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FROM BIOPOLITICS AND NECROPOLITICS TO GEO-POLITICS AND BODY-POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE

The article focuses on the interrelated epistemic and ontological dimensions of the global crisis of modernity and critically analyses the possible ways out offered within various Western and non-Western paradigms (such as biopolitics and necropolitics), arguing for the decolonial (post)continental geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge stressing locality as not merely a geo-historical location of the knowing subject, but also the epistemological correlation with the sensing body, perceiving the world from a particular locale and particular local history. Rethinking of the Cartesian formula "I think therefore I am" into "I am where I think" comes along with a discrediting of neo-liberal market teleology and the last progressivist universalist vector of global history vanishes together with the last closed utopia of the global salvation.

ОТ БИОПОЛИТИКИ И НЕКРОПОЛИТИКИ К ГЕО-ПОЛИТИКЕ И ТЕЛЕСНОЙ ПОЛИТИКЕ ЗНАНИЯ

В статье рассматриваются взаимосвязанные эпистемологические и онтологические измерения глобального кризиса модерности и критически анализируются возможные пути выхода из него, предлагаемые в различных западных и незападных парадигмах (такие как биоролитика и некрополитика). Автор выступает за деколониальную (пост)континентальную геополитику и телесную политику знания, подчеркивая локальность не просто как фокус на гео-историческом месте познающего субъекта, но и на эпистемологической корреляции с чувствующим телом, воспринимающим мир из определенного локала и в рамках определенной локальной истории. Переосмысление картезианской формулы «Я мыслю следовательно я существую» в «Я существую там, где мыслю» идет рука об руку с дискредитацией неолиберальной идеологии рынка, и последний прогрессистский универсалистский вектор глобальной истории исчезает вместе с последней закрытой утопией всеобщего спасения.

key words: *biopolitics, necropolitics, geo-politics and body-politics, coloniality of knowledge, imperial and colonial epistemic difference*

ключевые слова: *биополитика, некрополитика, геополитика и телесная политика, колониальность знания, имперское и колониальное эпистемологическое различие*

Ongoing efforts to re-conceptualize the shifts in the interrelated spheres of ontology and gnoseology of the postmodern subject have led to the emergence of several more and less known models produced in the West, in the non-West and in the border zones in between, all of them focusing in different ways on defining the massive crisis of subjectivity, epistemology, and ethics, leading to much more devastating and far reaching consequences than the strictly economic or even social crisis. Among them Michel Foucault's concept of bio-politics [8] and Giorgio Agamben's development of this concept and his notion of *homo*

sacer and bare (naked) life [1] act as the most well known and generally accepted ones. If Foucault focuses mostly on the type of the state management and its numerous techniques for regulating and subjugating individuals and their bodies through bio-power as a political technology of power effecting and policing all aspects of our lives, from public health to heredity, then Agamben shifts the attention to differentiation, fragmentation and either extreme formalization or no less extreme precariousness of bare (or naked) life resulting in the accentuating of life as a style, as form-of-life (good life) as opposed to lives with no value, biological lives of the bodies (not citizens). One of the shocking conclusions of his by now classical book then becomes the idea that “today it is not the city but rather the camp that is the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West” [1, 181]. Deconstructing the camp as a paradigm Agamben unveils the darker side of modernity from within, while the concluding page of his *Homo Sacer* points towards the often neglected yet clearly direct link between knowledge production and distribution, architecture and disciplinary theodicy and the crisis of (post)modern Western subject: “If we give the name form-of-life to the being that is only its own bare existence and to this life that, being its own form, remains inseparable from it, we will witness the emergence of a field of research beyond the terrain defined by the intersection of politics and philosophy, medico-biological sciences and jurisprudence. First, however, it will be necessary to examine how it was possible for something like a bare life to be conceived within these disciplines, and how the historical development of these very disciplines has brought them to a limit beyond which they cannot venture without risking an unprecedented biopolitical catastrophe” [1, 188].

