely divisive, excludes specific people on the basis of their religion, and is instrumentalized to trigger nativist movements. Extensive historical research illustrates that such proposals and appeals have not been seen or heard in Vienna and Austria since Nazi times (SOS Mitmensch 2019: 4). In such rhetoric, migrants are dehumanized (Charteris-Black 2006: 569), their number exaggerated to suggest an invasion by an alien and dangerous culture which will subsequently destroy the “pure” Christian Austrians, a process which subsequently legitimizes the moralization of borders and walls (see Figure 13.1).
City planner and legal scholar Peter Marcuse (1997: 228) distinguishes between “enclaves”, “citadels”, and “ghettos”, i.e. various guarded spaces defined in respect to their functions in distinguishing insiders and outsiders. The “black ghetto” in US cities, he claims, is an outcast ghetto; those within are subject to exclusion from the mainstream economic, political, and social life of the city. These ghettos are not necessarily surrounded by visible walls, but are rather defined by other spatial and semiotic characteristics such as street names, district names, visual signs of poverty, worse infrastructure such as bad roads, more unemployment, crime, and so forth. An “enclave”, however, houses cultural communities of migrants and differs from outcast ghettos. Finally, Marcuse states that citadels were and are established by higher-income groups, and thus differ both from ghettos and enclaves. Hence, space, class, ethnicity, religion, and race play decisive roles in organizing cities and urban wealth or poverty in neoliberal economies. Walls may divide such areas but they need not; moreover, borders can be visible but need not be. Indeed, as Ono (2012) states, the “others” internalize borders emotionally and cognitively, even if having accessed the areas populated and owned by the insiders.

**Legitimizing exclusion: discourse, argumentation, and legitimation**

Usually, in liberal democracies, politicians must seek the approval of the population for severe policy changes, appeals which obviously also depend on the mass media to convince the electorate. The discursive practices used to reach this aim thus have a strong strategic aspect and have been studied as strategies of legitimation.

As a sociopolitical act, legitimation is characteristically accomplished through discourse using persuasive and sometimes manipulative means. Regarding the linguistic realization of legitimizing acts, Rojo-Martin and van Dijk (1997: 531–32) distinguish between pragmatic,
semantic, stylistic, interactional, and social dimensions. Importantly, the propositions employed in legitimation are commonly organized by complex argumentative schemes, including premises that concern the nature of the proposed action and the phenomena it relates to (usually presented or established in descriptive or narrative modes) as well as conclusions that concern said action’s social, moral, or political acceptability (e.g. Rheindorf and Wodak 2019; Wodak 2018).

