



Concrete needs no metaphor: Globalized fences as sites of political struggle

Anna Feigenbaum

abstract

In this paper I argue for a conceptualization of material fences as artifacts of globalization, or as what I term ‘globalized fences’. I construct this category to bring together a diversity of fences that share similar attributes, including the separation fence in Israel/Palestine, the fence at the U.S./Mexico border, the fences surrounding immigration detention centers and the fences fortifying the temporary sites of global superpower gatherings. From this overview of globalized fences, I move to examine such fences from the vantage point of protest networks. Here I look at two specific types of struggles lodged against, and at the site of, such fences. The first includes resistance that uses the ‘fence as canvas’ and the second at struggles that engage the ‘fence as ICT’. I look at these two sets of protest practices as communicative acts that are able to ‘make fences talk,’ insisting that concrete is far more than a metaphor for the violence of containment.

Specific tricks have to be invented to make them talk, that is, to offer descriptions of themselves, to produce scripts of what they are making others – humans or non-humans – do. (Latour, 2005: 79)

Why fences?

Numerous scholars and journalists have argued that fences – both material and symbolic – stand as a mark of the injustices of globalization. While capital, development projects and private security firms often move freely between nations, people are increasingly contained within fences – in prisons, detention centers, at militarized borders and in ghettoized geographical enclosures. At the same time, fences are erected to protect the mobile neo-fortresses of globalization such as G8 summits, Free Trade Area of the Americas conference, World Trade Organization gathering and Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America meetings. Back in 2002 Naomi Klein wrote, ‘Thirteen years after the celebrated collapse of the Berlin Wall, we are surrounded by fences yet again, cut off from each other, from the earth and from our own ability to imagine that change is possible’ (Klein, 2002: xx). Another eight years on, following the internationally celebrated 20th anniversary of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, such fences remain.

Yet where there are fences, there is resistance. Struggles are lodged from village farmlands, prison yards and public street corners. People's protests take on many forms including: petitions, silent vigils, demonstrations, memorials, town meetings, environmental investigations, court cases, rebel clown brigades and teddy bear catapults. All of which, in different ways, serve as challenges to the construction and operation of fences. While there are many differences that make up each encounter with perimeter security, there is a resonance between people's struggles, something shared that echoes off the concrete and razor wire.

In this paper I propose a model for thinking about current fences as cultural material artifacts of globalization, upon and through which communicative struggles are played out. I use the term fences broadly to include any light weight metal and wood structures designed to restrict or prevent movement. While at times I differentiate walls from fences in structural terms, perimeter security networks are often made up of both. As such, at times I move between fence and wall to look at how they operate in a network, as well as how they function in relation to each other. To pilfer some terminology from the US Department of Homeland Security, I view them together as part of a 'toolbox of fencing solutions'.¹

In addition, as the rhetoric around perimeter security often intentionally obscures differences between 'fences' and 'walls'. A notable example of this can be seen in the different languages used to describe the Israeli 'Security Fence'/'Separation Wall'. Although this structure is made up of both fences and walls – using standard technical definitions – social activists will generally employ the term 'wall' when describing the separation barrier, whereas official government descriptions use the term 'fence'.² A consideration of the distinct physical features of various perimeter-security networks can therefore inform analyses of the political and symbolic communication that surrounds them and gives them meaning.

In what follows I first identify the common features of what I term 'globalized fences' and discuss their role in perimeter-security-networks made up of multiple technologies and people. I construct this category both to create a working subset of research objects and to be able to bring together a diversity of fences that share similar attributes. I then discuss two specific sets of resistance to fences, arguing that an analysis of how perimeter security systems work must look both toward the marketplaces that motivate their construction and the protests that disrupt their operation. Moments of political struggle hold both ethical and methodological significance. As Bruno Latour argues, objects in a network become most visible at times of innovation and breakdown (Latour, 2005: 81-82). It is when the fence is contested, transformed or destroyed, that it is rendered discernable. At these moments, the fence, that flat surface so frequently

1 Items listed in the DHS toolbox of fencing solutions include: steel picket-style fence set in concrete, vehicle bollards, steel beam vehicle fences and concrete jersey walls with steel mesh. See http://www.dhs.gov/files/programs/gc_1207842692831.shtm.

2 For example, the official Israeli Defense Establishment uses the phrases 'Security Fence' and 'Fence Against Terror' (see <http://www.securityfence.mod.gov.il/Pages/Eng/default.htm>), while grassroots campaigns take names such as 'Stop the Wall' (<http://www.stophthewall.org/>) and 'Anarchists Against the Wall' (<http://www.awalls.org/>).

reduced to a backdrop, a landscape, a mere signifier for some larger atrocity, comes to matter as wire and concrete.

