Marina Gržinić

Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna
margrz@zrc-sazu.si

We Need not a New But an Indecent Materialism: Transmigrant, Transfeminist and Transgender Struggles

Abstract: In the 1990s after the fall of the Berlin Wall we witnessed a blossoming of identity politics that in the form of multiculturalism was seen as a purely cultural phenomenon, but maybe we missed calling it a process of racialization that functions as matrix that sustains a monopoly on violent classifications, which decide who lives and who has to die. Therefore transmigrant, transfeminist and transgender struggles have to putthe relations of capital, power and labour at the center of investigation and contestation, as well as the expropriated surplus value that created superfluous populations, intensified capital's militarization and rampant deprivation and, last but not least, the Western, Occidental, White Matrix of Power, which is the matrix of pure colonial violence.

Keywords: Berlin Wall, Western, Occidental, White Matrix of Power

Introduction

This text is based on the keynote lecture I presented at the conference Material Matters in Times of Crisis Capitalism: Transnational Feminist and Decolonial Approaches in Giessen in Germany, November 2014. The sub-panel to which I was invited had the title Feminist Critique of Racism and Coloniality.

As this international conference was in Europe, and it seems that it would be possible to think, according to the large audience, in relation to its title that the questions of feminist economics and decolonial feminist thought address some geopolitical spaces outside of Europe, even more precisely spaces outside the European Union (EU). I want to show, in differentiation to such thinking, that this provincial, racist, colonial and anti-Semitic space of Europe/ European Union, of Germany, of Austria, of Spain, of Slovenia, etc., (the list is too long to

include all the countries) urgently needs a radical transmigrant, transfeminist and transgender decolonial approach.

This is the position I take when entering the European space. I also want to follow Sayak Valencia, who revisited the place of the subaltern, saying that subalterns do not exist per se, but that it is always a process of subalternization at work. This means to escape positions of victimizing / reifying / the colonial identity that subscribe to the idea that the threatening presence of the abject – (an abject coming from the former Eastern Europe), as it is formulated elsewhere by Joaquín Barriendos, – is the presence of the "'bad savage' that should only be visible as a form of **denial** of a proper existence."[1]

In the 1990s after the fall of the Berlin Wall we witnessed a blossoming of identity politics that in the form of multiculturalism was seen as a purely cultural phenomenon, but maybe we missed calling it a process of racialization that functions as a matrix that sustains a monopoly on violent classifications, that decides who lives and who has to die. Therefore transmigrant, transfeminist and transgender struggles have to be put at the center of investigation and contestation of the relations of capital, power and labor; of expropriated surplus value that created superfluous populations and intensified capital's militarization, rampant deprivation; and, last but not least, the Western, Occidental, regime of Whiteness -Matrix of Power, which is the matrix of pure colonial violence.

My initial proposal, in order to tackle the apartheid politics of the European Union – that is mostly the politics of the 'former', as they like to call themselves, Western European states, that are almost all colonial and anti-Semitic – is to intensify the political vocabulary of our analysis. Therefore it is necessary to intensify what the theoreticians of the decolonial turn (theoreticians formed by Latin American and the U.S.-Latin American context in the year 2000) propose as their point of departure. They argued rightly that on the back of modernity functions the *colonial matrix of power*; this matrix, they state, is modernity's darker side. The colonial matrix of power coined by Anibal Quijano should be, as Joaquín Barriendos argues, understood as a hierarchical power machinery that works throughout capitalism but under an explicit form, of what Anibal Quijano calls the historical-structural heterogeneity; in other words, coloniality (Barriendos talks of coloniality of seeing) is a series of inconsistencies, referrals, and reformulations of the hierarchical model of power, which interconnect in its dis-continuity, from the fifteenth to the twenty-first century.[2]

Today I propose to investigate the darker side of modernity and to conceive it as the darkest sides of the European Union (EU) and of neoliberal global capitalism. The darkest sides consist of four entangled levels of violent events and processes:

• Two modes of life biopolitics and necropolitics, former Eastern Europe and 'former' Western Europe;

• Global capitalism and its processes of financialization, dispossession, repetition, and the never-ending process of capitalist humanization (becoming human), with dehumanization as its darkest side;

• Capital's racialization as a process of the socialized/normalized system of discrimination, of sorting bodies, labor, and life under the policy of violent exclusion, seclusion, and surveillance, and last, but not least, death and enduring war;

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[1] Joaquin Barriendos, "Coloniality of seeing. Visuality, capitalism and epistemological racism", *VV.AA.Desenganche. Other visual elements and sounds*, Quito, Tronkal, 2010, 145.

