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WOMEN'S LABOR IN THE GLOBAL CITY:  
REPRESENTATIONS OF TRANSNATIONAL SUBJECTS AND SPACES IN  
CONTEMPORARY VISUAL GEOGRAPHIES

by

CARMEN-LAURA LOVIN

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Women's Labor in the Global City:  
Representations of Transnational Subjects and Spaces in  
Contemporary Visual Geographies

By CARMEN-LAURA LOVIN

Dissertation Director

Professor Joanna Regulska

This dissertation explores depictions of working women in three transnational urban spaces, Sibiu (Romania), Berlin (Germany) and Newark (New Jersey, USA). In the aftermath of the cold war and in the midst of globalization, these cities represent marked sites in the geopolitical axes of "west"/"east." Each city has grappled with labor restructuring, the upward redistribution of wealth, urban dilapidation, and segregation. Each city has also deployed a commodified version of multiculturalism to foster tourism, corporate development, and diverse strategies for reinvestment and revitalization. Within these contexts, I looked for contemporary art projects that render topical phenomena such transnational work migration, changing labor practices, new modes of livelihood, and new gendered, racialized and classed identities.

This dissertation relies on data and representational materials collected through extensive multi-location field research in Sibiu, Berlin and Newark. The case study on Sibiu foregrounds working women of three different ethnicities, Romanian, Romani and Saxon, and traces their articulation in relation to practices of transnational work migration. The case study on Berlin continues the engagement with transnational migrant workers. The theme of sexuality constitutes its core analytical dimension, as representations of voluntary and coerced sex work take the center stage of the visual arts projects encountered in Berlin. Finally, in the case of Newark, an U.S. city where work disappeared with the transnationalization of industrial production, the theme of racial neoliberal subject formation informs the analysis of the documentary representation of a young woman's work as a community activist.

Interrogating concepts of urbanity, representation, and affect, this research also identifies limitations of recent accounts of affective theories, methodologies and politics, arguing that while taking the affective turn in humanities and social science, researchers should continue to supplement their readings, viewing, and theorizations with contextualized examinations of informed by political economy and inquiries into the meaning making practices of situated subjects.

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## Introduction

This dissertation explores portrayals of working women in three transnational urban spaces, Sibiu (Romania), Berlin (Germany) and Newark (New Jersey). In the aftermath of the Cold War and in the midst of globalization, these cities represent marked sites in the geopolitical axes of "West"/"East" and "North"/"South." Each city has grappled with labor restructuring, the upward redistribution of wealth, urban dilapidation, and racial/ethnic segregation. Each has also deployed a commodified version of multiculturalism to foster tourism, corporate development, and diverse strategies for reinvestment and revitalization. Within these contexts, I have identified contemporary art projects that render visually and narratively topical phenomena such as transnational work migration, changing labor practices, new modes of livelihood, and new gendered, racialized and classed identities. Thus, this dissertation relies on data and representational materials collected through extensive multi-location field research in Sibiu, Berlin, and Newark. Immersed in these distinct geographical sites, I have investigated the visual and narrative vocabularies embedded in governing technologies, economic interests, and histories of transnational activism and engagement. In this dissertation, I examine how particular models of capitalist multiculturalism and racialization produce commodified constructions of ethnic, racial, national and sexual identities, as they vacate and refigure urban space for tourist consumption and financial corporate occupation. By attending to specific visual arts projects encountered during my fieldwork, I also explore the creation of new knowledges and affects that reassert and contest neoliberal hegemony. Exposing the mutually constitutive character of cultural, political, and economic fields, I

demonstrate how the politics of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and national difference are used as essential building blocks in the articulation of neoliberal politics and policies.

The urban development blueprints of the three cities under study have in common the alteration of the physical environment in view of the arrival of corporate capital, transnational tourists, and wealthier residents. Thus, Sibiu's rich architectural heritage was mobilized in support of its new brand identity as an Eastern European hub of culture and harmonious ethnic diversity. Berlin, a city divided by the Cold War and reunified in 1989, after the opening of the Berlin Wall, was fashioned into a hub for contemporary arts. The abandoned industrial buildings in East Berlin became cheap real estate for artists and gallerists from around the world. Anna Krenz's arrival in Berlin from Poland as an artist and gallerist is one such example. For the past decade, Newark's downtown has comprised a striking mix of deserted buildings with boarded-up windows and vibrant local retail businesses, glass towers housing corporate operations, and the state-of-the-art entertainment spaces of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJ PAC) and Prudential Center, raised in the immediate vicinity of Newark Penn Station. Under Cory Booker's mayoral administration, Newark strove to build a reputation that would enable a more effective capitalization on assets such as its proximity to New York City, cheap real estate, and the air transportation hub, Newark International airport.

Informed by visual methodologies, this interdisciplinary project engages scholarship in feminist theory, political economy, sociology, critical geography, and cultural studies. At the center of its inquiries are portraits of working women. The case study on Sibiu foregrounds working women of three different ethnicities--Romanian, Romani and Saxon--and traces their articulation as migrant workers. The case study on

Berlin continues the engagement with transnational migrant workers. The theme of sexuality constitutes its core analytical dimension, as representations of voluntary and coerced sex work are at the center of the visual arts projects that I look at in the case of Berlin. Finally, in the case of Newark, a U.S. city where work disappeared with the transnationalization of industrial production, the theme of racial neoliberal subjectification informs the analysis of the documentary representation of a young woman's work as a community activist.

Interrogating concepts of urbanity, representation, and affect, this research also identifies the limitations of recent accounts of affective theories, methodologies and politics, arguing that while following the affective turn in the humanities and social sciences, researchers should continue to supplement their reading, viewing, and theorization with contextualized examinations of political economy and meaning-making by situated subjects. To investigate the complexity of situated subjects and their labor, I suggest that a comparative analysis of images and spaces defined by determinate cultures, histories, and political economies is particularly helpful. In contrast to the rhetoric of depoliticized multiculturalism and post-racialism, concrete art projects illuminate changing material relations that enable affective dispositions and critical discursive resources.

Chapter 1, "A Theoretical Exploration of Work and Subjectivity: The Gendered, Classed and Racialized Categories of Neoliberalism," discusses and critiques conceptions of neoliberalism and marketization that have emerged in the fields of economics, development, and international relations as necessary conditions for prosperity, democracy and gender equality. I interrogate how pro-neoliberal globalization arguments

interact with the largely unquestioned hegemony of monetary gain, as well as the vocabularies of old and new colonialism. In this chapter, I also connect the theories of the feminization of labor, the feminization of transnational migration, and the feminization of development that have emerged in the writing of contemporary scholars, including Lourdes Beneria, Guy Standing, Juanita Elias, Frances Mascia-Lees, Naomi Klein, V. Spike Peterson and Anne Sisson Runyan in order to show that global neoliberal accumulations rest on gendered structures of labor exploitation. I incorporate and extend the insights of Wendy Brown (2003) and Aihwa Ong (1999, 2003, 2006), on neoliberal governance into my examination of work formations and working women's subjectivities to highlight the interplay between subjectification and agency. I argue that the visual arts engage neoliberal globalization through statements, figurations, and effects that are at once affective, aesthetic and conceptual. Thus, specific visual art projects, alongside feminist and critical social theory, can lead their audiences to question the appropriation and exploitation of "others" (their labor, knowledges and resources); uneven mobilities determined by new boundaries emerging between the colonial powers and the decolonized world; and novel modes of transnational relationality. I engage with the work of Elizabeth Grosz, Doreen Massey, Sara Ahmed, and Noel Carroll in an effort to identify the elements that enable a shift in the regimes of representational and transnational encounter away from registers that are continuous with the old mechanics of colonial subjectification and economic exploitation.

In Chapter 2, "Methodological Considerations on Representational Analysis, Discourse Analysis, and Non-representational Methods," I situate side-by-side the three methodological frameworks that shaped my engagement with the visual art projects,

which I include in this dissertation. This chapter combines theoretical problematizations of central terms in feminist research (e.g. the internal heterogeneity of the category of "woman" and the epistemological shifts enabled by transnational feminist analysis) with an overview of the analytical potentialities, as well as analytical limitations that representational analysis, discourse analysis and non-representational analysis pose to a critical engagement with representations of working women and transnational urban spaces in the age of neoliberal globalization. Thus, I revitalize the canonical scholarship on representation and discursive formations by Stuart Hall, Gillian Rose, Lisa Cartwright and Marita Sturken by infusing them with the analytics of transnationality, the critique of neoliberalism, and the newly emerged non-representational perspectives of critical geography.

Chapter 3, "Leaving Sibiu: Ethnicity, Gender, Race, and Work Migration in Anne Schiltz and Charlotte Gregoire's *STĀM – We Are Staying* (2007) and Rastko Petrovic's *Independence* (2006)" addresses the complex relationships between ethnicity, culture, and space as articulated against the backdrop of contemporary conditions of globalizing economies, European geopolitical remapping, and transnational mobility. Populated by diverse ethnic groups, Sibiu, the site of my first case study, plays a role both as a global hub of production, and as a migratory site from which ethnic Saxons and migrant laborers continually depart and return. I analyze the politics of cultural diversity as they unfolded during the year 2007, when Sibiu was the site of the mega-cultural event European Capital of Culture. The analysis of concrete cultural events combined with field observations about the physical transformation for the city articulate in a critique of the formation of commodified versions of ethnic identity and static notions of culture. While

the city was re-medievalized to better express its twelfth century Saxon origins to its western European visitors, the 2007 ASTRA FILM Festival enabled moments of more meaningful transnational encounter. The two documentary films, which I situate at the center of my analysis portray Sibiu, and by extension Transylvania, as an out-migration European urban space. By viewing the two documentary films side-by-side, the viewer comes to understand that women's opportunities for transnational work migration are significantly shaped by their ethnicity. The intersection of Saxonness and gender creates a hypermobile feminine subject, while the intersection of Romaness and gender mobilizes registers of old and new racialization which render the transnational work mobility of the Romani protagonist, if not impossible, at least improbable. Transylvania's colonial and nation-building histories account for the ethnically diverse populations of the region. Commodified versions of ethnic diversity that were used to market Sibiu as a European Capital of Culture have rendered invisible how these histories have shifted the location of ethnic groups in relation to centers of power and privilege and in relation to the scale of the urban, regional, and national, as well as the transnational. Chapter 3 makes palpable the mutually constitutive relations between representations, borders, mobility, identity, and spatial attachments. Ultimately, the two documentary films included in my analysis address what I perceive to be an ethically indefensible prioritization of investment in the city's infrastructures for transnational touristic in-migration and consumption.

