//Marina Gržinić

Dissident feminisms, anti-racist politics and artistic interventionist practices

In this article, *(15) I will discuss dissident feminisms that disrupt the monolithic history of a feminism that is heterosexual and white and based on a defined feminist subject that is supposedly a woman as a predefined biological reality (meaning, based on a natural category, as it were, of "woman"). As such, dissident feminisms intervene in the history (and present) of this monolithic feminism with marginalized positions causing antagonistic differentiations based on class, race and gender. These positions are marginalized in society in relation to a white majority in the Western world. Moreover, these positions conceptualized as minoritized consist of people who are immigrants, refugees, and undocumented immigrants from Latin America, Africa, and former Eastern Europe, which means that they come from geopolitical sectors that are minoritized in relation to the European Union, in general, and Austria, in particular. These people perform jobs that are seen as "minor" within a hierarchy of a white, middle-class "decency;" as these jobs are abusive and exploitative in terms of the basic life conditions of reproduction and economic remuneration. Therefore, in this article based on such a designated position of dissident feminism, I present artistic interventionist practices that in relation to sex, gender, race, and class develop agencies cited as transfeminist, transmigrant, and transsexual positions.

In the first part of the text I will contextualize what dissident feminism means and how the term was developed, as well as explaining its critical theoretical points. In the second part, I will present various dissident feminist artistic interventionist positions.

Contextualization of dissident feminisms

My thesis is that today, minoritized women including immigrants, transgender people, sex workers, lesbians, etc.—here I am referring to the title of by a text written by Luzenir Caixeta in 2011 (reprinted 2013) (*4), "Minoritized Women Effect a Transformation in Feminism" — are those who are making a transformation in and of feminism. My reference is to dissident movements within feminism that transform its white, heterosexual, essentialized perception (based on features that are seen as natural elements of a category called "woman") into dissident feminisms (that is, feminism in plural!). Luzenir Caixeta, a philosopher and theologian who works at maiz. Autonomous Center of and for Migrant Women in Linz, Austria, on health prevention, counseling and education of migrant sex workers, states:

> (I)n recent years, a number of authors have become well known around the world who are of the opinion that the new feminism must go much further beyond the old demands of white, Western and heterosexual middle-class women for legal equality. Attention should be given to the women who have always been marginalized, and the causes leading to differentiation based on class, ethnicity and gender should be opposed (Caixeta 2013: 146). (*4)

Even more, she straightforwardly subtitled a section in her aforementioned text, "Dissident Currents within Feminisms" and states that this section refers directly to the essay by the Spanish philosopher Beatriz Preciado, "Report after Feminism:

Women on the Margins" (2007). (*7) Caixeta, in reference to Preciado, argues that in opposition to a past feminism that developed its political discourse based on the division "between men (as dominators) and women (as victims), modern feminism is developing new political concepts and strategies for action that call into question what has previously been regarded as generally true: namely that the political subject of feminism [was] women — meaning women in their predefined biological reality, but especially women according to a certain notion: white, heterosexual, submissive and from the middle class" (Caixeta 2013: 146) (*4). Therefore, the dissident demand in feminism asks for a process of radical differentiation. Beatriz Preciado asks for "feminisms for the excluded" (Preciado 2007, quoted after Caixeta 2013: 147 (*4)). Or, as s/he argues in the text "Pharmaco-Pornographic CapitalismPostporn Politics and the Decolonization of Sexual Representations," these new feminisms for the excluded are "dissident projects for the collective transformation of the 21st century" (Preciado 2013: 251) (*8). Dissident feminisms stand in opposition "to a gray, normed and puritanical feminism, which sees in cultural, sexual or political distinctions a threat to its heterosexual and Eurocentric image of women" (Caixeta 2013: 147). (*4)

