Katerina Kolozova

IMAGINING THE FACE OF THE "REAL": SOME CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT WAR AND VIOLENCE

1. The War and her powers of consolidation (with respect to identity)

To a mind - and body - born and grown up in the "postmodern condition", and brought up according to the best traditions of the postmodern thought, the experience of war - and the violence pertaining (specifically) to it - calls for (or simply generates) some disturbing restructurings of the ways of thought. In my personal experience, what has been - in this sense - the most striking effect of the war that has been ailing Macedonia for almost half a year already, can be reduced to the shock by the necessitating powers of the Real (of violence) over the "realms of the Imaginary". (Under the designation of "the realms of the Imaginary" I subscribe also the notions of the "symbolic", "sign", "semantic", "fiction" - in psychoanalytic terms, all pertaining to the "signifying chain".)

Before our eyes we see, with our bodies and in our minds we experience the "imaginary" categories, such as "Nation" and some other collective identities, fold painfully into "real" ones, transforming themselves into concrete situatedness infused by the - still ungraspable yet not quite unthinkable - presence of the Real/real.

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Катерина Колозова

ЗАМИСЛУВАЈЌИ ГО ЛИЦЕТО НА „РЕАЛНОТО“: НЕКОИ РАЗМИСЛИ ЗА ВОЈНАТА И НАСИЛСТВОТО

1. Војната и нејзините моќи на консолидација (во поглед на идентитетот)

За ум - и тело - родени и израснати во „постмодерната состојба“, и воспитани според најдобрите традиции на постмодерната мисла, искуството на војна - и насилиството што (специфично) й припаѓа на оваа - поттикнува (или, сосем едноставно, произведува) одредени вознемирувачки преструктуирања на навиките на мислата. Според моето сопствено искуство, највпечатливото ефект - во оваа смисла - предизвикан од војната што на Македонија веќе речиси половина година, може да се сведе на шокот предизвикан од моќите на Реалното (на насилиството) ги поседува во однос на „областите на Имагинарното“. (Под именувањето „областите на Имагинарното“ ги сведувам, исто така, и поимите на „символното“, „знакот“, „семантичкото“, „фицијата“ - во термини на психоанализата, сè она што е припадно на „означителскиот синџир“.)

Пред сопствените очи гледаме, низ нашите тела и умови доживување како „имагинарните“ категории - како што е „Нација“ и некои други колективни идентитети - болно се превртуваат за да преминат во „реални“, преобразувајќи се во конкретна ситуираност напоена од страна на – сè уште несфатливото иако не сосема немисливо - присуство на Реалното/реалното.
The unconceivable self-nurturing of violence, the mysteriously auto-generated deployment of force, the grave continuous trauma in the shape of pain, anxiety and anger – still in a state of suspense, rather than certainty, of war – is something that can be experienced but as an omnipresent thrust of the Real into life. This is how it feels like now in Macedonia, at least for some of us...

This grave all-encompassing intrusion of the Real (of violence) inspires the emergence of its own abject dimension within certain “imaginary” and “abstract” categories such as nationhood, ethnicity, etc... Or to put it more simply, it (the “Real of War”) contributes critically that these categories are experienced as “real”, in their “reality” and as the “reality itself”.

We all - to a certain extent, inescapably - become a part of – to some of us abjectly – the concrete “we”. And, moreover, as opposed to “them”. And one is cornered to embrace this restrictive choice as a necessity, since it is the sovereign rule of the violence of War which decides so (for us). Most of the attempts for transcendence of this and such an imposition of choice turn out to be futile, although one cannot, must not abandon attempting. Nevertheless, frustration is created.