Globalized fences

While mass produced metal fencing and barbed wire were not introduced until the 19th century, border and fortress walls that served military functions have been around for thousands of years. The earliest known fortifications were discovered at Jericho in the period 6000-8000 B.C. and the oldest known defended gates are dated back to 5400 B.C. (Keeley et al., 2007: 83-85). Ancient Greek and Roman fortification structures served both as livestock corrals and had defensive military purposes (Keely et al. 2007). The symbolic aspects of these fortifications also date back to this time period. Aristotle's *Politics* suggest that perimeter fortifications should 'contribute to the embellishment of a city' (Lawrence in Keely et al, 2007: 82). As Keely et al. explain, 'walls may be built higher and gate towers longer than military necessity requires to intimidate and impress' (82). Openings in fortifications were also places that people gathered, where rituals and assemblies took place, where trade was conducted and in some cases, where court was held (82).

I would suggest that what Keeley et al. determined as the 'universal features' of historic and prehistoric fortifications remain key features of today's perimeter security networks. Whether built along borders, around bases, prisons or temporary meeting places, the symbolic aspects of these defensive architectures and the communicative or social dimensions of their openings are still of primary importance in understanding how perimeter security networks operate. This project investigates contemporary fences on a global scale, working from a conceptualization of material fences as artifacts of globalization, or what I term 'globalized fences'. These fences can be identified by four commonalities: they serve transnational security functions (particularly in a post 9/11 homeland security context), they are contracted through multinational companies, they are built with materials imported from different nations, and they integrate 'virtual' and physical technologies. In what follows, I'll give a short set of examples of what I mean by each of these criteria.

First, in contrast to previous intra and inter-national security perimeters such as the Berlin Wall, 'globalized fences' serve transnational security functions. Geographer John W. Donaldson, among others, argues that there has been a shift in the justifications for constructing national perimeter security networks from defense against state-to-state conflicts to protection from the threat of smaller factions – terrorists, insurgents, illegal immigrants and smugglers. This is even the case where a fence is built as a national boundary, as can be seen in the case of India/Pakistan and Israel/Palestine (Donaldson, 2005: 174). At present the dominant discourses around security argue that nations without secure boundaries will be potential harbors for trans-national militants and terrorists. This has led to a shift in border security that thinks beyond the nation-state. As Deborah Waller Meyers argues, recent US border security has taken 'a more coordinated inter-agency and inter-governmental approach, as well as greater reliance upon equipment, technology, and support originally developed for military use' (Meyers, 2005: 19).

Fences constructed around superpower gatherings such as G8 summits and WTO meetings are similarly built to provide transnational security. In these cases temporary defensive fortifications are built around gatherings of elite politicians and world leaders from different nations. The policing of such protests involves sharing of strategies, training and labor across different nations, a method of policing that has arisen out of and in response to globalization (della Porta et al., 2006). Detention centers can also be read as part of immigration-security networks that justify the detainment of human beings inside prisons to protect nations from ‘illegal’ migrants and terrorists. The US Homeland Security’s *Secure Border Initiative* called for 400 new Immigration Enforcement Agents and 100 new Deportation Officers and 2,000 new beds in detention facilities as part of their efforts to gain ‘operational control of both the northern and southern borders within five years’ (DHS.gov). Here again the purpose is not to hold entire populations of people, it is only a small fraction of those people deemed ‘illegal’ that could be imprisoned at any time.

Second, globalized fences are contracted through multinational companies. The most common of these contracts are with construction companies, telecommunications companies and increasingly infrastructural and organizational consultancies. Those companies designing and operating ‘globalized fences’ include the large Israeli firm Magal Security that operates in 70 countries securing borders, prisons, military bases and VIP residences. Another major player in fence security is Group 4 Securicor, notorious in the UK for losing prisoners during transit in the 1990s. After a rebranding in 2004, G4S has come to be at the forefront of prison and immigration detention center privatization in the UK (Corporate Watch, 2003). Group 4 is partnered to the US military, protects NATO buildings in Europe, operates 8 immigration facilities in The Netherlands and provides oil pipeline security in the Kazakhstan region – interestingly, oil pipelines are the next market that Magal, according to its company website, hopes to provide service for soon. Similarly, in the telecoms sector, major corporations involved in perimeter-security operations include AT&T, Verizon, Hewlett Packard (HP), IBM, Microsoft and Motorola. These companies have entered contracts in the US and abroad providing services ranging from biometric scanning to ID cards to radios for border patrol agents.

A third shared characteristic is that globalized fences are built with materials imported from different nations. Like many goods in the ‘era of globalization,’ individual parts are often produced and assembled in a variety of different countries. Materials such as concrete, steel and microchips, among others, are imported for the construction of perimeter-security-networks. For example, parts of the US-Mexico border fence constructed in 1994 were made from ‘leftover’ steel panels that had served as runways during the Vietnam War. More recently, in 2007 it was disclosed that steel from China was being used to build at least 10% of the new parts of the US-Mexico border fence. This caused uproar from the US Congressional Steel Caucus that made local, national and international news.

