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Jubilee as a Ceremonial of Coexistence of Heritages of
the World

After nearly a year of living in a state of emergency,¹ it is becoming clear that, despite the cracks we might sense in the fabric of the world, change will not be achieved by a quick and easy turnaround. Perhaps one of the most fundamental tasks is to ask ourselves what it really means to be human, and therein lies the answer to what they will become in the future. It is becoming increasingly evident that the dominant concept of the human as racialized and gendered, which is also the basis for a hierarchical categorisation and systematisation of people on the basis of their skin colour, gender, ethnicity, religion and sexuality, etc., is founded on false ontological and epistemological assumptions. If we aspire to establish different, more egalitarian relations today and to strive for a more sustainable future, it is vital that we understand the processes of establishing the colonial matrix of power, based on exclusion and subjugation (colonialism) and the pursuit of continuous progress (modernity). Above all, it is necessary to establish the possibility of a different narration with which we could begin to define ourselves.

In this contribution, we will lean mainly on feminist and decolonial theory, which seeks the emancipation of all Othernesses. On the experiential level, such a narration can only be formed and shaped by the Other, namely, someone that does not fall in the category of white, heterosexual, Christian man. It must be noted that in many cases the Other has internalized the conceptual framework of the ruling,

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pseudo-universal, which is why they must necessarily be aware of their site in the existing matrix and strive for delinking of connections that belong to them in this constellation, in order to be able to establish them anew or to integrate into the matrix in a different way. The Peruvian sociologist and decolonial theorist Anibal Quijano situates the origins of the practice of conceptualising the human as racialized and gendered in Europe around the fifteenth century, when processes of colonisation of new territories, Christianisation and enslavement were taking place in parallel in the “New World.” In explaining the principles of power mechanisms that allow us to see modernity/colonialism as two sides of the same coin, he introduces the concept of the colonial matrix of power. With it he explains the principles of the global hegemonic system, tailored to the white, European, Christian man, and the consequent conceptualisation of the world through Western knowledge and thought, based on binary oppositions, dualistic, strictly rival and subordinating attitudes. Professor of Romance Cultures and Literatures, semiotician and decolonial theorist Walter D. Mignolo reminds us that,

at that moment the colonial matrix of power was formed and it was a European invention in the name of salvation to justify their crimes [of imperialists]. From then on, the colonial matrix of power operates in two simultaneous movements: building itself as a civilizational project and destroying other civilizations. That means, silencing, disavowing [Others], racializing in a vast vocabulary from barbarians, to primitives, from communists to terrorists. (Mignolo 2017a)

In his concise account of the functioning of categorisations and difference, Mignolo draws on Quijano’s concept of the colonial

matrix of power, from which it becomes clear that the establishment of seemingly separate domains is in fact one of the grandest ontological fictions of them all. It is majestic in the sense of how profoundly it shapes and determines our reality, but also in the sense of its omnipresence, i.e. its global dimension. Several decolonial theorists therefore point to the need to rewrite world history and to the necessity of carrying out decolonial processes in the territories of former and current imperial powers (European countries, the USA, Russia, China, etc.). Mignolo provides a plastic schematic of the matrix's operation as follows:

The Man/Human who created and managed the cmp, posited himself as master of the universe and succeeded in setting himself apart from other men/humans (racism), from women/humans (sexism), from nature (humanism), from non-Europe (Eurocentrism), and from "past" and "traditional" civilizations (modernity). Nature, in the domains of the colonial matrix of power, lies between the domains of economics and politics; it was invented by Man/Human in the process of him setting himself up in the locus of the enunciations (institutions, actors, and languages) that created, transformed, and managed the rhetoric (narratives) of modernity, and the necessary and concomitant logic of coloniality. He who governs does not obey, became the assumption in the growing affirmation of the secular Ego in Western civilization. ("The Decolonial Option" 163)

For the final enthronement of the order with humanity at its centre (humanism), the key was the establishment of separate domains, human's detachment from the biotope, which at the same time also supported capitalism with its extractionist stages. Imperialists made this narrative turn by inventing the concept of nature. According to Mignolo,

[n]ature doesn't exist, or it exists as an ontological fiction – what there is is the relentless generation and the regeneration of life in the solar system from which processes emerged a species of living/languageing organisms. A limited sector of these creatures were able to define themselves as human and impose their self-referential description as standard for all living organisms of the same species. (“The Decolonial Option” 158-159)

Quijano lucidly reveals the continuation of this process by linking the emergence of racism through extractionism to capitalism, and also to the racialization of nations.

