

F E M I N I S T CRITIQUE

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EAST EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF FEMINIST AND QUEER STUDIES

Special Issue

**Breaking with Transition:
Decolonial and Postcolonial Perspectives
in Eastern Europe**

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Це число журналу *Критика феміністична* створено у співпраці з Балканським товариством теорії і практики. Номер підготовано за фінансової підтримки Канадського інституту українських студій і шведської фундації «Квінна тіль Квінна». Грантодавчі інституції не несуть відповідальності за зміст текстів.

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On the cover: statue of Black Madonna, the cathedral in Le Puy-en-Velay (France); engraving of blackbirds from *Nederlandsche vogelen* by Cornelius Nozeman and Christiaan Sepp (Amsterdam, 1770-1829).

У колажі обкладинки використано статую Чорної Мадонни із кафедрального собору міста Ле-Пюї-ан-Веле у Франції і гравюру дроздів із багатотомника Корнеліуса Ноземана та Крістіана Сепи *Nederlandsche vogelen* (Amsterdam, 1770-1829).

Contents

Special Issue Introduction: Breaking with Transition	7
Marina Gržinić, Tjaša Kancler, Piro Rexhepi Decolonial Encounters and the Geopolitics of Racial Capitalism	13
Genta Nishku The Wretched on the Walls: A Fanonian Reading of a Revolutionary Albanian Orphanage	39
Jeta (Jetim) Luboteni A Heavy Word: Discourses on Albanian Sworn Virgins	65
Lesia Pagulich, Tatsiana Shchurko (Re)thinking Postsocialism: Interview with Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora	91
Erzébet Barát Stigmatization of the Analytical Concept of Gender as Ideology	113
Мария Лукьянова, Рина Винтер Строчки из жизни швей	125
Оксана Дудко Гуманітарне насильство, або Критика американського імперіалізму	135
About the Contributors	139

Special Issue Introduction: Breaking with Transition

Post-socialist Balkan states are in a condition of economic and political devastation after years of war and struggles to join Europe. One of the most common theoretical frameworks employed to theorize this situation is known as transition politics, which denotes the transition from socialism to democratic capitalism. While transition politics previously referred to the transition from any political rule to another, it now exclusively denotes the transition from socialism to democratic capitalism – the natural end of history's movement. Transition politics is based on a belief that democracy and capitalism will finally bring peace, stability, and economic prosperity. Based on this belief, international intervention in the Balkans is enforced with the promise of European Union membership and, in turn, political and economic stability. Since the telos is determined, what remains to be controlled are the socio-economic circumstances in which capitalism can blossom. Transition politics is driven by the EU's civilizing mission as dictated by EULEX, NATO, IC, World Bank, IMF, the U.S., and USAID among others. All brutal mechanisms of transition are justified through the rhetoric of development, economic prosperity, and peace. Stabilizing the Balkan region has become a priority for international agencies, which make promises of economic integration and development.

The Balkan Society for Theory and Practice (BSTP) workshop, held in 2018 in Prizren, Kosovo, addressed the conditions of the Balkans from a radical political perspective. BSTP turned to decolonial and postcolonial discourses to analyze the current situation in the Balkans. The workshop sessions, presentations, and talks given by an interdisciplinary group of theorists (Paola Baccheta, Sezgin Boynik, Boris Buden, Marina Gržinić, Linda Gusia, Tjaša Kancler, Eli Krasniqi, Nita Luci, and Piro Rexhepi) covered a range of social and political issues particular to the Balkans. We addressed the status of non-EU countries and analyzed whether their status changes our conception of Europe and the corresponding distinction between the West and the East; the history of racial and ethnic discrimination of the Balkans by Western Europe and the way in which this history informs the nature of political

interventions in the region, which has led to further economic and political devastation; the relation between racial and ethnic discrimination and politics that have “appeasement” and “peace” at their center; the way in which transition politics and the “civilizing mission” of Europe forecloses or opens possibilities for non-heteronormative sexuality and/or gender expressions in the Balkans, and more. This special issue represents the decolonial and post-colonial analysis of the Balkans, which constituted the theme of the inaugural BSTP workshop.

Why decoloniality in the Balkans?

Aníbal Quijano famously employs “coloniality” to express the underlying logic of all forms of modern western colonial imperialism. He argues that colonialism was not an unfortunate feature of modernity but that the two are intrinsically connected. The decolonial task, for Quijano, is the task of epistemic reconstitution. Decoloniality seeks to analyze and untangle western structures of knowledge and power. This epistemic reconstitution is currently taking place in many parts of the world and in many forms in order to advance political goals across domains of the colonial matrix of power (e.g., knowledge, politics, economy, subjectivity, gender/sexuality, race/racism, nature/living). Decoloniality allows us to unveil the logic of colonial knowledge production and distribution and opens up the possibility of decolonizing our way of thinking and being in the world. Within decolonial discourse, however, Eastern Europe/the Balkans/post-socialist countries are generally neglected in favor of the Global South as the primary geo-political context. This issue seeks to expand decolonial and post-colonial discourse to include the unique socio-political conditions of postsocialist Eastern Europe.

In their trilogy, “Decolonial Encounters and the Geopolitics of Racial Capitalism,” Marina Gržinić, Tjaša Kancler, and Piro Rexhepi discuss various historical, social, and political issues in the Balkans ripe for decolonial intervention. This trilogy makes a case for why and how decolonial theory is relevant to the Balkans. Kancler, Gržinić, and Rexhepi do not present the Balkans as representing analogous modes of oppression to that of the Global South; rather, they trace the specific historical contours of capitalism, racism, xenophobia, and patriarchy as it has developed in Eastern Europe. Gržinić characterizes the Balkans, not as postsocialist, but as turbo-capitalist. Combining strategies of biopolitics with necropolitics, turbo-capitalism manages a vast array of “traditional” forms of class oppression with emerging forms of racialization, heteronormativity, processes of financialization, and religious-based xenophobia. Rexhepi nuances this account of racialization in Eastern Europe by considering the particular histories of Roma and Muslim communities in the region. Critiquing theorists who lump the racialized oppression of these communities into broader Orientalist narratives, Rexhepi considers what remains unaccounted for in this conflation of histories. Rexhepi asks how post-socialist racialized communities are disbarred from articulating their

own political agency and subjectivity vis-à-vis scholarship that has made socialist nostalgia both colorblind and classless? Analyzing capitalist-patriarchal forms of heteronormativity in Eastern Europe, Kancler identifies examples of theoretical, artistic, and activist work of recent decades that explore the tensions between truly radical sex-gender dissident feminist practice and the (neo)liberal valorization of so-called democracy. These groups, including ŠKUC-LL, a radical lesbian organization based in Slovenia, represent decolonial interventions in the Balkans that do not fall prey to either transitional politics or Western LGBTQIA+ movements, both of which have been absorbed into neoliberalism through homonationalist narratives.

In her contribution to this special issue, “The Wretched on the Walls: A Fanonian Reading of a Revolutionary Albanian Orphanage,” Genta Nishku develops a decolonial analysis of the Balkans through film. Nishku draws upon Frantz Fanon’s famous chapter, “On Violence,” in *The Wretched of the Earth* to understand the dynamics of power and violence in Albania’s history as represented in the 1976 film *Lulëkuqet mbi Mure / Red Poppies on Walls*. Nishku contends that Fanon’s assertion that the colonizer’s power is founded on force and maintained through violence, capitalist exploitation, dehumanization, and compartmentalization help us grasp the functioning of the world within the film. Ultimately, Nishku concludes that *Lulëkuqet mbi Mure*, a propagandistic film produced with very didactic instructions, allows the viewer only a strict binary – the same cold war dichotomy that Fanon cautioned against. The choice is either to be a fascist, capitalist, and colonizer or a communist, revolted, colonized subject ready to take up arms for national liberation and follow Party dogma.

Balancing personal and theoretical modes of analyses, Jeta (Jetim) Luboteni examines their discovery of burrneshas communities in Albanian culture. The article, “A Heavy Word: Discourses on Albanian Sworn Virgins,” describes Luboteni’s own experience of learning about an element of Albanian culture (their own culture) through a Western/English website about sworn virgins. Luboteni explains that burrneshas were described by this website as women who take a vow of celibacy, after which time society recognizes him/her as a man and affords him/her the role and rights of a man. The context given by the website is distinctly negative; the custom of burrneshas is described as a way out of an arranged marriage or as a last resort for a family left with no male descendent, most often because of blood feuds. Despite this negative characterization, Luboteni explains that they were filled with joy at the discovery of a community within Albanian culture that resonated with their own experiences of and relation to gender. Luboteni’s article analyzes the underpinnings of Orientalism that inform the Western characterization of burrneshas as victims of a backward culture that forces women to choose between their femininity/sexuality and their rights. Drawing upon several YouTube videos concerning burrneshas, Luboteni argues that the dominant Western narrative regarding burrneshas is problematic primarily because of the power difference between the Balkan subject and the Western observer. Turning to

queer theory, Lubotení argues that burrnesha must be understood in more nuanced terms. We must listen to burrnesha's own narratives of their lives as happy ones and offer more dynamic accounts of the conditions and circumstances leading to their transition to burrnesha, which does not necessarily preclude the presence of either coercion or agency.

In an interview titled "(Re)thinking Postsocialism," Lesia Pagulich and Tatsiana Shchurko offer a discussion and interview with Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora, editors of the special issue *Postsocialist Politics and the Ends of Revolution* of the journal *Social Identities* (online publication May 2017; print publication Winter 2018). Building on Atanasoski's and Vora's intervention into conceptualizations of postsocialism, this interview continues the conversation about the place of postsocialism in thinking about global coloniality of power. Specifically, the interview explores what possibilities exist for theorizing postsocialism in a register different from a liberal humanist project and how the theoretical location of postsocialism might contribute to new ways of thinking about capitalism, heteropatriarchy, racism, and imperialism. In their interview, the scholars address postsocialism both as a particular geographic location entangled with global circuits of power, a global condition, and as a space of theoretical inquiry. This discussion provides a critical perspective of post-Cold War narratives and examines postsocialism through cross-filiations between groups that belong to socialist lifeworlds that are not aligned with a temporality of Europeanization or neoliberal development. Thus, in their account, postsocialism centers enduring legacies of socialisms in "illiberal" or noncapitalist formations. Looking closer at different examples, Atanasoski and Vora focus on pluralizing postsocialisms and challenging liberal forms of forgetting in order to bring into light transnational movements, political actions, and ethical collectivities of resistance and liberation from the neoliberal and imperial trajectories.

In this special issue, we have also included an article written by Erzébet Barát, a book review written by Oksana Dudko, and an interview between Mariia Lukianova and Rina Winter concerning sewing labor in Ukraine and other countries.

Barát's article, "Stigmatization of the Analytical Concept of Gender as Ideology," examines the stigmatization of gender as 'gender-craze' and 'gender ideology' in Hungarian political discourse since 2010. Challenging the binary logic of sex and gender that undergirds critiques of gender as mere ideology, Barát argues in favor of a contingency model of gender. According to this model, gender is a polyvocal historical and social category that overlaps with other socio-political categories, which are relatively stable and open to reconfiguration. Tracing the socially regulated signifying practices of gender in Hungary – in contradistinction to a hegemonic model based in ideology – Barát identifies the meaning-making practices concerning the term 'feminism' along three historical junctures. Feminism was first dismissed by anti-American discourse as an alien export. Second, the 'woman question' was associated with a failed communist past and dismissed as relevant for the

constitution of the ideal 'new woman.' And third, feminism was critiqued for devaluing the importance of women's ways of knowing. Barát calls for a revitalization of gender discourse that relies upon an empty signifier in order to fully recognize the plurality constitutive of gender formation itself.

Oksana Dudko review of Neda Atanasoski's 2013 book *Humanitarian Violence: The US Deployment of Diversity*, situates Atanasoski's text within the larger discourse concerning the "American Empire." Specifically, Dudko argues that Atanasoski provides a critique of post-Cold War American imperialism, which exploits humanitarian ethics for global expansion. Under the guise of democracy, Atanasoski argues, the US deploys a politics of world supremacy.

In their interview titled "Lines from Seamstresses' Life," Mariia Lukianova and Rina Winter discuss the labor of sewers in Ukraine and other countries. Lukianova and Winter reflect upon their own privilege and consider the labor issues particular to sewers. They argue that consumers rarely think of those who engage in sewing labor and Lukianova and Winter seek to render this labor more visible through their interview.

This special issue examines the decolonial turn in the Balkans as a significant shift in theory and practice that further elaborates upon decoloniality itself. The contributors raise a wide range of questions about the status of Eastern Europe in relation to decolonial, post-socialist, and post-colonial theories. The organizers of the Balkan Society for Theory and Practice would like to extend a special thank you to Serafina Bytyqi for her work in organizing the first BSTP workshop. We are also grateful for the work of the contributors of this special issue. We hope that the content featured here is received in the spirit in which it is given: an extension, not a critique, of decolonial and post-colonial theories to consider the unique socio-political conditions of Eastern Europe, which far too often gets overlooked precisely because these conditions do not neatly fit into any existing category or mode of political analysis. Additionally, we hope that this special issue will draw further awareness to already existent anti-colonial discourses that are currently taking place in the Balkans.

Decolonial Encounters and the Geopolitics of Racial Capitalism



This conversation started in the summer of 2018 at the first Balkan Society for Theory and Practice workshop that took place in Prizren, Kosovo. Scholars, activists, and artists came together to engage in a very much needed debate about the past, present, and future of anticapitalist politics, feminism, queer and trans studies, critical race theory, postcolonial and decolonial critique in the context of the post-socialist Balkan countries and former Eastern Europe. The idea for this tri-logue came out of late night and early morning conversations based on common concerns and collaborations that have taken various forms through years of exchange and engagement with one another. What follows is a discussion among the three of us based on the questions posed in the open call for this special issue *Breaking with Transition: Decolonial and Postcolonial Perspectives in Eastern Europe*. To articulate some critical points, we find it necessary to rethink the conflicts and tensions and to envisage important analytical turns and political tactics within our ongoing struggles against turbo-racializing capitalism.

Photo: "Fuck the Fascism" Brussels Conspiracy Gathering, 2018; MariaBasura and Jorge Benavides, "Terrorismo Teatral Migrante" group; <https://fuckthefascism.noblogs.org>

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1. To take a political stance and further elaborate the decolonial critique about postsocialism and former Eastern Europe, we think it is necessary to bring together some introductory lines on what it means to speak about decoloniality in Eastern Europe and what decoloniality means for the post-socialist contemporary context. Where are we now and where do we stand?

Tjaša Kancler: To begin elaborating a double critique I propose the following thesis: post-socialism is not at all postcolonial. As Neda Atanasoski argues, “if post-socialism is relegated to periodizing a particular moment of regional transition that at once affirms the death of socialism and consigns it to an ideological formation inferior to Western modernity and universality, it particularizes what is actually a global condition in which the West situates the universal claims of human rights, freedom, democracy, that underwrite its global violence” (Atanasoski 2013, 26). This means that we have to analyse the entanglement of modernity, colonialism, and capitalism to understand the East (former Eastern Europe) in condition of coloniality in relation to the West. This requires taking into account the imitation of Western modernity by Eastern Europe, with racism at its core. Thus, while the Eurocentric critique of capitalism focuses on economic relations over other social, political, and cultural ones, the decolonial turn after 1989, without negating the continuous accumulation of capital on the global scale, class divisions and exploitation, points to the conflict through de/coloniality.

Aníbal Quijano, one of the founding members of the research group Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality, introduced a new concept named “coloniality” as the indispensable underside of modernity, which began in the 15th century and continues today. He defines coloniality as a matrix of power that operates through four interrelated domains: the control of economy, the control of authority, the control of gender and sexuality, and the control of subjectivity and knowledge (Mignolo 2008). Quijano conceptualized the intersections of multiple, heterogeneous, global hierarchies, and forms of domination and exploitation: racial, sexual, gendered, political, economic, spiritual, and linguistic. Emphasizing its structural, constitutive, and not derivative relations, by claiming intersectionality, these are in fact analytical methods introduced previously by the Black feminists (Combahee River Collective, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Audre Lorde, and Patricia Hill Collins, among others) and developed further by and with feminists of color (e.g., Chela Sandoval, Chandra Mohanty, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga) to point to their historical, theoretical, and practical exclusions. Interlacing these lines of analysis with those of the global capitalist power elaborated by Quijano, María Lugones introduced a concept provisionally called “the modern/colonial gender system” to make visible the instrumentality of the modern/colonial gender system in the subjugation of people of color in all areas of existence (Lugones 2008). Or, to refer to Gržinić’s analysis, the implications of racism are deeply related to class and gender (Gržinić 2013).

Decolonial ways of sensing-thinking-acting are a radical attempt to de-universalize, de-naturalize and dismantle capitalist/colonial, patriarchal, political, institutional, class, ethno/racial, sexual and gender border structures that operate in multiple ways locally and globally today.

Marina Gržinić: In order to approach the decolonial we have to first look to post-socialism and the post-colonial. First, because they precede the decolonial and also because both bear the prefix *post*. But to simply equate them is false parallelism; post-socialism is a condition of the whole territory of former Eastern Europe that denotes a transitional moment in the 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. For post-socialism, the referent is socialism that provided strong support to decolonization struggles after the WWII, which supported the idea of the non-aligned movement, building ties with Africa and the Middle East in the time of the Cold war.

In such a context, in the period of post-socialism in the 1990s that was heavily pressed by the West to forget its socialist past (and to cut any relation with socialism), we recognize other important counter positions. In the context of ex-Yugoslavia, the LGBTQ movement that organized and critically intervened in Slovenia, then the media technology and internet possibilities opened a production of independent projects that tackled in the time of the Balkan war in the 1990s important cultural and media reflections on the war. During the 1990s, in the period of post-socialism in former Yugoslavia, I completed a doctoral dissertation, which I later published as a book titled, *In a Line for Virtual Bread* (Gržinić 1996). In this text, I brought together post-colonial theory (Trinh Minh-ha), cyberfeminism (Donna Haraway), and the war in the Balkans to question the position of former Eastern Europe. My thesis was that the critique of post-socialism or the post-socialist condition and the post-colonial theory have, primarily on the cultural level, powerfully intervened on the state of things.

Decoloniality is, on the other side, connected with changes that were brought by neoliberal global capitalism. Neoliberal global capitalism dismisses the space of culture as a place of a radical critique. Neoliberal global capitalism, which I argue fully emerges in 2001 after the events of 9/11, introduced war as a direct machine for profit and death as its currency and vomits culture in front of our eyes as something completely subjugated to the so-called cultural industry. Neoliberal global capitalism has advanced with the death of thousands and more. To do this, it engages heavily in discrimination, separation, and ghettoization. We should not forget that the 1990s is the decade of multiculturalism, while the 21st century overtly despises the "Other." The latter is produced persistently through heavily racialized mechanisms. This is manifest in a myriad of hyper discrimination processes.

I want to emphasize here a genealogy of racism that bypasses individual racism, and that shows itself in the form of insidious, visible and non-visible processes, procedures, conditions that produce through the category of "race" systematic, permanent and unquestioned marginality, inequality and

discrimination. A race is only projected onto people because of their color, culture, or ethnic origins. So the regime of whiteness is privileged and unquestioned from the very start, because “white” is seen “colourless” and “neutral.” This genealogy of racism presents itself historically as scientific racism, institutional racism, social racism and finally structural racism working on every level of capitalist societies. In this relation, the term racialization designates and emphasizes the very process of discrimination that is ideological, systemic and material at work within different racisms. Farhad Dalal stated that “racialization is the very complex and contradictory process through which groups come to be designated as being of a particular ‘race’ and on that basis subjected to differential and unequal treatment” (Dalal 2002).

At this point, the most interesting element provided by decolonial theory is, as already emphasized by Kancler, the colonial matrix of power or coloniality of power. Cetshwayo Zindabazwe Mabhena in 2017 recuperates vividly what this is:

A colonial power matrix is in place that functions through governments of the world, big businesses and other entities. The interconnectedness and networking of these organisations to make a world system is what is called the world order, how the world works. When he coined the term ‘coloniality of power’ in 2000 Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano did not really invent anything new but came up with a fresh way of understanding a colonial and imperial problem that had haunted thinkers and leaders of the Global South for centuries. By the coloniality of power and colonial power matrix decolonial theorists have come to mean the structures and institutions of power, control and hegemony that emerged with the modern world of colonialism starting in 1492 and are still at large (Mabhena 2017).

Returning to the European context, we must ask what economic and cultural shifts occurred as a result of 2001? I argue that Europe has at least two types of capitalism. Following Paul Preciado, there is a hot (punk) capitalism that has primarily developed in the “former” West and the first capitalist world. The importance of hot capitalism is mostly semiotically-technologically organised. On the other side, and at the same time there is what I term, cold capitalism, a brutal logic of violence, persecutions, discrimination, and racialisations in the former Eastern European space (the former Yugoslavia, Russia, and other post-Soviet countries, etc.). We saw the violence of unbelievable proportions against the LGTBQ+ people in the former Eastern bloc, in the former Yugoslavia: beatings, killings, as well the negation of their basic human rights. We also see on a daily basis corpses floating in the sea, corpses of those who want to enter the “former” West Europe: refugees, people without papers traveling from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, and people who have drowned along the coasts of Italy, Malta, Greece, etc., and in the last period, more and more, near Libya.

Therefore on the one side, there is the hot “former West,” the once first capitalist world – that is, the Christian-capitalist patriarchal colonial and an-

ti-Semitic regime of power – with its processes of financialisation and liberalism that goes hand in hand with inclusion in its necro capitalist (global neoliberal) though largely presented biopolitical matrix of power of all those who in the past were perceived as “others”: the non-heterosexual identities (although there is still a great discrimination of trans people). To be precise, this is not about a new “enlightened logic” of the “former West” being more civilised than the former East, but a process of new racializations that on the one hand includes all those until now seen as the “others,” that were discriminated in the past (the white gays and lesbians, queer as Western nation-state citizens) to produce, and, on the other hand, and at the same time, an infinite list of new Others in the West: migrants, refugees, sans-papiers, people and women of colour coming from other parts of the world, and religious backgrounds. Of course, the practices of inclusion in the West can bring the danger of reproducing homonormativity.

Global capitalism shows a new face of re-westernization and of a brutal biopolitics (managing life) that transforms into necropolitics (managing death) with invigorating precarization of the more and more class and race antagonized job market.

More, the former East of Europe is no longer post-socialist, but turbo-capitalist.

Piro Rexhepi: Post-socialist conceptual vocabularies are deeply entrenched in colonial and Cold War area studies epistemic canons. This makes it difficult to talk about coloniality in former Eastern Europe given that the dominant thinking has emerged out of Euro-American academic concerns with institutionalism, transition, and ethnographies of the socialist or Balkan “other.” Katherine Verdery’s analysis of her own secret service file held by the Romanian Securitate while she was a researcher there, in *My Life as a Spy: Investigations in a Secret Police File*, is a great example of how area studies knowledge trends are continuously adapted to an ever-narrowing Cold War binoculars to see, make, and read the world through Euro-American imaginaries where socialist era injuries are aired and appropriated to provide relief for liberal geopolitical anxieties (Verdery 2018). As Tjaša and Marina point out above, the end of socialism continues to serve the affirmation of the global ascendancy of Euro-American universalism and the need to sustain this moment is visible in the resurgent Cold War nostalgia where Russia has been resuscitated to retake its position as the convenient global Other. Critical post-socialist studies have frequently fallen prey to these nostalgic renderings of socialism, through periodizations that project *pre* and *post*-socialism as reactionary chapters of capitalism and too easily redeem socialism as the sole emancipatory possibility in between the *pre* and *post*. Nothing illustrates this better than the surge of lefty hipster flavors in the last decade roaming around post-socialist ruins searching for artifacts and antiques to trade in the post-modern marketplace and in the process discovering that socialists were people just like them. Such is the current tribute to socialist modernist archi-

ture from *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980* currently on view at the Museum of Modern Art in New York where a Swiss curator reminds the viewer in a mixture of *AlanDeBottonesque* and TEDx fashion that lessons from Yugoslav modernist architecture could contribute to “a better life for everyone” to Ilya Khrzhanovsky’s *Dau*.

I bring this up because I think the attraction of Western observers to socialist modernity is its propensity to emulate and respond to European and American modernity – in both style and substance but particularly in flattening, whitening and secularizing history. Like post-war Europe and the US, the socialist world laboured in producing colorblind historiography that conveniently avoided questions of colonization and racialized labor-relations unless they were deployed to forge anti-imperialist proxy wars in the post-colonies so that the centres of East and West could be violence-free. Soviet and Yugoslav global anti-racist and anti-colonial campaigns were not serious undertakings – in as much racialized populations within their borders fared no better than racialized communities under capitalism – but geopolitical techniques of conflict and cooperation between the two Cold War camps. As Jennifer Wilson has recently pointed out on the Soviet Union courting the African American intelligentsia during the Cold War, the “need to build an ideologically correct Black proletariat came before the need to understand Black literature and Black people as diverse unto themselves” (Wilson 2018). Similarly, post-colonial subjects both inside and outside the socialist worlds became tokens of global self-fashioning of the post-racial and post-colonial just as socialism developed new settler colonial regimes and methods through population displacement and modernization and urbanization of racialized people and spaces in the name of socialist progress. In this context, the socialist and post-socialist worlds have a complicated relationship to coloniality as socialist historiography disowns its racialized colonial projects but also lacks a severe assessment of its role in sustaining coloniality through a Cold War division of labour into first, second and third worlds.

From a decolonial perspective, the (post) socialist world still cannot resolve its (geo)political position of being in pact and proximity of Euro-American coloniality or its product and defying periphery. When we think of decolonial critique about the former socialist world, I believe we have to acknowledge and work with these tensions. This requires attending to erased and ongoing decolonial struggles within the (post)socialist world and their relations to larger geographies of liberation beyond area studies periodisation’s, historical materialism, Eurocentric vocabularies, and imperial spatial imaginaries. More importantly, decoloniality may well be the sole political possibility to confront the post-socialist resurgence of racism now plaguing all political formations in former Eastern Europe, from left to right.

2. What characterizes Eastern European decolonial and post-colonial theory from decolonial and post-colonial theories that have

emerged from Asia and the Global South? How does Eastern Europe's socialist past influence these theories?

Kancler: On the one hand, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in the academic system the analysis was framed into the (neo)liberal area study of Central and Eastern Europe, Postsocialist Studies, etc., while Critical Theory focused on the continuation of Marxist analysis, struggling against anti-communist rewritings of the history and present politics. On the other hand, within post-colonial studies and decolonial option, while the so-called second world vanished (even though not all communist countries were differentiated within this category, some were part of the so-called third world), former Eastern Europe was placed in Europe, as not quite white but not really colonized, rather a colonizer and racist, similar to its western counterpart, before communist/socialist and now postsocialist.

Several intents to bridge the gap through postcolonial and postsocialist dialogues, by questioning both concepts from decolonial positionality, point to the void that is characteristic of the place Eastern Europe have after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. This void suggests a need for more complex analysis, which would critically address the past and present of colonialism/imperialism's constitutive relation with capitalism and heteropatriarchy in the context of Eastern Europe, as Marina and Piro make clear in this trilogue. Since the 90s, only a few theoreticians have written extensively on this problematic and against the erasure of histories of anticolonial, antifascist and feminist struggles in former Eastern Europe. At the same time, the critical question is what socialist histories/discourses are valuable for the present struggles and, thus, need to be brought back from a vanishing communist past and its buried Marxist archives?

Rexhepi: Recent attempts to rethink post-socialist studies, societies, and subjectivities through de/coloniality and Critical Race Theory have attended to the colonial and racial entailments of pre-socialist imperial formations within socialism and post-socialism. Madina Tlostanova for instance has explored the ways in which racialization and coloniality in the Russian context are difficult to detect in part because the Russian empire, and later the Soviet Union, strove to emulate Western European capitalist imperialist discourses though this required many distortions because of Eastern Europe's own marginality within the construct of whiteness, compensating for this inferiority by projecting its caricature racism onto the newly acquired territories.

If, as Tlostanova illustrates, Russian imperialist and racialized colonial categories informed socialist and post-socialist processes of racialization, how did racialized colonial categories operate in the Balkans, where, unlike Russia, pre-socialist colonial enterprises, fragmented and fragile though they might have been, were deployed in the service of mapping out the European racial frontiers of the late 19th and early 20th century, which today inform the EU expansion project as an unproblematic 'unification' of Europe?

Critical Balkan studies frequently elide colonial and racial legacies in a neutralizing critique of the Balkans as a whole being Orientalized. Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* is perhaps the best example of this lumping together the Balkans into the larger category of *Balkanism* (Todorova 2009). Similarly, in area-studies epistemic registers the debates within the field have been mainly shaped by Western anthropologists' neo-institutionalist approach that sought to problematize the binary of socialism versus capitalism but neglected the racialization of inequalities in both contexts such as the 2011 debate between Thelen and Cullen Dunn and Verdery (Thelen 2011; Cullen Dunn and Verdery 2011). While Roma and Muslims were racialized in Eastern Europe – what does it mean that their racialization is subsumed and levelled under a broader critique of the Orientalisation of former socialist subjects? What does this erasure through levelling achieve? More importantly, who speaks in the name of the post-socialist subject? Who is taken seriously and who is dismissed as a suspect for transgressing the field's compromise around conceptual frameworks, vocabulary, subject matter to be studied and approaches? How are post-socialist racialized communities disbarred from articulating their own political agency and subjectivity vis-à-vis a scholarship that has made socialist nostalgia both colorblind and classless?

By racialized communities, I refer to those communities that have been historically marginalized by their race, not only in the broader European context but also in the context of the Balkans. I am not offering here a scientific definition of race or racialization, not only because these categories are complicated by overlapping forms of marginalization (for instance, Roma Muslims who suffer the brunt of both racism and Islamophobia), but also because “part of what's particularly productive of the racialization of the category Muslim” as De Genova (2015) points out, “is that people who are Muslim can look many different ways, so again it systematically undermines the possibility of naming race as race because it appears to only produce a culturalist discourse of difference, thereby reproducing the old-fashioned idea that you're supposed to be able to read race off the face, that you're supposed to read race off the body, that somehow race is a knowable fact of biology, that it is phenotypical and self-evident and transparent” (De Genova 2015). Race and racialization are further complicated conceptual and social registers because they do not naturally lead to intersectional solidarity, which one may assume, would naturally follow given the common histories of oppression.

Far from it, as Roma, for instance, are subject to racism from Muslim and non-Muslim groups alike, just as Serb refugees from Kosovo displaced in Serbia, who are neither Albanian nor Roma nor Muslim, are racialized as *Šiptari*. Moreover, the racialization of migrants has allowed for almost all local racialized groups to shore up their whiteness vis-à-vis migrants. These racialized categories are therefore multivalent, complex and further complicated by ongoing neoliberal Europeanization, border-drawing, and securitization in the Balkans – all processes invested in securing the racial configuration and reproduction of 'Europe' as white and Christian/Secular. Give this, my work

critiques the dearth of questions concerning race and coloniality within Europe, as the racialized biopolitical forms of management of populations both within and outside the EU borders intensify.

Gržinić: I distance myself entirely from recent claims that colonialism and socialism can be understood as identical. I think that engaging in macabre resentment and denigrating socialism or producing not just a critique of communism, or the populist neoliberal assaults on communism and Marxism, but to argue for capitalism as “a better option,” is one of the biggest flops of decolonial thought emerging from and related to former Eastern Europe.

Take, for example, Madina Tlostanova’s recent work where she develops two extremely problematic critiques. In her text “The Postcolonial and the Postsocialist a deferred coalition? Brothers forever?” (2012), Tlostanova states in an exaltation of colonial modernity that “The USSR with its showcase ideology offered a grand utopia or a new religion. The failed socialist modernity has lost its most important future vector and turned into a land of the futureless ontology. By losing to the capitalist modernity, it failed to meet the expectations of so many ‘wretched of the earth’” (Tlostanova 2012). The second flop is her proposed equation of socialism and colonialism, which, I believe, is akin to equating communism and Nazism: “[Followers] of the global South are still marked by a residual sympathy towards the Soviet experiment, and socialism as such. For them, it is difficult to equate socialism with colonialism particularly that state socialism has always represented itself as an anticolonial system” (Tlostanova 2012). Both statements are problematic and show that the decolonial must be analysed in the context of global necrocapitalism.

Moreover, it is important to note that a productive critique of socialism, communism, and Marxism is necessary, especially in the context of Black people’s histories of resistance. Cedric Robinson does just this in his 1983 book, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, where he confronts the Marxist analyses on one side and Black radicalism on the other (Robinson 1999a). He exposed that the later must be linked to the traditions of Africa and the unique experiences of blacks on western continents.

In an interview, given in 1999, Robinson returned to these points that should be understood as essential to discussions relating to decolonial, anti-socialist, and anti-communist positions (Robinson 1999b). He stated that in defining Black radicalism, it is crucial not to side with Black Nationalism, but to “recognize the cultural history of the enslaved” (Robinson 1999b, 6). Robinson argued that “The Black Radical Tradition is not a biological reflex, but a reconstitution of historical, cultural, and moral materials, a transcendence which both transfers and edits earlier knowledge and understandings among the several African peoples enslaved. The dialectical method is well suited to these tasks” (Robinson 1999b, 6). In this interview, Robinson was asked about Marx’s belief that a communist society would emerge from the European working classes, thereby foreclosing the revolutionary potential of Black radicals throughout history despite their production of essential in-

sights. In response, Robinson provided a fascinating answer: “What is similar [between Black radicals and revolutionaries of a similar ilk] is the historical tendency to succumb to the seductions of nationalism on the premise that Marxism is essentially Eurocentric. It is as a response to the denial of historical agency within Marx that many non-western radicals have often thrown themselves into nationalist projects” (Robinson 1999b, 7).

Robinson makes a point when asked in 1999 about his next book titled *The Anthropology of Marxism: A Study of Western Socialism*: “I revisit familiar sites (Hegel, Kant, Engels, etc.) only to mark forgotten and suppressed work (e.g., Hegel’s study of British political economy) in order to proceed to the unexpected richness of the history of socialist visions and pursuits” (Robinson 1999b, 8).

Along with these thoughts, I can suggest that discarding the history of socialism in Eastern Europe, as asked by a part of a strand of a decolonial theory, will result in the missed opportunity to re-inscribe counter-historical experiences and practices of the social and economical and as well cultural into an insurgent path toward another future.

3. We see that capitalist political interventions in Europe increase the current political devastation. How does the history of racial and ethnic discrimination of Balkans by Western Europe inform these processes?

Rexhepi: The disintegration of Yugoslavia has served as a frequent reference point for the proponents of clashes-of-civilizations debates, which accompanied the end of the Cold War and the corresponding rise of neoliberalism. As war broke out in Bosnia, Muslims living in the Balkans, as well as the larger Muslim world, were targeted by various Islamophobic attacks, which occurred as a response to perceived threats against Euro-Atlantic geopolitical bordering projects that accompanied neoliberal reforms in the 1990s in the Balkans.