Finally, globalized fences integrate virtual and physical technologies. The development of digital and wireless technologies has shaped the design of new surveillance equipment from body heat sensors that allow patrollers and security officers to locate bodies in the dark to Unmanned Aerial Vehicles or UAVs that hover over the border

using advanced video and sensor technology to spot would-be crossers. These controversial ‘smart fence’ and ‘virtual fence’ technologies work in conjunction with human patrols, communications devices and physical barriers. For example, the fence constructed in India along the Line of Control consists of a 340 mile long fence electrified in some places as well as a variety of motion and thermal heat sensors. Much of this technology deployed in India is manufactured in Israel. These ‘smart’ technologies are also used in places to cut down on human labor or to replace physical barriers in low traffic zones and in zones where erecting a fence is not an option (due to land disputes, environmental protections, etc.).

While the stark contrasts and particularities of all fenced locations demand contextual analyses, my aim here is not to account for the biopolitics of distinct perimeters, borders or enclosures. Rather, I seek to highlight the significance of the fence as a particular kind of technological object that shapes and mediates interpersonal and political communication. My approach loosely follows methods for thinking about networks outlined in the work of Bruno Latour. I combine this with cultural materialist work on containers and scholarship on the affective dynamics of technologies as mediators of social life.

Fence theory

The maintenance (or semblance) of securing a fence requires ‘cooperation’ between a number of different people: government officials, lawyers, builders, police, soldiers, private security guards, etc. It also requires engagements between people and technologies. Many technology theorists have made the argument that ‘technology’ does not refer only to self-contained technical objects, but also to the social, economic and cultural systems which physically construct and give meaning to what we think of as ‘technologies.’³ One of the most influential of these is Actor-Network Theory. Science and Technology Studies scholars Bruno Latour and Michel Callon are generally credited with initially developing Actor-Network Theory in the early 1980s (Sismondo, 2009). Since then it has been taken up, critiqued and transformed by a number of theorists (Haraway, 1991; Law and Hassard, 1999; Latour, 2005). As it is concerned with relations between individuals, groups and objects, this approach is useful for analyses of ‘technology’ that address power and its potential transformation.

Actor-Network Theory provides a method for thinking about how interdependencies between people, groups, objects and other ‘networks’ emerge and function. It is particularly useful for thinking about how human and non-human agents are always enmeshed. Thierry Bardini offers this illustrative summary:

[Actor-Network Theory] describes the progressive constitution of a network in which both human and non-human actors assume identities according to prevailing strategies of interaction. Actors’ identities and qualities are defined during negotiations between representatives of human and non-human actants... The most important of these negotiations is “translation”, a multifaceted interaction in which actors (1) construct common definitions and meanings, (2) define

3 See for example Ruth Cowan (1985) and Judy Wajcman (1991).

representatives, and (3) co-opt each other in the pursuit of individual and collective objectives (Bardini, 1997: ft 3).

Employing this notion of ‘translation’, the process of joining together to secure a perimeter can be read as a series of negotiations in which human actors (police, soldiers, government officials) and non-human objects (wire mesh, fence posts, razor wire, guard towers, thermo-dynamic sensors, cctv cameras) enter into particular relations with each other. Each human actor might have different motivations for containing land and bodies (adhering to legal codes, maintaining a job or reputation, increasing the value of property), but through their construction of the tasks needed to achieve a common goal they negotiate a way to function as a whole ‘security network’. Describing post 1990s shifts in US-Mexico border security, Meyers argues:

border control has also evolved from a low-tech, one-agency exercise... to a far more encompassing concept including multiple agencies, the extensive use of technology and a broad geographic focus which not only include the entire US border and coastline but also projects to transit states and countries of origin (Meyers, 2005: 2).

Again this high-tech, multinational approach is a key characteristic of perimeter-security in a globalized world.

While any fence must always be read in relation to its functions in a network, there are also particular qualities of the fence as a technology that call for closer inspection. First introducing the idea of a ‘container technology’, Lewis Mumford argued that the role of ‘containers’ was often overlooked because of scholars’ focus on tools. He suggested that because containers were associated with the feminine, scholars disregarded their significance as technological objects (Mumford cited in Sofia, 2000). Zoe Sofia picks up Mumford’s discussion of gender and container technologies. She argues that containers are thought of as passive and static, rather than as active objects. This, she says, has led to a lack of consideration of how containing – storing or holding – is shaped by, and shapes, human relations. Sofia aims to correct this ‘phallic bias’ by reformulating the act of containing. She draws from Donald Winnicott’s work on space to argue that containers are not just empty vessels or objects that passively hold things. Rather, they are what we ‘put stuff into, and thereby identify with’ (Sofia, 2000: 185). Sofia’s conception of containment borrows from Winnicott’s ‘intersubjectivist accounts’ that view the ‘holding and supply’ of space ‘as the result of maternal labours’ which require ‘care’ (190-191).

