



2 The distinction between historic and biological types of racism became clearer through Michel Foucault's writing on biopolitics, biopower and racism. His lectures published in *Society Must Be Defended, Lectures at the College De France, 1976-77*, Ed. by Francois Ewald, Picador 2003, are devoted to a complex discussion of how to distinguish between the simple xenophobia that has existed in all places and times, and the "discourse of race struggle", a historical, social and political discourse that he placed in Early Modern times - in seventeenth century Great Britain, and the Modern nineteenth century biological or scientific racism. He also coined the term "state racism" in connection with sovereignty and state power.

What Comes After Racism?

On different racial technologies and on solidarity with Roma in the works of Rena Rädle & Vladan Jeremić

The export of racial technologies from the USA and Western Europe, the hatred of others in ethnic, gender or sexual terms, securitocracy, necropolitics, human rights violations going unreported: these are some of the most frequent issues in contemporary art that engages with reality. Several of these issues have received ongoing attention in the collaborative and participatory artworks and activist projects of the artists' couple Rena Rädle & Vladan Jeremić but juxtaposed with issues of solidarity, love, conviviality, and a kind of Derridean "unconditional friendship".

Before embarking on further discussion of the various aspects of racism directed at the Roma population in Serbia (and Eastern Europe in general) within the context of the projects that these artists who, working together since 2002, have realized most recently, I need to explain the text's title. I want to clarify the title in order to avoid any possible confusion about which racisms I am referring to. I am interested in discussing different understandings of racism today because even though it has become publicly unacceptable to admit one's own racism, there are many different events and phenomena that reveal that racism is ongoing.¹ Moreover, we still have not convincingly answered the question of why racism is so bad and should be extinguished.

There is a certain danger that my title could be misunderstood as an attempt to make a distinction between the white people's racism directed at African Americans and other coloured population in the USA or elsewhere, and the escalated Anti-Gypsy racism of the Eastern European "whites" against Roma people and/or chauvinism against other ethnic minorities. I find it important to argue that, on the contrary, making this kind of difference in this context is not necessary, even though it is viable and relevant in theory.²

¹ For example, in their text *Antiziganism and Class Racism in Europe* Vladan Jeremić & Rena Rädle mention one of the most common statements "We don't have anything against Roma" used to justify one's own actions against Roma.

3 Minorities, Race, and Genomics, Human Genome Project Information, 15 July 2009, http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genome/elsi/minorities.shtml.

4 Cosmopolitanism, Blackness, and Utopia, a conversation with Paul Gilroy by Tommie Shelby, *Transition – An International Review*, W. E. B. Du Bois Institute, 18 July 2009, <http://www.transitionmagazine.com/articles/shelby.htm>

5 Historical Memory, Global Movements and Violence Paul Gilroy and Arjun Appadurai in Conversation with Vikki Bell, *Theory, Culture & Society* 1999 (SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi), Vol. 16(2): 21–40, [0263-2764(1999)04:16:2;21±40;008253] www.appadurai.com/pdf/tcs-bell_interview.pdf

6 Cosmopolitanism, Blackness, and Utopia, <http://www.transitionmagazine.com/articles/shelby.htm>

Although differing historically, both of these racisms are ultimately founded on a very similar assumption: that there is a hierarchy between different people divided into superior and inferior kinds according to their racial differences, origin and skin colour.

Having said that, it is essential to immediately remind ourselves that: DNA studies do not indicate that separate classifiable subspecies (races) exist within modern humans. While different genes for physical traits such as skin and hair color can be identified between individuals, no consistent patterns of genes across the human genome exist to distinguish one race from another.³

And still, such proofs against any scientific foundation of racism and hierarchies among races are not powerful enough to overcome centuries of prejudices and irrational hatred against others, that can only be erased by cultural means, as they first began.⁴

Regarding the question of hierarchies among different racisms, according to Paul Gilroy, Arjun Appadurai and other postcolonial thinkers, racial discrimination should not be considered to be of lesser or greater importance depending on darker skin colour or number of members in discriminated populations and communities. Exactly by making such distinctions based on sameness one would ignite even stronger essentialist arguments: claiming difference of any “scientific” kind between different racisms may underline even more the belief in biological foundation of the racial difference that lies in the mere core of racism.⁵

Consequently, if we say that hate, discrimination, and racism against Black people in general constitutes the most radical and extreme kind of racism in the world, that could add more oil to the already old but still existing arguments that there are biological or genetic differences among people. Such emphasis put on African Americans as more exposed to hatred but also eventually more worthy of solidarity or compassion than the other discriminated people does not help the critical discourse on racism and racial discrimination.

Furthermore, according to Gilroy, even the solidarity raised around the sameness of race and nation among Blacks themselves should be seen as yet another form of racism and fascism.⁶

But the real questions concealed here are: would it be enough to say that we are against any racism anywhere, and does this do the work of solidarity?