Given its sociopolitical nature, it follows that legitimation routinely draws on recurring argumentation schemes in order to persuade the public of the acceptability or necessity of a specific action or policy. Van Leeuwen (2007) and Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) distinguish between four broad types: authorization, moralization, rationalization, and mythopoeias. Legitimation by authorization depends on reference to personal, impersonal, expert, or role model authority, but may also appeal to custom in the form of tradition or conformity. Legitimation qua moralization is based on abstract moral values (religious, human rights, justice, culture, and so forth), straightforwardly evaluative claims, or analogy to ostensibly established moral cases. Legitimation through rationalization references either the utility of the social practice or some part of it (i.e. instrumental rationalization by way of goals, means, or outcomes) or to assumed “facts of life” (i.e. theoretical rationalization by way of definition, explanation, or prediction). Rationalization may be established as “common sense” or by experts in the domains of knowledge used for legitimation, e.g. economics, biology, or technology. In legitimation through mythopoeias, the proponents of the policy in question will rely on telling stories that may serve as exemplars or cautionary tales (see Table 13.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 13.1 Types of legitimation (adapted from Wodak 2018)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authorization</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Personal authority: based on institutional status of individuals/groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Impersonal authority: originating from laws, policies, regulations, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Expert authority: academic, scientific, or other type of credible expertise</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Role model authority: popularity and acceptability of positions held by role models or opinion leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Custom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Authority of tradition: acceptability of what is claimed to have always been done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Authority of conformity: acceptability of what everyone or most people do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moralization</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstraction: abstract depiction of practices that links them to moral values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation: legitimation of positions and practices via evaluative adjectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analogy: legitimation relying on comparisons and contrasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rationalization</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Goal orientation: focused on goals, intentions, purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Means orientation: focused on aims embedded in actions as means to an end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Outcome orientation: focused on outcomes of actions as if already known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Definition: characterizing activities in terms of already moralized practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Explanation: characterizing people as actors because the way they do things is appropriate to the nature of these actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Prediction: foreseeing outcomes based on some form of expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mythopoeias</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral tales: narrating rewarding decisions and practices of social actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cautionary tales: linking nonconformist practices to undesirable consequences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the formal analysis of argumentation, which relies on a functional model of argumentation, the three basic elements investigated are argument, conclusion rule, and claim (Reisigl 2014: 75). Conclusion rules (also referred to as topoi) are central to the premise inasmuch as they justify the transition from argument to conclusion (see Wodak 2015: 51–54 for an extensive discussion). A key strategy of discourse analysis is to make tacit or implicit topoi explicit in the form of conditional or causal paraphrases (Reisigl and Wodak 2001: 69–80). While topoi are often “shortcuts” and not explicited in discourse, they are not necessarily fallacious. In the context of legitimation, the analysis of topoi may reveal flawed logic and manipulative or erroneous conclusions inasmuch as what they ignore or sidestep can be fallacious.

Most recently, Lehner and Rheindorf (2018)—analyzing political discourse in Austria—identified the following topoi in relation to arguing for or against inclusion/exclusion of refugees and asylum seekers (e.g. Rheindorf and Wodak 2018; Wodak 2018):

1. **Topos of abuse/definition**: Most of the people arriving at the moment are not in danger of being persecuted; therefore, they are not refugees but (economic) migrants
2. **Topos of burden**: Providing for so many refugees places an inordinate burden on Austria and Austrians; therefore, Austria should only accept a limited number
3. **Topos of culture/burden**: The people arriving at the moment are mostly uneducated and/or illiterate; therefore, they are an inordinate and unacceptable burden on the welfare state
4. **Topos of culture/burden**: The people arriving at the moment do not share “our” values and are therefore difficult/impossible to integrate; therefore, Austria should only accept a limited number
5. **Topos of culture/male nature and burden**: The people arriving at the moment are mostly young men who have never learned to or cannot exercise restraint; therefore, they are a danger to Austrian women
6. **Topos of economic resource limitation**: Austria does not have the resources (money, housing) to provide for so many refugees; therefore, Austria should only accept a limited number
7. **Topos of historical dissimilarity/conditionality**: The Geneva Convention was designed for a different (historical) situation and does not apply to the current situation; therefore, Austria should not be bound by it
8. **Topos of law and order**: According to international treaties (Dublin II, Geneva Convention), refugees must apply in the first safe state they reach; therefore, most of the people arriving at the moment are not eligible to apply for asylum in Austria