Similarly, Jean-Pierre Warnier argues that key to the interpretation of containers as objects is an understanding of sensori-motorcity, or in other words, how these objects affect and are affected by senses and movement (Warnier, 2006: 191). Reviel Netz makes a related claim in his history of barbed wire, writing, ‘[by] cutting through the boundary of our skins, you can act to protect the boundaries of your property, your prison, your border’ (Netz, 2004: 39). Oliver Razac also argues that barbed wire has an active relationship with bodies in excess of its role to contain and separate. This relationship, he writes, ‘occurs at the subtlest of levels, that of people’s awareness of suffering and their inclination to avoid it’ (Razac, 2002: 89). In this way, the wire simultaneously de-humanizes and returns one to the body as a site for injury and suffering. In addition, the presence of the wire assumes the bodies’ desire to cross over

the fence. These features of barbed wire express its material, symbolic and affective dimensions. The ways in which bodies act and react to the wire raise questions of embodiment at the fence as a site of political struggle. More than just a technology overloaded with cultural and political meanings, the fence is an active, networked object that shapes political practice and communication.

For the remainder of this paper I turn from this broad conceptualization of ‘globalized fences’ to a discussion of specific political actions that unfold against, and at the site of, such fences. I attempt to look from the point of view of the fence as a communicative location of political struggle. To do this I center my discussion around two key sets of protest practices that illuminate the distinctiveness of the fence as a technology in perimeter-security networks, namely, such actions that engage first, the fence as canvas and second, the fence as an information communication technology or ICT.

Surfaces – Fence as canvas

The surface of a fence can be full of holes, anti-climb slits, and rusted openings. Some are polished, others painted. They can be flat, smooth or textured sites, some covered in skinny wood slats diagonally laid to prevent bill postings. Yet one thing perimeter fences often share, particularly at sites of struggle, are brandished surfaces. They display graffiti, affixed objects, fragments of torn clothes, cut and bent wire – remnants of protest, of touch, of human and non-human presence.

In their recent work, Mark Halsey and Alison Young argue that there is an affective dimension of graffiti writing. Based on extensive interviews with writers, they argue that graffiti writing is ‘an *affective* process that *does things* to writers bodies’ (and the bodies of onlookers) as much as to the bodies of metal, concrete and plastic’ (Halsey and Young, 2006: 276-277, emphasis in original). Similarly, I consider graffiti writing and other practices that transform the fence into an apparatus for expression as affective engagements through which people forge connections with others and with their surroundings, often confronting or re-imagining conceptions of themselves as political subjects in relation to the spaces around them.

Dean MacCannell speaks of the social and communicative dimensions of the 25 foot high concrete portions of the Israeli ‘security fence’ arguing that the wall functions, ‘as a signboard bearing a message the wall builder or a graffiti artist wishes to communicate’ (MacCannell, 2005: 38-39). Ruchama Marton and Dalit Baum describe this as ‘opaque concrete’, arguing,

It is opaque in order to prevent the sight of misery and suffering on the other side [as this] might trigger compassion for those people, might develop identification with them. This must be avoided at all costs, because otherwise the question might arise: Who caused this suffering? (Marton and Baum, 2005: 216).

The answers to this question are often what is written and imaged on the surface of the Israeli wall. On this fence-as-canvas one finds accusations, calls for compassion, images of suffering and visions of a world that might be otherwise.

In 2005 the now famous British street artist known as Banksy, did a series of images on the Israeli wall. Both acclaimed and detested, his controversial graffiti evoked a range of emotional responses from those living at the wall, as well as the thousands of people who saw these images circulated in print and online. A number of Palestinians felt the artwork was unrealistic, engaging a visual rhetoric of hope that distracted attention from the brutal, everyday realities of the occupied territories. In December 2008, Checkpoint Watchers Machal C. and Tamar Fleishman discussed what had come of these paintings in Qalandiya:

The astonishing Pentimento displays on the Qalandiya wall exhibit a large range of insights that have been collected through out the years: One of the first graffitizes to have been painted on the wall over three years ago (November 2005), which presented a child holding a bucket of paint and drawing a crack in the wall as an escape channel, was criticized by the Palestinians as an effort to 'make the wall nicer to look at'. It has now been completely altered: the crack in the wall has been filled with bricks. There is no way out! Perhaps it is a symbol to end the naivety and optimism. (machsomwatch.org, 12 Dec 2008)

Graffiti is often recorded in Machsom Watch women's daily reports. More than a backdrop or description of scenery, words and images sprawled on the perimeter surfaces of the checkpoint become an active form. The cycle of graffiti production – creation, visibility and erasure – is mapped out across the course of watchers' reports. In this sense graffiti can be seen as a communicative event or living art. Returning to Hansley and Young this prompts questions about the affective dimension of graffiti writing – about what occurs between the surface of the wall and the bodies of onlookers (Hansley and Young, 2006: 276-277).

