

## THE GLOBALISING WALL

Fences have a longstanding relation with both liberal individualism and imperialism. Good fences were meant to create neighbourliness amongst the propertied and to guard their individual freedom against the encroachments of the 'other', most notably, of course, the state. But as is often the case, the truth had a nasty underbelly. For the same material (a precursor to the 20th Century's barbed wire) had been used to erect the Enclosures which uprooted whole populations from their ancestral lands, first in England, then in the colonies. Fences, in this manner, ushered in commodification. Initially, it was the fenced land that was commodified, priced in accordance to the wool or the corn that would 'grow' on it. Almost immediately, it was the turn of the human toil exerted within these fences to be commodified too, to become waged labour. Once the mechanical loom and the steam engine were thrown into the mix, the path toward the commodification of almost everything was thrown wide open.

However, something happened to fences after 1945. They started turning into impenetrable walls. What used to be relatively porous barriers were sealed off, the pores plugged, their openings cemented. Ceasefire lines turned into human-free zones, no man's lands gave their place to immense fortifications the purpose of which was, curiously, not so much to fend off a foreign army but to sever the normal ebb and flow of humanity. Even rivers were seized as opportunities to create perfect divisions while some oceans, most famously around Australia, suddenly lost their iconic potential to unite, ditched ancient customs of solidarity at sea, and acquired the symbolism of division and the ironclad logic of exclusion zones.

This unprecedented determination to divide perfectly erupted in disparate places at roughly the same time, shortly after the Second World War. As the last old fashioned Empires were collapsing, this newfangled type of wall spread like a bushfire: From Berlin to Palestine, from the tablelands of Kashmir to the villages of Cyprus, from the Korean peninsula to the streets of Belfast. When the Cold War ended, we were told to expect their collapse. The Global Village was the new paradigm which promised us a world without barriers; a world in which we would all be as good as our wares. Instead, they grew taller, more menacing, adamantly opposed to human movement across them, longer. They globalised, almost in a bid to poke fun out our delusion that we were shaping an infinitely mobile, integrated world.

From the West Bank to Kosovo, from the killing fields of old Ethiopia to the US-Mexico borders, their spectre was upon us. It is as if they were merging into some Globalising Wall that was weaving its way across the planet's face, hell bent on reshaping it in its own image. Before we knew it, it infected societies that had never known division previously, often following the path of invading Western armies; it sprouted in our Western cities, begetting 'gated communities' which were then

transplanted in Cairo, in Rio, in downtown Bagdad. In the name of security, the Globalising Wall is spreading generalised, debilitating insecurity to all those caught in its path. And given its incessant proliferation, this means all of us.

Danae Stratou's new work attempts to capture The Globalising Wall's stirrings on a constructed video. Using stills that she took during our travels to seven of the Wall's original 'sites',<sup>i</sup> she put together a moving strip of images that expose the Wall's unyielding motion, its audacious reach for new lands to divide, its monotony, its aesthetic, its sense of hideous purpose. The video is projected on a large free-standing grey wall upon which The Globalising Wall appears as it would to a passenger travelling on some imaginary train that speeds past its intercontinental length. The steady pace of the video projection; the audio which alludes to the imaginary train, but also packs actual sounds recorded *in situ* from the depicted places; the fixed strip that runs along the grey wall just under the projection in a loop (embracing and circumnavigating the free-standing wall and imprinting upon it the names of the places that appear on the video); these are the elements which Stratou combines in a work that seeks to ameliorate, perhaps to annul, indeed to counter-oppose, the horrid divisions it depicts.

Yanis Varoufakis  
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<sup>i</sup> The Green Line dividing Cyprus, the barb-wired Ibar river that cuts through Mitrovica in Kosovo, Belfast's 'Peace Walls', the minefields in the grey zone between Eritrea and Ethiopia, the fortified Line of Control on the mountain ranges of Kashmir, the Wall of Shame that cuts through Palestine and, last but not least, the paradoxical US-Mexican Border Fence which can be seen as Globalisation's greatest irony.