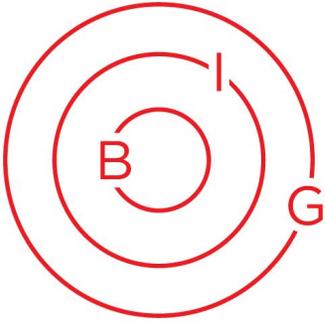




# **BORDERS IN GLOBALIZATION**





## **Borders in Globalization Research Project 93**

---

# **The Role of Physical Symbols and Objects in Subaltern Experiences with International Borders**

**Anelynda Mielke**

**Abstract:** This paper attempts to explore the centrality of symbolic objects in border struggles, building on Subaltern Studies, political theory and visual culture literatures. It first explicates the claims of Subaltern Studies founder Ranajit Guha (1983), who suggested that rebel violence in India should be considered a political act, despite its lack of conformity with ‘politics’ as takes place within official channels. He acknowledged the centrality of symbolic objects, which solidified class divides and thus had to be challenged in order to overthrow oppressive structures. Guha’s claims are discussed in conjunction with those made by Jacques Rancière (1999), whose telling of Herodotus’s tale of the Scythian slave rebellion acknowledges the importance of symbolism in the subjugation of subaltern classes. The work of Bruno Latour (2004) in outlining the field of *Dingpolitik*, a politics centered on objects, is then discussed along with those of Actor-Network Theorists like Michel Callon. These theories are discussed as they relate and contrast with the work of Guha and Rancière. The theoretical claims and contextual work of these theorists will be examined for their relevance to the context of the Canadian border, using a comparative study with the border struggle around the Israeli Wall or separation barrier in the West Bank and Gaza. One man’s fight in Montréal, Canada to escape imprisonment in a church and attain the right to remain in his adoptive country is used as a comparative case with the Israel/Palestine struggle around the Wall. The paper seeks to show how physical objects play a central role in the Subaltern (marginal) entity’s struggle against aggressive State practices and policies in Canada, as they do in other parts of the world.

## Introduction: Things at the Border

---

The border is a space that indelibly impacts the bodies that make contact with it, a force of image- and subject-construction. The border is for the ‘legitimate’ crosser a space of ineluctable over-representation. Passing a customs counter in any Canadian (and increasingly in countries of the Global South as well) involves a combination of digital storage of fingerprints, representation of one’s image in passport photographs and onsite photography of a person’s face. Driving across the border involves photography of license plates and CCTV cameras trained to record each vehicle’s progress. Amid controversial murmurings and protest,<sup>1</sup> airports in Canada and the United States installed full-body

---

<sup>1</sup> Many theorists express concern about the changes the border security regimes have undergone in the years since September 11, 2001. Kim Ryegeel notes that the system of borders across the world sorts travelers into high-risk and low-risk categories. In Canada, as in the United States and other countries of the Global North, no-fly lists have swollen in size even as programs designed to expedite the passage of ‘low-risk’ passengers (like the NEXUS and NEXUS-AIR and CANPASS and CANPASS-AIR systems) have also grown. Systems of identification use extensive biometric technologies, matching the peoples’ fingerprints and photographs presented at the time of travel to the records held in vast databases. Canadian citizens of Muslim or Arab background, or with dual citizenship in a ‘high risk’ country have found their citizenship rights abrogated as they are refused re-entry into Canada and in certain cases have been detained and even tortured in foreign custody.

scanners as an added security measure in recent years.<sup>2</sup> Travellers' physiognomy and citizenship are analyzed on the spot to allow some travellers to pass the border, others to be stopped for additional questioning, and still others to be disallowed from entering.<sup>3</sup> These passages through the border are facilitated by a series of things – symbolic objects as well as mechanical or technical things – which are necessary to define the border. Travellers know they are crossing international boundaries because they interact with screenings, customs officials' questions, CCTV surveillance, fences, walls, guns, badges, photographic equipment, fingerprinting, etc. The things – the objects – that comprise the contemporary international border can be identified through their entanglements in the experiences of border crossers who interact with the border. These physical, symbolic objects are found at the center of both violent conflict and nonviolent activism in political border struggles – struggles which are often defined by a Subaltern or marginal population or person interacting with aggressive State policies. In Canada, protests on behalf of Subaltern rights respective to the border are often carried out in a peaceful manner, with minimal to no casualties. Struggles in Canada might seem vastly different from those accompanied by much higher levels of violence in other parts of the world, and in many ways they are. However, physical objects are pivotal in the existence of both violent and nonviolent struggles; objects are as central to the struggles of Subaltern populations with the Canadian border as they are in other struggles abroad. There is much to be learned in comparing and contrasting the role of physical objects in the struggles experienced in relation to Canada's border with the struggles undertaken at other international borders. These physical objects – *things* – are not located only at the borderline dividing sovereign states, because crossers interact with the border in many places and spaces aside from the

---

<sup>2</sup> Border controls are driven by intelligence, algorithms, data mining, profiling to reduce risks and biometric technologies, all approaches that rely on technical and scientific expert opinions (Rygiel 2013).

<sup>3</sup> And, as mentioned, 'totally legitimate' travelers that are seen as posing zero risk are still routinely subjected to virtual undressing by body scanners, visual documentation by onsite mug shots, fingerprint recording and the vigilant eye of the ubiquitous CCTV camera.

borderlines that delineate the edges of a country. Regardless of their physical location, these symbolic objects define border experiences and struggles, shaping crossers' identities.

This paper attempts to describe the importance of symbolic objects to the experience of unequal power relationships across sovereign international borders, attempting in particular to understand the Canadian border by comparing it with other global border struggles. It first explicates the claims of Subaltern Studies founder Ranajit Guha, who suggested that rebel violence in India should be considered a political act, despite its lack of conformity with politics as it occurred within official channels set out in the constitution or left within the country after the end of British Occupation (1983). Guha's claims are discussed in conjunction with those made by Jacques Rancière, whose telling of Herodotus's tale of the Scythian slave rebellion acknowledges the importance of symbolism in the subjugation of subaltern classes (1999). The work of Bruno Latour in outlining the field of *Dingpolitik*, a politics centered on objects (2004), is then introduced, along with the related contributions of Michel Callon and other Actor-Network Theorists (1986). Their writings are discussed in conjunction with the work of Guha and Rancière in order to determine how these theorists can help us further our knowledge of border struggles in Canada and abroad.

These theorists are explored here because their work provides a theoretical foundation for understanding human social and political relationships across sovereign international borders. Borders require symbolic objects to define them. These objects often divide populations with vastly different wealth levels, health indicators and power on the world stage. Sometimes, one side of the border is home to a people that might be considered 'subaltern' when contrasted with those on the other side. Certainly the experience of stateless people, noncitizens, asylum seekers and refugees is characterized by a state of subalterity *vis-à-vis* the 'legitimate' citizens living within a state. This paper thus explores examples where objects are foundational to the experiences that subaltern populations have with international borders and boundary lines. It examines how particular objects take on meanings at the border. These symbolic objects define the experiences and identities of subaltern populations as they

interact with international boundary lines, indelibly changing the landscape of border experiences and shaping activism efforts.