Which racisms and which solidarity I am then actually referring to when discussing the work of Rădile&Jeremić? Actually, my proposal is that one should address the urgency of critique of racial hatred directed towards Roma people in Eastern Europe side by side any other racism, without

making any “hierarchy” between different historic types of racisms according to belonging to different races. The same goes for any solidarity based on sameness and identity because thus one reinforces the usual racist discourse and acknowledges the existence of race. Instead, practicing the issue of solidarity with the different that would not be based on belonging to the same nation and race that these two artists have already tackled on many occasions in their projects is much more urgent.⁷

When asked about the issue of whether people have racial identities Paul Gilroy stated:

I don't know the answer to your question, but I do know that the need or desire to attach oneself and represent oneself in that way might look different if things were more equitably dealt with, and might assume a different significance if white supremacy and racial hierarchy were not ubiquitous. So the argument that I made—and maybe I didn't make it well, I don't know—was a strong suggestion that, in order to do effective work against racism, one had to in effect renounce certain ontological assumptions about the nature of race as a category, which cheapened the idea of political solidarity, in my view, because it said that solidarity somehow was an automatic thing, that it would take care of itself. But I believe that solidarity—as you, I think, believe—doesn't take care of itself, that we have to do things to produce that solidarity.⁸

In this statement actually lies the answer to the question around which different understandings of racism I suggest we shape the discussion with. I suggest that we be aware of the distinction between the discussion of racist discrimination that focuses uniquely on the issues stemming out of biological, genetic and physical differences, and the interpretation of racism as a result of complex historical territorial and property struggles that were culturally covered underneath the patterned blanket of invented racial identity.

7 Vladan Jeremić & Rena Rädle projects related to racial discrimination directed at Roma people include *Under the Bridge* Beograd, 2005 – publication and video documenting the collaborative community based project realized in collaboration with Alexander Nikolić and other artists, *Journey to the World of Our Wishes*, 2008, participatory project with young Roma children, *Writing on the Sky*, 2008, collaborative work between Nannette Vinson, Rena Rädle and children of Stari Kostolac, Veliko Crniće and Požarevac and the most recent *Belleville*, 2009, DVD, 22 min.

8 In the conversation with Tommie Shelby *Cosmopolitanism, Blackness, and Utopia*, Gilroy analyses the notion of racial identity: “I've always tried to unpack the notion of identity significantly. So when you say racial identity, I immediately triangulate it: there's the question of sameness; there's the question of solidarity (which we've already dealt with); and there's the issue of subjectivity. So, identity can be unpacked into at least three quite discrete problems, which are usually lumped together when we speak of identity”.

9 In their most recent work, the video documentary *Belleville*, 2009, Rädle&Jeremić record the consequences of the violent eviction of 45 Roma families and of the tearing down of the barracks which they inhabited in New Belgrade. The barracks were in close vicinity to the residential complex Belleville that was built on the occasion of the international sports manifestation Summer Universiade 2009. The eviction and destruction was assisted by the police, without giving residents time to save their belongings, but also was supported by the neighbors, who showed no solidarity. In contrast, various activist, art and cultural organizations protested against such state action.

This is not the same as to equate race and class issues and to say that the application of David Harvey's type of critique of economic and territorial racist technologies as the reasons behind the pauperization of Roma people is the only appropriate way to extrapolate and terminate this problem. I do not believe that post-Marxian critique could help us to ultimately resolve and abolish the reasons and the persistence of Roma issue. However, it is obvious that such oblivion of the equal existential needs of the disempowered and impoverished with the needs of the ones who were the reason of their pauperization consequently led to the neglect of the basic human rights to work, to have, and ultimately to live. The line between these different but yet essential needs is very thin and invisible, particularly to the ones who were on the other side. Let us then stipulate here that one can only tackle this complex taboo theme by bringing forward both psychoanalytical and postcolonial discourse.

There are very few artists that not only courageously embarked on working with the very sensitive issues of Anti-Gypsy racism in the Balkan region, but that also deeply understood the complexity and responsibility attached to this issue as Rädle&Jeremić have. In their texts, art projects and activist actions, they address exactly the results of the dichotomy in the representation of Roma people as a problem, and their representation or self-representation as victims.⁹

They question whether there could be, somewhere between these two discursive figures, a potential for acting differently, for rationally understanding the vicious circle of both concepts: the problem and the victim that are interconnected results of our own repressive racial technologies. One way out for them may be the conscious attempt to deconstruct racism by ceasing to cling to the notions of ethnic, national or racial sameness, because notions of national and racial identity enable and even reinforce the return of the repressed racist outbursts. On the other hand, they are aware that the concept of racism must be maintained on a discursive level in order to remind us about the power that is contained in its forgetting and return.