Berlin, Germany, is a city that has been associated with images of movement, sexual fantasy, and liberation. In Chapter 4, "Arriving in Berlin: Gender, Class and Sexuality in Anna Krenz's *The Polish Wife* (2008) and Julia Ostertag's *Under the Red Umbrella* (2009)," I engage with images and narratives that constituted the identity of

Berlin in 2009, two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Between "then" and "now" the city of Berlin has fashioned itself not only into a hub of global artistic production and exhibition, but also into a city where sexual diversity is welcome. By juxtaposing art projects drawn from various institutional contexts—"HACK.Fem.EAST," the 1989-2009 "20 Years Since the Fall of Wall" events and the 2009 Berlin Porn Film Festival—chapter 4 deploys analytics provided by queer, feminist, and affect theories to explore how sexuality acquires different representational inflections, and triggers different responses, as it traverses different spaces of capitalism. I argue that the celebratory impulses associated with the increased visibility and liberation of alternative sexual identities must be considered in the context of patriarchal arrangements that continue to render invisible the feminization and sexualization of labor and citizenship in the New Europe. I juxtapose a wider range of visual arts projects engaging with the topics of sexuality, intimacy, and work migration, as well as feminist theorizations of sex work and agency, in order to show how Krenz and Ostertag's work are remarkable in their renditions of the complexity of agency, subjectivity, and the struggle for subsistence within changing global economies. The figures who emerge from these two projects are transnational migrant working women who arrive in Berlin from the Poland, representing the East and the Second World, and from the United States, capital of the West and the First World, to take jobs in the feminized sectors of the global economy: as cleaners and sex workers. While the two projects are situated differently in relation to representational realism, the narrative arcs of their characters allow for a theorization of subjectivity and agency that accounts not only for gender, but also for geopolitical location. Viewed side-by-side, the two projects show how differences between working women's starting points

in out-migration correlate to differences in working conditions, even when they enter the same sectors of global feminized labor. The sex worker protagonist of *Under the Red Umbrella* is able to mobilize discursive and organizational resources in order to make her entrepreneurial endeavor safe and profitable. The mathematics teacher of *The Polish Wife* has a clear sense of downward professional mobility as she traverses borders in search of work, while her student disappears without a trace in the underground world of global sex trafficking. I argue that by resisting to capitalize on either the spectacle of victimhood or the uplifting feeling of empowered agents, the two artists explore new imaginaries and formulate new vocabularies, which may contribute towards cultural changes and inspire policy reforms that will enable women to cross borders safely when searching for work.

In Chapter 5, "Staying in Newark: The Gender, Race, Class and Sexuality of Community Work in Marc Levin and Mark Benjamin's *Brick City* (2009)," I bring together a historical analysis of racial and labor relations in Newark with an analysis of gender, race, class and sexuality formations in the acclaimed Sundance documentary film. My analysis singles out the protagonist Jayda, and her community service in Nine Strong Women, the program that she initiates. I argue that Jayda's vision of what this program would be changes over the course of the film under pressure from the directors and producers to provide the audience with easily recognizable tropes of black postindustrial urban spaces and young black urban subjects. The works of James Snead, Patricia Hill Collins, Stuart Hall and the Collins Raq Media Collective inform my critical assessment of the subjectifying work of *Brick City*. I argue that typification of one of the young women in Jayda's group, as the hypersexual young black female subject at risk

aims to capitalize on stories of Black promiscuity, which are central elements of commodified Black culture. Moreover, through the young female on the brink of death, another subject formation emerging from Brick City, Newark is gendered and racialized through tropes of violent Black masculinity. Newark becomes a "brand name" site of danger, while Brick City is nothing more than the medium that enables an experience of exciting visual consumption of racialized danger, which fulfills the demands of the global market place. I argue that Brick City also bypasses an analysis of the structures of gender, race, and class inequality in distressed neighborhoods, as well as complex histories of enslavement, work discrimination, coerced out-migration and dislocation, in order to promote notions of social change within the paradigms of the individualistic solutions of neoliberalism. While the makers of Brick City argue that their project "makes a difference," perhaps based on its incorporation of an abundance of documentary footage of individuals, community groups, non-profits and governmental agencies at work against "crime," I argue that, in fact, Brick City is a visual art project that unwittingly works against neoliberal urban development by reinscribing the city as a volatile site of racial alterity and "broken windows" urbanity (Willson and Kelling 1982), instead of as a safe haven for corporate occupation and the settlement of wealthier residents.

The conclusion of this dissertation considers the initial blueprint of this research and the theoretical and methodological significance of particular moments of empirical, interpretative and conceptual work. The hegemonization of neoliberal ideologies during the past decade led to a slight shift away from the initial blueprint for my research. My fieldwork inquiries into visual art projects that posed a challenge to neoliberal vocabularies, discourses, desires, and attachments turned towards projects that were more

ambiguously positioned in their relation to neoliberal vocabularies. As this dissertation will show, encounters with radical critiques did happen, but more often than not, my encounters with visual arts and cultural events demonstrated that the notions of social and political justice had already achieved normalization as neoliberal articulations. The analytics of socio-economic structural constraints has thus been replaced by a paradigm that foregrounds modalities of social change which are reliant on autonomous, self-managing, self-disciplining, freely chosen, self-inventing, self-empowering, and self-entrepreneurial subjects (Gill and Scharff 2011). Neoliberal subject formations remain, nevertheless, in a tight entanglement with the inequalities and exclusions rooted in gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality and citizenship regimes. Visibility, representation, and subjectivity formation constitute central themes of inquiry because they inform the operations of neoliberal governmentality, and thus attend to the interests of neoliberal global capitalism. Taking into account these material, socio-political and cultural transnational urban contexts, I selected for analysis contemporary visual art projects that addressed topical phenomena of neoliberal capitalist globalization: work formations and changing labor practices, new modes of livelihood, and new gendered, racialized, and classed identities.

This dissertation examines such entanglements as played out in the selected visual arts projects. Visibility, representation, and subjectivity formation constitute central themes of inquiry because they inform the operations of neoliberal governmentality, and thus attend to the interests of neoliberal global capitalism. The overall case study based methodology and the limited selection of visual arts projects which were included in my analysis preclude my concluding statements from being widely generalizable. The goal of

my research was not to seek empirical confirmation for either the claims of defenders of global neoliberalism, or those of its dissenters, with whose politics I align. My goal was to treat visual art projects alongside arguments produced within the frameworks of other knowledge production institutions. This intertextual methodological approach aimed in fact at going beyond the realm of textual argumentation. By foregrounding the discursive and affective interventions of visual art projects, I sought to comprehend how affects, feelings, and emotions could be mobilized in the formation of subjectivities and collectivities with political valences oriented beyond the spectrum of neoliberal individualism (Puar and Pellegrini 2009).

## **Chapter 1**

### **A Theoretical Exploration of Work and Subjectivity: The Gendered, Classed and Racialized Categories of Neoliberalism**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will engage with the conceptual vocabularies of neoliberalism and seeks to account for how the operations of power structures are intricately linked to representations and are thus involved in creating and maintaining social inequalities as well as in the actualization of various social, political, or economic types of agency. The processes of representation are discussed in relation to media, popular culture, and visual arts analyses. However, representational practices are inherent to all practices of meaning-making. The knowledge produced by economists, social scientists, critical theorists and philosophers, as well as the categories which are operative in the fields of policy-making, governance, and social activism are also constituted by representational practices, which in their turn construct and convey the meanings of concepts that are central to feminist research, such as gender, femininity, masculinity, race and racialization, class, ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship.

The premise that informs my analysis posits that neoliberal governmentality narrows the understanding of the social and economic injustices of the current economic order. A major consequence of the alignment between corporate interests, media productions, and governance is the normalization of the logic of neoliberalism as common sense—often presented not only as desirable but also as inevitable (Runyan and Peterson 2014). The logic of neoliberalism compels all workers to internalize the logic of market competition and to identify with corporate interests. Runyan and Peterson

emphasize that "mainstream media ensure that workers everywhere are aware of global competition and systemic economic insecurities, and this awareness generates fearful and too often accommodating responses" (2014, 199). At the core of the unfolding crises, neoliberal ideologies situate their "undisciplined" subjects as generative agencies: "irresponsible mothers," "drug-ridden (racialized) inner-city gangs," "job-stealing migrants," "unpatriotic dissidents," "anti-American foreigners," "Muslim extremists," and the faceless—but always racialized—"poor" (2014, 200). Furthermore, global neoliberal capitalism also benefits from gendered ideologies that naturalize divisions of labor and differential valorizations of work in relation to the meanings attributed to notions of femininity and masculinity. Such gendered ideologies are embedded in global and local structures of political power, which act in concert and produce phenomena such as the crisis in social reproduction and the subsidizing of national economies by migrant laborers tending to the care needs of the middle and upper classes of the global North.