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Table 13.2 Topoi in Austrian media during the “refugee crisis” (Drawing on Wodak 2018 and, with permission, on Lehner and Rheindorf 2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topos</th>
<th>Warrant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topos of abuse/definition</td>
<td>Most of the people arriving at the moment are not in danger of being persecuted; therefore, they are not refugees but (economic) migrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topos of burden</td>
<td>Providing for so many refugees places an inordinate burden on Austria and Austrians; therefore, Austria should only accept a limited number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topos of culture/burden</td>
<td>The people arriving at the moment are mostly uneducated and/or illiterate; therefore, they are an inordinate and unacceptable burden on the welfare state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topos of culture/burden</td>
<td>The people arriving at the moment do not share “our” values and are therefore difficult/impossible to integrate; therefore, Austria should only accept a limited number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topos of culture/male nature and burden</td>
<td>The people arriving at the moment are mostly young men who have never learned to or cannot exercise restraint; therefore, they are a danger to Austrian women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topos of economic resource limitation</td>
<td>Austria does not have the resources (money, housing) to provide for so many refugees; therefore, Austria should only accept a limited number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topos of historical dissimilarity/conditionality</td>
<td>The Geneva Convention was designed for a different (historical) situation and does not apply to the current situation; therefore, Austria should not be bound by it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topos of law and order</td>
<td>According to international treaties (Dublin II, Geneva Convention), refugees must apply in the first safe state they reach; therefore, most of the people arriving at the moment are not eligible to apply for asylum in Austria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
The use of the *topos of authority*, or the “authority of tradition” is linked to the *topos of history*. Indeed, the *topos of history* plays a significant role in this context as many political parties, NGOs, and politicians allude to past dealings with refugees and migrants, such as in World War II or during the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s. The *topos of comparison* integrates well with moralization by analogy; mythopoesis (using anecdotes and stories as a legitimation strategy) is related to the *argumentum ad exemplum*, and so forth. In this way, the interdependence of legitimation strategies and argumentation schemes becomes explicit. In my brief example below, I will refer to both legitimation strategies and topoi when tracing Donald Trump’s arguments for building walls to keep “illegal migrants” out.

### Debating the building of walls

States and transnational organizations are developing policies and promoting practices in different directions: on the one hand, these policies are enhancing the free movement of labor and persons, e.g. in the European Union; on the other, billions are being spent to erect new and highly “technologized” effective barriers, electrified walls, and surveillance apparatuses to control and reduce the free movement of “unwanted”, “illegal” migrants. US President Donald Trump is leading the anti-immigrant war with wall-building as *rearguard action*, drawing on Israel’s wall to contain the Palestinians in the West Bank, as obsessive restrictions on migration and asylum are spreading throughout the world to divide us in an “age of walls” (Marshall 2018). This has also started a war of protectionism, turning the world upside down as the Chinese government under Xi Jinping is paradoxically becoming the supreme defender of free trade across the globe (Triminikliotis 2019).

In a similar vein, Rheindorf and Wodak (2018) investigated the Austrian debates about erecting fences and/or walls during the refugee movement of 2015/16. Major policy and frame shifts could be observed in this quantitative and qualitative study (see also Wodak 2018, 2019): overall, a discourse of empathy with and pity for the thousands of refugees

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**Table 13.2 (Cont.)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topos</th>
<th>Warrant</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topos of national borders</td>
<td>Austria has a natural right to control its borders and know the identity of everyone who is in the country; therefore, borders must be closed entirely and strictly policed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topos of national responsibility</td>
<td>If the EU does not control its external borders, Austria must take national measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topos of reality</td>
<td>The universal human right to asylum is a theoretical ideal, not a reality, unlike limited resources; therefore, granting this right is optional for Austria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topos of solidarity (within the group/charity begins at home)</td>
<td>Because they are Austrian (like us), homeless or poor Austrians deserve our help more than refugees; therefore, Austria should help them instead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topos of (potential) threat/danger</td>
<td>Some of the people arriving at the moment are/could be/may in the future become radicalized and commit acts of terrorism; therefore, Austria should close its borders and police them strictly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
fleeing from Syria and Iraq in August and September 2015 changed to a rhetoric of exclusion after the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015 and the sexual harassment case on New Year’s Eve 2015 in Cologne. This significant frame shift implied viewing strangers primarily as threatening and not as needy or suffering. This frame shift also implied the use of different strategies of legitimation (moralization, mythopoesis) and topoi (focus on topoi of culture, crime, and threat). Rheindorf and Wodak (2018: 34) thus succeed in tracing and documenting the step-by-step normalization of walls, fences, and borders: “borders are ‘moral,’ then, also in the sense that politicians can thus make a claim to be acting responsibly, using cost-and-benefit analyses in an effort to protect social security and cohesion.” Because of such frame shifts and related policy changes, it is also possible to reformulate the interdependence between borders and boundaries (Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking 2013: 346):

The fact that borders are politically constructed means they have to find their legitimacy in boundaries, i.e. the cultural and political narratives about a society, its culture, territory and history; about who is a member of that society and, consequentially, who is an outsider.