But as a Slovenian philosopher and visual artist Marina Grzinic argues in several of her works, “it is not possible to understand biopolitics without a process of its repoliticization through necropolitics and necropower. That means to frame biopolitics from the perspective of all those who do not count for biopower...Biopolitics is reserved only for the fictitious battle of forms-of-life, although death is all around the biopolitical” [9, 13]. In her understanding of necropolitics Grzinic starts and departs from a well known postcolonial theorist of the non-Western world – Achille Mbembe who thinks that today in the conditions of the war machine and the state of exception it is not enough to speak of the biopolitics and biopower. With a characteristic metaphorical drive he claims that “contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death (necropolitics) profoundly reconfigure the relations among resistance, sacrifice, and terror...The notion of biopower is insufficient to account for contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death...The notion of necropolitics and necropower accounts for the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*... Under conditions of necropower, the lines between resistance and suicide, sacrifice and redemption, martyrdom and freedom are blurred” [15; 40].

Grzinic uses necropower and necropolitics in a much looser and at the same time wider sense stressing the spread of this logic into the totality of the global North as well as the South when she claims that the “necropolitical logic organizes the contemporary neoliberal global capitalist social body” manifesting itself in the division of labor, aimed at the bare minimum for living instead of the maximum for life, the privatization and deregulation of all strata of society including culture and knowledge production [9, 15]. She attempts to repoliticize biopolitics through necropolitics stating that “necropower is the exercise of the power to let live and make die” [9, 49].

Liberal and Marxist thinkers, political theorists and economic experts alike, all accept that current global economy is capitalist. The only difference is that some of them are happy and want to maintain it (even during and after the crisis – they are preoccupied with saving

capitalism as if it has no alternative) and others are unhappy and want to dismantle it. Now let us delink from post-leftist European and postcolonial positions which no doubt reflect on the problematic of the ontological and epistemic crisis in interesting, fresh and valuable ways and look at the issue from the position of the decolonial option, i.e. a border position of the outside created from the inside. Then we will see that a decolonial thinker would be with neither of those who save capitalism nor with those who criticize it from the post-leftist stance. And this is because “capitalist economy” is not the core analytic concept of decolonial thinking, while the “colonial matrix of power” is instead [20, 23].

One of the most devastating consequences of modernity and particularly its neoliberal stage, so powerfully described by Agamben, Mbembe and Grzinić among others, the late stage marked by ubiquitous bio-politics and necropolitics, within which human beings turn either into dispensable material or maniacally focus on the idea of good life as a life always better than that of others around you, can be defined as a consistent cultivation and maintaining of the economic, social, cultural, ethical, gnoseological and ontological bondage or, in the terminology of the decolonial option, a global coloniality of being, of power and maybe most crucially, of knowledge since knowledge and not politics or economics will be the main area of power clashes in the 21st century. Throughout the last five hundred years this tendency has been expressed globally in various forms, yet essentially it can be taken down to the fact that the West/North has determined the single norm of humanity, of legitimate knowledge, of social and economic systems, of spatial and temporal models, of values and cultural norms, while all other people and knowledges have been classified as deviations, dismissed to alterity, to nature, or subject to various changes with the goal of making them closer to the western ideal.

This logic has been most graphically expressed in the question of culture versus nature or, the popular idea that modernity switched exploitation from human being to nature which brings us back to the value of human life and to distinction between *anthropos* and *humanitas* [24]. Let us not discuss here the devastating ecological consequences of this slogan, but concentrate instead on the inner logic and rhetoric of modernity which has elaborated a mechanism of justification of any violence against humans and/or nature if it can be fashioned as a cost of development, progress, technological achievement and capital accumulation. Having made nature into the object of exploitation, modernity exiled into the sphere of nature and labeled as “costs” everything and everyone that was to be exploited. Christianity, Eurocentrism, civilizing mission, market and developmentalist ideologies were used to remove certain groups of people from the realm of ethics and practice “misanthropic skepticism” in relation to them, to quote Nelson Maldonado Torres [13]. Market competition, political democracy, egalitarian law, individual rights and freedoms have always belonged to the lighter side of modernity, while those who were sent to the darker side, who were not White, European Christian males of particular economic and social status, and hence, were not fully human, have been subject to the ethics of war and to what F. Hinkelammert called “the inversion of human rights” [10].