Postcolonial and decolonial scholars have emphasized that work migration, in its coerced and voluntary forms, can be conceptualized as the movement of people-as-resource for the capitalist quest to maximize profit. Lydia Potts proposes the term, "world market for labor power." By drawing a temporal arc between the fifteenth century and present day, she connects the development of the world market for labor power under colonialism with the moment of industrialization and "the incorporation of the capitalist city into the operations of the world markets for labor power" (Potts 1990). Through this gesture she analytically connects present-day migration to the enslavement of indigenous populations that followed the conquest of the Americas, the enslavement of peoples from Africa, as well as other forms of forced labor and forced migration from the continents of

South America, Asia and Europe. Alongside with critical race theorists such as Ian Haney-Lopez, Jennifer Morgan, and Stuart Hall, Potts emphasizes that the exploitation of colonized and enslaved peoples unfolded synchronously with the production of racializing ideologies. Racialization continues to be entangled with ideologies of European superiority, orientalism, modernization, progress, and development.

I will start this chapter with an examination of the main arguments put forth by the proponents of neoliberalism, as articulated by a well-recognized voice of neoliberal economics, Jagdish Bhagwati. I will then turn to the critical arguments formulated by feminist and labor justice scholars and activists in response to the claims of neoliberal policy makers. I structure their interventions in four sections, each attending to a facet of neoliberalism and its gendered effects: a) the perspective of women's work; b) the feminization of work; c) the feminization of development; d) and the feminization of transnational work migration. The subsequent section turns to an analysis of subjectivity formation in neoliberalism and foregrounds the analytics of scale and agency. I end the chapter with a detailed exploration of the capacity of visual arts to disturb the narrow vision of neoliberalism and enable an understanding of the structures of violence, injustice, and exploitation that undergird its ideology.

### **1. 1. Neoliberal capitalist globalization**

Orchestrated by transnational geopolitical elites trained in neoclassical economics at the universities of the global North and western Europe, neoliberalism rests on the assumption that unregulated markets are able to "naturally" create the conditions for productivity, prosperity, liberty, democracy, and peace (Runyan and Peterson 2014, 193). Since the 1970s and through the mediation of transnational development policies of

international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), the global North's proponents of neoliberalism have acted in concert with the local political elites of the global South toward opening markets, lowering or removing barriers to capital, dismantling labor standards and environmental regulations, as well as supporting the privatization of land, resources, and industry (Bond 2006, Ray and Bedford 2010, Runyan and Peterson 2014.). After the fall of the state-run communist regimes, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), as well as those of the former Soviet Union (fSU), have undergone shock therapy programs coordinated by the European Union (EU), the WB, and the IMF designed to turn state-run communist economies into free-market economies. Liberalization, deregulation, privatization, and specialization were instituted as the means to increase the productivity and performance of the region's economies. While the conditions of neoliberal globalization were accentuating local economic problems and poverty, the countries of the global North were also opting for self-imposed stabilization policies and the privatization of public services, particularly under conservative governments. The financial crisis of 2008 led to additional cuts to social security programs in Europe and the United States. Austerity measures and Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) continued to impoverish working and middle classes, while the hegemons of neoliberal global capitalism, the banks and the multinational corporations (MNCs), were deemed worthy of bail-out. While they recovered, ordinary people around the globe continue to face precarity, exploitation, and unemployment.

In 2004, Jagdish Bhagwati, professor of economics and law at Columbia University and a prominent neoliberal voice, well known for his advocacy of free trade, published *In Defense of Globalization*. The volume was conceived in response to the criticism of neoliberal globalization by progressive and feminist scholars and the resistance of alter-globalization and anti-globalization movements. In response to what he considers to be an "ill-informed" criticism fueled by "hostile passions," Bhagwati constructs a series of arguments in praise of the beneficial effects of the global economic integration through free trade performed under the supervision of international regulatory bodies, the unrestrained flow of capital and advanced technologies in the service of global (economic) connectivity, and the current conditions for the circulation of workers. Bhagwati's vision is representative of the larger field of theorization and implementation of neoliberal policies. Thus, from the perspective of supply-side economics or market fundamentalism, the positive influence of globalization on local industries; "the rise of multiculturalism and the celebration of ethnicity" (2004, 110); the beneficent effects of free trade on gender gap reduction in the "developing" world; the general profitability of the emergence of "global care chains" (2004, 76), and the gender emancipating and poverty reduction effects of export processing zones are all, according to Bhagwati, "powerful weapons in the policies we can deploy to fight poverty" (2004, 7).

## **1.2. The free market as a stimulating environment for economic growth**

When managed properly, economic global competition is said to enhance the wealth of the nation-states of the Second and Third Worlds by placing their industries into the stimulating environments of free market operations. Interestingly enough, to support this position, Bhagwati opts for an analysis of the productive effects of free-

market competition in the global film industry and leaves his readers to assume that the conclusions he draws from the film industry case study can be extrapolated to other industries as well. Bhagwati's optimistic outlook emerges from an analytical stance that ignores the power relations that operate at the level of the so-called "free" global market economy. He also fails to mention that many local industries in the so-called "developing" world fail to secure viable market niches when in competition with MNCs. Moreover, the argument that local governments of developing countries must invest in domestic industries to the point where their economies are able to attain adequate levels of competitiveness also demands further qualifications (Bhagwati 2004, 117-119), if only to emphasize how, under current global circumstances, the strategies for economic development of some countries have become reliant on the export of women's domestic and sexual labor for transnational exploitation (Biemann 2008, Ong 2000, Parrenas 2000). It is important to emphasize that such gendered politics of governmental investment are shaped by the consumptive desires of the markets of the global North as well as by local historical, cultural and economic circumstances (Jeffrey 2003, Wilson 2004). Localized empirical examination would further support the perspective that throughout these processes transnational gendering and racialization processes work to the benefit of capital proliferation. Furthermore, it is important to note the losses that labor incurs in the processes of ensuring the competitiveness of local economies: restrictions on the rights to unionization, drops in minimum wage levels and wage liberalization, and the dissolution of the standards regulating optimal working conditions. Thus, global competition entails more consequences than can be grappled through the relative box-office success of some non-Hollywood films. In the absence of restrictive

local legislation protecting the operations of local industries as well as the absence of regulatory frameworks preventing the exploitation of the local human labor force, the economies of developing countries run not only the risk of failing to ensure adequate levels of employment opportunities, but also of not being able to ensure the livelihoods of certain segments of population.

### **1.3. Global circuits of cultural production and consumption**

Bhagwati's defense of globalization is followed by a plea for multiculturalism and transnational encounters such as are enabled by the "free" flows of capital, goods, services and workers. The flows of neoliberal global capitalism are framed as antidotes for the "'impractical fossilization of attitudes and values'" (2004, 114) that the closed systems of regulated economies are said to foster. Ultimately, the forces of globalization are to be praised for creating the conditions for "'the rise of multiculturalism and the celebration of ethnicity'" (2004, 110). Like many other neoliberal supporters of depoliticized multiculturalism, Bhagwati avoids an engagement with questions formulated by critical race theorists and radical critical theorists, such as: What representational vocabularies could work against the depoliticization of "difference" inherent in the celebratory impulses of commodified multiculturalism? Can we conceptualize cultural diversity in ways that could support and inform transformative antiracial politics? How can racial, cultural and ethnic difference be represented so that multicultural festivals do not become practices of spectacularization and exoticization of the ethnic, racial, or migrant other? (Chow 1995, Fusco 2007, Minh-ha 2011).

Bhagwati's account obscures the forces that shape the profitability of multiculturalism

and the fact that its representational registers are, most of time, modeled by the desires, interests, knowledges and pleasures of traveling agents in the global North.

#### **1.4. Neoliberal global capitalism and the gender pay gap**

Free trade is presented as a means to achieving gender wage gap reduction. Bhagwati erroneously contextualizes this aspect of gender inequality within the space of the so-called "developing" world, where, he argues, women are paid less due to local cultural pressures. The emplacement of gender prejudice and the gendered devaluing of women's work exclusively within the space of "developing" countries restates well-rehearsed colonial and neocolonial arguments about the "backwardness" of the global South and the need for modernization and development under the guidance of the already "developed" world.

The mechanism through which the gender wage gap can be reduced is, again, "liberalized trade, which enables foreign firms to compete with domestic firms in open markets" (2004, 13). The MNCs are free of prejudice in relation to the sex of labor, according to this argument, and as they relocate their manufacturing facilities to countries of the Third World, they also encourage domestic enterprises to free themselves of patriarchal notions about women's work and its worth; this cultural change presumably serves women as well as capital, since men's pay could now be lowered to the level of pay of female workers (2004, 13). Bhagwati's support of a pay gap closing strategy that "harmonize[s] downward" (Armstrong in McCall 2001, 31) is suspect, particularly when confronted with the neoliberal thesis that economic growth that follows unrestricted trade ultimately reduces poverty.

### **1.5. Intergenerational kin solidarities and the formation of the transnational migrant sub-proletariat**

Discursive dichotomies such as developed/advanced/modern versus developing/backward/ traditional frame neoliberal arguments about the positive effects of phenomena such as the emergence of "global care chains" (2004, 76) and export processing zones (2004, 83). According to Bhagwati's analysis, the transnational occupational segregations between the gendered haves and have-nots that the current global order displays ultimately represent an unproblematic win-win arrangement:

[...] the migrant female worker is better off in the new world of attachments and autonomy; the migrants' children are happy being looked after by their grandmothers, who are also happy to be looking after the children and the employer mothers, when they find good nannies, are also happy that they can work without the emotionally wrenching sense that they are neglecting their children (Bhagwati 2004, 77-78).