I emphasize that Preciado talks about the "proletariat of feminism" — a coinage that s/he uses in reference to the writer and filmmaker Virginie Despentes — that includes all those "monstrous bodies" left out of puritan Western feminism. These are subjects such as "whores, lesbians, raped, butch, male and transgender women who are not white … in short, almost all of us" (Preciado 2013: 251). (*8) Preciado lists names and delineates a genealogy of positions that challenge the naturalness and universality of the feminine condition. I quote from Preciado's text "Pharmaco-Pornographic CapitalismPostporn Politics and the Decolonization of Sexual Representations" in order to propose the genealogy of dissident feminisms:

> The first of these shifts is in the hands of theoretical gay and lesbian theorists like Guy Hocquenghem, Michel Foucault, Monique Wittig, Michael Warner and Adrienne Rich, who define heterosexuality as a political regime and a control device that makes the difference between men and women and transforms the resistance to gender standardization into pathology. Judith Butler and Judith Halberstam insist on the processes of cultural significance and stylization of the body through which the normalization of differences between the genders is effectuated, while Donna Haraway and Anne Fausto-Sterling bring into question the existence of two sexes as biological realities, regardless of the scientific-technical processes representation is constructed with. Moreover, along with the processes of emancipation of blacks in the United States and the decolonization of the so-called "Third World," the voices of criticism are also raised against the racist assumptions of colonial and white feminism. We have become empowered with projects and thoughts by Angela Davis, bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa and Gayatri Spivak, and black feminist, postcolonial, postChristian, postJewish, postMuslim projects, or those from the Diaspora that will require thinking gender in its constitutive relation to the geopolitical differences of race, class, sexuality, migration and human trafficking (Preciado 2013: 251). (*8)

Dissident feminist artistic interventionist positions

Until now I have discussed two main points in this article connected with the title: First, what we understand as dissident feminisms, and second, how dissident feminisms intervene in history in general and the histories of feminism in particular.

In what follows I will present a few dissident feminist artistic interventionist positions. The main aim of artistic interventionist strategies is to change the conditions of art, and the social, political, and economic realities at a historical moment in which these art practices take place. These artistic strategies intervene in order to effect social change and produce a demarcation within a certain space and public realm. My thesis is that it is possible to distinguish at least two lines that are in some cases parallel, or in other situations cross each other:

The first line of dissident feminist artistic interventions is marked by those positions that "escape from the academia to flourish in audiovisual production, literary, and performative action spaces" (Preciado 2013: 252). (*8) As such, the purpose of these queer-feminist projects "would not be so much to liberate women or get legal equality, but the dismantling of the political devices producing differences of class, race, gender and sexuality, thereby creating transfeminism art and action networks for decolonization politics" (Preciado 2013: 252). (*8) The artists and their interventionist practices in the field of dissident feminisms seen in such a view are those connected with postporn strategies, as Preciado states:

> (We) have a history going from the feminist kitsch porn movies of Annie Sprinkle, the docu-fiction by Monika Treut, literary works by Virginie Despentes, Dorothy Allison and Michelle Tea, Alison Bechdel's lesbian comics, photographs by Del LaGrace Volcano, dyke punk rock concerts by Tribe8, to the Gothic Revival sermons of Lydia Lunch, and the transgender porn science fiction of Shue-Lea Cheang, feminist postporn … aesthetics made of traffic signs and cultural artifacts with the critical redefinition of code standards that traditional feminism considered improper for femininity. Some of the references of this aesthetic and political discourse are queer-horror-porn movies of Bruce La Bruce and Christopher Lee, the distortion of sex shops of Maria Llopis, PostOp or Orgy, queer-Gothic literature, dildos as instruments of tectonic redefinition of the sexed body, trans-sexual vampires and monsters, cyborgs living queer punk, performance in public space as a useful political intervention … Sex was never so crude and gender has never been so cooked. (Preciado 2013: 252) (*8)

The second line of dissident feminist artistic interventions that I want to propose is associated even more precisely with non-white feminists and activists who work directly with antiracism as well as post-colonial and decolonial positions. I make reference to names cited by Caixeta as critical positions by migrant women and Black women, such as Katharina Oguntoye *(1), May Ayim, FeMigra *(2), Lale Otyakmaz, *(3) and Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez *(4). An important framework of reference for this development is the critique from Women of Color in the U.S. in the 1980s, including Combahee River Collective, *(5) Cherríe L. Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, *(6) bell hooks, *(7) and Angela Davis. *(8) And I add to these names María Lugones, Gayatri Spivak, *(9) and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. And last but not least, artists in Austria working in *maiz. Autonomous Center of and for Migrant Wom*en in Linz, especially Marissa Lôbo, as well as *The Research Group on Black Austrian History and Presence / Pamoja* from Vienna and their members Araba Evelyn Johnston-Arthur, Belinda Kazeem, and Njideka Stephanie Iroh, among others.