In an extensive study, Demato (2019: 276ff) analyses several speeches by Donald Trump in which he promised—as one of his most important electoral pledges—to build a wall along the border between the US and Mexico. As Demato argues, while Trump promises to “Make American Great Again” by building a wall to stem the flow of immigration, he is merely resurrecting the divisive politics of nativism that has a long historical precedent in American politics. Thus, Demato (2019: 291) states:

Trump’s anti-immigration rhetoric reinforces a vision of the nation and of its borders which is based on a power which is realized through the legitimation of the identity of some subjects and the alienization or exclusion of others: in Trump’s nationalist narrative the alienized subject is marginalized and kept out of the space of the US homeland. Through his wall proposal, which is instrumental in providing social actors with certain (negative) roles, Trump exploits a prevalent narrative which views the US-Mexico border as a gateway to the nation from unwanted and threatening enemies. Trump wants to “make America great again” through immigration reform because, by demarcating borders, both geographically, physically and socially, and by excluding the “alien” element, he can draw the rhetorical outlines of group identity, and specifically of who should be, and who should not be, American.

When Trump announced his candidacy for president on 16 June 2015, the “them” in this specific speech consisted of foreign countries that were apparently taking advantage of America by sending them immigrants who were inferior social outcasts. To Trump, the former great nation had thus become a victim (a well-known demagogic strategy labeled as victim-perpetrator reversal). Thus, he asked: “When do we beat Mexico at the border?” He then continued to disparage the entire Mexican nation, accusing the country of not sending their best people to the US, but of exporting a host of social problems onto American soil. His solution: build a big wall to protect Americans from the Mexicans. At the end of this speech, after disparaging all other candidates in both parties and severely criticizing former presidents,
Trump proclaimed that he alone could save America from its ostensibly downtrodden position:

Sadly, the American dream is dead. But if I get elected president, I will bring it back bigger and better and stronger than ever before, and we will make America great again. *(Time staff, 2015)*

In this way, Trump depicted America as a crumbling, declining country, a victim of losses to foreign competitors, and a nation that had failed to protect its people and their problems. His answer to this dystopic vision was to restore greatness by negotiating advantageous trade deals for Americans, by promising to create new jobs, by repairing the decaying infrastructure, *and by constructing a wall on the southern border of the US to curb illegal immigration*, thus employing rational and moral legitimation, substantiated by *topoi* of numbers, burden, law and order, and criminality (e.g. Table 13.2).

Obviously, many argumentative moves which occurred in the Austrian debates and other European debates are apparent in this rhetoric, albeit in this case directed against the so-called “illegal Mexicans” and “all illegal migrants coming from South America”, and not against the refugees coming from the Middle East. The Italian author Roberto Saviano (2019), however, provides the empirical facts about the metaphorically framed so-called “caravans” or “floods” of immigrants in an extensive and carefully researched essay; these migrants which are perceived as threatening the US-Mexican border are mostly refugees, fleeing from torture, slavery, and death in their countries of origin, including some of the most dangerous and crime-plagued countries in the world, such as Columbia, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, and Venezuela:

In recent months, some have said of the migrants, “Instead of running away, they should try to change the situation in their country!” Only those unfamiliar with the Honduran situation could say such a thing. Anyone who opposes it, anyone who criticizes it or tries to change it, risks death. Between 2010 and 2016, more than 120 environmental and human rights activists were killed in Honduras. Freedom of the press is also under siege, as Reporters Without Borders has documented [...] President Trump talks about the migrant caravan as if it were an attempted invasion. In reality, Honduras and Central America have paid an enormous price precisely because of US policies. The dire market in Honduras right now is shaped by the drug market, and the world’s largest consumer of cocaine is the United States. *(Saviano 2019: 2)*