### **Subaltern Studies, Jacques Rancière, *Dingpolitik***

---

In 1982, the inception of Subaltern Studies as a field of thought challenged the methodologies that had long been used in historical analysis. Dipesh Chakrabarty explains that Subaltern Studies' questioning of how history was written challenged the historiographical traditions of English Marxism, making a departure from those traditions inescapable (2000). Ranajit Guha, the initial inspiration behind Subaltern Studies, presented the idea of stretching the boundaries of the 'political' to encompass more than that which European thought imagined the category to contain. To deny such an expansion was to discount the challenge that peasants' uprisings brought to the political sphere; such denials would lead to an elitist writing of history (Chakrabarty 2000; Guha 1983). Thus, Subaltern Studies literatures, drawing on the existing fields of Marxist thought and English practices of studying "history from below," developed the idea of a history that considered the view of the 'common man' (more fairly: common person)<sup>4</sup> (Chakrabarty 2000:10). Politics in India was no longer to be thought of as occurring only in the administrative apparatuses left behind by the British, or as belonging only to the upper echelons of Indian leadership (like Gandhi, Nehru, and their contemporaries) who had led the struggle against colonial occupation. Indian peasant rebellions and uprisings, discounted by other scholars as incoherent roaring and violence emanating from a 'backward' consciousness (see for example Hobsbawm 1978), to Guha and Subaltern Studies, 'counted' as politics.<sup>5</sup> That is to say, these actors and actions were to be included in the realm of the political.

---

<sup>4</sup> Of course, there exists a host of questions around who the 'common man' or person is and how s/he is defined, or understood. The important thing here is that this existed as a goal.

<sup>5</sup> Partha Chatterjee also sees inhabitants of India that are not, "proper members of civil society and are not regarded as such by the institutions of the state," as having a political relationship with the institutions of the state (Chatterjee 2004:38). He means this in the sense that they are controlled and provided for in some senses by the state, that they are recipients of the governmentality regime generated by the state. This differs from Guha's characterization, which sees subaltern populations

More recent philosophical thinking incorporates the notion that actions and their outcomes must be examined to determine if a political act has taken place, as the idea of ‘politics’ is no longer relegated to the official spaces of government debate and legislation across a variety of socio-political cultures. Rancière states that various forms of collective action (he mentions strikes, elections and demonstrations) can be considered political or not political. A strike, for instance, “is political when it reconfigures the relationships that determine the workplace in its relationship to the community” (Rancière 1999:32). The definition of ‘political’ appears to hinge on actions and outcomes for Rancière. The question of whether the actor belongs to a certain enlightened class or possesses a ‘conscious’ mentality does not enter into the equation. Guha also tried to define politics on grounds other than actors’ ‘consciousness.’ Rather than claiming to understand rebel consciousness or capture their own perspectives on their experiences, Chakrabarty writes that Guha:

“...examined rebel practices to decipher the particular relationships – between elites and subalterns and between subalterns themselves – that are acted out in these practices, and then attempt[ed] to derive from these relationships the elementary structure... of the ‘consciousness’ inherent in those relationships” (Chakrabarty 2000:23; Guha 1983).

Thus the nature of political struggle can be understood by examining the ‘consciousness’ perceived in relationships (*a la* Guha) or by assessing the results and actions of actors involved in a struggle (as suggested by Rancière). Most interestingly for the present discussion, however, is that regardless of how these theorists decided to arrive at the conclusion that politics did (or did not) occur in a particular situation, both agree on the centrality of – on the pivotal role played by – physical, symbolic objects in a political struggle. Guha’s departure from the analyses of other scholars was based on the realization that peasant rebellions began with rebels’ attempts to demolish the signs of power and symbols of social prestige that designated the ruling classes. “It was a political struggle in which

---

as “political” actors due to their actions, because Chatterjee’s characterization of these populations as within the “domain of politics” is based on their being encompassed by the government, control, or programming of the state (Chatterjee 200:38). Nevertheless it is interesting to note that both writers see such populations as being political, or within the sphere of politics, but for different reasons (Guha based on the actions of the rebel or subaltern actor and Chatterjee based on the ethnographic classification, programming, and governmental control efforts of the state).

the rebel appropriated and/or destroyed the insignia of his enemy's power and hoped thus to abolish the marks of his own subalterity" (Guha 1983:75; see also Chakrabarty 2000). In this quote, the visual culture of hierarchical division is invoked, by referencing the signs and symbols that designated power and served to divide powerful classes from the subaltern. Rancière also recognizes the power of the symbol of oppression, of an object that carries the meaning of subjection and subalterity. He relates Herodotus's tale of the Scythian slave rebellion. Although their rebellion was almost successful, the Scythian slaves' defeat was secured when the returning warriors (their former masters) took up horsewhips instead of spears and bows (Rancière 1999). The Scythian slaves perceived themselves as equal to the warriors as long as both sides held battle armaments. The slaves would have defeated their masters, were it not for the symbol of oppression wielded by the latter in the form of the horsewhip. It appears that the peasant rebellions studied by Guha demonstrated great insight in targeting their efforts toward the abolishment of symbols and signs of inferiority. It is the symbol – objects and their signification, things and their meanings – which seem to have the power to ultimately defeat the equality claims of subaltern groups. In the same vein, activists consider the power of symbols, objects and their symbolism in attempting to evoke support for their causes and achieve their aims. Activism must (and regularly does) consider the power of symbols of domination, and directs political efforts accordingly.

Thus, perhaps unexpectedly, Rancière, Guha and the field of Subaltern Studies scholarship coalesce to a degree around this idea that symbols (or objects, which are invested with symbolic meaning) have a pivotal role to play within the struggles of subaltern populations to assert the validity of their claims. Participation in the political realm, which is necessary in order to affect changes in governing structures, was granted to the subaltern populations in Guha's writing. Their actions were carefully attuned to the use of symbols. For Rancière, the ability to speak and understand speech is central to participation in the political realm. Once a subaltern class can understand and speak back to

the existing police order, the existing order is disrupted because the subaltern's subalterity<sup>6</sup> was contingent on its being voiceless (see Rancière 1999). So, taking these two writers together, one begins to understand that symbols and symbolic objects are markers at the gate that subdivides a ruling class from a subaltern class, and that challenging such markers is absolutely necessary in any struggle to disrupt the existence or placement of such a gate. In order to enter the realm of the political, Guha and Rancière agree, subaltern or oppressed classes must deal with and disrupt the symbolic objects that separate them from their oppressive Other.

This is where the concept of *Dingpolitik* comes in. Bruno Latour's term claims to turn on its head the principles governing an era of *Realpolitik*, which claimed, "to describe a positive, materialist, no-nonsense, interest-only, matter-of-fact way of dealing with naked power relations" (Latour 2004: 14). In contrast, *Dingpolitik* is proposed as a way of thinking that accounts for the centrality of *things* or objects – in German, *Dinge* – that contemporary political struggles hinge on. Latour explains:

"There might be no continuity, no coherence, in our opinions, but there is a hidden continuity and a hidden coherence in what we are attached to. Each object gathers around itself a different assembly of relevant parties. . . . Each object may also offer new ways of achieving closure without having to agree on much else. In other words, objects – taken as so many issues – bind all of us in ways that map out a public space profoundly different from what is usually recognized under the label of "the political" (Latour 2004: 15).

