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Towards Marina Gržinić (Ed.), *Border Thinking: Disassembling Histories of Racialized Violence*

Marina Gržinić (Ed.), *Border Thinking: Disassembling Histories of Racialized Violence* (Vienna and Berlin: Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and Sternberg Press, 2018)

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Border Thinking: Disassembling Histories of Racialized Violence gathers together the work of over 20 scholars, artists and activists comprising a critical testimony and analysis of the politics of capitalist expansion and the racial violence of Western liberalism. It collects varying genres of texts and visual materials which makes it challenging to read and analyse the volume as a coherent theoretical framework, political claim and method. Despite the relatively coherent framework presented in the introduction by the editor Marina Gržinić, the texts, loosely assembled around the topics of race and border, differ significantly in genre, maturity of argumentation, and their overall capacity to adopt a theoretical and political framework. However, this heterogeneity can also be seen as one of the provocations of the book. The result perfectly embodies the idea of the multiplication of borders¹ and presents to us an intellectually and politically provoking multiplication of the voices of/from the border. It combines documentary style reports with highly theoretical works; historical analyses visual documentation and art; personal and very intimate political accounts of bordering and experiences of borders and racism. In this way, the volume prompts us to consider the implications of a Bakhtinian dialogic heteroglossia as a method for political and theoretical inquiry. The book combines a decolonial

approach (most explicit in Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso's article on the indigenous politics of feminism in America), with postcolonial theory, most notably Achille Mbembe's, critical border studies, and art activism. This heterogeneity allows multiple configurations and dialogues between the articles and artworks included therein. I will focus on following the conversation between some of the contributions that engage with the current crisis of Western liberalism and migration management in the EU.

Outside of this theoretical line, which I will follow here, there are some very original articles, such as Khaled Rhamadan's analysis of the cinematography of violence in ISIS' executions and African-American lynchings, which do not partake explicitly in this dialogue, but are extremely interesting and provocative in their own right. Rhamadan's article, for example, initiates a slightly different narrative and argumentative line that problematizes violence, race, and art as a spectacle and mediated performance. Rhamadan draws parallels between the scenography of ISIS execution videos, photos of public lynchings of African-Americans in the U.S., and the stalking and attempted murderer of Björk, showing the emergence of a certain aesthetics and performativity of violence with the development of visual media and documentary capture. This unsettling analysis points to the unexpected intertwining of media technologies and technologies of killing - although the case of Björk's stalker still remains unconvincingly linked to issues concerning the border and racialization.

The title of this volume makes a direct reference to the work of Walter D. Mignolo on decolonization and his concept of "border thinking"² as an epistemological method of overcoming the structures of oppression. It is worth noting the points of convergence and divergence in this book from decolonial theory. While Mignolo's concept of "border thinking" draws on a dichotomy between civilization and barbarism, colonial modernity and indigenous non-modernities, this book complicates the idea of the border, exclusion and race by interrogating different practices of bordering and racialization in Europe, as well as in the post-colonies and the "Orient."

¹ Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, Or, the Multiplication of Labour* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2013).

² Walter D. Mignolo, "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (De)Coloniality, Border Thinking and Epistemic Disobedience," *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2011), 273-83; Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012).

Border Thinking comes out at a time when the political order of the West and the superiority of liberal democracy and (neo)liberal capitalism are more and more contested. While these contestations have led to movements like Occupy and the resurgence of strikes and social mobilization, they have also been expressed through a turn to the fascist right with the solidification of nationalist, fascist and conservative regimes and political expressions across different regions of the world. To this, the volume counterpoints a repeated call for the queering of ethnicities (Stanimir Panayotov) and identities (Tjaša Kancler).

One of the central themes throughout the contributions is the so-called “refugee crisis” in Europe, which has become a focal point of repression, resistance and solidarity in EU politics, but also, significantly, a sign of the crisis of liberalism in the West. This crisis is seen as a result of the inherent contradictions of liberalism, which weaves its genealogy into the history of colonialism and racialized violence, a twinning at birth, which is argued by Domenico Losurdo as constitutive of the principles and paradoxes of liberalism.³ Panayotov, in his article “Necropolitics in the East,” delves into these paradoxes from the perspective of the current EU crisis of liberal democracy and migration management. He argues that the expansion of capitalist liberal democracy to the former socialist block after 1989 shatters the necessary dependency between the liberal core and its “other,” which sustains liberalism not only as a principle in the economy, but also as a political project. Panayotov argues for the possibility of complicating the notion of race and racialization through Fatima El-Tayeb’s concept of “queering ethnicity,” bringing class, race and ethnicity together as constitutive of the ways in which necropolitics work in the East European context. This argument is central to understanding how the volume depicts and critiques the dependence between liberalism and necropolitics as grounded in a series of operations of bordering that repeat the racialization, exploitation and negation of the colonies.

In the work of Marina Gržinić the double-faced nature of liberalism is critiqued through the concept of necropolitics, developed by Achille Mbembe and further elaborated by Gržinić as the other side of bio-

politics - a work of negation, extinction and silencing in the peripheries, which makes the solidification of liberal politics of life possible in the core. This theoretical and political project linking liberalism, colonialism, racism and the politics of death is developed in several of the contributions in the volume and I think it is worth looking into the kind of dialogue it creates.