Recent economic crisis made it obvious for the Western middle class observer that he is also vulnerable and not exempt from the logic of late and exhausted modernity, his life also becomes dispensable and his rights inverted in its deadly game which sacrifices lives in order to save the transcendental spirit of capitalism. Yet, the zombification of modernity remains intact even today, even at the point when the global crisis has clearly demonstrated the void of its epistemic, ontological and ethical dimensions projecting its own irresponsibility, cynicism, and arrogance onto the rest of the humankind making us all hostages of the deadly game of modernity.

Let us now look at modernity as a knowledge generating system. Modernity is not really a historical process. It is rather an idea that describes certain historical processes and needs a

system of knowledge that would legitimize it. Once the idea was created, it legitimized the system of knowledge that created it [16]. The idea of modernity and the system of knowledge that legitimized it, became a mechanism to disavow other systems of knowledge and make other historical processes non-modern. The making of epistemic modernity went hand in hand with epistemic coloniality: that is, with colonization of knowledge by either absorbing its content or by rejecting it. All knowledge which was not grounded in Greek and Latin or expressed in the six modern European languages, became just an interesting object of study expelled from the universal system of knowledge production that set the rules of political theory and economy, theology and philosophy, art and literature, science and technology [22]. This is how the darker side of modernity – coloniality – works in the sphere of knowledge production. The system, in which coloniality is embedded then created a meta-language wherein its own affirmation went hand in hand with the justification to disavow systems of knowledge that the meta-language described as non-modern. Meta-languages have the peculiarity of detaching the known from the knower, the said from the act of saying and create the effect of an ontology independent from the subject. Modernity then is the construction of such a meta-language which has been preserved in various forms in the last 500 years to become globally hegemonic today. Knowledge production is related to the bodies and to the geo-historical conditions of the modern/colonial world in which it is being produced, maintained or transformed as “knowledge production is not outside the modern/colonial world since it is through knowledge that “modernity” is conceived and conceptualized and through knowledge that “coloniality” has been unveiled as the darker side of modernity” [25].

The rationale that legitimized the classification of human beings and their ranking, was not ontology but epistemology: a system of knowledge production created by Western Christians in European territory, considered the standard of humanity and of knowledge. European expansion worked hand in hand with European assertion and control of its own conception (scientific, political and ethical) of knowledge (what is scientific knowledge, what it is for, what are our responsibilities in cognitive process and knowledge production).

In the basis of this skilful mechanism there lies an important relation between the enunciation and the enunciated which must be destabilized in order to disavow the rhetoric of modernity and its established geography of reasoning with the focus on the enunciated (the object/area to be described and explained) and not on the enunciation (the subject doing the description and explanation). Shifting the geography of reasoning is crucial because there is an ideological assumption in epistemology according to which subjects who are not Euro-Americans are mere tokens of their own culture. This presupposition implies that knowledge is located in a given “area” (the West) and controlled by certain people (the secular White quantitative minority). If we posit ourselves as epistemic subjects who take on the world from our own lived experiences and education, and rather than being tokens of our culture, take “as our object of our study” the Western imperial formations and the Western Christian and secular elites who created institutions of knowledge that became, imperially, the measure of all possible knowledges, then the picture of modernity, its ontological, ethical and epistemic crisis would look differently from what we are used to reading.

The system of knowledge production that is hegemonic today, is grounded in what a Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez described as the hubris of the *zero point*. The co-existence of diverse ways of producing and transmitting knowledge is eliminated because now all forms of human knowledge are ordered on an epistemological scale from the traditional to the modern, from barbarism to civilization, from the community to the individual, from the orient to occident [...] By way of this strategy, scientific thought positions itself as the only valid form of producing knowledge, and Europe acquires an epistemological hegemony over all other cultures of the world [4, 433]. The hubris of the zero

point is the place of the observer and the locus of enunciation that in Christian Theology was taken by God and in Secular Philosophy - by Reason. The zero point is the limit in which there is an observer than cannot be observed, the God of Transcendental Reason. Once a mortal human claims that he or she occupies that space, either in communication with God or in assuming the position of the observer at the top of the hill looking down the valley, a secure locus of enunciation is created that is hard to dispute. This happens because he or she observes not just with his or her eyes, but within certain languages and in certain linguistic tradition in the categories of thought; and consequently, whoever comes from knowledge systems incorporated in non-Western languages and relies on different principles of knowledge, would have a hard time to enter the house where the hubris of the zero point dominates.

