

The Israeli Wall

During the last few weeks, the mediatised Israeli-Palestinian space has been overflowing with images of the “wall”, the “separation fence” or the “seam-zone obstacle”, depending on who’s the proliferator of the images and what’s the context of the visual campaign: human rights activism, Palestinian elections, or post-Sharon political perplexity. Photographers, graphic designers and copywriters are competing in this prime-time contest to produce the wall as an iconic image to be engrained upon the historical memory as the emblem of what has become the most ambitious infrastructural project ever undertaken by the State the Israel: 759 km (more than twice the length of the Green Line) of concrete pre-stressed units, fences with electronic sensors and cameras, razor wire coils, trenches, control towers, check points and patrol roads.



The copyrighting of the wall is a task of certain urgency since the lingering process of its construction may already be recognized as the build-up of momentum for its destruction. Up to now, 35% or 275 km of the fence has been built and it is not unlikely that just when the line will be done – fully displaying its spatial and instrumental improbability - actual work to undo it will begin. It is evident that from the moment of its inception the wall was denied any intent of permanence either as military fortification or as a political marker. Its patent indecisiveness is manifested in its tortuous route and magnified by constant objections, demonstrations and lawsuits from all directions - Palestinian residents, Jewish settlers, NGOs, military planners and politicians. Such “borderline disorder” is entirely consistent with what might be called Zionist psycho-geography: a state of mind and a mode of operation that has relentlessly denied stable form and resolute line in favor of an open-ended process of cartographic deformation, urban dismembering, territorial negotiability and a “temporary state of exception” as theorized by Giorgio Agamben.

In the Israeli consciousness therefore, the wall cannot possibly be grasped but as a fence; a provisional gadget designed to disrupt vehicular and pedestrian infiltration; a prop suspending time for further spatial rearrangement; a tactical maneuver devised by Ariel Sharon the old master of deep frontiers; an (architectural) iconography without a (public or parliamentary) discourse. It goes without saying that such willful ephemerality is totally oblivious to the ongoing sabotage of daily life perpetrated by the wall along its rural and urban crossing and totally ignorant to the fact that the separation fence does not separate Palestinians from Israelis in as much as it cuts them

off from their resources and services, vandalizes their infrastructures and mutilates their urban and agrarian fabrics.

A series of frames taken by photographer Miki Kratsman on Friday January 27th in the Jerusalem suburb of El Azaria, shows local residents before and after crossing a section of the wall that blocks the main street of their neighborhood. People of all ages are forced to shape their way around the barrier or to swarm through adjacent courtyards and houses. The opacity of the wall instills an apprehension of the border patrol that may be waiting on the other side, but obviously, it does not effectively enclose space nor intelligibly divide it. The wall is there as a plain hurdle; a setup inflicting constant abuse and humiliation; a late re-enactment of 20th Century barriers that have long been demolished or partly preserved as war relics for tourism; an anachronism that never really endeavored to trace the territorial intricacy of the Israeli-Palestinian surface, nor indeed to slash through it. Architectural theorist Eyal Weizman writes:

The sheer geographical complexity of the politics of separation and the technologies necessary to maintain it will soon be exhausted.

The untenable territorial knot it has created reveals a fundamental truth - that although hundreds of proposals [...] attempted to find a path along which Israel and Palestine could be separated - this path has been repeatedly proven to be politically and geometrically impossible, and that this land can finally not be partitioned.

Indeed, the preposterousness of the wall, its excessive belligerent photogeneity, should be seen in this light – it is yet another false move demonstrating the impossibility of territorial partition and demarcation of continuous national boundaries. Long before its completion, the wall has unfolded its redundancy and entered the pantheon of war-like spectacles that instantly became vintage memorabilia of dated doctrines. In retrospect, it is the staging of a ceremonial burial for the borderline precept and the design of a single interlocking Israeli-Palestinian space that may be proven as Arielle Sharon's final wink.

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