



We Want to Claim the Public Realm

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It is no coincidence that many critical voices within the public debate and academia speak of cartography as a metaphor for the interrogation and rewriting of the dominant truths. The public realm can be seen as a physical, geographical location, but even more as a map, with roads, swamps and sea monsters. And a map is not identical with the world; it is an image of the world, an image, created by someone who was there before us, someone who claims that the image reflects the world correctly. Maps name and define, magnify and reduce, and last but not least, show the way – that it does not exist for many.

We want to reclaim the public realm. We want to join those voices in the debate, which, in the spirit of Virginia Woolf, aim to stop depicting the man twice its natural size. We want to do away with the notion of the heart of darkness, as charted by Joseph Konrad, we want to provincialize Europe together with Dipesh Chakrabarty and other postcolonial scholars, and perhaps we might even place the Northern hemisphere down under.

Despite the fact that we believe that we know most things about our Earth, new discoveries are made every day. Last year, it was uncovered that approximately 200 million women around the world, who should be alive today, were murdered.¹ It is fascinating how qualified ignorance can reach such heights, and yet it is not surprising. We can only wonder what will be discovered tomorrow, when it is too late to save one, two or hundred million people. Amnesia is equally appealing, it seems. Human skulls, gathering dust in university archives and mass graves constitute the undeniable evidence of the centuries of measures, expeditions and experiments to prove the cartography of the body; where each inch, each shape were used to construe distance between superiority and inferiority. The men of science of those times may be doomed to haunt history books as grotesque representatives of the past, but who can guarantee that their maps are not resurrected, with new labels and bibliographies, yet quite similar landscapes?

Is this a prelude to a reaction, an answer, a petition? Perhaps. And yet, this collection of texts is no more reactionary than those news reports, those columns and debates, which appeal to the prevailing common sense, to the anonymous and taken for granted majority. Our texts are based on established frames of reference, on existing knowledge and on the desire to move forward in the discussion. For isn't it odd that despite all the arguments highlighting the technologies of racism, presented by Fanon or Gilroy, by hooks or Crenshaw, it must be proved each time anew? Equally odd is the fact that despite of all the work feminist scholars have put in publishing, debating and developing knowledge about patriarchy, its structures, about gender, body, sexuality and psyche, feminism remains either a derogatory word or a free-floating label, up for grabs.

For the vast majority, it would never actually occur to accept uninformed opinions when it comes to economics or medicine. The social issues, on the other hand, particularly issues concerning "the others" situation, are almost exclusively reserved for ideas and elite debaters with the right to speak derived from their position, not argumentation or knowledge. The public debate resembles a monologue, an inaccessible space and scornful smiles. For many, it may be important to maintain such qualified ignorance. For us, it is vital to challenge it. But to challenge the hegemony of the world maps does not automatically entail a new, if re-drawn, atlas. The voices from the borderlands, many, different, which cannot and will not subject themselves to the clear-cut boundaries and divisions, which cannot be reduced to consensus or to oppositional arguments, nor can be silenced, will be our way of reminding that life cannot be reduced to the two-dimensional universe of cartography.

Note

1. Marie Vlachová & Lea BIASON (eds.), *Women in an Insecure World: Violence against Women Facts, Figures and Analysis*, Geneva: DCAF, 2005.