While some immigrant domestic workers might enjoy decent working conditions and dignified labor relations, Bhagwati's commitment to maintain a celebratory mood in relation to neoliberal capitalist globalization fails to acknowledge the various hardships and exploitations associated with it for the migrant women-- their separation from their children and families and the psychological and social costs of downward transnational occupational mobility (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009, Lutz 2002, Poo 2009).

Neoliberal arguments also go against the feminist and leftist critiques of MNCs' relocation of manufacturing facilities to zero tariffs zones, which free corporate agents of any accountability toward labor, the environment, and local communities. Bhagwati sees

this change as an opportunity for local governments to ensure "basic safety [...] and related health regulations [...] applicable nationwide, not just to EPZs" (2004, 86). While addressing only an apparently benign transfer of responsibility, Bhagwati fails to specify that export processing zones (EPZs) are spaces of absolute deregulation that emerge at the intersection of radical cuts in social expenditures, the IMF's and WB's requirements for tax concessions for MNCs in exchange for financial assistance, increasing debts accumulated by many developing countries while they were under the neoliberal management of IMF and WB, and a wavering commitment of local governments to address the needs of their citizens.

### **2.1. Feminist critiques of neoliberalism**

The dismantling of the state-run communist economies of Central and Eastern Europe marked the final step in the quest of neoliberalism for global hegemony. Neoliberal economics, which has been the dominant ideology of the United States and Great Britain since the 1970s and 1980s, eventually triumphed over its larger-scale alternative, the planned, state-run economies of Central and Eastern Europe (Berend 2006, Mascia-Lees 2010, Hall 2003, 2011, Tamas 2008). The economic capitalist globalization that has unfolded since the 1990s has mobilized complex global networks of production and consumption towards the goal of creating a single integrated global world market. The deregulation, privatization, liberalization, specialization, and stabilization of the economy were accompanied by ideological efforts to re-subjectify the body politic. Communal and public values as well as collective interests and strategies were replaced by the core principles of neoliberal thinking: individualism, autonomy, entrepreneurialism and self-creation (Bourdieu 1999, Brenner and Theodore 2002, Jarvis

et al 2009, Mascia-Lees 2010, Peck et al 2012, Runyan and Peterson 2014, Schneider 2002, Tamas 2008, Venn 2009). As shown in the previous section of this chapter, the promoters of neoliberalism argue fervently that unregulated markets create opportunities for more people to live better lives and exercise their rights. Adam Smith, one of the precursors of the neoliberal ideology, writes that the market will regulate itself through the force of the "invisible hand" – a mechanism set in motion by the private interests of individual participants. While the acts of individuals are set in motion by the force of competition with no regard for the common interest or the general good, the "invisible hand" of the market, not the state, nor regulatory agencies, would guide the economic operations of capitalism towards beneficial economic, social, and cultural outcomes (Smith [1812] 2012).

Neoliberal philosophy constructs individuality and freedom of choice as core traits of humanity. They are considered natural, inborn human rights and inclinations. Thus, while the drive for economic gain, the instinctive seizing of market opportunities, and the capacity to exercise rational choice towards the maximization of individual advantage are deemed inherently human qualities, their presence or absence contributes to the articulation of hierarchized gendered differences, racialized ideologies, and the configuration of geopolitical power relations. For instance, when failures occur within the economic systems set in motion by the "invisible hand" of the market, they do not constitute grounds for a reevaluation of the foundational theses of neoliberalism. Instead, they are qualified as temporary effects caused by individual characteristics as well as gendered and racialized traits such as laziness, lack of education, emotionality or large families or kin structures (Le Baron and Roberts, 2010, Mascia-Lees 2010, Phillips 2004,

Safri and Graham 2010). From a neoliberal perspective, individuals are normatively expected to attend to their own educational, social, and health needs. As pointed out by Michel Foucault, the governmentality of human life under neoliberalism transforms every individual into a rational and autonomous entrepreneur able to manage her own life (Foucault 2008, Foucault in Mascia-Less 2010, 163). Despite remarkable disparities between the wealthiest nations of the globe and the developing world, as well as the dramatic wealth disparities within the countries of the First World, the ideology of the "free market" continues to mask these inequalities while presenting itself as the most effective approach to the global economic challenges of the contemporary age.

## **2.2. Neoliberal globalization from the perspective of women's labor**

As a strategy for development, neoliberalism advocates Export Led Growth economic models. These have as a prerequisite the re-orientation of the domestic production of the developing nations away from domestic needs, in order to respond to the consumer product demands of their wealthier global counterparts from the global North. The increasing gap between the so-called "developed" world and the "under-developed" or "developing" world, the sharpening disparities between the lives of the rich and the poor in countries considered developed, the rapid deterioration of the environment, the intensified modes of national and transnational practices of labor exploitation with women and children as the most vulnerable working subjects of the globalized economy, the deterioration of the status of women despite their increased presence in labor markets, the hegemonization of western modes of knowledge, the ineffective financial policies and development visions orchestrated by western power, the IMF and the WB are all contested realities for the proponents of neoliberal globalization.

### **2.3. Flexible accumulation and the feminization of work**

Multinational corporations (MNCs) are central to an understanding of the processes pertaining to the restructuring of global labor. They are also the most prominent agents and beneficiaries of neoliberal globalization. In their quest for cheap labor, MNCs transform manufacturing plants into itinerant entities moving from country to country across the regions of the Second and Third Worlds. The countries of the developing world often compete among themselves to attract MNCs with offers of tax breaks, labor deregulation, government assistance, and the provision of raw materials (Harvey 2005, Klein 2009, Mascia-Lees 2010, Mills 2003, Sassen 1988). The underlying generative structures of these phenomena emerge from the paradigmatic shift from Fordism to the neoliberal concept of flexible accumulation. Flexible accumulation strategies of economic growth require a work force that can be swiftly adjusted to fluctuations in production demand. The work force of the neoliberal global economy had to be shaped into disposable, easy to fire, willing to accept short-term contract subjects, as the long-term employer-employee relationship of the Fordist era has been replaced by fragmented, part-time, and temporary labor relations (Mascia-Lees 2010, 172, Klein 2009). The flexible accumulation strategies of neoliberal global capitalism have normalized their reliance on flexible labor and produced the quality of "employee flexibility" as a trait that encapsulates not only multiple and diverse skills (Martin in Mascia-Lees 2010) but also a readiness for geographic mobility and working schedule expansion (Gregg 2011).

Neoliberal principles have also intervened in the relations between governments and worker-citizens. Ulrich Beck identified the formation of "risk regimes" characterized by a change in governmental accountability. Governments are no longer concerned with

the employment of their citizens, and their main duty becomes the management of financial risks potentially incurred by economic and corporate agents. Job insecurity and job instability become constants of the labor experience of the contemporary working classes, subjecting workers to frequent cycles of job loss and an accentuated/imposed self-reliance in regard to re-gaining employment, providing for their families, and securing health care (Mascia-Lees 2010, 1973).

Feminist scholars have noted that the scholars of globalization still disregard the important role that gender relations play in the production of the current global order (Mascia-Lees 2010, Massey 1995, Mills 2003, Runyan and Peterson 2014, Sassen 1988). They call attention to women's transnational labor migration, their employment as cheap labor within the growing sector of transnational manufacturing industries, and their struggles to maintain livelihoods in the post-industrial cities of the global North. Feminist scholars also emphasize women's unmatched contributions in the realms of transnational reproductive labor and agricultural production.

In 1999, Guy Standing, an economist with the International Labor Organization (ILO) highlighted the changes in work conditions that occurred in the transition from welfare capitalism and state-run communist economies to the socio-economic arrangements of intensified market deregulation. Growing labor insecurity and the feminization of labor represent two alarming effects brought about by two decades of globalized neoliberalism. The concept of the feminization of work has multilayered analytical potential. First, it addresses the rise in female labor-force participation worldwide (Massey 1995, Runyan and Peterson 2014). Second, it describes the structures of work that emerged after the elimination of waged, full-time, stable, unionized

employment (Harvey 2005, Peck et al 2012, Klein 2009, Standing 1999) by association with forms and terms of employment that have been historically associated with women's work: specifically, low-paying jobs, poor working conditions, low levels or complete lack of professional training, part-time or temporary positions, and lack of binding contractual agreements (Standing 1999).

The globalization of the free market hegemony, with its inherent corporate pursuit of labor flexibility, constitutes the transformational force behind the replacement of full-time employment norms, labor rights, and the security and social protection policies of welfare capitalism and state socialism with the increased insecurity of temporary, part-time, self-employed or informal forms of labor. The feminist value of the argument proposed by Standing emerges from the problematization of optimistic voices glorifying the present moment for its unprecedented degree of inclusion of women in employment. While women enter labor markets in greater numbers with the goal of achieving income security, what the global markets offer in abundance is irregular and low-paying jobs for both women and men (Standing 1999).

#### **2.4. The feminization of work: a feminist critique of development policies**

Operating within the conceptual and analytic framework of the feminization of labor, Lourdes Benaria, professor of economics at Cornell University, undertakes a comparative analysis of women's employment in the formal and informal sectors in the age of economic globalization (2001). She turns her attention to the much-lauded higher levels of women's educational attainment worldwide and finds that, due to gender occupational segregation and gender discrimination, the increased participation of women in education does not necessarily correlate with access to better jobs. While her findings also indicate

that women's relative wages improved in relation to men's wages, Benaria argues that the preference for women's cheaper labor in export-oriented employment sectors is, in fact, a source of greater insecurity for women in comparison to men, due to women's gendered position in relation to family responsibilities, job volatility, and technological change (Benaria 2001).

