

Some Thoughts on Borders and Partitions as Exception

di Rada Iveković

Borders on the land or boundaries in the minds are lines drawn to mark difference, then to hierarchize it and finally to render it normative. They are the function of some political enterprise. It is hard to say which comes first, but my leaning is nowadays to (only apparently) turn upside down the “materialist” belief and I now tend to think that if you have partitioned minds, it is difficult to imagine that you could construct continuous times and geographies, unhindered by hard and inhospitable borders. At the same time, we have more and more people living at those inhospitable border areas, whether within Western/Northern countries or at their more or less immediate outside. They may be waiting (time!) for admission to some kind of citizenship or status, or in a situation of transit, involving both unsafe spaces, legal no-man’s lands, as well as arrests in time and an uncertain future¹. We can clearly see that any continuity consists of so many discontinuities, or of their reinterpretation, rearrangement. This is what I have called – *partage de la raison*. In that sense, the view of the *delay* of female citizenship in time² (some 150 years, in France, against “universal” i.e. male suffrage) or of the backwardness of Third World countries compared with the West, or the question why is it that democratic processes in once enslaved countries could start only about 200 years after independence and the abolition of slavery (Haiti³) – which are as many attempts to set a boundary in time between the Modern and the pre-Modern – are themselves normative. The delay is a trick.

Europe exported through colonialism and war both the nation-state and borders⁴. We can now correct the more traditional Euro centric approach

¹ S. Bianchini, S. Chaturvedi, R. Iveković, R. Samaddar, *Partitions. Reshaping of States and Minds*, Routledge, London, 2005.

² A. Cavarero, F. Restaino, *Le filosofie femministe*, Paravia, Torino 1999, p. 124.

³ L. Hurbon, *Religion et lien social. L'église et l'État moderne en Haïti*, Eds. Cerf, Paris 2004.

⁴ E. Balibar, *Nous, citoyens d'Europe? Les frontières, l'État, le peuple*, La découverte, Paris 2001; Id., *L'Europe, l'Amérique, la guerre. Réflexions sur la médiation européenne*, La découverte, Paris 2003.

to borders and boundaries⁵, a decentring which requires “positioning oneself there where thinking is a vital necessity”⁶. It is a question both of space and of time.

Introducing the dimension of time as here, permits to reflect on (dis)continuities and on transmission from generation to generation. Isn't the *laïcité*, which in France was thought historically as the basis of the Republic, of the rule of law, and which was transmitted over a centralised system of public and free of charge schools, now in danger of becoming the exact opposite of its own secular ideal? After all, we see it yielding to the generation conflict which dismantles the political dimension by the prevailing of a new, and less efficient, authoritarianism. As Bertrand Ogilvie rightly says, “Le seul moyen d'éviter cette dés-institution perpétuelle du politique est de créer une structure qui permette à chaque moment du temps, pour chaque classe d'âge successive, de recréer les conditions concrètes dans lesquelles la constitution puisse être en quelque sorte 're-voulue' (ou modifiée) 'en connaissance de cause'. D'où l'importance décisive de la connaissance dans la perpétuelle re-fondation du politique”⁷. The *sconfinamento*, the repositioning of oneself with respect of *thinking* as a vital need and in a non-self-centred universe requires, indeed, time, it requires the *longue durée* of political processes, education, negotiation, confidence building, disarmament, yielding power, building-up of secularism⁸. But more than anything else, we need to be able to question and reconstruct, at every turn of history, at every change, the whole. Even the Republic, that secularised divine, cannot be given once and for all.

When living through a partition, you tend to think it as being an exceptional “event”. But what if partitioning were the very dynamics of the State and of intra- and international tensions⁹? We should now scrutinise the ef-

⁵ R. Menon, K. Bhasin, *Borders & Boundaries. Women in India' Partition*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick (NJ), 1998.

⁶ Astonishing statement from a complimentary letter dated May 6, 2004, by a reader, to Daho Djerbal, director of «Naqd», who brought it to my attention. The special issue n. 18 of that Algerian journal was dedicated to the traumatic experience, and had a paper by Ranabir Samaddar titled *Morts, responsabilité et justice* in overture.

