

# Theoretical- Critical Horizons Shifting Baselines

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— VIRUS

COVID-19

COLONIALISM

CONFINEMENT

(SELF)ISOLATION

DISCRIMINATION

VIOLENCE

MELANCHOLY

CONSPIRACY

SECRET

VIOLENT HISTORIES

BORDERS

REFUGEES

KNOWLEDGE

CLASS

RACE

GENDER

DECOLONIALITY

SPACES OF AGENCY

RESISTANCE

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PLUNDERING

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FRAGMENTATION

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## — INTRODUCTION

MARINA GRŽINIĆ AND JOVITA PRISTOVŠEK

What you have in front of you are the horizons of the theory and critical discourses of the project called *Shifting Baselines*, which started in 2018 and had until now several stations of presentation. The invited positions are coming from different backgrounds and experiences – opening multidimensional perspectives.

I .

### **How to capture briefly the history of the *Shifting Baselines* project, within which we have proposed this publication?**

The project's first research event was organised on 18 October 2018 at Narodni dom Maribor, Slovenia, as part of the Maribor Theatre Festival and was initially co-produced by Goethe-Institut Ljubljana, Association Nagib, and ArgeKultur Salzburg. The project started “with the act of common questioning: *What are the ‘shifting baselines’ to which we are now subjected? Which effects will become apparent in the future? How can we recognize, visualize and respond adequately today?*” (Maribor Theatre Festival 2018) A group of curators – Petra Hazabent, Mona Schwitzer (Mona Maria Mikula), Sebastian Linz and Philipp Krüger (Phil le Krueger) – hosted the first of a series of conceptual research meetings, aimed at opening the space for reflection on the phenomenon of “shifting baselines,” through local positions interacting with international guests and audiences, as well as through diverse artistic practices, such as sound installation, visual and design participatory exhibition, performance lecture, etc. (see Maribor Theatre Festival 2018).

Its second research event was also organised as part of the Maribor Theatre Festival, when artists and scientists from Germany, Austria, and Slovenia came together to work at the Maribor Puppet Theatre from 16 to 19 October 2019. A four-day artistic-scientific research lab, gathering artistic and theoretical positions was conducted, accompanied by two public events, at the Minorite Church and Puppet Theatre Maribor, in which the audience was taken on an experimental journey through theoretical, visual, and performative interventions in a concrete physical space, opening up multidimensional perspectives on the addressed phenomena (see Maribor Theatre Festival 2019; Švab 2020).

In March 2020, in the midst of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, Petra Hazabent, freelance curator, producer, manager, cultural policy researcher, and head of the Maribor-based Association Nagib, invited us to edit this electronic publication as part of the *Shifting Baselines* project, and we decided to approach and see this publication as a possibility to form a “theoretical” space as a mode of intervention into the project’s initially proposed thematic.

The *Shifting Baselines* project, as the group of curators state, derives its name from

natural science (marine and fisheries research), which was particularly well received and researched by the sociological discourse and then transferred to social science contexts and culture. The *Shifting Baselines* project aims to observe and reflect upon transformational processes, describing them as relationships between perceptions, values and patterns of action on the one hand and as a changing environment on the other. Social psychologist Harald Welzer explains this relationship as that of two sliding reference points, as, for example, two trains travelling on parallel tracks at the same speed, which therefore seem to stand still relatively to one another. The processes of change transforming social framework conditions are often not recognised by the people or societies affected by them, because at the same time – and just as unknowingly – the perceptions, values and patterns of action of these people or societies change as well. Consequently, even historically relevant events or changes are often not recognised or dealt with at the moment of their occurrence. (Maribor Theatre Festival 2019)

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The publication is conceived as part of the *Shifting Baselines* project, a long-term international project connecting three countries, Slovenia, Germany, and Austria, and co-produced and supported by Goethe-Institut, Association Nagib, and Austrian Cultural Forum (see *Shifting Baselines*, n.d.).

In order to respond to the project’s initial questions “*What are the ‘shifting baselines’ to which we are now subjected? Which effects will become apparent in the future? How can we recognize, visualize and respond adequately today?*” (Maribor Theatre Festival 2018), we decided to structure this publication by mixing the contributions from two different lines. One line is formed by invited positions from Macedonia, Slovenia, Slovenia/Spain, and one from Venezuela/Spain, the other is formed by three excerpts of interviews that were conducted in Serbia and Kosovo as part of the FWF PEEK (AR 439) arts and science research project titled *Genealogy of Amnesia: Rethinking the Past for a New Future of Conviviality*, hosted by the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna (2018–2020).<sup>1</sup>

While the publication does not address directly the territories of Austria and Germany, the ex-Yugoslav territory nevertheless shares with them the violent history of both World Wars and the present moment of the European Union integrating the states of the Western Balkan along with its managing of the Balkan Route. Likewise, the ex-Yugoslav territory and Latin America share common conceptual legacies of the Bandung Conference (1955) and the Non-Aligned Movement (1961), which was formed at the peak of the Cold War and coincided with the process of decolonisation, which was committed to self-determination of ex-colonies as well as to fight against imperialism, racism, apartheid, and

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<sup>1</sup> The *Genealogy of Amnesia* connects three sites of the European traumatic past: Belgian colonialism in Congo, Austrian antisemitism, and turbo-nationalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina/Croatia/Serbia and “Republika Srpska.” The full online video archive “Countering the Genealogy of Amnesia,” produced within this project and consisting of seventy hours of eighty-two interviews/positions/recordings, is available on the project’s website (see Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, n.d.).

militarisation, to name only a few. As Mbembe (2017, 1) stated, we live in a time when “history and all things flow toward us” and “Europe is no longer the center of gravity of the world,” implying not only Europe’s provincialisation (as we see it happening in the geopolitical sense today), but also the demotion, degradation of its thought.

The racialization processes have indeed become omnipresent with the COVID-19 pandemic. What were the headlines following the moment when China declared the novel coronavirus outbreak? “Chinese people in UK targeted with abuse over coronavirus” (Murphy 2020), “The pathogen of prejudice: The coronavirus spreads racism against—and among—ethnic Chinese” (*The Economist* 2020), “What’s spreading faster than coronavirus in the US? Racist assaults and ignorant attacks against Asians” (Yan, Chen and Naresh 2020), “The coronavirus exposes the history of racism and ‘cleanliness’” (Burton 2020), “Virus of racism” (Kišjuhas 2020), and last but not least, the “Virus of the European Soul” (*AR revija* 2020).

This is what is central to Marina Gržinić’s text published in this publication, which finds connections between the virus and colonialism, leprosy confinement, isolation, and contemporary neoliberal capitalist life, where bio bodies (privileged in the sense that they can still live) and necro bodies (already seen as outdated, superfluous) live one near the other. The virus incites the spread of violent racial differentiations, enabling the pandemic to (re)arrange territories, states, communities, and keep trapped an uncountable number of lives in inhuman conditions, historically racialized bodies, refugees, minorities, but also, although in a different ways, “graduated citizens”(Ong 2006) as well as those who are part of the “clean line” in the history of the national body. It seizes histories and counter-histories (Gržinić 2017), vocabularies, and the sensory apparatus of the body (Pugliese 2015).

In “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America,” Anibal Quijano argued that the new global power (with genocides, exploitation, and enslavement at its core) had to be simultaneously legitimised through the construction of Europe as a new entity/identity, i.e. articulating a Eurocentric epistemology and aesthetics, the central elements of which are dualism (mind vs. body; body vs. flesh, etc.) and evolutionism that mythologises the birth of “human” history as a straight time, as a continuous, linear progression from the “state of nature” to its culmination in the European “civilization” (Quijano 2020, 534–542). Today’s collision of the past, present, and future into a specific time-complex (Avanessian and Malik 2016) is putting at stake the very possibility of transgressing the current dystopian reality and imagery (Mbembe 2018). Time – as a mode of financial capitalism and necrocapitalism – is not on our side. The world where death “had become a fallacious rite of passage in modernity’s instrumentalisation of humanity,” a world of necropolitical production of death-scapes and carceral spaces, as Marina Gržinić states in her “Refugees, Europe, Death, and COVID-19,” is the result of a life centred on itself and incapable of relating to others.

We can see that clearly throughout Europe, and parallel to these processes, rather than tackling “colonial aphasia” (Stoler 2011), we are witnessing dehistoricisation; ideological discourse, as exposed by Dragomir Olujić Oluja in an interview, is built in a way so as to overcome traumatic pasts (and avoid responsibility for genocidal politics) by returning to prehistoric narratives. The task of the left, he suggests, is thus to exit this prehistory through an analysis that connects history with the present – to not lose the historical account of the current radical changes, which need to be re-thought for a different future to be built.

Where do we position ourselves with regards to that? Not so long ago, we witnessed an increasing presence of

the Fallist movements, such as Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall, but there were and have been for quite some time also indigenous, Black, decolonial feminist, migrant, queer, trans\*, sex workers' initiatives, night schools, and student movements for the decolonisation of universities, whose aim is to confront the coloniality of Eurocentric knowledge and Eurocentric academia. In "Toward a Non-Eurocentric 'Academia,'" Tjaša Kancler focuses on two universities that emerged as platforms for migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, as self-organised spaces for the production and exchange of counter-knowledge, which is challenging the idea of silence as a passive state as well as confronting the ignorance of the West.

"How can we recognize, visualize and respond adequately today?" (Maribor Theatre Festival 2018) Without a diagnosis, as with any other illness, according to Aleksandar Kraus in an interview, there is no therapy. Genocides and plunder will continue. If the situation is not addressed, everything will be taken away from us. Anyely Marín Cisneros in her "Thirty Tonnes of Landscape. The Fake, the Authentic, and the Digitisation of the Colonial Journey" states that seeing, "as an act of discovering how what we see has been produced, is an exercise in affective disobedience. Seeing is moving what the image hides." Therefore, if the left-wing politics in Europe is to articulate politics in a proper sense, as Shkëlzen Maliqi argues in an interview, it must stop flirting with nationalism and with national issues, just as it has to address the "uncomfortable histories," as Jovita Pristovšek argues in her eponymous text, recalibrated along the contemporary landscape.

Evolving in front of our eyes – posing tasks for us to see and reflect on – is a long list of discrimination: violence, fuelled by cultural, ethnic, religious, racist, anti-Muslim, anti-Roma and antisemitic hate, total fragmentation of communal and social space, blatant dispensability of life, natural as well as cultural environments turned into "death-worlds." When everything is present, as Stanimir Panayotov points out in his "Vanishing Secret," when everything is out-there, under the weight of its omnipresence, the most archaic forms of communication return.

Bringing together carefully selected texts and positions with the aim to theoretically and critically intervene into the *Shifting Baselines* project, *Theoretical-Critical Horizons* provides insights and analyses aimed at rethinking the current multiple perspectives, from the coronavirus pandemic, notions of death, to coloniality of power and borderisation, the purpose of which is to shift the outcomes for (different forms of) life, art's complicity in coloniality, radicalisation of sovereignty, etc. and shake up our privileges and unprivileged positions in order to make a change and give different horizons to our lives.

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# Vanishing Secret

**“We do not lack communication. On the contrary, we have too much of it.”**

– GILLES DELEUZE AND FÉLIX GUATTARI (1994, 108)

**“Modern communications states through their scale, homogeneity and excesses provide their populace with an unprecedented deluge of witnessed, but seemingly unanswerable injustices.”**

– JULIAN ASSANGE (2006A, 1N1)

Why is everything out there? Or, rather, if the very form of the question permits this theoretical machination, why has everything appeared? Why has everything, at least apparitionally, been made available? One does not need to be conservative or anti-egalitarian to ponder on the grandiose availability of everything there is on-the-line today. The air is decidedly brimming with the superfluous all-time high info-flow of everything that agitates us, as if this affect, this experience of living any knowledge has always already been the condition of truth.

It certainly has not been. But there is a dexterous shift I am trying to capture here with an opening question like this. Sharing knowledge is not the same as telling knowledge, much less so truth. The proliferation of sharing, marketed as a societal value of caring – even love – and the infrastructure behind it (to the displeasure of some posthumanists, it is not immaterial – yet), never raises this question alone; instead, it is the problem of availability that is being posed with a torpedoing immediacy. Does anyone recall why the rush? Do you understand now, much better than in the yore of telefax and VHS, why are you present *so much*? In short, really: Why has everything appeared? Or, rather, why has everything appeared *so much*, so that it governs us *this way*, to the extent that we no longer have the ability to ask questions?

At its core, the question is not all too different from its opposite: Baudrillard’s “Why has not everything already



disappeared?” In one of his essays, he seeks to prove that “[i]t is when a thing is beginning to disappear that the concept appears” (Baudrillard 2009, 12). Is this true of secrets too?

Problem-solving without a preceding question? There is some imminent tyranny in the quest and its unrelenting velocity. With the latter, problems appear to be an oddity of the past, an archeological whereabouts of illustrious reason, the value of which has its only exposure in the gestural circulation of the present. Strictly put, the shift under scrutiny here is one that concerns knowledge and truth *transfer* between any two or more possible agents of information (provided that in the theatre of sharing alone, an agent can redouble themselves and so singularity is a bygone condition of epistemological proliferation). Certainly, nothing substantial or epistemic is happening, but immersion and impression become the same fatal unit. This well lubricated grandiose availability of everything is certainly some kind of twisted sham, but has there been a shift in knowledge and truth telling that has been left unregistered? Has there been a basic truth about telling the truth in the age of sharing? Has sharing become telling? If, verily, we were told that everything is out there, that an indiscriminate and unaccounted for Buddhist plot of space-time has already occurred, we would first have to denounce the assumption of such an axiomatic positing. Thus, what is important is not whether everything has appeared, but the infrastructural retention of that illusion and the problem it produces by forgetting to raise the question that has generated it in the accelerated pursuit of resolutions that never concern anything below the radar of the present.

This shift has been more than noted. There is an enormous literature in the pursuit of untangling this love for eternal presence/present out there, but it often ends up tantamount to its object of inquiry. Rolling back on the speed of information torsions knowledge at its core, even when successful. From the early days of sectarian Christianity and the secret gospels of countless apostles, self-styled and unanointed, *the secret truth* was a noble deed of survival. Emperors and heresiologists have destroyed nearly all *textual* evidence from the schools of Valentinus and Carpocrates. Their truth of annunciation and communion was fully obliterated; their truth was made double secret. But a few chunks of secondary and tertiary doxographic evidence have survived, their sheer circulation proving them here – and it is appealing and sexy. The *sexy truth*: one that appeals to the present, even and especially if and when obliterated.