In May of 2009 Machsom watchers Rony I and Tamar F recorded the final days of the Longest Letter project, an initiative of the larger Dutch and Palestinian activist/NGO project *Send a Message* (sendamessage.nl). For this project, Muslim scholar and human rights activist Farid Esack was asked to write a letter addressing the current situation in Palestine. His letter compares human rights abuses in Palestine to apartheid South Africa:

We call upon the world to act now against the dispossession of the Palestinians. We must end the daily humiliation at checkpoints and the disgrace of an Apartheid Wall that cuts people off from their land, livelihood, and history. [<http://www.sendamessage.nl/the-longest-letter>]

This letter was then written onto the Israeli wall, running 2,625 meters. International sponsors were asked for €15.00 contributions, each of which sponsored 1.5 meters of writing. Rony and Tamar report:

Ever since the wall had been under constructions we had been documenting the graffiti paintings on it. About a month ago we had first come across the beginning of an inscription on the upper part of the wall at Ar-Ram. We returned to see what had become of it and tried to find out who was writing it... We learned that what had started out as a business opportunity for a group of Palestinians and Dutch, had materialized under an ideological principle and turned out to be an expression of the protest against the occupation... We felt it was important to document this project, as we know that the paintings on the wall don't usually remain untouched for very long. (machsomwatch.org, 10 May 2009)

Here the ephemeral life of graffiti – and particularly of graffiti in highly visible, politically potent locations – prompts Machsom watchers to create a visual and textual

record of this communication practice as event. The wall is explicitly seen as an object that actively holds and communicates information, or to return to Sofia's term, it can be read as a container technology that can unfold memories (Sofia, 2000). In her study of lesbian archives and lesbian public cultures, Ann Cvetkovich argues that memories of trauma are 'embedded not just in narratives but in material artifacts' (Cvetkovich, 2003: 7). Objects, such as photographs, invested with emotional and sentimental value, can be as much a document of trauma as a policy report or a personal memoir. While not the kind of archive Cvetkovich examines, I would suggest that, through people's actions, the fence becomes another sort of container: an ephemeral archive, as well as an archive of ephemera. The open mesh surface of a fence provides an ideal surface onto which one can affix objects. As they did so the fence becomes a collective documentation. In the place of detailed social statistics or scientific studies, it offers objects that hold people's stories. It can become, in Ann Snitow's words, 'an intense visual record' (Snitow, 1985: 45).

Speaking of pottery as material culture, Jean-Pierre Warnier writes that surfaces 'may be coated or receive a gloss or some other treatment to protect it or adorn it as well as to enhance the emotional dimension of its sensori-motor manipulations' (Warnier, 2006: 193). At the site of struggle, the surface of the fence-as-canvas comes to tell a unique story. Each fence has a style, an identifiable aesthetic. In Palestine: splatterings of paint in red, green, black and blue; scrawls of what is sometimes impossible to say out loud in public, testified here in Arabic, Hebrew, English, Spanish... These walls can talk.

At the same time, work must be done to get them talking, to uncover the stories of their past surfaces. Over time the fence-as-canvas erodes and transforms, becomes buried in other meanings. Objects are taken off and torn down from fences. Wire is removed and remolded. Entire concrete slabs and posts are even relocated. Palestinian artist and activist Suleiman Mansour tells interviewer Aaron Lakoff about a piece he was painting on the wall:

I started this type of painting, but I didn't finish it. You know they were putting the wall, they used to put pieces and then remove it again, so I started working on this piece which represents the hands of Adam and God as Michelangelo did it. But of course I separated the hands, I made a big space between the two hands. But then they took the pieces and I couldn't finish the painting (Lakoff, n.d.). Mansour explains that most Palestinian art is directed towards the situation here, and the occupation and the wall and the checkpoints, and everything that makes people angry. Of course the art brings this out. We never had a Palestinian art academy because during the Occupation it was forbidden for Palestinians to make two academic institutions... So you can see how they think, you know, the land is not yours, and you shouldn't express whatever happens to you. (Lakoff, n.d.)

Archaeologist Yvonne Marshall suggests that it is the struggles of a society and the archaeologies of its resistance that form 'an integral part of the processes which create, constitute and change apparatuses of societal control' (Marshall, n.d.: 2). However, it is not enough to construct or mark resistance as a monument or to preserve slabs of walls and wires in a museum under a glass case. We need new ways to excavate and archive resistance, ways that do not erase their sense of place, of context, of acts of transfer and circulation and destruction.