The classification and ranking of human beings needs a system of knowledge in which they are sustained and justified, for classification and ranking are not in the object itself, but in the knowing subject and the system of knowledge in which he or she operates [3; 30]. By so doing, the enunciator performed, in the modern colonial world, two simultaneous operations: it colonized knowledge, either by subsuming the content of knowledge produced in other system or by disavowing them directly as myth, traditions, folklore, magic, etc. And by the same token the enunciator (person and/or institutions) colonized being. Colonization of being was and is at work in the classification and ranking of human beings as not quite rational, mature or developed; or not sufficiently masculine, in case of gender; or not quite sexually normal, in case of the regulation of sexual preferences). Colonization of being, in other words, is how modern/colonial system of knowledge production created, maintained and enacted racism and patriarchy. The colonial and imperial epistemic differences were two pillars sustaining Eurocentric system of knowledge and simultaneously two mechanisms to disavow non-European ways of knowing.

The utter confidence in rational calculable computer models - typical modernity “games” pretending to understand reality yet grounded in agonistics in its most base “survival of the fittest” competitive forms, attempt to shift the attention from the fact that there are other options than saving capitalism [20], or saving the rhetoric of modernity with its inner logic of coloniality, for that matter, there are other kinds of life, different social and economic models and value and epistemic systems that need to be listened to, taken into account and given an equal chance in the new architecture of the world where many worlds should finally co-exist and interact, instead of one provincial narrow-minded western model demagogically propagating its self-interested myths and notions erasing and negating anything and anyone who falls out of this logic and refuses to be zombified by the myth of modernity and progress, capitalism and material success. In the post-crisis world progress should be measured not with quantitative indices of the GNP but at least with subjective gratification of capabilities [27]. If we take one more step away from the rhetoric of modernity with its logic of coloniality we will see that development defined by the think tanks of the global North and still regarded by Sen as the main horizon of humankind [28] can be further questioned and counterbalanced with other ideals and notions which equally have the right to exist yet have been systematically suppressed and negated within the rhetoric of modernity in which accumulation of wealth at the expense of life promotes the production of objects instead of reproduction of life.

Within the decolonial option a different need is being shaped – a need in an *other* civilizational paradigm, politically determined by the needs to production, reproduction and development of human life, that is, ecology, economy and culture. What the world needs today is “global epistemic and conceptual discussion on the decolonial politics of knowledge” [20] which would shake the grounds of the miserable model of reality which we live in and

which continues to be presented today as the only possible and reasonable for the whole humankind.

Decolonial option offers instead of bio-politics and necro-politics the concepts of body- and geo-politics of knowledge and of understanding the world, with a focus on location. This is a focus not only on geo-historical location of the knowing subject, but also on the epistemological correlation with the sensing body, perceiving the world from a particular locale and history. In European history of ideas and of science it was assumed that this locus can be only European by default, therefore the focus was on what and about what one thinks, and not from where and starting from where one thinks. Decolonial or/and post-continental philosophy aiming at overcoming the gap between analytic and continental philosophy through articulating “temporal-spatial epistemic fractures” [12], shifts the emphasis precisely to that, liberating the spatial imaginaries and conceptions of time, subjectivity, lived experience, theory, that are grounded on national [11] and continental [19] ontologies [12] and concentrating on the fractured space of non-belonging and of the new dialogic, mainly based on bypassing the West/North and organizing a South-South conversation [29] occupied by various dispensable lives (from border subjects to second-class citizens and condemned religions).