Racism consists in the racialization of ethnicities. [...] That is, *ethnos* and *natio* refer to what a community of people share in living together and recognizing themselves/ourselves in their/our memories, languages, symbols, shared knowing, and emotions, while race refers to an asymmetrical power relation between ethnicities or nations. (Mignolo 2017a)

Racialization based on national classification, derived from a territorial epistemology, became topical in Europe in the nineteenth century with the emergence of nation-states and, according to Quijano and Mignolo, became even more dangerous. This area of rivalry further potentiates the labelling and oppression of the Other.

If we want to understand the roots of Slovenian nationalism, we should look back to the time of the collapse of the Habsburg Empire and not to the mythical Carantania that the far-right would like us to conjure up. The process of national identity formation can be constructively examined in the specific case of Styria, since until 1918 the present-day Austrian and Slovenian Styria formed the common province of Lower Styria, one of the crown lands of the Habsburg Monarchy. As Karin Almasy, Professor of Slovenian-German translation and historian, and Eva Tropper, historian, cultural historian and museologist, point out in the exhibition catalogue

ŠTAJER-MARK: Razglednice zgodovinske Spodnje Štajerske 1890–1920 (Postcards of Historical Lower Styria 1890-1920),

[u]ntil the late 19th century, people did not feel as being “Germans” or “Slovenians,” other identities were far more important: they were Styrian man and women, Catholics, towns-persons or peasants, inhabitants of Maribor or Ptuj. (Almasy and Tropper 12)

The multilingual and multicultural historical situation in Styria was already highlighted in detail in the previous exhibition *Gledat, kaj delajo* (To See What They Do), which was also as part of the Maribor European Capital of Culture programme.

Although, from the historical perspective, modern nations are constructs, they have been established since the 19th century as influential social mega-clusters, due to their borders and due to tendencies for homogenisation of the “national” territory there were also often hard struggles going on. Even though the structural characteristics of individual nationalisms might share some similarity, we can see a clear distinction between the process of national differentiation among the German and Slovene populations in the Duchy of Styria in the early 19th century: the fight between the dominant German nationalism and the subjected (i.e. subordinate) Slovene one. Individual intellectuals have, on the basis of local information and their own wishes, determined the course of the “linguistic boundaries” between the German and the Slovene nation as an important component of the definition of national territory. [...] The linguistic boundaries therefore depended on the author’s national position and on their evaluation of the local linguistic situation. German authors, such as Joseph Karl Kindermann (1744 – 1801) and Richard Pfaundler (1882 – 1959), attempted to move the border as far south as possible, while Slovenian authors, such as Peter Kozler (1824 – 1879), who drew a map of the Slovenian country after the Revolutions of 1848, or Josip Šuman (1836 – 1908) and Ante Beg (1870 – 1946), wanted to move the border as far north as possible. (Arlt Elisabeth *et al.* 23, 25)

The case of Styria is certainly not the only one. Questions of national identity are often raised in relation to border territories and the minority communities associated with them, but they are also

profoundly linked to migration flows and issues of integration and assimilation, both historically and in the present day. By analysing these territories and their histories, we can develop a more detailed understanding of principles of national identification and related nationalism. It is interesting to note that nationalism can exist without a state, i.e. without a territory of its own. Furthermore, under such conditions, it is additionally enhanced and, as a result, all the more combustible. A particularly important role in the formulation of national identity politics is fulfilled by rituals (festivals, ceremonies, state protocol), which have both an integrative (community) and a legitimising function (social order). National identity politics are established by states primarily through the emphasis on state-building rituals, intertwined with the festivals of the official religion. In the European context, we can see that Christianity participates as one of the imperialist forces at the beginning of formation of the colonial matrix of power, but later, in the process of formation of nation states, it is localised and inscribed in national history. In this scheme, official religion is presented as something that has been there from the beginning, creating an illusion of continuity, displacing other “indigenous” forms of belief/cosmologies. Like religion, ceremonials linked to politics and the state seek to affirm a semblance of continuity, and by legitimising the social order, they perform the function of securing national pride. In this way, they maintain the stability of the separate domains, i.e. they feed the perpetuation of the

ontological fiction of separateness conceived in the fifteenth century.