In the abundance of the very possibility to tell (allegedly) everything, the idea and the purported value of not telling and sharing knowledge seems to have withered away. The very factual and existential infrastructure that channels the possibility alone to circulate anything obscures the magnanimous opportunity of disappearance. To disclose knowledge is to manifest you hold a secret, and to lose it. To hold a secret is sectarian, but in a different, conspirational sense. Holding a secret is a furtive glance on knowledge, not a secretive authoritarianism of selfish veracity. Secrecy, however, generates an overwhelming aura of attraction. It is not truth and knowledge that become, then, sexy per se; it is their unverifiable secrecy and the architecture of hidden community that make of knowledge a sexy regime of producing language, truth, and identities.

The last thing I want to be heard saying is that there is value in secrecy. Secrecy is not a value, it is an encounter producing a community. Only an encounter of this kind has value; secrecy is but a technology germinating in such value. The rest is anti-democratic blabbing about society, confusing existence and its apology in surfing the fatalistic premise of the human condition: a notion of a shortage epistemology which suits conspiratologists who want all the sexiness of truth for themselves. A dumbfounded notion that postulates in secrecy that only the elites can and could construct the vectors of contagion.

Telling-as-sharing knowledge is now inherently tied to regimes of visibility. To not have a share in any such regime has been made tantamount to stupidity. Sometimes, even stupidly so, simple things are what they are: they are truly simple and thus mind-boggling. Going offline is literally going secretive, albeit with no intention. To be visible, you have to eradicate secrecy, at least for the sake of posterity. But as soon as you eradicate secrecy, the other side already assumes you have concocted some fancy plot or regime of disappearance. No: there are people who do not live in such regimes, and there are knowledges that do not require them *now*.

So, the big shift in having a secret is in going offline? Is disappearance a concealment? Not at all: at least not in the banal daily routines of people working with human language. Consider writers who are often seen as conspiratorial weirdos precisely because the nature of their work makes them appear, if not be, masters of privacy and, with that, of secrecy. But with institutions, this is true in a different sense: when we focus on disappearance or, better yet, unavailability of information, of knowledge alienated from its producer, then secrecy is immediately enmeshed in a regime of conspiracy. In the early writings of Assange, we can find his insurrectional paranoid theories on the problem. In its most basic form, he declares, conspiracies are needed because (state) regimes refuse to be changed. Authoritarian power is maintained by conspiracy. To reduce resistance, the regime needs to sever all links between conspirators (Assange 2006b, 2). At their core, “conspiracies are cognitive devices” (ibid., 3). In a version of that essay, Assange posits that “[w]e can see conspiracies as a type of device that has inputs (information about the environment), a computational network (the conspirators and their links to each other) and outputs (actions intending to change or maintain the environment)” (Assange 2006a, 3). The theory in itself is solid only because in its initial phase it assumes that there is a power asymmetry between the state and the conspirator. Once the first big WikiLeaks blows were put to practice, some of the theory was exposed as irrelevant as soon as the asymmetry was lost. If and when the info-partisan defeats the secrecy of the state regime, then a new regime of truth computation is established, one where we cannot sentimentalise the secret over its exposure.

Blowing a restrictive regime of truth – whose secrecy, we are told, is always in the name of our security – does not in itself create a community. Anonymity is often misread as communal, whereas it is simply the analogy of a blind date: the sex was so good that for a few good days you feel reborn. But give it a week and you are on the next hunt for the banal pleasure, recoded as passion. Something of the kind was offered by Umberto Eco’s rebuttal of WikiLeaks’ sensational 2010 wires: “The rule that says secret files must only contain news that is already common knowledge is essential to the dynamic of secret services.” (Ecco 2010) For Ecco, the only scandalous edge in the campaign was the very circulation of otherwise banal contents. Assange’s theory of conspiracies can be reduced and denuded at its core to exposing what the secretive segments of any regime hold dear, namely, their mental habits and methods rather than the info classified by this psychology. And while it is indisputable that “the very notion that any old hacker can delve into the most secret secrets of the most powerful country in the world has dealt a hefty blow to the State Department’s prestige” (ibid.), the key to the sexiness of WikiLeaks’ truth-telling is debunking the prestige of the institution – its technology of secrecy, its ban on and enclosures of circulation, not of the files, not their contents. Anyone who has ever read a secret wire gone public takes pleasure in confirming what was already suspected and was, for some time, a “public secret.” For the state – which is a meta-community, but still one – to preserve its strictures of knowledge (itself required as a methodology of survival – an open state is no state at all), it needs to hide the way it thinks about the most banal shred of data.

So what is there to preserve for this meta-community? And what is being reproduced in our own urge to avail

everything to everyone? One day you open your Facebook and discover that a friend of yours has gone missing ... A seemingly banal disappearance, but immediately you start computing the options: (a) s/he/they has/have unfriended me; (b) s/he/they has/have deleted their profile. Assange's theory is right on its most banal level: you compute the next step of the party, consent notwithstanding. But in the grand scale of things, being there, available, downloadable, searchable – that is an indisputable and overblown complexity of there-is-ness: as soon as I go offline (however impossible this is, as we have learned from the Cambridge Analytica case), I become famous for a fraction of your attention span. Give it two months and your entire network is puzzled; some would even send emails. Your epistemological sexiness is conspirational: you have become the embodiment of a sexy truth. The apparitional disappearance of your digital footprint can be likened to a suicidal heresy; the emails you will receive are likely to repeat the same message: you have become Valentinus against Irenaeus of Lyons, your social network is your Eleutherius – and you did not even write a single word.

This is why when everything is appearing, when it bears the weight of its own out-there-ness, the return to the most archaic forms of communication, as Ecco has it, is the most secure means of information: “in future, states won't be able to put any restricted information online anymore ... it is pointless to hope to have confidential dealings over the phone. ... Only a single copy thereof will be kept – in locked drawers.” (ibid.) *Secrecy is thus against reciprocity and any principle of circulation*. No agent (network, state, individual, citizen actant) is more attractive to any other agent than the one which refuses the perpetual peepshow of superficial sightseeing.

The grandiose availability, the Big Everything that is out there is there simply because it can be, not because of some grand conspiracy. The baseline assumption that circulation of information has value is ancient, it is a question of literacy and enlightenment. The shift within this assumption, however, reflects an ancient epistemological illusion of all nobility: that control of circulation is more valuable than the value of knowledge itself as well as its contents. The total presentment of everything everywhere destroys all conspiracy. There is some queer, non-volitional secrecy behind the openness. “If total conspiratorial power is zero, there is no conspiracy.” (Assange 2006b, 4) The “total conspirational power” disappears as soon as everyone is connected to everyone else. If the very epistemic architecture of knowledge production and sharing (this includes your minutiae and daily routines) holds the capacity to entropically enmesh everyone and everything in its totality, then the realisation of that totality abolishes conspirational power. Baudrillard called this totality “ventriloquacity” (Baudrillard 2009, 69).

If the power of ventriloquacious circulation relies on banality, it is because the latter acquires a sacred and ennobled importance, the circulation of which is at least equally meaningful to the other. There is a causation between banality and availability, but banality is the sacred cow of epistemological sex-appeal. The Wiki hacker's anonymity is a simple and banal condition of breaking the code of a given flow of circulation, but without it the identity of conspirational power cannot be rendered meaningful and legible. It requires itself as the projectile of exposing the real secret. The Anonymous label is no different than early apostolic evangelisation.

The secret without the knower has no value. The real object of value is the available possibility of keeping a secret. The secret of having a secret is the exact same notion of availability; but it is the latter's vanishing that has shifted the secret to a scandalous condition of human knowledge.

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— DRAGOMIR OLUJIĆ OLUJA

- INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT [EXCERPT]

19 MAY 2018, CENTRE FOR CULTURAL DECONTAMINATION (CZKD), BELGRADE, SERBIA

INTERVIEW BY MARINA GRŽINIĆ AND ŠEFIK TATLIĆ

## Genealogy of Amnesia

The full interview is available on the *Genealogy of Amnesia* project website at [https://archiveofamnesia.akbild.ac.at/?videos=dragomir-olujic-oluja&\\_sft\\_people=dragomir-olujic-oluja](https://archiveofamnesia.akbild.ac.at/?videos=dragomir-olujic-oluja&_sft_people=dragomir-olujic-oluja).

**DRAGOMIR OLUJIĆ OLUJA:** Things are represented as if they have nothing to do with what was happening in some periods. There is a paradox now at work in those terms. The 1980s are now represented as if they were a “merry age” in Yugoslavia. The rock’n’roll scene, the basketball successes of various teams, such as Bosna, Cibona, Partizan, are all represented as components of this “merry age” through various TV shows, theatre; everything is represented as if all was shiny back then, as if everybody was happy and satisfied, however, at that time Yugoslavia had the greatest number of strikes in the world. What was most important for our rebellion in 1968, in terms of its importance today, was surely that everything we fought against and everything we warned against has become a reality. So, there is capitalism, regardless of how you characterise it, there is unemployment, de-industrialisation, privatisation, misery, poverty ... What I am trying to say is that we are witnessing the effects of the politics that defeated us back then.

**ŠEFIK TATLIĆ: What ideology, what ideological discourse is at work today in the sense that it dislocated the class prefixed social conflict?**

**OLUJIĆ OLUJA:** On a theoretical level, it is knowledge, in the world of “science” and in other sectors of life dominated by the liberal discourse. In everyday life, nationalistic discourse is the most dominant. But neither have an influence on the level of everyday living experience, especially not on relations between people. These ideological discourses are dominant once you get out of the intimacy of the family environment and enter the public sphere.

For instance, in 1997/8 I met Lino Veljak and Miljenko Jergović by chance at the central square in Zagreb. We all had big beards, which made us look like “chetniks,” but no one was paying any attention.

I have a friend who used to live in Dobrinja, a suburb of Sarajevo, which became a “Serb” district after the demarcation lines were drawn, meaning that Dobrinja belonged to the Serb Republic [an entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina].

My friend's mother and father did not want to hear about going "down" to Sarajevo. Her brother, on the other hand, who was a kid then, regularly visited Sarajevo with his friends, but was reluctant to let anyone know he was doing so. After the final demarcation lines were drawn, parts of Dobrinja were returned to Sarajevo, which meant that administrative issues were also integrated into the system of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. After that, my friend's father's pension was increased from 120 Marks in the Serb Republic to 200 Marks in the Federation, with the promise of an even higher increase. Hence, the father started telling different stories. Karadžić, the Serb Republic and so on, became unimportant. The mother, on the other hand, who did not have any direct benefits, continued telling "Serb" stories, still refused to go to Sarajevo. After some time had passed, she finally had to go to Sarajevo to deal with some administrative issues and my friend's son offered to accompany her. After they had dealt with the issues, they sat on a park bench in Sarajevo, where they met a man, a Muslim from Sarajevo, with whom they engaged in a pleasant conversation. After their return home, a gradual change of heart became apparent in this older woman. Later, she also started going to Sarajevo on regular basis. She kept it a secret for a while, but after a while "declared" that this was completely normal, that there were no problems, that people were people, etc.

**MARINA GRŽINIĆ: How should we read these two anecdotes within the context of the constant antagonism at work in Serbia, in the "Serb Republic," within the context of this defamation poised against the others? How does all this influence the lack of questions about what was done in the war? How does the anthropological perspective of individual life correlate to the dark discourse?**

**TATLIĆ: Which is still playing a role in the context of the mobilisation of amnesia.**

**OLUJIĆ OLUJA:** Let me say this first. When the war was over, I started going to Sarajevo as often as I did before the war, that is, I would spend a weekend there at least once a month. I also used to go to Goražde, Zenica, Tuzla, the villages above Zvornik, etc. in order to hear people's stories, see what happened, how it happened. At first, I encountered no problems, since the people I talked to had no negative emotions towards foreigners, towards the Serbs. After many such field trips, I came to realise what the catch was. Generally speaking, a Bosnian who defended his country knows exactly who did what to him. He does not have to lie and fabricate. Also, I knew at least a hundred men who were involved in the war, either as "weekend warriors" or as regulars of the Serb Republic's Army or the Army of Serbian Krajina [army of the Serb Republic in the occupied parts of Croatia, 1991–1995]. Six months after the war, according to their stories, no one had anything to do with what had happened. But if anything did, the story was that it was a stray bullet, that their wounds were caused by various accidents, etc. The people who went there, for one reason or another, and who were guided by illusions, misconceptions, or pure interest, had to make up, fabricate, and find some sort of explanation as to why they did what they did.

Something similar is happening with these new entities or states: those in power have to write new biographies. Everything that was in Yugoslavia is no longer any good. They eventually find something positive in the monarchist Yugoslavia [the so called first Yugoslavia] or in the earlier, even antique, histories of those entities – like when Antić and Krsmanović made up a history of the Serb Republic supposedly starting in the fifth century, etc.

Alongside all this, everything they have been doing from the 1990s to the present day is represented as if it were positive. The situation in the Serb Republic would be funny, if it were not tragic. Dodik [the president of the Serb Republic,

an entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina] came to power on the basis of criticising Karadžić, Plavšić, and the whole system constructed after the Dayton Accords. After he solidified his power and after he was not happy with everything that came out of that critique, he returned to the old stories. Now, there is a new student dormitory named after Karadžić, the streets are being renamed. Of course, all this is followed by stories about the impossibility of living together, stories of [Bosniaks being] endangered [as claimed] by Bakir [Bakir Izetbegović, the leader of the dominant Bosniak party, The Party of the Democratic Action – SDA] and the Muslims, etc.

**GRŽINIĆ: What does all this mean for the future? What does it mean for today and tomorrow?**

**OLUJIĆ OLUJA:** It means that we will have to put an end to these stories at some point. What is the problem now? Looking at it by itself, this kind of politics, of public discourse, can last a million years. Even when it causes obvious disasters, misery, poverty, it still goes on, unless there are some bigger conflicts that can be resolved without a surplus of violence. Up until the point when the left will have to do something else. What is the problem for the left now? It needs to read what is really happening, not to live in various theoretical misapprehensions and theories. On the one side and the other, generally speaking, this is the biggest problem now. In the constellation of forces as they were then, the previous Yugoslavia could have done what it considered had to be done, because it was up to it. Whether it was able to withstand the pressures or not, it was up to it. Nowadays, we have a situation in which the world is one, which is, I did not mention this earlier, another of the consequences of the 1960s, including the student rebellion. Nowadays, nothing depends on what we want or can do anymore. A significant place has to happen somewhere else, a place where significant decisions are being made and where the real world happens, we can only know how to join that, or not join it, and then look at the situation again.

