

Roger Waters' The Wall and the 'ISIS Crisis'

Written by Stephen McGlinchey

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STEPHEN MCGLINCHEY, NOV 23 2015

Pink Floyd's 1979 concept album *The Wall* has never been my favourite Pink Floyd album. I always felt its subject was a little too personalised to Roger Waters himself and the broader themes (and music sometimes) suffered as a result. However, after seeing the concert movie of *The Wall* based on a performance taken from his world tour between 2010-2013 I finally got it.

The movie is a full live rendition of *The Wall* interspersed with footage of Waters on a personal journey reflecting on the fact that he lost his father during World War Two, and his grandfather in World War One. Both fathers had gone off to war leaving infant or unborn sons behind, never to return.

Aside from the spectacular staging of the concert – which involves a wall being built in real time between audience and band and a series of projections beamed onto the wall – the content of what is presented is powerful and relevant to the international relations of the 21st century. Images of dead soldiers and citizens, corporate logos and religious emblems being dropped from bombers (as opposed bombs), and a whole manner of imagery depicting how war reflects isolation, alienation, and mankind's worst instincts.

Waters' 21st century update is, then, *The Wall* in its most brutal form. The nuance and the introversions of the 1979 version are (mostly) gone. Replacing them is perhaps the most explicit and affecting contemporary message about the damage war leaves on society as a whole, not least those on who have lost loved ones.

For those (like me) who have felt a bit of unease with the unfolding crisis over the ISIS terrorist attacks in Paris (and elsewhere) and the militarized response, watching *The Wall* would be an excellent and sobering use of 2 hours. Western nations are now talking about marching off to war again (and a land war seems inevitable with ISIS), defence spending is ramping upwards again in nations like the UK, and the politics of fear is seemingly entrenched in our societies.

Is more war really the best way ahead? Are there alternatives? Are the costs of a war justified? Is there a plan for what to do if ISIS is actually defeated?

To the best of my knowledge, none of these things are being discussed by our leaders. Those who do raise these questions (like Jeremy Corbyn the UK leader of the opposition) are hounded for being naïve and dangerous pacifists. The US Presidential debates (especially on the Republican side, though Hillary has been no wiser) has become a pissing contest to see who is going to be the toughest on ISIS. This is surely not a good state of affairs.

In the end, seeing Roger Waters' depiction of how war has made him a broken man and seeing how he has turned that into a powerful piece of art gave me hope that at some level, a more sensible debate is being had amongst citizens – if not yet amongst our political class.

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About the author:

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