Or, as Mignolo puts it:

The mutual foundation of the enunciated (the domains) of the colonial matrix of power and the enunciation that created the domains at the same time that it created itself as such, was founded on ceremonial acts and events. (“The Decolonial Option” 156)

These are domains that attempt to displace pre-existing cosmologies and the ceremonial acts based on them, or to preserve some of the customs and traditions, but as dispersed, particularistic and, above all, detached from their original function. In order for the concepts of decolonial theory to be applicable, it is necessary to address, above all, the emancipatory processes by which we can interrupt the energy currents of the colonial matrix of power and, at the very least, begin to exercise our personal sovereignty to establish egalitarian relations with living beings, things and the environment. In response to the three spectra of subjugation, Mignolo introduces the notion of decolonialism, in which

“de-” indicates above all the need and the goal of the re-: epistemic reconstitutions, re-emergence, resurgence, re-existence. That is, neither new nor post. (Mignolo 2017b)

Or, more directly,

[r]e-existing means using the imaginary of modernity rather than being used by it. Being used by modernity means that coloniality operates upon you, controls you, forms your emotions, your subjectivity, your desires. Delinking entails a shift toward using instead of being used. It proposes to delink from the colonial entanglement with modernity/coloniality. [...] Decoloniality names the vision and energy of delinking (disconnect) to relink (re-connect) with praxis of living, thinking, doing that we, decolonially speaking, want to preserve. (Mignolo and Walsh 146-147)

It should also be considered that decolonial delinking cannot be implemented on everything at once, but must focus on specific

domains, levels and currents of the colonial matrix of power and their relations with everything else. “Most of culture and civilizations on the planet see relations while in the West we are taught to see entities, things. Relations could not be called ontological.” (“The Decolonial Option” 146-148)

Where and when did stories of the colonial matrix of power replace relational ones?

One of the significant erasures in the domestic sphere can be traced in a recently published work by writer, publicist, printmaker and chronicler of folk heritage Pavel Medvešček, entitled *Iz nevidne strani neba* (From the Invisible Side of the Sky). It describes in detail a form of animist religion, which, in its very name, Old Faith, carries a hint of a form of indigenous pre-Christian cultural heritage that, through its peculiar mimicry, managed to survive as a living practice in the hills around the basin of the Soča Valley until the First World War. According to some researchers, the area of its existence once extended, in addition to other present-day Slovenian provinces, into Veneto and Istria (according to Toplak). The study, supported by extensive research material, details the rituals, customs, traditions and cosmology of the so-called *staroverci* (Old Faith Believers) or *naravoverci* (Natural Faith Believers), who live in harmony with *zduhci* (spirits), which they see in living beings as well as in inanimate things, such as rivers, trees, stones and wind (Medvešček). Unlike the anthropocentric worldview, Natural Faith Believers do not distinguish between nature and culture, nor do they place the human

in a superior position; on the contrary, for them, the whole experience, all living and non-living are interconnected, braided and interdependent, coexisting in harmony with one another. This also shows that the relational scheme of the Old Faith Believers, unlike the anthropocentric one, is egalitarian, and as such offers inspiration for delinking from the dominant pseudo-universal models that have been constructed in the last five centuries.

One of the few to point this out is feminist researcher and decolonial theorist Zoe Todd, a member of Canada's Métis indigenous community. Drawing on the legal scholar John Borrows, she develops the thesis that indigenous world views are not merely an interesting theoretical alternative to atomistic subjectivity, but in fact the basis for political struggles (qtd. in Burke Charmichael 135). Namely, the anthropocentric world view with its separation of nature and culture, as well as the centrality of the human in cosmology and their "right" of domination and connection to progress (modernity), which we discussed at the beginning, is no longer tenable. It is necessary to reverse the perspective. Each individual should delink from the site assigned to them and establish a more sustainable position. And the heritage of our Natural Faith Believers and other indigenous peoples presents itself as a possible perspective for a turnaround. This is because heritage belongs not only to humanity, but also and above all to the Earth as a community of all coexisting beings and things. In this light, we can also understand the philosopher and political theorist Achille Mbembe, who argues that in our time we have "to

rethink the human not from the perspective of its mastery of the Creation as we used to, but from the perspective of its finitude and its possible extinction.” (Mbembe) Only the inclusion of indigenous epistemologies and ontologies in existing knowledge systems would confirm the coexistence of a plurality of views (pluriversalism), and only then would indigenous peoples truly have the possibility to struggle for self-determination and sovereignty (Burke Charmichael 135).