⁷ B. Ogilvie, *Réflexions et interrogations sur le 'voile islamique'*, manuscript August 2003, for debate at the workshop *Penser le contemporain*, Ecole normale supérieure, Paris, 2004.

⁸ R. Samaddar (a cura di), *Peace Studies. An Introduction to the Concept, Scope, and Themes*, «South Asia Peace Studies», n. 1, 2004.

⁹ R. Iveković, *From the Nation to Partition; Through Partition to the Nation; Readings / De la nation à la partition, par la partition à la nation*, in «Transeuropéennes», nn. 19-20, 2001; reprint as a book: G. Glasson Deschaumes, R. Iveković (a cura di), *Divided Countries, Separated Cities. The Modern Legacy of Partition*, OUP, Delhi, 2003; a longer version of the same paper by R. Iveković was published as *De la nation à la partition, par la partition à la nation* as «Occasional Paper» n. 18 by Europe and the Balkans Network, Longo Editore, Ravenna 2001.

fects of exception when shifted or displaced in time, not only in space. For one thing, colonies were an exception to the metropolitan Constitution both in the sense of time as well as in the sense of space: considered to be lagging in time and extraterritorial. The exception has always been the rule, but not always for “us”, not always for the same. We discover a shifting subject as to the concept of exception, which is always an exception regarding *someone*. The exception marks a distance and a norm. Somehow, it seems to concern the subject “us”. It is the remote, the other. That which is seen as “normalcy” in one place, is the “exception” elsewhere: for example, Westerners often think that castes in India are an “exception” to some normalcy, which also means that they imagine them as added to society. So José Bové could ask, naively, the Indian government to eliminate castes (I don’t remember him asking Chirac to do away with class¹⁰). His idea is that, once you “remove” caste, there remains a “normal”, certainly in his view a Western-like society (“casteless”). What looks normal on one side, looks however like the exception on the other. S. Deshpande says that the “oppressive hierarchy [of caste] is so deeply embedded in tradition that it becomes part of ordinary common sense”¹¹, and adds that with regard to that, an additional step seemed to be, in the Gujarat violence of 2002, “seeking to integrate riots into normal life”. There is nothing new in the generalisation of exception. However an exception is necessarily limited not only in space, but also in time.

It is then also the concept of “normalcy”, as Satish Deshpande rightly suggests in the same paper, that needs to be revisited. The “exception”, after all, is an exception only if/when confronted to something else, to a “normalcy”. “Normalcy” and “exception” are mutually shaped. I have called this *le partage de la raison*, or you could say – the “Doublespeak of Reason”. The generalisation of exception is not so new as some of us may want to believe when they refer to Carl Schmitt or when they think of the extension/generalisation of borders and the shrinking of habitable territories, of Guantanamo, Sangatte, Nazi Camps, detention zones, retentions centres, torture in Iraq, deportations and ethnic cleansing, boat people etc. Western normalcy in the past was sustained by the worldwide “exception” of colonialism. *Colonial territories were ‘extra-territorial’ because it was essential*

¹⁰ By this, I am not trying to say that caste and class are the same, but that the hierarchy and divisions in one society is the society itself, and not something externally and only formally added to it.

¹¹ In his paper on the Gujarat violence which reminds me stunningly of the Balkans and in particular of Serbia today (you could use the same text by just changing the names): S. Deshpande, *Between jhatka and halal*, in «South Asian Himâl», March-April 2004.

that colonial legislation be made extra-constitutional and removed from sight. The Rule of Law has its flip side in the prior Rule of arbitrariness of the State. Which also means that there is a *politics* of law. The Rule of Law and the Rule of arbitrariness are one such example of the Doublespeak of reason and of the Doublespeak of law. Law and Reason are on the same side, they side easily with the powerful. The other side need to snatch them away for themselves. What we need to add to the definition of an exception is that it is limited in time and space or to a context, *even* as it gets “generalised”.

Translation

Does “doublespeak” imply translation? That is a thorny question.