There is another question here you may or may not ask, and it deals with the task of the left. The task of the left, apart from faithfully interpreting reality, is to establish communication. One of the places in that communication is whether to join or not join the European Union. I think that the interest of the left lies with joining the EU, because such a move would lead towards the elimination of a number of administrative problems, as well as to the socialisation of the left. Thirdly, it is still the working class that supports and sustains the left. Of course, it has been declassed and turned into a precariat and so on – I won't go into these stories – but the left should reconstitute the working class as a class again. Hence, the working class by itself does not exist, it is only a logical, analytical construct; a class character emerges on the basis of articulating one's own position, on the basis of the results of that positioning, and on the basis of the relation towards other classes. So, on the one hand, it must individualise itself as a class, socialise within itself as a class, and project its relation towards another class, all of which depends on whether reality was properly interpreted and the problems – and who is reproducing them – sufficiently detected. The task of the communists is to participate conscientiously in the construction of the working class or proletariat in its later stages, to participate in every concrete class struggle, to project perspectives in all these concrete struggles, and to advocate the unity of the movement, that is, its needs, interests, and so on. What is most important for the working class, unlike other classes, is it that it must be fully aware of its position, of its path, which it has to create by itself. No one else will do it. The bourgeoisie simply follow their "natural" path, the path of capitalism, whereas the working class have to make it on their own. To conclude, let me say only this: socialism is necessary only if it is wanted. We, as Marx said, have to think about the definitive exit from prehistory, and we are the ones who have to work on it.

**TATLIĆ: What would then be the task of the working class within the context of critical positioning against the so-called “post-ideological” paradigm?**

**OLUJIĆ OLUJA:** Within the context of the logic of the development of capitalism, we are witnessing the last step. So, what is important at this point? What is important is that the structure of the development of capitalism, based on the trajectory money–commodity–enriched money that marked the importance of mercantilism and production, has been upgraded with the phase marked by financialisation. Roughly speaking, the mode of production of money now determines the shape of the world. Commodity, services, etc. no longer play a crucial role; the production of money does. Money is no longer an equivalent, a resource you keep, or pay with; it is a commodity. The situation nowadays is that the same amount of commodities is actually manufactured, but we have much more money, which is unbelievable – especially when you include the moment of service industries in the formula. For example, the amount of money has increased by a factor of 700 over the last 30 years, while nothing else, except for the internet and similar things, has been produced. These are inseparable processes. The other thing is that capitalism has become a global system, realising a tendency it has had for a long time. It is becoming physically real. Capitalism is therefore approaching its end by becoming a world system, while socialism has yet to become a world system. Of course, we have to take a step back and compare what is happening on the level of production with what is happening on the level of the development of ideology – one only needs to know how to read it. I should mention that in 1956 Goldman wrote *The History of Philosophy*, which was a philosophical history of philosophy based on the analysis of money flows. So, everything that takes place in this sector, takes place on an ideological level, it only has to be seen. “Scientific socialism,” a term coined by Engels and later ascribed to Marx, deals with these issues in such a way that it tends to combine these levels.

For instance, in the “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” written, if you remember, in 1848 by Marx and Engels, there is a passage that precisely describes the crisis that happened in 2008. So, in order to have an ideology of scientific socialism, we absolutely have to have – I may be getting a little ahead of myself – absolute knowledge of what is really going on, what the real problems are – hence, we need historical analysis, not theoretical analysis. As I said earlier, we need activism. No matter what we know – there are many exceptional books analysing things in extreme detail, such as [Gáspár Miklós] Tamás’ book on the truth about class for example. A phenomenal text – but what are we going to do with it?



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# Refugees, Europe, Death, and COVID-19

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

**In March 2020, at the border of Greece and Turkey, tensions and a flow of refugees were exploited as a bargain for the dirty business between the European Union/Greece and Turkey. At the same time, we have an outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the EU, with Italy as the state under total quarantine. On 28 March 2020, the USA reported more than 100,000 coronavirus cases.**

These two situations collide and what we have in front of us still developing escapes easy analysis, as we put together snippets of events. One thing is sure: thousands are again being left to die at the border between Greece and Turkey. Italy is on the other side, transformed in a middle-age leprosy and in complete isolation. In the 21st century, we can see disease, isolation, and, let us say, self-voluntary segregation, which Valdemir Zamparoni (2016) defines as methods that are central to the colonial medical environment. We can think of this method as a form of self-segregation aimed at enabling immunisation. However, if we connect these two at first sight disparate situations, we can see that the facts of the case at the border between the European Union/Greece and Turkey are about “to kill,” and in Italy about “to let live.”

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks go to Stanimir Panayotov for his thoughtful remark on the English language editing of this text.

These two sides are the depiction of contemporary neoliberal necropolitics (see Mbembe 2003).

The reordering of spaces becomes crucial; it results in new practices of zoning and creating corridors as circulating modes through which accumulation will take place. I therefore focus on Europe, refugees in Europe, neoliberalism, and racism. Furthermore, the only way to open up possibilities for *white* Eastern European thought is, rather than fully embracing the old Western matrix of knowledge that is an outcome of colonialism, to try to rethink our conditions of potentiality together with those whose thoughts were marginalised for far too long. Colonialism and the present forms of coloniality have not only dispossessed millions of lives and made them commodities, but have also incarcerated their thoughts and discursivity. If Europe, as a fortress of Europe, the old Western world, is today a provincial territory, then the thoughts and the intellectual repertoire it can produce are provincial as well (Mbembe 2017).

Today, we know that incarceration, marginalisation, and the rejection of thoughts not belonging to the Occidental (Western) regime represent one of the approaches catering to the steady, discriminative, racist view of the West (Europe) in relation to what it calls “others.”

### **A dirty deal between the EU and Turkey on refugees**

In March 2020, a fierce onslaught by the Syrian forces and their Russian backers on Idlib, the last province held by the Syrian rebels, led to clashes with Turkey, which supports several rebel groups. Turkey already hosts some 3.7 million Syrians, but the conflict in Idlib has led to nearly a million more fleeing to its southern border. Although the EU promised additional billions of Euros in aid, Turkey was unimpressed and last week decided to open its borders with Greece, forcing migrants to come even closer to the northwestern border. The EU has accused Mr. Erdoğan, the President of Turkey, of using migrants for political purposes. It insists its doors are “closed.” Meanwhile, clashes have again erupted at the land border between Greece and Turkey. There appears to have been a change in Turkey’s position with regard to letting migrants try to enter Greece via this route. On 28 February 2020, Turkey reneged on a deal to prevent migrants and asylum seekers from travelling to the EU (McDonald-Gibson 2020).

In other words, in 2016, a dirty deal was made between the EU and Turkey, whereby Turkey would stop allowing migrants to reach the EU in return for funds from the bloc to help it manage the huge numbers of refugees it hosts (see European Commission 2016). But, since then, tensions between the EU and Turkey have been flaring up on various issues.

### **Death, neoliberalism**

Now, the question of death that has been brought to the centre of the debate of the day is really touching the base.

I have defined necropolitics as “let live and make die” (see Gržinić and Tatlić 2014). Necropolitics confronts us with the horrors of the human condition: death and killing, forced enclosure, total abandonment. I am referring to necropolitics, not to *thanatopolitics* (see Gržinić 2020). If we think precisely about what is going on at the border between the European Union/Greece and Turkey, we can see a new relation towards life and death, where the colonial/racial division is applied. All those detained there are coming from the states that were destroyed by imperialist Occidental appetites, as well as the racial differentiation between the white occident and other parts of the world, seen as not legitimate members of the

regime of whiteness and its colonial matrix of power, which has been stretching from the deep past to the present day.

The colonial/racial division is applied to citizenship, and we have two categories of citizenship: one is the category I will name *biopolitical citizenship* (the EU's "natural" nation-state citizens), and the other is *necropolitical citizenship*, one given to refugees and *sans-papiers* (the paperless) after they die on EU soil. While some are made "equal," the other Others are left to die and are brutally abandoned, or their second-grade status as citizens is fully normalised in the EU. An illustrative case is the one of the Italian Lampedusa, where on 12 October 2013 350 refugees from Africa drowned in a single day.

Nevertheless, the most perverse situation happened afterwards, when these hundreds of dead bodies were given Italian citizenship (but only so that the Italian government and the EU could bury them in Italy, which was obviously cheaper than sending the bodies back to their countries of origin and to their respective families). The Italian government decided to prosecute the few who did survive, for trying to enter Italy and the EU illegally. This is the clearest sign of the perverse and violent new attitude Western Europe has toward human rights (after the West had been heavily capitalising its democracy on these rights for decades) and of the occurrence of a new category of citizenship – the *necropolitical citizenship*.

This shift can be best captured through what was in 2000 exposed by Balibar as the passport of a "rich person from a rich country ... [which] increasingly *signifies* not just mere national belonging, protection and a right of citizenship, but a *surplus of rights*" (Balibar 2002, 83).

Death itself, as has been presented above, had become a fallacious rite of passage in modernity's instrumentalisation of humanity.

In his *Le nuove melanconie: Destini del desiderio nel tempo ipermoderno*, Massimo Recalcati (2019) states that melancholy is no longer what it used to be. Melancholy, Freud argued, involves a sense of guilt, but today melancholy has acquired new declinations, characterised by a fundamental lack of awareness of life, and also of supporting life as it is transmitted from one generation to the next.

Freud (1957) talks about melancholy; the old melancholy brings a feeling of guilt before the laws that are too severe, but contemporary melancholy is coming from an incapacity to give meaning to, I will add, the "Occidental" experience.

The relation in the Occident between subject and object can be put in a genealogical line as a series of discontinued modalities.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Western youth tried to distance themselves primarily from the fetishism of the objects. In the 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, consumer hedonism was pushed to the forefront, which has eventually replaced political passion.

The former East of Europe entered this process fully and speedily. In the new millennium, we rely on objects

heavily, they are mobile, transversal; our smartphones and technological gadgets present a hyper-overabundance of objects, to an extent that the social online platforms display an incommensurability of emptiness, a loss of meaning, the disappearance of ideologies, loneliness, and self-quarantining (not only due to the coronavirus disease). Recalcati calls this condition “new melancholy.” He talks about life connected to senselessness.

Without desire, life is directly connected to senselessness; the body is dead weight to be moved, pushed around. This Occidental subject is incapable of relating to alterity, otherness. It is symbolically reduced to a proper border of impossibility, and clinging on these borders is the last possibility of a true salvation. Recalcati writes:

The absence of boundaries inherent in the freedom of the hypermodern turbo consumer has gradually translated into a widespread feeling of anxiety caused by the loss of stable symbolic reference points, but above all, has given rise to a new demand for protection and security. We have thus gone from the manic emphasis relating to the dissolution of banks and borders to the need for their re-establishment and security enhancement. (Recalcati 2019, XI; trans. mine)

Again, we see this so palpably clear as staying silent, inert in front of what is going on with the refugees (in March 2020) at and on the border between Turkey and Greece. As Recalcati says, we are witnessing a syndrome that is centred on protection. This protection is fully embedded in the barbed wire and the closure, which are the emblems, the deadly emblems of our time. We have gone from unlimited enjoyment to borders, walls, and fortresses as new objects of investment.

What is going on with the refugees or migrants, as they are named, is actually deeply connected with the Occident. In the classical Freudian psychoanalytic theory (see Freud 1961a; 1961b), the death drive (*Todestrieb*) is the drive toward death and self-destruction. Under the force of this death drive, we see an excess of immunisation that transforms into an autoimmune illness. An autoimmune disease is a condition in which our immune system mistakenly attacks a healthy body. This could be seen also in relation to state quarantine, a new type of quarantine camp – that is what Italy was transformed into in March 2020.

So, to return to *necropolitics* and the emphasised difference to *thanatopolitics*:

THANATOPOLITICS IS ON THE ONE SIDE. IT IS A PURE WESTERN, OCCIDENTAL CATEGORY.

It resides in the Occidental subjective intimacy. The death drive opposes Eros, the tendency toward survival, propagation, sex, and other creative, life-producing drives. It is a change from preservation to destruction. In *thanatopolitics*, death is not an enemy undermining life from the outside, but something internally produced by life. The two drives are not facing each other, they are in reciprocity. *Thanatopolitics* is the knot that ties the death drive and the desire to live together.

NECROPOLITICS IS ON THE OTHER SIDE. IT IS AN EXTERNALISATION OF THANATOPOLITICS.

It spreads as a deadly contagious virus from the intimacy of the Occidental subject into the neoliberal global world.

Necropolitics is the regime of the war death machine that literally exports contagion to other places, or this contagion was already contracted through the legacy of Western colonialism (Africa). The vertiginous presence of death is the result of a life without consciousness of genuine vulnerability, one that is pathological, centred onto itself, incapable of relating to others.

Neoliberalism's fake vitalism has cut also the ties with the categories of the negative.

Recalcati has captured this very accurately:

The apparently manic inclination of the capitalist's discourse has reinforced a neo-melancholic inclination in young people who tend to let themselves be absorbed by the ever-present presence of the object, transforming the object into an object-Thing. It is no longer the object that appears against the background of the mourning of the Thing, but it is the object-Thing that melancholically denies this mourning. While the exciting impulse of the maniacal discourse pushes towards the unceasing exchange of the object in a succession of fragmented presents without historical continuity, this new and particular adhesiveness to the object – for example, to the technological object – reveals the undercurrent of this euphoric thrust: the neo-melancholic bonding to the object, the impossibility of sustaining its loss, the rejection of the mourning of the Thing. [...] The most emblematic clinical example is that of the regressive withdrawal of many teenagers who desert social life to remain glued to the virtual world, which ensures them of the ever-present presence of their objects. The world of the object-Thing replaces the world of encountering the Other and its inevitable turbulence. (Recalcati 2019, 141; trans. mine)

## **Coda**

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

On the one hand, we have the state institutions and the necropolitical sovereignty that is the sovereignty of intense racialization, ghettoisation, and expulsion, and on the other, the formation of not a monumental landscape, but, on the contrary, a death-scape (which is again a necropolitical measure).

Neoliberal global necrocapitalism mixes different forms of dispossession (providing accumulation) and therefore we see how the question of citizenship is embedded in the processes of dispossession, privatisation, and racialized specialisation.