[2] Ibid, 137.

• The question of race, gender, class, citizenship (white citizens and the other: Black European citizens, Chicanas, Asian minorities, regulated migrants, former Eastern Europeans), and non-citizenship (for undocumented migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers).

On such a basis it is possible to argue that biopolitics has to be replaced by necropolitics. Necropolitics is the violent execution of bio power, but with the logic of war and the military machine; though we see in neoliberal global capitalism necropolitics, as well the exercising of freedom – that is, according to Sayak Valencia, rather a freedom that only can be understood in the form of one power that seizes the other. This creates a parallel power to the state without fully subscribing to it. As a case in her analysis, Valencia takes the narco-cartels in Mexico and the Mexican state. Necropolitics, coined in 2003 by Achille Mbembe when he was analyzing Africa as post-colony in the time after 2001, is also demanding for a radicalization today. In 2003, two dystopian figures of necropolitics, context and performativity, as exposed by Valencia, both seem free, traveling in narratives and etc., while those presented, transformed, and captured as non-subjects are restrained, exploited and disposed by militarized economic dynamics. For Achille Mbembe, as well as for Giorgio Agamben, the German Nazi state is a perfect example of the sovereignty of death, of necropolitics; Mbembe also identifies the system of slavery as one of the first places of execution of biopolitics, but he exposed that inside the colonies biopolitics worked with necropolitics as a form of governmentality; necropolitics then has its biggest and most lasting form in the state of emergency, and this is a case from past until today.[3]

As neoliberal global capitalism seems to be almost an absolute historical form of capitalism in this present moment of historicization of capitalism, that means that it is "pure" in terms of being raw and non-mediated in the way it dispossess and makes surplus value from death, racialization and subjugation. I propose that when speaking of coloniality, racialization and dispossession in the back of the EU and neoliberal global capitalism, we also use absolute comparisons. This is why we need to talk about the darkest sides. We are not 'pure', but sold, waged – though again, differently, depending on which side of the colonial/racial divide we are situated.

There are two discontinuities in Europe that marked it significantly in the last decades: Europe after the "fall" of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and after the "fall" of the Twin Towers in New York on September 11, 2001. I use the quotation marks because nothing happened by itself! To these two we have to add the crisis that hit the world in 2008, also an outcome of the development of global capitalism in the sector of finance. The outcome has been that Europe/ EU has been "reborn", not in a biopolitical but in a necropolitical mode of global capitalism, and of a capitalist mode of reproduction of life, producing subjectivities. It is possible to state that what happened in the last decade is a "colonizing turn in Western thought," as described by Nelson Maldonado-Torres, by which we identify that along "the paradigm of discovery, we

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[3] A form of such special measures can also be seen in the new powers that will be given to border guards and airport police in the UK to seize passports from individuals who they suspect of planning to travel abroad for terrorism. This power will be extended to those under 18 in response to fears of indoctrinated British teenagers going to the Middle East to volunteer for terror gangs. In November 2014, the British prime minister, David Cameron, outlined plans to seize passports from British nationals linked to armed groups and to stop them in returning from fighting overseas. David Cameron has also proposed landing bans on airlines that fail to comply with London's no-fly lists. David Cameron has said "We will shortly be introducing our own new Counter-Terrorism Bill in the UK" in a speech to Australia's parliament before travelling to the G20 leaders' summit in Brisbane, adding that there was "no opt-out from dealing with this". The legislation will block individuals from returning from Syria and Iraq to the UK for at least two years, unless they comply with strict measures, which could include being escorted back to Britain and then facing prosecution, bail-style reporting conditions, de-radicalization courses, or subjection to Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measure orders (Tpims).

see the propagation of capitalism, racism, the modern/gender system, and the naturalization of the death ethics of war."[4]

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, post-Cold War Eastern Europe was re-launched as the former Eastern Europe in the 1990s to again be made obsolete in 2004 when the most significant enlargement to date of the economic and political union of the West European states known as the European Union (EU) occurred. In 2004, ten former Eastern European countries happily joined the EU and soon, a few years later, some others followed in greater or lesser numbers. Then, in 2008 not only was the crisis chasing and destroying our lives, though differently, depending on our geopolitical position – that means from which side of the colonial/racial divide we were/are situated – but a new project was launched to bring a final end to the former Eastern Europe. This project for contemporary art research, education, publishing and exhibition called Former West was launched in 2008 and continued through 2014. Former West is supported by the European Cultural Foundation (based in the Netherlands, and the project itself is organized and coordinated by BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht) and represents a final performative-repetitive rhetoric emptying of the history, politics, economy, and society of the former Eastern Europe and consequently of the EU. It indicates in its title "former", and without any question mark or hesitation. The West plays with a speculative form of itself; it wants us to think that it is all about fiction[alization], that it is somehow imaginative or fictional. The word 'former' presents a speculative setting that gives the West the possibility to repetitively perform its own supposedly outdated or (to put it better) *obsolete* condition of historical existence; being former means to be passé, and therefore for Western Europe it is not necessary to be conscious of its own historical (colonialism, slavery, vigorous anti-Semitism, exploitation) and contemporary hegemonic regimes of power (based precisely on these ultra-violent processes of past capitalist accumulation) – and therefore not necessary to be responsible for it.

