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What Freedom?

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When I got the invitation for this symposium with such a triggering title *The Illegality of Freedom*¹ freedom was already echoing in my mind for quite some time. Of course the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)² was there; for 13 years OEF brought "freedom" to numerous regions in the world, the operations lasted from October 2001 to December 2014. In the 13 years of its active presence it spilled over many geopolitical spaces and countries made "freedom" shaking in the Philippines, Horn of Africa, Trans Sahara, Caribbean and Central America. *Mimi This Nguyen in her seminal book The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages (2012) suggest and I quote "that the imposition of debt prevents the subjects of freedom from escaping those colonial histories that deemed them "unfree." To receive the gift of freedom then is to be indebted to empire, perhaps without end. Practically freedom as in Operation Enduring Freedom isn't just a rhetorical ploy that sounds pretty and hides the violence of liberal war and empire, but it's actually how liberal war and empire conceptualize its violence and power."*

Such a gift of freedom, she concludes and I quote again, "is contributing to the manufacturing of entire categories of unwanted people of which the illegal migrant, the undocumented worker, and more and more the refugee and the asylum seeker, are the prototypes. This global regime is characterized by the differential treatment of individuals, groups or communities with respect to movement or circulation. This differential treatment raises, at a deeper level, questions about the way in which the **"quality of being human"** as such is instituted in a globalized society (...); so that some human beings can be hunted by the police of certain States and their freedom of circulation subjected to massive controls and restrictions." Freedom with an adjective. NAKED FREEDOM, as the title of the video by Marina Gržinić and Aina Smid from 2010.

Freedom is coming with the adjective in global capitalism. It is exponentially doubled, given as a gift, naked, illegal, and therefore stays today for an emblematic point in the way how to approach an analysis of capitalism, its history and present, the relation between labor and capital and the historicity of its notions: sovereignty, citizenship, the subject, and humanity. How to deal with the relation of sovereignty on one side and governmentality on the other in the time of neoliberal global capitalism?

The present class exploitation and racialization of all levels of production and reproduction of life - to the extent that we can talk of a racialized labor,

racialized sexuality, racialized humanity, racialized theory, etc. -have changed our analyses of life, death, autonomy, and subjectivization, not to speak of freedom. Therefore we can talk of racialized freedom. Subjectivity is increasingly seen as produced at the intersection of biotechnologies, biomedicine, and bioeconomy - a constant work of modulation of the self in relation to desired forms of life; the bio(s), lives with forms, are pushed until the last consequences, while zoe (the naked life, an animality) is given, though supposedly without a form, a power of extra potentialities. The situation is absurd, though it corresponds to the relation of limitless procedures of neoliberal global capitalism and its multiplication of exploitation, expropriation, and dispossession. That we talk of illegality of freedom is the result of a crisis. Though this is not a crisis provoked by the refugees, but instead the outcome of a management of death conducted for the sake of the biopolitical sovereignty of the EU nation-states, performed through necropower procedures of abandonment, banning, exclusion, and racialization.

With this I open the differentiation of biopolitics and necropolitics. First, if necropolitics presents a new mode of governmentality for neoliberal global capitalism, that is a decision over administration of death (as being opposed to biopolitics as control over life), then we can ask in which concrete, political, economic, and social ideological situation the decision over death is normalized and accepted? Second, who are those that are "selected" and targeted as the goal of this necro "sovereign" decision? The situation of the refugees and the status of their lives and bodies in the camps in EU, but also when collected as corpses in the Mediterranean sea, cannot be described solely as murder, genocide, etc.; surely these terms have great rhetorical and political value, but they are also connected to certain historical situations that differ from what we have here and now.

Mimi Thi Nguyen makes a direct connection of freedom with the quality of being human, and I will push a thesis that the answer to the rhetoric question of what freedom stands for today, that is not rhetorical at all, lies precisely inside this relation that connects life, death and the human. I will thus continue on this line.

James Stanescu in his text "Beyond Biopolitics: Animal Studies, Factory Farms, and the Advent of Deading Life" (2013) states that the human is not a category that exists outside of political contestations and ontological battles. "Rather, the human is produced, and it is the site of great struggles, violence, and hierarchy," and "the human comes to name the category of beings we seek to protect and foster, and as such the idea of human exceptionalism can only be understood as related to the concept of biopolitics."³ Biopolitics is a horizon for articulating contemporary capitalist societies from the so-called politics of life, where life is seen as the zero degree of intervention of each and every politics in contemporary societies. I proposed that Foucault's *biopolitics*, a term in-between bio (LIFE) and politics can be designated in an axiomatic way as "*make live and let die*."

But we see a process of constant dehumanization in the refugee camp and therefore biopolitics I argue is only the politics of life for the Western world. As the refugee camp is not a site of humanization, but of dehumanization, it is not enough to make biopolitics the central point of analysis. The point is that this dehumanization brings different ways of thinking about life and death and freedom.