The concepts proposed by economists have consequences in the field of policy making as well as for social justice mobilization. Concepts such as "family wage" and "male bread winner" have constituted for decades the cornerstones of feminist policy and its social change agenda. The vocabularies proposed by Standing and Benaria may lead labor rights activists and policy makers to imagine public programs that tackle the problems encountered by women and men in the global labor market: job insecurity, low pay, poor working conditions, lack of access to social services, absence of benefits, no bargaining power, conditions that are unfavorable to labor organizing, and last but not least, gender discrimination (Standing 1999, Benaria 2001).

Rather than taking this path, when persuaded that women's wages alone do not address the problem of poverty in the global South, development agencies have identified working-class impoverished men as the problem. Operating on evidence that showed men as unwilling to assist with domestic responsibilities within the home, wasting the income brought in by women, and perpetrating domestic violence, the WB devised programs to encourage men to become more egalitarian partners in order to afford women more time to work for income (Bedford 2009). While there is nothing wrong with attempting to alter gender power relations at the household level, Kate Bedford explains that such policies constitute an instance of the global governance of intimate relations. This form of social

engineering targets and vilifies the working-class racialized men of the global South, rather than changing the parameters of contemporary economies so that men are able to perform equitable modalities of social provisioning and to enter more egalitarian, violence-free relations with women. Given their focus on heteronormative families, such policies are indicative of the exclusion of female-headed families from the development policies of the WB (Lind 2010).

Within the neoliberal frameworks of development, the expansion of the service sector and the relocation of manufacturing sectors are seen as opportunities that grant women from the developing world "greater levels of economic freedom as they move out of the household and into the global market economy" (Elias 2010, Elias and Ferguson 2009). Such statements reflect a free market ideology and an endorsement of economic privatization and export-led growth economic strategies. Juanita Elias points out that this perspective does not explain why women working for "globalized industries" are systematically relegated to the lower ranks of the occupational hierarchy, having to attend to monotonous work tasks with limited opportunities for promotion or decent remuneration. For the past three decades, feminist scholars have criticized the feminine gendering of the "ideal" manufacturing worker. While the gendered representational registers of transnational manufacturing labor differ from one national and cultural context to the next, the overall consequences remain the same. Coding specific industries as feminine results in the relegation of women to the lowest paid niches of the global manufacturing economy, the worst working conditions, and circumstances that are the least conducive to labor mobilization.

Across regional and national divides, within the spaces of global production, men have access to upper level niches and to supervising positions in comparison to women workers (Mills 2003). The discursive frameworks, which justify the exploitation of women, rely on essentialist notions that link docility, dexterity, a natural inclination for care giving, intuition, accountability, professionalism, or sensuality to the female body. Such discourses render invisible the fact that the very structure of work formations is wired for gendered exploitation through women's "lack of social, economic and political resources in comparison to men, making them more likely than men to accept lower wages and harsher conditions" (Freeman 1999, 214-215, Mascia-Lees 2010, 167-168, Mills 2005, Salzinger 2003).

## **2.5. The feminization of migration**

The feminization of migration is another conceptual framework developed by feminist scholars engaging with the gendered formations of contemporary work. This concept brings into focus two new phenomena: first, an increase in the number of women crossing national borders in search of work; second, the emergence of "feminized migration sectors" (Elias 2009). In response to the effects of neoliberal globalization, women from the global South are now migrating to take on traditionally "feminine" jobs in the global North. The remittances sent home by the transnational migrant workers worldwide were estimated at \$305 billion in 2008 and \$290 billion in 2009. However, the intimate and social costs paid by the migrant women and their families, while contributing to the developing economies and filling in the cheap labor sectors of the developed ones, remain most of the time invisible. Given that in the wake of 9/11 the global North has tightened borders and restricted immigration, undocumented migration

constitutes the work migration experience of many women and men. Under such circumstances, workers are denied access to medical and social services and face greater risk of state punitive actions. Many times, migrant workers encounter virulent anti-immigrant hostility. Conservative mainstream media and grassroots anti-immigration movements construct female immigrant workers as a burden on the social services of host nations and as bodies of uncontrolled fertility (Runyan and Peterson 2014, 204). The nation-states of the global North have shown little interest in ratifying conventions that extend either citizenship rights or labor rights to migrant workers (True 2012). Such a position with respect to protecting migrant labor is in fact integral to the neoliberal intention to ensure the cost-effectiveness of immigrant labor through the informalization of work.

For all these reasons, feminist researchers tend to focus their investigations of the experiences of women in search of work, on those who relocate from the developing world to the global North. This tendency creates a reductive picture of labor migration, as it excludes fluxes of work migration from "South" to "South" within the region of East Asia (Elias 2010, 408); at the same time, within the European context, this tendency renders invisible the transnational migratory flows to the European Union (EU) member states of Central and Eastern Europe, which are now either stepping stones towards a western European final destination or destination sites for employment in transnationally relocated manufacturing plants (Regulska 2001). Finally, the focus on the work migration from the global South to the global North renders invisible transnational work migration that flows from the global North to the global South. Professional migrants active in banking, finance, IT and communication technologies, development, and MNCs

management also represent significant agents of the neoliberal globalization. An engagement with their work experiences would shed light on new transnational class divisions such as these, articulated around gendered and racialized work formations. Ultimately, any inquiry into women's work during the age of neoliberal globalization must consider not only the gender of work but also its articulation at the intersection of structures of power and difference in relation to race, ethnicity, class, nationality and citizenship.

## **2.6. The formation of neoliberal subjectivities**

In the previous sections I addressed the work formations that accompany the globalized advent of neoliberal capitalism. This analysis allowed me to show that many of these rearrangements are predicated on gendered and geopolitical notions about what constitutes an appropriate work force. Now, I will turn to an explicit engagement with the subjectivity formation processes that neoliberalism sets in motion. In "Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy," Wendy Brown (2003) proposes an analysis of neoliberalism as a practice of governmentality and a form of political rationality. These exceed the scope of state governance and reach beyond the political and social consequences of economic policies. She contextualizes the emergence of neoliberalism against the backdrop of the progressive mobilizations that animated the United States during the Reagan, Bush and Clinton presidencies. . The framework of governmentality allows Brown to focus her analysis on the production of the "subjects, forms of citizenship and behavior" and the "new organization of the social" (Brown 2003, 1) unfolding in global neoliberal capitalism. In her view, the scope of neoliberalism "reaches from the soul of the citizen-subject to education policy and to practices of

empire" (Brown 2003, 2) and, through an array of insidious operations, it closes the spaces that previously existed between capitalist economies and liberal democratic values (Rofel 2007, 17). Brown identifies four main transformations produced by neoliberal governmentality at the level of social, economic and political practice. First, the extension, normalization and normativization of market values and market rationality across institutional practices, social actions, policy interventions and institution building initiatives; second, the replacement of the public organizing practices and principles of the state with operations administered by market rationality; third, the expansion of market values and principles into "formerly noneconomic domains" (Rofel 2007, 17) and the normativization of the entrepreneurial subject, who is rational, able to evaluate risk, and whose social and ethical worth is determined by measures of autonomy, self-care and self-provision; fourth, the transplantation of profitability measures to the fields of social policy (Brown 2003).

## **2.7. The question of agency in the analysis of neoliberal subjectivities**

While the nation-state constitutes the scale of Brown's analysis, with the United States as its context, Aihwa Ong's works formulate strong arguments that link the operations of neoliberalism with the transnational scale. In *Flexible Citizenship and the Cultural Logic of Transnationality* (1999), *Buddha is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship, and the New America* (2003), and *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (2006), Ong redefines neoliberalism as a product of transnational encounters among actors, cultures, economies, technologies, and state-governments (Ong 1999, 2003, 2005, 2006). By looking at the enterprises of Hong Kong mobile entrepreneurs, the life trajectories of Cambodian refugees to the United States, the operations of special

free-market zones created within China's socialist economy, the economic, social and technological practices that transformed Singapore into a center of scientific expertise, as well as at the flexible labor pools created across the Pacific by local governments, Ong recasts the critical focus away from the disabling effects of neoliberalism in relation to the capacity of local governments to perform public intervention. In so doing, her analysis also brackets the critiques of neoliberalism that concern its predatory endeavors and impoverishing effects on the global South. While in agreement with the direction and significance of these critiques, Ong also works within an analytical framework of governmentality and subjectivity formation similar to Brown's.

Central to Ong's critique of neoliberalism is the significance of "global assemblage" (Ong and Collier 2005), a concept that she makes explicit through an examination of contemporary forms of citizenship. Ong describes global assemblages as emerging spaces which bring together differentiated scales, and thus disrupt the understanding of citizenship as a nation-state bound set of entitlements (Ong 2005). She writes that in the age of neoliberalism, citizenship becomes more about a set of entitlements associated with "market criteria, administrative policies, and humanitarian interventions" (Ong 2005, 697). Furthermore, even as they pursue their own successful participation in the global economy, different regimes (be they democratic, authoritarian, communist or capitalist) get to deploy specific neoliberal strategies, which end up constituting populations, as well as economic and political spaces. Moreover, the specific manifestations of neoliberalism are determined by the local histories of governance and governmentality, which formed at the confluence of Asian cultures, European rule,

postcolonial legacies, and cultural differences from the West, as well as local religious systems.

Resonating with Ong, Lisa Rofel points out that, unlike the United States and Western European contexts, whose neoliberal manifestations produce "the calculating subject with its precarious individualism" and "the privatized risk management as a neoliberal technology of the self," the Southeast Asian context enables "a rational subject shaped by the authority of the state as cultural regulator" (Rofel 2007, 18). Ong's corpus of work, too, identifies forms of subjectification, which are "self-reliant but also dependent on the culturally sanctioned collectivity represented by the state" (Rofel 2007, 18). Her varied inquiries into the re-configurations of citizenship lead to further conclusions about the subjectifying mechanisms of neoliberalism. For instance, the global assemblage of neoliberal forces subjectifies Cambodian refugees in the United States as a category of racialized laborers at the "black" pole of the black-white racialization continuum. In her reading of *Waiting for Buddha*, Rofel points out the significant analytical value of Ong's departure from "simple determinism" and her careful consideration of the Cambodian refugees' agentive interventions in the subjectifying modes of neoliberal governmentality. Ong's work allows for an understanding of how neoliberalism is produced across nation-states, through encounters that cross-geographical scale and cultural milieus and which involve "complex negotiations of race, gender, class, and national status" (Rofel 2007, 19).