Why are these positions important?

These positions are important as they effectuate direct interventions in mainstream artistic production (coopted by the market and fully branded) as well as in processes of dismantling interlinked capitalism and racism, and Western Occidental knowledge with White hegemonic social and institutional regimes, such as universities,

museums, etc.

A very good case of the importance of such work is the life and poetry of May Ayim (1960–1996) who was an Afro-German poet, educator, and activist. Margaret MacCarroll exposes in her MA thesis “May Ayim: A Woman in the Margin of German Society” (*5) (defended in 2005 at the Florida State University, College of Arts and Sciences, USA) that “Although there is a long history of dark-skinned people living in Germany, this study focuses primarily on the period after World War II and examines concepts of culture, race and ethnicity in order to determine what role these concepts play in the experiences of Afro-Germans like Ayim” (MacCarroll 2005: 3). (*5) MacCarroll exposes that Ayim’s life was marked by a sense of displacement and not belonging as she tried desperately to find her place in German and African society.

What is important for this position and other dissident positions is that they cannot be contained only in an artistic field but in order to capture their importance and the way they radically intervene in art we have, first of all, to dismantle a standard division of art disciplines and, second, constantly take into consideration a wide social, political, and economic context of art. Therefore, Ayim’s tragic life and powerful art cannot be understood outside the genealogy of racism in Germany that functions as exposed by MacCarroll from “Negerhuren to Mischlingskinder to Afro-Deutsche or Afro-Germans” (MacCarroll 2005: 3). (*5) and this line of racism that did not vanish but was “just” modified. The same processes can be detected in Austrian society.

If I continue in the line of this logic, then Cherríe L. Moraga is perhaps best known for co-editing, with Gloria Anzaldúa, the anthology „This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color“ (*1) in 1981 (first edition). Her work is important for establishing a context of work for Chicana feminists and other feminists of color, and among scholars working in Chicano Studies and for the foundation for third wave feminism or Third World feminism in the USA.

María Lugones is an Argentinian scholar, philosopher, and feminist, who teaches at Binghamton University in New York. Lugones reworked the term “Colonial Matrix of Power,” coined at the end of the 1990s by the Peruvian theorist Aníbal Quijano who used the term to name the structures of power, control, and hegemony that emerged during colonialism and are reproduced to the present. Quijano talks about gender as biological, but Lugones argues that gender is a social construction. *(10) She coined the concept “Colonial/Modern Gender System” (2007) to talk of the binary gender system as patriarchal and heterosexual organizations of relations. She argues that gender itself is a violent colonial introduction, consistently and contemporarily used to destroy peoples, cosmologies, and communities as the building ground of the “civilized” West. The Spanish colonizers introduced a gender formation system based on “heterosexualism” (a key term for Lugones, as seen in the title of her seminal text from 2007), a system that only accepts opposite-sex attraction, opposite-sex relationships, and excludes homosexuality.

The “oppressive colonial gender arrangements” or “oppressive organizations of life” that remained from colonialism have inherently naturalized a gender dichotomy. This same gender dichotomy is used today as a matrix of power imposed on Africa or on the territory of the former Eastern Europe. This gender system thus stands in opposition to the “civilized” West that is opening and emancipating itself with queer positions, while the East and the Orient are pushed to embrace a colonial/modern gender system built on homophobic and transphobic violent attacks.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, another prominent voice of dissident feminisms, proposes in her article “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” (1984), (*6) a shift not only on gender, but also on ethnicity, and thus proposing an anti-white-centrism. She develops this shift by making a reference to Theresa De Lauretis proposal to develop an “anti-hetero-centrism.” Mohanty develops a criticism of hegemonic Western scholarship on a large scale in general, and of the colonialism in Western feminist scholarship in particular.