Therefore In "Necropolitics" (2003), Achille Mbembe discusses this new logic of capital and its processes of geopolitical demarcation of world zones based on the mobilization of the war machine. He talks about necropolitics, *necro* meaning death in Latin. Necropolitics is connected to the concept of necrocapitalism, i.e., contemporary capitalism, which organizes its forms of capital accumulation that involves dispossession and the subjugation of life to the power of death.

However, to be even more precise, we are not talking about thanatopolitics, but of necropolitics. We do not refer to Roberto Esposito but to Achille Mbembe.

Back in the 2007/2008, after re-reading Achille Mbembe's seminal text on necropolitics (published in 2003), I developed a proposal for the intensification of a re-politicization of life. I define *necropolitics* as "*let live and make die.*"

In a necropolitics that is always a culmination of the biopolitical, we clearly see this superimposition of the fear of racial impurity in the way the refugee camps are managed. In the light of these arguments, the refugee camps are not simply the state of exception, but a place to see the processes of auto-immunization in order to get rid of those deemed not human. On the other hand, such idea of seclusion is based on racism, as the idea of racial purity remains central to security at the camp; those inhuman are, of course, though presented as "naturally inhuman", meticulously constructed as such.

First, what comes across as striking is that when biopolitics is framed differently, we see the insufficiency of biopolitics as a frame to rethink the refugee camp. A refugee camp, as it is said and presented in public discourse, is supposedly here for the protection of human rights, but we can clearly see in the last years (as it was true before, of course, but in a less obvious manner) that the camp is a place of dehumanization. Second, it is also connected to a different status of life and, consequently, of death.

I want to name the life in the refugee camp, not by using the usual rhetoric, but by using a new category that is *deading life*, as elaborated in Stanesco's analysis. Deading life is a procedure employed to suppress, reduce, diminish, impoverish, to ruin life, but it is not death. The point that Stanesco makes, which is also present in Foucault, is that the fear of racial impurity remains at the core of biopower and biopolitics.⁴ The rise of State racism, as stated by Stanesco,⁵ produces fears about how races will mix. Therefore, a variety of controls are created precisely in order to regulate populations. What we have

at all times are the reactions of power to the own fears of contamination. In 2016, November 7, a few days before this presentation, the German government made a proposal that the German Ministry of the Interior should make a plan to send the migrants rescued in the Mediterranean Sea back to Africa. The proposal has not yet been discussed at the EU level, but has already sparked severe criticism among many politicians. "The Ministry of the Interior treats refugees as a contagious disease that one wants to keep away," Katrin Göring-Eckardt, leader of the parliamentary fraction of the Green Party told the newspaper. "Anyone who denies refugees the right to a fair [application] process acts in a very controversial way - both in terms of refugee policy and the law."

Stanescu states that if:

We take seriously Foucault's claim that biopolitics is about politics taking life itself as its object, then the obvious question arises: what is life? In the strange tension between biopolitics and thanatopolitics, we seem to be presented with a theoretical buffet with which to explore and understand what politicized life means. We have Agamben's bare life, Judith Butler's precarious life, Walter Benjamin's mere life, Balibar's disposable life, Eugene Thacker's after life, Timothy Campbell's improper life, and Deleuze's a life.⁶

In the end, he proposes deading life.

Finally, I will try to answer the question of what politicized life can mean today?

Stanescu also connects the notion of deading life with a changed view on death. He quotes Primo Levi who wrote that for certain victims of the extermination camp, "one hesitates to call their death" as death.⁷ Therefore, Stanescu states, "Death that we hesitate to call death? Where else is there an engagement with the production and fabrication of corpses?"⁸ Deading life is not simple death, as it is possible to think when we see the conditions in the refugee camps, and it is not, as Stanescu puts it, "life that is living, but a process and precursor to death. Life is but an added element to the end product, death."⁹

One of the most important elements that is part of deading life, as exposed by Stanescu, is a sense of life as pure production, pure use-value. This is a perplexing situation as everything connected to exchange value in capitalism is; but what is also present in relation to the refugees is a complete veto on the possibility that all these people enter the labor market to become - as all of us from the EU are - an exchange value. Those who get the job are not coming as refugees but through what is termed the needs of the diversified labor market, as high skilled labor force, etc.

What was the main demand of the Refugee protest camp in Vienna in 2012? To work, to become self-sufficient, and while some other demands by the

refugees were negotiated, the entrance into the labor market was out of the discussion. Therefore, we can ask if there has ever been a more complete and thorough realization of Marx's surplus population than the refugees? I will insist on this question and ask, according to Achille Mbembe and *altri*, if there has ever been a more complete superfluous population, as is the case with the refugees in Europe that are prevented to work and forced to live a life that is not death, but thoroughly fabricated use-value, a deading life.