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# Toward a Non-Eurocentric “Academia”

In her text “Who Can Speak? Decolonizing Knowledge,” Grada Kilomba asks a series of questions in relation to the existing academic institutions:

What knowledge is acknowledged as such? And what knowledge is not? What knowledge has been made part of academic agendas? And what knowledge has not? Whose knowledge is this? Who is acknowledged to have the knowledge? And who is not? Who can teach knowledge? And who cannot? Who inhabits academia? And who remains outside at the margins? And finally, who can speak? (Kilomba 2013, 27)

In relation to my experience as a migrant, trans\* from former Eastern Europe (former Yugoslavia, Slovenia), who still inhabits this symbolic East due to continuous reproduction of differences between the East and the West of Europe (see Kancler 2020) and who has been working since 2009 as a precarious associate professor at the University of Barcelona, under a so called “trash contract,” Kilomba’s questions made me see that to envision critical interventions or an even more necessary political movement for the decolonisation of the academia, we need to first start connecting capitalism with colonialism through what Aníbal Quijano in the 1990’s – based on José C. Mariategui’s work and Black Marxism – defined as the colonial matrix of power. Why? If power, so Quijano, operates through four interrelated domains, that is, control of the economy, control of authority, control of gender and sexuality, and control of subjectivity and knowledge (Quijano cited in Mignolo 2011, 8), we can say that all of them have been historically constitutive of and active within the academia (academic institutions) and still are. Entangled in the Western modern/colonial system, Eurocentrism was produced over the last five centuries, by Western conquests and colonisation, through which a set of colonial capitalist values and a system of knowledge was made universal by erasing, silencing, and disqualifying the rest and all of us. This means that the academia, as Kilomba (2013) argues, is not a neutral space of learning and acquiring knowledge. It is rather a white space, a Eurocentric fabric of subjectification, a disciplinary institution, and an institution of control, whose aim is to reproduce and maintain the existing colonial capitalist system through continuous exclusions based on class, race, gender, sexuality, ability, language, spirituality, etc.

In the context of the post-Cold War political reconfigurations, when it is said that Eastern Europe no longer exists, while Western Europe is nevertheless named “former,” the process of disappearance of certain borders does not mean that they are disappearing in reality, it’s rather the contrary: at once fragmented, unfolded, and multiplied, they are becoming zones, border regions, territories. We can say that the former Eastern Europe has been transformed into a zone that functions as a (new) border through the relation of repetition. Following Marina Gržinić’ arguments, we can see here a repetition of Western Europe’s political and economic model, its structures of government and governmentality, its modes of life and modes of death, institutional and migration control, its system of knowledge (theory), aesthetic regimes (art), even activism, etc. (see Gržinić 2009; 2018). This specific process of coloniality through repetition is functioning also through suppression of “local” histories, knowledge, and practices of resistance. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the mobility of borders, which corresponded with the process of the European Union enlargement and the expansion of global capitalism/coloniality, presupposed the construction of a new migratory and racializing control regime, based on bio-necropolitical technology.

Re-thinking the current crisis situation in Europe and globally, demands of us to address, with grave concern, the racism and the fascism that are increasingly on the rise. Thousands of people are dying as they cross the militarised borders of Fortress Europe, which is multiplying its walls, while undertaking negotiations about its externalisation to intensify the control of the EU external borders and cut the possibility of crossing borders in Southern and Eastern Europe. The asylum system is paralysed and inefficient, the existence of immigration laws is racist, refugees and migrants are trapped on their ways, detained in different internment camps, prisons, and border centres, experiencing systematic negation of fundamental rights, abandonment, intensified processes of racial discrimination, violence, and death. The militarised borders, walls, barbed wire fences, immigration detention centres, identification and expulsion centres, NATO, Frontex, coast and border patrols, Dublin III and other criminal conventions, the sophisticated biometric control systems, and the visa information systems, go hand in hand with the way in which the situation of refugees and migrants is “managed,”



with the imposition of hierarchies through the status of citizenship and the multiplication of internal borders that are constitutive of the global division of labour. These brutal colonial capitalist processes of selection of people in terms of racial, class, gender, sexual, and religious categories are embedded in the Western capitalist colonial history and present, and are at the same time repeated in former Eastern Europe and the Global South through externalisation of borders and local political servitude to colonial imperial centres. This is how those who are labelled as “Other(s)” are constructed as differentiated subhuman(s) through different processes of dehumanisation.

If migration/labour, capital, gender, sexuality, and race are today nowhere more disputed and uneasy than at the border, as Gloria Anzaldúa writes, “To survive the Borderlands / you must live *sin fronteras* / be a crossroads” (Anzaldúa 1987, 195). *La herida abierta* – an open wound as a way to describe her painful position (marked by modernity/coloniality) – speaks from the position of a border thinker. When asked what this meant, Madina Tlostanova in our interview told me: “When you are the border, when the border cuts through you, when you do not cross borders in order to find yourself on either side, you do not discuss borders from some zero point positionality, but instead *you dwell in the border*, you do not really have much choice but to be a border thinker.” (Tlostanova 2013) This statement highlights the fact that we cannot talk about choice; it is rather lack of it that makes us engage in analysis from a border perspective. I understand it as a constant state of transitioning, from which the potentialities of de-linking from the colonial capitalist system of power can be envisioned. Crossing, passing or going through the confines of the “normal,” located in a liminal space, border thinking necessarily implies intersectional and transversal analytics. It is an ongoing attempt to push for a conceptual denaturalisation, with the aim to undermine the fundamental logics of modernity and its disciplines, in need of asserting the rights (also epistemic) of the wretched (see Fanon 1963).

After 2008 – reaching the limit that was once thought, in Marxist analysis, to be the potential for overcoming capitalism – the idea of crisis as passage gained a different meaning. In this recent context, the concept of crisis itself is pushed into a crisis. The crisis, which ceased to be a periodic exception and has rather become the norm, the fabric of social life, of our existence, is not only economic, but also political, existential, spiritual, environmental, as well as academic and marked by increasing corporatisation, privatisation, and global neoliberal restructuring of the universities. If Eurocentric academia is a fabric of colonial capitalist knowledge production and its commodification, the site of production and exploitation of subjectivity, thus, in relation to its established models, modes of thinking, perceiving, and acting, which are today globally reproduced, we need to grasp all these dimensions in order to introduce a critical condition, point to old-new forms of conflict, and push for a radical change.

Although there were and are several indigenous, Black, decolonial feminist, migrant, queer, trans\*, sex workers’ initiatives, night schools,<sup>1</sup> Rhodes Must Fall,<sup>2</sup> and other student movements for the decolonisation of universities taking part in the long lasting confrontation with the Eurocentric academia, I will focus here on the following two: The Silent University and The University of Ignoramuses.

The Silent University initially started in London in 2012. Propelled by artist Ahmet Öğüt, it is organised as a solidarity platform for the exchange of autonomous knowledge between refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants, developing activities in Amman, Athens, Hamburg, Mülheim/Ruhr, and Stockholm. A group of professors, researchers, and consultants running the platform contribute in different ways to the development of courses, research, as well as personal reflections on what it means to be a refugee or an asylum seeker. Trying to prevent the loss of skills and

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Night School homepage at [www.nightschool.at](http://www.nightschool.at), conceptualised by Marissa Lôbo and Catrin Seefranz and run by Neda Hosseinyar, Marissa Lôbo, Stephanie Misa, and Catrin Seefranz.

<sup>2</sup> See Rhodes Must Fall, Writing and Education Subcommittees (2015).

knowledge that asylum seekers experience through all kinds of silencing processes, The Silent University proposes a new institution outside the restrictive norms of existing universities, immigration laws, and other bureaucratic or legal obstacles, faced by many migrants. Its objective is to challenge the idea of silence as a passive state and explore its potential through writing, performance, and collective reflection. The Silent University makes the exchange process mutually beneficial also by inventing alternative currencies or voluntary service. Their work is based on a transversal pedagogy, following a series of principles and demands, acting in solidarity, and working for the revolution of decolonial pedagogies (Malzacher, Ögüt and Tan 2016).

## **Towards A Transversal Pedagogy The Silent University Principles and Demands:**

1. Everybody has the right to educate.
2. Immediate acknowledgement of academic backgrounds of asylum seekers and refugees.
3. Acting knowledge without language limitations.
4. Acting knowledge without legal limitations.
5. Participatory modes of usership.
6. Artistic pedagogical practices need to be emancipated from commonly used terminologies such as "projects" and "workshops".
7. Pedagogic practices must be based on long-term engagement, commitment and determination.
8. We act in solidarity with other refugee struggles and collectives around the world.
9. Extra-territorial, trans-local knowledge production and conflict urbanism must be priorities.
10. Decentralized, participatory, horizontal and autonomous modality of education, instead of centralized, authoritarian, oppressive, and compulsory education.
11. Acting beyond limitations of border politics.
12. Adhocracy instead of bureaucracy
13. Action Knowledge can only be produced through assemblage methods.
14. Revolution of decolonising pedagogies.

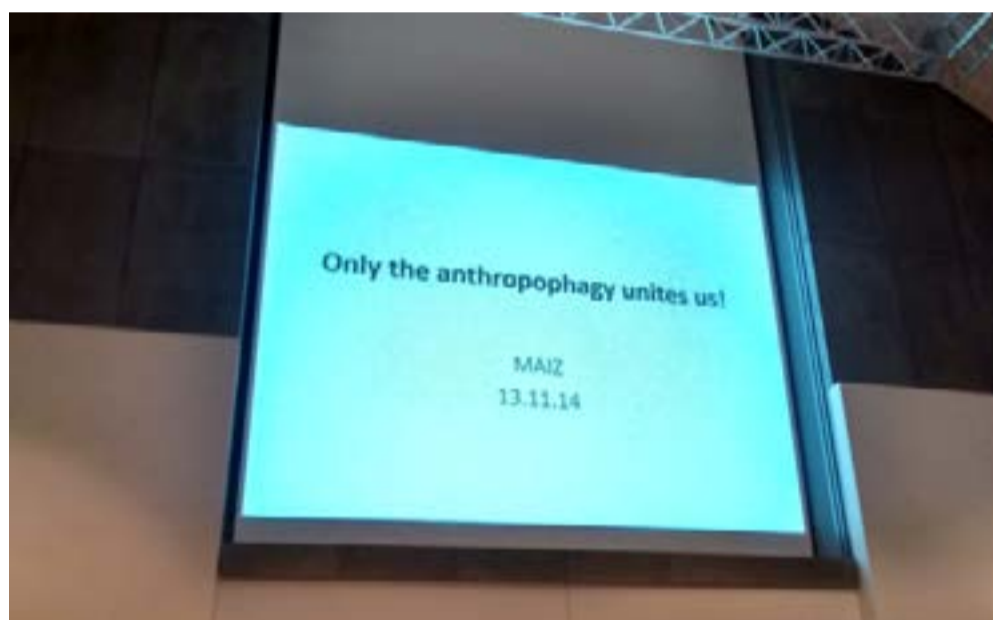


Image: Principles and demands of The Silent University (n.d.)

The University of Ignoramuses was conceptualised in 2014 by maiz – Autonomous Center of and for Migrant Women (Linz) as a space for producing counter-hegemonic knowledge as well as discussing the notion of ignorance, in the sense of socially ignored knowledge. Their initiative has been emphasising the need to re-think the strategies of political and educational processes: the issues of (un)learning, discourse, listening, and being-heard, as well as the role of artistic and activist practices for pedagogical spaces of agency. As the collective states:

maiz's feminist take-over of the anthropophagic concept shifts the contexts – it's about a displacement of borders, an emancipatory appropriation of space and thus about resistance against the exoticization of the “other.” It is important to not only ask what is being spoken about, but also who speaks for whom and what is recognized when and why as legitimate knowledge. (maiz 2014)

With their work, the University of Ignoramuses inscribed their practice in the history of decolonial struggles, opening the debate on the racist international division of labour, gender, racism, and its relations with migrations, re-connecting theory and praxis, and in reference to the Zapatista, looking for answers while walking.



A talk by Luzenir Caixeta (maiz) during the opening of the 2014 conference “Material Matters in Times of Crisis Capitalism: Transnational Feminist and Decolonial Approaches,” Universidad Justus-Liebig, Giessen, Germany.

Both initiatives show that the decolonial movement continues to extend through various translocal action networks, challenging and changing the existing academic system of the production of political fictions, repetitive narratives, and abstract universality, entangled in the history of modernity/coloniality, which is still very much present today. Grasping the global dimension of crisis from the perspectives of the epistemologies of the Global South and East, these projects reveal themselves to be critical nodes formed in the very cracks of the heterogeneous totality, attending to its complexity and refining their tactics of resistance by multiplying the sites of intervention. Insisting on the recognition of knowledge produced by racialized “other(s)” and decolonial movements, these initiatives are of crucial importance because they point out that the socially ignored and silenced knowledge is related to the ways of understanding how class divisions, racialization, ableism, sex-gender binary, and heteronormativity are historically constructed and perpetuated through the existing colonial capitalist academic institutions. At the same, they configure a space for the production of practices, memories, and relations that make possible not only negative resistance but also re-existence.

Here is where we need to situate decoloniality as a political intervention, if we think of the performative potential of this concept – in doing and taking action. As the artistic-activist group *Diásporas Críticas* write, in “hybrid tactics that traverse materiality and writing, memory and archive, affect and body” (Marín Cisneros and Close 2015). Against the current of political correctness or new academic specialisations for personal benefit and prestige of researchers, I understand a decolonial way of doing and acting as a radical attempt to dismantle capitalist/colonial, political, institutional, and border structures and system operatives globally. This means, as Yuderkys Espinosa, Diana Gómez, and Karina Ochoa (2014) write, insisting on the history, memory, and contribution of those voices and experiences that made a political shift, a change in perspective, a fracture in the existing system, because our current fight within the academia and beyond is based on and draws from previous flows of resistance to the Western white hegemony of knowledge production. Furthermore, by emphasising that many of us have gone from being an object of study to becoming a subject of knowledge production, the colonial/imperial difference – which is multiple – warns us against the silencing of different positionalities within our political work (ibid.).

All this tells us that in order to imagine and work towards a radical change in the system of interpretation and production of reality, it is necessary to reveal the constitutive underside of (post)modern reason. The transformation strives to be achieved by breaking down the academic walls, challenging the existing political economy of the global Eurocentric academia, racialization and segregation, the established academic disciplines, methodologies, sets of theoretical references, conceptual vocabularies, and colonial visual orders. By “shifting the geography of reason” (Gordon 2011) through dissident interventions, un/learning, producing counter-genealogies of thought and decolonial transfeminist sense/ibility, what is crucial here is to continue opening, accessing, thinking, and acting from multiple locations, alternative arrangements of the social, and different political and epistemic possibilities coming from the Global South and East, interrelated with the work of its critical diasporas.

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— ALEKSANDAR KRAUS

- INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT [EXCERPT]

19 MAY 2018, CENTRE FOR CULTURAL DECONTAMINATION (CZKD), BELGRADE, SERBIA

INTERVIEW BY MARINA GRŽINIĆ AND ŠEFIK TATLIĆ

## Genealogy of Amnesia

The full interview is available on the *Genealogy of Amnesia* project website at [https://archiveofamnesia.akbild.ac.at/?videos=aleksander-kraus&\\_sft\\_people=aleksander-kraus](https://archiveofamnesia.akbild.ac.at/?videos=aleksander-kraus&_sft_people=aleksander-kraus).