Latour's writing takes the argument that objects are important within politics to a new level: he sees objects as defining the political realm more aptly than political parties, constitutions, or other markers of 'the political' are able to do. His writing is obviously distinguished from Guha's and Rancière's in that he does not afford the concept of subaltern oppression a pre-eminent place. Rather, his lens focuses on the object as the thing around which politics occurs. Latour's work emerges from a history of study within the field of Actor-Network Theory (ANT), a definitive explanation of which is difficult to arrive

---

<sup>6</sup> I use the terms 'subaltern' and 'subalterity' for the purposes of consistency, to improve the overall coherence of the argument raised here. Although this is obviously Guha's term more than Rancière's, the concepts that both writers advance coalesce around the ideas conveyed within the term.

at, as the Theory encompasses analyses within a wide variety of fields and is better performed than explained (see Cressman 2009; Law and Singleton 2000; Law 1997).

What is the thread of continuity that connects how objects are seen in *Dingpolitik* and other theories privileging the centrality of physical objects, Subaltern Studies scholarship, and the writings of French political philosopher Jacques Rancière? Moreover, what do their writings offer in the way of better understanding borders? The entry of Guha's rebels into the realm of politics expanded the political realm from merely encompassing the institutions and actors set out in constitutions – beyond the 'official' actors, that is. Both Guha and Rancière suggest that objects are important to the political realm, leading to the natural conclusion that the definition of 'politics' should be expanded to include the inanimate objects that divide the subaltern classes from those that dominate political and social hierarchies of power. Latour suggests that the political realm is led by, is focused on, these objects. Borderlands are defined by a plethora of signifiers, of objects bearing symbolic meaning. In the absence of such objects human interaction with borders could not take place; borders might not exist aside from nebulous lines on maps. (Maps themselves are objects, so even without the physical evidence of borders on the ground, objects, it seems, are necessary to define borders.) Furthermore, international borders are in many cases lines of separation between the societies or countries possessing greater resources and social welfare systems, and those (one could say 'subaltern') groups that exist outside of such privilege.<sup>7</sup>

Corporeal destruction and psychological damage often results from interaction with international borders, particularly where new borders are made, where old ones have been disputed for decades and when longstanding borders divide great socioeconomic inequalities. This paper will now examine the politicization of inanimate objects in struggles across international boundary lines known as borders. Objects are literally used to divide one sovereign nation from another (or a State's claimed

---

<sup>7</sup> In the literature of Citizenship Studies, Audrey Macklin describes membership in a privileged society as possessing a citizenship with 'heft' *vis a vis* those global inhabitants who possess less advantageous citizenships (see Macklin 2007: 346; Staisulis 2013).

territory from the land outside), as in the case of a Wall or fence. In other cases, objects can be used to by activists to demonstrate the position or identity of a border crosser. Two particular examples that illustrate the work of objects in border struggles will now be explored. The vast differences between these two cases more strongly illustrate the common role that physical objects play in border struggles, regardless of the actors involved, the level of violent opposition and the geographical location of the struggle. In struggles around Canada's borders, as with other border struggles globally, the role of objects cannot be underestimated.

### **A Wall War & its Scale Model**

---

The 708-kilometer Wall that stretches throughout Gaza and the West Bank obviously symbolizes the separation of Israel from Palestine, and many observers consider its erection tantamount to permanent illegal land claims on the part of Israel. The majority of the Wall – 85% of the total planned length of it – is in excess of the Green Line that delineates the Israeli border prior to the 1967 Six Day War (Bishara 2012, McLagan and McKee eds.). The Wall attempts to establish permanent infrastructure that will de-politicize and legitimate Israeli claims to Palestinian land. Its construction – featuring a multitude of very visible and large construction implements – creates a media spectacle that attracts attention to the Palestinian cause. The Wall is a tangible object that works within the socio-political sphere of post-World War II Palestine to cement neo-colonial ambitions and (albeit unintentionally) to draw attention to the suffering of Palestinians in new ways.

Perhaps the Israeli Wall can be compared to the horsewhip in Herodotus's Scythian slave rebellion. It is a tangible object, a *thing*, which establishes the pre-eminence of the Israeli state and its military. Though the Palestinians may consider their claims valid and themselves on equal footing with Israeli settlers, the Wall establishes a tangible division. In concert with the establishment of this Wall, the residents of Palestine have felt their cause splintering into smaller disputes; their overarching claims have been relegated to negotiations in favor of rectifying fractional losses. These include disputes

around particular sections of Wall construction, cessation of checkpoints and the freeing of prisoners. These fractional conflicts have come to replace the larger, over-arching struggles for self-determination, against Israeli occupation and in opposition to broader political changes in the region (Bishara 2012, McLagan and McKee eds.). So it seems that this era of the Wall's construction is accompanied by a fragmentation and marginalization of the Palestinian cause. The physical and symbolic dimensions of the Wall's presence have indelibly impacted the struggle against the expanding Israeli State, even as the Wall has become central to this struggle.

The Wall as a thing, an object, presents a clear intention on the part of Israel to continue appropriating land and defending that land from re-possession by Palestinians. It seeks to legitimize Israeli actions with the erection of a permanent and exhaustive piece of infrastructure. This is an attempt to de-politicize the land disputes between Israel and Palestine. Israel claims the Wall protects it from terrorist insurgencies (Bishara 2012, McLagan and McKee eds.), an attempt to overwhelm dissent with an objective claim to national security. Once the Wall – or a section of it – has been completed, it follows that disputes around it will seem less valid by virtue of the fact that an obvious piece of insurmountable infrastructure marks the barrier between Israel and Palestine. After several decades of bloody disputes, the original land claimants and political actors pass away or cease to have power. New generations of claimants and dissenters can attempt to draw new boundaries, with different levels of success than their forebears enjoyed. However, if a Wall is present, the boundary cannot be so easily disputed or re-drawn. For generations into the future, the Wall itself will carry no small weight in the land disputes around it. The Wall will be present to fight the Israeli cause long after this generation of Israeli government or military officials has ceased to have power in the State's government. Even if a more moderate regime comes to power in the future, Zionist factions will always have the Wall to point to, to argue with, to lean on.

In the language of Actor-Network Theorists, the parties in the battle between Israelis and Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank can be described as a series of attempts by the invested parties

to ‘interest’ each other. “To interest other actors is to build devices which can be placed between them and all other entities who want to define their identities otherwise” (Callon 1986: 205).<sup>8</sup> While ‘interessement’ and the accompanying process of ‘enrolment’ has often been used – and was designed – to describe scientists’ relationships with subjects in the natural world (see Callon 1986), it can be extended to glean a better understanding of what happens in border struggles, particularly in the case of Israel/Palestine. The Wall attempts to define the identity of the Palestinian villagers as minor obstacles in the way of legitimate Israeli land claims and appropriate defense of those claims in the light of terrorist threats. The Wall can be seen as an actor in the network, one that is working to define the identity of the Palestinians, and potentially as a device being built to cut them off from other actors that want to define their identities. Enrolment is the goal of interestment; if actors accept their roles, the success is achieved (Callon 1986). In this case, other actors are also competing for the ‘interest’ of the Palestinian villagers: for the ability to engage them and define a role for them.