Openings – Fences as information communication technologies

Chain link, mesh and taut wire fences are often used when it is deemed necessary for security patrollers to be able to see or pass objects through an enclosure. Additionally, fences made of mesh wire are far less expensive to build both in terms of materials and labor than solid concrete or steel walls. For example, whereas portions of the Israeli ‘security fence’ in densely populated urban areas are made of concrete, the majority of the 500 kilometers long serpentine structure is full of openings. Marton and Baum argue:

The Zionist Israeli Collective does not want to see the Palestinians, but it finds it necessary to oversee them, to watch them with nonhuman sight, through a gun sight. ‘It is easier to shoot through a fence than it is through a wall’, remarked one Israeli activist in the Mas’ha Peace Camp. (Marton and Baum, 2005: 216)

The openings in fences allow for violence and surveillance. They are where negotiations are made, where empty chatter fills silences and frustrations play out. They are the place of exception, where verbal and physical abuse becomes the norm (Agamben, 1998).

At the fence as a site of struggle communication occurs between many different groups of people: guards and prisoners, soldiers and civilians, refugees and citizens. In the final section of this paper I consider openings in fences as the place of control *and* communication. I am interested in how fences mediate interactions at the site of violence, functioning as a vessel of communication that shapes and is shaped by the act of speaking. Like other technologies that facilitate the travel of information, fences become things people talk through, yet are never considered or included in discussions of ICTs. The definition of an Information Communication Technology used by the World Bank, reads:

Consists of the hardware, software, networks, and media for the collection, storage, processing, transmission and presentation of information (voice, data, text, images), as well as related services. [go.worldbank.org]

My provocation here to think of the fence as an information communication technology is not necessarily meant to redress this or other definitions of an ICT. Rather, I want to draw attention to the fence as a technological device that comes to mediate communication and information sharing between people. While it may at first seem merely metaphorical to describe the fence as an ICT, consider that throughout the early 1900s in rural America people hooked up telephones to lines of barbed wire to be able to talk with neighbors without having to pay network service fees. Alan Krell writes, ‘Instead of the more costly procedure of erecting poles and wires, many simply hooked lines onto existing pasture fences’ (Krell, 2002: 89). In what follows I look at two examples of fence-based struggles, the 2002 Woomera protests and the 2008 closure of Friendship Park. I focus on the communicative functions of fences in each of these events.

In 2002 nearly 1000 migrant rights campaigners gathered outside the Woomera detention centre, a detainee holding prison in a remote part of South Australia, well known for numerous human rights abuses during its operation from 1999-2003. At the 2002 protest the fence surrounding the Woomera complex was torn down by both those inside and outside, leading to the escape of over 40 detainees. While most escapees were 'hunted' down (in the language mainstream media including BBC news uses) and later deported, this event lives on in the collective memory of detainees, migrants' rights campaigners and immigration authorities.

A description of Woomera offered by Luther Blisset⁴ reads, 'The Woomera detention centre is all dust, tin sheds, riot cops and razor wire, but it still looks like an armed enclave, a roman camp' (Blisset, n.d.). Blisset's scene shows the interlinking of people and technology in perimeter security networks, as well as the underlying features that contemporary fence structures share with our understanding of historical fortifications and war zones. In testimonial accounts gathered under the title, 'Remembering Woomera', hosted on the website antipopper.com, protest participants recall the days of action that occurred at the perimeter of the detention centre. One solidarity participant recounts:

I suppose a bunch of protesters, advancing resolutely to shake hands and speak with asylum seekers through the fence can be *made* to appear violent when a bunch of cops are trying to disperse them with riot gear and horses. When a horse came out of nowhere, pushing me aside, and the mounted cop lightly kicked me in the head, smashing my glasses, I said, 'What are you doing? I'm only trying to say hello!'

Another protester at Woomera remembers this scene:

A man with whom I shook hands [through the fence] had gotten his head caught in the bales of razorwire that were on either side of the double fence. The razors were cutting through his ear. Another had been cut across the chest, and there was blood everywhere ('Remembering Woomera').

In both of these recollections the fence is described as vessel through which people communicate. The solidarity demonstrators outside are able to talk to, at times touch, the detainees on the inside of the fence. The fence is what one reaches through to express sympathy, desperation, longing, panic – and perhaps most of all – a sense of presence.

Friendship Park provides another more recent example of how fences perform as information communication technologies. Recognized since late 1800s as a gathering place for families and communities separated by the US-Mexico border, Friendship Park is a place of fence-mediated communication. Also considered sacred ground for Native Americans, the park is embedded with political and spiritual affections. For years this fence at Friendship Park served as a gathering place for families and friends separated by the border. A place romanticized by journalists, where 'lovers clasp fingers

4 Luther Blisset is a collective pseudonym first used in Italy in the early 1990s and now primarily used in Australia by artists and social activists. Blisset was a well known Australian footballer that played for A.C. Milan.

through the mesh' (NPR 'Fence Supplants Friendship') and people share 'tamales and news through small gaps in the tattered chain-link' (Archibold, 2008).