Translation might be considered as a mother tongue, in the sense that there is no zero degree of a non-translated language, in the same way in which there is no zero degree of violence. I shall take “translation” (in opposition to the concept of “dialogue between cultures” and to *francophonie*) as a way of dealing with producing exception¹² and as a permanent negotiation. Translation is about crossing borders, or in some cases about producing borders – for example when translating from Serbian into Croatian, from Urdu into Hindi, or from Russian into Ukrainian. So translation testifies to some resistance. Besides seeing it as resistance, I would like to suggest that *translation is the original mother tongue* of humankind, in the sense that there is no language that does not reach out to the other (self; person, or group) and intend meaning even when monologic. It also means a technique of negotiation and a strategy of survival in common and in integration. The concept of translation as the mother tongue implies the *border as your country*. Of course, these may be more or less uncomfortable. People can have borders or boundaries for their countries for different reasons, willingly or compelled. Most have no choice and in that sense borders are not to be celebrated. It is an unstable and uncomfortable position, a tragic one, when not chosen, but it is the site of resistance and of the construction

¹² R. Iveković, *De la traduction permanente (nous sommes en traduction) / On Permanent Translation (We are in Translation)*, in «Transeuropéennes», n. 22, 2002, pp. 121-145; see R. Iveković keynote speech at the Internationale Graduiertenkonferenz an der Universität Wien, “‘Postkoloniale’ Konflikte im europäischen Kontext” (Vienna University, on April 15, 2004) *The Split of Reason and the Post-Colonial Backlash*, forthcoming with Turia & Kant; also see the post-doctoral interuniversity course “Feminist Critical Analysis: Boundaries, Borders and Borderlands”, paper by R. Iveković, *Transborder Translating* on May 24, 2004, forthcoming in a Croatian translation by the Centre for Women’s Studies, Zagreb, 2005.

of something else. For most of the migrant and undocumented population today, the various refugees and exiles, it is far from being sexy. For the elites, but also for non nationalists or non fundamentalists in general, it may be an escape from nationalist or “cultural” ghettos. The relationship to transborder translation, as well as to borders *tout court*, then, is very ambiguous. You need to learn living at the border as in permanent challenge and insecurity. Is there anything else in Palestine/Israel *but* the border? The whole surface of the countries has become an all-encompassing border, a death trap. Borders are also states of exception. Through their extension to situations like the last mentioned, they tend to become *permanent exceptions*. This state of *exception*, becoming nowadays the *rule* and dangerously inverting the scheme of the saying that the exception confirms the rule – now indicates that the *exception of the untenable has spread so as to become the rule*: as borders in Europe “disappear”, some much more terrible borders appear elsewhere, everywhere. Borders expand, extend with centres of detention, of retention, spaces retrieved from publicity, withdrawn from public space, as the space between them shrinks. The relations between inside and outside has changed. This is a situation unknown to this extent before globalisation: fortress Europe¹³, open camps for undocumented “aliens” in different European and now also extra European countries, boat-people crossing the Mediterranean to a well guarded southern border, captains now indicted for favouring illegal immigration whereas before a captain would be accused if *not* helping men at sea... internment and filing of foreigners, the Israeli wall against Palestine, the USA wall facing Mexico, torture, humiliation and ill-treatment of prisoners in Iraq by the US Army and coalition forces, Guantanamo (a space out of all legal and legitimate spaces), flying random extra-judicial USA prisoners to hidden destinations in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan or elsewhere for unhindered torture – all that is quite up to the level of the now almost “benign” Berlin Wall and various Gulags, because there is no more checking, no translation, and no double meaning, no reading between the lines in this new era of Newspeak. This is our situation today, which won’t allow us to idealise borders.

Apart from that, translation as a transborder operation is complicated by all sorts of circumstances, and in particular by the context, which is one of the inequality of the two terms. In the sense that one of them is translated into the idiom of the other, thus creating a typical situation of *différend*¹⁴. There

¹³ M.C. Caloz-Tschopp, *Les étrangers aux frontières de l'Europe et le spectre des camps*, La Dispute, Paris 2004.