The problem of how the border operates as a mode of exclusion and difference plays a central role in the contribution of Tjaša Kancler, who offers a critique of EU border regimes. In “Interrogating Silences: Crisis, Borders, and Decolonial Interferences” Kancler discusses the processes and mechanisms of racialization in Europe, which take shape through the construction of multiple borderlands - the externalization of EU borders to African shores and the transformation of the whole region of Central and Eastern Europe into a borderzone, schizophrenically torn between its status of a guard post for EU’s anti-asylum policies while remaining Europe’s “other” (Kancler, Panayotov). Kancler argues that the inclusion of post-communist Eastern European states in the EU project has not only facilitated the externalization of borders, but also the externalization and denial of racialized violence. Redrawing the borders of Europe has made it possible for the West to absolve itself of its past histories of imperialism, while simultaneously constructing an opposition that transfers its vices of racialized policies to the East - the West openly welcomes refugees, while the East is racist; the West is global, while the East is nationalistic. The discourse about the welcoming West is consistently challenged throughout the volume in the works of Betül Seyma Küpeli, who critiques the proliferation of humanitarian-inspired art which exploits the topic of migration; focussing especially in the art of Neda Hosseinyar and Marika Schmiedt, who focus on racist and Islamophobic policies; and in Miguel González Cabezas’ map of the externalization of the Spanish external EU border.

However, Zoltán Kékesi’s “Transpositions: Jews, Roma, and Other Aliens in the Radical Right Culture in Hungary” offers a counter-narrative of sorts, tracing the histories of racism and anti-Semitism in Central Europe and their contemporary revival by the far right in Hungary. Uncovering past stories of vilified Jews adorned with a monstrous image and fear of black magic, Kékesi analyzes the per-

³ Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History*, trans. by Gregory Elliot (London and New York: Verso, 2011).

sistence of myths of the abuse and corruption of the pure nationalist body by various “others” and sees in their revival the repetition of past and forgotten racial histories.

Acts of repetition, silencing and death remain pivotal for building the overall argument, throughout the volume, of the repeated and silenced histories of racialized violence. It is through these concepts that Suvendrini Perera constructs a shared history of the Transatlantic slave trade and the current refugee crisis in her hauntingly poetic article. Perera retells the legend of Drexciya, which is part of the oral tradition of African slavery - an “undersea continent peopled by the unborn babies of slaves who were tossed or fell overboard during the Middle Passage” (186). This otherworldly oceanography is seen as the new deterritorialized territory of solace and solidarity in death that brings together the two journeys. Perera considers the possibility of imagining a corporeal geography of hope, vulnerability and the precarity of “survival media” carrying racialized bodies across continents and repeated histories of dehumanization and militarism.

Her evocative piece prompts a question at the core of this volume - examining the possibility of “striking the border” (28) and keeping solidarity in the midst of the repetition of the necropolitics of colonial violence. The possibility of exodus in some of the other articles remain constrained either within a retreat into an indigenous politics of difference (Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso) or the intimate politics of identity and the self (in Njideka Stephanie Iroh’s poem and Maira Enesi Caixeta’s diary). It is notable that the idea of solidarity is articulated through the deadly embrace of the ocean. The ghosts of babies who were born in the seas while their mothers were dying is an eerie image that does not easily translate into a message of hope or change. It remains troubling and the loss and death linger on. The young refugee from the contemporary passage, whose story Perera links to Drexciya, shares that a part of her remained in the waters, carrying the lifeless bodies of her companions. The capacity to keep solidarity in the face of loss and death is the most pressing question asked in this volume, one however, that remains unanswered - stepping beyond the testimony and analysis, we must ask: what are the possibilities of politically articulating the dead and the living dead in the geographies of necropolitics and necrocapitalism?

The possibility of thinking about the Eastern European, post-socialist experience through the lens of colonial oppression and violence in the context of EU enlargement and the current crisis is one of the provocative and intriguing accomplishments of this volume. There have been multiple attempts throughout academia to bring these two distinct experiences together, such as the works of Madina Tolstanova,⁴ Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery,⁵ Nikolay Karkov⁶ and Nataša Kovačević,⁷ among many others. The different voices and perspectives contained in this volume offer an important intervention into this emergent area of thinking post-socialist Europe through the power relations and dependencies with/in the (post)colony. It interweaves debates about capitalist expansion, crises and subjectivity as key aspects of a new revolutionary ontology of the past, present and future of a contracting geography. In this contraction full of political tension and muted political articulations, the border becomes a central technology for how difference is enforced, enacted and erased in the course of a long historical attempt of the West to rid itself of the haunting ghosts of racialized oppression and extermination that mark simultaneously its spilling out of the “old world” and its retraction into a morally guarded domain of a territorially defined birthplace of modern liberal politics.

⁴ Madina Tolstanova, “The Postcolonial and the Postsocialist: A Deferred Coalition? Brothers Forever?,” *Postcolonial Interventions: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2018), 1-37.

⁵ Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery, “Thinking Between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography After the Cold War,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (2009), 6-34.

⁶ Nikolay Karkov, “Decolonizing Praxis in Eastern Europe: Toward a South-to-South Dialogue,” *Comparative and Continental Philosophy*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2015), 180-200.

⁷ Nataša Kovačević, *Narrating Post/Communism: Colonial Discourse and Europe’s Borderline Civilization* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).