One realizes that behind that imaginary (presumably pertaining exclusively to the territory of Sign...) construction of identity resides a residual unsusceptible to transcendence, acting as necessity breathing upon the insurmountable Real of the (defining) opposition of the Other. The identity narrative within which one (we, you, I, they...) is situated becomes a self-enclosure (a turn upon and against “oneself”, upon and against one’s desire)¹, imposed by the confining imperative of the Real (of War) to embrace the opposition of the Other as his/her only possible position. (Meaning his/her only possible positioning with respect to “me” and “us”). And it is a confinement not only by, but also within the domain of the Real, namely the “material”² –
The compelling power to "voluntarily" embrace one of the two opposing identities within a binary structure (for instance, Macedonian/Albanian or Albanian/Non-Albanian; Pro-Western/Anti-Western, and so on). This power imposes these and such restrictive choices in a way that it renders them as some insurmountable necessity wrapped into a thick aura of an implacable reality. And it is the power of the threat of violence.

This "mysterious" compelling force is the source of the impression of the tangible presence of the real (Real) within what only until yesterday was but a specter, an idea, a concept – the politico-cultural and national identity. I shall argue that it is precisely the presence, the thrust and the insertion of the Real...
The becoming of flesh and blood of these "abstractions", and vice versa, incited by the imposed (to everyone in the country) exposition to the Trauma of war and violence, is what I would like to engage in considering here. I shall also attempt to expose the castrating powers of the Real (of War and violence) and the suffocating effects of the Abject - as merely the obverse of the Real - over the political Subject, inspired by the latest political and military events in my country.
desire to deal (away) with the war/violence as such and its discourse, to oppose it, win over and banish it, transcend it...

The firmness and implacability of this imposition originates from the actual sovereign rule of the Real (of violence and/or war) and its "performativ" position in language and discourse.

"The performative of the Real"... This may sound as *contradictio in adjecto*, but only if one claims the absolute and undisturbed absence of the Real from the signifying chain, which I am not (claiming). What I will argue here is precisely the contrary — that the Real "presentifies" itself into the pleasure principle and on the territory of the sign, and thus can assume its "performative" positions. In different words, the inescapability of the imposed choices, the unavoidability of the enforced discourses, with their strong aspects of violence and force, all of this renders these impositions (of identity situating, discourses, etc.) as the performances of the Real itself, together with its own specific impact — that of Trauma.

Thus, what I am discussing here are not the mediations of the Real through and by the signifying chain, but the immediacy of the Ungraspable and Implacable itself and its unmediated encounter with the fantasmatic, the imaginary, or quite simply — with the identity constructs. Violence in itself, and its interactions with and within the political, is the subject of our discussion here, as well as its active, shaping role within the processes of identification.

Let us now consider a brief account of the elements of how (and why) I am proposing to think the "unthinkable" (psychanalytic and, concurrently, postmodern) Real in the context of this debate:
[2.2. Ex-course: methodological points of departure]

By accepting François Laruelle’s radical critique of the dualistic, binaristic and oppositionary ways of thinking, I am also rejecting the dichotomy and the exclusive opposition between the real and the fiction. In fact, at the very core of Laruelle’s radical critique lies the deconstruction of the real:fiction dichotomy and it is precisely the notion of the “real” liberated from its relation (not only of opposition but of the “logic of relating” as such) to the fiction which enables him to conceive of a Thought which would be beyond duality. In his *Philosophie et non-philosophie* he claims that the “Thought-in-Two”, and the relational thought itself, deriving from the latter, represent the perennial essence of the Western thought and philosophy as dichotomic and oppositionary. The alternative proposed by Laruelle is the Vision-in-One (la *Vision-en-un*) conceived as a thought precisely in terms of the real and singularity, as the sole way of evading “relationism” and establishment of a “philosophical cosmos” (or in his own words, “decision philosophique”), which, being generalizing, is also universalizing.

"The problem of philosophy in general originates from the fact that it never thinks of the terms in their specificity, but as contrary to each other, within their relations, and, in the best case, at their borders and in their proximity. As a result of this, the concept of the fiction, like any other [concept], designates an amphibologic [amphibologique] reality, a limitrophy of the real, regardless of the fact whether it is placed beyond [au-delà] the latter, or before it [en deça], or at the border between the two.