One such actor, or set of actors, unexpectedly became more powerful because of the Wall’s construction; the Wall, perhaps surprisingly for its builders, has led to the proliferation of very specific spectacles of suffering within international media. These spectacles involve Israeli soldiers and Palestinian villagers engaging with each other, often surrounded by menacing construction equipment. Thus media actors – journalists, cameras, international broadcasting corporations – have become more instrumental in the fight to define the Palestinians’ identities and roles *because* of the existence of the Wall. While the Wall itself is not always featured in these images, the physical evidence of its impending presence is shown in the bulldozers crushing holes into the ground and the soldiers carrying unarmed civilian protestors out of the way of construction. The unexpected role of the international media presence around the Wall shows how “new displacements take the place of the previous ones...New spokesmen are heard that deny the representivity of the previous ones” (Callon 1986: 215).

---

<sup>8</sup> This is one way in which theorists describe relationships using Actor-Network Theory. Researchers who privilege the role of objects have also studied their particular importance to the ability of a State to execute its power (Meehan, Shaw and Marsten 2013).

The photojournalists can be seen as actors who disrupt the Wall's interestment and attempted enrolment. Their presence means that the object's intended goals in the way of determining the villagers' identity were disrupted (although ultimately, the Wall is still being built so its efforts are not completely halted by the presence of the international media).

The fact that a physical barrier is being instated accounts for the existence of images of protest.<sup>9</sup> Amahl Bishara describes the importance that such images have for the anti-Wall protest movement: "Protest photography establishes protestors as political actors worthy of a place in the public sphere alongside officials and spokespeople photographed at meetings and press conferences" (Bishara 2012, McLagan and McKee eds.: 141-142). She goes on to explain that the medium of photojournalism conveys a sense of objectivity, particularly when there is a great degree of affective content in the images presented (Bishara 2012, McLagan and McKee eds.). Ranajit Guha's belief that the political realm extends to actors and events outside of parliamentary institutions and those defined in a state's constitution is reflected in Bishara's comments. The Wall's construction and presence have led inadvertently to a widening of what spectators see as the political realm. The Palestinian challenge to Israeli occupation finds new ways of coming to light through the establishment of the new object – the Wall – separating Palestinians from the land claimed by Israel. From the Actor-Network Theory perspective, while attempting to 'interest' the Palestinians and define their identities in one particular way, the Wall unwittingly helps to promote an alternate identity. This physical, symbolic object is thus instrumental in this particular border struggle in more than one way. The intended and unintended consequences of its existence together serve to underline the Wall's centrality and importance.

The complexities of the Wall's presence and the added dimensions it brings into the Israeli-Palestinian war are more sharply elaborated in a trial that occurred over the Wall's construction,

---

<sup>9</sup> Other physical symbols of Palestinian culture are displayed in these photographs, such as the traditional clothing on an older woman being removed from a rural area by four or five members of the Israeli army and the olive branches that another protestor waves in the face of an oncoming Israeli soldier (Bishara 2012, McLagan and McKee eds.). The Wall is a physical object whose incumbent presence yields such images of Israeli-Palestinian interaction.

wherein the Palestinian villagers of Beit Sourik challenged the Israeli military position on the construction of the proposed Wall. Eyal Weizman describes this legal case presented to Jerusalem's High Court of Justice that concerned the construction of the Israeli boundary Wall in the vicinity of the Palestinian village of Beit Sourik. The proposed boundary Wall would sever approximately 300 acres of the villagers' fields from their village (Weizman 2011). Obviously, this posed a high threat to their livelihood and risked dispossessing them of land that carried both practical and cultural importance. This case is of particular interest because the legal trial hinged on a physical object: the Wall. This distinguished it from prior or subsequent trials centered on land claims or other actions concerning the border between Israel and the Palestinian territories.

By focusing on the Wall and its specific contours and placement, the issue of Israeli occupation and Palestinian dispossession took on new dimensions. In particular, at the beginning of the trial, the Court found it impossible to rule on the case because it could not conceptualize the details of the terrain in conjunction with the proposed Wall's placement. It required that the two parties return after ten days with a scale model to examine the claims with greater accuracy and detail. This model in itself is an object that points to a parent object. It was assessed and examined and discussed by the Justices and the disputing parties. The grand overarching dispute between the Palestinian villagers and the Israeli military authorities, with its religious, cultural, social and security accouterments was at that moment incarnated in the scale model. It was 'boiled down,' concentrated into a high-density foam, computer-milled object (Weizman 2011), upon which hinged an entire legal trial around the access of marginalized villagers to 300 acres of their farmland. As Weizman says: "Legal positions were thus translated into variations in the route of lines, and these routes became diagrams plotting the tensions, debates and force relations. These processes could later be read by studying the route" (Weizman 2011: 72). A war of dispossession, injustice and religious extremism becomes a legal trial over a Wall, becomes a courtroom debate over lines drawn on a scale model. The inanimate objects of war and

dispute – themselves incapable of injuring or killing – become central tenets upon which victory and loss precariously hinge.

First, the presence of the Wall in the legal trial effectively allowed certain Israeli actions to be de-politicized. The action of building the Wall in the first place, and building it within a certain margin of land, was no longer in dispute. Instead of having to justify the existence of the Wall in the first place, the Wall became a ‘given’ feature over which the villagers of Beit Sourik and the Israeli authorities fought. The existence of the Wall, however, was no longer in question. This is important to note, as it seems to connote a major success for the Israeli state, which sought to de-politicize its land grabs by erecting the Wall in the first place. In many ways, the success of this intention becomes clear in the fact that the Court was not concerned with the Wall but with its precise placement: a much smaller issue in the grand scheme of Israeli occupation. As Eyal Weizman points out, the way the trial was structured focused on arriving at the solution that presented the ‘lesser evil’ (Weizman 2011). The fact that a crime or injustice is being committed in the first place (the building of a Wall where Palestinians live, in excess of the agreed-upon international borders) is overlooked. Instead, the focus shifts to the specifics of the crime, the injustice, in an effort to find the ‘least bad’ solution. The search for the ‘lesser evil’ allows the existence of ‘evil’ itself to escape questioning.<sup>10</sup> In this case, the villagers’ representatives were given the opportunity to define where they ‘wanted’ the Wall to be established (ie. which position would be the least reprehensible for their interests). Allowing the villagers to tell the Court where they wanted the Wall made it seem as though the Israeli government were extending a concession to them, when in fact no concession was present in this action because the villagers’ desires were not considered *in the absence of the Wall*. The debate over the placement of the Wall allowed the Israeli State to appear more reasonable, even benevolent, in listening to the complainants from Beit Sourik. In reality, the looming, larger-than-life presence of this physical barrier obscured the real

---

<sup>10</sup> Weizman explicates the various ways in which this principle plays itself out through humanitarian interventions. In Israel itself, humanitarianism is used as a premise for Israeli treatment of Palestinians. The fact of the occupation is overlooked as its specifics are tweaked to ensure that inhumane treatment is the ‘most humane’ it can be (Weizman 2011).

concerns and issues. This physical scale model of the Wall, an apparently a-political object, silenced the claims of Beit Sourik’s inhabitants while claiming to give them a voice.