Understanding the concept of heritage from an analytical perspective can help us to shed light on the changing constructs of territorially conditioned identities or created ontological fictions that change and adapt over time as they are handed down from generation to generation. As elsewhere in the world, the lonely remnants of the past resound hollowly in the existing rituals, which, along with the belated formation of our national identity, is probably an additional reason why it has been largely formed on the hollowed-out celebration of the relics of tradition, homesteading mentality and the romantic idyll (ghosts of the nineteenth century). National pride was supposed to be created by the flag, the coat of arms and the national anthem, along with national costumes, Alpine-style folk music, Carniolan sausage and potica as the core symbols. The very set of these elements indicates that something is missing. It becomes obvious that in the homogenisation of the national body numerous particularities have been either ignored, erased or exterminated. In the face of this arbitrariness, we can see that contemporary identity is a fluid fusion

of fabricated fictions, which also offers the possibility of delinking from the imposed indoctrination and symbolic flattening of national identity.

In this light, it is also interesting to consider the view of Rodney Harrison, Professor of cultural heritage studies, who believes that

heritage functions toward *assembling futures*, and thus might be more productively connected with other pressing social, economic, political, and ecological issues of our time. (Harrison 24)

More precisely, in order to replace the yearning for growth and

progress with a different kind of becoming, it is necessary to introduce connective ontologies, “in which life and place combine to bind time and living beings into generations of continuities that work collaboratively to keep the past alive in the present and for the future.” (Harrison 27) In this respect, heritage can be understood “as collaborative, dialogical and interactive, a material-discursive process in which past and future arise out of dialogue and encounter between multiple embodied subjects in (and with) the present.” (Harrison 27)

In the process, we have established the protagonists, Dragica and Dragana, as actors whose queer identities inappropriately mark the established order and disrupt the classical, simplistic dualist scheme on which the colonial matrix of power is based. In this we were aware that in order to achieve the egress of protagonists from the established order, they must first symbolically build it by submitting to the protocols of tradition, and only then does the possibility open up for them to loosen and unravel it by delinking in order to relink in a more sustainable way. By embodying and enacting the concept of hybridity

and the method of cultural navigation, the protagonists underline the transformative power of situatedness of possible forms of subjectivation. It is a journey back in time to Romanticism, to a time when the capitalist way of governmentality (biopolitics) is strengthened to the extreme, and the protagonists are placed in it with a specific purpose. The ossified iconography collapses before the viewer towards its zero point through a process of deconstruction and delinking. At the same time, there is an increasingly empowering feeling of Dragica and Dragana using heritage to construct and also to constitute different narratives of the past, present and future. The audience is a witness to the emancipatory process of their becoming, as well as a mediator and potential guarantor of the strengthening and expansion of emancipatory processes. It is about the reversals of relationships and hierarchies that take place simultaneously in the current moment and in multiple imagined futures. They are a premonition of the world to come, made up of fragments of the past. This is achieved by using “a performative metaphor that allows for otherwise unlikely encounters and unsuspected sources of interaction of experience and of knowledge.”

We believe that the set of symbolic images, through their associative multiplication and transitions between fluid impressions of identities, allows for the weakening of the national code, established on the order of things based on dualisms, hierarchies and chains of meanings, which makes it increasingly difficult to consolidate the complexity of contemporary reality. Certain keys to realising the

potentiality of the fusion of cultural and natural heritage in the domain of artistic work are realised as protocols of speculative futures, while others are incarnated as protocols of speculative heritages.

In seeking a way forward into a more complex sense and understanding of the coexistence of the two hitherto conceptually separate heritages of the world, or their integration into a common heritage, we have sought to suggest that this is about the realisation of a new ethics that would link the hitherto stratified in a more egalitarian form; that would care instead of deplete, connect instead of divide. In this respect, our practice overlaps with the theoretical and practical attempts of decolonial, feminist and related positions, which consider that it is not a matter of correcting the phallogentric understanding of the body, but above all of building imaginaries that would allow for the establishment of more egalitarian relations. To sum up with Mignolo:

Liberation is through thinking and being otherwise. Liberation is not something to be attained; it is a process of letting something go, namely, the flows of energy that keep you attached to the colonial matrix of power, whether you are in the camp of those who sanction or the camp of those sanctioned. ("The Decolonial Option" 148)

In order to create an alternative, it is necessary to delink from established ways of thinking, which can also be achieved by contemplating the emotional forms of experiencing non-hierarchical visions of life and being. The spectator is subtly invited to an active contemplation in which they associatively decode the flow of images, experientially situated in their own specific position. We can only wish that this immersion would help them to delink from the colonial

matrix of power, in order to relink into a more sustainable position in the network of relations with the environment.

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