¹⁴ J.F. Lyotard, *Le Différend*, Minuit, Paris 1983.

remains something *unsaid* or *falsified* in this situation, or again there is a “transborder” residue of what has no language; which is more or less the same thing as saying that there is something *unheard*, an inaccessible space – a *no-woman’s land*. This basic inequality, which is already political (before there is any such thing as politics), can still be aggravated by historical circumstances that have made one of the two terms of the relationship – dominant. Since Foucault, at least, but also as a result of work done by anthropologists and psychoanalysts, we know that in the last analysis *it is a question of the body* and the order of bodies. I mean thereby both physical individual bodies as well as social bodies. And there are other disciplinary, and undisciplined, approaches, such as feminist theory, post-colonial studies etc., which tell us that what cannot be articulated or understood in conventional language also comes from the other, from the “untranslatable” transborder side – for example the Black Atlantic, from the immediate experience of repression, the limit of which is also very much the body. The body is what survives, what resists, what traverses borders and reaches out towards the other. It is somehow *with* the body, or within the body, that there remains an inviolable space, the transborder body not exhausted in itself or by violence. As much as violence, of course, destroys bodies, these, together with all that comes with them, *living* bodies and collective too, also survive, resist, overcome, though individual lives and whole communities may be lost. You could say – life survives death (as death interrupts life), it goes beyond, crosses the border between the two – indeed a *major* borderline runs between life and death – inasmuch as it is *cancelled*: life-and-death are really two sides of the same coin, incompatible but inseparable. They are one whole.

So translation involves bodies, movement and time; and this is the sense, both extended and restricted, in which I am using it here. An instance of organ-transplantation/intrusion-of-another-body would in this respect be no more than an extremely dramatic individual case in point. An experience of mediation is needed, which necessarily takes *time*. Time and the body is that which spills over both terms in the translation relation. Complexity isn’t exhausted by dichotomy. And it is in this “primary” sense that I will now take up the theme of the *politics of translation*, through our position as (female) mediators, both translators and translated. In this paradoxical position of holding both sides of the stick¹⁵ it is however not easy (and traditionally, not allowed) to tackle the fundamental question of the more general

¹⁵ Language and “ready-made thought” offers this cliché of “both ends of the stick” which, inadequately for our quest, suggests a symmetrical and equal relationship. But the “mirror” may be a better metaphor, since its “both sides” are far from equivalent in terms of existential stakes, as Luce Irigaray has demonstrated in *Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un*, Minuit, Paris 1977, and other writings.

political circumstances of translation/intrusion. Neither our origin nor our condition are in any of the two terms in the translating relation. Translation is after all a reciprocal rapport and not a one way street, a relation that exposes the translator.

What is to be translated is not texts, but contexts. And what encourages me to do so is the *crisis*, the critical situation in which the body finds itself; because the body (chronically always, but acutely – often), discovering itself called into question, heads towards translation, communication or transformation, as the only way out. It is the body, for its life, that grasps toward translation. In doing so it may both hit and cross borders. A border invites a transborder situation and lives by it, as well as vice-versa. The “identities” spread on both sides of the line of partition/division (*partage* in the French double sense), then¹⁶. On another level, Veena Das, talking about analogous situations, used the term “critical events”¹⁷. But what when critical events become the rule?

Experience teaches us that translation always takes place, and yet is always unsatisfactory. The feeling of imperfection or incompleteness that results from every border crossing or attempt at translation is not confined to this experience alone. More profoundly, it characterises the human condition, the existential paradox of being at once mortal and destined for immortality, at once *limited* and *unlimited*. No language, no translation, no “inter-pretation” can express this completely, because that process is never closed. Our condition, rather than in the terms of the translation, is situated in this unbearable, intolerable *inter-, between-two* that we nonetheless tolerate: the border, the transborder situation. It is the paradox of having a body and not being reducible to it, but not being able to live or think without it either. It is true that this condition could change when we (but who is “we”?) get to the point of thinking without bodies¹⁸, and it may be that we (?) are approaching that point. But I will not speculate on this ideal identity between the self and (one)self, whose will and effects of violence I have discussed elsewhere¹⁹. Translation (and life itself) takes place in this un-conditionality, this imperative of the *animated body*²⁰. As such, transla-

¹⁶ R. Samaddar (a cura di), *The Marginal Nation: Transborder Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal*, Sage Publications, Delhi 1999.