In accordance with these claims, I use the word *former* in 'former' Western Europe in quotation marks; the quotation marks point to a performative trope, while in the case of the former Eastern Europe *the former* denotes its conditions of im/possibility.

The Former West project is situated within the arts, of course, as through art and culture (as art and culture are mostly used these days for different unsavory jobs of cleansing/formalizing/hiding the capitalist social, political and economic contradictions, exploitations, dispossessions, etc.).

At this point it is important to state that in the case of Eastern Europe, the *former* means that the historical processes of evacuation, abstraction, and expropriation are actually 'over' (as it was proclaimed by Germany in 2009, celebrating its twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, "Come, come to the country without borders" – and I would say without history as well); but in the case of the *former* Western Europe, it implies a purely performative, empty, speculative gesture. While the East is increasingly excluded from history, knowledge, memory, etc., the West is just *performing* its supposed obsolescence.

Terms such as Third World and First World are very problematic and can be seen as oversimplifying methodologies. Though taking this comment by Chandra Talpade Mohanty into account, I refer to these worlds as nomenclatures that denote possible conditions of formation and develop different strategies of empowerment.[5]

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[4] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Thinking through the Decolonial Turn: Post-continental Interventions in Theory, Philosophy, and Critique – An Introduction", *Transmodernity*, Fall 2011, 1.

[5] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western eyes. Knowing Academic and colonial discourses", in: AA.VV, *Postcolonial Studies*, Madrid, 2008.

Why is making the West/East division obsolete in Europe so necessary?

Making the West/East divide obsolete after the fall of the Berlin Wall in the EU allows for a repetition and subsequently a multiplication of another division in the EU: the Occident/Orient division. This presents a new normativization of the re/construction of the European Union (EU) as a unified entity (the One), and also it works by individuating a new Other in this newly-homogenized EU space. The question is why? The answer is, according to Gabriele Dietze, that this allows for dispensing with a substantial contingent of im/migrants, refugees, sans-papier (paperless), and asylum seekers composed of former colonized peoples from North Africa to Pakistan, Indonesia, etc., coming to Europe.[6] They are today represented as the new Other through the internalizing of the global external division produced after 2001 as the clash between the occidental, capitalist, Western, and civilized modes of life, culture, the social, and the political, as well as the Oriental, barbaric, noncivilized life of the Other(s). This turn was well defined in a German context with the title of an article by Stephen Brown for Reuters in 2010, "German Muslims must obey law, not sharia: Merkel."

Chancellor Angela Merkel said Muslims must obey the constitution and not Sharia law if they want to live in Germany, which is debating the integration of its 4 million-strong Muslim population. What this means is open, but if we associate it with the case of the Kunduz massacre some of the connections will appear. Following Maldonado-Torres' statement in 2011 that what is going on in the present moment is the naturalization of the death ethics of war can be a path to follow. On 4 September 2009 at roughly 2:30 am local time, in Kunduz City in northern Afghanistan, responding to a call by German military forces there, an American F-15E fighter jet struck two fuel tankers captured by Taliban insurgents, killing over 90 civilians in the attack. In June 2010, Germany announced it would pay $5,000 to each of the families of over 100 civilian victims as an ex gratia payment, without admitting responsibility. The former Afghan Commerce Minister Amin Farhang described the $5,000 – equivalent to about 20,000 Afghanis – as a 'laughable' sum. Earlier, Germany had already reclassified the Afghanistan deployment as an "armed conflict within the parameters of international law", allowing German forces to act without risk of prosecution under German law. The last we can read about this case is that, as reported by Sebastian Brügge and Sybille Fuchs in 2012, "German officer responsible for Kunduz massacre was promoted to a rank of general."[7]

Erasing history and agency

In the back of these genealogies stays the old 'former' Western Europe and its core of states, more to the point: Germany. It has been active throughout the 1990s and in the 2000s (until the 20th anniversary in 2009) with supporting (selecting and awarding in collaboration with many other EU states and EU agencies and West European branches and NGOs) numerous projects with which, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the nonexistent former communist East Germany (that was integrated after 1989 inside the powerful capitalist and democratic West Germany) had to be constantly reflected in relation and through other former Eastern European realities. Finally, all of them together as 'a package' in 2009 were speedily washed from

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[6] Gabriele Dietze, "Occidentalism, European Identity, and Sexual Politics", in: Hauke Brunkhorst and Gerd Groezinger (eds.), *The Study of Europe*, Baden Baden, Nomos, 2010.