Ong's inquiry into the operations of global citizenship leads her to identify spatial formations which she terms "zones of hypergrowth." In Ong's definition, the zones of hypergrowth constitute the fulfillment of the neoliberal criteria for knowledge

accumulation, self-entrepreneurialism, and financial power, which outline an ideal form of citizenship (Ong 2005, 697). Through the concept of flexible citizenship, Ong qualifies the positionality negotiated by professional and entrepreneurial agents in relation to not one nation state, but a variety of nation-states, a complex territoriality onto which zones of hypergrowth could materialize along neoliberal subjects (1999, 2005). In the author's own terms:

Flexible citizenship describes maneuvers whereby subjects are induced to respond fluidly and opportunistically to dynamic market conditions regardless of the national borders. In an age of flexible accumulation, flexibility, migration, and relocations, instead of being coerced and resisted, have become practice to strive for rather than for stability (Ong 1999, 19).

And:

Furthermore national states seeking wealth-bearing and entrepreneurial immigrants do not hesitate to adjust immigration laws to favor elite migrant subject, especially professionals and investors. In advanced capitalist sites, the articulation of market-based criteria and citizenship norms encourages elite actors to exploit the possibility of capital accumulation through the astute deployment of multiple passports (Ong 2005, 698).

In highlighting the success of such claims to citizenship, Ong's analysis once again circumvents the determinist explanatory frameworks of neoliberals by rendering individuals agentive forces in the articulation of the new relations of neoliberal governmentality. This time, Ong's agents are privileged classes of transnational subjects. While remaining sensitive to differential positionalities in terms of resources and

privileges, Ong views the latter as neither the equivalent of agency nor as its necessary condition. Her theorization of contemporary neoliberal subjectivities through the prism of the "global assemblage" enables the analytical connection of subjectivity with a political spatiality that transcends the boundaries of the nation-state and that allows "for articulations of claims on resources from various sources beyond the state" (Ong 2005, 697). The interactions between citizenship norms, neoliberal values, markets, political strategies and the claims of border crossing actors, which all play out in the re-articulation of new modes of citizenship, are understood by Ong as two different "globalized milieus," namely as zones of hypergrowth and as zones of exclusion (2005, 698).

Alongside Brown, Ong asserts that in the United States and other "advanced liberal democracies" (Ong 2005, 698), governments are no longer committed to taking care of their citizens, but require them to act as self-actualizing free subjects who are able to confront autonomously emerging global insecurities. Since the urban poor, immigrants, and refugees are generally represented as less capable of self-improvement, these are also the populations that Ong identifies as the primary targets of the United States' neoliberal human technologies that "govern through the freedom or aspirations of subjects" (Ong 2003, Ong 2005, 698). In cities of East and South Asia, the neoliberal ethics of self-responsible citizenship is coupled with the duty to work towards the general improvement of society. Ong's comparative analysis is enlightening in showing how the locale-specific global assemblage produces locale-specific subjectivities:

While the tendency in England and the U.S. is to focus on the self-governing and technologically savvy citizen as an individual participant in civil society, in Asian

growth zones, the discourse of the knowledgeable and entrepreneurial citizen is tied to contributions to "civic society," or to solidarity as a national community (Ong 2005, 698).

Irrespective of context, Ong deems that it is the emerging neoliberal articulations that raise the professionalization and self-governing stakes of citizenship for the majority. As a consequence, the individuals and groups "who cannot scale the skills ladder or measure up to the norms of self-governing are increasingly marginalized as deviant or even risky subjects who threaten the newly normalized regime" (Ong 2005, 698). The zones for the politically excluded are conceptualized as spaces that are inhabited by "populations without rights—disenfranchised subjects, refugees, and migrants—in a variety of situations where they have little or no claims to protection, and for whom the most minimal claims of the right to survival are being posed for the first time" (Ong 2005, 698). Ong argues that the exclusion of these populations from "the environment of rights" is mediated through their socio-political invisibility, their location in "failed states," their racialized, alien, or "illegal" status once they have left behind their nation-states and are on the move (Ong 2005, 698). The power differentials between the categories of transnational subjects discussed by Ong are unquestionable. Her analysis illuminates my inquiry into the construction of gendered working subjectivities within transnational urban spaces as it specifically addresses the subjectification of "a vast female migrant population—working as maids, factory workers, or prostitutes" and their "slave-like working conditions" (Ong 2005, 699). Within the global assemblage operational in the subjectification of subproletarian women workers, a significant part is played by the NGOs attempting to improve their lives. If citizenship once again cannot provide access

to rights, NGOs invoke claims to "bio-welfare," a line of argumentation that emphasizes the symbiosis between migrant female workers and the wealthy households that employ them, as the latter depend on the former in their quest to maintain their lifestyle, and thus should be responsive to the workers' needs for healthy bodies and minds.

In her examination of the constitutive relations among neoliberalism, gender, sexuality and public culture in contemporary China, Lia Rofel points out that the subjectifying effects of neoliberalism "reach into the sinews of our bodies and the machinations of our hearts" (Rofel 2007,15). In the context of my research the question of subjectification is addressed through the examination of a variety of working subjects and subjectivities articulated by visual arts projects and circulated within the context cultural events, which render them part of neoliberal cultural production or in the terms of Giroux, the "cultural politics" of neoliberalism.

### **3.1. The pedagogical potential of art and visual representations**

Art and education are two cultural institutions that sit rather ambiguously in relation to the values of entrepreneurialism. While overtly sharing with entrepreneurialism the valorization of innovation, art and education do not align squarely with commercialism. Seemingly, they are both situated in a space of intellectual or aesthetic exploration separated by the rules and conventions of instrumentalism, private gain, and monetary interests. Various critical inquiries into the operating dynamics of the two have challenged this misconception. Art historian Julian Stallbrass stated that "the economy of art reflects the economy of finance capital," (2004, 4) meaning that art production, too, is subordinated to market demand and, furthermore, that the geography of the art market reflects that of the world's main financial centers. In his view, art

production has become the cultural project of global neoliberalism, an unending refrain celebrating "the demolition of barriers to trade, and the glorious cultural mixing that results" (Stallbrass 2004, 13). Around the same time, Henry Giroux and Susan Searls Giroux (2004) signaled the losses brought about by the neoliberal infiltration in the values of higher education. The aligning of the university with contemporary neoliberal and corporate values coincides with its abandoning of democratic values, and disinvestment from its goal of educating students as critical thinkers and engaged citizens.

For years, my research and teaching in the United States have revolved around the concepts of representation, culture, difference, gender, race, ethnicity, and decolonization in relation to processes of global production, consumption, and livelihood. When asked about their expectations of a course, many of my students eagerly espoused the marketability of "cultural difference knowledge" for future sites of employment. At the same time, new institutional discourses were emerging about the orientation of the university towards a more "global reach" via an instructional commitment to training the future leaders of the global economy, academia, politics, and cultural and artistic production. Central questions of my Ph.D. research were motivated by a search for feminist pedagogies that would enable my students—part of the next wave of professional global workers (or, in the terms of the entrepreneurial university, "the future leaders of the global economy") – to recognize that their understanding of "others" is contingent upon the implicit values and interests of the so-called "Western" world. Understanding the world in ways that are not informed by the vocabularies of old colonialism and contemporary neoliberal ideologies could revitalize democratic public

life, develop novel modes of transnational ethics, and open the imagination to what global democracy might entail. On the other hand, art can entice bodies into opening up to "strangeness" and encountering difference, substituting, preparing or supplementing an understanding from "mind to mind" among individuals coming from places that have little in common. Being entranced by surprise and then oriented not only towards the viewing of an art object but towards the contexts of different lives could produce new ways of talking about modernization, power, community, social change, globalization and capitalism.

### **3.2. A method for transnational communication through contemporary arts**

Today ancient questions concerning the transformative power of art take on new salience in relation to global political and economic change: Can visual arts articulate new spaces, visual vocabularies, and modes of encounter and thereby challenge the interests of nationalism, neoliberal development, and global corporations? What happens when visual art works travel transnationally? Can they enable us to cross the divide between "here" and "there," "us" and "them," the "inside" and the "outside" of our communities? If, so through what means? Which subjects produce these new geographies? How do artists make these geographies visible and how do art audiences encounter them? It is now widely accepted that the art world has transitioned towards an unprecedented transnational interconnectedness and integration.<sup>1</sup>

Noel Carroll (2007) points out that the transnational art world is discussed, most of the time, in relation to larger themes, such as globalization, neoliberalism, the development of information and communication technologies, the proliferation of art

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<sup>1</sup> These lines of argumentations were suggested by conversations with professor Harriet Davidson.