**ALEKSANDAR KRAUS:** First of all, I would like to thank you for the invitation, as well as thank Tanja Marković, who recommended me for this interview. I should mention that I know the people you have already interviewed; I heard what Marija [Perković] said; I am also acquainted with Dušan Maljković's work, and [Dragomir Olujić] Oluja's work. I want to say that all of us, as well as a number of other people, are part of an active and lively political scene in Belgrade, Serbia, and in the wider region.

I am, unfortunately, a bit older – a fact you may use as you see fit. This also means that I am a contemporary of Milošević, whom I knew personally, along with a number of other politicians of that time. I am an engineer of metallurgy by vocation, which means that I am well-versed in everything connected to industry and the economy, and very familiar with how they work. I have had a long professional life, and on that note I should say that I have been there in all the phases of self-management [*samoupravljanje* – workers' control over means of production and production processes] in Yugoslavia. Here I would like – and this is one of my main themes – to emphasise the importance of that experience, which is not sufficiently appreciated these days. It is also dismissed by many younger researchers, as you mentioned a moment ago, [...] present company included. There are many differences among us that may appear subtle, but they are not. The lack of clarification regarding these issues is precisely the reason why there is no action, why there is no change.

Given that I was general director [CEO] at a big company in Belgrade, this management angle gave me a lot of experience as an activist. I have always been in politics, and my involvement with metallurgy always allowed me, as for example in Zenica [an industrial centre in former Yugoslavia], to be in the vicinity of what is considered authentic working class. So, when we talk about the working class today, I must say that I know what it is, what it is not, and what it cannot be in this day and age – it can't be the way it used to be, which is something many young Marxists do not fully understand, thinking that things should be as Marx described them 150 years ago.

Here is where the problems start. I am president of the Alliance of Antifascists of Serbia, so I can answer your questions in relation to fascistisation. In parallel – I am trying to separate these two lines of work – I am also a member of an organisation we call Struggle for Socialism. We are currently trying to convince another leftist organisation called Left Summit [Levi samit], that is, its younger part, that there is a need to work faster and more ferociously ... There are a number of leftist and antifascist organisations in the region we collaborate and network with, we follow what is published, what is discussed at conferences etc., I am on a very tight schedule almost all the time. There is a conference soon, organised by Marx 21, another leftist organisation, about Marxism in the 21st century. So, regarding conferences, books, gatherings, a lot is happening. But what I have been doing in the economy sector concerns the management of changes, which is an issue that can be translated from the sphere of the economy to society. Of course, society is far more complex, but the question of how to achieve and effect changes remains.

Of course, my position does not have to be, but is, leftist. Although we take different approaches to the position, we all consider ourselves leftists, and this is the position I am taking in this talk today. Mine is not a dogmatic or a hard-line position, I do not expect revolutions to take place, nor do I think that such a revolution can be localised, but I hope this gives a sort of a profile of my position.

**MARINA GRŽINIĆ: You opened up two lines of discussion in your introduction. One is the question of socialism, the definition of which we have tried to extract from other interviewees in terms of the current moment, and how to think about socialism? In other words, how and to what extent is your thinking about socialism connected with our past? And what kind of a socialism are we actually talking about today, or could in the future?**

**KRAUS:** It is not a question of what kind of socialism. The point lies in the crisis of capitalism. We are constantly exposed to the fact that capitalism, from time to time, gets jammed by default and that it resolves these situations with wars and crises – the last one was in 2008. Beyond this, we are constantly aware that this system is unfair, unjust, and so on. It is difficult for the left forces, or for anyone trying to correct something, as they are constantly faced with challenges. As intellectuals, as workers who are exploited ... Everybody asks, each in their own way, how long can this be endured, and calls for action.

Yesterday, I was listening to a lecture by professor [Rastko] Močnik, you have probably heard of the series, it's called Theory of Ideology. He has translated a book by the French economics professor Catherine Samary to Slovenian, whose PhD thesis was about self-management in Yugoslavia and who still writes about the Yugoslav experience. As someone who had that experience – speaking also from the position of a director and someone who has worked with workers in various companies – I still advocate the reaffirmation of that experience. Of course, in some new form, a new scenario – but which will have to be an international experience, it could never have worked only in Yugoslavia. The people in Yugoslavia who did not understand that, who connected the Yugoslav experience with dictatorship, the cult of personality, defamation, anti-communism, anti-Titoism, etc., as well as many others – as Oluja could tell you – those people were, better said, they are liberals. That does not apply to Oluja, of course, but if you want me to be more specific, and although we are friends, I am thinking of Latinka Perović, there is also a book by Mira Bogdanović, etc. These questions are extremely relevant at this moment but are unfortunately insufficiently clarified. There is no diagnosis, no diagnosis at all. And without a diagnosis, as with any other illness, there is no therapy.

[...]

Although I was a member of the Citizens Alliance of Reformists, led by Ante Marković [Yugoslavia's prime minister, 1989–1991], and although I fought in the Citizens Alliance for another kind of a platform, I am very critical – and as time goes by even more so – of the human rights-prefixed circles, because they consider only human rights. This does not mean that we did not have human rights, but that before we had dictatorship, that was how it was perceived here. That discourse – in correlation with countries such as Latvia, Lithuania, etc. that were fiercely anti-Russian, that is, anti-communist – contributed to a situation in which the Council of Europe equated fascism with communism. It also produced a situation in which the local reactionary forces, who were partly in power and against Milošević, revelled in such anti-communist sentiments, which led to the loss of the Yugoslav experience with all its specificities, which were enormous. From the People's Struggle for Liberation [*Narodno oslobodilačka borba* – NOB] and self-management to mobility, Fulbright scholarships, you name it...

### **ŠEFIK TATLIĆ: The Antifascist Women's Front [AFŽ].**

**KRAUS:** The Antifascist Women's Front, yes ... I have something for you, I've brought it along as a curiosity. This is the only remaining registration sheet from the Second Session of the AVNOJ [The Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia, held in Jajce in 1943, which laid the foundations for Yugoslavia]. Nothing like this exists any more. There were two more in the AVNOJ Museum in Jajce, which was destroyed. This [piece of paper] further elaborates on my position, in terms of my family background. Coming from a family of intellectuals, partisans, communists, and Jews, whatever you can think of, made me transform this experience into something I consider my obligation. This has been my experience since I was a boy ... But, I want to be clear on the question of socialism: there is no magic wand. Before anything else, it will have to be global [system]. One cannot support Syriza from afar and just wait for them to win, is that not so? Had we provided some serious support to the left in the region and wider, we could have helped Syriza. This relates to all those leftist movements ... but something is going to happen in these terms. We did not have Sanders or Corbyn ten years ago, and here they are. There is also Varoufakis, despite the fact that some think he comes from "above," that his position is an elitist one ...

In any case, Marxism and left-wing ideas are here again, on the scene. Even those who were critical of them, in Serbia and the region, are starting to change their opinion. More and more often, you can hear people say that Tito was wise, that it was better back then. Even the citizen circles are starting to remodel their discourse, which was so strong at the time that I think it did nationalism a favour – things may have been better if it wasn't so ... What happened? When Milošević went on a warpath and organised national-socialism, I will say without any reservation, Vuk Drašković appeared as his main opposition. There was this single chetnik [Serb fascist movement in World War II] family, and its structure, which then resulted in a situation where your choice was limited to either Milošević's SPS [Socialist Party of Serbia], where many indeed went, or Vuk Drašković, whose nationalism was anti-communist. That was a catastrophe, and that is where the citizen circles brought us. Vesna Pešić and many others led us into a situation where there were no alternatives, because Drašković's party was the second strongest after Milošević's.

Of course, all of this is connected. But it also says a lot about the situation in which all these *partitocracies* and regimes in these broken, banana states that appeared after Yugoslavia have found themselves in. Also, the wild capitalism



needed the war so as to keep the ruling elite in power, to allow the acquisition of power and safeguard it, a situation that suited everyone. All these new hierarchies and regimes in [ex-Yugoslav] republics would actually be losing out if they really sought reconciliation. From time to time, they send a signal, like when Kolinda [Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, president of Croatia] visits Serbia, or Vučić [Aleksandar Vučić, president of Serbia] visits Croatia, but that is it. Those three [members of the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina] come here, Vučić goes there, and so on. All is measured on a [delicate] scale, a little show for Europe, but in all honesty, there is no reconciliation.

**GRŽINIĆ: In this particular story you have told, is there a place for antifascism? In terms of the 1990s, what has happened to that tradition, which was once so strong?**

**KRAUS:** We are recognised in the public sphere, and I am extremely engaged in this respect. We were recognised as a veteran organisation, one of various veteran organisations. The main one is the Alliance of Veterans; another was created by the division of our organisation and is called the Society for the Truth of Yugoslavia and the People's Liberation Struggle; and there is also the Alliance of Anti-Fascists of Serbia. The Alliance of Anti-Fascists emerged based on resistance against Milošević, and comprised various generals and leaders – people who were in politics their whole lives, who were involved in the war, etc. All these people, me including, understood ... [what it was all about]. I used to sit next to Milošević in various meetings, I knew where everything was leading. I knew Ivan Stambolić [ex-president of Serbia in the 1980s] and many others. I had the chance to see those historical flows, witness what was happening at the time, how those people were thinking, as well as had the chance to get to know them. I also knew Mira Marković [Milošević's spouse/widow and the president of The Yugoslav Left – JUL] very well, as well as the people from her family, Draža Marković, Moma Marković, Petar Stambolić, etc. At the previously mentioned Council of AVNOJ, my father made acquaintance with Judit Alargić, who was the wife of Petar Stambolić, for example ... I had many personal relationships.

Through these relationships, it was possible to see what Milošević and his wife were, and how they fitted in this unfortunate sequence of historical events. It is often said that things just had to be the way they were. Maybe so, but the conundrum of psychological circumstances that connected these two people ... I don't know how much you know, but it was a tragic set of circumstances. Mira Marković sought to "manufacture" her husband as the new Tito, as someone who would continue on the same foundations; and she was right – the space was empty. Milošević was not a nationalist: he used nationalism to get to the position of power and to stay there, and it proved to be a winning ticket. Latinka Perović speaks about this in terms of a long-term trajectory, in terms of something that can last up to 200 years, etc., which may be the case, but does not necessarily have to be so. I am not entirely convinced by her argument, as contemporary flows are quite different. Had we more faith in self-management, if the system was better developed, if the party withdrew a bit ...

**GRŽINIĆ: How did the mobilisation of the body of paramilitary and military positions that conducted genocidal politics become possible?**

**KRAUS:** Milošević was very shrewd. The Alliance of Anti-Fascists recognised this easily, it was not difficult for an experienced general like Ljubičić to recognise this.

**TATLIĆ: They recognised it as fascism?**

**KRAUS:** You know, my mother was on her death bed at that time. She said something about Milošević, which shocked me at the time, namely that until she saw him she did not know that Serbian national-socialism existed. That was her definition, as someone who was in the partisans, who lived through all sorts of things. When she saw how he spoke, how he performed, that was what she said. Whoever wanted to see, whoever wanted to understand, and was seriously engaged in the analysis of what was going on, could have easily recognised all that as fascism, as a fascist performance, etc. The word fascism was not used at that time however. When the Alliance of Anti-Fascists was formed and after we parted ways with the former society, it was because we were strongly convinced that fascism presented a serious threat, despite the generals saying that fascism was defeated in World War II and that we were fighting to preserve the memory of Yugoslavia, of the People's Liberation Struggle [NOB] – to preserve the memory of everything that was good. But, the danger of fascism proved latent and ever present. So, the Alliance of Anti-Fascists parted ways with some of those people, although we have good relations today. But we are against the Alliance of Veterans, which is much bigger and has accepted into its ranks many veterans from the 1990s, thus becoming one huge organisation. Those I mentioned are called chetniks – they are something similar to the defenders/veterans [*branitelji*] in Croatia – so that is now one enormous organisation and we are still against that faction and generally against the mainstream, even on a daily basis.

**TATLIĆ:** Based on what you have just said, could we say that the selective co-opting of historical anti-fascism has been at work since World War II, and that, on the other hand, we are witnessing historical revisionism, along with the erasure of history from the 1990s within the context of the breakup of Yugoslavia? What is your grasp on the ideological function of the erasure of history over the last 30 years?

**KRAUS:** What you said, the whole story is connected to the 1990s. No one would have anything against Yugoslavia or socialism if it was not a way of sustaining power today. Socialism, the People's Liberation Struggle, partisans, communism, not to mention Tito, all have to be rejected in order for the capitalist *carte blanche* to be obtained by those who are in power. So, this is unfortunately the same in all regions, it is not specific to Serbia, but Serbia still has to be considered the most responsible for this in the wider context, because Serbs are the most numerous and because it all started in Serbia. Every time I go to Sutjeska [the site and the name of a famous battle between partisans and the Axis forces in today's Bosnia and Herzegovina], I have to answer for the culprits from our ranks, because they were the most dangerous, and until they are pushed away and until something different happens, a *cul de sac* is going to be the state of things. This new wave of tensions can almost be felt in the air, and something is going to happen. I think that Bulgaria and Romania have profited the most by entering the European Union, and Serbia is now surrounded; Macedonia will enter NATO, Montenegro is already a NATO member, etc.

What you did not ask, and which is hidden in your other questions, is the question of the relationship with the Serb Republic [an entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina]. There you have one line of blackmail, with Russian influence present as supporter, which has, I guess, already been recognised by the Europeans and the overall situation is becoming increasingly tense. Russian influence is big and strong, which can present a danger and, of course, decisions will have to be made; and those decisions will cause big tremors. There will be big political changes and re-groupings; however, the Democratic Party has lost its chances completely, which is also a basis for my thesis that the left does have a chance. A great majority of people do not participate in the elections because nothing is offered, there are no alternatives. We should hurry, while our grandparents still remember self-management, in order to [reaffirm it?] ... A better life is possible.

[...]

**GRŽINIĆ: What do you make of the sequence of events in relation to Kosovo in the 1980s, and then later in Bosnia and Herzegovina? I am referring to the “Serb Republic.” Are there any elements of continuity?**

**KRAUS:** If you look at it from a left-wing perspective, it is relatively clear. None of it is acceptable in terms of class. This is all nationalist politics. Regarding Kosovo, Koča Popović was right when he said that Albanians were able to accept becoming Yugoslavs, but they could not accept becoming Serbs. You cannot make Serbs out of Albanians, but you can make Yugoslavs out of Albanians. We had a rotating presidency, similar to that of the EU: I remember this writer, Fatmir Hodža, who was president of the state and president of the party – we had Albanians leading the state. Milošević first abused and then abolished the autonomies of Kosovo and Vojvodina, using their votes to take control of the army. Bogičević from Bosnia and Herzegovina did not want to give his vote to Milošević, but he got votes from Sejdo Bajramović from Kosovo, Boro Jović from Vojvodina, as well as from Kostić from Montenegro, along with the vote from the army. All this combined allowed him to take control of the army. Before that he “worked” Ljubičić, Gračanin, the “old school” generals, all in the name of caring for their old age and representing himself as a communist. And he was cunning. He got the majority, and Ivan Stambolić was naive. He could have formed the new party precisely there and then, he was popular and should have gone in that direction, but he unfortunately withdrew, which was a terrible mistake.

