

Building and Destroying Walls
(Fall of the Berlin Wall Anniversary)

*Papa drove steel and Momma stood guard,
I never heard them holler 'cause the work was hard.
They were born to work up to their graves,
But they were not born to be worked-out slaves.
Maya Angelou, One More Round*

My father is a working man, working day and night trying to make a living out of scraps. He never complained, he never groaned and nobody ever really asked him what he wanted his life to be like. The lack of money and a wish for a better life made him go to Germany one year. He was what you would call today, a cheap worked-out labour force, without health insurance, in poor working conditions. In Maya Angelou's words, he was "a worked-out slave". Again, he never complained. He never had the voice through which he could freely speak. Today, in a symbolic manner, I want to be my father's voice and express all the thoughts he never had the opportunity to say.

So, what is the real question here? One might assume that I do not find it necessary to celebrate the fall of the Berlin Wall. Now, please, do not get me wrong, but the first part of the title is what I would like to develop my ideas on. However, what I do find unforgettable is the striking act of human solidarity that took place on November 9, 1989.

On the other hand, soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in 1993, the European Union was established. New, invisible and visible walls started to pop up and the Schengen Agreement from 1985 soon became a harsh reality. Words such as *detention, deportation, illegal, refugee, immigrants*, soon became words used very frequently. Much of the Agreement was about increased control of travellers coming in. And, while EU politicians still claim that the Agreement was made to enable a free flow of capital, merchandise and people, the fall of the Berlin Wall opened up new territories for the flow of capital and merchandise, while 138 (out of 142) articles of the Agreement were about

increased control around EU borders. It seems they tried to keep out what in their minds were “illegal immigrants” or the “unlawfully present”.

Thousands of people flee prosecution, war, poverty in search of a more suitable place to live, a less harsh environment. Labelling people as “illegal” or “unlawfully present” creates a cheap working force that will accept all working conditions. Fortress Europe, as it is referred to sometimes, keeps people out and the capital and merchandise inside.

The French president Sarkozy, who recently had a touching speech about “tearing down the walls that still separate the world, that divide cities, regions, nations”, not so long ago together with Berlusconi, “called for clear steps to strengthen the European frontier agency Frontex and a deal to be concluded with Libya to tighten its borders”.

To avoid being labelled as a Euro-sceptic, North America is in the same situation, isolating itself from its southern neighbours.

While we may talk about statistics and numbers, what frightens me the most is the fact that behind all those numbers are complex human stories of people searching for better economic opportunities, of people being detained, deported and mistreated.

I do not write this to prove that I am able to see beyond a grand illusion, I write this to express my bitterness, my complete and utter dissatisfaction and to give a voice to those being silenced and lost. I am angry and sad with a pinch of “being lost” somewhere in between.

History really does seem to appear twice, the first time as a tragedy and the second time as a farce, remaining equally selective both times.

Ivana Kovačević