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The Border Fences of Ceuta and Melilla. A Landscape for the Future?

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"We thought the network society and informational capitalism was seamless, but we see more of these crude and cruel stitches than before, where the haves and have-nots are brutally kept apart. The walls of Ceuta, Palestine, Tijuana prove that our world is not a smooth corporate network society but a striated space of fortresses, enclaves and capsules" [Lieven de Cauter, *A Cyberpunk Landscape: Snapshots of the 'Mad Max Phase' of Globalization* (2008)]

Ceuta and Melilla are arguably two of the most contested territories in Europe. Inscribed with a specific history of military occupation lasting over five centuries, these two Spanish enclaves on the Mediterranean coast of North Africa have been protected since 1993 by highly militarized border fences. These borders are like *multifaceted fault-lines*[1], defining at once a colonial/national boundary between Spain and Morocco, an economic boundary between Europe and Africa, a geopolitical boundary between North and South, and a religious boundary between Christianity and Islam[2]. The two territories are part of what architect Teddy Cruz defines as the *political equator*[3] that separates the functional core of global capitalism from the rest of the world saturated with poverty, armed conflicts and political violence.

The two enclaves date back to the 15th century, when Ceuta in 1415 and Melilla in 1497 were seized from Morocco by Portugal and Spain (Ceuta later became Spanish territory on the signing of a treaty with Portugal in 1668). Since the decolonization of Morocco by France and Spain in 1956 and the problematic handing over of the Saharan territories under Spanish rule in 1975, the situation of the two enclaves has remained an unresolved colonial issue. Spain argues that Ceuta and Melilla had been an integral part of the Spanish territory long before the colonial protectorate. Morocco, however, points to the fact that the two cities are in North Africa and surrounded by Moroccan territory. This dispute became even more pertinent in 1986 when Spain entered the European Economic Community (later European Union), making Ceuta and Melilla the only EU territories in continental Africa. These two territorial borders, which had been quite fluid and permeable for decades, are now the way for migrants in Africa to enter EU territory without crossing the sea. The fencing of the two Spanish cities in 1993 was a response to the increasing number of unauthorized border crossings. Following mass storming of the security fences in September 2005, the fences were doubled and raised from three to six metres high, with tear gas sprinklers and 3-dimensional detection cables in the space in between, surveillance cameras, and sound, movement and heat sensors. These technological fences can be monitored by the Spanish border patrols from a central surveillance room, while on the other side, and funded by the EU, the Moroccan army has set up numerous old fashioned sentry posts and military camps, as if laying siege to their own country, to invigilate the southern approach to borders it doesn't even recognize as legitimate, but sees as a residue of colonial

impositions.

In its desire to expand to new territories, and later to withdraw from them, Europe left a very poor legacy in many parts of the world: with a few exceptions formerly colonized territories have not done very well. In the 1980's economic globalization was widely seen as the way forward to reduce the gap between centre and periphery, to eliminate poverty and to make life better for most, and everywhere. But this, again, is proving not to be the case: instead of diminishing, poverty is on the rise, and the gap between rich and poor is increasing. According to Joseph Stiglitz the failure of globalization to deliver these expectations is due to unequal, inadequate and undemocratic international trade agreements (more like impositions) orchestrated by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, which result in the circulation of enormous capital revenues one way, and financial debt obligations the other[4]. Saskia Sassen wrote, back in 1996, that "the context in which efforts to stop immigration assume their distinct meaning is the current transnationalization of flows of capital, goods, information, and culture"[5]. The failure of globalization is clearly manifested in these asymmetric attitudes towards the free circulation of goods and capital and the free circulation of people. The fences of Ceuta and Melilla suggest that the dream of the utopia of the global village, of a seamless world of shared experiences, equal rights and equal access, is over. Instead, the enclave, the gated space, and the fence emerge as the new paradigms of the 21st century architecture and urbanism, a sign that the capitalist modern project has not worked out that well.