What we had here may seem insignificant in comparison to some international experiences, but it also seems that a greater number of people are becoming more and more aware of it. What is on offer today? Sanders was very popular in the US. He is the winner of the elections in terms of presence, in terms of advocacy. His chance to confront Trump was abused, which created a situation in which everyone lost. I hope that in the next elections, a larger number of Americans will swing to the left. The same thing is happening with Corbyn; he had a strong position and he managed to sustain it. All of them will eventually be in a position to offer something, that is, to negotiate the definition of the left. There are no chances for us to offer the self-managing experience from here in the form of a new economy – that economy will have to be thought on the basis of the welfare state experience, the labour movement – as it once was. Even the union movement is not what it used to be. However, it cannot be expected that the position of the working man remains unaddressed. These are the motives for new modes of thinking. There is the question of water, the question of commons, what is common, there is a lot of space there for the left – to be even more left and more vital than it is today. If the situation stays unaddressed, everything will be taken away; water, air, etc. If the situation is addressed, if control over our cities is achieved – as is happening in Barcelona, Naples; there are also certain attempts here, based on municipal networking – then new experiences may arise out of the whole thing, on the basis of ... Unfortunately, I don't have the recipe.

**TATLIĆ: If we look at capitalism, not only as an economic and social but also as a colonial relation of dominance, do you think that some kind of anti-imperial perspective could function as a form of revival for the left?**

**KRAUS:** We had the non-aligned movement, a Yugoslav political movement that was very important. Last year, I went to Melbourne to attend a conference on Marxism in the 21st century, and as soon as anyone heard I was coming from Yugoslavia they immediately remembered Tito. His was a kind of politics that resisted colonialism, that helped a plethora of movements, and which would – I am positive of that – be absolutely valid today. Today, it needs to be

said: Wait a minute, Europe, England, France, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, even Germany, these countries got rich because of colonialism. They fought wars based on colonial aspirations. The relationship between Slovenia and Kosovo, separated by two centuries and which Yugoslavia wanted to resolve, is something that awaits Europe. This is something that awaits all left-wing forces. How can we develop the underdeveloped in a different way?

**GRŽINIĆ:** In 2016, Slovenian journalist Valentin Areh made a documentary based on a number of new documents he acquired from the Hague tribunal. There is an interesting scene in the film showing a long procession of trucks carrying goods plundered from the Bosnian villages into what is today called the Serb Republic. However, this endless line of trucks carrying material goods was also travelling towards Serbia, and in that sense the image testifies to the criminal act of plundering. Have there been any debates about this, apart from the genocidal dimensions?

**KRAUS:** Yes, we now have the new rich. It is not just about the banks and the pyramid schemes, we should also look at the refrigerators, typewriters, houses, doors, windows. This was a war looting of the lowest level, and I can't deny that in Serbia, you may have heard about Arkan, such acts took place. The same was going on in Kosovo; the police were looting gold, jewellery... These things are never mentioned. New people appear, with new capital, and someone from an honest family can only speculate about the origins of that wealth. But this question is not tackled at a political level and generally people do not address topics of this kind, topics that make one ask questions like: "Dad, what did you do in the war?" Until this question is asked, until the answer is given, there will be no lasting reconciliation, no serious chance for a change.

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# Thirty Tonnes of Landscape. The Fake, the Authentic, and the Digitisation of the Colonial Journey

A photograph published in April 2020 shows a group of children from the Pemón community in Southern Venezuela – their hygienic masks are a sign of pandemic times. They are posing in front of the spectator outside the frame, and behind them there is an enormous rock, partially covered with a white veil. The scene would have gone unnoticed, passing easily as a tourist's souvenir snapshot, if it hadn't been produced during the period when the global health authorities recommended social distancing, self-isolation, and quarantine. What important issue could have obliged military and state officials to abandon social distancing protocols and travel hundreds of kilometres to visit the Pemón communities, far from the urban centres, which were at that time the focal points of contagion? Why was this meeting called during quarantine?

The scene unfolds leaving a few threads loose – the image itself denies certain parts of the larger production.

## New age extraction

At the end of the 1990s, the German artist Wolfgang Kraker von Schewarzenfeld launched his *Global Stone: A Worldwide Peace Project*, a “land art” style gesture with a new age twist. The artist’s plan was to extract two enormous stones from five “continents.” One stone would be placed in the country of origin, and the other one shipped to Berlin. The five stones would then be positioned in the Metropolitan Park in the centre of the German capital, arranged in a circle calculated at precise angles, so that on 21 June the rocks would reflect the light of the solstice and create an energetic connection between the points across the globe. Each piece would be inscribed with a motivational word: Europe’s stone with “the awakening”; America’s with “love”; Africa’s with “hope”; Asia’s with “forgiveness”; and Australia’s with “peace”. The stones were mined in Venezuela, Australia, South Africa, Bhutan, and Russia.

The search and shipment of the rocks began in 1998 and continued until 2011. In the project’s description, von Schewarzenfeld states that the project is the culmination of a lifetime’s preparation for doing good in the world: “My long and varied experiences have prepared me to make sure that this project has all the possibilities to be completed successfully. [...] I have built boats and my own house, planted trees around the world, and have learnt throughout my life how to deal with bureaucracy.” (Kraker von Schewarzenfeld, n.d.; trans. mine) The artist documented and published the story of the stones’ journeys on the project’s website, describing the crossing of innumerable borders, which required all kinds of extraction technologies, geological tests, environmental permits and passports. The bureaucratic feat seems to form a significant part of the conceptual framework of the project, something that signals the extent to which the ways of seeing and doing, typical of the “development” logic, have been legitimised by the global art system.

What is not always visible is how the (naïve) activism exemplified by *Global Stone* repeats the conditions of doing and seeing unfolded in certain primordial scenes of the 19th century colonial journey, updating them for the 21st century. The colonial journey blends with humanism’s “best intentions,” the asymmetric conditions of (artistic) production between the North and the South, and the capacity for unlimited appropriation and extraction, all packaged in a neo-gnostic discourse.

*Global Stone* is just one example of what it was possible to do and think at the turn of the century in the name of globality. This also marks the emptying out of the political and poetic force of the international solidarity movements of previous decades. “Healing the world” became the property of a certain intellectual, artistic, and activist class, who travelled “the Third World” and were moved by their “contact” with “other cultures.” This revised salvationist framework was sponsored by capital, which was no longer directed at solidarity projects between marginalised peoples, but at projects with a globalist reach and, of course, of individual authorship.

Around 1992, five hundred years after the European invasion of America, the decolonial positionalities emerged. Heirs to the Marxist tradition and proponents of an anti-development discourse, these new social movements rose against the advances of both the nation-state and the neoliberal agendas. Indigenous communities and organised ethnic minorities, who had been neglected and misunderstood by the new global agendas, were forced to confront both the repressive tactics of the state and the paternalism of the transnational humanitarian projects, which pay little attention to local contexts.

## Sacred jasper

The enormous red stone representative of “America” was extracted from the Canaima National Park in Venezuela in 1998. The area is one of the oldest geological formations on Earth and was declared a natural World Heritage site by the Unesco in 1994. As the landscape of the indigenous cosmogony, it is inseparable from the origin myth of the Pemón people, who have been living there for thousands of years. The Pemón were introduced to Western ethnological records in 1913 via a study published in German, *Vom Roraima zum Orinico. Ergebnisse einer Reise in Nordbrasilien und Venezuela in den Jahren 1911–1913* (*From Roraima to Orinoco. Observations from a trip to Northern Brazil and Venezuela in the years 1911–1913*) by Theodor Kock-Grünberg. The study was not translated to Spanish until 1979 and was available in a very limited edition, barely distributed in Venezuela. This detail serves as a backdrop to imagining the enthusiastic von Schewarzenfeld choosing a rock tailored to his tastes in the sacred plains of the Gran Sabana, inspired perhaps by the wealth of writing about this area in his own language.

The transfer of the “love” stone in 1998 coincided with protests organised by the Pemón, who were objecting to the Venezuelan state project of installing a high-voltage electricity plant, which was to supply electricity to Northern Brazil (the state claimed that the area’s natural resources proffered an “excess” of energy, a business opportunity that should be taken advantage of). The strategy of the protesters was to obstruct the main road connecting the Venezuelan South with the central areas of the country. According to various testimonies, the enormous red jasper stone being driven down the road and out of the area sparked outrage and the activists decided to detain the cargo for several months (see Núñez 2006; Surós 2018). In the end, thanks to the German artist’s careful management of bureaucracy, as he stated, he managed to get the piece out of the country. In January 1999, the rock arrived to Berlin.

The first stage of the conflict that arose was focused on the stone’s geological origin. The Venezuelans alleged that it was jasper: a semi-precious red quartzite, a protected mineral. The artist claimed that it was sandstone and thus worthless. The second stage of the conflict involved discussions about the sacred nature of the stone and its role in the Pemón cosmology, which understands the land as a unified whole, where the sacred and earthly elements inform and complement each other. For the Pemón, who were highlighting the geological and religious values of the mineral to the Gran Sabana, these were neither separate nor separable arguments.

In response, the artist argued stubbornly that the Pemón had “instrumentalised” the coincidence of the rock’s transfer with the protests and that this indicated the red stone had no greater value in the Pemón culture. Disputes over territory and resources mark the history of indigenous struggles across South America. It is understandable that the theft of 30 tonnes of the Pemón landscape, at a time when the great electrical engineering project was about to modify the land, provoked anger and rage about the dispossession that both projects entailed, without consulting the inhabitants of Canaima Park.

This incident could have been the moment that *Global Stone* turned its attention towards the local communities and their fight against the transnational giants of the energy business. However, the artist chose to discredit the Pemón and their political strategies. In January 2000, when the new age installation opened in the Berlin's Tiergarten Park, the artist addressed the Pemón in a letter entitled “Dancing on the Stone.” He informed them that thanks to their protests *Global Stone* achieved the media attention it previously lacked. He also urged them to stop taking advantage of him and

using the project as a banner for their territorial demands.

In 2010, the second stage of the dispute began, when the Venezuelan government assumed the role of the spokesperson and presided over the return of the stone from Germany, a process through which the stone was given a further mystifying twist: now it is the sacred nature of the stone and its role in local mythology that becomes the main argument in the request for its return. The stone begins to be referred to as “la piedra-abuela Kueka” (Grandmother-Kueka-Stone) across a great number of official government and press documents and public statements demanding the return of the 30-tonne jasper stone. In a film issued by the Venezuelan Ministry of Culture, a Pemón speaker, subtitled in Spanish, delivers a powerful message about the central role of the stone in the Pemón mythology. Some commentators suggested that the subtitles were manipulated to offer a different story about the stone and its relationship to the mythology (Illis 2010). The “Grandmother Kueka” is a revised story that many young Pemón leaders, belonging to a new generation who were not protagonists of the 1998 protests, have largely taken up.

### **Very young myths**

The journey of the stone from Berlin back to the Gran Sabana was paid for by the Venezuelan government at a cost of 35,000 Euros. The German government committed only to signing the documents permitting the stone to be taken out of the park; neither compensation nor apologies were given. The whole story was termed “a friendly agreement” and the case was closed. In 2018, when the agreement was signed, images of a Pemón group travelling from the Gran Sabana to Berlin to perform a stone healing ritual in the German capital’s Tiergarten park, were released by the Venezuelan Foreign Ministry. These images evidenced, according to their descriptions, the end of a long struggle: “With this Pemón ritual of healing in Berlin comes the definitive repatriation of the Grandmother Kueka, the sacred stone and cultural heritage that was stolen from its place of origin.”<sup>1</sup>

The terror of cynicism lies in the reaffirmations of the cynic that their actions are good: what is done is always done for the best of the other. Cynicism is a condition of seeing and making see. A kind of framing that is excessively produced but whose structure cannot be found “behind the image,” but rather in front of it. We may be able to tug on the loose threads of the scenography though – interpret why the light falls as it does on objects, why one angle has been chosen and not another, how much infrastructure is needed to transform an experience and deliver it from a distant corner of the earth onto a computer screen in the form of a complete, expressive image. Seeing, as an act of discovering how what we see has been produced, is an exercise in affective disobedience. Seeing is moving what the image hides.

In 2016, Venezuela opened the Orinoco Mining Arc to Russian, Chinese, and European commercial forces: 111 thousand square kilometres of new mineral exploitation sites for mining gold, diamonds, bauxite, titanium, among others. The Mining Arc includes a large section of the Gran Sabana and the indigenous territories. Over the last decade, as the mining industry expands and the economic crisis deepens, some Pemón communities have become involved in the search for gold. However, the majority of the Pemón are opposed to mining and continue their fight for the preservation of their environment and ancestral home (see Ramírez Cabello 2020). This is what the return of the stone hides.

“Grandmother stones” are not very common to the Pemón vocabulary. The reddish stone that was intercepted by the Pemón environmental campaigners in 1998 ended up becoming a sacred symbol for the Venezuelan nation state,

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<sup>1</sup> Statements made by the Chancellor of the Republic, 5 May 2018.



rather than the Pemón. As a sacred object and protagonist of a myth, the Grandmother-Kueka-Stone emerged as a new deity that many Pemón still do not recognise. The official forces intervened in the indigenous struggles, shifting attention towards the existence of an individual rock with symbolic and cultural value as opposed to recognising it as material evidence of the plunder of minerals in the area. The framing of the rock as a “cultural good” distracted from the resistance to the devastation of the landscape by extractivism, accelerated by the new economic strategies of the state.

On 16 April 2020, the news about the new coronavirus and biosafety protocols on national television and the Telesur continental channel were interrupted: the stone claimed by the Pemón had returned to Venezuela after a 22-year long dispute. The media offered triumphant narratives about indigenous struggles: “the pride of the homeland”; “the balancing of a historical debt”; “the victory of organised peoples”; “the advance of the Bolivarian revolution”; “the restitution of cosmic balance,” and “the ancestors’ relief.”

The confluence of these sound bites found visual expression in the ritual ceremonial acts, broadcast by national television on 21 April, when the stone was taken to a promenade where it was to reside permanently. Beside the rock, there is now a plaque that “certifies and accredits this place as a National Monument.” These are the words of the Minister of Culture, who was photographed handing a large print of the inscription of the accreditation written in Spanish to a young indigenous leader, both of whom were wearing masks. The journey of the virus in this instance could not stop the journey of the stone.