In all his speeches, Trump promises to build a “big, fat, beautiful wall” to prevent Mexicans and others from illegally crossing the border, thus discursively constructing and presenting himself as “the savior” of the US—a strategy employed by all far-right populists in their attempt to present themselves as the speakers for the “true people” (Wodak 2015, 2017). Such leaders necessarily claim to speak and act on behalf of *the people*, who are in turn arbitrarily defined as a unified homogenous whole, which supposedly constitute the majority of the state and represent the *will* of the nation. Along this vein, Milbank (2019) maintains—quite sarcastically—that

*[t]he trouble with the wall isn’t that it’s evil, but that it’s medieval [...] To turn the 2000-mile border into a walled fortress Trump desires, my experts suggest a medieval
arms race as terrifying as the plague. Not only will we need a 30-foot ‘glorious wall’ (Trump will like that term) with towers rising to 50 feet, but we’ll also need two more ‘curtain’ walls, a moat and an earthen berm to keep away the invading migrants’ siege towers, ladders, battering rams and pole axes.  

Of course, there is much opposition to Trump’s plan, especially in Congress since the Democratic Party succeeded in winning the majority in the November 2018 mid-term election (Riotta 2018). Internationally and nationally, Trump triggered an enormous scandal when dozens of parents were being split from their children each day—the children being labeled “unaccompanied minors” and placed in government custody or foster care, the parents being labeled criminals and sent to jail, in August 2018. Indeed, as Lind (2018) elaborates:

Between October 1, 2017 and May 31, 2018, at least 2,700 children have been split from their parents. 1,995 of them were separated over the last six weeks of that window—April 18 to May 31—indicating that at present, an average of 45 children are being taken from their parents each day.  

However, this is not the first time in recent decades that the US rejected unaccompanied adolescents and children from applying for asylum in the US. As Lind (2017) elaborates, the US (and other countries in the Western Hemisphere) could have saved thousands of Jews from the Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s but instead they closed their borders. The US even rejected a proposal to allow 20,000 Jewish children to come to the US for safety. Of course, many politicians and people did not know at that time how terrible the Holocaust would become. But, Lind states,

Americans did know that Nazis were encouraging vandalism and violence against Jews—many Americans had been alarmed by Kristallnacht in 1938, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt had issued a statement condemning it. But America didn’t feel strongly enough about the mistreatment of Jews to allow them to find a safe harbor in the US. That is a moral stain on the nation’s conscience, and it’s what led the US and other countries, after the war, to create a way for persecuted people to seek and find refuge.  

However, such historical facts do not influence Trump’s decision-making in any way. He intentionally triggers and substantiates fear, which draws on the historically recurring theme of criminal foreigners who attempt to invade the country to take jobs away from law-abiding citizens and which evokes the image of Mexicans as illegal aliens, rapists, and criminals.  

In the following, I present the argumentative moves distilled from four of Trump’s speeches (from New York 21/11/15; Birmingham 8/12/15; Iowa 16/6/16; Las Vegas 11/7/16):

1. “We have illegal immigrants who are being taken care of better than our incredible veterans.” “People flow through like water.”
2. “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best … They’re sending us not the right people.” “They’re sending people they don’t want.” “When Mexico sends its people … they’re sending people that have lots of problems.” “[they] take our jobs, and then we pay them interest.” “It’s going to get worse and worse.”
3. “ISIS authorizes such atrocities as murders against non-believers; beheadings and unthinkable acts that pose great harm to Americans, especially women.” “They want to kill us.” “These are people [who] don’t want our system. They don’t want our system and lead a normal life.”

