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Euro-Slovenian Necrocapitalism

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The transition from socialist republic within the former Yugoslavia (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia or SFRY) to an independent neoliberal capitalist society has also brought with it the "illness" of contemporary capitalism. Slovenia has therefore displayed in its 17 years of independence a history of exclusions and evacuations that are, on the one hand, directly linked to processes of "kidnapped creativity" by various economic, political, ideological and institutional forces of power in Slovenia and, on the other hand, to traumatic and obscene procedures that can be considered shocking examples of violence against basic human rights in Slovenia and in the wider Europe. It is necessary to rearticulate precisely these points, to politicize them in order to make visible antidemocratic and racist processes in Slovenia and through it in the wider EU space. What is going on in Slovenia is not far from the processes of discrimination, deportation, etc., similar to EU politics. An example of this politics is a statement on new border-security measures presented by the European Commission on February 14th 2008. Brussels has proposed fingerprinting for all foreign visitors to Europe, and electronic registration upon every entry and exit. Some of these control measures are already being used by major airports in Britain, France, Germany and the Netherlands. A European Border Surveillance System for the

external land and sea borders is another possibility for boosting internal security, Brussels officials said. More joint operations of member states would also see the role of the EU's border control agency Frontex expand.

My thesis is therefore twofold: the case of Slovenia cannot be properly understood if it is not enlarged on the one hand as being the symptom and the rearticulation of the process of necropolitics (Achille Mbembe) in the European Union today, and on the other hand as being the symptom and the rearticulation of the turbo fascist processes (Žarana Papić) in the post-Yugoslav territory (mainly analysed by Papić in Serbia). In "Necropolitics," (2003) Achille Mbembe discusses the spatial demarcations of the state of exception as the geopolitical demarcation of zones, and the more recent mobilisation of the war machine. Mbembe concludes his essay by arguing that the concept of biopolitics might be better replaced with necropolitics. I am making a reference to both the symptom and rearticulation of it according to Santiago López Petit, who in his essay "A civic democracy: a new form of control," employs the word articulation as a process and also its result.

Although it seems that these two processes are very different and it is not possible to establish a platform of a common, though hidden genealogy, my belief is that these processes are connected and therefore even more effective as they are part of the wider European Union space politics. This space can be described, if I make a reference to Nataša Govedić's analysis of the Dogma 95 film movement as "wonderful fascism and ugly freedom." Aren't the new proposed Schengen border-security measures precisely picturing such a new condition of life in the EU today?

The post-Yugoslav situation is not a condition per se, i.e., a condition separated from the current situation within neoliberal

global capitalism. On the contrary, rather than "outside" this framework, I can fully argue it is most internal to it.

I will expose the changes that affect the position of contemporary art today, its institution and the art market, due to which contemporary culture is being transformed into the most repressive field within contemporary capitalist society. On the one hand, what we have today is the complete institutionalization of the field of contemporary art. The practices of criticism and theory of contemporary art and culture are part of a very powerful institution of art where a mixture of younger and older generations are "searching" for possibilities to organize different formats of art and critique. But in reality, all those who are seen as a new generation depend terminally on the old structures; few names are organizing the space, mostly men and some women (gender division becomes unimportant as both groups of mostly or maybe solely members of the white middleclass are subordinated to the power of capital which, through multinational corporations, banks, insurance companies and powerful family businesses, decides who will be part of the core and, from time to time, who among the younger generation will be chosen to refresh the art scene). They are all also in charge of the selection (of who will be the next curators) and organization of the most powerful and notable festivals, biennales and other forms of presenting art and culture of worldwide importance. They are in charge of state and powerful associations, funds on national and international European levels, as well as belonging to such visible and less visible boards that are connected to each other and support each other.

The reasons are very simple: the contemporary institution of art depends on money, the market and collectors, and will not jeopardize this power; what all of them have in common is the ideology of neoliberal capitalism; this is the ideology of the good

life, as Suely Rolnik would say: they are caught in the vicious circle of luxury subjectivity production, of being part of the middleclass elite, travelling around visiting art festivals, eating and drinking well, and having fun. This is common to all these structures, no matter if it is a private, state, semi-private or semi-state structure. All of them have only one agenda: power and more power based on different channelling of the neoliberal ideology which translates this desire for the good life into the vocabulary of a fancy theory using words such as democratization, efficiency and development. In short, it is possible to say that due to globalization and ICT technology, for example, the quantity of information and the quantity of critique and analysis are rising proportionally.