Since 9/11, 2001, Islamophobia has operated through the EU assemblages of securitization policies enacted in the European “integration” processes that seek to create and secure the EU borders in the Balkans while also labouring to privatize public wealth and subsequently integrate the Balkan labour force into the EU labour market. The borders desired by the EU thus supply Europe with both a security zone and a supply of nominally white Europeans – a racialized buffer supply zone that utilizes local race regimes and deploys them at the EU post-national level.

Kancler: The roots of the current political and economic situation in the Balkans can be traced back to the colonial/imperial capitalist history that runs over the world producing differentiations, dehumanization, and capitalist devastation. While communism/socialism intended to break with this history in terms of political and economic organization, it failed to transform the conditions of production and power relations radically. Racialization, class divisions, the oppressive gender binary, and heteronormativity were reproduced under the surface of brotherhood and unity.

In the 1990s, during the war and resulting dissolution of Yugoslavia, we started to witness a phenomenon in which capital is pushed beyond its limit,

and through financial mechanisms, it begins to operate independently of real production. The processes of rising fascism and suspension of democracy by financial powers and the market are proposed as the “rational” and “reasonable” behaviour in the world, where through individual debt, public deficit, and public debt, the lives of entire populations are mortgaged and expropriated. According to Achille Mbembe, nation-states have become agencies for the collection of debt on behalf of global oligarchy of investors and international financial industry, which is politically *unassailable* (Mbembe 2011). The extortion of public debt, interests, depredation, and the expropriation of goods and common wealth rely upon accumulation, dispossession, and simultaneously occurring processes of negation and violations of human rights. Accumulation is now possible without real inversions and creation of new productive capacities, and while it works simultaneously, as Mbembe writes, through and across different scales of “race”, the principal consequences include the material and existential precarity of populations or, as Judith Butler puts it, our dispensability (Butler 2011).

These transformations, as Paul B. Preciado argues, also point to the articulation of a set of new micro prosthesis devices for the control of subjectivity with new molecular biological techniques and media networks. As he writes, we are facing a new kind of capitalism that is hot, psychotropic, and punk (Preciado 2008). We must question Preciado’s claim and make clear that this hot, punk capitalism operates in the “zones of being.” In the contrasting “zones of non-being,” we witness a cold, necrotoxic, and heavy metal capitalism (Fanon 2005). The present crisis no longer describes an exceptional period, something temporal or episodic; instead it becomes a norm, the fabric of social life and our existence. This new necropolitical mode of life, as Marina is saying, means pure abandonment. The surplus value of capital today is based and generated from (the worlds of) death.

Gržinić: Both biopolitics and necropolitics work globally. Though necropolitics’ function (mostly in the so-called periphery) generating surplus-value through actual and social death, where value of life equals zero.

For example, migrant workers from former Yugoslav republics who temporarily worked in Slovenia lost their jobs, were brutally fired, and kicked out of companies and onto the streets without their wages. The so-called need for these mass firings was, in reality, the consequence of company fraud and bankruptcy. However, the repressive state apparatuses neither penalized these companies for fraud, nor the brutal infringement of workers’ and human rights. Instead, the state simply deported the temporary workers to the other side of the Slovenian Schengen border, leaving them without financial compensation for their labour. This mass deportation and wage theft led to “the Erased people.”¹ When we talk about the processes of exploitation, deregulation, dispossession, and racialization, we must do so in the historical context of western colonialism as well as inside the present colonial matrix of power. As stated by Achille Mbembe in his book *Critique of the Black Reason*,

many people, not just Black people, are in a situation of deprivation, subjugation, exploitation. This forces them and us to think of a new condition of people in the world of global necrocapitalism that is the condition of what Mbembe calls “the becoming-negro of the world.”

4. How have transition politics and the “civilizing mission” in Europe foreclosed or opened up possibilities for both non-heteronormative sexualities and gender expressions in the Balkans? What is the relation between the process of colonizing trans bodies and Eastern Europe? What is the relationship between postsocialist sexuality, Islam, and homonationalism in Eastern Europe?

Gržinić: I will re-contextualize the points made in the above question by turning to Suzana Tratnik’s oral history shared in the feature-length film documentary I co-directed, *Relations: 25 years of the lesbian group ŠKUC-LL*. The documentary was conceived by me and Aina Šmid, along with other members of the lesbian scene surrounding ŠKUC-LL in 2012, to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the first publicly constituted lesbian section (LL) of the Student Culture Center (ŠKUC) in 1987 Ljubljana. On the production of LGBTQ as second-class citizens through processes of violence in former Yugoslavia, and, later, in independent Slovenia, Tratnik argues:

One thing has become clear to me: that the hatred of Others was previously seen as domestic violence. It was violence against homosexuals in the parks, against homosexuals seen as second-class citizens, as less valuable people. Such violence was therefore never reported because homosexuals were ashamed. This is now very interesting to read about; a bunch of novels has appeared in the East, also a writer under a pseudonym from Belgrade, another from Poland. What was the life of gays like in the time of socialism? It was in the closet, literally in public toilets, meeting in parks, etc. In fact, when the coming out occurred, when these people were no longer satisfied with such a position, when they came out and said ‘We are exactly just like you,’ or, ‘We are different, and we have a right to this difference and still we want to be respected,’ then this violent response began. Because in the East, there was no familiarity with this type of civil movement, there was no Black Movement as there had been in America, which made the situation there completely different. There was no women’s movement, as it was said in fact that it was no longer needed. All these situations, plus some ideological closures, that ruled there. Still, on the other hand, I do not want to say that the West was open. And then the presence of the war, many years of war violence, horrible killings, rapes, etc., situations that are not resolved, disastrous situations, wandering from court to court [...] the result is an explosive mixture, and the situation, therefore, cannot be otherwise (ŠKUC-LL 2012).²

¹ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Erased

² The whole oral history exposed in the video-film is also recontextualised in (Gržinić 2017).

Achille Mbembe has provocatively asked, “But what does it mean to do violence to what is nothing?” to explain how the queer approximates physical violence that marks the edges of subjectivity itself (Mbembe 2011, 9).

Moreover, white anti-racism is increasingly acquiring a form of grandiose anti-racism that goes into the direction of self-promotion and transforms into what is termed “charitable anti-racism” that is just a different form of unreflective racism. White anti-racism is when white citizens in the Occident engage through charities in helping and sympathizing with those “Others” that are produced as Others through white capitalist state violent measures (racial profiling, denied asylum or other papers to live and work in the Occident or on the base of race produced as second and third grade citizens).

I want to emphasize that Black diaspora, migrants, and women of color (all categories which significantly overlap) have significantly influenced feminist theory to the extent that we talk presently of new-, post-, and trans-feminism(s) of Color, Black feminisms and Chicana and Muslim feminisms. One of the important points in these processes of re-signifying the monolithic category of white feminism was the attack on feminism and its liaison with the regime of whiteness and capitalism. The outcome was the deconstruction of feminism with and by postcolonialism and, after 2000, with the decolonial turn of feminism (Maria Lugones).

Or, to reformulate in a politically radical way: can queer decolonial politics in Europe and globally be thought without a more precise re-elaboration of the relation between queer and the categories of nationality and race? NO! What can we then learn from the conceptualisation of queer about the nation-state, geography and processes of racialization – institutionalized, structural, and social racism(s)? A LOT!

Kancler: I think it is first necessary to challenge the basis of LGTBIQ+ activism in the West and think about what, why, and how it has been progressively absorbed into (neo)liberal politics by not addressing colonialist history, whiteness and the privilege attached to it, and the marginalization and exclusion of racialized and migrant LGTBIQ+ people. Today white, European, LGTBIQ+ politics is complicit in reproducing and maintaining the western world order, and, therefore, it is part of colonial imperialist expansionism, its wars and civilizing missions. The geopolitics of colonial capitalist time is operating by placing LGTBIQ+ as a measure of democracy, progress, and modernity, while homonationalist imaginaries and practices participate in the construction of Fortress West (Desde el Margen 2018). These hegemonic processes not only create divisions within and between gender and sexuality, but they also institutionalize the racializing differences between white LGTBIQ+ and racialized, migrants, refugee sex-gender dissidents.

A recently developed critique in the book *LGBT Activism, and Europeanization of Post-Yugoslav Space* interrogates a link between “Europeanisation” and “gay emancipation.” The authors question the processes through which certain forms of gay activist engagement are elevated to a measure of democ-

racy, progress, and modernity while homo-transphobic attacks are relegated to the status of non-European “Other(s)”, who are inevitably positioned as appertaining to the patriarchal past that should be abandoned. As Rexhepi writes “this separation serves the purpose of creating and strengthening a local liberal European-oriented elite, which then acts as local interlocutors that, in advocating Europeanisation as the solution to violence directed toward queer communities, become vehicles of EU expansionism” (Rexhepi 2016). Therefore, if we want to consider whether transition politics have opened up possibilities for both non-heteronormative sexualities and gender expressions in the Balkans, we must first ask about its relation to a (neo)liberal conception of “liberation.” We must ask for whom have these possibilities been opened, given the continued silencing and negation of past and present fights for radical liberation and self-determination by (neo)liberal capitalist colonial frames.

There are examples of theoretical, artistic, and activist work created during the last three decades in the context of former Yugoslavia, which explore the tensions between truly radical sex-gender dissident feminist practice and the (neo) liberal valorization of so-called democracy. Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid are one of the crucial references. As members of the group Borders of Control N.4, they produced one of the first films in the former East during socialism titled *Icons of Glamour, Echoes of Death* (1982) and *The Threat of the Future* (1983). These films present and dramatize, conceptually and politically, institutions of masculinity, femininity, and lesbian relations through drag performance as well as lesbian feminist positionality. Staging a performance in front of the camera the artists spoke about sexual and gender politics, female pleasure, sadomasochism and pornography. Gržinić has continued to elaborate upon topics related to dissident feminist practices, artistic performances, and space in texts written before and after the abovementioned films (Gržinić 2008; Gržinić 2012; Gržinić 2014). In their documentary video, *Relations: 25 Years of the Lesbian Group ŠKUC-LL* (2012), they share testimonies of counter-power lesbian movements and their struggles for visibility and emancipation. Since the 1980s, ŠKUC-LL and its founding members Nataša Sukič, Susana Tratnik, Tatjana Greif, and Nataša Velikonja produced important analyses and engaged in political interventions that took multiple forms: texts, performances, events, and actions. Each intervention strove to redefine the very point of struggle(s) necessary to abolish discrimination in Slovenia, as well as locate the memory of the lesbian movement for a new future. The need to persistently redefine the subject of the feminist movement in Slovenia expressed itself first as a lesbian political stance. Lesbians positioned themselves in the 1990s through re-reading of history, language, and performativity, and developed a sharp critique of Western activism. They also established alliances across the (post)Yugoslav region, not only among lesbians but also with Roma, trans, sex workers, disabled activists, and other marginalized groups. In addition to this critical audio-visual production going

back to Yugoslav Black Wave, it is also necessary to mention Želimir Žilnik's 1995 film, *Marble Ass*, which is the only fiction film that depicts trans practice, the subversive power of transvestite, and sex work in order to challenge nationalism at its core by disrupting the very idea of the natural, essence, and identity. Also, as Rexhepi argues in his text "From Orientalism to Homonationalism: Queer Politics, Islamophobia and Europeanisation in Kosovo," "inviting-in, disidentifications, and imperceptibility, may be just some of the living strategies "queers" use "to confront the normative liberal politics of coming out and visibility to avoid being absorbed into neoliberal governmental technologies" (Gržinić 2008; Gržinić 2012; Gržinić 2014).

Rexhepi: For nearly three decades we are witnessing what Jasbir Puar calls the folding of queer bodies into heteronormativity and modes of reproductive respectability centred on demands for rights, such as the right for gay marriage, adoption, military service, and parades (Puar 2013). LGBTQI+ movements had come to embrace the nation, nationalism, and the family by appealing for "inclusion," which bolstered these institutions during a time when the existing social structures of support were being dismantled by neoliberal economic reforms. That these trajectories overlap and inform one another is not accidental. Affective and familial economies replaced redistributive ones. Nor is it accidental that queer liberation struggles begun by queer and trans people of colour were appropriated and subsequently transformed into NGOs and civil society networks – just as liberal governmentality was transitioning into non-governmentality – whereby the delivery of social services of which the state was once responsible are now contracted out and delegated to NGOs. Like corporations that expanded their operations through former socialist markets liberalization, exploiting cheap labour and cheaper bodies, EU and US gays extended their political agendas along with myriad other industries for "saving humanity" that emerged to globalize and preach liberal humanism. All these processes are at once providing problems and solutions. Travelling gay saviours came *en masse* in post-socialist spaces delivering instructions for post-homophobic times. This is a disturbing trend.

The appointment of the first lesbian prime minister in the region, Ana Brnabić in Serbia under the presidency of Aleksandar Vučić who once served as an information minister in the Milosevic government is illustrative of this trend. Belgrade Pride honoured Brnabić despite her denial of Serb historical violence in Kosovo and her views on Srebrenica as not constituting genocide. Throughout the region, questions of sexuality continue to be mobilized to mediate projects and ideals of sexual rights aligned with nationalism and recognizable EU–US models of sexuality. In short, with few exceptions, LGTBIQ+ politics are still characterised by early post-socialist (homo)nationalist activism dominated by wealthy, urban, cisgender success stories of the post-socialist neoliberal reforms, disconnected and depoliticized from broader questions of social and economic justice.

5. How to approach colonial afterlives in the EU border and integration projects imposed on the Balkans? How to confront the re-calibration of post-socialist racism? What characterizes Islamophobia in Eastern Europe? Where does the figure of the Balkan refugee stand inside capitalist humanism?

Kancler: We have to begin by recognizing that racism exists in our countries and that we are all responsible for fighting it. We must also analyse it in order to understand how local elites work together with western agents, producing the racist organization of former Eastern European space through different intertwined processes: from the imposition of neoliberal economic models, negation of labour rights, migration politics and racist methods of zoning, to pinkwashing and promoting divisions among differentiated, hierarchized and marginalized groups in terms of class, sex, gender, ethnicity, race and religion. Understanding these processes and their logic is crucial to develop effective strategies, tactics, and politics, to re-politicize solidarity, build alliances and articulate a common struggle for liberation.

Eastern European countries that became subsidiary states, peripheralised in their servile relation to EU politics, show, on the one hand, contempt toward “those below them” in processes of constant hierarchisation, and, on the other, intensified servitude toward European capitalist colonial centres. Ethno-nationalism and differentiation with labour division on a global scale are today presented as “liberation” from what was suppressed during decades of communism/socialism. European abstract universalism as a form of cosmopolitanism is counterposed to ethnonational constructions. Correspondingly, the West needs the East to project itself as a free democratic space, as a space of hospitality culture and respect for human rights, while it points to former Eastern Europe as a pathologic space, still not quite European, where racism, fascism, and homo-transphobia prevail as “essential” characteristics of the region.

By understanding racialization contextually and racism as fluid, we can say that freedom and opportunity for some is generally acquired at the expense of the “Others.” Islamophobia in Eastern Europe is related to the capitalist colonial history of othering, and is present everywhere, from school textbooks to institutions, economy, politics, and everyday racism. There are continuous, systematic discriminations on religious and ethnic grounds against Muslims and Roma, which are also reproduced in the discourse of the secular left. We are trapped in what Sirin Aldbi Sibai calls “epistemological-existential, spatial-temporal and aesthetic prison” (Sibai 2012; Sibai 2017). In this context, migration is defined in terms of crisis to be managed. Calling the current reality “refugee crisis” or “migrant crisis” rather than the crisis of European politics, its capitalist economy, its systems of production of truth, its Eurocentric colonial concepts of the nation-state, citizenship, human rights, heteropatriarchy, and colonial epistemology of sex-gender binary, points to the dimension that today depoliticization has (Gržinić 2015). When

we say “migrants” or “refugees” we must ask ourselves how are these categories being formed by hegemonic politics, through the processes of production of “Other(s),” reducing the complexity by situating migrants in the a-historic context, outside of geographic and political frames (as if EU has nothing to do with wars from where people flee) (Rodríguez 2001). At the same time, the EU migratory control apparatus regulates the selection of bodies in relation to belonging to determined ethno/national, racial, or religious groups, as well as gender and sexuality by reproducing oppressive sexual norms that are gendered, racialized, and classist.

All that was said also relates to the processes of zonification. We see that the European politics of segregation transformed former Eastern Europe into a border-zone in the way that the territory of former communist/socialist countries functions as a buffer zone to control and block migrations from Africa, Middle East and Asia, while migrants from former Eastern European countries are at the same time subjected to control, discrimination (employment), and processes of deportation from the “former” Western Europe. The democratic universality of human rights is closely related with the particular national belonging, and with whiteness. The Fortress West is strengthening borders, sophisticating exclusions and criminalization mechanisms through migration politics and institutional racism, at the same time it’s accentuating the nationalist ideological mantle that deepens the ethno/racial, class, sex-gender, epistemic and spiritual hierarchies of the “otherness/externality.” Likewise, in recent years we are witnessing an intensification of public discourses and attitudes of hatred that are becoming normalized, the emergence of what Philomena Essed calls “entitlement racism”: the idea that majority populations have the right to offend and to humiliate the “Other.” Expressions of this form of racism vary according to racial, ethnic and religious group attributions and can range from assimilative paternalism to extreme conditions of exploitation, humiliation, persecutions, racist identifications, tortures, deportations, and death (Essed 2018).

Gržinić: Today in Europe we have two modern regimes of power working at once! One is the generally accepted modern regime of power that goes from Foucault through Agamben via Butler and maybe Žižek, and is distributed in the Nato-countries in the time of crises throughout the global world; the other is the regime of colonial power. The first one functions with demanding integration and even more with the “distribution” of debts (!), fear, and fantasies, the second functions with exclusion, marginalization, de-symbolization, and disfiguration. We have, therefore, two regimes of discrimination, racialisations, and exploitations that are *almost* the same, but the latter is not white. Though the entanglement between them is visible in a myriad of class racialisations. Race, therefore, stands at the point of junction where sexual difference and the human resolve,” as stated by Brian Carr, “into the ungended figure of dehumanized racial ‘flesh’” (Carr 1998).

In the case of our (my proper) former Eastern Europe and now newly acquired white petit-bourgeois crippled genealogy, we have to critically conceptualize, as stated by Hortense Spillers, that “race” signals gender’s socio-symbolic unmaking. Our transition from communist uncivilized nonsubjects to a capitalist, post-Cold War “not yet quite, not yet right,” civilized and human subjects, (from one propriety relation to another), testifies only to our potentiality for convertibility on the capitalist market. Though it is possible to state that, as argued by Brian Carr, “white bodies are no imaginable as nonhuman *because of their race* as their whiteness does not have the linguistic gravity of animality, primitivity, or property,” I will propose to say for us in Slovenia: *white post-socialist turbo neoliberal capitalist bodies*. Though it definitely remains true that, “whiteness is not enough to detect *us* as humans [italics added, in Carr’s essay the “us” refers to the replicants from the film *Blade Runner*], whiteness is not ‘in and of itself’ a differential mark,” whiteness is tediously-administratively and horrifyingly-monstrously re/produced, nurtured, and manufactured mechanism of violence, oppression, hegemony (Carr 1998).

While some are made “equal,” the Others are brutally abandoned and left to die. An illustrative case is the death toll of African migrants who drowned (measured in hundreds of bodies in one single day) near the Italian island of Lampedusa. This disaster is an additional confirmation of the alarming scale of the refugee crisis in the EU. Though the most perverse situation happened afterward when Italian citizenship was given to these hundreds of dead bodies (but only so that the Italian government and the EU could bury them in Italy – it was 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 had tried to illegally enter Italy and the EU. This is the most definite sign of the perverse and violent new attitude that Western Europe has toward human rights (after the West had been for decades heavily capitalising its democracy on it) and the occurrence of a new category of citizenship – *necropolitical citizenship*.

The colonial/racial division is applied to citizenship. We have two categories of citizenship: one is the category which I will name *biopolitical citizenship*, the EU “natural” nation-state citizens, and the other is *necropolitical citizenship* given to refugees and sans-papiers (paperless) after they die on EU soil. If in the hot, punk capitalism we are an oppressed group of zombified positions, all medicated and doped up, consuming sex as the *only* food in the time of austerity, in the cold former Eastern Europe under global capitalism we have, being beaten, and killed. Therefore, the *necropolitical turn* of dispossession and exploitation (part of the techno-sexual matrix of global capitalism today) teaches us entirely that neither gender nor sex is natural conditions of our lives, and neither misery, dispossession, enslavement, nor killings.

Rexhepi: The invitation to whiteness, to Euro-Atlantic structures requires not only a geopolitical separation from the racialized other but also their undoing. Like anti-Blackness and Islamophobia, which have been the

violent canvases on which white innocence is constructed in Euro-American spaces, dehumanization, and racialization of Roma people serve to “naturalize the ‘hard’ political borders of Europe” with Euro-American support. The recent re-enactment of socialist nostalgia is neither a solution nor socialist alternative to the colonial and racist entanglements in contemporary global politics but a recalibration of Eurocentric binary political hegemony and colonial duress of racism in the contemporary contexts. I want to hope that anti-racist and decolonial movements in the Balkans, like Vetëvendosja in Kosovo, become part of larger geographies of liberation and growing network of decolonial movements that are neither mourning the passing of socialism nor celebrating the pseudo-socialist politics of the Euro-American left but are working towards dismantling turbo-racializing capitalism and the building up of the Decolonial international.

6. What does decoloniality mean for the Balkans both from the perspective of geo-politics and body-politics? What will be the main traits of queer, anti-racist, decolonial, and feminist histories of feminism in Eastern Europe during and after socialism?

Gržinić: In 2011 in the radio program “Lezbomanija” [Lesbo mania], which was hosted by Nataša Sukič on Radio Študent, Ljubljana, to reflect different histories and conditions for a politics of class, race, and gender I stated that “Before being feminists, we were lesbians.” In this way, I indicated on the necessity for the persistent rearticulating of the political subject of the feminist movement, which in the 1980s in Slovenia expressed itself first as a lesbian political stance. I pointed toward a redefinition of the political subject and its history, which has become a strategic weapon in the actual social space. I proposed a redefinition of the very point of struggle for the abolition of discrimination in Slovenia.

It is clear that what global capitalism brings in front of us is a necessity to revisit globally racist, homophobic, and discriminatory processes, not as simple identity differences but as processes that are entangled with capital, new media technology and with the change of the mode of life under capital’s brutal modes of racialization and exploitation. I am interested in talking about politics and interventional politics, practices, and struggles that are transfeminist, transmigrant, and politically subversive. I am interested to conceptualize the place of race, nation-State, and migrants in queer theory and global necrocapitalism, asking where they stand inside a relation of power and subjugation, saying *Race Trouble: Transfeminism and Dehumanization*.

I want to address two questions: 1) What do we understand as dissident feminisms? 2) How do dissident feminisms intervene in history in general and the histories of feminism in particular?

Dissident feminisms advocate for disruption of the monolithic history of feminism that is heterosexual and white and is based on a woman as the subject of feminism that is apparently a woman as a predefined biological reality (meaning based on a kind of a natural category of a woman). As such,

dissident feminisms intervene in this history and present of monolithic feminism with positions that are marginalized causing antagonistic differentiations based on class, race, and gender. Concerning the white western world, these positions are marginalized. Moreover, these positions, that are conceptualized as *minoritized* consist of people being migrants and refugees or paperless from Global South and East, therefore coming from the perspective of the European Union and Austria from minoritized geopolitical sectors. These people perform jobs, which are seen as “minor” (that means that are seen simply to say as squalid within a hierarchy of a white middle class “decency”) and jobs that are abusive and exploitative in terms of basic life conditions of reproduction and economic benefits.

My thesis is that today minoritized women (and here I am making reference to the title of the text “Minoritized Women Effect a Transformation in Feminism” written by Luzenir Caixeta in 2011 [reprinted 2013]) are those migrants, transgender, sex workers, lesbians, etc., who are producing a transformation in and of feminism. This implies dissident movements inside feminism that transform its white, heterosexual, essentialized contextualization of feminism (based on features that are seen as naturally appertaining to a category that is named “woman”) into dissident feminisms (see that feminism is in plural!). Luzenir Caixeta, philosopher and theologian that works for *maiz. Autonomous Center of and for Migrant Women* in Linz, on health prevention, counselling and education of migrant sex workers, states that, [i]n recent years, a number of authors have become well known around the world who are of the opinion that the new feminism must go much further beyond the old demands of white, Western and heterosexual middle-class women for legal equality. Attention should be given to women who have always been marginalized, and the causes were leading to differentiation based on class, ethnicity and gender should be opposed (Caixeta 2013, 146). Caixeta in reference to P. Preciado argues that in opposition to a past feminism that developed its political discourse based on the division “between men (as dominators) and women (as victims), modern feminism is developing new political concepts and strategies for action that call into question what has previously been regarded as generally true: namely that the political subject of feminism [was] women – meaning women in their predefined biological reality, but especially women according to a certain notion: white, heterosexual, submissive and from the middle class” (Caixeta 2013, 146). Dissident feminisms stand in opposition “to a grey, normed and puritanical feminism, which sees in cultural, sexual or political distinctions a threat to its heterosexual and Eurocentric image of women” (Caixeta 2013, 147).

Kancler: In relation to geo-politics and body-politics, a decolonial turn with its ongoing attempt to push for a conceptual denaturalization, aims at undermining the fundamental logic of capitalism and modernity/coloniality, in need for assertion of rights (also epistemic) of the wretched. Rexhepi points out in reference to Fatima El-Tayeb’s work, “in most standard academ-

ic accounts, post-socialist Eastern Europe is perceived as white/European" (Rexhepi 2018, 14). This is despite Gržinić's claim that: "In relation to 'former' Western Europe, its hegemony (supremacy) and construction of deficient 'other,' someone coming from former Eastern Europe is always part of the process of discrimination; because there is always implemented the so-called principle of the 'deficiency' of a certain geographical region called former Eastern Europe, where it is seen as such by its Western counterpart" (Kafeero et. al 2013, 117). At the same time like continental Europe, racism and coloniality are occluded through categories of "class" and "ethnicity" (El-Tayeb 2011, 2016), so when the color of the skin is a border, then, as Gržinić argues, "within the discrimination processes, we have to recontextualize ourselves, so to speak, every moment, both while entering the public as well in the private context, because it is not the same as being white and second grade, we can still hide ourselves within a system of mimicry" (Kafeero et. al 2013, 117).

Feminist, Queer and Trans Studies and activism have for years faced antiracist and decolonial critiques by theoreticians and activists who focus their analysis on the coloniality of gender and articulate their interventions through the historic relations with Black, indigenous, women of color, feminisms, as well as queer of color critique, while continuously exposing the reproduction of Eurocentrism and racism by marginalizing the concerns around racialization processes, which are actually central to the capitalist colonial gender system and its logics of oppression.

The work of Maria Lugones is crucial for challenging the colonial formulation of gender classification. On the one hand, because she develops a critique of Quijano's understanding of sex as biological. She points out his failure to see that within the concept of gender the idea of sexual or biological dimorphism (man-woman dichotomy), heteronormativity, and the patriarchal distribution of power are inscribed. On the other hand, her analysis of gender within coloniality poses important questions by revealing that Eurocentrism and racism are embedded in the universal notions of the gender binary system. Lugones exposes how gender and sexual diversity are filtered through a colonizing binary gaze and presented as naturalized ideas of "sex" and "gender," both operating as Eurocentric categories. Her main claim is that the sexual difference that is itself a colonial invention (fiction), is not socialized as such. The enslaved and racialized workers, as she states, were bestialized. The concept of gender does not pick them up as men and women in a Western sense, negating their humanity and gender, while erasing the facts that in many societies and locales before the Western colonization such categorization did not exist, or categories of seniority, professional and clan principles, etc. were more important than biologized gender. Instead, as she writes, we must understand its meaning within the particular cosmology/metaphysics (Lugones 2008). These are important statements because the traces of those histories of removal and dispossession remain, as do their entanglements in global sexual and gender politics today. As Yuderlys Espinosa,

Diana Gómez and Karina Ochoa argue, through such analysis, the reach of her postulates is entangled with today's re-empowered critique and work already previously developed by counter-hegemonic, antiracist feminisms, which at the same time have a significant influence on the development of decolonial option (Espinosa Miñoso, Gómez Correal, and Ochoa Muñoz 2014).

If we situate the postcolonial and postsocialist dialogues within this context, we have to take into account specific features of the coloniality of gender, as Tlostanova writes, due to the erasure of socialist gender trajectories and the pre-socialist local genealogies of women and feminist struggles, as well as the multiplicity of gender expressions and dissident sexual experiences. This is related on one side with the intensified imposition after 1989 of Western feminism and Queer theory as a new kind of mind-colonization, to use Tlostanova's words, supported by grants and accompanied by particular ideological demands. On the other, it is connected to difficulties regarding a proper production of transfeminist knowledge and articulation of struggles from decolonial positionality, which would take into account a specific pre, post, and socialist experiences. Relatively scarce or entirely missing from the analysis is a sustained critical engagement with sexual and gender dissident practices, embodiment, history, and culture in the former East, with the ability to capture the systems of knowledge and experiences that exceed the categorizations of gender, sexuality and even transgender. While such discourse is yet poorly or not at all conceptualized, our condition should be regarded, as Tlostanova argues, in its complexity and dynamics with today's dispersion of former socialist subjects in different directions (Tlostanova and Kancler 2013).

To better understand our context, we should engage in what Somerville and Jasbir Puar call "reading sideways" (Somerville 2000; Puar 2017). Reading sideways means linking together seemingly unrelated and often disjunctively situated moments and their effects in ways that attend to the interconnected histories of racial, gender, sexual and other bio-necro-political formations and regulations, as well as to the practices of resistance. By shifting the geography of reason and questioning Western universalizing progressive narrative, we see that, as Espinosa Miñoso argues, "The future already was" (Espinosa Miñoso 2015, 13). In decolonial erotic turn is crucial the fact that it is the European capitalist colonial expansion, which started with the conquest of America, and by progressively introducing the first regulations and punishment laws, prohibition of homosexuality and multiplicity of gender expressions, it deployed gender and sexuality as technologies to categorize colonized subjects and organize their subsequent removal, re-education or genocides (Rodríguez Moreno 2015). Thus it is necessary to insist on the history, memory, and contribution of those voices and experiences which made a political shift, a change in perspective, and fractures in the existing system or revolution. It is important to show that today's decolonial consciousness is based and takes from previous flows of resistance to Western domination.

Furthermore, it requires us to think about the political economy, and from which location are we speaking, to think and situate ourselves from the borderlands from where to confront and delink from the capitalist conditions of production, Eurocentric epistemology and the Western system of national identities, the classification, hierarchization and differentiation of our bodies. All this implies articulating strategies, tactics and political interventions, having in mind that decolonial revolution requires a revolutionary transformation of subjectivity, paradigms, ethics, and structures of domination. Here the critical question is how to negotiate questions of difference through the practices of solidarity and political actions to dismantle the capitalist colonial system.

Rexhepi: From an immediate and urgent point of view, I think keeping the *Balkan Route* open to refugees and strengthening cross-border anti-racist networks is vital to confront the rising racist politics across post-socialist spaces that have gone mainstream like the ones in Bulgaria and Croatia. Embryonic movements, like Autonomni kulturni centar Attack and Borders None in Zagreb, Legis in Skopje, SOS Team Kladuša (BiH) among others have already emerged in Salonika, Zagreb, Skopje, Belgrade and Sarajevo challenging the Euro-Atlantic geopolitical enclosure in the Balkans and forging solidarity and resistance along the route. I cannot stress the urgency of these initiatives given the electoral success of fascist coalition governments like the ones in Bulgaria and Croatia as well as the intensification racist violence and displacement of refugee and Roma communities across the Balkans. To think through a decolonial position on the post-socialist context is to refuse the EU and NATO invitation to whiteness and racial colonial-capitalist regimes labouring towards a geopolitical gated community that in sealing the Balkan refugee routes it seeks to simultaneously divide the post-socialist subject from the post-colonial subaltern other. This refusal has to be accompanied by the rebuilding of what Moten and Harney call *the undercommons* (Harney and Moten 2013, 1). That extends from Bandung to the Balkans. I say rebuilding because despite the ongoing erasure of non-aligned solidarities of the socialist block with the post-colonial world (its problematic relations of power taken into account) histories of common struggles against racialized colonial-capitalism and coloniality offer crucial lessons for the decolonial turn. On the regional level, it means cooperative cross-border anti-racist projects that should be tied to ongoing workers movements, mobilized to prevent the privatization of whatever public and worker-run enterprises are still left from the violent post-socialist neoliberal reforms. Fundamentally, it means to detach the Balkans from Euro-Atlantic geopolitical enclosures and remake the region into a space of solidarity and resistance. This would require not only the confrontation of assembling fascist governmentalities and governments but also Balkan leftist dismissal of queer, decolonial, critical race, and Muslim studies as “identity politics” and frequently denying the contemporary and

historical genocides on Roma, Muslim, Bosnian, and Albanian communities under the rubric of “post-socialist revisionism.”

To speak about decoloniality in the post-socialist Balkan from a longer perspective, is to rethink the (post) genocidal present on our Roma and Muslim communities not as outcomes of socialism but as a historical formation of a European colonial race regime as a continuous project of violence, expulsion of undesired raced and religioed bodies and a re-conquista strategies that have sought to “make the Balkans white again” contingent on and compliant with long-dure Europeanization. This commitment to decoloniality requires a parallel undoing and unlearning of both post-socialist narratives of *Europeaness* as well as the constant questioning of leftist narratives that erase questions of racism, homophobia, and transphobia in *nostalgic* renderings of the recent socialist past as colorblind and classless. In the first instance, it means to confront the erasure of decolonial and queer struggles and memories actively hidden from plain sight in the current political projects while actively fostering and facilitation of decolonial, queer and critical race critique into post-socialist leftist communities.

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The Wretched on the Walls: A Fanonian Reading of a Revolutionary Albanian Orphanage



Abstract

Using Franz Fanon's "On Violence," this paper analyzes dynamics of power and violence in *Lulëkuqet mbi Mure / Red Poppies on Walls*, a 1976 Albanian film about WWII anti-fascist resistance, told through the story of a group of orphans in Italian-occupied Albania. Fanon's explication that the colonizer's power is founded on force and maintained through violence, capitalist exploitation, dehumanization and compartmentalization, elucidates the film. His argument that decolonization is possible only through greater counter-violence is critical in understanding why the orphans use violent means to liberate themselves. The children's struggle against the fascist orphanage directors is noticed and harnessed Communist Party members. I argue that

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though the Party's guidance helps the children fight their subjugation, it also curbs their revolutionary potential. Thus, the didactic and propagandistic goals of *Lulëkuqet mbi Mure* allow only for a strict cold war dichotomy: one is either a fascist, capitalist and colonizer, or a communist, revolted colonized subject ready to take up arms. My engagement with the film, however, demonstrates that the children's solidarity with one another and their subtle resistance prior to the communists' intervention, gestured toward an alternative way of building community – one closer to Fanon's ideas of a new humanism, even if it ultimately remains unrealized in the film.

Keywords: Albania, Fanon, decolonization, violence, resistance.