[7] *World Socialist Web Site*, August 21, 2012.

their communist (or better to say, as it exposed, totalitarian) past. Parallel to the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the project "Former" West (2008–2014) was launched in order to constitute one single and at the same time historically-'purified' Europe, or more accurately stated: the EU.

It is interesting to see how this washing away from history and history itself being subjugated to science and other geological times and ecological perspectives affect the interpretation I am giving in this text. Recently, Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin conceived The Anthropocene Project. A Report(16. 10. 2014 to 8. 12. 2014). In the project A Report an extensive program of events concluding The Anthropocene Project, the HKW will be exploring these questions: "Nature as we know it is a concept that belongs to the past. No longer a force separate from and ambivalent to human activity, nature is neither an obstacle nor a harmonious other. Humanity forms nature. Humanity finds itself embedded within the recent geological record." This is the core premise of the Anthropocene thesis, announcing a paradigm shift in the natural sciences as well as providing new models for culture, politics, and everyday life. What is interesting and shocking is that 42 researchers, artists and others participate in the project, let's say from the whole world, but no one from the former Eastern Europe and no one from Africa! Another striking point is that the administrator in charge for this project from the HKW is Katrin Klingan. In 2003 she was appointed artistic director of relations, a project initiated by the Federal Cultural Foundation in Germany and orientated toward its Eastern neighbors. The original initiative came from the German Federal Cultural Foundation, which has had a special focus on Eastern, Southeastern and Central Europe since 2002, and they concluded the project by 2009, when the interest of Germany in its Eastern neighbors was completed and dismissed from the agenda.

Actually, what we see in front of us is a perverse logic that is not simply about a new "enlightened logic" of the "former" West being more civilized than the former East, but a process of new racialized discrimination politics in global capitalist neoliberal Western societies that take into its borders those "others" that were discriminated against in the past (for example the white gays and lesbians, queer, etc., as Western nation-State citizens) while at the same time producing new Others in the EU: migrants, refugees, sans-papiers, people and women of colour coming from other parts of the world and religious backgrounds.

In the homophobic Eastern Europe, especially the former Yugoslavia, Russia, etc., on the contrary we see that the LGBTQI people have the status of second-grade citizens. Slovenia, which was a "model State" for neoliberal privatization, is today a turbo fascist neoliberal wreck that rejected a referendum in 2012 that proposed a family law which made it possible to regulate same sex partnerships and other basic rights of the LGBTQI population in Slovenia.

So how to understand these differences between the West and the East in the EU?

It is important to state that this is not a case of some backwards populations. We are witnessing a change, the shift of the former Western nation-States, that are all colonial and anti-Semitic, into what is today possible to conceive of as the war-State; in the meantime, all the former Eastern European states are within the EU as just nation-State (s). Therefore, while the war-State(s) militarize (and include the former [LGBTQI] white Others into the military machine, while also producing new Others), the nation-State(s), as we know from history, violently patriarchalize and produce second-grade citizens inside its nation-body based on a firm homophobic, chauvinistic psychosis.

Biopolitical/necropolitical citizenship

The violent effect of the substitution of biopolitics by necropolitics is evident in the process of granting citizenship. An illustrative case is the case of Italian Lampedusa, when 350 refugees from Africa drowned in a single day on October 12, 2013. But this was just an additional confirmation, crystallization as those following Deleuze will say, of the alarming scale of the refugee crisis in the EU going on daily and lasting more than a decade. However, the most perverse situation happened afterwards, when these hundreds of dead bodies were given Italian citizenship (but only so that the Italian government and the EU could bury them in Italy – it was obviously cheaper than to send the dead bodies back to their countries of origin and to their respective families). The Italian government decided to prosecute the few who did survive, as they tried to illegally enter Italy and the EU. This is the clearest sign of the perverse and violent new attitude that Western Europe has toward human rights (after the West had been heavily capitalizing its democracy on it for decades) and the occurrence of a new category of citizenship – the *necropolitical citizenship*.