biennials as a strategy of urban marketing, development through international tourism and, possibly, the emergence of new modes of cosmopolitanism. He argues against a characterization of current art practices as "global" and calls for a careful consideration of the practices that seemingly constitute a context of intensified intercultural contact and growing cosmopolitanism. Carroll is skeptical about the inevitability of the global order, and alongside other critics of globalization, he tends to privilege a descriptive and analytical distinction between the concepts of "global" and "transnational". Whereas the term global would refer to "a cohesive [...] network playing the same tune in different registers," (Carroll 2007, 135) the term transnational would account for fragmented and varied, yet coeval, relations, which "do not add up to a cohesive global network" (Carroll 2007, 136). The ever multiplying sites of biennials; the unending crossing of national borders by art curators, gallery administrators, and art critics; the recently emerged yet clearly ascendant development of international art tourism: the interconnected worlds of contemporary art practice and global communications technologies have not converged into the production of radically new forms of cultural hybridization and cultural exchange. For this reason, the "global" institution of art is a misnomer for more complex and less unitary and homogenous phenomena (Carroll 2007, 135, 136). Carroll also rejects the characterization of the art world today by the term of "global" due to the false sense of completeness conveyed by the term; hence the invisibility around cities, nations and regions that seemingly are situated outside the global village (Carroll 2007). Localized cultural articulations and the particulars of their relations to Western practices of globalization; power relations among differently positioned groups within such spaces and their graduated access to what have become markers of Western capitalist globality

(i.e. consumer goods, education or mobility); and the graduated speeds at which their inhabitants can travel and cross borders are all elements that require visibility and discursive presence. Nevertheless, for the transnational subjects whose passports or identity cards take them across borders, whose jobs are lucrative enough to allow for international art tourism, what does art do? And what makes differently located artists, critics, curators, and audiences able to understand each other when they converge into this transnationally organized space? After a comprehensive examination of the field, Carroll concludes that all transnational participants share an understanding of the main discourses, formal devices, and themes at work. Thus, the shared discourses that recurrently frame contemporary artistic projects are postcolonialism, feminism, gay liberation, globalization and global inequality, the suppression of free expression and other human rights, identity politics, and the politics of representation, generic anti-establishment politics, institutional critiques of the systems of museums, biennales and the commodification of art (Carroll 2007, 140).

Second comes the knowledge of the formal devices, such as "radical juxtaposition, de-familiarization, de-contextualization of objects and images from their customary milieus, and [...] pastiche" (Carroll 2007, 140). These are shared by artists and audiences, and employed by both as strategies for "articulating content" and "sense-making" (Carroll 2007: 140). Finally, the themes engaged by artists today, which include the problems of urban centers and urban life, modernization, and capitalism, are themselves part of the shared vocabulary of today's art. To transnational publics, an art project is intelligible thanks to a preexistent knowledge of patterns of decoding in relation to critical arguments, matters of interest, and formal devices. The fact that the

contemporary publics of art events on the contemporary transnational scene attain and refine their capacity for intercultural understanding is not valueless. However, the somewhat rehearsed, didactic, and formulaic tones of these experiences run against the realization of a more radical gesture. If Carroll's model of transnational art expression and communication is given full explanatory power, the transformative potential of art practice is limited to mere exercises in the acquisition and practice of the vocabulary, grammar and syntax of the new lingua franca of the transnational art enterprise. My teaching with the visual or performance art of Trinh T. Minh-Ha, Coco Fusco, Guillermo Gómez-Penã and Ursula Biemann showed that students' lack of familiarity with the parameters of the semiotic, theoretical and formal features of contemporary art practices discussed by Carroll translate into moments of communicational incommensurability.

When deconstructive formal techniques interrupt their aesthetic-sensual engagement, students question the criteria that justify the classification of such cultural products as art. But the moment that creates the most difficult rupture is when no prior knowledge of the contemporary art lingua franca compels students to describe such critical artistic endeavors as cryptic and ultimately meaningless. It is important to stress that Carroll is aware of such limitations. He states that the "emerging transnational institution of art" (Carroll 2007, 141) does not effect in an utter fixity of themes and sense-making strategies or a loss of situated interests precisely because of the high investment in "difference, resistance, and critique" of their informing conceptual frameworks (Carroll 2007, 141). However, it remains to be asked: what makes for a more open and less rehearsed encounter with cultural difference? Is there something that

exceeds the language of the transnational institution of art? Could this excess lie with affects, emotions, and the materiality of space, time and life itself?

### **3.3. An affective perspective to encountering art**

The questions stated in the closing of the previous section call for the precursory question of why people create and want to see art. The response offered by feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz emphasizes an inherent "impulse to art" (Grosz 2005, 2008) that exists in human beings and all animal life. Having just stated that the institutional-semiotic model proposed by Carroll leaves unanswered important questions pertaining to contemporary transnational art encounters, I turn now to the ontological-material line of argumentation developed by Grosz, to bring to the fore the sensory and affective dimensions of art making and viewing. In *Chaos, Territory, Art* (2008) Grosz shifts discussion of art from the realm of institutions, signs, symbols and images to a register where art is force and form of creativity which produces and intensifies sensations and affects. We seek encounters with art and we experience such encounters as pleasurable because art viewing, too, mobilizes the body's affection and sensorium (2005). It is thus sensations and affects, or more precisely, their intensifications that circulate among art makers, artworks and art publics. In art making, artists call on their extraordinary capacities to extract from the world visual qualities that are not yet noticeable to most of us, and to render them visible for art publics (2005, 27).

This ontological perspective enables a valuation of the transformative potential of the arts through the perspective of what Deleuze and Guattari have previously termed as the actualization of material becomings. The intensification of our bodies' sensations and affects occurs under the impact of forces, elements, and particles of the universe, which

constitutes instances of exchange "with the other to become more than other" (Grosz 2005, 28). If sensations and affects "are surprising enough, of course they generate thought. [...] the best art has always had this conceptual impact, but its goal I don't think has ever been purely conceptual. Its goal has always been about explorations of the medium itself, the materiality of the thing itself " (Grosz 2005b, 2). Complementary, yet secondary, to material becoming, imaginative becomings emerge as fields of engagement with potential for the articulation of ethics and politics that do not rely on images and narratives that reinforce the boundaries of what is already known and represented. Grosz's emphasis on the primordially of sensations and affects could be misread for an inverted reinscription of the mind-body dualism of Cartesian thought. However, the relations that she establishes in her analysis of art, creativity, and "the inventiveness of life itself" (Ziarek 2012, 385), ultimately aims to articulate a model that is "as affectual as it is intellectual" (Zepke 2010, 549). Whereas Carroll's model poses explanatory limitations on the nature and mechanisms that account for a radical newness of artistic practice, Grosz's ontology brings into focus the materiality of the interactions between artists and publics with the matter of the world itself. The asphalt, the light through the basement window, the loud sound of the motorbike are not passive elements of the world, but agentive parties in our "doing" and "becoming." While the ways in which politics and contemporary art connect remains understated under these ontological presuppositions, and the ontological model proposed by Grosz cannot be effectively mobilized to illuminate a path that would reach to a mode of understanding the world beyond the homogenizing paradigm of the "global" and the logic of old and new colonialisms.

### **3.4. Art as navigator through coeval geohistories**

Ahmet Ögüt is one of the artists whose work I encountered in Berlin during my fieldwork. His artistic process troubles the distinction between the field of affects and sensations and that of critical concepts and ideas. His engagements with social theory and his responsiveness to the agency of the material world are transparent in his photography, installations, videos, performances, and books as well as in his published interviews and conversations with social theorists. While comparing art and sociology, Ögüt notices that the maker of art and the social theorist alike are sparked into action by "an experience, an observation, a curiosity" (Ögüt in Boynik 2008, 28). The paths taken after such initial encounters differ. The sociologist follows the path of data gathering and analysis to then narrow down to one theory. The standards of evidence and methodological rigors of the discipline void her work of risk and spontaneity. Experience itself loses its organic quality and becomes ossified by "a process that leads to a single result" (Ögüt in Boynik 2008, 28). On the other hand, the more immediate response of the art maker maintains the dynamism of experience as something that "constantly archives and renews itself" (Ögüt in Boynik 2008, 28).

According to Doreen Massey, inherent and central to the modern discourses of social sciences has been a rendering of spatial heterogeneity into a temporal sequence. For Massey, thinking of space poses simultaneously theoretical and political challenges (Anderson 2008, 227). The "mis-thinking" of space arises from an imagination of space as a given continuous surface. Interwoven with this formation are vocabularies of the discovery voyage and the politics of old and new colonialisms. From the sixteenth century onwards, spatial metaphors such as "crossing space" or "conquering space" naturalized an understanding of other places, people, and cultures as mere phenomena on

surface of earth. Immobilized, lacking their own trajectories, and awaiting the arrival of the Western subject (Massey 2005, 5, 120), they waited for the European traveler to discover them, and for centuries they have been allegedly awaiting the arrival of global capital to enable their development. Nowadays, the global space is imagined as a free-market economy and a neoliberal ethos. All the different socioeconomic and political arrangements are rendered as delayed arrivals or as the realities of foreign competitors trailing behind on the path of progress and development inscribed onto the geopolitical surface of the globe by capitalist Europe and North America. The elision of the possibility of thinking space in its multiplicity, performed by the mapping of heterogeneous spaces onto a linear continuum of time, also ensures that sociocultural difference is precluded. It is, thus, important for the graduate of the entrepreneurial university to comprehend the representational mechanisms that lead to the elision of difference and her own self-positioning as a representative of the "West," "North," or "First World," and the normalization of such geopolitical categories. Given that other places and their inhabitants are imagined as lagging behind on the trajectory of progress, yet following the same itinerary, they cannot be encountered in a way open enough to preclude falling back on stereotypes of equivalences with the subject at home. If such sameness becomes the core of contemporary cosmopolitanisms and the blueprint carried out by the graduates of the entrepreneurial university in their global enterprises, the imagining of distant and different worlds as coeval others having "their own trajectories, their own particular histories, and the potential for their own, perhaps different, future" is foreclosed (Massey 2005, 5).

As stated in the previous section, affects and emotions connect us to the world.