It is nighttime. Sulo has been shot. His small body falls from the top of the orphanage wall he had been climbing in his attempt to flee. The blow is fatal. The Italian fascist night patrol has mistaken Sulo for an intruder trying to break into the building and shot him. Sulo's friends, the other children of the orphanage, hear the shot and slowly move toward the window. They had been barricading their door with furniture to keep out the orphanage's caretaker. The caretaker, indignant at the trick the children had played on him earlier, which had caused him to fall down the stairs and break an arm, had been on a mission to find the culprit among them. He had targeted Sulo, a sensitive and quiet boy, to become his spy and expose the guilty ones. Every day since the accident, the caretaker tried new forms of manipulation on Sulo: teaching the boy what statements to make to provoke a confession, bribing him with food while the rest of the children were being starved, and finally confronting him in the late night hours. Sulo, tormented by the very thought of betraying his peers, spends the night sobbing. Once the other boys learn of his predicament, they try to devise strategies for Sulo to avoid the caretaker and his next investigation. The night of Sulo's death, they know the caretaker expects him to reveal the names of the guilty children, so they advise him to stay put and use the excuse of having fallen asleep as an explanation. But the caretaker does not accept this excuse, gets furious at Sulo's insolence and begins to beat him, threatening to break his neck. Sulo's attempt to flee the caretaker's ire lands him outside the orphanage walls, where he is spotted by the patrol and shot.

The children's efforts had aimed to resist the caretaker's demands, which they knew would result in violent beatings, and even worse, in the betrayal of the solidarity they share among each other as orphans in Strehë Voronore. A public orphanage in Tirana operated by a pro-fascist administration under the tutelage of King Zogu, the institution served as an incubator for the promotion of Mussolini's ideology during the Italian occupation of Albania. In the now canonical essay "On Violence" in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon describes the colonized subject's dreams as action-filled ones where they first release the "aggressive vitality" collected within their bodies as a result of the violence, dehumanization and compartmentalization of the co-

lonial world (Fanon 2004, 15). The colonized experience freedom through dreams of a radical reversal of roles, the complete reorganization of society, in which the colonized take the colonizer's place. It is not by chance, then, that much of the action of the Albanian film *Lulëkuqet mbi Mure / Red Poppies on Walls* occurs at night and in the children's sleeping quarters, where they are packed one on top of the other in shabby bunk beds. However decrepit and crowded this room may be, it serves as the children's only space away from the surveillance of orphanage administration. In this paper, I will conduct an analysis of *Lulëkuqet mbi Mure* through the lens of Fanon's "On Violence." The analysis reveals how this film, directed by Dhimitër Anagnosti and released in 1976, closely mirrors the violence and dehumanization of colonialization described by Fanon. Critical to understanding this film is Fanon's argument that only a counterviolence of greater magnitude than that of the colonizers' – whom as he shows, establish their power through force and maintain it thanks to violence, capitalist exploitation, dehumanization and compartmentalization – can make decolonization possible. Ultimately, it is through such a strategy of counterviolence that *Lulëkuqet mbi Mure's* oppressed orphans liberate themselves from the subjugation, dehumanization, beatings and abuse of the fascists in charge of the institution. While the children had created their own small ways of resisting, it is the guidance of communist insurgents that instructs them on how to make strategic use of violence against their oppressors. Through this guidance, the children's greater revolutionary potential is curbed in order for them to join the Communist Party, and thus be part of another ideological system.

I view the children's marginal and ambiguous position as orphans – who lack traditional family figures that can steer them toward the right set of values, and who can be more easily exploited – as what makes them particularly vulnerable targets of ideological training from both the communist and fascist factions of the film. The Italian colonists and their allies in the national bourgeoisie, to use Fanon's term, either question or fully reject the children's humanity, and subject them to great violence. At the same time, they need the orphans to populate the orphanage so they can profit by stealing from its funds, as well as from the rhetoric of "civilizing" the children. On the other hand, the Albanian communists or the "revolutionaries from the towns" to use another of Fanon's terms, recognize in the children's suffering the potential for indoctrinating them into the Communist Party and making them take up arms for national liberation. Yet they also fear that if the children's rage goes unregulated it could disturb the Party's careful planning, thus they need to control the children's thoughts and actions. Although the orphans manage to create some forms of anti-fascist resistance and solidarity prior to being officially incorporated into the national liberation struggle, the film does not allow for these modes to develop fully. Instead, it divides the world into two clearly delineated sides, from which the children must choose: will they side with the fascist, colonist capitalists or will they join the communist nationalists?

That *Lulëkuqet mbi Mure* poses this question is no surprise, considering it was made by the propaganda machine that the Party of Labor of Albania¹ had developed to solidify a national identity as dichotomously opposite to the colonial and imperial powers of the West. Nonetheless, its depiction of Albania under Italian occupation does provide an opportunity to think about colonialism and decolonial struggle in the context of the Balkans, a region that occupies an ambiguous place within both de- and post-colonial studies. Fanon serves as a crucial interlocutor here, as his writing on decolonial struggles during the cold war provides apt tools for interpreting both the film's potential for critique of inequality and its limits in making such a critique, given its conditions of production. What we find in *Lulëkuqet mbi Mure* is a world that exemplifies the compartmentalization named by Fanon as a key cause of colonialism's dehumanizing violence. In Fanon's analysis, society is divided into clearly demarcated quarters that are stratified primarily by a racial division where white colonizers are the ruling class and black natives dwell in the lowest ranks. The compartmentalization of the colonial world manifests in spatial segregation, which dictates those colonized will live in the worst possible state, while the colonizers live in the best (Fanon 2004, 4). Colonial compartmentalization also divides the colonial world in terms of morals and culture, thus creating a Manichean world where colonizers represent goodness and the colonized represent pure evil (McLaughlin 2014, 111). The result of such compartmentalization of the world at the spatial, racial, sociocultural and moral level is the complete dehumanization of the colonized – an effective strategy in order to justify exploitation of people and resources in the colonized territory. Thus, both the world in the film and the colonial world are ones already poised toward violence because their very foundations are constructed out of violence. The only response to such a system and the only way to ensure the goal of decolonization – the “substitution of one ‘species’ of mankind by another” – is a violent upheaval that does more than just replace who is in power, but collapses the entire system (Fanon 2004, 1). Fanon's thought on decolonization and his particular concern with the workings of violence within this process, combined with his attention to psychosocial effects experienced by colonized subjects and his use of a Marxist analysis, make him a pertinent interlocutor for a film depicting a national liberation struggle led by communist rebels, during the precise moment when society's most marginalized must make a choice about whether to take up arms.

In *Lulëkuqet mbi Mure*, it is Sulo's death that persuades the orphans of the necessity for counterviolence. After Sulo dies, they abandon their other methods of resistance to join the militant armed struggle. The children understand that Sulo's death was the expected result of a colonial, imperialist and capitalist world that seeks the ultimate exploitation of the people rele-

¹ The Communist Party of Albania was established in 1941. In 1948 it changed its name to the Party of Labor of Albania.

gated to the bottom. Having been well acquainted with violence through their experiences in the orphanage, the children are now faced even more clearly with the most concrete and painful proof that their lives are disposable, not their own, and that they are not free. This knowledge does not defeat them, however – it is after Sulo's death that the children begin to rebel even more against the fascists in charge. When the orphanage's director gathers them to spin lies that blame the caretaker for Sulo's death, which he proclaims a tragedy because Sulo was a nice child who could have become a dignified fascist citizen, one of the children shouts, "we heard the shots!" Later, they also refuse to sing the Italian songs they are being taught, saying that they have no use for them and go further, openly shouting, "death to fascism!" Their anger and rebelliousness are recognized by Ali, a secret communist from the city and a friend of the film's protagonist who is also one of the boys of the orphanage, Jaçe. Their literature teacher is another secret communist who inspires and instructs the children. Right after Sulo's death, the teacher recites Fan Noli's elegiac and patriotic poem "Anës Lumenjve" / "Next to the Rivers." His passion ignites the children's spirits, some of whom spend the night writing anti-fascist messages on the walls. When the director banishes these children from the orphanage, they join their literature teacher and Ali in the quarters of the Communist Party. The teacher initiates them into the Party, telling them it will now be their "new mother".

This mother has a task for them, and it is a violent one: "the annihilation of a dangerous agent". In the final scenes of the film, the children coordinate with one of the communist insurgents to shoot and kill the orphanage's director. It is the third and last shooting in the film, and it is through this act that the children are redeemed. The murder of the director is the "irreversible act" that all militants must perform in order to join the insurgency group (Fanon 2004, 44). Fanon provides the case of the Algerian struggle for independence, where one could only join the ranks of the militants by earning their trust through an act that would make it impossible to re-enter the colonial system ever again (Fanon 2004, 44). Similarly, the children gain a place within the quarters of the Communist Party only through the commitment that they will assist with the director's murder. As viewers, we are meant to believe that this inclusion into a different ideological system brings the children joy, comfort and freedom. In the film's closing scene, we see Jaçe biking through the city after fleeing from the shooting that kills the orphanage director. He now wears a hat and a checkered button-down shirt, symbols of his new identity, though we never learn if the new system that granted Jaçe his new identity reproduces imbalances of power that continue to harm marginal members of society, or if the decolonial struggle is successful in achieving what Fanon calls a new, more equitable humanism. I argue that while there may be no definite answer to be found within the film, especially in light of the didactic purpose it serves, paying close attention to the children – these poppies that hang onto the wall, who watch the outside world with hope and conviction, who create small ave-

nues of their own resistance while under pressure to conform to one ideology, whose flowing blood colors the walls red but who ultimately do not move any of the adults in the film toward the real “redistribution of wealth” and resources advocated by Fanon – can give us critical insights into the workings of ideology, categorization, and compartmentalization under colonialism.

Colonialism and capitalism in the orphanage

Lulëkuqet mbi Mure takes place during Mussolini’s occupation of Albania, which made the country part of the Italian Empire from 1939 until 1943. Mussolini exerted his influence on Albania with the support of Ahmet Zogu, Albania’s self-proclaimed king, who placed the country under a decade long authoritative rule (Juka 2012, 8–10). Since Zogu refused some of Mussolini’s demands, the latter gave Albania an ultimatum and went forth with Italy’s plans for invading the country. These plans were in line with the Italian state’s imperialist and expansionist aims that included annexation of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, territories in Libya (Hom 2012, 282). Thus, Italy’s influence and interests in Albania had deep roots that were characterized by a colonial mentality and strategy. We can see this reflected in Italy’s rhetoric around Albania’s “racial” and “cultural” make-up, which they saw more closely affiliated with that of Italy than the Slavic “character” of Yugoslavia (Kallis 2000, 133). Aristotle Kallis explains that this rhetoric was found in many reports published in Italy at the time, which served to bolster support for the invasion of Albania, whose strategic geopolitical location would make it an effective Italian-controlled outpost between Yugoslavia and Greece, eventually leading to further expansion into the Balkans. That the racial and cultural make-up of the colony was described in these terms of affinity allows us to glean important insight into *Lulëkuqet mbi Mure*, whose plotline centers around the moment when communist partisan groups were rebelling against the fascist occupation of the country. It was not uncommon to see this kind of logic used in regard to the Balkans, which as Maria Todorova argues, has been constructed in the western imaginary “not as other but as incomplete self” (Todorova, 2010, 18). Rather than being a complete other, like colonies further east, the Balkans were seen as a version of the self that was not yet civilized, but stuck in a backward, pre-modern temporality. This explains the need for the region to be civilized by benefactors from across the Adriatic, whom we see parading inside the orphanage of *Lulëkuqet mbi Mure*, preaching about the lofty cultural values of fascist civilization, which the orphans still need to learn.

Similar to the ambiguity that the geopolitical territory of Albania (and the Balkans more generally) occupies, the orphanage where the children live is also in a position of liminality within the colonial system. We learn early in the film that the all-boys orphanage is located in Tirana and administrated by King Zogu’s government during the Italian occupation. The institution is directed and operated by a group of local pro-fascist employees: a director, a caretaker, and an accountant. The latter two oversee the daily operations of the orphanage, including meals and lessons, which are provided by other

local employees. Both the caretaker and the accountant are convinced that Italy's presence in the country will help Albania, and they have no qualms about mistreating the orphans so that they learn to follow fascism. In this, they follow the orphanage's director, who leads the institution with an iron hand and little regard for the children. He works to ensure the orphans' ideological allegiance to fascism, even giving them lessons in the Italian language. What makes the director even more despicable is that he steals government funds allocated for the orphans, deliberately depriving them of clothing and food so he can pass the money to the Italians. The director acts in accordance with Fanon's depiction of the "colonialist bourgeoisie" – the elite class of the colonized country who have learned they can gain economic advantages by following the colonizers' orders and who thus have convinced themselves they benefit from colonialization (Fanon 2004, 22–3, 28).

Given that the orphanage offers substantial financial benefits and political leverage for the director, he cannot fully reject its value, and in turn, the value of the orphans. He despises the children but at the same time, boasts of the accolades the orphanage earned from representatives of the kingdom, and stresses their need for education on both fascist ideology and Italian culture and language. In a back and forth with the secret communist Ali, the director disagrees with the man's assertion that the orphans are "just children". When Ali arrives to pick up his friend Jace for a day out in the city, the director explains to him that the administration sees the orphans as "the future of Albania." This explains why he is hard at work cultivating the children "spiritually and physically" in service of fascist values and against troubling ideas of communism that have infected the city. The director understands that the economic gain from interfering with the operations of the orphanage, while at the same time purporting a cultivation of "values", is effective for earning him some power in the colonial system. As Fanon argues, there is no greater threat to such a profitable dynamic than "socialist propaganda [which] might infiltrate the masses and contaminate them," by convincing them that they are undeserving of the inferior status ascribed to them by their occupiers (39).²

The mutual interdependence of colonial and capitalist systems explains why the colonizers and their allies among the colonized population are concerned with preserving the status quo without resorting to absolute violence. If armed resistance from the colonized side were to start, and if the colonists were to respond through violent large-scale repression, then the economic investments made by the colonists would be in jeopardy. At the first signs of trouble during the decolonization process, "[the] monopolistic fraction of the metropolitan bourgeoisie will not support a government whose policy

² Albanian theorist Gani Bobi further supports this observation, writing that in the context of Albania between the two world wars, the consequences of the Ottoman colonial rule manifested in internal tensions and trauma. This is especially evident in the elite classes, who come to realize the precarity of their rule and thus form arguments about why Albania should not be self-governed (Bobi 43–44).

is based solely on the power of arms” because what they “expect is not the devastation of the colonial population but the protection of their ‘legitimate interests’ using economic agreements” (Fanon 2004, 27). A purely violent response to the colonies would lead to such “devastation” thereby making economic profit impossible. This is why, in *Lulëkuqet mbi Mure*, the orphanage director and his fascist superiors are not indifferent to the news of Sulo’s death, even if they do not care about his life. They become agitated because of what this murder would sound like in the press. How does the orphanage look when the institution allows one of the children to be shot by the Italian night guard? Sulo’s death too explicitly connects colonialism to deadly violence. Not only does the boy’s murder compromise the orphanage’s status, but it also has the potential of igniting rage among the population and bringing them to the communists’ side. The director and his fascist supervisor know that news of Sulo’s death at the hands of the night patrol would risk ending the steady supply of money they receive from the orphanage. Thus, they attempt to cover up the truth and concoct a fictitious story that places the blame for the child’s death on the caretaker’s ire, completely erasing the involvement of the fascist night patrol.

The film’s exposure of the underlying capitalist interests of the colonizers and their allies relates to its production from the Kinostudio “Shqipëria e Re” (New Albania), the national and only film studio in Albania during the country’s five decades of socialism. The Kinostudio played an integral role in constructing Albania’s national identity after WWII. In a country with high rates of illiteracy, films were better able to reach urban and rural populations with the official narrative of the new, socialist Albanian identity – which was ensured through support and resources from the film industries of the Soviet Union, and later China (Mëhilli 2018, 612). Albanian filmmakers were restricted to producing films with clear ideological purposes, where the didactic teaching of lessons from the Party took precedence over the aesthetic and artistic inclinations of the director. The Party placed the Kinostudio under a highly regulated system of monitoring and censorship: all directors, screenwriters, cinematographers, cameramen, and editors were under the leadership of an “artistic director” appointed by the Party, while the Ministry of Culture decided on the thematic line that all directors and writers had to adhere to for the year (Williams 2012, 226). The latter part of the 1970s coincided with an increase in the Party’s isolationist policies in all areas of Albanian political, economic, and social life. In regard to filmmaking, this meant greater censorship, greater control of film production, and more emphasis on film’s ideological purposes (Gjikaj and Puto 16). Released in 1976 and directed by Dhimitër Anagnosti, one of the most well-known and prolific directors of the socialist period, *Lulëkuqet mbi Mure* can only be properly understood through the background of its production, where Albanian filmmaking during socialism was at the crossroads of cold war politics.

The colonial world through the spacial politics of the orphanage

Lulëkuqe mbi Mure opens with a shot of the orphanage wall. Children are seen hanging on it, watching the happenings in the city outside the confines of the orphanage. The focus on the orphanage's walls sets up a key dynamic of the film: similar to the colonial world described by Fanon, this is also a world of separations and compartments. The orphans are relegated to the space behind the wall, where their world is comprised of a small yard, a classroom, their communal bedroom full of bunkbeds, and the dining room where they sit in identical rows of tables, hoping to receive some food. In Fanon's description of the colonial world as one of compartmentalization, the first apparent division is the spatial separation of colonized from colonizer, which coincides with racial, social, and class hierarchies. The colonizer lives in a sector made of resilient stone and steel, full of light and paved roads, where everything is clean and orderly. Like the colonist himself, this sector is the "extension" of the metropolis (Fanon 2004, 15). The sector of the "natives" is the direct opposite: it is a space of malnourished people and dilapidated infrastructure, where resources are scarce and misery, violence, and humiliation reign. Understanding well that their own position is one of inferiority and exploitation, the colonized subject refuses to accept this inferiority any longer. During the decolonization process, the colonized are driven by an impulse to take the position occupied by the colonist and radically alter their reality (Fanon 2004, 2–3; 17). Embedded in the process of decolonization, then, is the drive to destroy this compartmentalization, the colonists' sector and all those living in it. It is through this process that the colonized subject, dehumanized through colonialization, becomes human again, part of "a new generation of men, with a new language and a new humanity" (Fanon 2004, 2). Thus, the rediscovery of one's humanity is a prerequisite for undertaking the decolonial struggle.

In *Lulëkuqe mbi Mure*, we do not see the colonizer's sector, and we only have glimpses into the space outside of the orphanage. Instead, most of the film is concentrated within this institution, which as was mentioned earlier, occupies an ambiguous geo-political position – meaning that it is not fully the compartment of the colonized, which is due to something I discuss below, namely the orphans' own ambiguous status in terms of "humanity". While the process of constructing the orphans as subhuman is well underway, it is not cemented *completely*, as the children are still considered trainable in the "civilized" ideology of their fascist occupiers. Even though it is certainly part of the sector of the colonized, the orphanage's role in educating the next generation of followers of fascism gives it a unique status. This makes the orphanage a place where there can be more mixing between social strata. In a way, the separated compartments of colonized and colonizers find a "meeting" location within the orphanage: the wealthy families from the city who offer the orphans "charity" by taking them home for a meal, the refined music teacher

who crosses the orphanage gate each day to teach the children Italian songs, the visit from Zogu's officials that the director mentions to Ali, all point to the complex position of the orphanage within the compartmentalization of the colonial world. Inside the orphanage are the "native" Albanian children who need to be guided to the right path, taught Italian (thus, European) culture and values. Outside the walls are the hopeless colonized subjects and even worse, the dangerous ideas of communism. Even with the terrible conditions within the orphanage, the administration likes to remind the children that the alternative of the street is much worse. But the orphanage's ambiguous position also makes it a viable place for the communist insurgents to make a move. Since the orphans are considered in need of surrogate parents who could be responsible for their socialization, they are made into special targets of the dogmatic propaganda of the fascist regime, something that the communist rebels surely note. This is why both the orphans' literature teacher and Ali seek to turn the children into loyal followers of communist ideals, though not through the violent, humiliating means of orphanage employees, but through appeals to national identity, patriotism, righteousness, and family. Both sides – capitalist colonialists, and communists – have a vested interest in keeping the children off the streets, not out of concern for their well-being, but out of fear that their uncontrolled energy and rage would devolve into violence in service of neither fascism nor communism.

Out in the streets, these orphaned children would really "belong" to no institution and could potentially form an alternative alliance among each other that might challenge the colonizers, but not in ways prescribed by the Communist Party. When the director finally banishes Jaçe and his friends from the orphanage, after they write anti-fascist messages on the very orphanage walls that had separated them from the rest of the city, the boys run out onto the street. This is the same street where Sulo had perished earlier, and so we expect something sinister to happen again. However, the orphans are welcomed by the street children, whose bare feet and lack of shirts lead us to believe that they are even poorer than the orphans. The two groups of children laugh and play together, the children in the street even share some bread with the orphans. This scene, however, cuts abruptly to the next one, where Jaçe and his friends are inside the quarters of the Communist Party. It seems that the transgression into the street will also not be tolerated by the children's new supervisors. Great emphasis is placed on showcasing the communists' quarters in this scene: as a dramatic score plays, the camera pans around the room, focusing one by one on the faces of all present. Among the literature teacher and their friend Ali, the children also find other young men, even some young women and the orphanage's cleaning woman. The communists' quarters are not luxurious, but they bustle with the energy and the exciting feeling that a radical change will come. And for the orphans, the space also promises the sense of inclusion and care they had been missing, and which we are led to believe could not come without subscription to the communist

ideal. Very didactic in its purpose, the film teaches its viewers of the party's heroic struggle, the nation's historic oppression, and the necessity to follow all party orders. As such, it is not interested in those moments outside when the orphans freely play with the other children – such moments are treated as inconsequential.

Thus, for most of the film's duration, the world outside of the orphanage is forbidden to the children. They are not allowed beyond its walls for long unless they are accompanied by an adult, if they are running an errand, or if they have been invited to have Sunday dinner with one of the families from the city. The outside always presents danger or humiliation – from the taunts that the orphans receive by the “normal” boys who walk the streets confidently next to their parents, to more traumatic events like murder. In fact, when the children leave the confines of the orphanage and “overstep” their limits by abandoning their chaperone, they end up witnessing the first murder in the film. Their friend from the city, Ali, assassinates an Italian fascist in the street where the children are wandering, leading to their questioning by the police in which they deny knowing the man. And of course, it is when Sulo steps over the threshold of the gate that he is killed. The message is clear: do not challenge the spatial divisions of the world constructed around you. Fanon reminds us: “The colonial subject is a man penned in; apartheid is but one method of compartmentalizing the colonial world. The first thing the colonial learns is to remain in his place and not overstep its limits” (Fanon 2004, 15). The apartheid ensured by the orphanage serves to categorize the orphans as something other than the colonizers, as something that needs to be disciplined and trained. At the film's conclusion, this dynamic is reversed when the director is shot as he steps outside the orphanage. Once he makes the first step outside the space of this institution where the colonial apparatus gave him power, the director meets his death at the hands of a communist rebel and the orphans helping him. As predicted by Fanon, the colonized have put an end to the immobility that compartmentalization imposes upon them through use of counterviolence against their oppressors. But, of course, in *Lulëkuqet mbi Mure*, the orphans are freed from the confines of the orphanage only after they have committed themselves to the communist cause.

Dehumanization and violence in the orphanage

What is the nature of the violence in the orphanage? It is comprised of the physical and psychological abuse, compartmentalization, and Manicheanism through which the colonizers dehumanize the colonized. Fanon writes:

The colonist is not content with stating that the colonized world has lost its values or worse never possessed any. The “native” is declared impervious to ethics, representing not only the absence of values but also *the negation of values*. He is, dare we say it, the enemy of values. In other words, absolute evil (Fanon 2004, 6, emphasis mine).

Were these values seen as *absent* from the colonial world, there would be hope of rehabilitation. Instead, the colonist constructs the colonial subject as beyond this possibility, as the negation of values. Great effort is needed to carry forward this dehumanization, which serves to ultimately cast the “native” outside the category of the human. Sylvia Wynter points to the Western European colonial expansion into Africa and the Americas as the moment when categorization of people was no longer based on religious modes but secular ones of rationality and reason. The “primary code of difference” became the “cultural-physiognomic variations between peoples” – a racial categorization that placed “natives” in the sub-human sphere of nonrationality (Wynter 1996, 477). It was during the colonization of the Americas that new identities based on “race” were created and ordered according to skin color, wherein superiority was “premised on the degree of humanity attributed to the identities in question. The ‘lighter’ one’s skin is, the closer to full humanity one is, and vice versa” (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 244). This colonial logic, predicated on the lack of humanity of the people of the colonies, served to support their domination via capitalist exploitation, slavery, serfdom, and genocidal practices. As the defining feature of modernity, such an imperial attitude of suspicion and skepticism of the humanity of those deemed as “barbarian” shaped the world beyond the conquests of the sixteenth century (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 246–7).

Similar skeptical attitudes about the orphans’ humanity are at work in *Lulëkuqet mbi Mure*. The caretaker and the director constantly describe the children as malevolent, unable to think, acting not like people but akin to pests that suck the blood out of the civilized fascist administration.³ When the literature teacher tells the director that the children were exhausted after being forced to erase anti-fascist signs on the walls, the director retorts by calling them “deceitful and lazy” and warning the teacher about their trickery. The children are constructed as intrinsically devoid of values: the ways of the civilized are not in their nature as *Albanian* orphans, so the fascist director needs to educate them. In the discourse of Balkanism, this is a common line of thought – the barbarian and backward people of the Balkans need the guidance of the enlightened westerners in order to enter modernity. Both the director and the caretaker state in clear terms that Albania is benefitting from its occupation by the Italian Empire, which will “improve” the country and finally make it part of “civilization.” It is unsurprising that the orphanage

³ This dehumanizing violence starts from the fact that the children lose all signs of personhood when they enter this space – their heads are shaved, and they are made to wear identical uniforms. The shaved heads and uniforms alienate the orphans, who outside of the institution might have passed for children of different social strata. Because they are immediately distinguishable from other, wealthier children, the latter mock them with taunts of “qerosa!” – a word that points out the orphans’ bald heads, and to their marginal position in society. Inside the orphanage, their shaved heads and uniforms render them indistinguishable from each other and make their lives interchangeable.

administrators adopt the same rhetoric toward the children and the rhetoric of *training* the savage, or *taming* the animal, mirrors the dehumanizing effects of colonialism. This manifests at the level of the colonizer's language via allusions of the colonized subjects' animalistic appearance, movements and gestures, all of which serve to construct the colonized as devoid of humanity and rationality (Fanon 2004, 7).

One scene in the film illuminates these workings of dehumanization. We see the orphanage's accountant at a window, throwing pieces of bread to a group of eager and happy children. He seems to be playing a "game" with them, seeing who can catch the bread with their mouth. The accountant, dressed in a sharp white shirt and black vest that shows the string of his pocket watch, throws pieces of bread to the children. Each child struggles with the others next to him and jumps up to be the one who catches the bread. It is the literature teacher that breaks the activity when he sees what is happening and yells "What is this *game*?!" The children disperse and the teacher tells the accountant that he is wasting the orphanage's bread. The accountant responds with, "I am making the children more agile. Did you see that Italian circus?" The orphans are so low in the accounts' hierarchy of the human that they can be humiliated and trained as circus animals. Not only that, but the training would be *good* for them, would teach them "agility" and give their existence worth. The fact that this is an Italian circus is also significant – Italy stands for Europe, and Europe stands for all that is civilized, regardless of the brutality it had caused.

As the children walk away from the game, they complain that the teacher ruined their fun. Jaçe interjects that the teacher was right to stop it. Another boy, Bardhi tells him he is only mad because he was not good at catching. Jaçe's response is a rejection of his own dehumanization: "It's dogs that have bread thrown to them like that, I am not a dog." Taking this as Jaçe's way of calling him a dog, Bardhi becomes angry and the two start a fight in the yard, which causes a great commotion as more children become involved. The caretaker sees this and calls the two boys to his office for their punishment: they must slap one another as he watches. They each give the other a slap, but then Jaçe stops. The caretaker whips Bardhi and orders him to give his friend "five good ones." When it is all over, the caretaker comments on the importance of order and discipline, and to prove his commitment to these ideals, beats Jaçe himself and locks him up in the cellar without any food. This scene reveals that some of children are already knowledgeable of the fact that they are being trained to behave in submissive ways. As one would train or domesticate a dog – through cruel beatings, reprimands and the use of food as incentive to behave – the administrators are training the boys. The accountant's retort to the teacher that he is making the boys more agile is further proof of this

deliberate effort to dehumanize the children. Combined with the caretaker's punishment of having the boys inflict violence on each other, and thus repeating the gesture of violence until it becomes habit or second nature, the orphanage administrators continue to show the boys what they really think: that these children are impervious to rationality and logic and can only learn through the language of violence and degradation.

The same logic is apparent in the scene where the director expels Jaçe and his close friends from the orphanage. This occurs after Sulo has been killed and the literature teacher has been fired, which had led some of the orphans to retaliate by writing on the walls inside the orphanage, "DOWN WITH FASCISM" and "DOWN WITH THE DIRECTOR." When the director sees these, he storms into the building, grabs Jaçe and two other boys and begins to scream at them to leave the orphanage forever. He bombards them with a slew of insults: vagabonds, bastards, misers, vagrants, criminals, ingrates. He tells them that now they will have to be homeless and ends his diatribe by screaming, "Like dogs you will wander the streets, you will become animals, you'll end up in a ditch!" This insult, which equates the children to dogs is made right before the director banishes the children to the streets, the undisputed compartment of the wretched, uncivilized, colonial subjects who never had the chance to become assimilated into Italian culture.⁴ If the children occupied an ambiguous position regarding their humanity while living in the orphanage, once they are cast outside of it they lose their humanity completely. Under the eye and control of the occupiers, the children's reduction to the state of animal had the protentional to be only temporary. Once they learned Italian and absorbed the fascist ideology, they might have been able to move up to the status that the director, accountant, and caretaker possess as native accomplices of the colonial regime. But because they fail to do this and instead rebel. The children become incorrigible, nothing more than dogs.

We see how the question of the children's humanity and "trainability" comes to light again when the caretaker talks with the orphanage's cook, Loni.⁵ Loni attempts to make the caretaker sensitive to the children's needs, who have been starved for several days:

Cook: They are orphans, this is not right. On one hand, you beat them, and on the other hand you want to deprive them of food. And how much is allocated for them anyway? This little.

⁴ It is a similar insult that the caretaker yells after Sulo when the boy runs out to the street prior to being shot. He curses him by calling him a son of a dog, or "qen bir qeni."

⁵ During this scene, Loni also complains to the caretaker that the accountant and the director have been stealing money from the orphanage and pocketing it, which might be one of the reasons why they let the children go without food for days, and why there are little resources available at the orphanage. The cook mocks their purported patriotism. The caretaker advises Loni to not think about the matter, for they should be grateful for their jobs and the great treatment they are receiving from Italy. Unlike the caretaker, Loni often questions the fascist director, supports the children, and interrupts the Italian music lessons by singing traditional Albanian folk songs.

Caretaker: Ah, but they are bastards. Besides, people need beatings, otherwise they become a problem.

Cook: People can also learn through gentleness.

Caretaker: Yes and no.

Cook: Yes, yes.

The caretaker continues to stress the idea of the children as incorrigible “bastards” who can only learn through violence. But this exchange also reveals that for the orphanage administration, the children are not yet completely outside the category of the human – at times they are indeed people who can be “taught” and at other times are simply irrational, or dogs. Nonetheless, in both cases what is shown by the slippage between the terms used to refer to the orphans is a certain “skepticism” about their humanity, as Maldonado-Torres puts it. Such “misanthropic skepticism” continually questions the humanity of the “barbarians,” who are constructed as inferior under the racialization and classification established through colonization (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 246). As such, the orphanage administrators and their Italian fascist overseers find it hard to believe in the humanity of the orphans, whom they see as biologically predetermined to be inferior to them. While the idea that they might be trainable is also present, it is all too easily disturbed by any disobedience on the children’s part.

It is disobedience from the children that sets off the chain of events that leads to Sulo’s death. When the boy does not follow the caretaker’s order to report to his room with the names of the children who had caused his fall, the man becomes furious and forces Sulo out of the boys’ room. He does not care about Sulo’s continued assertions that he does not know anything about what happened. Sulo calls the caretakers’ efforts futile and in an attempt to end this psychological torment, tells him to just “do what [he needs] to do.”⁶ This statement sparks even greater rage from the caretaker. By implying that he knows physical punishment is imminent, an expected outcome of the situation and power imbalances between the two, Sulo signals that he knows what the caretaker really is: an instrument at the hands of an empire, a lowly worker in service of the country’s colonizers, who try as he might to gain status within the colonial apparatus, will only remain a pawn, frightful only to defenseless orphans. The boy’s comment also exposes that the caretaker’s method of discipline is violent force. This revelation is nothing shocking, for a large part of the film has consisted of the beatings and humiliation of these children. If the violence was so obvious, why does the caretaker take such offense at Sulo’s comment? Why does he feel mocked and ridiculed by the child? I believe this has to do with what underlies Sulo’s comment: an understanding of his positionality as an exploited subject and his rejection of this status of inferiority. Sulo and the other children have started to recognize themselves as *human*,

⁶ In the Albanian, Sulo says: “Bëj çfarë ke për të bërë.” All translations are my own.

not the animals or things the administrators call them. This recognition is a crucial step in the process of liberation, which Fanon names as the process that turns the colonized “thing” into human (Fanon 2004, 2). And it is this recognition and the decolonization that follows it which puts the colonizer’s power in jeopardy.

After the comment, the caretaker’s questioning of Sulo turns into threats and more violence – he declares he will break the child’s neck and drags Sulo down the stairs and out into the yard. Sulo escapes his grip and runs out of the open gate to escape his ire. The caretaker curses him and locks the gate behind him. Pressed closely against one another, the rest of the children watch the scene from their window and start to shout in support of Sulo. They mock the caretaker and, distorting their voices, they call him a fascist and spy. Sulo’s complete aloneness and fear outside the orphanage walls is magnified when contrasted with the other children’s unified stance against the caretaker; their glee at the insults they hurl and vigor with which they grab furniture to bolt their door shut. The camera focuses on Sulo’s concerned face when he hears the fascist patrol round the corner. They yell for him to stop, but Sulo has already run toward the gate’s wall and climbed almost all the way up when he is shot in the back and falls, dead. When the other children hear the gunshot, they turn somber and move to the window, whence in unison they yell out Sulo’s name. In the process, their bodies become almost one, become even more indistinguishable from one another. Sulo was one of them, and with his shaved head, his plain white shirt and nondescript dark-colored shorts, he could have been any one of the boys.