Pemón women and children were placed in the foreground of the images of the ceremonial acts, dressed in seemingly authentic traditional wear, despite that fact that the Pemón have been known to wear Western clothing for decades. The children danced traditional dances – as a backdrop to the official statements and declarations of the authorities. The songs and dances were accompanied by the *cuatro*, the main instrument in traditional Venezuelan music, which provided the background music to this performance of official sentimentality. It accompanied the patriotic and revolutionary discourses, the magic of the stone, and all the good intentions that gathered that afternoon. The music helped bring the dance closer to the audiences viewing the event nationwide by framing the belonging of the Indigenous peoples to the homeland and transmitting the victory of national diplomatic strategies. The scene unfolds and the enemy is unnamed, protected by a friendly agreement between politicians. Wolfgang Kraker von Schewarzenfeld's name dissipates into the background, as does Germany's irresponsibility in managing the stone's return. The music diverts conflict: harmony and arpeggio, sovereignty and mysticism. In the end, the new age vibe that carried the stone to Berlin welcomes it back home.

### **The garden of decolonisation**

On 16 April, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated on its website that the “Kueka Stone returns to Venezuela to bring spiritual balance to the world,” as did the German artist, when he claimed that the energetic connection of the five rocks would contribute to world peace (Arias 2020).

The revaluing of the stone in new age parlance reveals a trace of the continuity between *Global Stone's* discourse and the discourse of the Venezuelan state. The second Venezuelan stone extracted by the German artist sat for years on a pedestrian avenue in Caracas. Over the course of the international dispute, this second piece was never mentioned.

However, during the April quarantine, workers, protected with masks, moved the rock to a city museum. What was once von Schewarzenfeld's "love" stone will now be included on the list of objects to be exhibited in the future "Garden of Decolonisation": a new project organised by the Venezuelan Institute for Decolonisation with the participation of internationally recognised representatives of decolonial thought. "Cultural rescue" missions, decolonial processes, state sovereignty, and the defense of natural resources have become a theatre for new mysticism. Scenes of patriotisms, nationalist sentiments, fragments of indigenous myth, and anti-imperialist slogans hide the real scene of devastation.

In *Les damnés de la terre* (1961; *The Wretched of the Earth*, 2004) Frantz Fanon emphasises in different ways that "decolonization is always a violent event" (Fanon 2004, 1). Yet the journey of the Pemón stone and the discursive mutations that the dispute unfolds have reduced decolonisation to a walk through the garden of oblivions.

Thanks to Rebecca Close for translation.

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— SHKËLZEN MALIQI

- INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT [EXCERPT]

19 JULY 2018, NATIONAL GALLERY OF KOSOVO, PRISHTINA, KOSOVO

INTERVIEW BY MARINA GRŽINIĆ

## Genealogy of Amnesia

The full interview is available on the *Genealogy of Amnesia* project website at [https://archiveofamnesia.akbild.ac.at/?videos=shkelzen-maliqui&\\_sft\\_people=shkelzen-maliqui](https://archiveofamnesia.akbild.ac.at/?videos=shkelzen-maliqui&_sft_people=shkelzen-maliqui).

**MARINA GRŽINIĆ:** How did the war and the whole path towards independence influence the formation of memory and history in Kosovo, and what were the most drastic changes in the relationship between Kosovo and Serbia?

**SHKËLZEN MALIQI:** It's a complex question. Are you asking me how did the discourse change?

**GRŽINIĆ:** Yes, discourse.

**MALIQI:** If we look at the Albanian side, at Kosovo Albanians, it did not change. It was strengthened. It is a discourse similar to the one in Serbia. It pivots around the idea of national history, of an ethnically perceived past. It is an Albanological fiction that mirrors the same tendency on the Serb side, where it is even more intense, and both have clashed here with regard to the status of Kosovo. Is Kosovo Albanian, or is it Serb? In the beginning of the 20th century, Serbia managed to conquer Kosovo, but in the 19th century, Kosovo was a place where the Albanian national programme, its rejuvenation, was formulated. Prizren, for example, was where the Prizren League was formed. This was an Albanian league that fought for autonomy and independence within the confines of the Turkish Empire. But later, it turned out that Kosovo was not part of the state that was created after the Balkan wars, Serbia simply took it. And that conflict remained [and can be seen] in various forms. Ethnically, Kosovo was Albanian, an Albanian majority lived here, while the Serbs went back to the Battle of Kosovo [fought between the Serb medieval kingdom and the Ottoman Empire in 1389, won by the Ottomans], into the past, when Kosovo was the heartland of the Serb medieval state, and they constructed the Kosovo myth. This was nicely elaborated by Dimitrije Tucović and the Serb social democracy at the beginning of the 20th century. Dimitrije Tucović spoke about it especially in the book *Serbia and Albania*, which covers the Albanian question in detail. He spoke about the false pretensions of the Serb bourgeoisie to conquer territory, they were not interested in the

people, the Albanians. He formulated it well, saying that the conflict in Kosovo was between living people, the majority of Albanians, and dead monuments. He predicted that what Serbia did in the Balkan Wars, its underestimation of Albanians and the Albanian question, would have repercussions, that the conflict would last for 100 years, and that after a century the Serbs would probably realise that those years were lost and that they conquered something that ultimately did not belong to them.

[...]

This is a long story. There is a kind of triumphant nationalism that “is constructing” the state presently in Kosovo, but I guess it was a positive moment that the road to independence was first framed through Kosovo being a UN protectorate, followed by the insistence of the Western powers on Kosovo’s independence, with some compromises. This process was blocked in the UN Security Council by a Russian veto, although it was positive that the West, a sponsor of Kosovo's independence, insisted on the correction of nationalism, and that Kosovo has to be a multi-ethnic state, emphasising the greatest possible range of rights for the Serb minority, and so on. The greatest possible range of rights does not mean an extreme number of rights in terms of divisions, as was the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosnia and Herzegovina is, in a way, a bad model of intervention. Four years of genocide and a total deterioration of ethnic configuration were allowed to happen there, resulting in a division of the country, after which the whole country was artificially composed. A Bosniak-Croat Federation was constructed, while the Serbs practically took half of the territory, were made to agree to 49 % of the same territory. The unfortunate Dayton Peace Accords actually legitimised genocide and the dislocation of large parts of the population, especially Bosniaks.

When this new, modern Kosovo was being constructed, there was the idea that certain territories, those where the Serbs held the majority, should have some kind of lower-level autonomy, but that there should also be some kind of a line of division, i.e. territory, which was after the liberation of Kosovo in 1999 still left under Serb control. Not under the control of the local Serbs, but under the direct control of Belgrade. Still, south of the Ibar river, in the central region of Kosovo, there are a lot of Serb enclaves, but these are mostly small places, settlements of 2,000 or 3,000 people, sometimes more, of Serb origin, which can be best described as a kind of a canton.

The point is that the West succumbed yet again because their intervention, both in Bosnia and here, did not follow through to the end. Since they intervened against the Serb hegemonism, nationalism, etc., they should have occupied Serbia too and brought it to reason, to some kind of self-reflection, a decontamination, as was the case in post-World War II Germany. And yet, they did not go all the way. In Bosnia, they recognised and legitimised all the cited transgressions. Here, they used the same, albeit a slightly altered model, because they did not want to reward the Serbs with a territory, saying that these territories must be a part of Kosovo and retain special rights and institutions.

Kosovo declared independence in 2008, sponsored by the US, Britain, and France. Without their support, it would not have happened so easily. Nonetheless, these powers insisted that the Serb minority get their rights; an amount [of rights] to which the Serbs would agree. They sought more, they sought an autonomy that would mirror what the Serbs got in Bosnia, the goal was to have a Serb Republic here. The West agreed, saying: you can have a community of Serb municipalities that are not territorially connected, which can then construct some kind of a coordinating body representing the will and the interests of the Serbs, but not in the capacity of forming an institutions as a third level

power or as a form of autonomy with executive powers.

**GRŽINIĆ: So, if I understand you correctly, the mistake made in Bosnia is being rectified ...**

**MALIQI:** [...] It is attempted in Bosnia, yes, but it is very hard there. Because the conditions set up by the Dayton Peace Accord require that all new decisions must be consensual, approved by all the elements comprising the Bosnian Union. Here, it is still being negotiated. This is a crucial point in a range of dialogues that are taking place. The Dialogue [EU-facilitated dialogue for the normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo] was a compensation for the defeat Serbia suffered after it sued Kosovo at The International Court of Justice in The Hague because of its unilateral declaration of independence. The Court ruled that such a declaration of independence was not a violation of international law. After that, the whole process was blocked in a way, also from the perspective of the international community.

The agenda could not go back to the UN Security Council. They said: okay, Kosovo and the whole region will become part of the EU, we will let the EU and Brussels deal with it. Moreover, in its early phases, the Dialogue was shaped based on a model used during the process of normalisation of relations between East and West Germany in the 1970s, when East Germany was allowed to become a member of the UN so that it would not become a pariah of the international community or a Russian satellite.

The Serbs could have liked the idea, since the German version of the process ended with a situation in which West Germany “absorbed” East Germany, as the story goes. Except here, a different scenario is at work, and ultimately it should be the other way round. Not in the sense that an entity would take over another entity, but in the sense that Kosovo should receive the status of an independent state. Still, the constitution of Kosovo, Ahtisaari's [Martti Ahtissari, Finnish politician and the UN's special envoy for Kosovo] Plan, as well as all the decisions and intentions of the international community were oriented towards preventing Kosovo's unification with Albania. It is an obstacle because Serbia, which has always had the intention of creating a Greater Serbia, is the one loudly voicing protests about Greater Albania, an idea that supposedly threatens peace. Perhaps, if Kosovo would have had full independence, and since Albania has full independence, they could one day, as sovereign states, decide to form a confederation, a federation, and/or become one state. Yet, this is also a Serb projection, something they were not able to pursue to the end. There are also talks now about reconciliation with the Albanians, aimed at resolving the Albanian question through a form of unification of Kosovo and Albania, but only if the Serb Republic [an entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina] unifies with Serbia. The overall situation in the region, if some geostrategic peace, security, and stability are to be achieved, hinges on Serb-Albanian relations and consequent stabilisation, following which other problems should also subside.

**GRŽINIĆ: What does then the European, the EU, perspective represent?**

**MALIQI:** The European Union could, if we see it as a positive example, which in many aspects certainly is, especially from a legal/judicial angle ... Until 2010, the EU provided a perspective in the sense that it was generally perceived just as it thought of itself. [It was perceived in a similar way as] those who imagined it perceived it – not just as a loose confederation, but as a long-term project, where the decision-making process would not depend only on specific members and which, as the Lisbon Agreement projected, would integrate even more in terms of further limiting the sovereignty of member states, who would retain some traditional prerogatives, but in a more cohesive manner.

However, what happened is that the EU embarked on the same course as the Yugoslav Federation. Instead of realising the constitution, instead of moving towards majority decision-making, instead of going towards unified armed forces and a unified currency – after all, the Euro was conceived as such – the project was compromised in 2010, or more precisely in 2008, due to the world economic crisis. Subsequently, Europe has been witnessing those old tendencies; the rhetoric of the defence of sovereignty, nationalisms, etc. have returned. As can be seen in the case of Brexit, the right-wing is growing stronger in various ways, not just in the conservative countries such as Poland or Hungary, but in Austria and the Netherlands as well. There is still some balance, but ...

**GRŽINIĆ: If we take a look at the internal issues over this one decade of Kosovo's independence, how would you rate the current situation? How does this national state function, on what principles is it based?**

**MALIQI:** Since the 1990s, the majority of political parties in Kosovo have identified unification with Albania as their main goal. On the other hand, there was a more realistic wing, who dismissed the idea as impossible for the time being, claiming that what was possible should be done first. They argued that Kosovo must first become an independent state and then, after these preconditions were met, seek what could be done. This conflict began in the 1990s and was framed by the question of whether a rebellion should be initiated or not. At the time, Kosovo did not have the necessary capacity. In Yugoslavia, there was not only a federal army, every republic also had its own defence forces, the General People's Defence Force – but this was taken away in the 1980s and the 1990s, meaning that Kosovo did not have the necessary conditions for organising resistance against Serbia. Even in the 1990s, when everyone believed that the war would start in Kosovo, it began elsewhere; it began in places where Serbia and Croatia pursued their expansionist goals. And the only territory where they could expand was Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosnia was a central question with regard to resolving issues between Serbia and Croatia, issues seen as resolvable by expansionism. I think, and historical sources can confirm this, that Tuđman and Milošević negotiated an agreement on the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but Bosnia and Herzegovina, as an independent republic, managed to get admitted to the United Nations as an independent state, so that could not be allowed, not by Badinter [Robert Badinter, member of the Arbitration Commission of the Peace Conference on Yugoslavia], or the UN, the EU, or the super powers.

It is a problem similar to those we are now facing in the Middle East, where one state can fall apart, but the constituents of that state – republics in Yugoslavia's case – are not able to rearrange their borders overnight. So, the Serbs and the Croats failed in the case mentioned here, but they did manage to sustain a structure in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which they, in the future perhaps, can utilise in order to pursue their goals. Serbia is also seeking to gain something in Kosovo, as their representatives are constantly repeating to foreign diplomats that everything was given to the Albanians and Kosovo and nothing to them. It's not that they want Kosovo divided; they care about the northern part of Kosovo [where the Serbs live], they seek the easing of prohibitions with regard to changing state borders, hoping to be allowed to establish some sort of connection with the Serb Republic in Bosnia – if not in a form of unification, then in a form of some kind of confederation, at least in perspective. Similar as in the new, Putin's Russia, similar even to what is happening in the former colonies and/or states such as Iraq, Iran, those in the Arabian Peninsula, Libya – which are all composite states. I think that the logic of [the maintenance] of state borders is being compromised in terms of a demand for changes. Russia simply took Crimea and created two independent states in Georgia. There are a lot of similar situations, which they count on. The question is whether a new world crisis, or the crisis of the European Union, including the question of

Catalonia, can lead to the actualisation of these questions. In my opinion, the logic is the following: if the Catalonians and the Spanish can no longer live together, it is better for them to separate – and the same logic can be applied to the Serbs in Bosnia and the Serbs in Kosovo.

There are some Albanians who believe that this is our chance to unify with Albania. These are, so to speak, risky options, but it seems that many diplomats, outside of their official capacity, also support these kinds of ambitions. In the sense: Well, if this is what they want, let them go. It seems that Trump is also inclined to this way of thinking since, as we know, he stated during his campaign that it was okay that Russia seized Crimea, because it had once been theirs. International law is not perfect and many situations, previously maintained by force, cannot be perpetuated forever.