Colonialism is not only what Edward Said has named a pact between anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism but furthermore a project of dispossession and dehumanization by capitalism covered by a veil of humanity that is, as argued by Aimé Césaire, "a sordidly racist concept" or a "pseudo-humanism."¹⁰ Therefore, if the main characteristic of the biopolitical is pseudo-humanism, and if it is clear that the human is always a concept constructed against the background of racism and class, I will state that the human machine of necropolitics, which Stanesco did not propose as he presented a full analysis of biopolitics, is the post-human.

Or, if biopolitics resides in colonialism and its pseudo-humanism, I claim that necropolitics resides in coloniality and its post-humanism. Both are constructed on a racist foundation but their rhetoric is different. What is the rhetoric?

My thesis is that "More human than human" was the biopolitical dream, while the necropolitical injunction of neoliberal global capitalism is "Still too human!" That is why necrocapitalism resides on post-humanity, and has no interest whatsoever in human misery. Or to put this differently, in necrocapitalism the human is illegal as such.

"Still too human!" in the global necropower capitalism impose the illegality of freedom. All has to vanish, to become illegal, not only freedom, but the subject as such as well. Today the notion of the political subject is seen as a form of an (old) archaic subjectivity, and is therefore "delegated" to the so-called third world capitalism. The consequences are terminal regarding political agency.

What is the result of these relations for citizenship? The colonial/racial division is applied to citizenship, and we have two categories of citizenship: one is the category which I will name *biopolitical citizenship* (the EU "natural" nation-State citizens), and the other is the *necropolitical citizenship* given to refugees and sans-papiers (paperless) after they die on EU soil.

How is this possible? An illustrative case is what happened in the Italian island of Lampedusa on October 12, 2013, when 350 refugees from Africa drowned in a single day. However, as those following Deleuze would say, this was just an additional crystallization of the alarming scale of the refugee crisis in the EU, which is happening daily and lasts for more than a decade now. Still, the most perverse situation happened afterwards when the hundreds of dead bodies were given Italian citizenship (but only in order for the Italian

government and the EU to bury them in Italy - it was obviously cheaper than sending the dead bodies back to their countries of origin and to their respective families). The Italian government decided to prosecute the few who did survive as they tried to illegally enter Italy and the EU. This is the clearest sign of the perverse and violent new attitude that Western Europe has toward human rights (after the West had been for decades heavily capitalizing its democracy on it) and the occurrence of a new category of citizenship - *necropolitical citizenship*.

Therefore, as I tried to show, citizenship today is not only in opposition to non-citizenship, but splits in halves - biopolitical and necropolitical; similarly, freedom is always coming with an adjective - naked, a gift of freedom, etc.

Then what freedom stands for? To visibly radically expose the violent colonial/racial processes of dehumanization.

In the face of racialization by neoliberal global capital (that presents the re/production of animality), the flesh of those that do not count for humans has to get a different frame, and therefore I argue that this is not just a flesh, but a political flesh. Thus the violent systematic procedures of dehumanization and racialization that want us to think that any kind of political subjectivity is obsolete forces us to take the political flesh of the refugees, of the wretched of the world, as the political agency of the future.

Political flesh is the answer to what politicized life can mean today. Political flesh is what reveals daily the falsifications and travesties of Occidental humanity.

*The presentation at the conference and the present text is based on the text by Marina Gržinić "AFTERWARDS": STRUGGLING WITH BODIES IN THE DUMP OF HISTORY, published in the book *Body between Materiality and Power: Essays in Visual Studies*, edited by Nasheli Jiménez del Val. This book was first published in 2016 by Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2016, pp 163-183.

¹ See <https://www.akbild.ac.at/Portal/institute/kunst-und-kulturwissenschaften/konferenzen/2016/the-illegality-of-freedom>

² Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) is the official name used by the U.S. government for the Global War on terrorism. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Enduring_Freedom

³ James Stanescu, "Beyond Biopolitics: Animal Studies, Factory Farms, and the Advent of Deading Life," at <https://phaenex.uwindsor.ca/ojs/leddy/index.php/phaenex/article/view/4090>, 137.

⁴ See Michel Foucault, *"Society must be defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76* (New York: Picador, 2003), 254-263. Quoted in Stanescu, "Beyond Biopolitics," 138.

⁵ Stanescu, "Beyond Biopolitics," 138.

⁶ Stanescu, "Beyond Biopolitics," 148.

⁷ Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz: The Nazi Assault on Humanity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 90. Quoted in Stanescu, "Beyond Biopolitics," 150.

⁸ Stanescu, "Beyond Biopolitics," 150.

⁹ Stanescu, "Beyond Biopolitics," 151.

¹⁰ See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 98, and Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: MR, 1972), 37. Quoted in Stanescu, "Beyond Biopolitics," 141.