“[H]ow do we get from the atmosphere of violence to setting violence in motion? What blows the lid?” asks Fanon (Fanon 2004, 31). In the film, Sulo’s murder rests somewhere between what Fanon calls the “trivial incident” that can set off the machine-gunning, and what he identifies as the point of no return occurring once the armed struggle has already started, when the magnitude of violence intensifies (Fanon 2004, 31 & 47). Sulo’s murder happens at a moment when we have been inundated with violence enough to know that it was the only mode of expression their oppressors understand. As Fanon writes, the colonized choose to liberate themselves through violence as a natural result of having been taught it by their colonizers: “The argument chosen by the colonized was conveyed to them by the colonist, and by an ironic twist of fate it is now the colonized who state that it is the colonizer who only understands the language of force.” (Fanon 2004, 42). By the time that Sulo is killed, the orphans have not only been beaten by the caretaker, verbally and physically abused by the orphanage director, coerced to labor for the fascists, starved of food, and fought one another, but have also witnessed Ali fatally shooting a fascist in the streets of Tirana and the corresponding agitation caused by this shooting to their occupiers. Thus, they have learned that the legitimacy of their condition rests on violence and force, which also appear to be same tools they need for changing these conditions. I see Sulo’s death

as the point of no return, following Fanon's idea that this is the point when both colonized and colonizers recognize that things cannot continue as usual and a fundamental change needs to take place. Even though the children had known violence before this event, had even used it themselves when they had caused the caretaker's fall down the stairs, it is only after their friend's death that they have no doubt that the orphanage's administration and their fascist rulers are evil, and that they must join forces with the communists who have already taken up the armed struggle.

The revolutionary from the town and the native intellectual

As has been mentioned, the orphans join the struggle for liberation thanks to the guidance of two key figures who are part of the communist insurgency: Jaçe's friend Ali and their literature teacher Luan.⁷ I read these characters as an iteration of what Fanon calls the "revolutionaries from the towns", who have been ostracized from the native parties for their radical views and angry outbursts (Fanon 2004, 28–9). He writes that "these undesirables with their inflammatory attitude [...] realize in a kind of intoxication that the peasant masses latch on to their every word and do not hesitate to ask them the question for which they are not prepared: 'When do we start?'" (Fanon 2004, 29). Ali, as well as the literature teacher, have a similar relationship with the children. The boys hang on every word these two men say and much of what the children do is aimed at pleasing both Ali and the teacher. Before the culminating action of helping to kill the fascist director, the children act together to carry out a series of minor subversions: they steal a communist leaflet and spread the information on it to each other, they disobey and mock the orphanage administration, they set up a trap that makes the orphanage's caretaker break his arm, they refuse to spy on each other, instead they spy on the fascists and report back to Ali and the teacher. They always seem to be asking "when do we start?", though their zeal is quieted and monitored by Ali and the teacher. Fanon warns against the native elite of colonial countries, whose goal is not to dismantle the system, because they have learned how to use it to their advantage. For them the greatest threat is not the colonizers but the potential of mass mobilization of the peasantry (Fanon 2004, 28). I do not think that the characters of the teacher and of Ali are concerned with this, as they are both obviously fighting to end the Italian occupation. However, in guiding the children in the "proper" uses of violence, they start to control the

⁷ Ali is sometimes also referred to by Jaçe as his neighbor, something that implies Jaçe might not actually be an orphan, but a boy placed there by parents who cannot afford to feed him. It is interesting that Jaçe is one of the most important characters of the film, who becomes somewhat of a leader among the orphans. While his exact situation is not revealed, Jaçe's position gives him access to his "neighbor" Ali and brings him closer to a normative family than the other children. It is as if the filmmaker could not allow for a *true* wretch or bastard, to be the leader of the orphans' rebellion.

revolutionary power that these children hold. It is not a huge leap to imagine why this theme of patient guiding by their elders might have been a theme in the film – it is the Party telling viewers in the 1970s to listen and not disobey.

There is a telling exchange between Ali and Jaçe that reveals the discipline required by the Party. This occurs the day after the caretaker falls and breaks his arm. Fed up by the abuse they experience in the orphanage, and inspired by communist leaflets, the language teacher's lessons, and Ali's shooting of an Italian fascist, the children devise a way to get back at the caretaker. At night, they plant a string by the top of the stairs that the caretaker does not notice when he is walking downstairs. His fall and injury, however, are not considered as simple child's play by the fascist administrators of the orphanage. They immediately interpret it as an act influenced by communist anti-fascist sentiment and punish the children by depriving them of food and tormenting them with verbal abuse. During this time, Ali comes to visit Jaçe and they meet by the gate of the orphanage. Their exchange begins with Jaçe saying to Ali that he knows he is a communist, because he has seen him shoot the Italian man. Then, Jaçe announces that the children carried out an action of their own. Ali laughs at him, considering the action not very significant. Nonetheless, he cautions:

Ali: Wait, what if he had broken his neck?

Jaçe: That's what we wanted.

Ali: Oh, really? What do you think this is, we just go in the streets and shoot? Dangerous spies are killed but only when the party says so.

Jaçe: But he is a spy.

Ali: Sure, sure, but these things have an order.

Jaçe: But because of this we have been starved all day.

Ali: Ah, here you go, I almost forgot. [Ali gives him a sandwich that Jaçe considers but then says he will eat later.]

Jaçe: That's not why I told you this.

Ali: Okay, okay. Are you upset?

Jaçe: We just wanted to do something like what you did.

Ali: But you had a duty, or have you forgotten it?

Jaçe: Yes, but the man has not come. We always keep watch.

Ali: Anyway, good job, because these things take courage. But for anything new, you have to ask, do you understand?

Jaçe: Yes.

Ali: Good. There needs to be discipline. [Notices Jaçe looks annoyed.] What, you don't like it?

Jaçe: Those are the words the caretaker tells us every day.

Ali: Well, you shouldn't have gotten yourself in this situation, then. You might have as well told them that the murderer was Ali Hima, your neighbor.

Offended by Ali's joking, Jaçe grabs his friend and tries to hit him in the face. Ali calms him down and laughing, tells him to stop because he "[hasn't] even eaten, [he has] no energy." It is evident from this scene that the communists consider revolutionary violence as something that needs to be planned,

deliberate, and not to be determined by the explosive emotions of the orphans. Jaçe's comment equating Ali's disciplinary tone to that of the caretaker shows the boy's understanding of the nature of this reprimand. It is also interesting to note the parallel movement that the caretaker and Ali take when they are speaking with Sulo and Jaçe, respectively. As they are talking, Ali offers Jaçe a sandwich, meanwhile the caretaker attempts to bribe Sulo into confessing who had caused his injury by offering him a bowl of soup and some bread. Both boys have been without meals and are starving at this point, yet neither of them accepts the food, Sulo says he is sick, while Jaçe makes a vague statement that he will eat it later. Sulo's gesture is clearly the film's way of showing his loyalty to his friends, but Jaçe's gesture is more complicated. He considers eating the food, even brings it up to his mouth, but then stops. It is as if the children are seeing through the words of these adults and finding their own small ways of resisting. In this case, it is through the refusal of this gesture of "kindness" and by making up excuses for doing so (which are ones that would not outright offend either man), that the children can assert their own agency.

Nonetheless, Ali (and as we will see, the teacher) is able to control the children through a careful harnessing, monitoring, and directing of their nascent rage and violence. Jaçe is right to point out how the emphasis on discipline and order reproduces the dynamics of the orphanage, which, in addition to a foundation of violence, are also dependent on ideals of "reason" and "objectivity." To this, Fanon says, "[f]or the colonized subject, objectivity is always directed against him" (Fanon 2004, 37). In the case of the film, the native intellectual and the revolutionary from the town, while engaged in the violent struggle, nonetheless "are not sure that this reckless violence is the most effective way of defending their own interests" (Fanon 2004, 25). Their problem is with the unregulated violence of the children, enacted within the space of the orphanage and thus, away from the watchful eye of the party. Ali's words serve to curb the children's actions, for although Jaçe recognizes the hypocrisy of Ali's words and is clearly upset about them, he still deeply respects and admires the older boy. And again, it is interesting to note here that the caretaker employs the same strategy of appealing to reason and objectivity when he petitions the children to confess who hurt him. Whether on purpose or not, the film creates these multiple parallels between the caretaker and Ali's actions.

While Ali is able to influence the children during his visits to the orphanage, the literature teacher, Luan, has the children's attention within the orphanage during their daily lessons. Unlike Ali, Luan is not seen carrying out violent acts himself – his tools are different, they are words and poetry. This figure of the revolutionary teacher that spreads word of the party is popular among Albanian cinema of the '60s and '70s. Scholars have attributed this to a possible allusion to Enver Hoxha, who had been a schoolteacher himself (Peshkopia, Zahaj, Hysi 2014, 76). Such characterization of Hoxha was often made through the progressive teacher from the city, who educated and enlightened

the peasants of the countryside, an archetype that again recalls Fanon's conceptualization of the "native intellectual." Furthermore, it is no coincidence that this is a teacher of *literature* for as Fanon points out, it is important for the colonized to reclaim their own cultural productions and national identity in response to the forceful imposition of the colonizer's culture and values. In the case of *Lulëkuqet mbi Mure*, the literature teacher makes deliberate choices about the works he reads to the orphans. He is careful to only cite key figures of the Albanian nationalist movement of the 19th century – the Albanian National Awakening, which sought independence from the Ottoman Empire and the creation of the Albanian nation. The literary works he reads to the children espouse clear nationalist ideology, where the suffering of the Albanian people under Ottoman rule is used to make a call for national unity and, in turn, for homogeneity of identity and political convictions. Further, by invoking figures of the National Awakening, the teacher makes an explicit connection between historical subjugation and the current struggle for liberation from fascist Italy. Thus, literature serves as an effective strategy for the indoctrination of the children into the Communist Party, especially due to its strong appeal to emotion and group (and national) belonging.

We first meet the teacher after the children are forced to stay up all night to erase anti-fascists messages written on the walls surrounding the orphanage. As the children walk back to the orphanage in the morning, tired and covered in paint, the teacher runs into them. Finding out what they had been doing in the night leads the teacher to read aloud to them a poem by Naim Frashëri, one of the leading figures of the Albanian National Awakening movement. Frashëri's works are dedicated to the national ideal, and in fact, played a key role in constructing the idea of Albania at the time when it first emerged as a nation-state after a long Ottoman rule. The poem, titled "Tradhëtorët" / "Traitors", begins with a call for listeners to beware of the traitors among them, then addresses these traitors directly, telling them they will regret betraying the nation. Reading this warning to the children who had acted against the interests of the national liberations struggle, achieves the teacher's desired effect – from that point on, the boys are motivated to prove to him that they are not traitors. This accounts for many of the actions that the children take, like collaborating with Ali to spy on the director or hiding and distributing the communist leaflets. For his own part, the teacher stands up on behalf of the children in meetings with the director, bringing up the "inhumane methods" that the director employs and mocking the "humanism" of Rome, which makes him a target of the director's ire. The director sends a spy to follow him, accuses him of being a communist and eventually fires him, but not before the teacher gives a moving speech at the climax of the film. This occurs right after Sulo has been shot, when the children are at their most vulnerable. The teacher enters the classroom to find the children silent, a bouquet of flowers on Sulo's seat. He asks Jace to read a poem aloud – "Anës Lumenjve" / "Next to the Rivers," by Fan Noli (who had been an ardent

enemy of the fascists and King Zogu's rule). When the boy stumbles through the words, the teacher takes over and recites the poem from memory. He is overcome with emotion as he recites, his voice grows louder and his gestures wilder. Written in 1928, the poem lists the ways in which the Albanian people have been oppressed and subjugated throughout history, from the Ottoman occupation to WWI. The end of the poem turns into a revolutionary call for peasants and workers to revolt, in the same way that the rivers overflow and flood the land. After reciting the poem, the teacher delivers this speech to the boys, who have been watching him intently:

An orphan country is unlucky. They take advantage of it. They deny its ancestors and origin; they deprive it of its language and daily bread. They abuse it and spit on it, they take away its dignity. Who will save it? It will save itself. It will tell its sons, stand before me: here is my anger in your hands like a sword, let us accomplish this work.⁸ And from this moment, the country is no longer orphaned. And you are no longer orphans. A mother struggles for you, a mother who is always near. ... Listen to her, lest you want to be taken advantage of, to be treated like dirt, to be killed, and to be deprived of honor.

In this speech, the teacher captures the essence of colonial exploitation and dehumanization, and offers the children a way out of their state of despair. First, he notes the manners in which an "orphan" country or people can be abused – through denial of its culture, history, language, and bread. Then, he presents them with a way out through harnessing the power of their anger and by taking up arms. This moment the teacher speaks of is the moment when the atmosphere of violence – that constant state of violent existence that the colonizers have created and that allowed for the establishment of their power – leads to a response of armed struggle for liberation. And yet, it is obvious that the teacher's speech serves a similar function to Ali's talks with Jaçe. The teacher seizes the moment, using the children's vulnerable states and their sadness at the death of Sulo to earn their loyalty. Certainly, the communist efforts to liberate the country were warranted, but we must question the ways in which Ali and the teacher simultaneously incite and curb the children's feelings.

The teacher equates the colonized country to an orphan, wherein the orphan is imagined as the most unfortunate member of a society, a disposable body that can be abused without impunity, as the film has indeed shown. But the orphan, here, is also imagined as the child missing a *mother* – it is the mother that makes a child orphaned, because it is the mother whose "natural" duty is to care for the children. That the father is also missing seems to not even be taken into consideration. It is by invoking the figure of the moth-

⁸ This language of labor mirrors Fanon's own words: "For the colonized, this violence represents the absolute praxis. The militant therefore is one who works. The questions the organization asks the militant bear the mark of this vision of things: 'Where have you worked? With whom? What have you accomplished?' The group requires each individual to have performed an irreversible act" (44).

er that the teacher can earn the children's greatest commitment. And this comes as no surprise, knowing how essential tropes of motherhood are to nation-building. The promise of a mother that can care and struggle for them on a most fundamental level proves irresistible to the children, who throughout the film have cemented allegiances among each other by swearing on their "mother's soul." The literature teacher is well aware of the strong effect such an appeal to family and a mother's care has on the orphaned children, which is why he also employs it later when he talks about the Communist Party. After this passionate speech, the children are moved to organize themselves and write anti-fascist messages on the walls, then join the teacher and Ali in the communist quarters. During the film's ending scenes, Jaçe and another boy help one of the communists shoot the director. As this man shoots the director, he utters the final words of the film: "In the name of the people, you are sentenced to death!"⁹ The director falls to his death at the orphanage's gate, which had helped to compartmentalize the children's lives and separate them from the rest of the city. Through this act, the orphans finally become part of "the people" who were struggling for liberation.

Conclusion: the children's alternative

After the director is shot, Jaçe flees the scene. The film ends with him pedaling through town, now seemingly free and saved from the violent world of the orphanage. We are meant to believe that Jaçe is no longer an *orphan* now that he is part of the Communist Party and the national liberation struggle. Not only has he shed that identity, but he cannot even re-enter the orphanage, for he has performed the "irreversible act" that now places him into the ranks of the militants (Fanon 2004, 44). His participation in this act of violence has made a new "man" out of him, a man of the revolution. Is this similar to the new humanism envisioned by Fanon, which would lead to a "new rhythm, specific to a new generation of men, with a new language and a new humanity" (Fanon 2004, 2)? At the core of Fanon's new humanism is the recognition of the humanity of all those who colonialism had cast outside the category of the "human" and the end of their subjugation. Homi K. Bhabha, in the forward to *The Wretched of the Earth's* 2004 edition, links Fanon's ideas of a new humanism with his stance *against* the imposition of what seemed as an unequivocal choice that Third World countries had to make after gaining independence: the choice between socialism or capitalism (Bhabha 2004, xvi-xvii). Rather than being limited to only these two choices, Fanon calls for post-colonial countries to focus on values, methods, and styles that are specific to them (Fanon 2004, 55). And while he identifies the need for a redistribution of wealth the most critical issue of the time, Fanon's vision of a hopeful new humanism, without any compartmentalization and subjugation, also goes

⁹ In the Albanian, the sentence spoken is: "Në emër të popullit jeni dënuar me vdekje!"

hand in hand with the “destruction of the Manichaeism of the cold war” (Bhabha 2004, xiv).

In *Lulëkuqet mbi Mure*, the overt ideological purpose of the film leaves little room for any possibilities outside of this cold war dichotomy. As a result, what we find is a lesson about the perils of capitalism and the necessity of adhering to the principles of socialism. Only two choices are offered by the film: you are either a fascist and capitalist, colonizer and colonial bourgeoisie, or you are a communist, a revolted colonized subject ready to take up arms for national liberation and to fully subscribe to state socialism. No other alternative to fascism is imaginable and the film implies that a total allegiance to the Party is necessary lest the foreign threat prevail again. As we have seen, the orphans’ ambiguous position in the colonial system makes *their* choice a crucial one, which is why their actions in the film get progressively more rebellious toward the orphanage administration as their education from the communist insurgents intensifies. Very little attention is given to the children’s own thinking or agency, to the possibility that they might be able to forge something different. It is only through careful attention to the children’s small modes of resistance and solidarity unmediated by the Party, that we can observe a gesture toward an alternative, even though this alternative ultimately remains unrealized.

I would like to conclude by considering these unrealized alternatives that the children created on their own. The orphans overtly resisted the fascist administration: they insulted the orphanage administrators and called them fascists, got revenge on the children who taunted them in the streets (for instance, by writing “spy” on the back of one of them), stole and read partisan leaflets, even engineered a way to injure the caretaker. They also resisted through refusal: refusal to sing Italian songs, refusal to properly pronounce Italian words during their language lessons, refusal to spy or physically harm each other, refusal to reveal Ali’s identity to the fascist police, refusal even of food offered to them with too many strings attached. Yet another form of their subversion is their mocking and parodying of the orphanage administrators, especially of the caretaker. For instance, the children mimic the meltdown he experienced when the music teacher stormed out, too fed up with the children’s choir. With a make-shift hat fashioned to resemble that of the teacher’s, the children recreate the scene in their sleeping room during the night, with one child pretending to be the teacher, and another pretending to be the caretaker. The “caretaker” makes exaggerated gestures and pleas for the “teacher” to stay, allowing the children to expose the caretaker’s weakness and pathetic sycophancy toward anyone higher than him in the social ladder. This performance ends with a mock shooting of “the caretaker,” before Jaçe and his close friends retreat to their corner of the room to plan their trap on the real caretaker.

These subversions would not have been possible without the solidarity that the orphans have built with one another, and which has ensured their

survival in the miserly conditions of the orphanage. When Jaçe is locked up in the cellar after refusing to hit Bardhi, the other children stealthily stow away pieces of bread from their meals so they can sneak it into him. Later, the children band together to get Jaçe and Bardhi to make up after their fight. Jaçe starts to come around after Ali also advises him in a similar fashion. When he relates Ali's advice to the others, one of the children responds, "So what if Ali told you? What about us, who are your friends?" This statement is telling of the fact that despite their subjugation, the children place worth on their own convictions and actions, and see great importance in the friendship among one another. In fact, through their friendship, the children create links of solidarity that are not based on national identity. While the communists' initiation of the orphans into their party is based on a specific idea of the nation as an oppressed and colonized entity, the children develop ways of coming together and to each other's rescue that do not depend on their unity as *Albanians*. In fact, it is the literature teacher who gives them cultural references for what makes them part of the Albanian nation, and it is the partisan leaflets they steal or obtain from Ali that teach them about the national struggle, which they learn is taking place throughout the country. The communists are invested in giving the children a new identity, one where they are not labeled as orphans but as children of Albania.

The children, however, do not see as completely insignificant an identity that has made possible their friendship, solidarity, and endurance. Together, they have learned to use their position as orphans strategically to survive among the violence that surrounds them. When an officer approaches them after they witness the shooting of the fascist in the street, he asks them if they knew who fired the shot. "We are from the orphanage, we do not know anyone," the children respond. Of course, they had all recognized the shooter had been Ali, but the knowledge of their position as orphans is used intentionally to feign ignorance. How could they know who fired the shot, when they are orphans stuck inside the walls of the orphanage? Once again, the children demonstrate knowledge of their positionality and an ability to use that knowledge to subvert the colonial fascist system. However, the film's didactic, ideological purposes do not allow their subversion to develop on its own, and the alternatives that the children could have created remains unfulfilled. Instead, *Lulëkuqet mbi Mure* confronts the viewer with "the unequivocal choice between socialism and capitalism" and in doing so, limits its own imagination for a new humanism and a more radically different future (Fanon 2004, 55).

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A Heavy Word: Discourses on Albanian Sworn Virgins



Abstract

This paper takes up the portrayal of burrnesha in media, where they are usually referred to as sworn virgins. Specifically, this paper utilizes news clips and informational videos accessible on YouTube in order to better understand the interplay of power dynamics between the West and Albania. The majority of these videos constitute a dominant discourse, aligned with most of the literature, that presents the custom of burrnesha as curious and anachronistic. This paper divides the pattern of Western engagement into four sub-themes: knowing, judging, finding, and dying. These themes are evident in the unequal power relations that allow the Western journalists to discover burrnesha, define them, and critique not only them, but Albanians and the Balkans more broadly. Indeed, the videos suggest that this practice is dying out on its own as the Balkans attempt to join modernity. The burrnesha themselves are un-

derstood as forced into a male role that punishes the breaking of the oath of celibacy by death. However, the burrnesha, when interviewed, form a counter-narrative by complicating the rigid picture put forth in the literature and media. While they show nuance in their respective motivations, all show satisfaction with their lives. Finally, this paper reflects upon the interplay of the Western gaze, and the ways in which Albanian media interacts with its own people. I argue that most Albanian media distances itself from the burrnesha in order to make claims of being civilized vis-à-vis the straggling burrnesha who remain an anomaly to progress.

Keywords: Balkans, journalism, third gender, homonationalism.

The first time I heard about burrnesha is clearly imprinted in my memory. I was reading about Albanian culture on the internet when I came across an article that described this practice, among other things. This site described the “sworn virgin” as a woman who takes a vow of celibacy, after which society recognizes her/him as a male and affords her/him the role and rights of a man. According to this site, this custom was the only way out of an arranged marriage or a last resort for a family left with no male descendant, most often because of blood feuds. The negative framing of the practice did not dissuade me. On the contrary, it is difficult to put into words the surprise and joy I felt in finding out there was something in my culture that fit me perfectly. I had known for a long time that I wanted nothing to do with marriage, relationships or sex. I identified increasingly less with femininity, therefore, for me, it was not a question of whether I wanted to take part in the custom of burrnesha. Rather, it was something that was somehow always a part of me, but the name of which I found this day.

The irony of learning about a gender practice indigenous to my culture from a Western/English website was not lost on me. I was frustrated that I had gone for so many years in pain and confusion not knowing that burrneshas existed. Why had I not heard about the burrnesha from my family?¹ Why did the Western sources know more about my culture and history than me? This paper explores several reasons for the disconnect between culture and memory. The aim of this paper is to situate the seeming re-awareness of the burrnesha within the context, described by Maria Lugones, of the replacement of pre-colonial genders with a Western capitalist-based gender binary (Lugones 2007).² This paper focuses on the interplay of power dynamics be-

¹ I did hear the word used once, to connote a strong (married) heterosexual woman who ‘gets things done.’ It can be understood as a woman getting her value from being like a man, but it can also mean that the positive treatment of burrnesha exists in phrases that modern Albanians scarcely understand. This further reflects the “forgetting:” the notion of burrnesha exists, but the backwards actual practitioners have died. It is perhaps also a purposeful shifting of meaning towards straightness, to obscure what in Western gender norms is shameful.

² While it is a matter of debate if Albania and the Balkans experienced colonization, they clearly did not experience the level of destruction of indigenous “gender” that was imposed

tween Western knowledge production of burrnesha and what can be understood as an Albanian media rediscovery of the custom. To better understand the modern iterations of the relationship between the Balkans and the West, this paper utilizes videos accessed on YouTube about burrnesha.³ These videos are particularly informative as they include foreign journalists visiting Albania as well as subsequent coverage by Albanian media. They illustrate the interplay of the Western gaze (in popular media and academia) and Albanians' understanding of themselves. What emerges from this analysis are much of the same hegemonic narratives I encountered when first learned about burrnesha, which present the practice as rigid and unfit for modernity.

I argue that the dominant Western narrative regarding burrnesha is problematic primarily because of the power difference between the Balkan subject and the Western observer. The latter has the authority to evaluate and define the former, because it has the backing of authoritative educational institutions and a history of power imbalance between it and the Balkans particularly in terms of politics and economics. The Western understanding of burrnesha presents them as victims of a backwards culture that forces women to choose between their femininity/sexuality and their rights. By contrast, I turn to the work of queer and decolonial theorists, such as Jasbir Puar, Maria Lugones, and Sara Ahmed to argue that burrnesha must be understood in more nuanced terms. I argue that we must listen to the burrnesha's own narratives of their lives and identities. Only when burrnesha speak for themselves does one hear the nuances to their stories, which run counter to the dominant discourse. For example, all burrnesha interviewed emphasize their happiness with their life, even while noting the difficulties they faced. They also show a variety of conditions and circumstances that led them to take on the role, ranging from simply not wanting to get married, to having to step up after a blood feud. Many cited masculine characteristics and some even describe having to convince their families to let them take this path. So, not only was taking on this role usually of their own free will, but it indicated their own internal identity.⁴ This is of great contrast to Western sources, which claim that this practice is wholly imposed and oppressive.

upon Native Americans or the Yoruba. However, it is clear that the imposition of western gender-regimes is an important part of the spreading of colonial hegemony, no matter if the region is directly or indirectly colonized. This is of course deeply tied in with race.

³ One of the ways burrnesha are presented today in popular sources is on YouTube. Some of the videos first appeared on TV (particularly the case for Albanian clips) but others were made just for online video consumption. I used the search terms "burrnesha" and "sworn virgin" to locate videos on the subject. Overall, I review thirty-two YouTube videos. There were surely much more videos and documentaries about burrnesha, but if they were not uploaded on YouTube, I had no way of accessing them.

⁴ It is possible that some may have retroactively created a narrative of male-ness. Yet, this is a human tendency more than anything, and to specifically target trans people to attempt to dissect their gender is problematic to say the least.

Knowing Burrnesha

There is great power in knowing. Epistemic power on the part of the Western observer, combined with the history of power imbalance between the West and the Balkans, gives him/her authority when reporting on the Balkans. This is especially the case with the burrnesha, who have little power to set their own narratives. The European, usually Western, traveler and/or anthropologist has historically been the one that leverages their knowledge, often over the locals, and even over the burrnesha themselves. Part of the reason for this, is that no burrnesha are located in Western educational institutions and thus able to respond on a level playing field to the works written about them.⁵ This power imbalance is present in the videos reviewed, as well as both the anthropological sources, and the travelogues from the 19th and 20th centuries.⁶ It is striking to see that, though the media and time period is different, the general narratives have changed little from the nineteenth century.

Most popular reporting on burrnesha characterizes these subjects as mysterious, hard to find, products of the patriarchy, old, backwards, and dying out. By focusing on geography, particularly winding roads and mountains, and by occasionally using black and white, YouTube videos about burrnesha situate them physically and temporally distant from the present. The videos feed particularly on the curiosity created by anthropologists but also fiction writers, and the old travelogues to some extent. While there is some critique of the problematic representation of burrnesha, this does not negate the power of these images in shaping the popular imagination of the Balkan subject, and often even the Balkan self-concept. Indeed, this authority is not limited to Western media coverage, but also includes Albanian media. First, Albanian sources adopt the Western discourse on burrnesha. This places them in between the subjects and the authoritative observers: avoiding observation, and mimicking the hegemon, often in order to avoid implication in the custom. Second, to avoid association with this negatively framed custom, the Albanian sources distance themselves from it by further ceding authority to 'know' the practice to the Western observer. Albanians have their ways of understanding burrnesha, but those local ways of knowing are undermined by the Westerners who are assumed to hold superior knowledge.

⁵ Burrnesha usually find themselves economically marginalized. This will be discussed in further detail further in this work.

⁶ In particular, Antonia Young, but also Rene Gremaux, Whitaker, Edith Durham, and others. Durham's work, was not consulted closely as it is outside of the time frame of the focus of this piece, but the frequent citations of her by these and other authors (and media) warrant her mention. Based on those accounts, she possesses one of the most positive portrayals of the sworn virgins, yet still exercises authority over them. For example, the picture from her book is the image for the article on "sworn virgins" on Wikipedia. Yet, in the videos reviewed, Antonia Young has the greatest impact.

One of the most influential anthropologists writing on sworn virgins, Antonia Young, is referenced in many of the videos, illustrating how her influence goes beyond just academia. Perhaps the most striking example of Young's impact not only on outsider perceptions of the burrnesha, but Albanians as well, is that of the Albanian news clip from 2013: "Virgjëreshat e betuara shqiptare" në fokusin e "Daily Mail" [Albanian sworn virgins in the focus of "Daily Mail"] (Ora News Lajme 2013). The title is the translation of 'sworn virgins' into Albanian, as opposed to the use of the native term (burrnesha), is cumbersome, yet telling. Accordingly, the reason the sworn virgins have become newsworthy is that 'our' tradition made it to the Western gaze. It is striking to see this Albanian video use clips of a famous video on sworn virgins by the National Geographic. This is because it would have been expected for the Albanians to know more about their own cultural custom, and therefore use their own footage and narrative. Below is an excerpt from the narrator of the video, which is particularly illustrative of the power that the anthropological approach holds over the self-image of Albanians:

Antonia Young antropolge dhe studijuse e ksaj praktike ne shqiperi, thot se femrat shqiptare ktheheshin ne burrnesha ne dy rrate: kur nje familje perbehej vetem nga gra edhe njera nga ato duhej te merrke per siper kte fat, ose ne rrastin kur prinderit vendoseshin per ta martuar vajzen dhe ato refuzonin. Burrneshat apo Virgjreshat e betuara kurr nuk do te lajohen te te bejn serisht jeten e nje femre. Kjo do te ishte nje denim me vdekje per ta. Studjusja thot se kjo tradite e lasht para 200 vitesh ka lindur nga ligji tradicional verior, Kanuni i Lek Dukagjinit. Por si studijuse ajo thot se kjo praktik lejoj qe shum femra te shpetojn nga martesat e pa-deshiruara. Ajo thekson gjithashtu se kjo praktik jo vetem qe ju dha grave panvarsin port e te drejtat per te kryesuar nje familje. Interessant e thekson ajo qe shumica e burrneshave ndihen krenare per fatin e tyre (Ora News Lajme 2013, emphasis mine).

[Antonia Young – Anthropologist and researcher of this practice in Albania, says that Albanian women turned into burrnesha in two cases: when a family was comprised only of women and one of them needed to take on this fate, or in the case of parents deciding to marry off the girl and she refused. burrneshas, or sworn virgins, will never be allowed to have the life of a woman again. This would be an act punishable by death. The researcher says that this ancient tradition was born two hundred years ago from the traditional law of the North, the Kanun of Lek Dukagjin. However, the researcher says that this practice allowed many women to be saved from undesired marriages. She emphasizes that this practice did not only give women independence, but also the rights to be the head of the household. It is interesting that she emphasizes that most of the burrneshas are proud of their lot in life.]

This video is particularly illustrative of the dominant discourse because of its emphasis on strict rules regulating the behavior of Albanian women. It attempts to clearly delineate the cases when a *woman* must give up her *womanhood* – for good. The death penalty for a burrnesha violating the oath of celibacy is constantly referenced in Western narratives on the practices, as

it is here, and serves to present Albanians as uniquely violent and honor-obsessed. The video names the “Kanun of Lekë Dukagjin [Law of Lekë Dukagjin, a Medieval Albanian nobleman]” as the culprit for these conditions placed upon women, which as it mentions, is a body of traditional law with particular sway in Northern Albania. Though it is indeed highly patriarchal and somewhat influential across Albanian speaking areas, it is not the sole determiner or source of all Albanian behavior, just as any given holy text or constitution is not the sole determiner of the behavior of all the people in a particular religion or country. Over-emphasizing the sway of the Kanun on Albanians to this day locates them in the Middle Ages and presents them as pathologically patriarchal. Finally, this particular video does concede that burrnesha enjoy their lot in life, but it calls this “interesting,” as if those assigned female at birth should be inherently miserable if they are not married with kids.

This video clip from Ora News is also noteworthy for its repeated deference to Antonia Young’s authority on burrnesha (as emphasized). Sentence after sentence, the narrator repeats the word “studjusja [studier/researcher],” thereby letting Young speak for this indigenous practice. This repetition insinuates that Young is the true expert on this topic, and no Albanian can speak more authoritatively than her. The Albanian source might be expected to know more about burrnesha, owing to its proximity to the practice and geographically and culturally. Instead, the Albanian source alienates itself from this practice, thereby distancing itself from something it sees as backward. Another reason for the tone of deference in this excerpt could be that the narration might have been translated directly from an English video that cites Young. It is not rare for Albanian media to translate news from English when it does not have the means to do original reporting. This would be understandable if the videos were on another country or topic, but it is quite astounding when done for an issue that Albanians would be expected to understand more intimately than foreign anthropologists. Furthermore, the excerpt above parrots the deeply entrenched narrative of strict rules and death for transgressing them, which is often sensationalized by the media. Burrnesha, and Albanian culture at large, are presented as backward, patriarchal, and violent. Therefore, it makes sense that the Albanian source surrenders authority to Young, in order to distance itself from burrnesha, by insinuating that they are remote, irrelevant, and only know-able by an anthropologist specifically looking for the odd and novel.

The dynamic of discovering Balkan oddities has historical roots. Ivan Jezernik, an author that writes about the travel narratives of the Balkans in general, and not the burrnesha specifically, provides pointed critiques on the ways in which Western travelers portrayed the Balkans. He states that, for the Westerner, there was “a strong sense of achievement if in the course of a tour he visited a spot ‘where no European traveler had preceded him,’ be it in the heart of Albania or ancient Macedonia” (Jezernik 2004, 30). This is painfully illustrated in the videos where journalists attempt to find burrnesha to interview. The emphasis on the mountains, in some cases referred to as

the “accursed mountains”⁷ is meant to show how difficult it is to find the burrnesha. Journalists are considered deserving of applause for ‘finding’ these elusive burrnesha. One of the videos, published by *Russia Today* [RT]⁸ in 2016, is particularly illustrative of the excesses of foreign journalists (Russia Today 2016). It renders the burrnesha as ‘elusive’ creatures antithetical to modernity, to be found and interrogated. This is not the first time *Russia Today* went to Albania to ‘find’ burrnesha. They also went there earlier, in 2009, where they interviewed Lali the first time (Russia Today 2009). Yet, in 2016, *RT* feigns surprise in encountering Lali, and says, “we were certain that burrneshas [sic]⁹ only remained in the rural highlands, but suddenly we bumped into a sworn virgin in quite a large Albanian town” (Russia Today 2016). *RT* had already interviewed Lali seven years prior, in this ‘town’ (which is actually the port city of Durres, the second-largest city in Albania). The older clip does not go into the mountains like the 2016 report but does espouse its own set of problematic assumptions. Chief among them is the authority claimed by Albanian ‘experts’ interviewed, one of whom argued that *these modern burrnesha are not observing the custom correctly* and are instead ‘pretenders.’ They seemingly internalized an extreme anthropological definition of the custom, which holds that only an impossibly rigid Kanun definition is ‘legitimate,’ therefore it is impossible for this custom to exist anymore. However, I have not yet come across an academic source that argues with such force that burrnesha today are ‘not really burrnesha.’ Therefore, this seems to be another case of the internalized colonialism.