¹⁷ V. Das, *Critical Events. An Anthropological Perspective in Contemporary India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1995.

¹⁸ See J.F. Lyotard, *L'Inhumain. Causeries sur le temps*, Galilée, Paris, 1988.

¹⁹ R. Iveković, *Le Sexe de la nation*, Léo Scheer, Paris 2003; Ead., *Dame Nation. Nation et différence des sexes*, Longo Editore, Ravenna 2003.

²⁰ See V. Das, *Violence and Translation*, and *The practice of organ transplants: networks, documents, translations* in M. Lock, A. Young, A. Cambrosio (a cura di), *Living and Working with*

tion is no more than a *relationship*, being nothing in itself and without its terms. And so are borders, that can be hard or soft, barrier or contact. It is thus the line between life and death that keeps life on, that allows for translation and movement. It is never “only” a question of the body, but also of the way in which the condition of the being is enfolded by it (*without*, but also *with*, organs; anatomy or not), and reciprocally, but not symmetrically, a certain “translation” lies in the way that the prism of the psychical, social and historical refracts the body. In this sense, we will always have been a graft of ourselves as other, overcoming our own bodily limits. And grafts can add onto others, thus complicating things, as Jean-Luc Nancy shows in *L’Intrus*²¹. Life grows out of life, however “imperfect”. Not only is *animated corporality* the condition of translation, but it makes translation necessary: there is no situation other than translation; there is no pure “natural” state that is still untranslated or unreflected. Even total incomprehension demonstrates this. To imagine a state (of language, or civilisation) *before* all translation and transborder movement²² would be like imagining a body without a “soul”, a pure nature, or biological sex clearly distinct from gender, outside of all mediation. This would mean falling into the nature-culture, sex-gender, female-male, subject-object, interior-exterior dichotomy. It would also mean imagining that, in the dyad, the two terms could be equal, symmetrical, and without any implicit hierarchy. Culture is first and foremost a matter of translation, even within a given language. But language (re)produces – and thrives on – not only differences and borders, but also inequalities. Any border is indeed *ineffable*, because it is a crossing line, a vanishing meeting point and because it is nothing in itself, being all in a relationship of the twain that tries hard to build separate and autonomous identities.

Translation is preceded by many experiences of mediation as borders are subject to negotiations (or to wars), and by many *intimidating* obstacles, attempts at establishing hedges. We are looking into the politics of translation or adopted in translating.

the New Medical Technologies. Intersections of Inquiry, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 263-287. The text published here is in part a reaction to her ideas and our discussions.

²¹ J.L. Nancy, *L’Intrus*, Paris, Galilée 2000; see also the movie *21 Grams*, by Alejandro González Inárritu, 2002, as well as *Lost in Translation* by Sofia Coppola, 2003.

²² I am aware that a border is a concept related to the establishment of the modern State: *that* border is much harder. I have enlarged the concept here in order to investigate the limits of other types of borders which I see as different *degrees* of the same life-and-death process. Within the Western context, “life-and-death” (*punar-bhava*, *punar mrtyu*; *samsââra*) are understood as merely “life”, whereby an additional hardening function of the concept of “border” is unnecessarily introduced. Any border is really *ineffable*.

The Balkans and South Asia

As borders have been redrawn and States redefined in the peninsulae, nobody wants to identify with the Bad Guys any more, but everyone will have been a “victim”. Most in the Balkans have forgotten the non-aligned third-world policy of the former Yugoslavia, which shows the non-contemporaneity of history and historiography. It is again an issue of time. One can only deplore a gap here, and a *postponed remembrance, a displaced or shifted recollection*. Non-alignment was a boring official discourse then, while all eyes were directed towards the great consumerist model. The real-socialist pattern was generally abhorred while pride was nevertheless taken in the Yugoslav resistance to Nazism and Stalinism, as much as the post-colonial one was unrecognised as akin, largely ignored because hammered as the official example. Deeper similarities between the socialist and the third-worldist post-colonial blueprint remained unknown. So the present belated recognition of a once existing but fundamentally neglected parentage with the Third World has some characteristics of all the “post-” movements starting with post-modernism: they execute a strange “loop” in time with a *petitio principii* in the “post-”.