Some very recent examples of artistic interventionist practices

In the following I describe four examples of artistic interventionist practices in Austria, beginning with one in greater length. If I talk of very recent artistic practices then we have to name Marissa Lôbo, born in Brazil, who lives and works in Austria and is a black activist and a member of MAIZ. One of Lôbo’s most impressive projects is *Iron Mask, White Torture*, a performance and installation that was presented as part of the group exhibition “Where do we go from here?” presenting new positions from Austria and Central Europe at the Secession in Vienna in 2010. After the opening of the show an article was published in the main daily newspaper Der Standard in which not a single word was written about Marissa Lôbo’s performance *Iron Mask, White Torture*. This omission is very telling and disturbing alike as the performance consisted of nine Black women and Women of Color, wearing black outfits and having bright blue eyes. The blue eye represented a reference to Anastácia, a slave in Quilombo region in Brazil, whose struggle for freedom became the symbol of anti-colonial resistance. Performers in the project were Agnes Achola, Alessandra Klimpel, Belinda Kazeem, Flavia Inkiru, Grace Latigo, Steaze, Sheri Avraham, Njideka Stephanie Iroh, and Marissa Lôbo. The performance was impossible to miss at the opening of the exhibition!

Marissa Lôbo, *Iron Mask, White Torture*, performance and installation, 2010.

Marissa Lôbo, Iron Mask, White Torture, performance and installation, Secession, Vienna, 2010

The curator chose the title “Where do we go from here?” for the group show. The question “Where do we go from here, Vienna?” was commented on by Marissa Lôbo and Sheri Avraham as an ironic question to be asked when as they stated “your history is imprinted in every corner, and at the same time we revile openly and

legally a deep-rooted racist structure" (Lôbo 2013: 272). (*2) They commented on a recent Austrian election campaign, in which legislation was discussed that would enforce laws imposed on those defined as "aliens," citing those coming from non-EU countries (Lôbo 2013: 272). (*2) Lôbo refers to the parliamentary elections in Austria in 2008 and to the subsequent reinforcement following the major amendments to the "Aliens Act" and the Asylum Law in Austria adopted in 2002.

I will now describe the performance in detail and make a direct reference to a text presented online: *(11) One long empty table is slowly occupied by nine Black women and Women of Color. They sit next to each other and stare directly at the audience. The group articulates and gives voice to all objects exhibited in art museums that have been object of theft, violence, lies, and silence. The reading starts with a repetition of the name Anastácia by each of the nine performers. Then each woman, one after the other, firmly exposes thoughts by Black feminists. Thoughts that concern racism and sexism, African Diasporas, Black identities and colonization are juxtaposed with critical migration politics and with "rethinking Black feminism as a social justice project." In the last minute of the performance they take out the blue eye lenses and leave the space — some applause comes from the audience. This applause can be understood as a violent moment of contemplation on the art work, and the strong voice by Grace Latigo asks "Is there something to be applauded here?" Not to forget the question that does not want to be silent: "Where do we go from here?" "Nowhere! – We are here to stay!"

The project and performance are important as they develop a relation to the role of "empowerment," "agency," and "choice" in terms of who speaks and the role of epistemology as well as the role of art institutions, such as galleries, museums, etc.

Another project by Marissa Lôbo is the video performance and lecture *Safer sex? Fuck Europe, here I am to stay, Super puta Praderstern* (2013). As Marissa Lôbo states, the work exposes colonial desire and violence, otherness, sexuality, racialized bodies, contra aesthetics, migrant-precarious bodies, migrant identity, sex work, society's double morals, the regime of Western body politics, and white supremacy.