From classical rationalism to contemporary deconstructions, fiction has remained captivated within that relation of the mixed [le rapport de mixte], i.e., of the unitary [unitaire]. Excluded by the real, internalized by it, while internalizing it herself and pretending to co-determine it, [la fiction] has never escaped the games of inter-inhibition [entre-inhibition], which are those that philosophy plays with herself, where it is but one of
inhibition], оние што философијата ги игра со самата себе, и во кои ова е само една од играчките на историјата која претендира да ја надмине." (Laruelle, 1989: 232)

Така, јас предлагам овде да го мислим Реалното (или реалното) во термини на Ларуеловата сингуларистичка мисла на реалното, ослободена од сопствената опозиција, од „односноста“, кон фикциското, фантазматското, имагинарното, знаковното...

Што се однесува, пак, до Реалното на психоаналитичката и постструктуралистичка традиција, тоа, ре-чиси без никаков потрес, успева да ја одржи својата по-зиција au-dela, на Непристапното и Немисливото. На тој начин, тоа се однесува како (веројатно, последното и единствено) недопрено Трансцендентално. Несомнено, аксиом е дека Реалното, и неговите дејства, е нешто што не може да се сретне низ јазик и воведе во (политичкиот) дискурс, бидејќи е немисливо и невообличиво во пракса. За мене, ова е нешто во својата основа проблематично; не можем да му одолем на впечатокот дека токму оваа широко прифатена “Вистина” е само невидлив остаток на метафизичката верба во Трансценденталното.

Понатаму, самата лакановска психоанализа - или, поточно, фројдовската, низ читањето на Лакан (во Les quatres concepts fondamentaux...) - овозможува мислење на “Немисливото”, односно Реалното. Се работи за Реалното во неговиот аспект на Траума, или, поточно, за Реалното како Траума, како она (за) кое може да мисли, расправа или, едноставно, да се оприликува во јазикот. Според Лакан, Реалното/Траумата како tuché - односно случајност и случај што го прекинува, му се наметнува со своето присуство и го трауматизира означителскиот синцир - е во интеракција со синцирот на означителите (automaton). Според ова, лесно може да се извлече заклучок дека tuché - преку своите ефекти - произведува превртени и нови знаци во знаковиот поредок (automaton).

Исто така, оваа расправа во значителна мера ја должи на постојаната заложба на Славој Жижек, која, the toys of a history which pretends to surpass it." (Laruelle, 1989: 232)

So, what I am proposing here is to think the Real (or the real) in terms of Laruelle’s singularistic thought of the real, thus liberated from its opposition, or “relationism”, to the fictional, phantasmatic, imaginary, signifying...

As for the Real in both the psychoanalytical and the post-structuralist tradition, it has maintained - almost unshakably - its position au-delà, as the Unpenetrable and the Unthinkable. Thus, it acts as (perhaps the last and only) unsullied Transcendental. It is a virtual axiom that the Real, and its workings, is something that cannot be conceived in language and introduced into (political) discourse, being unthinkable and thus unquestionable. I find this fundamentally problematic; not being able to resist the impression that this particular widely accepted “Truth” is but an invisible remainder of the metaphysical belief in the Transcendental.

On the other hand, Lacanian psychoanalysis itself – or rather Freudian, through Lacan’s reading (in Les quatre concepts fondamentaux...) – renders the thinking of the “Unthinkable”, namely the Real, possible. It is the Real in its aspect of Trauma, or rather the Real as Trauma, that can be thought (about), discussed (about) or, simply, made present into language. According to Lacan, the Real/Trauma interacts with the signifying chain (the automaton) in as much as the tuché, i.e., the hazard and incident that is interrupting, intruding into and traumatizing the signifying chain. Thus, one can easily infer that tuché produces (through its effects) reversals, and thus new signs, in the order of signs (the automaton).