In early 2009 the US government announced the closure of the park to make room for 'triple fence' border wall as part of the broader secure border initiative. Signs were affixed to the temporary fencing demarcating the area listing new rules, among them: 'The exchange of items through, over or under the fence is prohibited; Physical contact with individuals in Mexico is not permitted'. The taller and thicker border fence now prohibits direct conversation and human contact, though people still gather, shouting across the gaps. The Border Meetup Group, a community organization that has gathered people together from either side of the wall over the past four years to hold language exchanges and readings. Now they use amplification technologies to transmit participants' voices. Families and friends that continue to gather at the park sometimes talk over cell phones and walkie-talkies while catching glimpses of each other through gaps in the fence (voices of sandiego.org).

I want to think about interactions through these openings as communication practices that are mediated by fences to be able to examine the fence in relation to other ICTs. As the field of communication studies currently stands, ICTs remain almost exclusively the domain of development policy and research. They are generally heralded as the good containers, the tools of empowerment, the media through which people and communities can facilitate their belonging. A telling example of this public relations rhetoric can be found in the recent European Commission's pamphlet 'On target! Impacts of European ICT Research', available online and distributed in colorful glossy print by this EU's publication office (EU, 'On Target!'). Two declarations of success on the front page of the brochure read:

- Do you know how the billions of Euros spent on ICT research and innovation help society tackle major challenges in health, learning, security, energy, or the environment?
- Do you know how knowledge sharing, partnerships and networks contribute to ultrafast internet, swallowable cameras for surgery, or emotional robots caring for the elderly?

Such pre-codings of ICTs as benevolent benefactors renders invisible, or at best marginal, all those other objects, devices, apparatus and platforms that mediate communication. It obscures the prevalence and significance of those fences invoked in this paper, as well as all those more discrete fences, barriers, gates, barred up and bullet-proof glassed windows that increasingly mediate face-to-face communication in much of the modernized world. To exclude these technologies from our definitions of ICTs is to act as if they are in fact exceptions, rather than guiding principles, architectures and artifacts of our time (Agamben, 1998).

Moreover, in the age of 'smart fences' that integrate so-called virtual and physical technologies, it is impossible to bracket off questions about how the very same developments that give us high speed internet, miniature robots and elderly care are those that bring us advancements in militarized technologies used to maim, kill and destroy humans, animals, environments and infrastructures (Dyer-Witford, 1999).

The development of digital and wireless technologies has shaped the design of new surveillance equipment from body heat sensors that allow patrollers and security officers to locate bodies in the dark to Unmanned Aerial Vehicles or UAVs that hover over the border using advanced video and sensor technology to spot would-be crossers. These controversial ‘smart fence’ and ‘virtual fence’ technologies work in conjunction with human patrols, communications devices and physical barriers. For example, the fence constructed in India along the Line of Control consists of a 340 mile long fence electrified in some places, as well as a variety of motion and thermal heat sensors. Much of this technology deployed in India is manufactured in Israel. These ‘smart’ technologies are also used in places to cut down on human labor or to replace physical barriers in low traffic zones and in zones where erecting a fence is not an option (due to land disputes, environmental protections, etc.).⁵

In addition, as global producers of ICTs are often manufacturing goods for a range of sectors, there is a particular need to draw attention to the fact that the very companies providing the technology and infrastructure for laptops, mobile phones and wireless internet are also making and supplying technologies for security regimes. In a telling recent example, Huneed Technologies, a company that has developed a laptop ‘designed to withstand severe environmental conditions such as heavy rain, high & low temperature and high humidity’, also recently donated \$7million worth of fiber optic fencing to the Minutemen who are currently constructing segments of the US-Mexico border wall on a volunteer basis, perhaps hoping the US government would take note of the efficiency of their product.

Conclusion

In this paper I offer a conceptualization of ‘globalized fences’ that highlight the material qualities of fences and their roles in perimeter-security networks in order to better understand the relationship between the different kinds of fences that continue to spring up and expand both within and between nations. In addition, I introduced two types of resistant actions that engage the fence as a site of struggle: the fence as canvas and the fence as ICT. Here I showed how fences at sites of struggle become platforms for and through which people communicate. I argued that considering fences – and related security technologies – as ICTs offers a clearer account of both the positive and negative ways that new technologies are utilized.

