

SUMMARY

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The Walls that Surround Us

In November 2009, Germany celebrated the 20th Anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall. The event has also been largely discussed in the rest of the world. In this respect, the word “wall” has been a key term in the mass media in various countries for some time. In German culture, *Berliner Mauer* or even just *Mauer* have a special status, as *Mauer* has become a unit that actively unlocks its associative potential particularly in poetic discourse.

However, the Berlin Wall is a well-known phenomenon not only in German, but also in Russian and Latvian cultures, for the outcome and consequences of World War II, i.e. the erection of the Berlin Wall and all related subsequent events of the second half of the 20th century, including the destruction of the wall as well as the 20th anniversary of its fall, are all significant facts of the world history. This proves to be an argument for my claim that there exists common background knowledge expressed by those German, Russian and Latvian speakers, who use such naming units as *Берлинская стена*, *die Berliner Mauer* and *Berlīnes mūris* respectively. Nevertheless, there are certain meanings related to the Berlin Wall phenomenon that are particular to each of the above mentioned cultures only, which is explained not only by different cultural contexts, but also by the difference in linguistic meaning between the Russian *стена*, and the German *Mauer* / *Wand* or the Latvian *mūris* / *siena*. *Mauer* / *mūris* stands for a massive stone wall built up for protection from foreign enemies as well as alienation or prejudice in a figurative sense. In German and Latvian, such meanings as personal space, safety, comfort, and home are implied in the words *Wand* and *siena* respectively. In Russian, the word *стена* combines the meanings of *Wand* / *siena* and *Mauer* / *mūris*

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