This discussion is also deeply indebted to Slavoj Žižek’s consistent engagement in, what can be arguably called, the “theo-
I find a very close affinity with Alenka Župančič and her remarkable work The Ethics of the Real, representative of the "Žizekian school" (if one can put it so...). Departing from Kant and Lacan, Župančič engages into thematizations of the "impossible", nameless Real as such, thus establishing the paradoxical possibility for a theory of the impossible. Just as a measurer, but encapsulating, illustration of what The Ethics of the Real is about I am offering the following quotation from this inspiring book:

"The heart of all ethics is something which is not in itself 'ethical' (nor is it 'non-ethical') – that is to say, it has nothing to do with the register of ethics. This 'something' goes by several different names – although we will limit ourselves to two: for Lacan, it is 'the Real'; for Badiou, 'the event'. These terms concern something which appears only in the guise of the encounter, as something that 'happens to us', surprises us, throws us 'out of joint', because it always inscribes itself in a given continuity as a rupture, a break or an interruption.

According to Lacan, the Real is impossible, and the fact 'it happens (to us)' does not refute its basic 'impossibility': the Real happens to us (we encounter it) as impossible, as 'the impossible thing' that turns our symbolic universe upside down and leads to the reconfiguration of this universe." (235)
or imaginary - or that which belongs to the sign - universe with the "impossible" Real in the face of violence and war - perhaps its only (possible) and "true" ("real") face, that of Horror itself.

[2.3 Insertion and intertwining of the "material" or "territorial" inasmuch as "the Real" into the processes of identification]

The account of the politico-ontological frustrations caused by the war continues... The fact of occupying a concrete circumscribed and circumscribing physical ("material") space, such as specific villages and towns, areas and regions, plays a key role in the current processes of re-shaping and condensation of identities. The limited physical space (of a certain size measured in square meters) is limiting and determining in terms of the possible situation of identity - only such and such specific "Albanian" or "Macedonian" identity in this and that village and town can emerge and be claimed.

Nowadays, territory is prescribing - very strictly - the possibility of identity and its situation. The more limited the territory, the more limited and constraining in detail the prescription of identity is. For example, in a village or a smaller town it does not suffice to be a "Macedonian" or "Albanian" at the right place, one also has to be a patriot, nationalist, hate the other... In the bigger towns, or in the capital Skopje, the exigencies for claiming a certain ethnico-political identity are lesser, but the imposition of identification choice with this or that group - which is ever more often the one between "Non-Albanian" and "Albanian", rather than that between "Macedonian" and "Albanian" - is inevasible.

Space in terms of its size, and of its organization (urban or rural), has thus had determining and defining powers over the processes of shaping of the political. And the nature of these powers is such that they are essentially restrictive – and
the difference between urban and rural is in the degree of restriction, not in substantia – and reductive, not expansive nor proliferating. Or in different words, they are "exclusive" and quite certainly not "inclusive".

Space, and geography, also conditions the political discourse and describes its boundaries. In the more "restrictive" places, one can - in the best case - expect a peace campaign proclaiming tolerance and understanding for the other to be accepted in the sense of hosted, but without it fundamentally affecting – let alone undermining - the strong prohibition of any "indigenous cosmopolitanism".

The abject presence of the Real - that brute, traumatizing physical restriction of movement in space - is being infused, or infuses itself, into the "etherical", delicate nature of identity and its sensitivities. Here again we encounter the (conditioning) thrust of that which cannot be thought, of the "conceptless", merely territorial, into the ways of identities, into the narratives within which we live (the identities), into our universes.

The obverse of this situation is that identity restricts one’s movement in space - where one can enter or pass through and where one cannot. More generally, the discourse of war and the symbolic universe it has created - the rules and ways according which one lives now, the Law of this universe of war – conditions highly restrictively the freedom of body and its movement in space. You cannot take the route through Tetovo if you want to get from Skopje to Ohrid – you can get killed, be shot at. You can take the safer one – but far from being actually safe – through Bitola. Thus one is deprived from the landscapes – mountains and villages, colors and fragrances – that has shaped one’s sentimentalities, one’s intimate, affectionate "I"... Here violence and territorial restrictions, both but the Trauma of the Real in itself, have joined their "creative" forces to influence upon the feelings and – consequently - processes of re-structuring of identities.
Реалното по себе, ги здружиле своите „творечки“ моќи за да им влијаат на чувствата и - следствено - на процесите на преструктурирање на идентитете.