Therefore, it is important to state that lives in the post-Yugoslav condition as well as in the former eastern bloc, are nowadays organized according to the "standards" set by the first capitalist states. If so, then maybe the biopolitics that is operative and is managing this life needs to be intensified. Therefore, instead of talking about biopolitics, we should talk, in Mbembe's words, about necropolitics. Biopolitics involves articulating the politics of life, where life (does not matter any more, being bare of life with forms) is seen as the zero degree of intervention of each and every policy. But nowadays the capital surplus value is based on and capitalized from the perspective of death (worlds). Also, in the first capitalist societies, the logic is not the maximum of life but the minimum for living and sometimes not even this. It is this logic that organizes the contemporary neoliberal global capitalist social body. The minimum that is imposed can be captured through analysis of all the battles that are going on at the moment in Europe; from the demands to control the processes of precarity, the loss of the social state, social and health security, not to mention the politics of improving measures of control on the

Schengen borders throughout the whole EU space. The new proposed measures to control the Schengen borders are seen as those lines of division that will regulate the process and politics of death. Those who will be stopped at the EU frontiers are already the living dead, those who have nothing to lose not even life. The EU's improved and coordinated immigration policy with the possibility of arranging the status of immigrants and all others is nothing more than a policy enabling the set-up of a system to kill, exterminate and get rid of all these bodies without a life (if rejected) at the Schengen borders.

In his essay, "Live and Let Die: Colonial Sovereignties and the Death Worlds of Necrocapitalism," published in 2006, Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee, referring to Agamben and Mbembe, discusses how some contemporary capitalist practices contribute to necropolitics. Necropolitics is connected to the concept of necrocapitalism, i.e., contemporary capitalism, which organizes its forms of organizational accumulation that involve dispossession and the subjugation of life to the power of death. The necrocapitalistic capture of the social implies new modes of government that are informed by the norms of corporate rationality and deployed in managing violence, social conflict and the multitudes. No conflict is tolerable that challenges the supreme requirements of capitalist rationalization – economic growth, profit maximization, productivity, efficiency and the like.

My belief is that necropolitics must be implied in all the politics that lay down the condition of originating the social and political space of the post-Yugoslav reality. Let us just draw up in detail these elements.

In Slovenia, necropolitics is set in motion in at least two very precise situations. One such case which must be "internationalized"

and politicized further is the case of the so-called "erased people" or in Slovenian "izbrisani." On 26 February 1992, eight months after declaring independence from Yugoslavia, the new Republic of Slovenia deleted some 28,000 residents from its civil registries. This happened long after hostilities between Slovenia and Yugoslavia had ended, so war cannot be used as an excuse for the mass cancellation of these residents' legal status. These people, who came to be known as the *izbrisani,* or the "erased," are Serbs, Croats, Bosnian Muslims, Albanian Kosovars, Roma and other non-ethnic Slovenians originally from other parts of the former Yugoslavia who had lived and worked in Slovenia for many years, some of them for decades. They were suddenly deprived of all official status in Slovenia. Their citizenship papers were confiscated, destroyed or invalidated, which meant that other official documents were also made invalid. As a result, they found themselves deprived of the right to work, to social insurance, indeed the right to live a normal life. There are many names for this massive violation of human rights by the Slovenian state: soft genocide, administrative genocide, administrative ethnic cleansing, civil death, mass denationalisation and so on. These are all names for social and political elimination in the de- and re-territorialisation of bodies and are a textbook case of contemporary not biopolitics, but necropolitics. As a result of this policy, some 12,000 members of the targeted groups (out of approximately 30,000) left Slovenia. The 18,305 "erased", who remain in Slovenia, exist between two deaths: the physical – since without papers they cannot function normally – and the symbolic, resulting from the horrific psychological pressure of being expelled from the social context, cut off from their own families and from all manifestations of public life.

In 2003, the Slovenian Constitutional Court proclaimed itself in favour of the *erased,* demanding that the erased people be recognised and be returned the status they had prior to the erasure on 26 February 1992. The centre-right coalition currently in power in Slovenia opposes the Constitutional Court Decision. At the end of October 2007, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia presented a Draft Constitutional Law for the Implementation of the Fundamental Constitutional Charter on the independence of the Republic of Slovenia, concerning *the erased people*. With this Draft the present Slovenian Government creates different categories of the erased people, is fully discriminatory towards the erased, enables new withdrawals of statuses, denies responsibility of the state bodies for the erasure and annuls the right of the erased people to compensation.

Instead of finally giving a stolen life back to the erased people, the Government tries to implement further unconstitutional, unlawful and discriminatory procedures. The Draft is a measure with which the present Slovenian Government wants to "solve" the demand from Brussels, from the EU, which stated that the problem of the erased has to be resolved before Slovenia takes over the EU Council presidency in 2008. (Cf. the statement issued on the case by the Peace Institute, Ljubljana http://www.mirovni-institut.si/Main/Index/en/).