The colonial/racial division is applied to citizenship, and we have two categories of citizenship: one is the category I will name *biopolitical citizenship* (the EU 'natural' nation-State citizens), and the other is *necropolitical citizenship* given to refugees and sans-papier (paperless) after they die on EU soil. While some are made 'equal' the other Others are left to die and are brutally abandoned, or their second-grade status as citizens is fully normalized in the EU.[8]

These processes of invigorated control of borders, expulsion of refugees, etc., are judicially, economically and, last but not least, discursively and representationally (as different semio-technological regimes), ratified, legislated, and normativized. Today it is central to draw a genealogy of racism that parallels capitalism's historical transformation and historicization.

Racism passed from *institutionalized* to *structural* to be today identified as *social racism*. To talk about social racism means (as argued by Nasim Lomani, an Afghan refugee that works in the immigrant social center run by volunteers in Athens, Steki Metanaston) "to talk about an all-pervasive racism; its violence legitimized by the State itself." Contemporary social racism is an all-pervasive racism that fully impregnates the neoliberal social body and is approved by the EU governments. It is socially-approved and internalized to such a micro level that the structures of violence produced by social racism are said to be a type of (micro) fascism. Making reference to Étienne Balibar's repeated interventions on racism already in 1988 before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, it is possible to claim that social racism constitutes the essential form of "European apartheid".[9]

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[8] Great Britain, at the end of October 2014, declared they will not support any future search and rescue operations to prevent migrants and refugees drowning in the Mediterranean Sea, claiming they simply encourage more people to attempt the dangerous sea crossing, as the Foreign Office ministers have quietly announced. The British refusal comes as the official Italian sea and rescue operation, Mare Nostrum, ended on November 1, 2014. The Italian operation will now end without a similar European search and rescue operation to replace it. More than 2,500 people are known to have drowned or gone missing in the Mediterranean Sea since the start of the year. Instead of the Italian operation, a limited joint EU "border protection" operation, codenamed Triton and managed by Frontex, the European border agency, was launched on November 1, 2014. The new European operation will have only a third of the resources of the Italian operation that is being phased out. More migrants and refugees will die in their attempt to reach Europe from the North African coast.

[9] Étienne Balibar, "Y a-t-il un 'neo-racisme'?" ["Is there a 'néo-racism'?"], in: Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (eds.), *Race, Nation, Classes: Les identités ambiguës* [*Race, Nation, Classes: Ambiguous Identities*], Paris, La Découverte, 1988.

Racializations and the post-human

I am elaborating racialization as a process of capital's differentiation between citizens (first and second grade citizens), non-citizens (refuges, asylum seekers), and migrants; they are all violently, but differently, discriminated against, as the labor market under global capitalism imposes violent processes of racial, class and gender selection of im/migration in Europe. Europe is renewed today through a genealogy that excludes all those who are seen from its Western perspective as unimportant (that are constructed as *subhuman* through a process of dehumanization). This process stays unreflected also due to the new rhetoric developed in contemporary philosophy and theory of the *posthuman*. As stated by Maldonado-Torres, these dehumanizing forces, logics, and discourses hardly seem to find an end in the current neo-conservative and neoliberal moment, or in the liberal and Eurocentric radical responses that it sometimes generates. Continued […] polarities between sectors considered more human than others, the accelerated rhythm of capitalist exploitation of land and human labor – sometimes facilitated, as Fanon put it, by neocolonial elites among the groups of the oppressed themselves – as well as anxieties created by migration and rights claims by populations consi-dered pathological, undesirable, or abnormal (to name only a few of the most common issues found today), make clear that decolonization will remain unfinished for some time.[10]

In all these processes the concept of the new human, the post-human (as outcome of a capital's regime of humanization and as contemporary human capital subsumed to the unfinis-hed project of Western modernization) stays largely untouched. The Occident does not want to deal with it, and therefore engages in all imaginable post-human modes, while the present and historical modes of Occidental colonial *de*-humanization remain largely undiscussed.

To conclude: if we depart from the most influential book in academic feminism and queer theory in the 1990s, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* by Judith Butler, and taking into account the passage from biopolitics toward what I have tried to develop – racialization and necropolitics on one side, transfeminism and transmigration, as a proposal of intervention politics, on the other – I can propose another PROGRAM/PLATFORM OF INSURGENCY for the new decade of the twenty-first century. The title of this PROGRAM/PLATFORM OF INSURGENCY will be *Race Trouble: Transfeminism and Dehumanization*, in order to discuss the place of race, class, sex, nation-State, and migrants in queer theory and global necrocapitalism, while forming Trans modes of insurgency.

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[10] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, op. cit., 2–3.