Недофатливото Нешто, под безименото Име на Војната, создава ранлив и исплашен субъективити сведени (осудени) на тоа да се потпираат на искушени - често несакани - идентити, етничките и националните. Надминувањето на оваа и ваквата редукција подразбира надминување на реалноста на војната - имено, на Реалното на физичката рестрикција, односно на владеењето на физичката закана иманентна на голото, разузлавено насилиство и територијално ограничување. Во мигов, ова би претставувало незамисливо тешка задача да се исполнит.

[2.4 Опозицијата и исклучивоста му се иманентни на насилиството а ова потекнува од областа на Реалното]

„Креативната (и неопходна) игра“ на бинарните опозиции од царството на знаците, каква што ја замислила структуралистите, не треба да се меша - иако, теориски, може да биде навистина предизвикана и релевантно да се порази - со опозицијата на Реалното. Природата на средбата со Реалното е секогаш онаа на опозицијата, бидејќи - да се потсетиме на поговорендото од Лакан - формата во која се явува е секогаш онаа на tuché. А оваа, пак, секогаш претставува Траума, едноставно - Болка. Насилството е опозицијата на и против Реалното, произведена од страна на, и насочена против, (нечија) „физичност“. Пароксимот на опозицијата и исклучивоста кулминира во (желбата за) физичкото поништување на Другиот. Или, со други зборови, насилиството е иманентно опозиција, и тоа од видот кој специфично му припаѓа на Реалното.

По пат на физичка закана, придружена со територијални и телесни ограничувања, насилиството и/на војната наметнува дискурзивни граници кои ја одразуваат, и се произведува на, неговата „собствена логика“, имено онаа на опозицијата. Така, Реалното на Војната или Сувереното

The ungraspable Thing, by the nameless Name of War, has created vulnerable and fearful subjectivities reduced (doomed) to the clinging to exclusive – often resented – identities, the ethnic and national ones. Overcoming of this and such a reduction implies but the overcoming of the reality of war – namely the Real of the physical restriction, that is to say the rule of the physical threat immanent to the reign of the bare, out-of-joint violence and territorial confinement. At the moment, this should be an unimaginably difficult task to accomplish.

[2.4 Opposition and exclusiveness are immanent to violence and violence is from the realm of the Real]

- The “creative (and necessary) play” of binary oppositions within the kingdom of signs, as envisioned by the structuralists, should not be confused – although may be theoretically quite intriguing and relevant to relate – with the opposition of or by the Real. And the nature of the encounter with the Real is always that of opposition, since – let us recall the above quoted paragraph by Lacan – it becomes present but in the form of tuché. The latter is always Trauma, thus – Pain. Violence is the opposition of and against the Real, produced by and directed against (one’s) “physicality”. It is the paroxysm of opposition and exclusiveness culminating into (the desire for) physical annihilation of the Other. Or in different words, violence is immanently opposition, and of the kind pertaining specifically to the Real.

By means of physical threat, accompanied by territorial, and thus bodily restrictions, violence and/or war imposes discursive limits which reflect and are product of its own “logic”, namely that of opposition. Therefore, the Real of War or the Sovereign Rule of Violence can produce but opposing and (mu-
With its all-flooding nature of opposition it opposes and bans every non-oppositionary discourse and positioning of identity. Its principle is the unrestrained expansion and thus leaves no space for critical thinking which, in order to come forth and flourish, has need of the empty space of rupture between the signs in the symbolic and/or imaginary universe, an abyss of crisis within the signifying chain. Or in Foucauldian language, it can be said that these *topoi* of critique can be identified with the critical - also in the sense of *loci* of crisis - knots of resistance in the Web of Power. Crisis - since Hoelderlin and Nietzsche until Jaspers and Deleuze - has been but the moment and locus of hiatus and rupture.⁶