Second, the presence of the Wall in this legal trial presented the Israeli military with an opportunity to construct more ostensibly objective arguments in favor of its construction along the proposed lines. It was easy for the authorities to justify the actions of the military by referencing the incline of the hills and the distance of the Wall from Israeli settlements (Weizman 2011). Weizman quotes Israeli military experts’ testimony in the trial brought to the High Court by the Beit Sourik villagers. In response to the Wall proposed by the villagers’ representatives, the Israeli experts argued that:

“Placing the fence so close to [Israeli] settlements might put them under constant fire... the fence must run on top of the hills to generate topographic surveillance in the valley, as you draw it here, it would be constantly exposed to sniper fire... Besides, the route you proposed is too steep and raises complex engineering problems the fence has roads along it and the route should be no steeper than 6-7 per cent” (Weizman 2011: 75).

It is evident in the above quote that the military experts were able to blame practical considerations like the need for “topographic surveillance” and the existence of “complex engineering problems” for the need to place the Wall in a location that was more advantageous to the Israeli position. These practical considerations seem to go hand in hand with the idea of having Wall at all, in the Israeli military mindset. The experts seem to argue that since the Wall *must* be constructed in a certain way, since it has to have certain characteristics, the villagers’ complaints are rendered unimportant. The Wall takes precedence, and reference to technical problems and concerns effectively obliterates underlying concerns over the Wall’s existence or villagers’ rights to access their land.

Actor-Network Theory can help us appreciate the Wall’s role in this border struggle more completely. Michel Callon uses the theory of translation (a version of Actor-Network Theory) to explore the case of scallop fishing in Briec Bay, France. In his example, scallops, fishermen, and members of the academic community are actors that a group of researchers tries to interest in its claims and plans for the restocking of the scallop population in the Bay (Callon 1986). Callon’s

case features a scientific a set of actors that tries to establish a network in support of its interpretations. The establishment of the separation barrier/ Wall in the West Bank and Gaza can be seen in a parallel light: it represents an attempt by the Israeli authorities to interest and achieve enrollment of a set of actors in order to establish political pre-eminence and indisputability. While in Callon’s example, establishing scientific pre-eminence or authority was the goal of the actors, in Israel’s case, the sought-after position is one of unquestioned moral and political pre-eminence. Technical and ‘scientific’ knowledge is mobilized in support of this goal, as exemplified in the hearings, which used the Wall’s scale model. The Wall, and its scale model, are an actor in the network that tries to interest actors and achieve their enrolment so that pre-eminence of a particular perspective is achieved.

The Wall in Palestine is a thing – an object –, which outside its particular context and placement means nothing, expresses nothing. It is mortar and concrete and wire, constructed to a specific width and height and length.<sup>11</sup> In the context of the struggle between Israelis and Palestinians, however, the Wall is a powerful symbol. It is physical evidence of the power Israel has to displace Palestinians under the auspices of national security, an effort that involves de-politicizing the Israeli state’s dispossession and illegal claims on Palestinian lands. The Wall-building efforts allow Israeli military officials to justify oppressive actions, eliding the injustices perpetrated by the state by focusing on the practical considerations involved in constructing the physical barrier. Its impending presence affords new dimensions in the portrayal of Palestinian protestors as political actors, alongside the official leaders that are photographed at conferences and summits. Finally, the Wall’s scale model commanded the attention of a High Court Justices, lawyers and other actors as it occupied the space of central importance in a trial brought to the Israel High Court by the villagers of Beit Sourik. The villagers

---

<sup>11</sup> Eyal Weizman also notes the complexity of the Wall, though I have described it simply here. He says: “It is a heterogeneous and interwoven assemblage of interconnected systems of fortification, architectural constructions (the ‘terminals’), sensing technologies, automatic weapons...marine systems... (Weizman 2011:80). He sees the Wall and its accouterments as capturing, “something of the meaning of what Foucault referred to as ‘an apparatus’)” (Weizman 2011: 80).

were, through the indelible inception of the Wall's construction, charged with the responsibility of defining their preference for where the undesired, oppressive object would be established. Thus, while construction of the physical Wall has led to greater exposure for the anti-Wall movement its presence has been accompanied by a fragmentation of the Palestinian position and its scale model amounted to betrayal of Palestinian voices within the Israeli High Court trial concerning the village of Beit Sourik. Understanding how the Wall's existence is pivotal in the border struggle around the separation barrier in Israel and the West Bank can help illuminate the role of physical objects in subjects' experiences at the Canadian border. This idea will now be explore through a Canadian example.

## **Popsicle Sticks on Pavement**

---

Another politicized border debate which centered around symbolic objects occurred in Québec in 2009, where an asylum-seeker gained the right to remain in Canada after almost four years spent living in a Montréal church sanctuary.<sup>12</sup> Abdelkader Belaoui's<sup>13</sup> case attracted support from 250 community organizations and several MPs before he was allowed to remain in Canada. The Canadian Government's position saw this man as an aberration, an outlier and a potential leech (at best) or threat (at worst). The Immigration Department's Spokeswoman commented that the Department "does not condone individuals hiding in places of worship to avoid removal from Canada " (*CBC News* Oct. 26, 2009). Belaoui interacted dramatically with Canada's border every day he spent in hiding, despite

---

<sup>12</sup> This is a tactic currently in use by Central American migrants to avoid deportation by American authorities, as well (*The Guardian*, 9 Sept. 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Belaoui claimed that he initially fled his adoptive New York home after his passport was removed by U.S. authorities post-September 11 2001 following his name being added to a "special registration list" because of his Algerian origins. In March 2003, he moved North to Canada because he feared deportation or imprisonment (*CBC News* Oct. 26, 2009). Following an outpouring of community support and the endorsement of MPs from each of the four major political parties, he was granted the right to remain in Canada on humanitarian grounds after nearly four years spent in his church home. This was over a year after Schoepp's and Hameed's artistic display. Visibility of his situation contributed to his victory, according to this lawyer. 250 community organizations expressed support for Belaoui. These organizations no doubt connected via social media, to a large part dependent on the photographic representations of Belaoui's situation. The camera proved to be, in the end, helpful in Belaoui's case.

being far from its physical location. The border exerted a stranglehold on his mobility, trapping him within the small radius constructed by the walls of his church home.

Belaoui's relationship to the border was clear from the state's perspective: he belonged on the other side of it, out of Canada. His identity was that of an illegitimate stowaway, whose fate was sealed save for a minor loophole that allowed him to escape the state authorities. This identity, however, was in dispute. According to Ayesha Hameed and Anita Schoepp, the former a researcher and the latter a multimedia artist based in Montréal, Belaoui was not 'hiding' but rather was a prisoner of the Canadian Government. Hameed explains: "...the day-to-day experience of living in a church forms another form of incarceration..." (Hameed 2011: 127). Thus emerged a stark contrast in terms offered from disputing factions to define Belaoui's identity. In order to change Belaoui's fate and end his incarceration, it was necessary to convincingly demonstrate his identity as a prisoner, and to declare his circumstances unfair. In their efforts to do this, Hameed and Schoepp physically demonstrated his incarceration using an unlikely set of objects: Popsicle sticks.

In order to demonstrate Belaoui's alternate identity – that of a victim and effective prisoner – Hameed and Schoepp staged a performance outside of the Passport Office<sup>14</sup> in Montréal. The idea for the performance centered on the theme of incarceration: "...we...took 902 sticks, each marked for a day he was incarcerated, and placed them on the ground: four in a row and one across, like a prisoner marking days on the Wall of a cell" (Hameed 2011:129).<sup>15</sup> This was a visual demonstration of the identity the Canadian Government denied Belaoui, a place he nevertheless inhabited, as was exhibited by the protestors.