Rehabilitation of space and rethinking of the Cartesian formula “I think therefore I am” into Walter Mignolo’s “I am where I think” [21] comes along with a discrediting of neo-liberal teleology of market and consumption. Thus, the last progressivist universalist vector of global history vanishes together with the last closed utopia of the global salvation. As a result, *topos*, in a sense, re-conquers *chronos*. Consequently, there comes the task of looking for other grounds of organizing the chaos we live in and creation of other concepts which would not be confined to passive describing of the past by means of outdated and provincial categories of Western modernity, or to simple negation and criticism of modernity as such, but also would concentrate on the present and on projecting the open and pluritopic positive utopias into the future.

It is important to stress here that decolonial philosophy is not trying to legitimate modernity and its regimes of knowledge production offering instead an alternative picture of history and an other genealogy of knowledge, not based on the linear myth of development and not grounded in and focused on a *telos* of what is already known and legitimized. Here the result is unknown and uncertain as it never existed in reality, while decolonial option is a critical open utopia looking into the future as opposed to closed conservative utopias fixed on the present which marked the 20th century according to the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos who points out that it is always necessary to remember that the alternatives themselves are not with no alternatives and that all of them have equal rights to exist and are not final [26].

Decoloniality as an alternative to modernity is an epistemic de-linking from modernity, a shift leading to pluri-versality instead of universality, which is based on pluritopic understanding instead of monotopic hermeneutics of the western tradition. It is an alternative to modernity, paving the road for decolonial options and “trans-modern” (according to Enrique Dussel [6]) futures, built on epistemic and aesthetic (based on sensing as opposed to pure rationality) disobedience of the other toward imperial designs of the same, disobedience that transforms and converts the epistemic imperial same into an equal other. Dussel’s transmodern civilization as overcoming of modernity offers a new ontology of political power for the 21st century which is to be based on the will to life and not a will to power [7].

There is a global march of decoloniality today moving toward a trans-modern, and not a postmodern or alter-modern, world. Its agents are yet not very well known publicly but gaining a more and more profound space in the political society [5] and particularly in social movements (World Social Forum, Zapatistas, Food sovereignty, *La Via Campesina*) who are

not competitors in the same terrain, but bodies de-linking from the rules of the game established by corporations who are interested in increasing gains and not really letting people improve their quality of life or practice and produce their own knowledge.

The decolonial option is grounded on a different from modernity ethos, questioning progressivism, agonistics, the Western concept of the (hu)man and the unavoidable human taxonomy as its byproduct, the opposition of modernity/vs tradition, the clichéd and long meaningless concepts of democracy, human rights, and justice that need to be unlearned in order to relearn them based on different principles.

The issue at hand here is not the overused “clash of civilizations” but the struggle for epistemic emancipation and undoing the epistemic imperial (and colonial) differences. The point is not to claim some essential non-Western system of knowledge, but to inscribe such systems in the human construction of global (not just Western) futures. De-westernization and de-colonization of knowledge (and therefore of being) then are two simultaneous, although not necessarily complementary processes.

Dialogue of civilizations then should be based on the idea of pluritopic (and not monotopic) hermeneutics [17, 13], simultaneous coexistence of many worlds based on parity, where everyone is equal and therefore has the right to be different, an *another* democratic principle “leading we obey” [18] and also walking while constantly asking questions on the way and listening to different answers [14] instead of the missionary syndrome of coming to humanity with one ready made solution for everyone, be it Christianity, civilizing mission, market economy or Western democracy. What is needed is a critical political justice based on solidarity, responsibility, and symmetrical participation of others, excluded and the damned in the plurinational post-state of the future.

Modernity deadens with its commodifying touch all forms of knowledge and subjectivity. However there remain the stubborn islands of resistance and re-existence [2] which on many levels work for the liberation of being, of consciousness and of knowledge from the zombification of modernity. Such a liberation often turns out to be impossible in legitimate (for modernity) forms of rational academic knowledge, the non-existent in many locales civil society or the strangled political society. Yet there are decolonial intersections of ontology and epistemology, effective in the process of liberation of knowledge and of being from the myths of modernity, which will step forward globally in the near future.

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