Of course *consciousness is always belated in a way, and received history masks the diverse and possibly many scripts of alternative histories*. The displacement / being out of place, in other words (e)migration or being apatrids, which is a general human condition but so palpable in situations of partitions and wars, was recognised by the Balkans only when it happened here itself – i.e. 50 after the South Asian or other examples, in spite of the former non-aligned ideology. It seems that it is our own narration and physical suffering that brings home to us a reality or, *no-one else's life can feel as real as our own*. Here appears again the “us” against which the exception is defined. But various contemporary nationalisms and fundamentalisms rely on post-colonial discourses of other times, and trick their public. A narration “translates a space into place”²³, transforms a *utopia into a topos*. Non-aligned citizens had no narrative field for the concept of “partition” until the connection to it was made through concrete experience, and its meaning was given by their own history and with reference to “their” (“our”) bodies, territory, culture and identity. It is in a way when it lost a territory (the Yugoslav space as an unproblematic whole) and its referent other, the “non-aligned” that the non-nationalist opposition – earned itself a *narrative*

²³ S. Chaturvedi, *The Excess of Geopolitics: Partition of “British India”*, in S. Bianchini, S. Chaturvedi, R. Iveković, R. Samaddar, *Partitions. Reshaping States and Minds*, cit.

field for post-colonial imagination as its own. It is when new borders appeared on the ground that paradoxically the condition sprang up for them to disappear in some minds (or to gain much consistency in others). The post-colonial text is now the deviation of “our” own unconscious. There is a paradox here, inasmuch as the strategy of anti-colonial, anti-imperial, post-colonial, “no-global” resistance is structured by the wish to reshuffle the relationship to the other (between “us” and “them”) through a *translation* of the past or of the unconscious into the new common narrative field while avoiding binaries, which also means reconstructing/displacing the hegemony, whereas all the players in the game are being replaced or transformed. No easy task.

Certainly, one could argue, as has been done, that land conquered by Empires, in the European case neighbouring countries, are forgotten “colonialisms”. It is a matter of definition but it is not philosophically challenging. My point is that such a decision, whether to encompass or not such cases into the description of colonialism – is itself always necessarily a territorially *located decision*, one with a priori borders, a matter informed ideologically (pro or con); and that this is itself a part of a *partage de la raison*.

Sovereignty - Self-Determination

Historically, there are two partly converging lines in the origin of the modern concept of *self-determination* based on State sovereignty, after the turning point known as the Westphalian Treaty (1648) at the very end of the Middle Ages and at the end of domination of the Catholic Church over kingdoms in Europe: one of them was shaped by Lenin, the other by Woodrow Wilson; starting from the Nation State, the two approaches have much in common, and particularly the idea of self-determination. The Nation State has territorial appropriation as one of its instruments as enabling the building of capitalism. The level of inclusion (as subordinate within a unit *or* as one of equal units) is one of the possible elements to judge a colonialism or a sovereignty by, but there are of course many ways to foil proclaimed “good intentions”.

The partaking of *all* equally in the common good (“equal rights of nations”) was certainly not achieved and not even quite intended by any of the known systems. There was however at least some merit and effectiveness in the *universalising principle* (much as the principles of French Revolution): a principle of equality formally recognized for all (nations) which, although it was not implemented, could at least be *invoked* in further political struggles

and would represent a landmark or a horizon in the history of ideas. As a matter of principle, this has comparatively the same importance as the possibility for women or slaves to appeal to the *Declaration of the rights of man and citizen*. Even today, women remain symbolically markers of borders and boundaries, of the nation. In fact, the relation of the nation to the female body seems to be at least as old as the nation (a European formation) itself, and thus at the founding “roots” of Europe in its construction: this is true of the constitution of any type of community (as a difference of society)²⁴.

The concept of self-determination as well as the concept of sovereignty, the landmarks of political Modernity are, of course, products of borders and partitions, of *partings and partakings* as much as they reproduce them. Borders are themselves paradoxically both links and separations.