As Latour has made clear, our understanding of politics is enhanced when we consider the importance and centrality of *things* (2004). While Latour's definition of 'things' includes issues that

---

<sup>14</sup> in Complexe Guy Favreau.

<sup>15</sup> The other part of the installation involved placing radios in different locations on the walkway between the complexes housing the Passport Office and the site of the hearings for the Bouchard-Taylor Commission. Hameed explains, "this area encapsulated the contradictions of citizenship, cultural difference, and intolerance; marking the borders between several modes of citizenship, mobility and ethnic stratification" (Hameed 2011: 128).

extend beyond the realm of physical items, Abdelkader Belaoui's case demonstrates that even the most innocuous inanimate objects can occupy a place of centrality in border politics. By arranging them in a fashion that is commonly understood to denote someone's counting the days of their incarceration, the Popsicle sticks became emblems of the Canadian border's entrapment of Abdelkader Belaoui. The identity and fate of this asylum-seeker would be determined by a struggle that took place over the very concept spelled out by the Popsicle sticks. If their message was denied, as was being done by the Canadian state, then Belaoui remained a stateless person in the eyes of the law, and a prisoner in the eyes of his supporters. If their message was accepted, understood and acted upon by the Canadian government, as was eventually done, then Belaoui would receive permission to stay in Canada legitimately. The unstated charges against him (of being a threat or a leech on the system) would have been leveled by arguments in support of his rights and empathy for his situation.

Again, the concepts of interessement and enrolment become useful in analyzing Belaoui's interactions with the Canadian border. The Popsicle sticks, placed to represent incarceration, attempt to 'interest' and achieve enrollment of several actors to support Belaoui's cause. Some of these actors were 250 community organizations and several MPs that had to be rallied before the Immigration Department and the Canadian Government granted heard his plea and accepted his request to stay in Canada. The Canadian Government, particularly the Immigration Department and other concerned authorities, were other such actors that the Popsicle sticks attempted to 'interest' and 'enrol' in support of Belaoui's cause. What was principally at stake was Belaoui's identity: was he a 'legitimate' asylum seeker, or a freeloading, illegal alien and/or a threat to Canada? The Popsicle sticks can be seen as objects that attempted to 'enrol' a series of actors in support of the first interpretation. Belaoui should first of all be seen (instead of overlooked or silently deported), and more specifically should be seen as an asylum seeker who was in hiding and thus effectively incarcerated by the Canadian State.

The Wall's scale model in the Israel High Court in Jerusalem embodied the conflicting causes that comprised a political struggle at the border between Israel and the Palestine. Similarly, the

Popsicle sticks on pavement embody a one man's political struggle with the Canadian border. The Wall's scale model was developed in response to the High Court Justice's demands that a tool be presented to assist the Court in understanding the situation faced by the villagers of Beit Sourik. It became a tool that forced the villagers to participate in the process of severing their access to their fields. The scale model was a *thing* that wound up helping the Israeli military support its claims to establish the Wall based on 'technical considerations' while choosing the path that represented 'the least of all possible evils' (see Weizman 2011). The Popsicle sticks laid down by Hameed and her colleagues similarly denoted a political struggle around an international border, but their function and the outcome they promoted differ from that of the Wall's scale model in several important ways. First, the similarities between these cases will briefly be explored, prior to examining their differences.

The Wall and its scale model and Belaouni's church and Popsicle sticks that demonstrate his position vis-à-vis the Canadian border share key similarities. Obviously vast differences divide the case of the Wall from that of the Church, but in both cases a literal barrier prevents contact between a stronger state's authorities and a person or population that can be seen as subaltern. An oppressed subject must struggle to have the state recognize their identity as oppressed, as subalterns deserving attention. This is the first and most conceptual similarity shared by the objects described in these two cases. The Wall's scale model and the popsicle sticks bring the subaltern politics around literal walls – the Wall and the Church Walls – to light in a new forum, forcing engagement between a person or people oppressed by physical walls and the authorities connected with such an action. A visual and corporeal representation (Hameed and the others involved their *physical bodies* in the process of laying down the sticks) challenged the State's rendering of this man as *outside* the system of visual and biometric classification and therefore as alien. After all, prisoners are still recognized in the system of classification; they are citizens who belong to the state, unlike stateless outliers deserving deportation. Belaouni's supporters struggled on his behalf to have the Canadian Government recognize that this was a person oppressed by the border. Similarly, the villagers of Beit Sourik and many other villagers like

them who are engaged in the anti-Wall protests challenge the Israeli authorities to recognize them as people oppressed by the Wall, and by the strategies of control and exclusion that accompany it. Both Belaouni and the villagers of Beit Sourik struggle to establish themselves as people with valid causes, who are oppressed by the practices and physical barriers that constitute the border.

Second, in both cases, symbolic objects are used to demonstrate that a political struggle is occurring, where state authorities would prefer to claim that they occupy an objective high ground that should be seen as apolitical. Ranajit Guha's argument that rebel factions in India were committing political acts when they violently opposed state power, and that challenging insignias and marks – symbolic objects – of oppression formed the basis of their political struggle is pertinent here (see Guha 1983; Chakrabarty 2000). The pre-eminence of the physical Wall in the Palestinian villages enables the recognition of the villagers' violent and passive reactions as political acts to a wider audience, because photojournalists cover the events around the Israeli military's interactions with Palestinians more closely since the Wall is being constructed. Despite the fact that the Wall's builders might hope that it establishes Israel's land acquisition as a permanent fact, enhanced media coverage of the anti-Wall protests might have the opposite effect: that of thrusting the Palestinian cause into the light of the political realm. This Wall has perhaps allowed a greater number of people – and members of a subaltern population, outside the realm of 'official' politics – to bring their concerns to light as serious political issues.

Similarly, the Canadian state claimed an objective position in the case of Abdelkader Belaouni, preferring to establish his outsider status as an apolitical fact, beyond the realm of debate or questioning. Popsicle-stick activism undertaken by his supporters questioned this position, engaging in politics through the use of symbolic objects that demonstrated Belaouni's subaltern position and his right to fair treatment at the Canadian border that had entrapped him in a Montréal Church. Symbolic objects allow subaltern populations to thrust their claims into the political realm, emerging from spaces

of silence and invisibility to which the state relegates them when it attempts to establish its restrictive practices as apolitical and uncontested (or without legitimate opposition).

Third, the Beit Sourik villagers' suggestions as to the placement of the Wall, expressed through lines drawn on the Wall's scale model, evoked strong dissent from the military authorities, which tried to assert the infallibility of their position on technical grounds. The placement of the popsicle sticks also promoted a reaction from security authorities, even though the connection between Belaouni's case and the sticks on pavement might not have been as clear as the connection between the Wall and its scale model. The Popsicle sticks were seen as contentious in the moment of the demonstration, by the security authorities that reacted to the protestors' actions. Hameed and her collaborators were intrigued by the photo-documentation that the authorities were compelled to engage in at the site of the installation.

“Toward the end... the security guards crossed the street and followed us off the property of the park, and as an effort to intimidate us began to take pictures of the sticks on the ground. Ironically, they also took pictures of a message written in chalk that described Kader's incarceration for their own records” (Hameed 2011:129).