By and large, the methods with which the Western media come to know the burrnesha are highly problematic. For example, two of the most problematic videos depicted interviewers who simply showed up to the homes of burrnesha asking for an interview, as do many print journalists (SBS Australia 2010; Deutsche Welle 2013). Those interviewing seem to think that burrnesha owe them an explanation for their incongruity.¹⁰ Seeker Stories (2015) did use Diana in interviews, but at one point did not translate one of her key points: “As gje nuk kam te imponuar [Not one thing is being imposed on me].” The video instead created a narrative that argues that Diana’s identity was unusual and oppressive.

Many of the videos are image-heavy, focusing on still images in a slide show, as if the burrnesha are some archaic specimen. The most overt example of this is a Belgian showcase of the pictures of the burrnesha in a gallery. This presentation completely silences burrnesha, and redefines them according to the Western gaze. This serves to subject the burrnesha – referred to as sworn

⁷ Indeed, this is how they are often referred to in Albanian. But its use in videos serves to associate gender transgression with the Devil, curses, and evil.

⁸ *Russia Today* is the state-owned media of Russia

⁹ This RT documentary did not use the term Sworn virgins throughout. Its title screen was “THE VIRGINS,” but it called them burrneisha (as opposed to burrnesha) throughout, perhaps because of a Russian pronunciation.

¹⁰ This is not unlike trans people in general, who are often faced with invasive questions which they are expected to answer at any given time.

virgins and men-women – to the way the West sees them, rather than letting them speak for themselves in any way. They are displayed like relics at the worlds' fair. The video, however, has a voice, and its opening slide puts into words what it and many videos claim or hint:

SWORN VIRGINS

BY PEPA HRISTOVA

In northern Albania, in the Cursed Mountains, said to have been created
by the Devil himself, the tradition of the "sworn virgins",
Europe's last men-women, lives on.

The Kannun, a collection of laws from the Middle Ages,
passed on for generations by word-of-mouth, permits
families to replace the male head of the household
with a woman in the case of the patriarch's death.
These "oath-virgins" or *Burrnesha* not only receive
the status but also the rights of men and are highly respected
in the family. They adapt to their roles so perfectly that,
over time, they are no longer recognised as women
outside of their families. Over the years,
the woman in them is lost.

This excerpt has no qualms about ascribing devilishness to the *burrnesha*, as if their gender deviance, and remoteness makes them 'fallen from grace' as the devil. This type of narrative is not unique to Albania or the Balkans, in fact, Lugones (2007) shows similar attitudes toward indigenous people in general, and their gender practices in particular by the colonizers. However, it does not suffice for the *burrnesha* to be living as cursed mountain-devils, they must also disappear. On the contrary, the phrasing "*Europe's last men-women*," connotes that they are the worst of Europe, the most backward, and thus destined to die out soon. Referring to the Kanun as transmitted by 'word-of-mouth' suggests that Albanians are illiterate and backward. The rest of the excerpt mourns the 'loss' of the femininity to the pathologically patriarchal Albanian culture. Indeed, the whole aura of the video is sad and dark. However, the video does not mourn the *burrnesha* themselves, but they mourn the female, as if to argue that they need to save Albania from its own backwardness that allows this tradition to continue to live, albeit with its date of death fast-approaching. Even more so, far from being truly liberatory, this narrative is transphobic and gender-essentialist. It, like colonialism, is hidden behind a concern for the women, to save them from their men and culture, and to place them all under a benevolent new regime.¹¹

¹¹ Of course, the colonization of Albania is not the same as that of Afghanistan, for example. And there is significant debate on whether Albania can be considered colonized. But I argue that the post-communist and post-war relations between Albania, Kosovo, and the West, can be considered a kind of colonization even if 'just' culturally and economically.

Just because the burrnesha are celibate, does not mean they cannot love or have meaningful platonic relationships. Nor does it mean they are miserable, contrary to what many of the journalists seem to suggest. On the contrary, all of the burrnesha interviewed were quite happy, some more than others. One example of this was when they were pressing Lali about not missing out on love, to which he replied: “Ku ka dashuri te singert sot, pppfff [Where is there sincere love nowadays, come on].” He countered: “Jam I dashuruar: me natyr, boj foto . . . [I am indeed in love – with nature, I take pictures...]” (Ora News 2018). This illustrates Lali’s happiness with his life, despite the fact that it might not seem as such to others. Furthermore, he turns the discourse of love on its head: he shows the limitations of confining love to a heteroromantic sphere and makes a criticism of the often-shallow ways many people express love.

Judging Burrnesha

This paper reviews videos on burrnesha, accessible on YouTube, from media mostly located in Western Europe or Albania. Some of these videos contain interviews with the burrnesha. Videos where the burrnesha are not given room to speak and instead are subject to Western depictions almost exclusively fall into a hegemonic dominant discourse that is over-simplified, negative and problematic. But, when burrnesha are given a chance to speak, they constitute an alternative discourse that asserts their agency and satisfaction in their own lives. This is despite tolerating prying and offensive journalist questions and stereotypical video and photo positioning. Yet, overall, in the videos it is clear that the outside observer has the power to define and judge burrnesha, and this is evident across much of the videos.

Both the videos and literature reviewed favor the term ‘sworn virgin’ to refer to burrnesha. While this is indeed the term used in English, it leaves one to wonder about the origin of this phrase, particularly because of its connotations. First, it emphasizes the binding nature of the oath as well as the virginity centering male control. This casts burrnesha as victims of their culture, and presents the Balkans as the [last] bastion of patriarchy in Europe. Furthermore, it places the focus on sexuality as opposed to gender. This occurs alongside the sources’ insistence in gendering burrnesha as female, even while simultaneously noting their role as men and usual use of male pronouns.¹² As Aleksandra Horvath critiques, “S/he is seldom, if ever, perceived or referred to as male, except in those cases when a traveler is deceived by his/her male looks and manners” (Horvath 2009, 3). This further essentializes gender: the authors describe burrnesha’s masculinity/male gender, while persisting to

¹² While Dickemann, like Young, chooses as an anthropologist to state that the “sworn virgins” are male and use male pronouns, she, nonetheless, continues to refer to them as female (Dickemann 1997, 201).

refer to them as female.¹³ For example, Young states “there are many different terms used to refer to *these women* who fill the place for which there is no man, although none of the (approximately fifteen), I have met, seemed *aware* of any special term, preferring to think of themselves simply as men” (Young 2009, 63, emphasis mine). Again, Young here invalidates their preferences immediately after presenting them. Even more so, she holds herself in a higher position of knowledge than the subjects by saying none were ‘aware’ of a term to refer to themselves, other than “men.” Yet, compared to the offensive over-generalization many 19th and 20th century travelers to the Balkans made, Young and most modern anthropologists are much more respectful to those they study, even when imposing (even unintentionally) gender essentialism. Overall, the anthropologists/Balkan travelers are therefore straightening and invalidating the preferences of the burrnesha. This is also a central tendency of the YouTube videos, because they follow in the footsteps of anthropologists – without the intellectual backing but still making authoritative and influential claims.

Aleksandra Horvath, the author of a pointed critical article on burrnesha, makes successful use of the Montenegrin term “tobelija,” which gives autonomy to the people to name themselves. In only six pages, Horvath provides a much better picture not only of burrnesha, but also of the power dynamics involved in the western gaze towards the Balkans. The Western travelers seek to discipline the tobelija as they would flora or fauna, and they exercise power over them by placing them into “a strict dimorphic gender system, the same one that reinforced normative heterosexuality and bourgeois marriage values in Western Europe at the time” (Horvath 2009, 5). This is of course painfully evident in the videos, as many of the interviewers repeatedly pester burrnesha as to why they would renounce sexuality, whether they have been in love, or whether they would wear a dress. Overall, there is no respect for other ways of living: the only acceptable way is a heterosexual life, and burrnesha’s refusal of that warrants interrogation and disapproval.

Likewise, in her chapter on “Balkans sworn virgins,” Mildred Dickemann questions the controlling narrative on burrnesha (Dickemann 1997).¹⁴ While her work includes the observations of anthropologists such as Durham, Rene Gremaux, and Ivan Whitaker, she applies a critical lens to them. She counters their overarching claims by stating, “I believe these canonical rationales gloss over the complexity of the motivations and the agency of several ac-

¹³ This refusal to see the burrnesha as male is akin to the narrative of Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists in the United States, which refuse to accept trans people, in particular trans women, as valid.

¹⁴ Though this paper does not take up the issue of religion and burrnesha in detail, it is important to note that the book in which Dickemann’s work is included is titled *Islamic Homosexualities*. Almost no other source discusses Islam, but they do occasionally reference Christianity. This is indeed an area in need of much more discussion, particularly in connection to race and racialization of religion.

tors, including the individual concerned" (Dickemann 1997, 198). She adds, "Even more significantly, few accounts reveal the motivation of the individual herself in becoming a surrogate son" (Dickemann 1997, 199). Dickemann's points are supported by some of the videos: when burrnesha speak in Albanian, they talk about nuanced and varied motivations for making the choice that they did. However, much of this is lost in the translation. This is even more so the case when they are simply photographed and not given an opportunity to speak. Burrnesha show a strong personal identification and satisfaction with their role that is lost on the narrative that centers on rules and blood-feuds.¹⁵ Dickemann even shows a bit more nuance in the rule of celibacy, whereas all nuance is lost in the videos. She says that "sources overall suggest to me and Gremaux that heterosexual sex was extremely uncommon" (Dickemann 1997, 201). This is distinct from the videos, which presumably seek to show Albanians as uniquely backward and violent – that they will unequivocally kill a "woman" for having sex. Dickemann instead does not make an absolute statement of celibacy, but fairly presents it as the (respected) centerpiece of the role.

One video that is a lampooning of the celibacy of the burrnesha is a particularly offensive Albanian comedy clip simply titled "Burrnesha." With Albanian traditional music playing in the background, the video shows a reporter walking into the mountains. If this sounds familiar, it is because it is a caricature of the usual videos on sworn virgins. It shows a burrnesha with makeup, a skirt, fancy heels, but also a gun. Her outfit is mismatched. Her gender performance is there for comedic relief. A man who is apparently, her husband says: "kush o moj burrnesh [who is it, o burrnesh]." She says "pun gazetaresh doken ... ndoshta dojn naj intervist per njerzit e ngujume [looks like journalists, perhaps looking for an interview of isolated people]" (TV 2000 2018). The journalist arrives and says "miredita zoj [good day ma'am]," and she gives him a hard handshake, which ushers in a laugh track (TV 2000 2018). The journalist goes inside the meager home to interview the disheveled, long-haired man, who does not leave the house for fear of being killed for blood. This simultaneously casts the men as hyper-masculine (insatiable for blood) and effeminate (so scared to leave house that the woman has to carry a gun and stand guard).

When the journalist comes back outside, he inquiries about the woman's undergarments set out to dry. The woman describes that each of her clients prefer a different pair, insinuating that she is engaged in some type of sex work in the village. Clients include politicians, village elders, and shopkeepers. The journalist says: "paske shume pune [you seem to be very busy/have a lot of [sex] work]," to which she replies: "po ne per nje nderr rroj morr

¹⁵ Of course, one can claim that people make up cross-gender narrative in hindsight, but this is an accusation usually levied at trans people to delegitimize their identities, and naturalize firm gender essentialism (Dickemann 1997, 199).

burr [But we live for honor good sir],” which is the punch line of the clip, and the end of it (TV 2000 2018). This insinuates that the villagers are pathological hypocrites, whose word means nothing and who have no honor. The video seems to suggest that their gender transgression and isolation makes them particularly sexually licentious, and that those that claim celibacy are the most perverse.

This comedy clip is in many ways unsurprising, as Western travelers have made similar claims. Leo Brenner-Gopcevic’s insinuation that the sworn virgins are in fact not virgins and break their oaths, mirrors the “punch line” in the comedy (Horvath 2009, 4). Brenner taunts them to be careful not to get pregnant because their barbaric culture will have them killed. Likewise, “Steinmetz describes the morality of the local population as being lax, and provides the additional detail that the particular *tobelija* he met was ugly, which is the reason he gives for why she opted to become a sworn-virgin-cross-dresser” (Horvath 2009, 4). This mirrors the gaudy depiction of the burrnesha in the comedy, as well as run-of-the-mill transphobia.

At first glance, it is odd that such a negative portrayal would come from Albanians themselves. However, as with most of the other videos, the Albanian treatment often outdoes the Western one in contempt for the tradition and mountainside. One explanation for this can be that it is an attempt by the city-folk to ridicule the rural people for the sake of recovering dignity in the face of Western domination. Many Albanians, especially the city dwellers, see burrnesha, and villagers in general, in a negative light: as if they are remnants of the past, which need to be civilized. Urban, nationalist Albanians (who in my experience also identified with the Communist regime and who seek heterosexual prestige) wholeheartedly accept this kind of discourse.

To be sure, other videos have their share of rude depictions, more than can even be summarized. Most videos take serious issue with the requirement of celibacy. No matter the language, they frame it in terms of sacrifice. For example, in describing Lali, Ora News states that “Vendim e ka par per ti shpetuar dominimit te meshkujve ne nje shoqeri patriarkale si kjo e jona, qmimi per ta paguar eshte virgjiria [He saw this decision to escape the domination of men in a society as patriarchal as ours is, and the price to be paid is virginity]” (Ora News 2018). This is milder than other videos, but still frames virginity as a price paid for freedom. One video in particular, pushes this narrative to its ethnocentric extreme: “Women Forced to Live as Men” (SBS Australia 2010). If the title is not offensive and inaccurate enough, it proceeds to argue that because Albanian men cannot stop killing each other, some women need to become men. Such an assertion is rife with ethnic connotations about the backwardness of Albanians, and, as in the comedy clip, emasculates them (Yuval-Davis 2003, 27). This video, like many others, takes place in the mountains and begins with Albanian traditional music so as to set the stage, culturally speaking. They describe burrnesha according to the mainstream narrative, situating them as a product of patriarchal law, and introducing the

burrnesha as “a woman who is forced by tradition into a startling transgender transformation, required to act and live as a man” (SBS Australia 2010). The terms “forced,” and “required,” as well as the phrase “startling transgender transformation” not only emphasize the oppressiveness of the practice, but also appeal to transphobia by associating gender transgression with backwardness. Such a description completely converts the practice into the discourse of colonial gender, doing great violence in the process.

Another example of distasteful treatment of burrnesha by Albanian media is asking if they have ever tried on a dress or if they were ever in love (Tujani 2016; Vizion Plus 2014). One journalist even had the audacity to bring in a ‘gift’ for one burrnesha, Justina (RTV Klan 2015). The gift was a dress, which the journalist asked Justina to put on, and of course, Justina refused. This is clearly quite disrespectful to Justina’s autonomy as a person. Justina’s orientation and life trajectory are troubling to the journalist, who would like to see Justina in a dress instead. Time and again, the Albanian media outdo their Western counterparts in disrespectful engagement with the burrnesha, as no Western media has had the gall to suggest such a thing.

Finding Burrnesha

For the Western traveler, the sworn virgins are seen as “the remnant of something primeval, the embodiment of a stage of cultural development that civilized societies have already passed through, part of civilization’s early childhood” (Horvath 2009, 4). Therefore, they are seen as a past European state: as if Europe could learn about itself by looking back in time at its backward internal Other. Dickemann shows that this argument has been made explicit at least once:

Are the only known institutionalized female to male role and identity transformations in modern Europe, paralleling those known from native North America (Blackwood 1984; Lang 1990). Indeed, Scandinavianist Carol Clover (1986) has proposed that they represent a surviving example of cross-gendered female roles widespread in pre-Christian Europe, as evidenced by sagas, folklore, and early, Christian accounts. In fact, their former presence in now urbanized Dalmatia and Bosnia is attested by epic folk-songs (Dickemann 1997, 197).

This serves to categorize burrnesha with other ‘third gender’ practices, but also as the ‘last frontier’ of civilization in Europe. Note the use of the term “survive:” somehow, Albania has sheltered what could not live in Christian Europe. With the passage of time, perhaps Albania too would learn to be properly European, and the dying out of the burrnesha might be a testament to this. But the burrnesha are a testament to the ability of the Balkans itself to harbor backwardness, as Horvath states: “epitomis[e] all that is exotic, strange, and

primeval about the remote and mountainous regions of the Western Balkans during this period” (Horvath 2009, 1). Therefore, in focusing on them, Westerners can make claims about the Balkans in general, as well as their superior position to them.¹⁶

In many ways, the Western gaze is reflective. Horvath explains that “as Comaroff and Comaroff remark, colonialism, either narrative or political and economic, was not only about forming the periphery but also about forming the centre” (Horvath 2009, 5). Therefore, Europe learned/learns about itself by juxtaposing its achievements with the Balkans. What these achievements were varied over time. At the time of these travel narratives, Europe was trying to control and discipline bodies as part of industrialization and colonization, especially with theories of Darwinism (Horvath 2009, 2). This would help justify Western superiority while subjecting the populations to total intellectual subjugation, concurrently in many cases with physical subjugation. Nowadays, this is still the case to an extent, but with the ‘achievements’ of gender liberation and LGBT rights, perhaps the West would like to look at its past self (the Balkans) and feel proud about what it allegedly overcame. It is also possible that the emphasis on third-genders (not just in Albania) is part of a search to legitimize sexual and gender minorities as a thing that has always been a part of humanity.

One of the major themes in the video is that of distance: both physical, and temporal. Jezernik argues that though “there has never been much disagreement about [the] non-European character [of the Balkans] or its intention to Europeanize itself [...] After the age of Enlightenment, the Balkans was perceived at once near (geographically) and far (culturally)” (Jezernik 2004, 25; see also Rexhepi 2016). It is almost as if he is watching these videos himself. Combined with Ahmed’s claim that “bodies as well as objects take shape through being orientated toward each other,” Jezernik’s argument helps to unpack the dynamics of the journalists’ search for the burrnesha (Ahmed 2006, 54). Her points about the Orient and distance are also very relevant, as well as ideas of farness and reachability (Ahmed 2006, 114, 117). Western Europe is in a way going back in time via distance and remoteness and finding their ancient cousins who have not yet evolved to whom they can compare themselves. Burrnesha’s orientation is perhaps especially troubling for Western gender regimes, because they are not oriented to anyone. As Prend says in the end of his interview:

Kanuni thonke burrneshat si rrine. Ajo duhet me shkue drejt Zotit mendes tende te fort edhe me hec me burra. Un jom ka rri me ty sonte se se kem kurxho shopen kur njoni, jem ka rrin bashk dy sonte, jena vlla e moter mos dajt Zoti. A je ka kuptu? At her une kom shku drejt githmond me mendje te Zotit ne qjiell edhe ton dynjaja mu ka duk vlla (Russia Today 2016).

¹⁶ Furthermore, Horvath’s work makes clear the need to further investigate the mechanisms of racialization of the Balkans, especially regarding race and religion.

[The Kanun says burrnesha stay as they are. She needs to go towards God with a strong mind and to walk among men. I am sitting with you tonight and we are not related nor friends, but tonight we are sitting together, we are brother and sister,¹⁷ may God never separate us. Do you understand? So, therefore, I went forward always with my mind towards God in Heaven and all of humanity was my brother.]

Prend shows his understanding of all of humanity as his brothers and sisters, which connects him to them in a familial way, thereby wholly ruling out sexuality. He also says that burrnesha are to be oriented toward God, and walk among men. Therefore, Prend is oriented not toward another person romantically nor sexually, but still possesses a fulfilling path in life. Other burrnesha have talked about how they are focused on music, the mountains, art, etc., rather than being oriented to anyone sexually. This does not fit well into Western cosmology, particularly in the context of a neoliberal/colonial gender regime. Nevertheless, burrnesha report satisfaction with it.

Ahmed's contributions are great when applied to the 2016 *Russia Today* report, which interviews four "burrniesha [sic]" (Bedri, Lali, Nadir and Prend), and is rebuffed by at least one (Haki). The video is structured a "wild goose chase," with a handful of dramatic flashbacks throughout of Bedri talking about his life (Russia Today 2016). The video is reminiscent of *Animal Planet*, as if the journalists were looking for a rare but dangerous animal. In the introduction to the video, the Australian narrator says they are "looking for sworn virgins who uphold a mediaeval highland tradition. Several times we thought we'd manage to pick up their *trail* but somehow they always managed to slip away," leaving the viewer with the impression that they were trying to catch a wombat or Tasmanian devil (Russia Today 2016). They had an Albanian journalist, who, as can be expected by now, attempted to outdo the Russians in disrespect for the burrnesha, to civilize himself by comparison. They stop to ask for directions through the villages and winding roads. The people giving directions are usually Albanian men, who are all shown pointing in the direction of the burrnesha: orienting the journalist toward the oddity/undesirable. Ahmed's theory of orientation here is invaluable to critique this (Ahmed 2006). The foreign journalists can only find the 'unreachable' burrneshas through locals (racialized/backwards) pointing and orienting the Western journalists to the dying deviants. It is as if they are pointing back in time. As is the case when traveling at the speed of light: the farther the journalists drive, the farther back in time they go. Finally, the pointing is terminal and therefore necropolitical: the journalists can proceed to pester the undead burrnesha and leave the other Albanians alone, as they are comparatively more modern and acceptable – for now.

When the journalists finally reached Haki, they sent their Albanian journalist to speak to him first. Note that he called Haki "Hakiye" and referred

¹⁷ He is being interviewed by a young woman.

to him as female, even though Haki has made clear in other interviews that he used male pronouns. Haki wanted nothing to do with this interview, even “mdhafsh florijs [if you give me gold]” (Russia Today 2016). After this failure, the Albanian journalist runs back to the car, and recounts how he felt threatened after Haki told him to get lost, because he realized Haki had a gun and could have trapped him with his cows (Russia Today 2016). This scene is uncannily similar to a passage cited by Horvath of a traveler named Schultz who described burrnesha. He:

portrays the inhabitants of the Balkans as completely uncivilized, adding a romantic flavour to his account by describing how it was only on his third attempt, on horseback and without the Sultan’s permission, that he managed to penetrate into the inhospitable region of northern Albania ... His transvestites are said to “shoot like mad”, and are described by him as having renounced “the greatest happiness” i.e. marriage (Horvath 2009, 4).

It is as if his work is a transcription of the video itself, as it describes all the themes: that the burrnesha are troubling the reporters, that they are remote, violent, and stupid. It begs the question of if *Russia Today* and other productions are knowingly referencing this discourse, or if they are oblivious and full of their own stereotypes that they, like Schultz, present such terrible descriptions.

Amazingly, after interviewing Lali and Bedri (whom they also treat disrespectfully), the journalists head back to try with Haki again! But this time, they send a reluctant Lali to talk to him. Haki is of course not convinced, and is secretly recorded telling how he was mistreated by other journalists promising him they would help him get retirement benefits, who wasted his time, who made fun of him and his family, and disappeared.¹⁸ The narrator says: “the further and higher we went into the mountains, the more desperate we became. Without realizing it we had become embroiled in the complicated dynamics between the last remaining upholders of a medieval tradition and journalists” (Russia Today 2016). First, of course the “dynamics” between exploitative foreign journalists and burrnesha would be complicated, yet this narrative blames burrnesha for it. Overall, they felt the need to show the trouble burrnesha caused them, but not the trouble they caused the burrnesha. Second, describing the burrnesha as “last upholders of a medieval tradition” sanctions the burrnesha for death.

It is interesting that a Russian media agency is engaged in such negative treatment of burrnesha. To be sure, they are far from the only ones, but they are one of the worst offenders reviewed here. Their geopolitical motivations in the Balkans and in general help provide a glimpse as to their motivations

¹⁸ “I kan thon [vllaut] jon kau lidhin pension tonave e jon ardh e ka rra e kom hup dy ore qaty me ta e masi mandej jon tall me neve e jon shku ne pune te vet.” Translation: They [journalists] told him [Haki’s brother] that they would get us retirement benefits and they came and I wasted two hours with them and then they made fun of us and went on their way.

for such a report. As Horvath states: “The exoticizing of the peripheral, present in almost all early accounts of *tobelijas* and embodied in patronizing, sardonic, and infantilizing narrative strategies, could be viewed as a kind of exclusion, taking place simultaneously with processes of normalization back at the centre” (Horvath 2009, 5). In this way, perhaps Russia is attempting to normalize itself vis a vis the homophobic laws enacted of late, at the expense of the Albanians. Furthermore, their support for Serbia would render them interested in anything that would make Albania look bad.

The Albanian sources also create geographical distance from burrneshas despite inhabiting the same country. One of the only videos from Kosova visits Mire Lajqi in Rugova, and is also the only video in which they¹⁹ appear (Klan Kosova 2017). The video is in black and white and begins with a pan of the mountains and old man playing traditional music, which, much like the foreign videos, situates the burrneshas in the time before modernity. Before the interview, the reporter introduces the practice very much according to the dominant discourse. She calls the rules that brought it “te egera [wild]” (Klan Kosova 2017). The screen then shifts back into color and strongly reinforces the reporter in saying “Kjo jete *primitive* ne nje shoqeri patriarkale te asaj kohe po vazhdon edhe sot [This primitive live in a patriarchal society of the past continues even today]” – thereby positioning Mire as a living remnant from the distant past (Klan Kosova 2017). The video does concede and describe Mire as taking the role “me vetdeshire [Of their own wishes],” but also says that they are “E fundit ne anen e rrugoves [The last in the Rugova valley],” asserting that Mire’s wishes are anachronistic (Klan Kosova 2017). While emphasizing that Mire is the last in burrnesh in Rugova, the camera focuses on their wrinkled mouth and eyes, to further emphasize that ‘the days of this tradition are numbered.’ The interview portion of the video is much less alienating, but the introduction and cinematography is so Othering that it outdoes many of the Western productions on which it is clearly based. It begs the question as to why *KLAN Kosova* wanted to make this report in the first place. They seem to have forgotten their tradition and only re-discovered it after the West pointed, or oriented, them toward its oddity and newsworthiness (Ahmed 2006).

Dying Burrneshas

The final major theme found across the sources is the discourse of dying. The videos seem to suggest that certain orientations and positions are unlivable as Albania increasingly opens to the global economy and its corresponding gender regimes (Ahmed 2006, 99). Following Jasbir Puar, it is clear that burrneshas are anything but “properly queer subjects,” primarily because they are

¹⁹ I use “they” as Mire’s pronoun because in the video Mire shifts back and forth from the masculine to the feminine in this clip, as do many of the other burrneshas.

submitting to a patriarchal culture (Puar 2008, xiii). Instead, they should be submitting to Western capitalism in order to truly be free (i.e. homonationalism). Therefore, they have been “targeted . . . for death,” not by bombing, but by a slow dying-out (Puar 2008, xii). The images of wrinkled, ill, old ‘women who became men’ in popular media confirm this, and make death seem inevitable.

A piece by ITV News that seems to be a part of a larger documentary heavily relies upon this narrative. It is titled “The ‘sworn virgins’ of Albania: Women who have lived their whole lives as men” (as usual, calling them women). This production interviewed a few burrnesha, but the clip does not show any interviews besides that of Bedri. The clip focused on the story of Shkurtan, who is now very old and confined to his bed, and yet ITV news had no qualms about interviewing him in that state. In fact, it helps their argument by showing that the burrnesha are literally dying off. It says that he “was forced to live as a man ... Now close to ninety, he says it was an honor” (ITV 2018). This in a way does honor their lives, yet the use of the term ‘forced’ is again meant to justify the dying-out of the practice. It continues on this trajectory: “there are only around twenty sworn virgins left, and as cultural change comes to Albania, they may become a thing of the past” (ITV 2018).

Not all of the sources agree on the prognosis of the burrnesha. One point of distinction is made clear in noting the association between Dickemann’s critical approach and her conclusion that “it is too early to conclude that the institutionalized cross-gender role is a thing of the past” (Dickemann 1997, 202), as well as Young’s anthropological approach and her claim that the practice is dying. Young states that she has “not yet met any child who is being brought up to be the next generation’s sworn virgin (Young 2010, 67). She predicts, however, “due to rapid social changes, this traditional gender role change will probably die out within a generation or two” (Young 2019, 68). It is an almost fatalistic prognosis: that the burrnesha are destined to disappear, and be replaced by a more enlightened Western gender regime.

Maria Lugones is essential for understanding the colonial use of gender, and the distinctions between the regimes it imposed in Africa and the Americas, to the gender system it imposed in the core (Lugones 2007, 186). These systems destroyed traditional ways of knowing and living, and made colonial subjugation possible. Furthermore, she argues that patriarchy is not the inherent historical state of all humans. The narrative of “this mythical starting point,” where “other human inhabitants of the planet came to be mythically conceived [...] as an anterior stage in the history of the species, in this unidirectional path” is particularly relevant to the Western conception of the Balkans (Lugones 2007, 192). Again, though Albania was not militarily colonized as was the case in modern day Nigeria or Mexico, it is subjected to these narratives of primitivism, patriarchy, and progress. However, in the case of the Balkans, it seems Europe sees more of itself than in it has in its African, Asian, and American colonies. This is, of course, a product of racist thinking. Triumphant Europe looks back at its fallen cousins, in this case the Albanians,

from a point of the most ‘advanced’ gender regimes – where it has overcome patriarchy and homophobia, and now can lament the rest of the world for remaining back in time (Lugones 2007, 192, 196–197). It need not remember how it treated, and still treats, Western women.

Saffo Papantonopoulou brilliantly develops the concept of “economies of gratitude” which is “an attempt to hail the transgender subject into a debt of gratitude toward neoliberalism” (Papantonopoulou 2014, 281, 290). In this context, Albanians would have to be forever grateful to the West for ridding them of their backward customs and for bringing them into capitalism. They would then have to respond with Islamophobia and racism to whichever Other fits the bill. She shows that in the film *Dangerous Living: Coming Out in the Developing World*, showing that “queerness/gayness and sometimes transness (when it is acknowledged) were invented in the West” (Papantonopoulou 2014, 288). This narrative is often taken up by decolonial struggles, but in the opposite direction: that the West invented queerness, and thus all queer members of society are either traitors or must be eliminated. In this vein, it is unclear if the burrnesha are being increasingly conceived of as LGBTQI+ and thus a Western colonial invention, which is ironic, not to mention violent. But it is to be expected, as racialized queer subjects always suffer the most in the tug-and-pull between colonization, pinkwashing, neoliberalism and nationalism.

These videos *show* but do not adequately *discuss* the difficult economic state of these burrnesha. It is interesting that many of the videos show how important the burrnesha were to the economic survival of their families, either when they needed an extra hand or when they had no male heir. They usually passed the family fortune on to their nephews. Today, however, many burrnesha live alone and in poverty. Prend talks about how poverty made him small, so even smaller than all the men when he would go to male-only gatherings²⁰ (Russia Today 2016).²¹ In the 2016 *RT* video, Bedri cuts off the interview after being told by a friend that interviewees should be paid more. It seems *RT* was only going to offer him about 50 euros for all of his time and emotional labor. He mentions that the villagers will consider him a sellout if he gives interviews. Yet he put his whole reputation on the line to give *RT* an interview as he is doing his friend Lali a favor and is in a difficult situation as a taxi driver in a village trying to raise his brother’s kids.

²⁰ “Githmond un per veten time kur kom shku ne mledhje, o kom shku ne pamje, o kom shku qeshtu, une kom nxon vend ma pak se I tjetri. Se boll e vogel jom po edhe ma fort jom zvogglue. De me thon ma e varfer. Sa I varfer njeri kur ska [?] me I para.” Translation: “I always went on my own to village meetings, or to express my condolences [to families of the deceased], or I went to such events, I took up less space than anyone else. I am small enough but I have shrunk even more. Meaning, I am poor [not well fed]. How poor a person is when they don’t have [?] more money.”

²¹ *RT* treated Prend much better than the other burrnesha, probably because the Albanians with them on that journey were not journalists, but blood feud reconcilers who have had significant experience in the mountains. They set a much more respectful tone towards the burrnesha.

Many of the Burrnesha reveal in their interviews the great help that they were to their families. Mire explains how they: “Kom naj, kom naj me burra, skom naj une me fmi ... pleqnor, te zot, qe kan dit me fol, qe kan dit me te eduku ... [dhe kom rrujt dele] deri ne 400 copa [I stayed with men, I did not stay with kids ... wise old men, that knew how to talk, that knew how to educate ... [and I managed sheep] up to 400 of them]” (KLAN Kosova 2017). Nadir, Bedri, and Prend likewise made great contributions to their extended families: by taking care of children and property (Russia Today 2016). Few reporters truly appreciate this. For example, regarding Mire Lajqi, the reporter says “me krenarije jetoje jeten e nje burri, ku edhe sot me shume *xheloz* vazhdon ta mbaj ket perbetim [They lived their lives with pride, who to this day with much jealousy continues to keep this conviction/oath]” (KLAN Kosova 2017). Of course, Mire would be proud of what they did for their family and would not want to change at the very end of their life. Yet, the reporters seem to consider this conviction a jealous one, which, especially when considering Mire’s contributions, is particularly ironic. However, in the context of the nuclear (and neoliberal) family, the sacrifice of Mire and other burrnesha becomes invisible and unnecessary. There is little value and place for a contribution like Mire’s, helping with subsistence farming, in neoliberal economies. In fact, Mire says: “qajo si pom sheh jom kon tona her edhe jom, dej te des. Kur te des tem gjujn dikund most e kan dert per mu hiq, ma kan pa hajrin sa ma kan pa, tash sma sheh kerkush [As you see me, I have always been, and will be until I die. When I die, they can throw me somewhere, they shouldn’t care about me at all, they benefitted from me [lit: saw good from me] as long as they did, now no one benefits from me]” reflecting that because of their age and changing context, they see themselves as useless to their family – worthy of being thrown somewhere and forgotten when they die. The changing economic conditions are inexorably linked with the shifts in gender roles, making Mire doubly illegible, and sentencing them to death. Burrnesha is not a tradition that meshes well with modern nationalism. It works very well in patrilineal, patrilocal rural areas that usually live on subsistence farming, but it is greatly at odds with Western ideological and economic regimes.

Burrnesha remain satisfied with their lives, despite what many perceive as changing times. In fact, most videos hold that the freedom is coming from the West is to save the burrnesha, and Albanian women in general. In this context, it makes sense as to why many of the interviewers ask burrnesha if they would go back on their oath. This incessant questioning illustrates the strength of colonial gender. For example, when Bedri speaks in the ITV clip, it is clear he is responding to a question about “renouncing” his role. Bedri cuts the reporter off: “O burr! Se jom I knaqun e e kom zgjedh ket jet me koker shpirti, e do ta jetoj deri ne pik te fundit [Oh man! Because I am happy, and I chose this life with the greatest will and greatest pleasure of my soul and I will live it to the end]” (ITV 2018). Interview after interview, though life has not been easy, burrnesha show how much they have enjoyed their lives and

special roles, and that they would not want it any other way. Unfortunately, their wishes mean little to journalists, the majority of whom persist in seeing the practice negatively.