The recent (2004) upsurge of Islamist violence in Uzbekistan and possibly soon elsewhere in Central Asia, in Chinese minority provinces, is due much to the new avatars of the old historic *Great Game*, a great producer of borders since those times on even now, and the effect of the destabilisation of the region by the US war on Afghanistan and Iraq; its developments are still to be seen. The Great Game was the conflict of colonialisms (mainly Russian and British) in Asia, centred on the areas surrounding Afghanistan (which itself remained unsubdued thanks to the Great Game itself until the Soviet invasion in 1979) and its larger region. Much as there has been an ongoing conflict of colonialisms in Africa (mainly French and British) of which Rwanda, the Great Lakes and today Ivory Coast are probably the ultimate incarnations. The celebration, in April 2004, of the centenary of the 1904 *Entente cordiale* over colonies and colonial reciprocal wars through an official visit of Queen Elisabeth II to France, and later that year of the French president to Great Britain upon a business nobody dares to spell out, bears witness to the present history and to the future prospective of that colonial past: “the 1904 pact reflected the two colonial powers’ desire to resolve long-running territorial disputes. But the two also shared a common suspicion of Germany’s growing military and naval strength. At the time, France’s relationship with Britain was its most important foreign alliance. They were two fellow imperialists. Their rivalries, and mutual suspicion, ran deep”²⁵. In Central Asia, the Great Game added Russia to the partners, thus producing a triad of players and amounting between 1904-1907 to the Triple Entente, sealed by 1914 before World War I – to counter Germany but also to de-

²⁴ N. Loraux, *Les Enfants d’Athéna*, Seuil, Paris 1990; Ead., *La cité divisée*, Rivages, Payot 1997.

²⁵ *Of entente, understanding and Verständnis*, in «The Economist», April 10th-16th 2004, p. 21.

fend colonial vested interests²⁶. Historically, the United States countered those conflicts and interests (until the Suez conflict in 1956, where they opposed the French and the British), but the latter have gradually been replaced by American new imperialism starting with the Korean and the Vietnam wars, all the way into this last Bush era. Out of the historic (and itself intrinsically colonial, but independentist) American resistance to European colonialisms, the other line (compared to Lenin's) in the origin of the concept of *self-determination* is that of Woodrow Wilson at the Peace conference in 1919, where it appeared together with the idea of the *right to collective security* (including setting and imposing borders), and paved the way to the Society of Nations and later the USA's National Security Doctrine. Wilson intended thereby to counter British and French colonialism. The concept of self-determination, upon which during the Cold War both political blocks relied in order to achieve the balance of power, was to be used as the basis for post-colonial independencies, as the basic principle of "non-alignment" and as the guarantee of the Cold War equilibrium. But those same borders would have to be torn in partitioned independences, and new ones would be created. Self-determination itself is based on reason, on the parting/partaking of reason.

Not only has the national State been a colonial State, but it seems to ultimately regularly lead to the *securitarian* State. Yet the main point to press may be that colonialism, which still informs our culture, our way of thinking, our world order, including the way Europe is being constructed – is not an isolated event in the past, a past event. It is the same process as the production of borders as territorial and symbolic markers, separators, identity-building frameworks. It is also here that colonialism, borders and the gender divide are intimately interdependent: crossing borders in wars is therefore regularly linked with mass rape as the marking of territories and as shifting the line of demarcation with the alien. Territorial expansion and land-grabbing as a long-term project part of the Nation, with establishing borders as an on-going constant process, seems to have been and to be a basic component and tendency of the State itself: of the national State as such with its European epicentre. In this sense, it's a long way to Vladivostok!

We must also insist in exploring the parallelism, the contemporaneity, the complementarities and, indeed, the unity of outer colonialism together

²⁶ "The contract of April 8, 1904, between England and France regarding the conflict over colonial matters, especially about Morocco, acquired the character of an anti-German coalition. By this agreement, France got a free hand over Morocco, and England over Egypt. By this agreement (*Entente cordiale*) the division of Africa became effective, and the Entente begins" cfr. *Enciklopedija Leksikografskog zavoda* 1, Zagreb, 1955, p. 167 [transl. by me].

with its ethnic cleansings at a planetary scale, with that inner colonisation that was the most remarkable of all the rifts in reason – the gender hierarchy seen as inner colonisation²⁷.