Political protest routinely attracts denial and even violent response from military or security authorities. However, in both the case of the anti-Wall protests and the Popsicle-stick demonstration, the centrality of physical, symbolic objects affects the way in which official dissent takes place. The presence of physical objects provides a focal point for officials' attention, so that dispute is based around the presence of the object instead of on the more theoretical ideas, themes or messages that comprise the elements of controversy. Latour's conception of *Dingpolitik* is, quite literally, exemplified as the Popsicle sticks, the Wall and the Wall's scale model occupy the officials' attention, apparently focusing each dispute on the symbolic objects themselves.

Ayesha Hameed's reference to the security guards' use of photography in the Popsicle-stick protest against Belaouni's captivity highlights the fourth and final similarity I will discuss between the cases. It has already been mentioned in this and in the previous section, but deserves more attention.

Photojournalism at the anti-Wall protests presented a degree of objectivity in highlighting the plight of Palestinian villagers at the hands of the Israeli military. This thread of objectivity runs through the photographic efforts of security authorities at the site of the demonstration in support of Abdelkader Belaoui, and the efforts of photojournalists to document the anti-Wall protests. Even though the parties documenting these two occurrences might have vastly diverse intentions or motivations, the effect of photographic capture is that it imparts an occurrence with a degree of objectivity. A photograph, while always embedded in a context, is “not merely a visual image awaiting interpretation; it is itself actively interpreting, sometimes forcibly so” according to Judith Butler (2010:71).

This is the reason why Hameed registers a sense of irony at the authorities’ photographing of the scene of demonstration: the photograph’s power of self-interpretation, imparted through its undeniable representation of reality. The Popsicle stick demonstration and the photography of the Popsicle stick demonstration says ‘something happened here and something is happening to this man; He is a prisoner in a Church.’ The authorities photographing the demonstrators’ Popsicle-stick display can be read as an act that renders the fact of the demonstration, and its political statement, as an objective occurrence. Even if the authorities aimed to document the protests through photography in order to record an infraction, the act of producing a photograph immortalizes the fact that the demonstration took place. It can no longer be easily denied, and if the demonstration is a fact, the political claims about Belaoui’s identity rendered through the Popsicle sticks, are not as easily denied or forgotten, either. As Susie Linfield says: “...people know – even after forty years of postmodern theory and two decades of Photoshop – that photographs record something that happened” (2010:160). Certainly, a photograph can be misunderstood and media can twist images to reflect views it supports. But the inimitable purview of photography is its ability to guarantee that, “what I see has been here” (Barthes 1980: 77).

The demonstration against Belaoui’s incarceration, like the demonstrations in the anti-Wall protests have undeniably happened; the option of pretending that the issues represented are apolitical is

no longer available in the light of photographic evidence. Of course, the goal of activists in both cases is to achieve outcomes that are advantageous for a subaltern population or person, in terms of securing greater freedom and rights, but such an outcome requires recognition that dissent is taking place within the political arena rather than outside of it. Photography's capacity to state objectively that protest has taken place somehow solidifies dissent as political fact. This establishes protestors as political agents, not just radical dissidents and violent savages. In this way, photographic images help show (literally), as Guha postulated, that violent opposition outside of official channels 'counts' as political action (1983; Chakrabarty 2000). Thus the wildly different objects – the Wall and the Popsicle Sticks – both present a rallying point for political interaction. Regardless of the path an object takes to arrive at the center of political disagreement, it nevertheless can come to constitute a focus around which politics is conducted. Photographic evidence of protests focused on these objects establish each conflict as a political struggle which might not be documented or would certainly take on a much less potent form if these objects were absent.

The differences between the case of the Wall and its scale model and the case of Abdelkader Belaouni's unconventional incarceration and the Popsicle-stick protest in support of his cause are numerous. At a cursory glance, it is easier to note the differences than their similarities. Three similarities, however, are of particular importance. First of all, the Wall is a direct object of oppression whereas the Popsicle sticks are insignificant outside of the particular context of protest but within that context attempt to bring liberation. The Wall is an object symbolic of oppression leveraged against a population that can be considered subaltern, and its scale model presents a situation where the villagers of Beit Sourik are asked to participate in their own oppression (see Bishara 2012; Weizman 2011). The symbol stems from the repression of a subaltern population, akin to the Scythian horsewhip used to cull the slave rebellion discussed by Rancière (1999). The Popsicle sticks used to protest the incarceration of Abdelkader Belaouni are tools used by activists to thrust a situation into the political spotlight. Though the Wall's presence has potentially increased media exposure, increasing sympathy for the

Palestinian cause and understanding of the Palestinian experience, it is a symbol and physical barrier of oppression. Popsicle sticks are not used to oppress Belaouni, but rather to express his situation and claim his identity as an incarcerated person; the protestors infuse the object with its significance, for the express purpose of highlighting, not instigating, subaltern experience. Thus the intentions with which the objects are thrust into the political realm – the manner in which these symbolic objects begin to participate in and then create a center for political engagement – are widely divergent from one another. The Wall is a symbolic object of oppression that marks the border and the Popsicle sticks are illustrative tools, benign in and of themselves. Absent their use as illustrative devices to demonstrate Belaouni's interaction with the border and Canada's security apparatus, they carry no meaning in relation to Canada's border.

A second important difference between these two cases presents itself in the question of permanence. The Wall, as discussed at length above, represents an attempt by the Israeli State to establish indisputable facts on the ground, demonstrating its apolitical right to occupy Palestinian land. This intention is demonstrated in attempts by the Israeli security apparatus to claim 'objective' reasons for placing the Wall in an advantageous location (see Weizman 2011). The Wall's lethal character is found in its claim to permanence, to forever establishing a distance between Palestinian villagers and their land. In the case of the protest demonstrating Belaouni's plight, the temporary nature of the Popsicle sticks is essential to their meaning. As detailed by Hameed, the security guards followed the demonstrators off the premises, as they had no legal right to occupy the space (and apparently constituted a threat of some kind). The area in Complexe Guy Favreau, outside the Passport Office in Montréal, was not the site of a land claim by the demonstrators, and as the security guards supervised it, the temporary nature of the Popsicle stick exhibit was necessary to its effectiveness. Any attempt to establish a more long-term exhibit would have attracted vandalism or other criminal charges. The demonstrators had to be able to dismantle or leave the physical evidence of Belaouni's struggle behind

at a moment's notice. Furthermore, as the demonstrator's hope and aim was to ensure that Belaouni's incarceration was temporary, it is fitting that the Popsicle stick demonstration was not permanent.

Finally, the Wall and the Popsicle sticks can both be seen as actors that engage a series of other actors in a network to achieve a particular cause. The Wall in Gaza and the West Bank attempts to achieve enrolment of a set of actors in order to establish Israeli moral and political pre-eminence: an indisputable position of superiority over the Palestinians' claims. The Popsicle sticks try to 'interest' the Canadian Government authorities, various political parties and social interest groups, NGOs, and other community actors, as well as the public, in a network that supports Abdelkader Belaoini's cause to remain in Canada. The Wall and the Popsicle sticks are objects employed in different contexts in different times in order to achieve 'enrolment' of various network actors in support of a cause. These causes are, of course, vastly different, and had different outcomes, as outlined above. However, the central importance of physical objects cannot be overlooked as these can be seen at the center of networks that determine borders struggles in Canada, as they do in the world's most politicized, bloody and controversial border struggles.