What is distinctive about situations like this – in Macedonia “the situation” has become the most popular euphemism for “war”... - is that the authority of the Real over the construction of the Subject and identity is becoming poignantly recognizable, brutally present, and so easily detectable. That amorphous, purely experiential fact of trauma, fear and pain – impossible to identify with a concept, fix it to a meaning – conditions the creation of a certain meaning of the “I”, of what “I” mean and represent – of my identity. And this conditioning power is virtually above my individual authority of choice. This alien factor is that which makes the decision for me of who “I” am or of who “I” ought to become. Briefly, this outlandishness has to become an inalienable part of my innerness.

The Real is thus inextricably intertwined with the realm of the sign – the imaginary, symbolic – by way of its inescapable absorption into subjectivity and identity. The Abject is part of the Subject. And the war and violence make it even more so.
The terrorism and territorialism of war infuses the Subject with an unbearably heavy presence of the Abject and, consequently – as we have already implicitly inferred above – through the presence of the Real, solidifies the exclusive, stable and opposing identity.

3. The closing paragraph

Such are the suffocating and castrating powers of the “unbridled” Real. But it can also be “bridled”, “domesticated” and “pacified”. Nevertheless, it is always already at the base of - and in a constant play with - the narrative of the “I”. I hope that, through this saddening example of the Real in the face of War, I have managed to make some small positive theoretical contribution. Namely, to have shown that the formative powers of the Real are inherent to the construction of both subjectivity and identity, and are an inalienable part of the realm of the Sign.

NOTES

1 An allusion to the Nietzschean conceptualization of the Subject's formation, and to the developments of the latter by Judith Butler in The Psychic Life of Power from 1997.

2 For an explanation of the use of the quotation marks here – and how the notion of “materiality” can be related to that of the “Real”/"real" - see note 4 below.

3 "N'est il remarquable que, à l'origine de l'expérience analytique, le réel se soit présenté sous la forme de ce qu'il y a en lui d'inassimilable - sous la forme du trauma, déterminant toute sa suite, et lui imposant une origine en apparence accidentelle? Nous nous trouvons là au coeur de ce qui peut nous permettre de comprendre le caractère radical de la notion conflictuelle introduite par l'opposition du principe de plaisir au principe de réalité - ce pourquoi on ne saurait concevoir le
trouvent là au coeur de ce qui peut nous permettre de comprendre le caractère radical de la notion conflictuelle introduite par l'opposition du principe de plaisir au principe de réalité - ce pourquoi on ne saurait concevoir le principe de réalité comme ayant, par son ascendant, le dernier mot." (Lacan, 1973: 65)

5 "Материјалното", односно "телесното" и "физичкото", се, исто така, сегаолаш веќе концепти или loci/toposi населени од имагинарното и никогаш девствено такви. Па и самата идеја за "девствено такви" е само - идеја. Поимот на телото како материјално, или на неговата материјалност, беше деконструиран од страна на Џудит Батлер во нејзиното значајно дело Bodies That Matter (1993). Сепак, се чини дека сегаолаш кога одредена психичка операцiя/деjствие е насочена кон Реалното, или кон тоа да деjствува врз Реалното на определено нешто или определен некои, тоа има за цел да деjствува врз телото, физичкото. На пример, желбата за целосно, потполно, "реално" поништување на некого се остварува низ деструкциjата на неговото/неjзиното тело - реализираjки се или како убиство или како нанесување краjна физичка болка. Во современата мисла (и тоа не само философската), претопувањето на Реалното со физичкото/материjалното е епистемолошки факт, овозможен од самиот факт што овие се единствените ("консензуално") "признани представници" на опипливо постоечкото (како стварни) - единствено "несомнено реалното".

6 Пошироко ги истражував метафорите и концептите на процеп, криза, бездна и кајсура кaj овие автори во студиjата "Les troubles et matamorphoses de Mnemosyne: Sur les concepts tragiques du temps", pp. 35-39

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