Another key project/position in the Austrian context is the *Research Group on Black Austrian History and Presence / Pamoja* with representatives Araba Evelyn Johnston-Arthur, Belinda Kazeem, and Njideka Stephanie Iroh, among others. The pan-African movement in Austria called *Pamoja* brought together young Africans in Austria to fight for their rights and against racism in Europe. The starting point of the group is the violent historical presences of (neo)colonial representations in Austria. The group works with gendered images, which according to Araba Evelyn Johnston-Arthur and in reference to Stuart Hall, completely repress any existence of "homemade" (neo) colonial imagery in Germany and Austria. *(12)

Project by the Research Group on Black Austrian history and Presence /Pamoja with Araba Evelyn Johnston-Arthur and Belinda Kazeem at the exhibition Toposcapes : interventions into socio-cultural and political spaces, curated by Marina Gržinić and Walter Seidl, at Pavelhaus Laafeld, Austria, 2007.

The Research Group on Black Austrian History and Presence connects its work to black, migrant, feminist, postcolonial theorists in the German-speaking countries such as Fatima El- Tayeb, Maisha Maureen Eggers, May Ayim, Nicola Lauré al-Samarai, Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez, Grada Kilomba, *(13) and Audre Lorde. *(14) The group aims at recovering suppressed knowledge about Black Austrian history, creating a new space and thereby situating Black people in this country differently; namely, from a Black perspective that positions itself beyond voyeuristic depictions of the “exotic other.”

In short, and in conclusion

I argue that the context for rethinking feminism by elaborating on new movements focusing on marginalized positions within feminism— “dissident feminisms”—opens a new discourse of struggle in neoliberal global capitalism. Dissident feminisms (in plural) dismantle the one-sided history of feminism and put at its center the struggle against normative, discriminative, patriarchal and racist society of tomorrow that has at its core capitalist neoliberal subjugations based on exploitation, dispossession, racialization, and privatization. Dissident feminisms insist on the destruction of all political policies that codify distinctions between class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Echoing Preciado (2013), I can state that dissident feminisms strive for an artistic and political platform with a vision of a future for everyone. The examples of artistic interventionist practices presented in this article radicalize the theoretical and critical thoughts presented as forming dissident feminisms. They do so in order to push forward a new configuration of categories such as epistemology, labor, history, and mobility and consequently shape subjectivities at the crossroads

of a world that has to deal seriously with transmigrant, transsexual, and transgender positions.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that positions I have mentioned as part of the dissident feminisms in Austria are also active in the *Refugee Protest Camp* in Vienna, which began with a ten-hour march of approximately one-hundred refugees and their supporters. This march on November 24, 2012 began at the refugee reception center in Traiskirchen (around 20 km away from Vienna) and ended in the center of Vienna. The refugees' demands are for better living conditions, from adequate food to a decent social life: the right to stay and the right to work. At the present moment, the refugees are in strict isolation. Their demands are being ignored by the Austrian authorities. On December 9, 2013, several refuges were deported from Austria to Lahore / Pakistan.

//Zur Person

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Dr. Marina Gržinić is philosopher, artist and theoretician. She is professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Her latest book is *Re-Politicizing art, Theory, Representation and New Media Technology*, Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna and Schlebrügge Editor, Vienna 2008. She also published an edited online book on *Biopolitics, Necropolitics and De-coloniality* (Pavilion, no. 14, 2010). Gržinić has been involved with video art since 1982, she works for 30 years with Aina Smid, she is professor of art history and free-lance editor. Gržinić lives in Ljubljana, works in Ljubljana, Slovenia and Vienna, Austria. Films and texts by Gržinić under: http://grzinic-smid.si/

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*9 *Quijano, A. (2000): Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. Nepentla: Views From the South 1(3), 2000, pp. 533–580.*

//Fussnoten

*1 *Katharina Oguntoye is a historian and has influenced the Afro-German movement; she is a co-editor of the book Showing our Colors (1986)*
and is the founding member of the "Initiative of Black People in Germany."