## Conclusion

---

This paper has attempted to show the impact or centrality of physical and symbolic objects to both the existence of borders and disputes around them. The border is constituted by physical objects, which impress upon and shape subjects that interact with it, forming and impacting identities. Without these physical, symbolic objects or things, the border and its disputes would take on an unidentifiable form, arguably ceasing to exist at all. Many border struggles are the interaction of a Subaltern person or population, entities who have little to no power in relation to the State or security apparatus that patrols and enforces the border. States have a vested interest in maintaining their claim that actions taken to enforce or even expand the border are neutral, objective and apolitical. The Subaltern quest to place a

cause within the political arena is focused around the use of symbolic objects, as recognized by Ranajit Guha in his declaration that actions perceived as ‘barbaric’ or ‘irrational’ and therefore outside the purview of politics should be located firmly within the realm of what is considered ‘political’ (1983; Chakrabarty 2000). The Scythian horsewhip, which was of central importance to the identity-formation and self-perception of the slaves in Herodotus’s tale as retold by Rancière (1999), remains central in contemporary border disputes. Although the Scythian slaves were not engaged in a border struggle, the horsewhip presents itself again and again in the armaments, uniforms, construction equipment, mortar, concrete and barbed wire that make up the Wall rapidly dividing Palestinians from land that Israel claims. The Wall is an attempt to establish permanence, objectivity – in short to demonstrate that the Israeli cause is apolitical. In the struggle over the Wall’s construction, the Israeli state has at times succeeded in making Palestinian villagers complicit in designing the instruments of their own oppression (see Weizman 2011). Greater media attention, in particular photojournalism, focusing on the Wall’s construction and the anti-Wall protests launched by Palestinians has had the unanticipated consequence of lending some objective credibility to the Palestinian claims that a political struggle exists (see Bishara 2012). Similarly, photographs of the demonstration showing Abdelkader Belaoui as a prisoner in a Montréal church established the political nature of his struggle against the Canadian border authorities. Permanent or temporary, innately oppressive or enlisted for a brief period of time in order to show the intensity of a particular individual’s plight, symbolic objects – *things* – at the border form the center of conflict. Through the presence of these things, those people who interact with the border indelibly impacted, formed into new identities as a result of this interaction. Indeed politics, at the border as much as elsewhere, can be conceptualized as *Dingpolitik*.

Guha taught social scientists to expand their ideas of what constitutes the political realm, inviting consideration of the violent or apparently irrational actions of Subaltern populations as political acts. Rancière mentioned the central importance of the symbolic object in the struggles of Subaltern populations in his retelling of the Scythian slave rebellion. Guha recognized this focus as

well, when he explored the tactics used in peasant uprisings to challenge existing social hierarchies. Latour's claims about the centrality of things in the political realm introduce the concept of *Dingpolitik* – a field of thought that places physical objects at the center of political analysis. These fields of inquiry have compelling implications for the study of borders, as this paper has shown through the study of two particular cases where physical objects alter the nature of political struggle at the border. The very nature of political struggle, its visibility and outcomes, are impacted by and in fact center on the existence of particular physical objects in many cases. These physical objects – though they are inherently vastly different from each other, and are employed in the pursuit of vastly disparate aims – command positions of centrality as actors in achieving enrolment of networks to support border-related causes. The outcomes and success of these actors differ from one another (the Wall has had unintended effects of drawing more media attention in support of the Palestinian cause, while the Popsicle Sticks can be seen as helpful in securing Belaouni's freedom), but their importance remains salient. The Canadian border, made up of objects as disparate as security cameras, church walls and Popsicle stick demonstrations, can be better understood when the centrality and importance of these disparate objects is appreciated. Canada's border struggles are further elucidated when they are compared to those in other regions of the world.

This paper concludes with a final note on the work of identity-formation that objects perform, an area that warrants further research, especially in relation to borders. Perhaps further research stemming from Latour's term – *Dingpolitik* – could investigate more deeply how the things that are central to politics form identities. The Palestinian villager becomes more noticeable and garners greater empathy once she becomes an 'anti-Wall protestor,' to take an example explicated above. Her identity changes once the Wall is established as an instrument of border enforcement. Similarly, as mentioned in the introduction, full-body scanners are objects that have caused more travelers to question the nature of their identity in relation to international borders and their enforcement (see Rygiel 2013). Prior to the introduction of these scanners, travelers were still dissected and categorized at airport

border crossings, identified as a passport number and assessed with regards to the apparent risk their crossing presented. The inception of full body scanners, however, somehow represents a sticking point, where a thing, a physical object, has caused travelers across Canada's borders to more deeply re-examine how they are objectified and examined during cross-border travel.

## Works Cited

---

- Barthes, Roland. 1981. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Richard Howard trans. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bishara, Amahl. 2012. "Circulating the Stances of Liberation Politics: The Photojournalism of the Anti-Wall Protests." pp. 138-147 in *Sensible Politics*, edited by Meg McLagan and Yates McKee. Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books.
- Butler, Judith. 2010. *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* New York.
- Callon, Michel. 1986. "Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St.Brieuc Bay." pp. 196-223 in *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?* London: Routledge.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. "Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography." *Nepantla: Views from the South*. Duke University Press 1(1): 9-32.
- Chatterjee, Partha. 2004. *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cressman, Darryl. April 2009. "A Brief Overview of Actor-Network Theory: Punctualization, Heterogeneous Engineering & Translation." *ACT Lab/Centre for Policy Research on Science & Technology (CPROST) School of Communication*, Simon Fraser University.
- The Guardian. 9 Sept 2014. "Migrants facing deportation take sanctuary in churches to avoid arrest." <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/09/migrants-deportation-central-america-church>.
- Guha, Ranajit. 1983. *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Hameed, Ayesha. 2011. "Borders in the City." pp. 121-139 in *Imagining Resistance: Visual Culture and Activism in Canada*. Cronin, J. Keri and Kristy Robertson eds. Waterloo, Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press.

- Hobsbawm, E. J. 1978. *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Latour, Bruno. 2004. "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public." pp. 14-43 in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, edited by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Law, John and Vicky Singleton. "Performing Technology's Stories: On Social Constructivism, Performance, and Performativity." *Technology and Culture* 41:765-775.
- Law, John. 1997. Traduction/Trahsion: Notes on ANT." Published by the Department of Sociology. Lancaster University. Accessed 11 April 2015.  
<http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/sociology/stslaw2.html>.
- Linfield, Susie. 2010. *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Macklin, Audrey. 2007. "Who Is the Citizen's Other? Considering the Heft of Citizenship," *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 8(2): 333-366.
- Meehan, Katharine, Ian Graham Ronald Shaw and Sallie A. Marston. 2013. "Political Geographies of the Object." *Political Geography* 33: 1-10.
- Rancière, Jacques. 1999. *Disagreement*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Rygiel, Kim. 2013. in *Mobilities, Knowledge, and Social Justice*, edited by Susan Ilcan. McGill-Queens University Press.
- Stasiulis, Daiva. 2013. in *Mobilities, Knowledge, and Social Justice*, edited by Susan Ilcan. McGill-Queens University Press.
- Weizman, Eyal. 2011. *The Least of All Possible Evils: Humanitarian Violence from Arendt to Gaza*. New York: Verso Books.