These documentations are only a beginning. There are many more fences and many more forms of resistance to them, including cutting, climbing, trespassing, tunneling and remodeling. As I gather archival research and collect anecdotes along this sometimes seemingly endless trail of fences, I am guided by Bruno Latour’s somewhat playful proposal for how to study objects. He writes, ‘Specific tricks have to be invented to make them talk, that is, to offer descriptions of themselves, to produce

5 In March 2010 the US froze funds allocated to constructing parts of the planned ‘virtual fence’ along the border. Part of the broader SBInet project, this funding was cut off due to missed target deadlines and the overuse of funds. The money is planned to be reallocated for alternative perimeter security projects.

scripts of what they are making others – humans or non-humans – do’ (Latour, 2005: 79). Perhaps, put simply, the goal of my project is this. It is an effort to get these fences talking, to make people’s stories of struggle echo off the concrete and razor wire.

references

- Archibold, R.C. (2008) ‘US-Mexico border will split Friendship Park’, *New York Times*, [<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/22/world/americas/22iht-22border.17155357.html>].
- Agamben, G. (1998) *Homo sacer: Sovereign power and bare life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Beuabien, J. (2009) ‘Fence supplants friendship’ [<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=100155361>].
- Blisset, L. (2002) ‘Remembering Woomera’, [<http://antipopper.com/papers/remembering-woomera/>].
- Cowan, R. (1983) *More work for mother: The ironies of household technology from the open hearth to the microwave*. New York: Basic Books.
- Cvetkovich, A. (2003) *An archive of feelings: Trauma, sexuality, and lesbian public cultures*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- della Porta, D., A. Peterson and H. Reiter (2006) *The policing transnational protest*. London: Ashgate.
- Department of Homeland Security (n.d.) ‘Fact sheet: Secure border initiative’, press release 11 February 2005, [http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/releases/press_release_0794.shtm].
- Donaldson, J.W. (2005) ‘Fencing the Line: Analysis of the recent rise in security measures along disputed and undisputed boundaries’, in E. Zureik and B.M. Salter (eds) *Global surveillance and policing: Borders, security, identity*. Portland: Willan Publishing.
- Dyer-Witheford, N. (1999) *CyberMarx: Cycles and circuits of struggle in high technology capitalism*. Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- European Commission (n.d.) ‘On Target!’, European Commission Press Office, [ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/ict/docs/ict-impact-brochure_en.pdf].
- Halsey, M. and Young, A. (2006) ‘Our desires are ungovernable: Writing graffiti in urban space’, *Theoretical criminology*, 10(3): 275-306.
- Haraway, D. (1991) *Simians, cyborgs and women*. New York: Routledge.
- Keely, L.H., M. Fontana and R. Quick (2007) ‘Baffles and bastions: The universal features of fortifications’, *Journal of archaeological research*, 15(1): 55-95.
- Klein, N. (2002) *Fences and windows*. New York: Picador.
- Krell, A. (2002) *The devil’s rope: A cultural history of barbed wire*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Lakoff, A. (nd.) ‘Cracked and shrinking maps: An interview with Palestinian artist Suleiman Mansour’, *Aaron Reports*, [<http://aaron.resist.ca/cracked-and-shrinking-maps-an-interview-with-palestinian-artist-suleiman-mansour>].
- Latour, B. (2005) *Reassembling the social*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Law, J. and J. Hassard (1999) *Actor network theory and after*. New York: Wiley and Blackwell.
- MacCannell, D. (2005) ‘Primitive separations’, in M. Sorkin (eds) *Against the wall*. New York and London: New Press.
- Marshall, Y. (n.d.) ‘Archaeologies of resistance’. University of Southampton.
- Marton, R. and D. Baum (2005) ‘Transparent wall, opaque gates’ in M. Sorkin (eds) *Against the wall*. New York and London: New Press.
- Meyers D.W. (2005) ‘Us border enforcement: From horseback to high-tech’, *MPI insight*, 7(November): 1-31.
- Netz, R. (2004) *Barbed wire: An ecology of modernity*. Middleton: Wesleyan University Press.
- Razac, O. (2002) *Barbed wire*, Trans. J. Kneight. New York and London: New Press.
- Sismondo, S. (2009) *An introduction to science and technology studies*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Snitow, A. (1985) ‘Pictures for 10 million women’, *Frontiers: A journal of women’s studies*, 8(2): 45-49.

Wajcman, J. (1991) *Feminism confronts technology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Warnier, J. (2006). 'Inside and outside: Surfaces and containers', in C. Tilly, W. Keane, S. Kuechler, M. Rowlands and P. Spyer (eds) *Handbook of material culture*. London: Sage.

the author

Anna Feigenbaum is an Assistant Professor of Communications at Richmond, The American International University in London. In 2008 she worked as an LSE Fellow in the Department of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Her research explores the historical and contemporary significance of media and communication practices in social justice protest networks. She is a founding member of the Creative Resistance Research Network and an active participant in climate justice and migrant rights campaigns.
E-mail: Anna.Feigenbaum@richmond.ac.uk