This situation is also connected with the position of those who are not erased but are workers from former Yugoslav republics who are living in the most precarious situations, they are the new "lumpenproletariat" that is not even included, for example, in the syndicate demands for a better life that are presented today to the neoliberal capitalist Slovenian state and government.

Another such case that has to be "internationalized" and politicized further is that of the Strojans, an extended family of 31 Roma, 14 of them children, who were forced to abandon their land on 28 October 2007 when the local population of Ambrus and other nearby villages surrounded their homes, threatening to kill them and demanding their eviction. While the police kept the crowd back, Slovenian government officials negotiated the blitzkrieg family's removal. Due to the government's role in the removal of the Strojan family, the incident ranks as one of the most serious attacks on a Roma community in Europe in a decade, according to some rights groups.

Therefore, putting these two "situations" together it is obvious that it is only possible to think about the history of the critique of the institutions of art and culture in connection with the social and political spheres in Slovenia. Therefore, the most important task in contemporary art and culture situation in Slovenia is to develop such analysis and art projects that through such events are capable of universalizing politically and socially the so-called "autonomous space of contemporary art and culture dedicated only to creativity." At the local level of art and culture, it is necessary to detect the universal (meaning EU as well) question of exploitation by capital. This exploitation is visible also in small groups of a specialized new generation of curators and artists that are not able to connect transversally and fully the question of the "lumpenproletariat" of neoliberal global capitalism with the perverse commercialization and specialization of art as the space of good life where art is solely a question of trends and brands. Moreover, these local processes are enforced and institutionalized on different levels from outside the post-Yugoslav condition and reinforced by the neoliberal global system in Europe. These specialized, managerially motivated networks which are established through different channels, groups

and positions, are in most cases asked to join European Union presentations, being themselves also transformed into the brand of what is seen as the "normalized" – Intercultural dialogue as a fundamental value of the EU – status.

In his already mentioned essay, Santiago López Petit writes that the discourse on civic behaviour implies and requires two elements: the first is war state, which is a capitalist mechanism that produces orders based on war, and the second is postmodern fascism. Civic behaviour, argues Petit, is a spurious way of determining today the intervention by the largest population in the social and political sphere, while contemporary neoliberal global capitalist states try to depoliticize such interventions by transforming the "citizen that urinates on the street" and the "protesters that try to improve social conditions," into equal groups of citizens; the state qualifies them as just two type of criminals.

What we have in the case of the erased people or in the case of the Roma family Strojan are precisely these two conditions coming together. They also present a never-ending state of exception. The war state as defined by Petit is a capitalist mechanism that produces order based on war that needs a permanent individuation of the enemy. In practice, this is a war which, in Slovenia for example, ranges from war against poverty to war against journalists, who in 2007 sent a petition to the EU institutions describing the situation of the media in Slovenia as totalitarian to the present moment when the Slovenian government is at war with the so-called tycoons or ultra capitalists. Petit says that postmodern fascism acknowledges differences so that they can be used to unify order. In this context, as argued by Petit, the defence of personal autonomy is actually a form of control; freedom of choice means that nothing really changes.

According to Petit, democracy today is practically the re-articulation of the war state and postmodern fascism. These are not only the two major features of the post-Yugoslav condition, but also of the EU, if we just think of the mentioned task of changing the control policy. However, each democracy, as argued by Petit, is implementing a specific articulation of these two features. Today, the state in neoliberal global capitalism is pushing, realizing and articulating a strong policy of de-governmentalising sectors of what was seen in the past as public life, social and health agendas of common interest that, following decades of class struggles (nothing is given in capitalism), were set for the majority of citizens. It was the idea of the European social state, which was also active in the Yugoslav context in the time of Socialism. Today this de-governmentalizing process is going on with the total and complete privatization of all these public fields. In order to cover this complete privatization and the role of the state in neoliberal global capitalism that is just the agency of capital and multinational interests processing necropolitics (the minimum that is beyond the minimum) a whole set of ideological practices are re-implemented on the whole territory of the EU. In order to obfuscate the necropolitical practices through the Blut und Boden ideology, the state and its apparatuses, respectively in specific conditions and through specific language, knock on the 19th century national pride and rights of Slovenes, Croats, Serbs as well as the French and the Germans, etc.

In order to come to a conclusion about the post-Yugoslav condition as a condition of specificity, but also a unifying moment that overdetermines, as Louis Althusser would say, the whole space of post-Yugoslavia and connect it directly to the EU, I will call the economical, social and political situation in Slovenia turbo neoliberalism. By presenting an ideology of neoliberalism, with

clear turbo and clerical fascist patterns, it disrupts straightforwardly, and at all levels, any kind of a possible social state.

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