Burrnesha are caught at the fault line of isolated mountain tradition and neo-liberal/globalized mass media. It is unclear what the outcome of this ambiguous position will be. So far, it seems that burrnesha are losing ground, without an accompanying societal de-centralization of heterosexuality. Most media sources depict the required celibacy of burrnesha as backwards. Yet, Albania makes no significant effort to grant women rights without having to make this allegedly terrible sacrifice (that is a very rare occurrence anyway). The Western onlooker determines that sex – the alleged meaning of life – is too steep a price to pay for freedom, and seems to define freedom as the ability to have sex with whomever one wants. In the context of homonationalism, there is another dynamic: “the pejoration of a traditional gender role and its assimilation to the stigmatized modern “homosexual” identity, a process we see occurring in places as distant as Thailand and East Africa, are occurring in the Balkans as well” (Dickemann 1997, 201). These dynamics seem to usher death for the burrnesha from multiple fronts.

Re-Defining Burrnesha

A handful of videos reviewed here do not concern burrnesha as they have been traditionally understood. Some of them use the term “burrnesha” as a figure of speech rather than as a reference to a tradition. This shows a shift in the use of the term, to one that is more in line with Western gender and assumes compulsory heterosexuality. One video is about a woman put into jail by the communists for her pan-Albanian sentiments (Albanian Report 2016). She is referred to as a burrnesha here on account of her strength and it is unclear if she also made some oath of celibacy. Another misuse of the term burrnesha is found in a video where a woman politician in Albania encouraged her supporters to give a salute of loyalty. Perhaps she was referred to as burrnesha because she was tough and because coerced a whole crowd into saluting and pledging allegiance to her (Top Channel Albania 2018). Finally, in another video, an imam is saying that “indeed, even in Kosovo there are burrnesha!” (Mesazhi Islam 2014). He discusses some women who did not have brothers but still took charge by donating money to the mosque. It is possible that he is aware of the Western fascination with burrnesha and is referencing that. Usage of the term as in the above cases hints at some cultural knowledge of the practice. Yet, they shift meaning of the word to the purposes of the speaker: connoting a strong woman within the framework of compulsory heterosexuality. This understanding of burrnesha is relevant in the context of nationalism. The nation needs fertile heterosexual women to bear men who can fight more (Yuval-Davis 2003, 13). Women are valuable because they can bear sons to pass down the family name (Whitaker 1981).

It could be possible that these and other nationalist logics are another way that modern Western ideology has influenced social forces that complicate the existence of burrnesha.

In the context of what can be described as gender respectability politics, burrnesha can be seen as an embarrassment, and not necessarily because of their masculine traits. Just as some nationalist discourses might argue that the strength of the nation comes in not having any gay men, the erasure of burrnesha could be attempting to remove gender transgression that does not serve respectability and capitalism. This is especially the case when under the Western gaze, Albanians seem to be trying to seem 'more heterosexual' in order to be more prestigious. The frequent framing of burrnesha as backwards and odd in Albanian media makes this clear. Men's traits will continue to be privileged in the Albanian communities (and Western contexts) but women continue ridiculed if they are not monogamously heterosexual.

I have faced significant pushback from some people with whom I have discussed my identification as a burrnesha, from multiple angles. Some take issue with my identification with the tradition because they consider it to be backward, and something that will open me to ridicule. Others emphasize that transgressing gender norms is embarrassing. Still more assert that my life cannot be complete without heterosexual marriage and I should not limit myself to a life they see as incomplete. All this puts aside that I identify as asexual, and would have had nothing to do with sex or relationships even if this tradition never existed. Furthermore, I identify with masculinity, so I would have been transgressing gender norms anyway. Though they have converged in my case, asexuality and burrnesha need not be related. Burrnesha are a diverse group that are living contradictions to the claim that one needs to be married to be happy, and that gender is rooted in biology. Perhaps the problem lies in the fact that many Albanians would like to think of themselves as civilized and on par with some imagined Western level of gender equality. Yet even in the West, women are oppressed, though in different ways based on their race, class, gender, and sexuality. The lack of sincere progress in improving the lives of Albanian women is hidden under the myth of having 'progressed' to the point that they don't 'need' burrnesha anymore. The existence of the burrnesha complicates many Albanian's opinions of themselves as civilized Europeans.

Conclusion

This look at the treatment of burrnesha primarily in video media as accessed on YouTube has illustrated a narrative that holds the power to find burrnesha, define and judge them, and conclude that they are fit for death – a reason for celebration. The observers hold a level of power over the burrnesha, which legitimizes their claims and cements their superiority. Such attitudes are present across sources. The sources at the margins of Western power had particularly negative discourses, as if to comparatively argue their

humanity in picking apart the burrnesha. Most of the Albanian sources in particular sought to distance themselves as far as possible from the tradition as evidenced by the way they presented the burrnesha. All this begs the question as to why a group of no more than one hundred gender-variant individuals scattered across rural Albania have garnered so much attention and provoked such reactions from national and international media. One also wonders why the old age of the burrnesha and their (supposedly) dwindling numbers are so emphasized with glee. The answers to these questions must necessarily take into account the historical and continued power relations between the West and the Balkans, especially Albania and Kosovo, as well as the history of Western destruction of indigenous gender practices throughout history.

The fact that burrnesha are in fact not dead yet allows for them to counter many of the clear cut and hegemonic discourses about them. They show that there is more to the tradition than simply a 'solution' to all the men dying, and even more than a choice for more freedom. It is a response to a varying and complicated set of life circumstances and opportunities that make life as a woman untenable for some. It is also a powerful testament to the impossibility that all humans will fit into a strict un-transgressable gender binary. It is unclear what will happen to the tradition in the changing circumstances in Albania, but as long as the burrnesha can speak, they can provide a counter-narrative to a discourse that has so far been authoritative over their existence.

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(Re)thinking Postsocialism: Interview with Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora



The dominance of present-day liberal politics, which collapse political notions of freedom with the unrestricted spread of free markets, and justice with liberal rights-based outcomes, beg for an extended exploration of the aftermaths of the social, political, and cultural disappearance and subsequent reconfiguration of a socialist political imaginary.

Atanasoski and Vora 2018, 152

Since 1950-60s, decolonial and postcolonial scholars have studied mechanisms of global coloniality that have produced racial, gender, and economic order of global systems and that have defined the human and who is eligible to humanity. Sylvia Wynter (2003) states that the struggle of our times is the struggle against the overrepresentation of the Western conception of Man that pretends to be the human itself. The concept of the human incorporates a certain descriptive statement of eligibility and ineligibility, according to which the hegemonic Western construction of Man/ Human

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depends on the Other who is produced as barbarian, not capable of reason, therefore, sub-rational, sub-human/non-human. Thus, Wynter describes a foundational mechanism of global coloniality that has produced racialization and colonization as a global system. She maintains that “one cannot ‘unsettle’ the ‘coloniality of power’ without a redescription of the human outside the terms of our present descriptive statement of the human, Man, and its over-representation” (Wynter 2003, 268). In turn, Aníbal Quijano (2000) argues that colonization of Americas produced a new hegemonic global order; global coloniality of power, according to which “race became the fundamental criterion for the distribution of the world population into ranks, places, and roles in the new society’s structure of power” (p. 535). Quijano adds that the global coloniality of power determined a new global model of labor control, capitalism (Quijano 2000, 535-536). Thus, decolonial theory, critical race theory, Black feminist thought and queer of color critique have powerful tools and theoretical frameworks to address such issues as colonialism, imperialism, and structural inequality in the transnational perspective. For example, Denise Ferreira da Silva (2014) states that decolonization is “the unknowing and undoing of the World that reaches its core” (da Silva 2014, 85); it consequently “requires that knowing and doing be emancipated from Thought, unhinged from the many ways in which Thought – the said seat of the universal – is limited, constrained, and arrested by Truth” (da Silva 2014, 86). In other words, in order to produce other narratives and ways of knowing and understanding the world, one has to go beyond the scripts of modernity. As Boaventura de Sousa Santos argues, the “task” for a radical thinker is “to imagine new ways of theorizing and of generating transformative collective action” (de Sousa Santos 2014, 5).

What is the place of postsocialist studies in these conversations about global coloniality of power? The term “postsocialism” is often used solely in relation to the specific former state socialist spaces and is rarely included in the scholarly discussions about colonialism and imperialism. This approach narrows the possibilities of other interpretations and analytic potential of postsocialism. Also, the predominance of “racelessness” and the idea of the inapplicability of “race” to the former state socialist region reinforces hierarchical scripts that lead to the exclusion of non-Slavic people and perpetuates racialization in the regions.

Moreover, the liberal rhetoric of human rights and multiculturalism often dominates the discussions of political action and resistance to the power structures, discursively cementing liberalism as the only possible choice in the struggle for social justice, while liberal formations themselves are rooted in colonialism and slavery (Atanasoski 2013, Hartman 1997, Douzinas 2007, Lowe 2015, Manokha 2009). The logic of Western liberal “progress” and liberal capitalist model are presented as the only options for the former state socialist countries against the Soviet “backwardness.”

Therefore, the following question emerges: what does it mean to practice

radical thinking that opens up possibilities for radical imaginations outside the scripts of modernity and predetermined “solutions” of capitalism? We are searching for forms of thinking that allow a disruptive potential of knowledge production, including the disruption of the totalizing logic of neoliberalism as the undisputed universal Good. We must hold on to the option to say “No” to the “easily acceptable liberal face” offered on the dominant’s terms (Trinh 2016). The refusal to be legible, rational, and liberally recognized keeps the door open for reimagining.

One such example of radical thinking that counteracts the standardized, simplified and one-dimensional interpretation of postsocialism, as well as looks for “an emerging political imaginary that connects already existing localized economic alternatives to capitalism” (Atanasoski and Vora 2018, 140) is the special issue *Postsocialist Politics and the Ends of Revolution* of the journal *Social Identities* (online publication May 2017; print publication Winter 2018). The following interview is a conversation with the editors of this special issue: Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora. In the “Introduction” to the issue, Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora pose questions that explore: What does it mean to demand thinking of postsocialism or “postsocialist reading practices” that do not use the tropes legitimized by Western reason? How to center postsocialist imaginaries, “radical and decolonial imaginaries of collectivity and political action” (Atanasoski and Vora 2018, 142) that destabilize and dismantle Western hegemony, imperialism, colonialism, and racial capitalism? Can postsocialism simultaneously be a critique of coloniality of knowledge, of imperial and colonial difference, and a theory of political action, ethical solidarity, and coalitions? They push the bounds and definition of postsocialism by freeing it from a homogenized history tied to state socialism and European thought of traditional Marxian teleologies (Atanasoski and Vora 2018, 140) in order to explore “how socialist legacies at multiple scales, expanding beyond state socialism and the Communist International, have (or have not) remained constitutive of contemporary radical and decolonial imaginaries of collectivity and political action” (Atanasoski and Vora 2018, 142). Atanasoski and Vora make a powerful intervention into conceptualizations of postsocialism, focusing on the legacies of a plurality of socialisms and postsocialism as a global condition and a temporal analytic that questions the very forms of established thinking and paradigms of epistemological genealogies (Atanasoski and Vora 2018, 143, 151). In this sense, Atanasoski and Vora offer a complex and nuanced engagement with time and space in relation to postsocialisms. They suggest looking at obscured historical connections between past and present examples of political solidarity and coalitions that expand approaches to politics and futurity.

Using this special issue as a collaborative platform, in our conversation with Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora, we would like to contemplate on radical possibilities of postsocialisms and the potential of postsocialist reading practices to situate the former state socialist regions, such as Balkans and Eastern Europe, in the conversations about global coloniality.

Postsocialisms

We [Lesia Pagulich and Tatsiana Shchurko] would like to start with the question of how the idea of this special issue *Postsocialist Politics and the Ends of Revolution* came about? Why is this special issue important? Why do you think it is important to reimagine postsocialisms?

We [Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora] became friends and collaborators through discussions of the political, economic, and historical conditions in India and the former Yugoslavia that ran in provocatively parallel tracks. How could we explain the similarities in the ways that people in the subcontinent and in Eastern Europe looked after each other informally through a sense of commitment to greater society? Why were there connected commodity circuits and labor markets forming in these two regions, connected at times by grey economies and informal trade circuits? And this in the face of such different political histories? We realized that the socialist legacies of each region connected them, as well as to other global sites. Postcolonial studies offered tools for understanding Soviet imperialism, yet came from regions with very different racialized, gendered, and sexualized dynamics of power that accompanied the European colonial form of economic domination. At the same time, postsocialist studies was actively excavating and engaging the impact of socialism on cultural and political life in Eastern Europe in a way that did not seem to gain traction as a way to understand the socialist commitments of newly independent governments in the third world who were non-aligned but initiated social welfare and redistribution policies to protect newly launched national economies, policies that continue in some places until the present.

In the US and northern Europe, since the 1980s, we have been seeing a shift away from social welfare and distribution policies across continents and towards privatization and individualization of social interactions. With this movement away from “society” as a whole, and with no unified global political economic imaginary to stand as a counterexample to capitalism, the political left in the US has stumbled. As we mention in the “Introduction,” there has been a sort of melancholic relationship to socialist imaginaries as something lost. We realized the folly of this state of despair together, given our experience living and working in parts of the world where socialist imaginaries still live active lives and shape policy and politics. In 2010 we organized a research group to think about these political and economic patterns, as well as imaginaries, arising from socialism under the theme of postcolonial contexts and postsocialist legacies. This grew into a 10 week residential research group at the University of California Humanities Research Institute where we assembled a group of scholars thinking through the relationship between imperialism, socialism, and capitalism in different world regions. Thinking together with that group inspired us to form this anthology, and several participants from that group are contributors to the special issue of *Social Identities*.

Importantly, in addition to thinking through the relationship between imperialism, socialism, and capitalism, your conceptualization of postsocialism is also in dialogue with queer theory. As you state, postsocialism “marks a queer temporality” (Atanasoski and Vora 2018, 141) which is crucial to question the politics of time-space and the writing of history. And, if we understand your ideas correctly, in the case of postsocialism, it means that postsocialism, being detached from specific geography, unveils the cultural and material violence by calling into question dominant historical narratives as well as searches for other relations with historical pasts and unexpected collaborations that resist normative concepts of time and history as linear, teleological, and progress-oriented. In this sense, how do you conceptualize *queer temporality* in relation to postsocialism? Why is “queer” important for you in this conceptualization?

Part of the legacy of socialist imaginaries, particularly in the formerly non-aligned or “third world” nations, is the notion that coloniality and capitalism did not successfully write over the lifeworlds that preceded it and continued despite it. This is a different argument from a Marxist teleology, where capitalism will generate the conditions of its own eventual demise. Perhaps capitalism may yet produce the conditions of its own destruction, but the subaltern, decolonial and postcolonial thinkers we cite, as well as those you cite, have asserted that capitalism was never a singular socio-cultural political and economic system that simply reproduces itself in whole cloth. It is an argument that capitalism produces a sense of linearity and indeed produces its own futurity, but to concede that this is “time” and “history” itself is to ignore all of these lifeworlds and thinkers who have struggled to show all of the worlds that co-exist in ways that sometimes coincide, and sometimes do not coincide, with a world that claims to be a unified (capitalist) whole, reproducing itself through institutions both economic and cultural. One of the qualities we ascribe to postsocialisms, though not exclusive to postsocialisms, is cross-filiations between groups that are not organized by descent from a singular socialist past, but that belongs to political and ethical histories that are compatible while each still belongs to its own “time.” These are histories that are still unfolding towards unknown conclusions. The queerness of postsocialisms, in our sense, is that they are propelled by political desires that do not aim to reproduce capitalist reality, nor are these groups that are somehow unified in their political desires just because they bear socialist legacies. We may not even yet know what these radical political desires move toward. This is part of their queerness. To simply capitulate to a left melancholy that laments the failure of socialist ethics, as we note in the article, is to recognize only the capitalist lifeworld and only its own reproductive drive and temporality.

Another aspect of postsocialism that we find to be queer is the way in which this term can signal those lifeworlds that are not aligned (or brush

against the grain) with a temporality of Europeanization or neoliberal development. The concept signals those political-economic-social projects that run against liberal temporality that ends in “democracy” “individual rights” or “juridical transparency.” We can think about how certain imperial projects are even seen as not leading to the development of this modern world (the Russian, the Ottoman) as opposed to say the British or French empires that are viewed as central to the making of this modern world. So socialism is one such “aberrant” project that is seen as needing to be erased (bringing Central and Eastern Europe back into the fold of proper European development).

In response to your answer, thinking about projects that run against liberal temporality reminds us of one more dimension of queer temporality, that is the interconnectedness of the concept “queer” with questions of coloniality of gender and sexuality, institutionalized unmarked whiteness, heterosexuality, and gender normativity. For example, Jaclyn I. Pryor (2017) in her recent book *Time Slips. Queer Temporalities, Contemporary Performance, and the Hole of History* introduces the concept of “time slips,” which she defines as moments of experiencing time queerly. Specifically, “time slips” refers to a shift from linear, teleological, capitalist, “straight time” to “queer time/ temporality” that defies “the logic of capitalist accumulation, as well as the presumed naturalness of a sense of time that is governed by an imperative to own property, produce offspring, establish stability, accumulate wealth, and ensure inheritance” (Pryor 2017, 4). Pryor conceptualizes “straight time” as linear teleological time, produced by the logic of capitalism, heteronormativity, racism, and colonial politics. In other words, “straight time” produces individual and collective experiences of trauma for those bodies, which are out of sync, marginalized queer and trans people, people of color, and other subaltern subjects, and forecloses processes of reparation and accountability. So, it is interesting to think how postsocialisms defy “straight time,” embracing the lifeworlds of non-normative bodies and “out of sync” collectivities. Pryor’s ideas also speak to your understanding of postsocialism as detached from certain tempo-locality and focused on centering non-european non-white experiences of socialism that are “out of sync” with Western time, space and epistemology. Consequently, we would like to move to the question about geographies, spaces and localities. In the “Introduction” to the special issue *Postsocialist Politics and the Ends of Revolution*, you state that you want to free postsocialism from the particular geographical location in order to articulate postsocialism as a global condition, “not one that just affects the former Soviet-bloc” (Atanasoski and Vora 2018, 143). At the same time, you envision the postsocialist conditions as both global and “contradictory localized.” Could you elaborate on the relation between postsocialism and locality?

We were interested in thinking about postsocialism as a global condition because of the ways in which in most research to date postsocialism was used as a descriptor (without being redefined) in such a variety of contexts (privatization in Poland, economic reform in China, deregulation in Vietnam, etc). We felt that putting this scholarship into conversation could yield something potentially exciting in terms of commonalities (but not as a comparative project that would just collect data and think about similarities and differences). Rather, we wanted to think about the potential to undermine the seeming inevitability of liberal politics as having a monopoly on ideas of justice in the present by thinking about contradictory political formations that are marked by socialist legacies, yet that, in the present, themselves don't reproduce grand narratives of a singular revolutionary futurity. For instance, in her article for our special issue, Erin McElroy (2018) provocatively begins by recounting a fistfight between nihilists and Marxists in Oakland, California as an entry point for theorizing the "gentrification," dispossession and displacement driven by the so-called Tech Boom 2.0 in the San Francisco Bay area and postsocialism. As McElroy proposes, "these two conditions – that of nihilistic despair and that of being haunted with some semblance of hope for revolutionary futures past – when compounded upon local and global theatres of dispossession, fashion something new" (2018, 4). Thus, she contends, postsocialist time enables a consideration of conflicts around the futurity of Silicon Valley and an emphasis on Silicon Valley as a racial and spatial form. McElroy's piece demonstrates that, as an analytic reimagining of political-temporal relations, postsocialism is a methodological and conceptual tool that makes legible the contemporary problem-space of seemingly universalized capitalist and liberal global ethos. At the same time, Xiao Liu's (2018) article in our issue tracks apolitical collectivity as connectivity in her discussion of the Brother Orange incident. The incident refers to the media production of a homosocial "love story" between a New York City gay cosmopolitan tech worker and a poor Chinese worker. As Liu (2018) argues, the media production of the two men's "bond" – enabled by the sale of the tech workers lost phone in China, and the emergence of pictures from the phone's new Chinese owner on the New Yorker's storage cloud – in fact erases the vast differences in the economic and social status of the two, not to mention the conditions of production of tech gadgets like the iPhone that enable the fantasy of infinite connectivity in the present. Such an erasure, Liu (2018) posits, is also a part of the postsocialist condition. In this sense, the politics of postsocialist collectivities need not be "progressive."

Decolonial theory, global coloniality, modernity, and race

Decolonial theory was formed in response to the colonization of Americas; as such, some decolonial debates address the impossibility of

applying decolonial theory outside of the context of Americas. How do you envision postsocialism is situated in relation to these discussions? For example, in the “Introduction” to the special issue, the connection between decolonial, postcolonial and postsocialist theories serves as an important line of your inquiry: “Pluralizing postsocialisms as a method opens up a space of conversation between decolonial projects like those in the former USSR and those bearing the legacy of third worldist socialisms, among others, without necessarily using the established terms of “postcolonial theory” as the preferred language of that conversation” (Atanasoski and Vora 2018, 150). If postsocialism is not attached to the specific geography and refers to a global condition, in what way is it possible to talk about the postsocialist decolonial theory? It is also a question about postsocialism and global coloniality. How can postsocialism as a theory contribute to the understandings of global coloniality?

We mentioned briefly in our response about postsocialism and queer temporality that certain imperial histories are not currently a part of either postcolonial or decolonial theories. We were less interested in our issue in discussing the fractures between postcolonial and decolonial theory; nor were we interested in the facile move of signaling a progressive politic by simply adding the modifier “decolonial” in front of certain political movements. As we suggested above, postsocialism(s), conceptually and methodologically, ask that we not treat state socialist histories as aberrant or improperly aligned with the “natural” progression of Euro-American global modernity (along with its economic, social, and racial configurations). Rather, the concept references and centers socialism and asks us to consider the enduring legacies of the histories and lifeworlds of these “illiberal” or noncapitalist formations as never fully erased. As Jon Beller, a contributor to our issue has suggested to us, we can in some ways think of the “post” as being in quotation marks or bracketed.

Along these lines, we can also take seriously the ongoing legacies of other imperial formations, like the Russian or Ottoman Empires, each of which lay beneath the particular form that state socialisms took in Central and Eastern Europe. Madina Tlostlanova (2015) has called these empires “subaltern” or second-rate empires. This is a useful conceptualization in the sense that it accounts for the ways in which the Soviet, Russian, or other non-Western empires (the Japanese or Chinese) are not considered as a part of the making of our global coloniality (though, of course, they are). Yet the argument that “second-rate” empires merely copied the West (this is Tlostlanova’s argument about Russia), does not fully account for the specificity of the form of these empires and how this specificity also shaped our modernity. In this sense, it still applies existing postcolonial/decolonial understandings of race and other forms of difference (which have been theorized in relation to other geopolitical contexts and regional histories) and applies them onto post-imperial formations where they may not apply. Might socialism itself and the partic-

ular forms it took be tied to the differing imperial legacies in different places (for example, in the former Ottoman colonies, or in the formerly Russian colonies)? Relatedly, what about the socialisms that arose in African nations, or liberation theology in Latin America, or pro-indigenous anti-colonial nationalism in India? How were these socialist socialities differently positioned in relation to anti-imperial movements? A postsocialist decolonial theory might thus emphasize relationality even as it connects socialism to anti-imperialism. At the same time, of course, it is important to recognize the imperial relation of the USSR to its peripheries and satellites. But as we do so, it is crucial not to replicate the Cold War discourse around Soviet imperialism that demonized the USSR to imagine the US as a beacon of anti-imperialism and democracy. In this sense, postsocialism as a concept asks us to think about shifting imperial forms during the cold war, how they build on earlier imperial formations and transform them as part of shifting geopolitical configurations of our global modernity.

A recent article by Piro Rexhepi (2018) provides a great example of what this might look like in contemporary scholarship interested in theorizing postsocialist politics. Rexhepi argues that whereas socialism was aligned with anticolonialism, in the period after the demise of state socialism in Bosnia and Herzegovina there has been an attempt to erase the history of the Habsburg empire for the purposes of EU integration. Amnesia about the Habsburg empire is part of a dominant narrative of the European Union as a post-imperial formation. Rexhepi argues that whereas Gavrilo Princip, who assassinated Archduke Ferdinand, was remembered as a hero of liberation under socialism, he has, in line with European history, now been reclassified as a terrorist. As Rexhepi powerfully shows in his piece on the renovations happening in the cityscape of Sarajevo to bring it in line with the timespace of the EU, protesters who objected to this sanitizing of Habsburg past as non-imperial rely on socialist history to do so (emphasizing the worker, the importance of public space, and memories of histories rendered aberrant to Euro temporality, like that of the Ottoman and the socialist pasts). In this case, socialist legacies and ideas about property, worker dignity, etc. are deeply integrated with a decolonial protest against the neo-imperial forgetful temporality of EU integration.

Following the conversation about thinking of the enduring legacies of socialist formations, we have a further question about postsocialism, race and decolonial praxis. In the “Introduction” to the special issue *Postsocialist Politics and the Ends of Revolution*, you discuss the problems you faced in searching a place to publish the special issue that you relate to the “dominant understanding in the U.S. academy that there was nothing left to say about the ostensible end of socialism and its legacies, not to mention that, with the association of postsocialism with Central and Eastern Europe, it also reaffirmed the impossibility of imagining this region as fertile theoretical ground for advancing conversations

in race or decolonial praxis” (Atanasoski and Vora 2018, 142). How does postsocialism allow bringing the former state socialist region into the conversation about race, imperialism, and colonialism?

One interesting development since we wrote this introduction is that, following the election of Donald Trump, a number of articles have been published that actually make the case that Eastern Europe can now be useful (theoretically) to the rest of the world because of its history of fascism and totalitarianism. Dace Dzenovska and Larisa Kurtovic (2018) have recently argued that there are several major areas where Eastern Europe can teach the West valuable lessons about the futures it will live out. They name 4 major areas where this occurs: (1) knowledge of totalitarianism/authoritarianism; (2) knowledge of fascism/nationalism; (3) knowledge of Russia; and (4) prefiguration of the future of the West. But even in this formulation, the knowledge that comes out of the East is never one filled with political possibility, but rather political hopelessness. Thus, if Eastern Europe is always totalitarian/fascist, it is always racist (and not a place from which to theorize the resistance of the marginalized). This erases the many interesting routings of black radicals (for instance W.E.B. DuBois) through the USSR (the historian Kate Brown has explored this in her work). But it also fails to account for the ways in which Eastern Europe is a site that has been racialized in multiple imperial histories that are overlapping.

To the point, in the “Introduction” to the special issue *Postsocialist Politics and the Ends of Revolution*, you mention that liberalism is intertwined with fascist trends, while liberal formations are presented as oppositional to fascist tendencies. Could you explain the complementarity of liberalism and fascism? And how the positioning of liberalism as the antithesis to fascism limits our understanding of political action, protest, and subjectivities?

This question is interesting to think about in relation to our earlier response (where liberalism is posited as the solution to Eastern Europe’s ostensible problem of being a condensed articulation of all things associated with fascism/totalitarianism). Yet liberal reforms are themselves violent – and can be a form of terror, as in the case of shock therapy, or the process of privatizing state and worker-owned factories across post-socialist spaces. According to Nikhil Pal Singh, a “liberal” order has long been associated with the values of “universality, open-mindedness, and tolerance,” as well as with the utmost primacy on individual freedom as opposed to collectivism (Singh 2014, 153). Two strains of liberalism have traditionally been theorized separately: the first, market liberalism supporting free trade and unregulated markets; and the second, political liberalism centering citizen subjects as juridical subjects rendered equal before the law. Yet, within the context of privatization and socio-economic “transition” that was part of the dismantling of state socialism across Central and Eastern Europe and also, globally speaking, neoliberal

world-bank driven reforms, the entanglement of the two (the market and the juridical) and, therefore, the need to assess their co-constitutive effects, is obvious. Across Central and Eastern Europe, privatization and the institution of market economies was seen as leading to juridical rights and the rule of law after the demise of state socialism. For instance, the legacies of communism were often blamed for the wars that broke out across the former Yugoslavia. At the same time, As Achille Mbembe explains, it is crucial to remember that “European liberalism was forged in parallel with imperial expansion. It was in relation to the expansion that liberal political thought in Europe confronted such questions as universalism, individual rights, ... international justice, [and] the nature of the relationship between European and extra-European worlds” (Mbembe 2017, 55). Building on Mbembe’s argument, we can understand privatization, juridical reform, movements against corruption in the postsocialist world, etc. as the most aspirational Euro-American liberal values. Yet, this is also about the ongoing production of Europeanness or Western-ness through the aberrance of non-European worlds – pointing to illiberalism or those histories not aligned with capitalist modernity as aberrant (illiberal, unjust, criminal). This is a narrative that fails to account for the ways in which liberal principles are in fact founded upon histories of slavery, imperial violence, and economic expropriation.

Your answer brings to mind one more process, i.e. decommunization that has been happening in some former state socialist countries in conjunction with the processes of neoliberalization and “Europeanization.” We think that postsocialism as a temporal and decolonial analytic that, as you write in the “Introduction,” “creates space to work through ongoing legacies of socialisms in the present” (Atanasoski and Vora 2018, 141) is necessary in order to reflect on and address the politics of decommunization in Eastern and Central Europe that entails neoliberal changes in the levels of policy-making, discursive shifts, ways of thinking about social organization, collectivity and everyday practices, and reconfigurations of public space. Moreover, such projects of decommunization happened in many former state socialist countries as the processes of homogenizing/universalizing of political imaginary. In this situation, postsocialist queer temporality that we discussed above enables radical modes of responding to the neoliberal logic and opens new conversations about racial capitalism and colonialism, while acknowledging Soviet imperial racial, sexual, gender, and economic hierarchies. In this sense, our next question relates to the ways of countering modernity scripts. What language may be generative to think through and communicate the lifeworlds that would be disruptive of the scripts of modernities (Soviet socialism and Euro-American liberal democracy) and the nation-state paradigm? How can we challenge the forgetting of lifeworlds incommensurable with either of the modernities and vio-

lence related to them? For example, what do you think of the language and aesthetics of the visual, considering the violence and objectification inscribed in it within the modernity paradigm?

A great example that may be useful for thinking through your question is the “Four Faces of Omarska” project that [Neda] has written about in a recent (2018) article. The project is spearheaded by the Belgrade-born artist Milica Tomic and a large collective of artists, scholars, and survivors of the concentration camp at Omarska that was active during the wars of secession in the former Yugoslavia. Omarska is remembered in the global imagination as one of the most horrific examples of the “barbarism” of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s and the so-called ethnic-hatreds that resurfaced after communism ostensibly suppressed nationalism that never went away after WWII. Because the camp was an iron ore mine during the socialist era, and because in the postwar epoch it is once again an active mine, there is currently no memorial at the site of the camp.

In response to this problem, the Four Faces of Omarska group conceived a kind of memorial that seeks to create an “active exhibition that [will] ... comprise an inter-archive of materials ... such as: documents, interviews, videos, photos, performances, discussions/interventions etc., [and] that will be continually updated and cross-linked” (Tomic ND). By inter-archive, the group means to indicate not just different kinds of texts that are assembled by participants, but also the interactive component – how participants engage and make the texts come to life across different temporalities. This engagement is a form of social sculpture and not a physical sculpture that would more traditionally serve to memorialize the victims of war crimes. “Social sculpture,” a term put forward by Joseph Beuys in the 1960s, conceives of art and archiving as inclusive, participatory, multidimensional, and above all, about uncertainty. Social sculpture works with and attempts to sculpt social changes in these ways. As the group puts it, “Four Faces of Omarska is an ongoing art project that questions strategies of memorial production from the position of those whose experience and knowledge have been subjugated, excluded and disqualified, pushed outside public remembrance and public history.”¹ The “texts” produced by the working group are dependent on the network of people participating in the production of archival materials tied to Omarska. Their form (or what they will look like) is not known at the outset because it depends on conversations between the participants (artists, activists, survivors).

“The Four Faces of Omarska” dwells in a multiplicity of time and place, entangled as they are in Bosnia’s losses since the demise of state socialism. As the collective has explained,

The title Four Faces of Omarska comes from four constitutive layers in the history of this mining complex in northern Bosnia. [Omarska] was established in socialist Yugoslavia as an iron ore mine...; at the beginning of the 1990s wars, Bosnian Serb forces and local authorities transformed the mine into a concentration camp for ethnic Muslims and Croats; after the

war, in 2004, [the Austrian-based Arcerol Mittal company, the largest steel producer in the world], assumed majority ownership of the Omarska mine and resumed commercial mining operations; finally, in 2007 it was used as a film shooting location for *Saint George Slays the Dragon*, the historical ethno-blockbuster ([based on the] First World War) co-produced by film companies from Serbia proper and Republika Srpska [in Bosnia] (Open Space "Film Bulletin 'Four Faces of Omarska'" ND).

In the project, then, Omarska evokes several competing notions of the past, present, and future, and of production, value, crime, death, and life. These facets of the "Four Faces of Omarska" encapsulate the tensions between capitalist production and competing notions of time and place and frame postsocialism as a global condition in which such contests take shape. Speaking about her involvement with the project, Milica Tomic has argued that to understand the wars and crimes of the 1990s, as well as the ways in which the wars of the 1990s have been put to use in the name of liberal governance, it is necessary to contend with "the transition from socialism to capitalism, which began during the course of the war and is still ... ongoing. The process of appropriating public property ... in the name of ... transition ([and] the ties connecting global capital and the local ruling structures), [can be understood as] a form of the extreme terror [and] as a means and a medium of robbing the population" (Fluid States ND). Rather than reproduce the dominant narrative of a transition from totalitarianism to democracy, Tomic here deploys the post-9/11 discourse about terrorism, asking what it might mean to conceive of the dissolution of Yugoslav socialist self-management as a mode of terror.

Solidarity and collectivity

How can postsocialism serve as a methodology of thinking about transnational solidarity, as well as inform or change the understanding of "transnational"? How does postsocialism as a methodology and a global condition allow re-thinking transnational through transnational dynamics of race, nationalism, ethnicity, colonialism, and sexuality?

To answer your question we turn to [Neda's] article "A Feminist Politics and Ethics of Refusal: Teaching Transnational Cinema in the Feminist Studies Classroom" (2016) that offers important insights about transnational perspective. For this reason, further we use excerpts from this article.

In the article, [Neda] starts discussion about transnational analysis in feminist studies with the 2013 statement on women's studies scholarship where the United States-based National Women's Studies Association Field Leadership Working Group Members named transnationalism as one of the "four key concepts central to women's and gender studies scholarship, teaching, and service." The report describes the scope of transnational feminist analysis thus:

Transnational analysis in women's and gender studies examines power, privilege, and differences within and across boundaries and through processes ranging from the intimate to the global. ... Analyses intervene in hierarchical paradigms and resist binaries of local/global or domestic/international. Note that the transnational is not conceived as indicating a location "over there" but rather is approached as an analytic that enables practitioners to comprehend the impact of global processes across spaces, over time, in distinct locales, and in the intimacy of homes and bodies. Transnational analysis decenters "the center" wherever it may be, and it explores the way that the center is always multiply constituted in and through its relationship to the periphery (as cited in Atanasoski 2016, 222–223).