**GRŽINIĆ: If we take a look at the national body in the national state of Kosovo, on what kind of a relationship is it based? Since this identity was constructed by the majority, I wonder, are there minorities? Are there some drastic differences with regard to the treatment of women's rights, other rights, how does this state function?**

**MALIQI:** The state is conceptualised fairly well. It is based on the most progressive principles, which means that positive discrimination exists and that the rights of the Serbs are guaranteed by the constitution. There are also other minorities here, such as Turks, Roma, there are even some Roma subgroups that call themselves differently, such as Ashkali, Egyptian, and others. They are all represented directly in the parliament and have protected parliamentary seats – even if they have more seats, it is okay. The Serbs have ten seats, which is more in relation to the real percentage of the population. They make up no more than 5% or 6% percent of Kosovo, but they have ten seats. They also have other rights, which they sought concerning the municipalities they comprise and which were formed in order to reflect their interests. These special municipalities usually have 2,000 or 3,000 inhabitants, while others have up to 50,000. They are allowed to have control of the health system, education system, to work according to their own programme as well.

Other minorities are not as big a problem because they are smaller in number, dispersed, and territorially disconnected. From the perspective of the constitution and the law, no one is endangered. For instance, the Turks, who are concentrated in Prizren, have their language as one of the official languages used in that municipality, as well as elsewhere in Kosovo.

[...]

**GRŽINIĆ: Throughout the Balkans, Marxism is being pushed aside, liberal discourse dominates, there are elements of fascism, not historical fascism, but in the sense of the social body becoming racist, a negative stance towards immigrants, Europe, hatred of others, etc. – all this is not being analysed, but instead normalised. Are there such tendencies in Kosovo? Are there any other discourses?**

**MALIQI:** There is a kind of confusion here. There are many parties in the political arena, but no left-wing ones. Even if there is something resembling the left, it is flirting with nationalism, with national questions; it turns out to be something that resembles national-socialism. Not directly, but ... It is hard here to construct normal parties of the Western type. They, by name, can have that connotation, but they are mostly positioned in the centre, centre right, or on the right. In the 1990s, I was one of the founders of the Social-Democratic party of Kosovo, but at the time there were no

chances of conveying the vital components of the social-democratic programme, because it looked as though we were offering mantras, despite the fact that objective demands for the liberation of Kosovo were part of our programme. It is only now that the party has gained some new influence. It would be impossible to create a socialist party here, because there is huge resentment towards Milošević's Socialist Party of Serbia, in which Kosovo also played a part some time ago. That would not be feasible, no one would vote for such a party. But it seems that a couple of social-democratic parties are nevertheless emerging on the basis of ex-Marxists and Leninists who have not gone to the right. It is something that cannot be done in 10 or 15 years, because there are no clear economic interests, nor is there a clear class division. There are people who used to be part of the former regime, who had some property and became landlords. For instance, when 50 or 60,000 people from the UN, not just soldiers but also the UNMIK [United Nations Mission in Kosovo] staff/administration were here, anyone who had some personal property, a big flat under socialism, moved to a smaller apartment and rented out those big apartments for big money.

Our society is experiencing a rapid transition, but those who have profited the most are the ones who got rich in the 1990s. In those times, this was allowed by the state. It was a criminal state that allowed the accumulation of wealth based on smuggling. For example, you could make a deal with the head of some big company to get the merchandise but pay for it with a three months' delay, so when it was paid, due to the inflation of dinars, that was not nearly the same sum of money. You could buy five million dinars' worth of merchandise and then pay only 10 or 20% percent of that sum. This is the kind of plunder that was going on. The system of privatisation was such that it allowed a part of the population to get rich very fast, and those structures very quickly started to collude with the politicians, who would get rich merely on the basis of allowing the privileges for which they themselves were paid in return. Also, there were a lot of big international tenders regarding Kosovo's natural resources and energy/energy production, which were sold to Turkish buyers. All was sold for small money, but the politicians were probably getting big concessions and money from these Turkish, let's say, investors. Some say that Erdogan, in many aspects, stood behind those deals. That is it. Many layers of the population still do not recognise where their interests lay, or they belong to a clientelistic or corruption network, in terms of the use of various regional ties that allow the distribution of privileges on the same basis. Meanwhile, a third or maybe a quarter of the population live outside the country, in Western Europe or the US, sending money home and sustaining the population here, who can then buy a truck, a car, start a taxi business, etc.

The conditions for social protests are non-existent; not because they would be prohibited – we are not in a police state – but because there is no interest. It is all very diffuse, the way people survive. It could be said that this country is one of the poorest, the unemployment is high, etc., but you cannot get people to protest because very few are actually hungry or have nothing to live on. The conditions for larger social protests are not there, and this is why injustice exists. The question of class sedimentation should be looked at in a specific way, because the definition of interests precedes the translation of voices for the left, the right, for someone who reduces salaries or raises taxes. The only strata of the population that have unions here are those working in state companies, while the private sector is untouchable in terms of union-like networking, because neither unions nor the state can guarantee that a private employer will not fire a worker because he/she asked for a higher salary. The police, teachers, doctors can strike, and they usually get what they want; but on the other hand, the authorities can stop them by influencing the same unions, which are in principle controlled.



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# Uncomfortable Histories

This article discusses collective aphasia regarding the Dutch colonial past as it illuminates the intimate relationship between “public power” and the “private violence market,” which is one of the main features of today’s sovereignty. Some core questions at the focus of the analysis are: What kind of an overall picture of the Dutch history does this “colonial aphasia” (Stoler 2011) really want to conceive? Where does this “uneasy” approach to the questions related to the history of slavery on the soil of the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands (1581–1795) originate from? What lies behind the multi-ethnic makeup of the Netherlands?

Researching several historical and theoretical analyses that came to life especially over the last decade<sup>1</sup> and call into question the “optimistic assessment of the Dutch Republic as the ‘first modern economy’ that was characterised by free labour markets, the right economic and political institutions and sustained economic growth,” as Fatah-Black and van Rossum (2015, 55) argue, it came out visibly that there exists an increased interest to re-analyse the history of the Dutch involvement in slavery and the Atlantic slave trade.

As is known, in 1602, the leading statesman of the Dutch Republic Johan van Oldenbarnevelt co-founded the Dutch East India Company (VOC), which covered the interests of the Republic in the East Indies. The VOC had quasi-governmental powers in its overseas colonies (including the right to wage war, arrest and execute convicts, negotiate treaties, and to strike its own coins and create colonies) – it is regarded as the world’s first form of a transnational corporation. In the time of its existence, the VOC was considered the international arm of the Dutch Republic as well as the symbolic power of the Dutch Empire (De Latte 2016). In 1621, the Dutch West India Company (WIC) was formed to wage economic warfare against Spain and Portugal in the area of West Africa and America. It operated between 1621 and 1791 and had control over the Dutch involvement in the Atlantic slave trade, Brazil, the Caribbean, and North America (ibid.).

The Dutch initially transported slaves to northern Brazil, and in the second half of the 17th century, they had a controlling interest in the trade in the Spanish colonies. In the 18th century, today’s Suriname and Guyana became important markets, and in a span from 1612 to 1872, the Dutch administered around 10 fortresses along the Gold Coast (today’s Ghana), from which slaves were transported across the Atlantic. The trade declined between 1780 and 1815. The Dutch part of the slave trade in the Atlantic is estimated at 550,000–600,000 Africans. In 1863, the Netherlands was one of the last countries to abolish slavery, although the decision was made already in 1848. Moreover, only in 1873 would the slaves in Suriname be fully free, as the legislation stipulated that a mandatory 10-year transition was to take place (African Studies Centre Leiden 2020).

In their recent article “The Importance of Atlantic Slavery for the 18th Century Dutch Economy,” Pepijn Brandon and Ulbe Bosma (2019) state that in 1770 the Atlantic slave-based activities in the Dutch economy “contributed 5.2 per cent to the gross domestic product of the Dutch Republic, and even 10.36 per cent of the GDP of its richest province, Holland. Moreover, 19 per cent of Dutch imports and exports at that time (expressed in value) consisted of goods produced by the enslaved in the Atlantic,” such as sugar, coffee, and tobacco (for comparison; today’s digital economy contributes around 6.5 per cent to the US GDP) (ibid.).

What Karwan Fatah-Black and Matthias van Rossum pointed out in 2015 is that this violent colonial history is still largely regarded as part of the European “overseas” expansion history. Their article argues against this highly mistaken (commonly national) idea of the colonies as detached from the metropolises and their political, economic, and cultural development (Fatah-Black and van Rossum 2015, 57). This myth, they argue, the idea of the absence of the *institution of slavery, the practices of slavery, and the actual presence of slaves* on the Netherlands’ soil, has nevertheless been a constant to this very day (ibid., 58), preserved as it is, among other things, by speculative interpretations of an old story saying that the first recorded group of more than a hundred slaves arriving with Captain Pieter van der Haegen’s ship to the port city of Middelburg (in the south-west of the Zeeland province) in November 1596 was “freed” following a

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<sup>1</sup> For the full list see African Studies Centre Leiden (2020).

decision by the local authorities (see Hondius 2008, 85–86). However, in a survey of archival material, Dienke Hondius has convincingly argued that “[w]hat had at first seemed a stand against slavery by the local Dutch authorities turned out to be merely a decision to uphold slavery and the slave trade at a certain distance – overseas” (ibid., 87).

Fatah-Black and van Rossum argue that slavery existed as a real institution, as slaves from both the West and the East Indies (although in small numbers) had been brought to the Republic. Moreover, once the slaves had arrived, they did not gain their freedom (Fatah-Black and van Rossum 2015, 72). The physical presence of slaves testifies to the institution of slavery as being more than an overseas phenomenon (ibid.). “This is crucial, as the enslaved with their presence in the metropolis embodied the important links between the histories of slavery and slave trade, often overseas, and the history in and of the Dutch Republic. The holding of slaves was *en vogue* amongst exactly those elites directing the Dutch Republic and Dutch Empire through its political, cultural and economic institutions.” (ibid.; emphasis in original) Discussing the “Dutch exceptionalism and its politics of racism-denial” as having a role in the “pasteurization of history” and being an intricate part of institutional racism, Zihni Özdil (2014, 54) states that in terms of understanding history, unlike the English-speaking world, Dutch historiography, culture, and the Dutch lexicon lack analytical depth. Özdil argues that there is no analytical differentiation between the concepts of “slave” and “enslaved” in the mainstream Dutch discourse, although “the Afro-Dutch community introduced the term ‘enslaved’ in an act of ‘epistemic disobedience’ around fifteen years ago [...]. The dismissal of analysis by black and non-black people of color stems for a great deal from the institutionalized marginalization, fuelled by pasteurization, which keeps the spectrum of mainstream academic and public debate extremely narrow” (ibid., 54–55). Part of the Dutch exceptionalism is also the politics of denial with regards to the terms “whiteness” and “white privilege,” as allegedly bearing no substantial weight for the Dutch (colour-blind) society; according to Özdil both terms are being consistently replaced with more “neutral” term “blank” (ibid., 58).

Hondius maintains straightforwardly that none of the Black slaves who were forcibly brought to the Netherlands in the Golden Age period were referred to as slaves (2008, 87), which indicates a whole structure of language that avoids slave and enslavement terminology. The Netherlands has been practising this (racial) way of abstracting the slave-owning relations for a long time; in a certain sense, this finally came to an end with the general abolition of slavery in the colonies on 1 July 1863 (Fatah-Black and van Rossum 2015, 58). Although, as argued by Fatah-Black and van Rossum, the history of the slaves who were coming to and stayed in the Netherlands is mostly a hidden one, it nevertheless resurfaces in the notarial deeds and inventories (where the enslaved people are noted as part of the household mobilia), in passenger lists (with which the colonial authorities kept record of all the movements of passengers to and from the country), in the records of incidental court cases records (held about their status in the Republic), and in numerous artworks portraying prominent Europeans with their black servants (ibid., 61). “Together these sources give the impression of a small but often unproblematic presence of enslaved people and people of colour in Dutch towns” (ibid.).

In the conclusion, I am returning to Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee, who opened his remarkable 2006 analysis titled “Live and Let Die: Colonial Sovereignities and the Death Worlds of Necrocapitalism” – whose Slovenian translation was published in the third issue of *Reartikulacija* journal – with a quotation from a memo Jan Coen wrote in 1775 to his staff after being appointed Governor General for the Dutch East Indies Company: “Trade must be driven and maintained under the protection and favor of your own weapon. Trade cannot be maintained without war, nor war without trade. The times now require you to manage your general commerce with your sword in your hands.” (Banerjee 2006)

Banerjee (2006) further exposed the brutalities of Coen's "prescription on how to manage trade during the glory days of what was probably the world's first multinational corporation – [...] East India Company. In an era of European colonial expansion, the company was engaged in conquering markets, eliminating competition, securing cheap sources of raw material supply, building strategic alliances: in short everything management textbooks tell us to do 200 years later." These colonial expansionist practices involved capital appropriation as well as permanent destruction of indigenous industries (Banerjee 2006).

Moreover, Banerjee (2006) concludes his text by exposing how modern nation states have built their public power by drawing from the "private violence market." This "intimate relationship between colonial powers and their chartered private corporations is not qualitatively different from modern privatized military corporations and imperial powers of today." The Dutch East India Company flourished into the richest and most powerful of all, argues Banerjee (2006), because it was "absolute, and invested with a kind of sovereignty and domination," making "peace and war at pleasure."

In her review of Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics* (2019), Marina Gržinić captures precisely this idea of recalibration of "making peace and war at pleasure," when analysing Mbembe's use of language as a "dense literature language; a description of the fragmentation, or more accurately, of an accumulation of adjectives that present the main term always anew – racism is in this respect lavish, extravagant, excessive, and unrestrained. It proliferates as madly, poisoning, violently as to acquire a form of nanoracism, as a small invisible particle, or put in the context of the current developments, like a virus" (Gržinić 2020, manuscript submitted for publication, n. pag.). Nanoracism, as she elaborates it several passages later, is "the small-minded white prejudice [...] but also the basis of another machinery, the hydraulic racism that is the machinery that works even without the computer [...]." Racism, she argues, is constitutive for both, "the occidental drives and economic subjectivity" (Gržinić 2020).

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Bringing together carefully selected texts and positions with the aim to theoretically and critically intervene into the *Shifting Baselines* project, *Theoretical-Critical Horizons* provides insights and analyses aimed at rethinking the current multiple perspectives, from the coronavirus pandemic, notions of death, to coloniality of power and borderisation, the purpose of which is to shift the outcomes for (different forms of) life, art's complicity in coloniality, radicalisation of sovereignty, etc. and shake up our privileges and unprivileged positions in order to make a change and give different horizons to our lives.



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