The capitalist modern project is partly built on the territorial expansion of the 19th century and the public works associated with that. The photographic legacy of that process is considerable, and therefore it is possible to trace parallels between this making of a new landscape and the development of photographic representation of the land. Early landscape photographs were often as much about the public works constructed to traverse the land as they were about a specific geography. In those photographs bridges, tunnels and railroads represented a notion of expanding territories, of movement, trajectories and shifting perspectives. But they were also about the reasons and inclinations for travel, what was entailed at the end of the journey: exotic cultures, ancient civilizations, natural resources, commerce, empire... They were a manifestation of the desire to open up the territory (to reach and to be reached), to connect places and to bring them closer to each other. Photographic expeditions were complex enterprises based on distance and encounters with the mission of producing factual representations for the purpose of knowledge of geological, cultural, or scientific significance. In Europe these territories were the very edges of the continent, East and South, and the overseas colonies. But, more often than not, the photographic expeditions were, directly or indirectly, connected to colonial processes with political, military and economic implications. Désiré Charnay's photographic expedition to Madagascar in 1863 is an example of the connection between photography and colonial expansion, as is his album *American Cities and Ruins* (1863) "dedicated to His Majesty the Emperor Napoleon the Third". Photographic surveys which were part of multidisciplinary geographical explorations under the auspice of government processes of colonial expansion, inevitably offered "*positions* caught up in power relations"[6]. Coincidentally, as Saskia Sassen points out, in the Europe of the late 19th century, public works were mostly constructed by migrant workers that traveled far away from their place of origin, moving with their families from one site to another. Carving tunnels and building bridges was labour intensive and time consuming, so much so that it required the setting up of temporary camps that

moved with the work from site to site[7]. Although this world of migrant workers and migrant communities hardly ever appears in the photographic records of those 19th century 'new' landscapes, the bridges, tunnels, roads, and railways built by them could be seen as the disconnected elements, like punctuations, of another geography of migration.

However, at the height of a globalized world, the 21st century seems to be more concerned with enclosing space, gating communities and fencing cities. Zygmunt Bauman calls it the *end of the era of space*, where “no one can hide from blows, and nowhere is so far away that blows cannot be plotted and delivered from that distance”[8]. Bauman’s argument follows that there is no *far-away* anymore, no land or territory that can keep a distance from violence, and that, without that distance, everywhere becomes a frontier-land[9]. Military strategies once reserved for the front line are now making a reverse trip back to the centre. Michel Foucault called it the *boomerang effect*[10], a sort of internal colonization, where typically colonial strategies and techniques are being brought back into the management and design of western cities; an *inner city Orientalism*[11] as can be seen today in Tel Aviv, but also in London, Paris, or New York. Oscar Newman’s notion of *defensible space* has become a prerequisite for contemporary urban design and architecture, introducing ‘secured by design’ techniques to prevent dissident attacks on buildings and public spaces. Tags, pins, passwords, e-borders, congestion charges, and dissuasive security measures: they define a landscape of securization and membership turned into one of disassurance, anxiety and fear. It is a landscape of networks, certainly, but also of capsules, of enclosed spaces, scissions and discontinuities, a landscape as capable of exclusion as it is of inclusion: of flows of capital and flows of information, but also flows of unwanted bodies. Ceuta and Melilla are, perhaps, archetypes of the new walled city of the future, what Lieven de Cauter calls the neo-medieval *capsular civilization*, simultaneously archaic and hypermodern: We don’t live in the network, writes Lieven de Cauter, we live in capsules, increasingly surrounded by technological fences that, because they take as a model the prison fence, mirror the effects of exclusion and seclusion: “Gated communities and detention camps for illegal refugees mirror each other. The counterpart of the fortress is the camp”[12].

It could be argued that the border fences of Ceuta and Melilla are to the European landscape of the 21st century what bridges, tunnels and railroads were to the landscape of the late 19th century. Like them, they also make a ‘new’ landscape, but this time it is a landscape of secession, an architecture of exclusion, emerging from poverty and overtly racialized, where certain bodies are marked out, stigmatized, or eliminated. The aim of these two photographic journeys through the landscapes defined by the border fences of Ceuta and Melilla is to bear witness to these places, to give them more visibility, and to contextualize them historically and politically. The photographs were taken along the whole length of the border fences, from sea to sea, on the Spanish side looking south towards Morocco, within the limits of authorized photography. I believed that these border landscapes had to be photographed from public access points, without mediation or intimacy with the institutions that regulate them. In this respect, the photographs don't offer unusual vantage points or hidden inside views, but the quotidian presence that both sides are used to living with. They are mostly open views of a messed up landscape shaped by centuries of disagreement, of mobile borders, relocated defensive lines, divided communities and asymmetrical military technologies. As a response to their lack of visibility, these photographs intend to be statements towards a political cartography of the border fences of Ceuta and Melilla as the very edge of Europe. These two border fences are, perhaps, the contemporary public works that can best define,

like monuments to inequality, the European landscape of the 21st century.

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