This definition envisages a transnational feminist analytic that is mobile, intervening in established binaries and spatial and temporal hierarchies, thus destabilizing entrenched nationalist and hegemonic knowledge formations. The NWSA's characterization of transnationalism is politically and pedagogically useful in many respects. Nonetheless, the problem of being everywhere and nowhere all at once that Rachel Lee pointed to with regard to the category "women of color" remains applicable to this contemporary demarcation of the transnational. As Lee writes, "the seduction of nonterritoriality ... is also a seduction for women's studies scholars more generally" (as cited in Atanasoski 2016, 223). In turn, through their educational paths in the field of feminist studies, students are themselves seduced by the nonterritoriality of the transnational. A number of feminist scholars have raised similar concerns about interdisciplinary institutional formations that uncritically celebrate border crossing at the expense of groundedness in area studies. Along these lines, Leela Fernandes (as cited in Atanasoski 2016, 223) has argued that precisely because transnational feminist analytics and approaches have attempted to "delineate new spaces" not tied to "the territoriality of the nation-state," territorial formations like the nation state can now only be addressed through an implicit contrast with the celebrated space of border-crossing. Ensuing "regimes of visibility," Fernandes contends, discipline the feminist imaginary, even if differently, than older nation-based paradigms.

Fernandes's notion of transnational "regimes of visibility," and the possibilities and limits of such regimes to transform feminist studies students' engagement with the world, is particularly provocative in relation to postsocialism as a complementary but also at times contradictory theoretical frame to that of the transnational. For instance, following the end of the Cold War, the former second world fell out of visibility within predominant U.S. (inter)disciplinary and transnational paradigms. As the Global North and Global South conceptually displaced the old three worlds model, scholarly work either subsumed formerly state socialist nations into the Global South, or, for the nations seen as successfully participating in capitalist development, into an undifferentiated Europe (the Global North). While such tendencies to erase the former second world from relevant cultural and political knowledge has

been rigorously interrogated by scholarship explicitly invested in theorizing postsocialism as a global condition, to date, most transnational feminist and cultural analyses have marginalized postsocialism as a regionally specific analytic that is relevant only for Central and Eastern Europe. In short, the historical and cultural legacies of state socialism are unaccounted for in U.S. based feminist conceptions of the transnational.

According to Jennifer Suchland (as cited in Atanasoski 2016, 224), for instance, in spite of transnational feminism's stated commitment to "destabilizing fixed geographies and seeing the intersections and hybridity of power," it has privileged and indeed conflated the "third world" with the "transnational." She reasons that the second world's status as "nonregion" is due to the fact that its mode of "difference" is not recognizable as a difference that matters in women's studies scholarship. This is in part because of the racialized understanding of the "global" within a U.S. academic context, and in part because during the Cold War the second world was not viewed as critical of the first world, but, rather, as wanting to join it through processes of democratization and Europeanization.

At the same time, as Katarzyna Marciniak (as cited in Atanasoski 2016, 224–225) has compellingly argued, any project invested in theorizing how the former second world might unsettle existing transnational feminist epistemologies should not stop short at adding categories "to the list of 'other worlds' so that it [can] compete with them for attention." Instead, she contends, it may be more useful to contemplate the "discursive disappearance" of the post-communist world a place from which to rethink how and why the Western gaze is directed and diverted differentially in relation to geopolitical and historically specific "threats." Put otherwise, rather than figuring the terms through which Central and Eastern Europe might be brought into the transnational paradigm, the more challenging, and therefore, perhaps, also the more productive problematic is that of how seemingly politically progressive paradigms (like transnational feminism) themselves participate in disappearing not just certain parts of the world, but also ways of life, from the realm of relevant knowledge. We could ask what might it mean to think through the materiality of postsocialist disappearances beyond the regional frame? [Excerpted from (Atanasoski 2016)].

We also think that it is important to discuss solidarity and collectivity in terms of ethics. For example, in the "Introduction" to the special issue *Postsocialist Politics and the Ends of Revolution*, you refer to the "new ethical collectivities" (Atanasoski and Vora 2018, 141) that oppose military, economic, and cultural expansionism. It is interesting that you use the term "ethical collectivities." What meanings do you include in the terms "ethical" and "collectives"? Could you give examples of new ethical collectives? What moments of solidarity do you think could open other possibilities to imagine postsocialist queer feminist communities locally, transnationally, and globally?

[Kalindi's] recent article "Biopolitics of Trust in the Technosphere: A Look at Surrogacy, Labor, and Family" (2018) offers great ideas and examples for the question. Therefore, in order to answer it, we use excerpts from this article that provide important insights for thinking about ethical collectives.

When [Kalindi] started researching transnational Indian surrogacy arrangements in 2008, she spent several months at a surrogacy clinic in north India. [Kalindi] found an insistence among surrogates that common sense should dictate it should be commonsensical that commissioning parents would naturally feel that they owed their surrogate an extended form of patronage, in light of what the surrogate had given them – something beyond what money can repay or represent. In fact, such relationships between people of power and resources and those of little have well-established precedents in South Asian history (Vora 2013). The social contract that binds the nation together, where citizens subject themselves to state power in exchange for security, is a model for the marriage contract. It is also a model for surrogacy contracts. The social contract (and its reproduction in the labor and marriage contracts) – an agreement between two supposedly autonomous parties that will be upheld by the state legal apparatus – makes one party, in this case, the surrogate, subordinate to another, here the commissioning parents, because by law she is a temporary service worker who will gestate their property and progeny for 9 months after which she is no longer part of the parent's, or the commissioned infant's, social world.

The modern nuclear family as an ideal is a relatively recent invention consisting of a set of people living together in one household economic unit recognized through tax reporting, medical insurance registration, school enrollment, death benefits, visitation and custody rights, etc. In the United State, it wasn't until the early- to mid-20th century that the heteropatriarchal nuclear family became the privileged site of the citizen subject. In his book *Contagious Divides*, Nayan Shah explains how in the US in the mid-20th century, anxieties about immigration and racial intermixing were part of a national project to promote the members of the white, middle-class nuclear heteropatriarchal household as the ideal citizen subject. He explains that many alternate domestic formations existed at the time, and that these were pathologized to support the ideal family household. In reality, of course, most households do not match this imaginary of the nuclear family – in fact, we can see these "queer domesticities" as Shah calls them, as protesting the reproduction of the nation because they destabilize the white nuclear family norm. Shah described those intimacies and domesticities that are non-productive in a capitalist frame, and that don't replicate the idealized citizen-subject out of that white middle-class nuclear family. Mixed families, single mothers raising children unofficially with cooperative arrangements with other single mothers, grandparents housing and supporting adult children and grandchildren... the list goes on.

What types of communities of care might arise, then, out of the retraction of the social welfare state? Can we see these as both a symptom of the failure of the state, but also as sites of possibility to interrupt the easy reproduction of the nation and the family form? The way former surrogates in India describe the potential for structures of life-long responsibility between commissioning parents and the families of surrogates helps us imagine alternatives to nation-state organized family and marriage-based structures of kinship and mutual aid.

“Who can trust me to care for them” is a question of building collectives within or despite the nation. Collectives have historically challenged the model of the autonomous individual property owner. Surrogates who feel they should be in a relation of responsibility with commissioning parents are calling for those parents to think about a collective investment. Whom will they care for? The genetic progeny borne by a surrogate because it is a relation sanctioned by the state, but not the surrogate? Many people are already living as part of alternative collectives – those queer domesticities that the nation has tried to sanction. [Kalindi] has argued that in some ways, social reproduction and the domestic sphere have always been such a place even as they have been central to racial, gender and imperial exploitation [excerpted from (Vora 2018)].

Your answers make us think of one more dimension related to the question of solidarity. One of your approaches to postsocialism is through queering the temporality and building on the past conditional temporality “what could have been” suggested by Lisa Lowe (2015). This is one of the ways to disrupt liberalism, its politics of forgetting, and the present-day neoliberal policies. Consequently, you state that it is important to explore how “the grounds for political solidarity and co-alition have been formulated” in order to prioritize “obscured historical connection between past and present” (Atanasoski and Vora 2018, 143). Therefore, pluralizing postsocialisms and challenging liberal forgetting bring into light transnational movements (such as black internationalism and third-worldism), political actions and ethical collectivities and the connections between their past and present examples (Atanasoski and Vora 2018, 141). Could you name examples of collectives invested in excavating the past and present politics?

Your question brings to mind the terrific documentary work of Canadian-Yugoslav filmmaker and researcher Tamara Vukov called *Tranzivija/Transition* (forthcoming 2019). In it, Vukov documents in two parts the multi-year struggles of factory workers in Serbia in the 2000s to maintain their ownership stakes in the factories in which they had worked. “Transition” or privatization occurred later in Serbia than in the rest of Central and Eastern Europe because of the Milosevic regime than had remained in power throughout the 1990s.

The first part of Vukov's documentary project, *Tranzicija/Transition: Zrenjanin* focuses on the three-year strike organized by the mostly women workers of the Zrenjanin Jugoremedia pharmaceutical factory. The second part, *Tranzicija/Transition: Yugo* turns its attention to the decimated auto and steel industries in the Zastava plant in Kragujevac. Both films tell a history of socialist self-management and shed light on the human costs of global capitalisms' need to erase socialist modes of sociality in the course of privatization. In contrast to commonplace association between capitalism and the growth of industry and wealth that has often been contrasted with austerity, scarcity, and poverty under socialism in the Western Cold War and post-Cold War imagination of the East, Vukov's two documentary films demonstrate the extent to which privatization decimated industrial infrastructures in the former Yugoslavia, leading to extreme poverty and hardship for families.

The documentaries showcase people's refusal to accept what has in dominant global media and political discourses been characterized as the inevitable political outcome of the end of state socialism – that is, privatization and a liberal individualist politics that dominate the postsocialist landscape. Instead, Vukov's documentary project sheds light on the persistence of an ethos of collectivity and justice instilled in the unique system of self-management that was part of ex-Yugoslavia's state socialist formation. To be clear – this is not a project that falls into the pitfalls of nostalgia for state socialism. Rather it tells the unique story of worker self-management in Yugoslavia that remains untold (Yugoslavia was a unique case and was not a part of the so-called Eastern Bloc). In this sense, Vukov's *Tranzicija* Files make an invaluable contribution, because they do just that – explore the ethos of self-management and its articulation in the moment of its attempted erasure.

Part of what we are saying here is that the work of provincializing Soviet state socialisms also allows us to draw attention to the ways in which the particularities of state socialism allow for an ongoing if different mode of collective protest in the present (in this case, socialist self-management).

Postsocialisms may reveal multiple understandings of “common,” which is, actually, one of the questions in your new forthcoming book *Surrogate Humanity: Race, Robots, and the Politics of Technological Futures*. Could you talk more about the multiple understandings of “common” and also why is it necessary to raise a question of how we consider “common” in the contemporary conditions of capitalism?

In one chapter of our book, we consider how concepts (including collaboration, sharing, and the commons) have undergone a radical decontextualization as they have risen to prominence as descriptors of what makes the technological innovations of the fourth industrial revolution socially and economically revolutionary. In the book, we argue that the tech economy appropriates collaboration, sharing, and the commons to announce capital's unprecedented liberatory potential, while divesting the concepts it uses from

an anticapitalist politics and ethos. In 2015, the Oxford English Dictionary introduced “sharing economy” as a term it would now include. The sharing economy is a socioeconomic system built around the sharing of human, physical, and intellectual resources, especially those that individuals may see themselves as possessing and underutilizing (Airbnb, where people rent out unused rooms to travelers, is one well-known example). The sharing economy thus includes collaborative creation, production, distribution, trade, and consumption of goods and services by different people and organizations. The sharing economy is framed as being built on “distributed power and trust within communities [of users] as opposed to centralized institutions,” blurring the lines between producer and consumer. Based on the name alone, the much-touted sharing economy, enabled by digital connectivity and wide distribution of the means of production, sounds like it approaches a socialist ideal of “the commons,” land or shared resources belonging to a whole community that provide life necessities. Yet, although the sharing economy is sometimes also referred to also as the “collaborative economy” because of initiatives based on horizontal networks and the participation of a community, “community” is defined tautologically as simply the whole of those who participate as users.

Our book critiques imaginaries of the so-called “creative disruptions” to capitalism, which propose that technology will bring about the end of capitalism as we know it through the creation of a collaborative commons built on the internetworking of things and people in the sharing economy. We contend that unlike Marxist feminists, who have theorized the rise of capitalist wealth accumulation as dependent on the unpaid labor of racialized and gendered populations, technoliberal appropriation of collaboration, sharing, and the commons reproduces the erasure of racialized and gendered work in their postcapitalist techno-utopias. Within what we call technoliberalism in our book, the commons, once the staging ground and goal of potential socialist proletarian revolution, is evacuated of political content. Sharing becomes an anonymized market transaction that can sidestep the social and what Marx called “species life,” a material and ontological underpinning to the commons that gave it a teleologically revolutionary potential. Put otherwise, our critique of the “sharing” in the sharing economy, as our critique of the “collaborative” in collaborative robotics, draws attention to the ways in which the architecture of postindustrial surrogate humanity works through the elision of the racial and gendered dimensions of capitalist development in its production of the fully human. We investigate the ways in which socialist concepts of collaboration, sharing, and the commons have been appropriated within technoliberalism for purposes of accumulation and expropriation, even as technoliberalism claims freedom and equality as its express end goal. In contradistinction to the recently popularized discourses of the sharing economy, and to a lesser extent collaborative robotics, imaginaries of technology, sharing, and collaboration from Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto*

to Haraway's A Cyborg Manifesto offer their political motivations as being at the heart of their uses of technology as "decolonizing" and "liberating." At the same time, as feminists and critical race thinkers have pointed out, even these imaginaries risk refusing difference in the name of a universal (humanist) revolutionary call [excerpted from (Atanasoski 2016)].

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Stigmatization of the Analytical Concept of Gender as Ideology



The stigmatization of 'gender' as the category of feminist ideology has become a central element of the political discourse in Hungary since 2010. I identify three junctures of this process since the system change in 1989, which have emerged and crystalized into the discourses of 'gender ideology' and 'gender-craze'. This appropriation of 'gender', the key category in feminist analysis is a serious attack to stigmatize and ostracize its critical potential and existence. I shall reflect on the specificities of these changes and argue for a model of meaning in terms of polyvocality that is always already open to critique. We need such a socially situated model to reclaim gender as the critical category of analysis that has been developed to expose the very ideological interest of patriarchal institutions to re/produce unequal relations of power as given. The move is all the more necessary as most feminist researchers and activists' debates in Hungary in the face of the accusation of 'ideology' are caught within a divide between the post-structuralist under-

Photo: "Less catcalls, more cats!" Graffiti in Thessaloniki, Greece.

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standing that all meanings should be ideological and the claim to 'truth' of the structural (economic) dispossession of women over false agendas of identity politics. Despite the fierce criticism of the other they seem to be caught within the reversal of the same logic, enacting what Laurent Berlant (1996, 243) has called the spectatorial sports of self-destruction among harmed collectives in the public sphere.

Epistemological framing

In order to orient my reader on the subsequent journey from the start, I would like to establish that as a scholar who does critical studies of discourse I understand 'gender' as a social practice of distinction that emerges from within institutionally regulated practices, an important constitutive element thereof is the symbolic practice of signifying, the act of encoding the material practices one directly engages in doing or practices one is not enacting but reflects on from within the actual one. In short, practices always entail a practice of categorization and the emerging categories come to be embedded within orders of value, indexical of the institutions within which they emerge as concepts of/with particular intelligibility. The most important element of the above definition is the claim that making sense of the practice one engages in doing inevitably implicates articulating multiple reflections on other practices at different locations, moments of time and systems of value. This means that the model I am proposing is inherently plural; the emerging categories in the process are necessarily organized by plurality. A category is made possible to emerge as a coherent and hence a meaningful pattern by a dialectic process of partial integration of diverse meanings from elements of meaning always already pertaining to multiple other fields of practices, hence other categories as an effect of the interplay of the dominant relations of ruling.

The point of departure of my reflections on the stigmatization of gender in the analysis below is the category of masculinity. I am fully aware of the potential disappointment about my choice due to the resentment to the effect that most of the space and attention is already given to men. The relationship between women and power has always been uneasy¹. Yet, in order to expose and understand the privileges that are at stake in the current systemic discreditation of gender as ideology in the discourse of Hungarian politics, we need to expose the unsettling and unsettled gender relations of power mobilized by "aggrieved entitlement of masculinity" that fuels despair and rage across diverse groups of men. The internal division within feminist groups may dangerously play in the hands of this rage.

¹ See for instance: Sreberny, Zoonen 2000; Vavrus 2002; Lakoff 2003. They all address the conflictual relationship in the field of media, which is the primary discursive field my data is taken from.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity is introduced by R.W. Connell in 1987, taking issue with the dominant approaches to gender in contemporary sociology at the time. He challenges the consensual, taken for granted conceptualization of the category as a self-contained set of pre-given character traits that should correspond to one's 'biologically given sex' and as such should have its corresponding typologies of 'gender roles' that are argued to be acquired in a top-down manner through a unidirectional developmental process of socialization. Ironically, then, the canonized model of sex is conceptualized in terms of a categorization practice that privileges 'male' as the 'obvious' principle of categorization rooted in biology and as such producing a distinction of binary opposition at the expense of 'female'. That binary may only allow for the researcher to explore particular social activities linked with the 'two sexes' and sort them out as if pertaining to one or the other 'gender role'. The way out of such a homogenizing static practice of categorization for Connell is to see gender as an active process of negotiations whose outcome (including the category of biologized sex) is the effect of dominant power relations. With James W. Messerschmid then in 2005 she revisits her own concept to see the explanatory power of the model in the light of the social changes of global capitalism. They conclude that the concept needs to be made more dynamic and that way, I would say, they can come up with a more complex explanation of social change – in terms of masculinity. They argue for the recognition of the plurality of masculinity and encourage researchers to study other forms of masculinity (such as blue-collar male worker, gay middle-class white man, subcultural hard rock male fan, Roma urban unemployed man, etc.) in addition to the hegemonic one. The ultimate objective should be to see the productivity of the other forms, to understand that any change to the ideal form of masculinity is the result of the struggle by stigmatized, excluded, or devalued and tolerated masculinities challenging and subverting their perceived value and position in the eye of the relations of ruling.

However, in agreement with my epistemological stance on multiplicity as constitutive of meaning, I say we need to make this masculinity model more dynamic. If the ideal(ised) form of masculinity becomes what it is perceived to be in its contested relationship with the various other forms in a socially regulated process of negotiation of their value, we need to make only one more but very important step and reflect on how we understand 'relationship' itself. I argue that polyvocality or heterogeneity is integral to all categories in so far as they emerge as a more or less coherent category articulated out of several other discursive elements/categories. The resulting category will be overlapping with the ones whose elements it has in common. Consequently, their boundaries cannot be imagined to be self-contained but overlapping and so of relative stability, always already open to reconfiguration. The possibility of change at the same time is not only the matter of logical possibility but that of political viability at a given historical moment as well and the latter serves as a relative but relevant limit to our (academic

or activist) imagination. What can be imagined at a given historical moment within a given institutional space is the result of the various vectors of power relations in place during the process of change – the emerging patterns of meaning are therefore not the matter of an arbitrary free play of signifiers but a socially regulated discursive articulation of contingency.

The corollary of this argument, in my reading, is that meaning, the emerging concept is ideological in so far as it is to naturalize, play down, or make this contingency either a matter of pure chance or an inevitably homogenized given. Despite their oppositional stance, they would equally pre-empt the recognition that it is only particular meanings emerging within a given exclusionary power-matrix that make some meaning function as a stigma. The arbitrary arrangement of signifiers, meant to challenge the dogma of universal truth used against other meanings as false consciousness and as such ideology, however makes it necessary to say that all meanings are ideological. That is, there is no possibility to even imagine a politically viable moment of equal standing but infinite flows of hegemonic (i.e. hierarchical) reconfigurations of relations of power and categories of naming. Despite the defying effect of unlimited arbitrariness and the corollary of the ideological effect of any construction of meaning, there is one thing we can expose: infinite arbitrariness is not necessarily in a binary relationship with contingency. It is sufficient for the articulatory logic at play to be informed by a partial distinction. What is at stake is making a category perceived sufficiently different to be recognizable as distinct enough and then see if the multiple vectors of meaning may result in a configuration of equal standing. It is similar to what Denise Thompson (2001, 27) argues to be the case: "What we are always in is systems of meaning, whether [the given] meanings are ideological or not depends on whether or not they are used in the service of domination." Drawing on Thompson, I would like to contend that the contingency model of meaning emerging at the intersection of multiple socially regulated signifying practices may allow for us to imagine and negotiate a configuration where the matrix of power relations turns out not to be informed by hegemony and hence the meaning of categories embedded in the process can be articulated without ideological investments. To me, what is at stake in the feminist debates about what standpoint we should take to effectively fight against the contemporary discreditation campaign that discredits feminism as gender ideology, to be willing to go beyond the binary perception of the social situation as one that calls for (structural) reality instead of the always ideological cultural constructions (of identity politics) and assume, instead, this stance of positioned, discursively articulated polyvocality of meaning (the category of gender included).

Given that multiple relations of hegemonic domination constitute the contemporary status quo, the effectivity of a particular ideology hinges precisely on the familiarity of meanings often to the point of escaping (critical) recognition, working as 'common sense' knowledge and unquestionable 'truth'. Over the past nine years this is what has happened to the meaning of gender redefined as dangerous ideology and as such a legitimate target of

hate attacks, a discourse that is, uniquely in the case of Hungary, is manipulated from within the various institutions of state power. Therefore, the question is not about negating the accusation rather about *how* to approach the actual state ideologies at play in the campaign especially the one/s in dominance. I therefore argue for the relevance of challenging and studying common sense meanings of gender in academic and non-academic discourses. Drawing on Michael Billig's (1995) work, I also argue against the collapse of the banal and benign in the assessment of various forms of 'unflagged' nationalism in political discourse and contend that studying what is usually devalued in academic scholarship through the routine appeal to the banality and hence irrelevance of common sense concepts to the effect of 'What is new about it?' is dangerous. Its danger consists in disregarding that the perception of anything as benign is made possible precisely for its passing as 'obvious', 'common sense'. Therefore, we need to try challenge that conflation and draw the relative but all the more relevant distinction between the meaning of banal and benign. In short, I also argue that the conceptualization of 'relationality' as a historically specific dialectical, partially inclusionary formation of relation applies then to the conceptualization of 'difference' as well. In agreement with James Paul Gee's (2014) model of discourse: differentiation is the discursive act of meaning making that emerges as the result of multiple dimensions of encoding practices, endorsing one pattern over other patterns of meaning as sufficiently in sync with what is perceived as intelligible in a given social space without any further reflection, as common sense.

The three conjunctures in the discreditation of 'gender'

The specificities of the order of political discourse in the past three decades in Hungary can be effectively studied in terms of the changes of the meaning of feminism and gender. It is particularly relevant for us to understand the current Hungarian official discourse of politics situated in the cartography of gender knowledge since it can be characterized by a routine attack on and sacrifice of the rights of women, sexual minorities and people with non-conforming gender identities as well as feminist academics in the wake of a right-wing populism where hate-speech has become the daily routine of communication.² The stigmatization of 'gender' as ideology has become a central element of this state political discourse in Hungary since 2010.³

² For a detailed critique of that populist political discourse see my recent study (Barát 2017).

³ In fact the systemic verbal attacks resulted in the ultimate point of drafting a decree that should ban the discipline of gender studies from the national list of MA degrees on August 13th 2108, followed by its deletion from the national registry of degrees on October 13th simply published in the National Gazette without any explicit further announcement. However, at the time of the development of the argumentation in the current paper these turns were yet to happen and so I could not consider them retrospectively. Yet, the trajectory of my arguments can sadly be extended to the culminate in the state intervention.

I can identify three junctures of meaning making of 'gender' since the system change in 1989 that have crystalized into common-sense discourses of gender ideology and 'gender-craze' of right wing populism – that can be, sadly, indirectly shared by self-identifying members of the feminist opposition in various public debates and publications.⁴ The first period comprises the 1990s. In it the various meaning-making practices evolve around the term 'feminism' predominantly in the printed political media. The meaning of feminism emerges at the intersection of three dominant discourses and very quickly comes to be collapsed into the scary figure of the feminist who is assumed to be unintelligent to judge the various media-identified harmful effects of feminism. However, in so far as she is represented as only a few crazy women, the implied readership of the various media products is safely protected by their expected outrage and disidentification with such dangerous figures. The three discourses are that of an anti-American discourse that sees feminism as an alien export, undermining the newly won autonomy of the country as well as that of the alleged interest of its women who should not go along with their American sisters' craze who should have gone 'too far' and take the (mostly wealthy celebrity men) to court and sue them for sexual harassment with no reason – either motivated by their greed or lesbian hatred for men. As an inevitable result she would be (rightly). The other intertwined discourse would contribute to this meaning with the accusation that these feminist women did not learn from their experience that the 'woman question' belongs to the failure of the communist past and the ideal 'new woman' of the system change would obviously want to leave that past behind. Finally, the feminist woman is a failure on its own term as well in that she refuses to acknowledge the importance of women's ways of knowing, disregarding the arguable satisfaction expressed by the majority of contemporary women.

These characteristic features I have discussed in detail (Barát 2005). What is of relevance of my points today, on the one hand, is the media's gate-keeping mechanism early on that invests in the discreditation of feminism as an ideology through its articulation as a new imperialist (American) ideology intertwined with the old communist one, and the oppression of the 'other' women's understanding of their life. On the other hand, my 2005 study has also shown that the little media space given to feminist self-definitions themselves against the hostile practices of othering comes to be caught within the hostile hegemonic discourses of gender in the media with the reformist female academics on the one hand in a most troubling agreement with the misogynist male position on the heterosexual myth of men and women as partners in a complementary relationship and the hardly present representatives of the critical voices of outlaw sexualities on the other. In short, the po-

⁴ For a recent study that reiterates and endorses this unhelpful divide see Weronika Grzebalska, Eszter Kováts and Andrea Pető (2018).

tentially autonomous voices come from precisely the violently marginalized non-heterosexual positions

that come to be the shared point of departure for both the misogynist (hetero)sexist male and reformist feminist voices in their hegemonic allegiance in defence of the hetero-gendered social order, even if for different reasons. (...) Insofar as (discursive) practices can be considered to be ideological in that they aim at maintaining the status quo by naturalizing the given hegemonic relations of patriarchal power, (...) the various types of discourses enacted in the definition of 'feminism' reinforce the patriarchal regulation of women's labour and desire precisely by taking gender as sexually pre-given (Barát 2005, 206–7).

The first decade of the 21st century then seems a quiet one, there are no further attempts at defining feminism for the general public.⁵ The work is predominantly taking place in academic institutions with no immediate interest voiced by the media or any other political institution. The third period then emerges in the wake of the discussion of the national curriculum of pre-schooler in Parliament caught in the very middle of the part political struggles in the finish of the national elections. However, this time the category is not feminism but gender that seems to have been functioning ever since as Ernesto Laclau's (1996, 44) empty signifier. In my understanding one of the most telling characteristic features of a right-wing populism is the production of social relations set up between two such empty signifiers as in reconcilable contradiction with one another through the routine use of hate speech. On the one hand that logic produces a homogenized 'manhood' around which the diverse social groups of 'our' men can easily and conveniently come together to re/imagine themselves as 'strong' defenders of the nation in the face of any event, institution or collective declared to be 'a hostile malicious threat' while safely failing to see that their sense of 'fairness' and 'legitimacy' has always been built on the backs of various others. The Government's right-wing populist communication appeals to the 'strength' of the nation vested in them to 'protect' our Christian family values of the 'real Europe' against the 'other' men, the homogenized Muslim male 'intruders' and – more indirectly – against the so-called gender and human rights craze of 'Soros-sponsored' civil organization and any research or academic teaching that should stand in support or literally 'behind' the 'invasion'. The ideological work of this empty signifier then is also desirable in that it brings all these diverse groups and events together around the empty signifier of 'our threatening alien', thereby legitimizing targeting anyone who then comes to be labelled, stigmatizes as one of them – without any further explanation or justification.

Although at the beginning of the past decade gender turns out to be the term that invites hysterical reactions in the parliamentary debate whereas

⁵ For a detailed discussion of the period see Barát (2012) – available in Hungarian only.

the government's proposed change suggests the promotion of tolerance in two regards: the instructors are recommended to choose activities in the pre-school that should challenge gender stereotypes and embrace multiculturalism. Interestingly, in the debate the latter change was not even mentioned as problematic. The Christian Democratic Party, the most vocal faction against the change – for one more month in opposition – did not see any threat in other cultures *yet*. Their number one enemy turned out to be gender in the government's modest act of gender mainstreaming: they explicitly attacked the change as gender for them meant the ideological code 'hiding the real agenda' of making 'our children' lose their sense of male and female identity and so indirectly promoting the hidden agenda of the 'third sex'. The central left Government was accused of attacking 'its own people' and therefore the Christian Democrats promised to abolish the new policy as soon as they come into power; which they did first thing after the inauguration of the new minister of education (the exact same person who was attacking the central-left government's act as a hidden agenda of the 'liberal gay lobby'). It is in the wake of the Syrian refugee's arrival in the summer of 2015 through the Balkan route, when the intersection of the supporters of the 'migrant' and the 'gender-craze' may come together around the two interconnected empty signifiers of hate speech, the routine mode of communication in the country. But unlike elsewhere in Europe, this order of hate discourse is produced, its main characteristic features, the actual targets are defined and promoted from within state political institutions and intermediaries.

During 2010–2014, the first four-year period of the central-right wing government, the main terrain of discrediting gender is played out by actual government faction MPs against their women MP peers in the opposition in the middle of their speeches when reading a bill, or in their questions addressed to government members in the question time session. It is most telling that the disparaging statement of hate speech they receive when discussing the bills criminalizing domestic violence. Although in its second reading the law is passed but predominantly as an act that is seen to protect children and the violence is not called 'domestic' as that should associate the home and the family with sexual/physical violence which literally was argued impossible. Instead it is called violence in partnership. When fighting against the bill there were speeches whose logic resonated with liberal feminist agendas of protecting women's rights when explicitly arguing that if women gave birth to 'sufficient number of children first' – specified as three to five – there would be no reason for violence...(sic). In the second period of the current regime, 2014–2018, the context of producing hate speech and the selection of the 'proper target' is shifted from the MPs in power to the actual people in the highest offices. The Chair of the House, for instance, has also given voice to his concern about women unwilling to give birth, 'giving grandchildren to us' on several occasions and in this intensified stage, always explicitly naming the reason for the 'death of the nation': it is gender-ideology, it is gender-craze.

Finally, since April 2018, the attack on 'gender' has been integrated into the general discrediting campaign and curtailing of academic freedom and autonomy. In a way, the stigmatization of gender and anyone brought into connection with it has reached its highest level of discrimination: questioning the scholarly standing of gender studies and thereby its key category of critical research and labelling it as pure ideology – successfully projecting its own act of political interference not the scientific field that would expose it just like that.

In suspense

In the current situation I believe there are two important moves we can do. One is building networks of solidarity that challenge the appeal to a national 'us'. In so far as that appeal is articulated by various populist political regimes across the globe, in response to the various crisis of global neoliberal capitalism, we should reach out and connect with one another. I believe that would consist in building an empty signifier on the left but one whose concept of identity itself would recognize plurality as constitutive of its formation. explore the possibilities of imagining an inclusionary act of belonging that, at the same time, does not get caught in the liberal discourse of humanitarianism that inform the various agendas of integration – ever more intensively losing grounds in the whole of EU by now. To do that, I shall draw on Butler's (2014) concept of vulnerability. It is all the more important as she develops the concept when considering the possibility of collective action and forms of political assembly. She appeals to the shared condition of human vulnerability and our sense of precarity and austerity that, in her ontology, nobody can will away as that is our primary vulnerability to others without which we would cease to be human (XIV). In the face of the coercive strategies of global power – which should obviously apply to the millions of dislocated people, to the millions of women and children in human trafficking – I think it is precisely this differential, queer logic that may expose the uneven distribution of the damaging powers of toxic masculinity.

I see the flight of the refugees to Europe, or the recent resistance of Brazilian and Polish women against the curtailing of abortion as a form of "performative bodily resistance at work that shows how bodies are being acted on by social and economic policies that are decimating livelihoods." (Butler 2015, 10) Yet, it is telling of the enormous strength of these people, who, in showing their embodied precarity, are also resisting those very powers that declare the refugees' life 'disposable', unworthy of grief.

The appeal to shared precarity is also addressed as a more desirable agenda in comparison with identity politics as in Butler's understanding the former would allow for a broader, by implication, non-exclusionary, understanding of 'demands' – based on the ontological condition of vulnerability of (human) life. Nevertheless, I think, inclusion is not that much of a matter of scale as the reference to a broader/narrower scope should imply. This inclusiveness of an empty signifier other than that of right-wing populisms

multiple modes of stigmatizing exclusion is made possible, paradoxically, by the fact that the category of precarity is conceptualized to allow for imagining sharing the demand of liveable life in public spaces in the form of a political act of plural performativity – inviting all possible supporters as well to come together with the directly targeted. I claim that sharing should not be necessarily seen as impossible in the case of political acts by mobilizations around ‘identity’. Identity (collective or individual) does not inherently operate through the production and maintenance of normative conceptions of belonging and nonbelonging – provided categorization is enacted in terms of a relative – not an absolute – distinction between the immediate and implied target of hate⁶. To me, Butler’s distinction seems to produce a binary between a sharing that is associated with a universally imagined human condition of vulnerability over and against the articulations of particular demands linked up with identity.

If we accept the ontological premise that utterances (for their intelligibility) are structured by plurality, or multiplicity, that is the meaning of any category, including identity as well as precarity, is by definition polyvocal or dialogic, then all categories are informed by this multiple logic. Plurality is integral to all categories as a logical contingency. Consequently, the identity of the ‘I’ or ‘us’ is always already called into question in and by its differential modes of relating to others. Then the task to me is not that much to argue that identity as a category should necessarily fail to furnish what it means to live and act ethically together while precarity could deliver this by way of its necessary orientation to inclusion but rather to explore the genealogy of the categories themselves; to see whether the current historic conditions of social struggle are more favourable towards an understanding of, or preference for, precarity over identity. What we should study then is the reasons for precarity to seem more of a promising category in contemporary political thought than identity – whose dominant meaning is that of the possessive self of consumerism, a matter of lifestyle that can always be mobilized in the name of the ethic of individualized guilt. It may also be the case that the concept of precarity seems more productive in political thought because it has not become sedimented in the same way or to the same level of ‘obviousness’ as identity has either in academic or in non-academic discourses of progressive politics when we try to evoke people as a group of belonging. However, we still might argue, that an empty signifier that appeals to precarity still may bring about an ‘us’ as a result of its current meaning being more readily/directly ready to foreground that living socially is relational: “One’s life is always in some sense in the hands of the other. It implies exposure both to those we know and to those we do not know; a dependency on people we know, or barely know, or know not at all” (Butler 2009, 14).

⁶ For the importance of the inclusion of the ‘rest’ of a given society in addition to the immediately targeted group of people, see Mari J. Matsuda et al. (1993).

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Строчки из жизни швей



Две участницы швейного кооператива ReSew, Рина и Маша, поговорили о швейном труде.
Рина: Как ты пришла к тому, чтобы шитье стало твоей работой?