The Balkans again

It is surprising how recent history, since the Nineties, has erased the once substantial difference between the perception of the Soviet Block and Yugoslavia, or between State socialism (or State Capitalism, as some called it) in one case, and self-managed Socialism in the other.

But both the local history, and the international context then, as well as now, of Yugoslavia *and* the Eastern Block mark a substantial difference and not just one of degrees. Certainly, the dismantlement of the Cold War division was the context as well as one of the main reasons of the collapse of Yugoslavia. What makes it “similar” to less analytic thinking today, is the erasure of history, of 50 years of real history of materially lived lives of people of my generation. This amnesia is amazing, it is itself depoliticising the issues and dehistoricising them. But it is not only self-inflicted. There was a programme on Euronews in 2004 which filmed and “showed” where in Gorizia/Nova Gorica (Slovenia/Italy) “the Iron Curtain used to run”! The journalist was so ignorant that s/he didn’t know that *that* was an open state border where people travelled both sides, did their shopping or worked on the other side, and that Yugoslavs had passports with which they travelled abroad. Yugoslavia was not behind the “iron curtain”. That is more than a substantial difference, it says something about the regime. But what makes the former Yugoslavia now look more like the eastern block once, is the general pauperisation, militarisation, primitivisation due to the last war. One other element of amnesia which makes some people think now that Yugoslavia was like the Eastern Block and therefore just a matter of degrees is that they make no difference between the former Yugoslav regime *and* the regime of Milošević in Serbia which imposed on the rest of the country whatever happened thereafter, including ethnic cleansing in all directions, and a series of wars run from Belgrade (Yugoslavia had been created by the “soft dictator” (irony included!) Tito, and was many times reformed; that country lasted until 1991: last prime minister Ante Marković). They ignore that Yugoslavia had broken away from Stalin and Russia in 1948. They also prob-

²⁷ I have tried to show elsewhere the role of gender in the construction of the nation, see note 14.

ably don't know that Yugoslavia did have an important resistance movement and was mainly self-liberated from German nazis and Italian fascists (also, from Bulgarian fascists on its Eastern front) during World War II. The important difference between Yugoslavia and the Soviet satellites was that it wasn't the Red Army that liberated it although it did enter there, help and retrieve. If you class Yugoslavia with the rest from a *present* point of view and thereby change the past, you forget all that and many other things, embark on an ideological simplification, and make indeed very poor history, as some well intentioned "generalists" dealing with the topic do nowadays.

What is interesting here is the way received history informs not only present and past, but through them the future too. Received history builds an *immunisation* of sorts, and immunisation against an open past and history, against alternative histories. Immunisation in this sense is of course the enemy of freedom. It is true that immunisation, as everyone knows through the medical simile, is also protection. But excessive protection is both suicidal as well as murderous. And it is the condition of creating exceptions and borders. Roberto Esposito has shown very well the common origin of *immunity* and *community*²⁸. We could conclude from it to the necessity of a balance between the two, a balance avoiding the deadly division of reason. That equilibrium is most certainly achieved by a measured retrieving of the self, of the "us", of the centre opposed to the exception and defining it – the exception being the virus, the infection, the other, or anything across the border, including paradoxically the border itself as embodying the other. Between "health" and "sanity" there is a continuous process and complementarities, but no clear-cut separation.

It turns out, then that there is an important zone of *inner alterity*, *inner border*, *inner other* – that cannot be estranged or removed without threatening life at the centre, in us. This is where the importance of thinking as a vital necessity, a vital stake, reappears: where thinking is no luxury.

²⁸ R. Esposito, *Communitas. Origine e destino della comunità*, Einaudi, Torino 1998; Id., *Immunitas. Protezione e negazione della vita*, Einaudi 2002; Id., *Bios. Biopolitica e filosofia*, Einaudi 2004; A. Brossat, *Immunité, culture et politique*, in «Combat face au sida», n. 35, 2004, pp. 28-31.