*2 *FeMigra (abbreviation for: "Feminist Migrants") in Germany is an activist women's group mostly consisting of members with an academic background or work in the social sector. They are also involved in strong networking activities with other ethnic, migrant, and Jewish women in Germany. FeMigras' theoretical reflection of how to act politically as feminist migrants is strongly influenced by the reception of post-structuralist, black and post-colonialist authors such as Gayatri Spivak, Nira Yuval-Davis, Adrienne Rich or Angela Davis.*

*3 *Lale Otyakmaz works at the University of Duisburg-Essen on and with questions of Diversity Management.*

*4 *Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez works at the Institute of Sociology Justus-Liebig University Gießen (Germany) and is known for the book Decolonizing European Sociology. The book challenges the androcentric, colonial and ethnocentric perspectives eminent in mainstream European sociology. Cf. http://www.ashgate.com/isbn/9780754678724*

*5 *The Combahee River Collective was a Black feminist Lesbian organization active in Boston (USA)from 1974 to 1980. They are perhaps best known for developing the Combahee River Collective Statement, a key document in the history of contemporary Black feminism and the development of the concepts of identity as used among political organizers and social theorists.*

*6 *Gloria Anzaldúa (1942–2004) was a scholar of Chicana cultural, feminist, and queer theory. Her most well-known book, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987) is on her life growing up on the Mexican-Texas border and incorporated her lifelong feelings of social and cultural marginalization into her work.*

*7 *Gloria Jean Watkins (1952), better known by her pen name bell hooks (written without capitals), is an American author, feminist, and social activist. Her writing focuses on the interconnectivity of race, capitalism, and gender and what she describes as their ability to produce and perpetuate systems of oppression and class domination. Primarily through a postmodern perspective, hooks has addressed race, class, and gender in education, art, history, sexuality, mass media and feminism.*

*8 *Angela Davis (1944) is an American political activist, scholar, Communist, and author. She emerged as a nationally prominent counterculture*
activist and radical in the 1960s, as a leader of the Communist Party USA, and had close relations with the Black Panther Party through her involvement in the Civil Rights to abolish the prison-industrial complex. Her research interests are in feminism, African-American studies, critical theory, Marxism, popular music, social consciousness, and the philosophy and history of punishment and prisons. Her membership in the Communist Party led to Ronald Reagan's request in 1969 to have her barred from teaching at any university in the State of California.

*9 *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1942) is an Indian literary theorist, philosopher, and university professor at Columbia University, where she is a founding member of the school's Institute for Comparative Literature and Society. Spivak is best known for her contemporary cultural and critical theories to challenge the "legacy of colonialism" and the way readers engage with literature and culture. She often focuses on the cultural texts of those who are marginalized by dominant Western culture: the new immigrant, the working class, women, and other positions of the subaltern. Her best known essay was published in the 1980s with the title "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is considered a founding text of postcolonialism.*

** 10* *Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonial/Modern_Gender_System*

** 11* *The description is taken from the text published online. See http://grzinic-smid.si/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Rear2010tikulacija10111213.pdf (last visited: December 5, 2013).*

** 12* *The references are from Araba Evelyn Johnston-Arthur. She is a social justice activist born and raised in Vienna to a Ghanaian family. Johnston-Arthur, as reported by Kali TV, succesfully co-founded a pan-African movement in Austria, "Pamoja," which has brought together young Africans in Austria to fight for their rights and against racism in Europe. Published online March 26, 2013, at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sliXyjOJj9U&feature=youtu.be (last visited, December 5, 2013)*

** 13* *Grada Kilomba's book Plantation Memories. Episodes of Everyday Racism, (Münster, Germany: UNRAST Verlag, 2008), deconstructs the normality of racism, making visible what is often made invisible; the book is described as essential to anyone interested in Black Studies, Post-colonial Studies, Critical Whiteness Studies, Gender Studies, and Psychoanalysis.*

** 14* *Audre Lorde (1934–1992) was a Caribbean-American writer and civil rights activist. She described herself as "black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet" and dedicated both her life and work to confronting and addressing the injustices of racism, sexism, and homophobia.*

** 15* *Unfortunately, the pdf-Version is not able to convert some of the special signs. We apologize for that!*