First, Trump depicts a dangerous situation in which, he claims, the US presently finds itself: He employs the almost universally used metaphor of migrants as floods which implies that there is no way to defend oneself against such a natural catastrophe. Americans, thus, have to be defined as victims. Moreover, he appeals to resentment by employing the topos of comparison, setting veterans against “illegal immigrants” who, he claims, receive more support than veterans, a highly respected group in the US. His second move then depicts Mexican migrants as criminals and enemies, unworthy to enter the US. They threaten the “true and pure” Americans as they would, he further claims, take their jobs away. Finally, in these first moves, he mentions ISIS (which is of course not connected to Mexico) but serve as enforcing the danger created by strangers. Maybe, via analogy, listeners might see similarities between radical fundamentalist ISIS warriors who kill, rape, and murder innocent people, and “illegal immigrants” from Mexico. After all these claims, Trump continues with the “data”, the evidence for the alleged danger.

1. “We’re out of control. We have no idea if they love us or hate us. We have no idea if they want to bomb us.” “And it’s got to stop and it’s got to stop fast.”
2. “We have to be vigilant.” “We have tremendous eyes and ears.” “We have millions and millions and millions of eyes and ears.” “Database is OK and watching them is OK and surveillance is OK.” “I want to know who they are.”
3. “To make the country strong, we have to stop the border.” “We have to establish borders and we have to build a wall.” “We have to and we will.”
4. “You can’t be great if you don’t have a border.”

Here, Trump claims that the government is out of control and has to win back control in order to protect the US and its people. Trump does not provide any evidence for his claims. However, this move is reinforced by the topos of urgency as otherwise a catastrophe is to be expected. Urgency implies that decisions have to be taken quickly. And, as is presupposed throughout this argumentation scheme, only he as leader of the American people would be able to take these decisions and promise to implement more security. In this way, the discursive construction of fear and resentment is linked to the promise of hope, of a savior protecting the American people. Law and order, Trump argues, would have to be strengthened via more surveillance and, finally, borders would then be better controlled—specifically if a wall is built. Only then, he concludes, will America be great again!

It is a simple argumentation scheme (e.g. Toulmin 1958) which is employed here: Crisis and dystopia are presented as immediate dangers which can only be prevented if a wall is built which would keep the “illegal immigrants” out—who are claimed to be the cause of all social and economic problems in the US. This is a typical scapegoating strategy, coupled with the evocation of fear and—in a second step—hope, with the promise of a savior—Trump—who will urgently implement all necessary steps to make all problems disappear and guarantee safety and wealth, i.e. will “make America great again” (see Figure 13.2).
Conclusions

The revitalization of debates about borders and walls and their mediatization in Europe, the European Union member states, and beyond since 2014 could be regarded as a response to the mounting influx of refugees from war zones in Iraq, Syria, Sudan, and so forth (Triandafyllidou, Krzyżanowski, and Wodak 2018). These debates reflect a worldwide tendency—i.e. the fortification and securitization of borders, the building of fences and walls, as a way to protect state sovereignty against globalized phenomena such as migration and terrorism—that began in the early 2000s (Sicurella 2018), or as Briese (2011) legitimately argues, much earlier.

The social scientist and essayist Ivan Krastev argues in his essay Twilight in Europe (2017) that the experience of demographic decline should be awarded a central role in explaining the rise of the far-right populist vote and the political agenda to keep “strangers” out. (Krastev has developed his argument mostly in light of East European experiences and particularities. However, his observations may also apply to more general developments and therefore merit consideration.)

Thus, we might ask: what actually happened after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989? After 1989, most East European countries have indeed seen their populations reduced: Poland has lost 2.5 million people, Romania 3.5 million, Bulgaria and East Germany each around 10% of their previous populations. This is why, Krastev argues, the remaining population, mostly older, less educated, and less mobile, suffers from “demographic panic”: the “fear that a country and its population ceases to exist” (Krastev 2017: 50–51). This fear, he continues, might explain why these people are unable to consider migrants and immigration as a solution to fill the demographic gap: They fear being overwhelmed, that their “culture” will become extinct.