Маша: До этого я работала в кафе официанткой. Потом наступил момент рассогласования этой работы, находящейся в рамках капиталистической системы, с приобретенными феминистскими и левыми взглядами. Я становилась все более дерзкой, а потом поняла, что больше не хочу так работать. Взяла отпуск и не смогла вернуться. После написала и защитила магистерскую диссертацию. Какое-то время ничего не делала, а потом появился швейный кооператив «Швемы», и я пошла туда шить. Впрочем, во время работы в «Швемы» я подрабатывала, да и сейчас, помимо швейки, бывают подработки, от которых я не отказываюсь и которым рада. Иногда бывают времена, когда я думаю, что если все это так тяжело, так выматывающе, не удовлетворяет и приносит такой низкий доход, то, может быть, все бросить и найти какую-

Фото: «Рассвет и спальное место на работе, мастерская ReSew»; авторка фото Мария Лукьянова

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нибудь другую работу. Тогда я начинаю думать над планом В, планом С: так, какие работы я могу? умею это, умею это – а кому это надо? никому не надо. Вроде бы и работаешь, а в голове такое творится... А бывает, думаешь, что и стоило бы найти подработку, но ведь и без нее – столько заказов!

Рина: Могу рассказать о своем контексте. Довольно рано в моей голове появилось осознание, что журналистское образование с моим складом характера и положением в обществе не даст возможности реализовывать себя. Тогда я устроилась на работу в книжный магазин. Отчасти мне это нравилось, потому что там были книги, но меня не устраивала коммуникационная сторона. В какой-то момент, когда многие факторы достигли своего развития, я подумала, что хочу делать что-то руками. Делать и сразу же видеть результат, иметь возможность на него повлиять. А не так, как со статьями, которые я писала параллельно с работой. Например, о тестировании косметики на животных. Я понятия не имею, что это в итоге. Есть текст, он опубликован, но какая это единица влияния, есть ли понимание со стороны прочитавших, мне совершенно не понятно. Это вводило меня в состояние апатии, как минимум. И тут я как раз увидела объявление о кооперативе. Совпало, мне кажется, два момента: шить – это делать что-то своими руками, влиять на результат, а кооператив – это горизонталь, которая до сих пор кажется мне действующей и важной альтернативой. Для меня это одна из немногих возможных форм активизма. Хотя иногда я порываюсь это обесценить внутри себя, но в целом считаю, что да, это форма активизма.

Наша беседа имеет две задачи-мотивации. Первая – осознание собственных привилегий: мы работаем в горизонтальной структуре по схеме, сводящейся к формуле «сами на себя». Нам важно показать, как мы пришли в эту деятельность. Вторая же задача этого взаимного интервью состоит в том, что даже в нашем формате видны проблемы швейного труда как такового в Украине (и не только). Мы решили поговорить как подруга с подругой, чтобы на пример своих историй и переживаний сделать видимой работу, о которой потребительницы редко задумываются.

Маша: Есть разница в ощущениях между тем, как ты шила вначале и как делаешь это сейчас?

Рина: Сейчас я лучше понимаю, как устроены отдельные этапы работы, и знаю, как вклиниться в какое-нибудь звено и изменить его. Например, косая строчка – ровная строчка, это приходит с опытом. Сначала и 5 мм можешь не замечать, а потоммотришь на 2 мм – и кажется, что это целый сантиметр. И что у людей на улице или в общественном транспорте куртки пошиты неправильно, платья пошиты неправильно, неровно. Но когда я не в лучшем расположении духа, я чувствую себя иголкой, которая втыкается в слишком толстую ткань и вместе с лапкой топчется на месте. В такие моменты мне кажется, что я тоже топ-

чусь на месте и не могу развивать свои навыки шитья. Иногда я свожу это в своей голове к чему-то конкретному. Например, к геометрии, она кажется важной в шитье. Хотя в детстве мне говорили, что раз я девочка, то должна быть развита гуманитарно, а не технически. Но в целом сейчас у меня больше шансов развиваться в шитье, чем раньше. Появилось больше возможностей радоваться, если получается что-то мелкое (вдруг! наконец-то!), и не обесценивать свой труд. Не говорить себе, что, мол, это должно было получиться еще полгода назад, а я только сейчас это могу, значит, все, нужно завязывать. И дальше мысли о том, что либо нужно искать другую работу или подработку, либо идти более мелкими шагами в шитье. А это, мне кажется, упирается в систему – в привилегии и ресурсы. И в приоритеты.

Маша: Что для тебя швейное развитие?

Рина: С одной стороны, это практический навык: насколько качественно кто-то может сделать вещь. С другой стороны, это работа над концепцией шитья как труда. Когда я пришла сюда, я думала, что есть простые изделия, которые можно быстро пошить, что ремонт не требует больших усилий. Мне казалось, что шитье – это узкопрофильный навык, поэтому его может освоить каждая, причем относительно быстро. Сейчас я думаю, что эта концепция изменилась, и мне кажется, это мое внутреннее развитие, проживание этой концепции. Теперь я знаю, что изделие, которое выглядит простым, может потребовать много труда. Людей на фабриках просто заставляют делать такое изделие быстро, а так-то оно требует больше времени. Эта узкопрофильность условна, иллюзорна. Чтобы создать изделие с нуля, человеку необходимы одновременно навыки конструкторки, швеи и закройщицы. Мне часто кажется, что для шитья нужны навыки многих профессий.

Маша: Да, это интересно, Твоя мысль о концепции шитья перекликается с вопросом об обесценивании. Людям кажется, что шить – это просто. Возможно, это системная проблема. Швейный труд достаточно долго приписывался и назначался людям с женской социализацией. Например, в этнографических музеях, если это скульптура, то автор часто известен, но если это классное платье, какой-нибудь вышитый камзол или ковер, то там указана дата создания – и все. Кто его ткали? Кто шили? Скорее всего, люди с женской социализацией. При этом существует миф о мужчинах как самых крутых модельерах, закройщиках, портных. Но ведь всю мелкую монотонную трудоемкую работу чаще всего выполняли швей-женщины. Когда думаю об этом, хочется как-то поработать в этом направлении, поиграть с темой: где же, кто же эти авторки прекрасных вышивок, которыми все восторгаются? Почему их не знают? И да, меня очень бесит, когда люди пишут: «Мне нужно совсем простое изделие, платье, там всего 4 строчки». Действительно? Ты что, «квадратик»? Я не очень понимаю, как людям объяснять, кроме как говорить открыто, что сначала их нужно обмерить, потом построение вы-

кройки займет, в лучшем случае, день, потом моделирование – полдня, потом я раскраиваю и сметываю на примерку – это еще полдня-день, и только после этого мы делаем примерку. Если что-то окажется не так, потому что плоскость – это не объемы человеческого тела, я все распускаю, подправляю выкройку, потом снова сметываю на примерку... Может быть, стоит говорить людям: «Вот это занимает столько-то часов, а это – столько-то», – и спрашивать, сколько стоит их час работы. Не знаю, может быть, так. Вот «Наденька» (творческое объединение художниц, Россия – прим. ред.), когда выставляет платье, все подробно расписывает: это сумма за материалы, это работа швеи... Такой подход мне нравится. Но мне не хватает временного спектра. Когда я считаю, сколько потратила времени на платье, например, то ужасаюсь, сколько получаю в час. Но я все время – ха-ха, «все время», я шью с 2015 года, уже пятый год, – думаю: «Не наработала, не набила руку, тут не уверена, тут забываешь, тут подглядываешь, как в видео на YouTube... Вот если бы ты шила чаще подобные изделия, то, конечно, получилось бы быстрее». Блин, пятый год шью, не одно платье сделала, не одни штаны, а сама все время думаю, что мало работаю, мало сшила, что надо руку набить, чтобы быстрее работать и больше зарабатывать. Непонятно, когда же я уже руку набью?

Рина: ...И какой ценой. Это перекликается с вопросом, который мне кажется все более актуальным: как на тело и сознание влияет то, что ты работаешь условно 10+, 8+ часов. То есть больше, чем в «обычном» режиме работы.

Маша: Таковы наши реалии. Мы пробовали засекают время, не работать больше восьми-деяти часов; из-за того, что я делаю нормальные такие перерывы на обед и ужин, чистого времени в работе выходит 7,5-8 часов – это неплохо. Но часто я не успеваю выполнить план дня, поэтому превышаю эту норму. При этом я чувствую себя иначе, чем когда, например, работала в кафе по 2 смены подряд, а это 14 часов на ногах. Мне это нравилось, было проще один день работать так, другой – учиться, хотя после 14 часов иногда и встать тяжело. Но одно дело 14 часов в системе с четкими функциями и контролем (за тем, как ты работаешь, следят), а другое дело сейчас. В мастерской нет следящих. В те 10-12 часов, что я провожу там, я могу работать, отвлекаться, заходить в Интернет, свои дела решать параллельно – это совсем другой режим. Иногда он продуктивный, иногда – нет. Но выходит так, что я чаще всего «живу на работе». Хорошо, что живу недалеко. А на тебя как влияет такой график?

Рина: Мне кажется, больше на сознание, чем на тело. Я чувствую себя привилегированной, когда представляю, как люди на фабриках очень сильно перерабатывают по часам. При этом, как ты описывала, над ними кто-то стоит, подгоняет, им нельзя лишний раз отойти в туалет, выпить чаю, еще что-то. А я могу это делать, отвлекаться. И, мне ка-

жется, это помогает телу более-менее выдерживать ночевки на работе. Но при этом мое сознание как будто плавится от того, что оно рассеивается. Происходит постоянная внутренняя борьба. Я вот знаю, что должна дойти до определенного этапа в работе, и, если не буду отвлекаться, то сделаю это, например, к 3-м часам ночи. Но тело подает сигнал, я отвлекаюсь и в результате нахожусь без сна дольше, а запланированное заканчиваю к 6-ти утра. А вставать уже через несколько часов... Сознание сопротивляется этим схемам и как будто подталкивает к выбору чего-то одного. Мне кажется, этот выбор похож на модель продуктивности в капиталистическом мире. Я как будто могу работать, не отвлекаясь, по 10 часов, потом получать достаточное количество сна, снова работать 10 часов, потом, например, 8 часов. «Не отвлекаясь», «продуктивно», «не совершая ошибок». С одной стороны, за них меня никто не штрафует и не ругает, а с другой – я чувствую за них ответственность. Во мне еще есть это внутреннее давление капиталистического или неолиберального мира, в котором я самой себе должна быть продуктивной. А если я растягиваю работу до 5 утра, значит, я сама виновата, я не продуктивна, со мной что-то не так и я должна быстро это исправить. Это очень деморализует. Это похоже на состояние измененного сознания: вот я засекаю, сколько работаю, причем я стараюсь не учитывать перерывы, а когда время подходит к 12+ часам, я чувствую, что уже не понимаю, что происходит вокруг, и это пугает. Я как будто теряю ощущение границы: сколько еще стоит работать, а когда уже пора пойти спать, поесть или выпить воды.

Маша: Я со многим согласна, ощущаю похожее. А что касается концепта внутреннего давления из капиталистического мира, мы ведь продолжаем в нем жить, и у нас были опыты долгого пребывания и работы по таким схемам, мы знаем все эти требования: качество, скорость, результат... Сейчас я готова спорить, задавать вопросы, что значит «качественное», «быстро», но внутренне я всегда засекаю время и хочу сделать работу быстрее. Иногда получается, иногда всего 50% от запланированного, а иногда не получается вообще ничего. Этому есть причины и объяснения, но я все равно расстраиваюсь. Но это такое, считаю, момент работы над собой – хорошо, что это есть. Но постоянно жить с ощущением «я неудачница, я плохо работаю» ужасно. Хотя оно и сейчас часто есть (*смеется*). Меня очень подбадривает, когда люди пишут, что им нравятся наши сумки, вещи, благодарят, – такие отзывы о нашей работе радуют. Я думаю: «О, класс, все не зря!». Или: «Окей, я работаю медленно, зато качественно». Вот не могу оставить кривую строчку. Порой это полный абсурд, далеко не все люди замечают мои классные прямые строчки, но я же о них знаю. Поэтому беру и переделываю. Если бы я работала на фабрике, то вряд ли бы была такой щепетильной к своей работе, на многое бы забивала, но все равно бы переживала потом, а может, и не переживала бы, но такой труд быстро стал бы отчуж-

денным и не приносящим радости. Я бы чувствовала себя винтиком и человеком-функцией, а тут я что-то большее, если так можно сказать. Ощущение измененного сознания мне тоже знакомо: когда ловишь себя на чувстве, что ты как киборг – я называю это состоянием киборга, а не измененным сознанием. Физически ты все остро ощущаешь (спину, глаза), но продолжаешь работать, шить этот десяток сумок. Иногда я перестаю чувствовать ход времени, особенно если это работа по ночам, и когда в какой-то момент наступает 4-5 утра – очень удивляюсь. Часто, после того как уже все дошито, я подолгу не могу переключиться на что-то другое, как будто забываю обо всех других занятиях, поэтому снова ищу себе работу, начинаю фотографировать сумки, например, как будто не могу закончить над этим работать, заставить себя остановиться. Словно я машина по производству этих сумок. Но бывают состояния, когда тело уже отключается физически. Недавно я прятала ниточки... вот тоже, кто сейчас прячет ниточки? На производствах – никто, только в элитных ателье прячут (*смех*) и мы, потому что очень уж муторное занятие. А в 5-6 утра еще и усыпляющее, кажется, прямо за этим и заснешь сейчас, тупишь, замираешь с иглой в руках на пару минут, уговариваешь себя спрятать ниточки еще в 2-3 сумках.

Рина: Что тебе приносит радость в швейном труде?

Маша: Радость я испытываю, когда есть довольные нашей работой заказчи_цы. Когда они примеряют обновку и любуются собой в зеркале. Или когда я смотрю на пошитые сумки, и они мне кажутся классными – тоже радостно. На самом деле, много моментов радостных. Вот, например, когда для индивидуалки нужно строить выкройки по точкам: из точки А в точку В, потом в точку С... Если из этих точек, набора размеров, что-то вырисовывается – каждый раз удивляешься, что все получилось. Радует, когда удаются сложные моделирования и построения. Раньше это давалось сложнее, чем сейчас. Я нечасто вспоминаю, как все было в первые разы: расстраиваешься, от того что не понимаешь, не можешь найти ошибку, а потом понимаешь, находишь, исправляешь... а теперь уже с первого раза строишь и моделируешь, и даже на первой примерке все не так страшно. Все это радостные моменты, как задачи, которые ты решаешь, – маленькие, большие. Вообще, я поняла, что люблю сложные задания, хотя и трачу на них больше времени. Мне хотелось бы, чтобы для переделок и исправлений времени было достаточно, чтобы быть довольной своей работой. Я расстраиваюсь, если это не удастся. Вот я, например, вижу место, которое надо переделать, а заказчи_ца хочет забрать изделие, даже если чуть-чуть недовольна. Я очень расстраиваюсь, если не могу довести вещь до совершенства, своего совершенства. Но не буду же я отбирать у людей их же вещи. А у тебя как – в радости, печали?

Рина: Похожий момент с тем, когда начинаешь понимать что-то из технических нюансов. Иногда это бывает в форме инсайтов. Еще меня

радует, когда у нас заказывают изделия из использованных или хотя бы имеющихся материалов. Потому что меня очень пугают мысли о новых тканях, токсичных красителях, людях на производстве тканей. Пугает, что объемы произведенного сильно превышают объемы необходимого и даже желаемого. Поэтому, если меня спрашивают, можно ли что-нибудь пошить из занавесок, я такая: «Вау, отлично!». Еще я радуюсь, когда чувствую, что нас воспринимают не как безликих работниц с навыками проложить строчку, а как людей. В том числе с политической позицией. Разных людей, но собранных на определенной платформе. И когда к нам обращаются (на страницу, например) как к *людям* – вежливо и по сути, а не как будто у нас стоит автоответчик и не нужно заморачиваться над приветствием или доступным объяснением. Еще я радуюсь, когда люди приходят на воркшопы и возникает групповая динамика, которая, по-моему, частично зависит от поставленных нами по групповой динамике задач, очерченных нами правил и нашей коммуникации между собой. Мне кажется, это влияет на микроклимат воркшопов, особенно тех, которые проходят у нас в мастерской. В такие моменты я думаю, что это не просто рабочее место. Это площадка для высказываний, социализации, обмена идеями, эко-френдли лайфхаками и так далее. Это ценно.

Маша: Какое время кажется тебе оптимальным для работы?

Рина: Зависит от состояния. Если с телом и сознанием все более-менее в порядке, думаю, я могла бы работать 5 дней в неделю по 8 часов. Круто, конечно, было бы работать еще меньше, но варианты на уменьшение мне кажутся совсем уж утопическими. Только я бы оговорила: хорошо, чтобы в эти 8 часов входила не только непосредственно швейная работа, но и уборка, интернетная деятельность, бухгалтерия. Такая стабильность была бы окей для меня. А если есть проблемы с телом и/или сознанием, тогда мне хотелось бы, чтобы дедлайны не приводили к ухудшению самочувствия. То есть чтобы существовала пластичность. Если же она с дедлайном для заказчи_ц не возможна, то хотя бы определенность. Чтобы мне сразу говорили, мол, через месяц мы хотим вот это. И если я заказчи_ц прошу для их же заказа прислать рисунок, то чтобы мне присылали его не за неделю до дедлайна, а сразу, когда делают заказ. В таком случае я бы могла, отталкиваясь от своего самочувствия, распределять на месяц, когда я могу дать телу отдых и сон, а когда – проработать 10-12 часов, оставаясь собой, в себе и на рабочем месте. А для тебя?

Маша: Я хотела бы работать 4 дня в неделю по 9 часов, чтобы в итоге получалось 36 часов, даже не 40. Это что касается швейной работы. При этом я могла бы что-то делать дополнительно: например, воркшопы и коворкинги. Мне не хватает выходного дня для себя, для других своих проектов. В целом я люблю работать и могу шить по 9-10 часов подряд, но не когда приходится заниматься этим каждый день, 7 дней в неделю,

если есть дедлайны, или 6 дней с одним выходным в обычном режиме. Когда я думаю о швейной работе – это одно, но работа в кооперативе – это другое, очень много чего еще туда входит. Но если бы я работала на фабрике, то я бы не работала сверхурочно, хотя... ха, конечно, работала бы, чтобы больше заработать. Мне сложно представить себя на фабрике, скорее всего, меня бы уволили за медлительность. Одна участница воркшопа во Львове рассказывала, что когда пошла работать на фабрику, то за месяц забыла все, чему ее учили в швейном училище, потому что сидеть и делать одну операцию – ужасно отупляет! Мама подруги работала на конвейере и рассказывала, что месяц приходила с работы и рыдала от усталости и общего самочувствия. Люди, которые обращаются к нам, понимают, что мы живые люди, швеи со своими идеями, такой вот проект. Мы публикуем тексты, где описаны проблемы швейной индустрии с точки зрения трудовых прав работни_ц, с точки зрения нагрузок на экосистему, предлагаем некоторые решения в виде вторичного использования материалов, ремонта, топим за честную цену за труд швеи. Но эти же самые люди могут продолжать покупать вещи в масс-маркетах¹, тем самым поддерживая фабрики и производство в так называемых странах третьего мира. Они могут знать о фабриках тут, в Украине, где швеи получают плату, несоразмерную затраченным усилиям. Непонятно, что делать со знанием всего этого, как применять? Как люди поступают? Соглашаться с тем, что мир не совершенен? Я сама не знаю, что с этим делать, кроме активистских вылазок-выходок, но на них тоже нужны силы. Я рада возможности об этом говорить, с другой стороны, говоришь-говоришь, а разве что-нибудь меняется? Хотя вот после перформанса «12-часовой рабочий день» я на себе ощутила невозможность и дальше покупать одежду в масс-маркете, а вот обувь могу. Хотя не думаю, что на обувных фабриках дела обстоят лучше. Я не могу пошить себе обувь, но могу покупать ее в секундах, хотя там она с тех же фабрик (*глубокий печальный вздох*).

Рина: Иногда эти размышления заводят меня в тупик, потому что если уж разбираться, то давайте разберемся во всем. Окей, одежду, например, брать из секунд. Я не раз была на той же Лесной, например. Какие там условия работы? Отвратительные. Люди прячут пирожки, то есть свою еду, от работодателей между обувью и пытаются урвать какие-нибудь 10 минут, чтобы поесть. Едкий химический запах, который переходит во вкус. А ведь они проводят там много часов, я думаю. При этом еще и постоянный шум. Да и обращение работодателей или «менеджеров» с непосредственно продающими много раз казалось мне ужасным. Вот условия труда в магазинах такого типа. И я выбираю их,

¹ В индустрии моды «масс-маркет» – это бренды одежды, использующие стратегию быстрой моды и подражание модным тенденциям. Также это изготовление одежды из материалов низкого качества на фабриках с очень низкой оплатой труда.

чтобы не спонсировать фабрики, где тоже жуткие условия. Я попадаю в ловушку: если я не произвожу сама, значит, я обязательно спонсирую чью-либо эксплуатацию. Эта ловушка очень жесткая. И я чувствую, как люди (в том числе и в коммуникации с кооперативом) манипулируют этой безвыходностью. Но я считаю, что даже если не можешь изменить все, это не значит, что не можешь изменить ничего. Ценными кажутся и маленькие шаги. Например, заменить полиэтиленовые пакеты мешочками из тюля, произведенного энное количество лет назад. То есть он лежал невостребованным, а сейчас в него можно сложить овощи-фрукты. Я считаю, что это маленькое, но изменение. И чем больше людей будет следовать этой стратегии, тем большим будет масштаб перемен. Мне хочется, чтобы люди рассматривали эту логику как потенциальный инструментарий, хотя бы частично.

Маша: Слушая тебя, я вспомнила, что, когда мы впервые стали шить тюлевые мешочки, над нами подсмеивались: «бабушка-стайл», «камбек СССР». А сейчас – где только не пиарят эти тканевые мешочки. Это так смешно и грустно: наблюдать, во что это превращается. Мы их поначалу стеснялись продавать. Что там продавать? Давайте обучать, ведь их так просто шить. Потом согласились, ведь не у всех есть на это время и силы. А сейчас капитализм захватывает и это, эко-мешочки, но из новых материалов и пошитые в местах с низкой оплатой труда (*грустный смех*). Впрочем, я тоже придерживаюсь принципа малых дел. К сожалению, я не волшебница, чтобы изменить мир и все в нем переустроить. Но возможны изменения в каких-то конкретных точках, и то, в какой момент ты там оказываешься и начинаешь менять что-то, снова и снова. Я стараюсь не обесценивать то, что я делаю. Правда, когда я пытаюсь подумать о картине современного мира в целом, то слышу скепсис по поводу запары об экологии.

И вот еще о скепсисе, обвинениях, навязывании, как должно быть все по правилам, по закону. В России кооператив не был официальным, мы не платили налоги и имели классную отмазку, что не хотим спонсировать государственную политику. Сейчас, в Украине, я не могу сказать, что согласна с политикой государства, но блин, мы платим налоги. И что, нам от этого легче? Да мы могли бы покупать на эти деньги оборудование и быть более уверенными, что у нас будут деньги на аренду мастерской, больше получать за работу. Просто играем в игру, что все законно. Но я отвлеклась от темы. Может, успеем еще поговорить о швейных мечтах и желаниях. Есть у тебя такие?

Рина: Мне определенно хочется доделать вещи, которые я начала на школе швейного кооператива, когда еще не была его участницей. Мне нравятся штаны, и все, что с ними нужно сделать, это ушить. Но у меня не хватает времени и сил. Еще я хочу сделать обтачку на жилетке с вышивкой Free Political Prisoners и носить ее. Часто мне хочется шить подарки людям, в первую очередь, практичные. Иногда я фантазирую

на тему одежды, которую мне хочется пошить для себя из имеющихся тканей. Есть задумка «агендерного» облачения, я бы назвала это «самурайским платьем», но не могу внятно объяснить почему.

Маша: У меня тоже есть свои швейные мечты и желания, даже планы. Забавно, но в моменты, когда я сержусь, что много работаю, медленно работаю, я начинаю прокрастинировать таким образом: все бросаю и начинаю что-то делать для себя. Беру с полки «ремонт для себя» (так как для себя, то вещи ждут ремонта годами), доделаю, а потом такая радостная, что сделала. У меня много таких задач: поменять резинку в юбке, фастексы на комбинезоне, отремонтировать растянувшееся на спине платье (пока не знаю как, надо придумать) ... Из актуального – аппликация на пиджак, вот та, с кружевом. Задумала еще год назад, если не два. Вроде и просто, но руки не доходят. В один вечер начала, на воркшопе продолжила, нужно найти вечерок закончить. Хочу себе пошить несколько трусов – это жизненная необходимость. И для Тони пошить трусов. А еще хочу Тоне пошить пиджак из ткани на стеллаже (такой, восточной), куртку по модели косухи из коззама, которая у нее была (ткань для этого есть), красные штаны. У нее такие были, и ей очень идет, но нет ткани. А для себя – пальто. Люся мне отдала 3 года назад, и у меня есть идея, как его переделать: вышивка, подкладка – много работы. Доделать платки, которые я в Азербайджане вышивала. Хотя вышивать можно годами. Еще хочу себе другую вышивагинку, рубаху с рукавом-регланом и воротником-стойкой из черного льна с вышивкой фиолетовыми нитками по схемам, которые Тоня разработала. Костюму улитки я очень рада – спасибо Вале за выставку, что предложила участвовать – он уже получился, но я знаю, как его улучшить. Мне в нем очень комфортно. Я шутила, что через несколько лет моей одеждой будут костюмы котика, улитки, собачки, гусеницы... – Маша стремится не быть человеком. Эти костюмы агендерные и не антропоцентричные. В комбинезонах круто, что скрывается тело (мое тело для меня, а не для внешнего взгляда!), но как сделать так, чтобы не раздеваться полностью, когда ходишь в туалет, – прямо конструкторская задача, интересно решить. Попробую в костюме улитки сделать задний замочек. Еще пару лет уже хочу домой покрывало, из таких джинсовых лоскутков, чего у нас целый мешок, чтобы коты не срывали. В общем, надолго мне хватит этих швейных мечт (*смех*).

Публикация подготовлена в рамках проекта «Гетерообременность: феминизм, зины, солидарность: отпор дискриминации на бумаге и в реальности» при поддержке малых грантов от Центра «Жіночі перспективи».

Гуманітарне насильство, або Критика американського імперіалізму

Atanasoski, Neda. *Humanitarian Violence: The US Deployment of Diversity*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

Резонуючи з популярними сьогодні студіями «Американської імперії», книга Неди Етенесоскі «Гуманітарне насильство» є передусім критикою сучасного американського імперіалізму. Зокрема Етенесоскі стверджує, що американський імперіалізм експлуатує гуманітарну етику задля досягнення глобальної експансії. Відтак під виглядом боротьби за демократичні цінності та права і свободи Сполучені Штати розгортають політику світового панування.

Побудована хронологічно, книга розглядає найбільші американські воєнні кампанії після Другої світової війни. На прикладах В'єтнамської, Афганської та Балканських воєн 1990-х років Етенесоскі стверджує, що американські інтервенції «вибільювалися» через зображення інших регіонів як місць крайнього насильства, варварства та відсталості, які Америка покликана гуманізувати. Авторка вдало поєднує різноманітні приклади з літератури, фотожурналістики та кінематографу, аби показати формування ідеалізованого образу США як універсального носія демократії, свободи та ліберальних цінностей.

У книжці «Гуманітарне насильство» показано, що американська імперська риторика гуманітаризму, яку авторка називає «постсоціалістичним імперіалізмом», є черговою реінкарнацією старого колоніального словника прогресу і просвітництва «відсталих» регіонів. Так само, як в XIX і на початку XX століття західний імперіалізм декларував «благогородну» мету цивілізувати «недорозвинуті» регіони, США після Холодної війни пояснювали свою агресивну зовнішню політику бажанням зупинити насильство і порушення прав людини у світі. На думку Етенесоскі, «гуманітарне насильство» як новітня форма західного імперіалізму виникло у відповідь на нові геополітичні реалії, що постали після завершення Холодної війни. У цей час «комуністичне зло» перестало бути основним ворогом американської демократії. США почали шукали

нові расовані «місця п'їтьми», щоб принести туди світоч ліберальної демократії і капіталізму.

Одним із таких «місць п'їтьми» став В'єтнам. Як стверджує Етеноскі, В'єтнамська війна сприяла майбутньому утвердженню нового гуманітарного імперіалізму. Попри воєнну невдачу США, символічну перемогу у В'єтнамі здобули американські нові медіа. Ця перемога полягала у приголомшливій відкритості американських медій до зображення звірств армії США. Для прикладу, Етеноскі показує, що документування насильства відомим американським фотографом Еді Адамсом та іншими кореспондентами стали інструментами «реанімації демократії». Авторка наголошує, що надалі Америка не боялася використовувати спрямовану на неї критику в'єтнамської політики, щоб довести силу і унікальність американського імперського проекту. Адже тільки справді демократична країна була здатна зіткнутися із власним періодом «п'їтьми» у В'єтнамі та публічно викрити державні злочини.

Втім, для Етеноскі критика американського імперіалізму є також «співучасницею» імперського проекту, яка підживлює його. Авторка, зокрема, підкреслює, що демонстрація співчуття та співпереживання йшли пліч-о-пліч з об'єктивацією і расуванням місцевого населення. Справді, місцеві громади були лише тлом для демонстрації американської публічної спокути за злочинне насильство у В'єтнамі. До того ж, безпосередня критика американської політики у В'єтнамі відтворювала старі колоніальні тропи. На прикладі документальної стрічки «Серця п'їтьми» Елеанор Кополі про зйомки «Апокаліпсису сьогодні» Етеноскі демонструє, як стрічка, що критикує американський колоніалізм, є водночас його продуктом. Відомо, що Френсіс Копола знімав «Апокаліпсис сьогодні» не у В'єтнамі, а на Філіппінах, у колишній американській колонії. Відтак у фільмі увесь регіон Південно-Східної Азії перетворювався на узагальнений позаісторичний простір насильства. Окрім того, зйомки були черговим прикладом колоніальної експлуатаційної економіки. Попри шалений бюджет фільму, задіяне у зйомках місцеве населення отримувало мінімальну оплату. Відтак, Етеноскі показує парадоксальність культурної критики американського імперіалізму: здатність викривати хиби імперського проекту не підважує імперіалізм, а навпаки, реанімує його і допомагає формувати його етичне обличчя. Інакше кажучи, антиімперська критика творить образ США як здатної до саморефлексії моральної імперії.

Після В'єтнамської війни новим етапом застосування гуманітарної риторики для утвердження американського глобального домінування стала війна в Афганістані. Американські медіа позиціонували воєнну кампанію в Афганістані як вимушений захід з метою захисту релігійних свобод місцевого населення, якому загрожував безбожний радянський імперіалізм. Підтримувані США моджахеди змальовувалися борцями за свободу проти репресивного радянського режиму. Однак, із завер-

шенням Холодної війни зникла необхідність демонізувати Радянський Союз; натомість після теракту 11 вересня виникла потреба переозначити афганську війну. На прикладі вже канонічного фото Стіва МакКаррі «Афганська дівчина» (1985), Етенесоскі показує, що під час радянсько-афганської війни фото мало викликати співчуття до афганських біженців, але в умовах американської інтервенції в Афганістан 2000-х років воно перетворилося на символ боротьби за права жінок. Відтак, антирадянська риторика змінилася критикою афганських моджахедів, які тепер стали втіленням «тоталітарного і деспотичного зла». В обох випадках гуманітарна риторика, як наголошує авторка, була ключовою в обґрунтуванні американської інтервенції.

Воєнні кампанії у В'єтнамі та Афганістані заклали основи імперської американської гуманітарної етики, але повністю вона проявилася під час Балканських воєн 1990-х. Етенесоскі звертає увагу, що після Холодної війни Балкани стали метафорою позаісторичного простору насильства, де відбуваються расові, етнічні й цивілізаційні протистояння «просвітленого» Заходу з «доісторичним диким Сходом». Апелюючи до блокбастера «Ван Гельсінг», авторка наголошує, що демонізація Балкан як місця домодерного вампірського насильства дозволила військам НАТО здійснити воєнну інтервенцію з порушенням міжнародного права. Проте на офіційному рівні ці нелегальні дії НАТО було подано як морально виправдані, а тому легітимні. Балканські війни стали прецедентом, що закріпив за Сполученими Штатами право приймати рішення всупереч міжнародному законодавству. Для Етенесоскі воєнне втручання НАТО стало ключовим свідченням постсоціалістичного імперського домінування Америки, яка отримала безапеляційне право судити і карати, порушуючи наявні правові норми.

Врешті, у книжці «Гуманітарне насильство» йдеться про те, що повоєнний Міжнародний трибунал щодо колишньої Югославії став ще одним кроком до утвердження нового ліберального порядку. Дослідження демонструє, що діяльність трибуналу перетворила Балкани на місце, де «Захід» вправлявся у створенні нових стандартів «постсоціалістичної моралі та гуманності». На прикладі феміністичної боротьби за визнання зґвалтування знаряддям війни та геноциду авторка показує, як феміністичний правовий активізм проклав дорогу до встановлення глобальної версії американської моральної етики. Етенесоскі критикує західних феміністок за вкрай вузьке бачення встановлення справедливості на Балканах: «Створюючи єдиний наратив про спільну людяність, що заснована на секулярних, мультикультурних і феміністичних цінностях, трибунал змушує населення маркованих насильством регіонів [Балкан], задекларувати свою віру в принципи і процедури трибуналу, якщо вони хочуть знову отримати визнання світової спільноти як *правдивого людського регіону*» (курсив мій – О.Д.). Таким чином, хоч трибунал став важливим прецедентом завдяки виокремленню сексуального

і гендерно-зумовленого насильства як злочинів проти людяності, авторка критикує його за узаконення західної моральної етики як єдино прийнятної для врегулювання конфлікту та повоєнної нормалізації на Балканах.

Попри гостру критику американського імперіалізму, праця «Гуманітарне насильство» не стверджує, ніби США є імперією зла. Книга є радше активним закликом до переосмислення американської зовнішньої політики, що ніяк не позбудеться старих західних імперських тропів. Етенесоскі наголошує на важливості формулювання нової гуманітарної етики, яка не об'єктивуватиме і не дегуманізуватиме регіони поза Заходом.

Книжка «Гуманітарне насильство» стимулюватиме не тільки тих читачів і читачок, які прагнуть долучитися до концептуалізації «альтернативних формулювань для справедливості». З огляду на розмаїття представлених сюжетів і багатоманітність методологічних підходів, книга буде цікавою також тим, хто хоче більше дізнатися, як витворюються культурні змісти на перетині політики, насильства, культури і медій. Також дослідження Етенесоскі є чудовою нагодою критично переосмислити роль сучасної гуманітарної політики й обміркувати, як ми можемо демонструвати емпатію і турботу, не вдаючись до об'єктивації відмінних людей і культур.

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СХІДНОЄВРОПЕЙСЬКИЙ ЖУРНАЛ ФЕМІНІСТИЧНИХ ТА КВІР-СТУДІЙ

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