If we take into account Gilroy's critique of any clinging to the "sameness" with your own group, either racial or ethnic, and his pursuing the potentiality for solidarity that is not based on sameness, we could conclude that the importance of the artistic and activist actions by Rädle&Jeremić stems exactly of the solidarity based on difference. When they initiate the projects, not only they offer any kind of support that their Roma participants and collaborators may need, but they also offer them to share in the open potentiality to act and create. They often invite their colleagues from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, collaborate and to share

with them the potentiality to love, support and help the endangered ones: to participate in the act of solidarity that somehow moves from the understanding that Roma are only problems or victims.¹⁰

Gilroy points to perhaps the most important issue with any racism: that in racist discourse society conceptualizes the subject (or group of subjects) that is perceived as the other, the different, both as a problem and as a victim.¹¹ As a problem because it disturbs the established order of sameness, as a victim because the compassion that accompanies the victimization is a kind of redemption. “Racialized resistance” and solidarity, on the contrary, require an action towards getting away from the perpetuating cycle of problem and victim, and this is more difficult. Here one could evoke the Freudian concept of melancholia, as Paul Gilroy did, in order to explain ethnic absolutism and racism (or, more specific to this context, racism in Serbia), just as Freud explained Nazism as linked to Germany’s postwar reactions to “the loss of a fantasy of omnipotence.”¹² We could argue that while Serbia attempts to deny the contemporary effects of its recent loss of Kosovo, it has effectively reaffirmed its power through actions like the Belville aggression.

Serbia is currently undergoing many overnight changes. It is torn between the desire to catch up with the other Balkan states in the race for accession to the EU on the one hand, and the race to catch up with the transition (or should I say transgression) to neoliberal capitalism, that is often seen as an unwritten (e.g. in the EU *acquis*) but most important bench-mark, on the other. The hatred towards Kosovars who, in the eyes of the radical nationalists but also of many other citizens, are completely to blame for the shrinking of national territory and power cannot be entertained openly, has to be repressed in order to get points with the EU. Such repression of one ethnic racism resulted in outbursts of another one, the one that is more ancient and more generally recognizable – the hatred towards Roma. The case of Belville is only one of many similar outbursts.

What an absurdity that those racisms that exist longer in history (and are thus more frequent) are easier to recognize, but are also, unfortunately, more tolerated. As if the existence of such racism in the past justifies its return. My questions therefore are related towards the mechanisms, the technologies that allow and even support the occurrence of such events and actions (in the case of the Belville evictions, it was the state that tore down the barracks inhabited by Roma). Can we believe that racism will ever cease to exist?

10 For example, for the project Under the Bridge Beograd that was partly realized in the Roma settlement under the Belgrade bridge “Gazela” they collaborated with Nenad Andrić, Anna Balint, Ljiljana Blagojević, Sezgin Boynik, Maja Ćirić, Thomas Crane, Siniša Cvetković, Minna L. Henriksson, Dragan Ignjatov, Zorica Jovanović, Stephan Kurr, Karin Laansoo, Milica Lapčević, Peter Jap Lim, Boris Lukić, Erika Margelyte, Dr Agan Papić, Predrag Miladinović, Tanja Ostojčić, Ivana Ranković, Matthias Roth, David Rych, Selena Savić, Hanno Soans, Ricarda Wallhäuser and other collaborators and participants.

11 Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, Houston A. Baker (Foreword), Chicago, IL: Chicago University, 1991, 11-12.

12 Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholy (The Wellek Library Lectures)*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006, 99.

Here we are drawn back to Michel Foucault's phrase "state racism" that in my view should accompany even the most conceptual and psychoanalytical explanations of the origins of racism. For even if we agree that racism is a phenomenon closely related with the subconscious mechanisms of repression, could we subject to psychoanalysis the state apparatus that tolerates and allows that Roma issue and ongoing racism directed at Roma people? Foucault was perhaps right while making the theoretical difference between biological (or scientific) racism, historical/social racism and state racism. Such distinctions help us understand how these mechanisms work, but one must be aware that in reality all these racisms collapse into one. They intertwine and serve as a kind of easy definition, even justification, for the profound hatred that enables contemporary lynchings to take place in front of the eyes of state "order" and, moreover, even often allow the perpetrators to go unpunished.¹³

Regardless of all cultural attempts to put an end to racism we see many varieties of this societal disease coming back time and time again, and I am afraid that psychoanalytical and any other theoretical analysis cannot help much in its eradication. By establishing the complex relations between the subject's position and the societal context in the racist debate, one could better understand how neither the subject nor the surrounding society ever succeeded in expunging racism from the human stratigraphy, not only in Eastern Europe. More importantly, our "multicultural" and "metropolitan" societies still have not answered the very basic but urgent questions regarding racism, namely: why racism is so bad and how we can proceed with some more effective measures against it.

To conclude, the art projects of Rena Rädle & Vladan Jeremić are not limited to societal research or to utopia concepts claiming to heal the societal disease of racism, and it is all too much to expect this from their artistic actions. However, their focus on solidarity and profound engagement with various Roma communities especially, in Serbia and elsewhere, point to the only possible way to activate the potential of artistic agency to prevent society from continuing to treat Roma as either a problem or victims, and to discuss the necessity of providing the required conditions of conviviality.

13 The case of a young Roma boy Trajan Bekirov killed while chased by Skopje police is paradigmatic: the Macedonian Government did not start investigating his death until Helsinki Human Rights Committee started publicly pressuring the state. For more details on his unresolved death under the most obscure circumstances see: NGOs Urge Macedonian Authorities to Investigate Death of Trajan Bekirov: Romani Youth Last Seen Alive While Being Chased by Police, European Roma Rights Centre, 16. 06. 2006, <www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=2604>.

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