Also, in receiving countries after 1989, xenophobia and antisemitism began rising—against the influx of migrants from the former Eastern bloc (Matouschek, Wodak, & Januschek 1995). Austrians, for example, felt threatened by East Europeans and employed similar exclusionary rhetoric as in 2015, however without at first focusing on religion and Islam. These experiences provide much evidence that emigration and immigration can be instrumentalized; scapegoats are easily created to explain the alleged causes of huge economic and social problems which obviously have their roots elsewhere.
Thus, economic problems, specifically after the financial crisis 2008, “the demographic argument”, and fears of acceleration/globalization emphasize the serious disruptions of the social fabric and cohesion of the life world and civil society in late capitalist societies. The racialized exclusionary rhetoric of “our land”, “Heimat”, and the wish to protect “our country” from outside influences and attracts many who harbor such fears and simultaneously hope that far-right populist leaders might be able to turn back the clock to an imagined homogenous society which is nostalgically believed to be safe. In this way, debates about walls signal a massive tension between different ideologies and visions (Bauböck 2019: 14): the anachronistic vision of “the homeland” in the midst of turmoil, insecurity, and loss of stability on the one hand, and the importance of defending democratic values and human rights against authoritarian governments that would rather watch refugees and migrants drown than open the borders of their countries on the other.

Notes

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2 See Delanty, Wodak, and Jones 2011; KhosraviNik 2010; Krzyżanowski and Wodak 2009; Pohl and Wodak 2012; Reisigl and Wodak 2001; Sicurella 2018; Wodak 2015, 2017).


6 Translation: “Freedom Party Councilors Eischer/Resch: Social Democratic Party [SPÖ] Deliberately Steering Migration to Döbling! The FPÖ in Döbling demands: No more Muslim migrants in municipal housing in Döbling! Vienna—As the latest data from wien1x1.at reveals, the municipal housing blocks in Döbling are struggling with an increasing proportion of foreigners. The situation is especially dramatic in the famous Karl-Marx-Hof: By now, over 50% (!) of the inhabitants were not born in Austria. The proportion of inhabitants with a migration background in the Karl-Marx-Hof and other municipal housing in Döbling must therefore be much higher still. ‘The welcome policy of the red-green city government is also having an impact on Döbling. The number of complaints by Austrian municipal housing residents about problems with Muslim neighbors, of whom a not insignificant number have fundamental [sic] values, is rising. The SPÖ must put a stop to this development’, so the Viennese city councilor Michael Eischer, who is from Döbling. The increase of migrants in Döbling’s municipal housing is no coincidence, according to the local FPO party whip Klemens Resch: ‘For years now, the SPÖ has not been taking care of the people of Döbling. Now they are trying to plant voters by giving Muslim migrants preference in the allocation of municipal housing, who form the only remaining voting base of the SPO. The FPO in Döbling will continue to take care of the people of Döbling and will address the problems brought into municipal housing by the Muslim migrants. The slogan must be: No more Muslim migrants in the municipal housing in Döbling!', so Eischer and Resch concluded.”(italics inserted by RW) Via emphasizing the allegedly high number of migrants who are said to receive such housing and by claiming that the “real Viennese” thus might not have access to municipal housing, the FPO appeals to resentment and envy, and attacks the Viennese “red-green” government.


the language of walls

11 It is impossible to cover and present the entire debate about walls during Trump’s presidency in detail in this chapter; moreover, the debate is on-going during the time of writing, and a range of conflicts between the democratically led Congress (since the mid-term elections in November 2018) and the White House dominate the US media and public sphere. In this chapter, I primarily deconstruct the macro-argument and have to refer readers to other detailed studies of Trump’s rhetoric and speeches (e.g. Montgomery 2017; Kreis 2017; Demato 2019).

References