They form where there is interaction among subjects, and/or between subjects and objects. Sara Ahmed sees affects and emotions as connectors between the levels of the psychic and the social levels and mediators between the scales of the individual and the collective. They are defining elements of the ways "we inhabit the world with others" (Ahmed 2004b, 28). While Grosz separates sensations and affects from emotions on the grounds of their belonging among discursive, meaning-making responses to the world, Ahmed opts for a separation of sensation from affects and emotions due to the experiential essence of the former and the connection to perception and memory that define the latter two. Subjects as well as objects are not only parties that encounter one another; they are effects of encounter because the affective-emotional charge of such moments activates histories of past encounters (Ahmed 2004b, 40). To Ahmed, the affectivity of perception and memory does not equate with a privileging of meaning. To emphasize her departure from the Cartesian tenet of metaphysical subjectivism, which affirms mental activity as the sole indisputable fact of human experience. Ahmed explains:

Affective encounters, insofar as they open up histories of past encounters, do not make something out of nothing: subjects as well as objects 'accrue' characteristics over time [...] my argument [...] does not posit the subject's consciousness as that which makes the world. The subject both materializes as an effect of encounters and has, in some sense, *already materialized* given such histories (Ahmed 2004b: 40).

Ahmed takes the theorization of affects and emotions into the realm of political economy by placing Marx's concept of commodity fetishism in dialogue with that of the circulation

of emotion. This analysis takes the centrality of the circulation of commodities and money to the creation of value and surplus capital, and translates it into a discussion of the accumulation of affective value through circulation between objects, figures or signs. The latter only "appear to 'contain' affect" (Ahmed 2004a: 120) due to sticky associations and intensified circulation. Similarly to the way in which commodities erase the histories of labor written in the making of products and their exchange within capitalist economies, feelings and emotions appear to exist on their own by concealment of personal histories of "production and labors, and circulation and exchange" (2004a: 120-121).

To Ahmed, the sociality of the current global order materializes from encounters with the bodies of others, who are "both felt and read "like me" and "not like me." Moreover, the sociality and the spatiality of the global are co-constitutive. Proximity among global subjects translates in the formation of social relations and interactions; nevertheless, relations of identification with others, or relations of dependency on others do not require spatial as well as temporal nearness. Precisely because global proximity does not imply co-presence, image-making institutions, agents, and practices come to fill the absence that results from the incapacity of circulation of certain bodies, objects, and images. While contributing to the formation of the contemporary sense of global community, these processes of representation crystallize nevertheless the incapacity of mobility around certain bodies, whose agency and subjectivity are thus foreclosed, and who are transformed into mere objects of feelings which rehearse old stereotypical associations and make impossible their imagination as coevals (Ahmed 2004a: 139).

In his analysis of contemporary transnational art institutions, Carroll argues that their operations are predicated on a shared language as well as the mobility of the bodies

of certain artists, curators, audiences and the grounding of "local" places, histories, and people. I argue that Carroll's semiotic-institutional model needs to be weaved together not only with elements derived from Grosz's ontological explanation of art, but also with Ahmed's understanding of the role that affectivity and emotionality play in the forging of contemporary global socialities. As Ahmed points out, globality emerges "as a felt collective through the movement of some bodies, which is afforded by the fixing of others" (Ahmed 2004b: 38). The mobile subjects shape the experiences, meanings, and affective-emotional value of difference through their travels, encounters, and dialogues, while "fixed others" gain the status of objectified reality. As objects of representation and consumption they are rendered static by their entanglement in notions of remote locality, developmental backwardness and poverty, and, in Ahmed's view, at risk of being felt "not like us."

## **Conclusion**

These scholarly debates on the practices and discursive formations of neoliberal global capitalism, which have emerged in the fields of feminist theory, critical theory, anthropology, geography, political science and sociology, will further inform my inquiry into how neoliberal cultural production and capitalist multiculturalism produce commodified constructions of ethnic, racial, national, and sexual identities, as they vacate and refigure urban space for tourist consumption and financial corporate occupation. In this chapter, I surveyed conceptual frameworks developed within cultural, political and economic fields in order to demonstrate how the politics of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and national difference are used as essential building blocks in the articulation of neoliberal politics and policies. In the following chapters I will explore the creation of

knowledge and affects that contest neoliberal hegemony, by attending to specific visual arts projects encountered during my fieldwork. I argue that an engagement with representations of work carries the potential to challenge the naturalization and normativization of subjects who are defined as "self-governing individuals who exercise political choices as citizen consumers" (Bondi and Laurie 2005, 5). At the same time, such an engagement may also prove effective in destabilizing the current neoliberal vocabularies of policymaking, governance and social activism.

## Chapter 2

### **Methodological Considerations on Representational Analysis, Discourse Analysis and Non-representational Methods**

A method means a path: not the path that a thinker follows but the path that he/she constructs, that you have to construct to know where you are, to figure out the characteristics of the territory you are going through, the places it allows you to go, the way it obliges you to move, the markers that can help you, the obstacles that get in the way. Examining a method thus means examining how idealities are materially produced [...]. Ideas always are material realities, taking over bodies, giving them a map of the visible and orientations for moving (Ranciere 2009, 114).

In breaking the equivalence between "method" and a pre-established path that researchers follow in their inquiries, Ranciere's intervention aligns with the critiques formulated by feminist epistemologists who problematize the understanding of "method" as a universally applicable technique that moves the knower towards the truth about reality. On the other hand, Ranciere's metaphorical renderings of "method," in terms of movement across territories, invites a conceptualization of method as an account not only of the embodied, located, and historical condition of the researcher, but also of the radical interdisciplinary quality of any research question. The epigraph that opens this chapter describes research as a journey across national and disciplinary borders. The spatial metaphors of borders point simultaneously to national spaces, disciplinary fields, and communities of knowledge producers. The paths that I follow as my dissertation unfolds take me across such boundaries and allow me to dwell within such places. I start this chapter with general

considerations specifying the sites of my research and the particular visual arts projects that I situate at the center of this research. These projects nevertheless do not represent the only source materials that my dissertation incorporates, as they are read in relation to policy, governance, and social activism documents, sociological accounts of the conditions of life and work conditions in the cities I discuss, as well as my own on-site observations and encounters with these cities and their inhabitants. My decision to use a comparative transnational framework is discussed in relation to terminological debates central to the interdisciplinary field of Women's and Gender Studies, specifically the differences and power relations at work within the category of woman. The next section of the chapter turns to the three modalities of analysis I applied to the data I collected: representational analysis, discourse analysis and non-representational or affective approaches.

### **1.1. General considerations**

The three geographic sites of my research are the cities of Sibiu (Romania), Berlin (Germany), and Newark (NJ, USA). My relationship with each of these cities is different. Sibiu is my hometown in Romania; Berlin is an important global hub for the arts that I visited solely for the purpose of my research and Newark is the city where I lived during my graduate training at Rutgers University. Between 2007 and 2010, I spent time in each of these cities for the purpose of identifying art projects that engage with depictions of transnational urban spaces and the identities and experiences of working women and their families. While immersed in these distinct geographical sites, I investigated the visual and narrative vocabularies embedded in governing technologies, economic interests, and histories of transnational engagement.

While my encounters and interpretive engagement with visual art went beyond this final selection, my dissertation focuses on five art projects. For the site of Sibiu, I look at two documentary films screened during the Astra Documentary Film Festival in the context of the mega-scale cultural event 2007 Sibiu, European Capital of Culture: *STAM-We are Staying* directed by Anne Schiltz and Charlotte Grégoire (2007) and *Independence* directed by Rastko Petrović (2006). For the site of Berlin, I chose *The Polish Wife*, a web-art and installation project by Anna Krenz presented at Hack Fem East, an exhibition curated by Tatiana Bazzichelli and Gaia Novatti for the Bethanien Kreutzberg gallery and *Under the Red Umbrella* by Julia Ostertag (2008), a video manifesto/documentary film screened during the 2009 edition of the Berlin Porn Film Festival. Finally, for Newark, I turned to *Brick City*, a Sundance Channel five-episode documentary series directed by Mark Benjamin and Marc Levin and produced by Forest Whitaker. I treat these projects as "events," following Phillip Vannini. In the 2014 volume *Non-Representational Research Methodologies*, Vannini writes:

Events are happenings, unfoldings, regular occurrences inspired (but not over-determined) by states and irregular actions that shatter expectations. [...] Events, in sum, are examined because they inevitably highlight not instrumental plans, blue prints for action, and a priori scripts and conditions but rather the possibility of alternative futures, the failures of representations, the contingencies of interventions, and the effervescence with which things actually happen (Vannini 2014, 9).

While conducting onsite research I encountered dozens of visual art projects. The power of the event rendered palpable the relations between some of them and larger discourses

and practices shaping the contemporary transnational urban spaces. The theme of gendered work and the global city was thus materialized in each project I chose; while, based on the specific material and ideological conditions of each city, different configurations of gendered, racialized, classed and sexualized subjectivities took analytical center stage. In terms of genres and media, documentary film dominates my choice of visual art representations. Sibiu and Newark are looked at entirely through the lens of independent documentary films, while for Berlin, a documentary film is complemented with a web-art and installation project.

Writing about these projects pulled me into and across different knowledge production spaces and led me to the construction of a multi-faceted method with site-specific inflections. The so-called "markers" of art criticism pointed my inquiry towards gathering biographical and critical material about artists and their works. My writing is thus located within gender and cultural critical theories, while questions of "creative origins" and the attribution of meaning to an intentional and controlling producer are rendered secondary as I give priority to explorations of the relations that develop between representations and cultural, political, and economic strategies and contexts. Textual and visual discourse analyses constitute the methods that I resorted to in this exploratory quest. I consider the visual art projects and the contexts of my encounters with them as aesthetic/political instances that are also, at the same time, socio-political and sensory engagements. For this reason, in deciding my methodological approach and devising the methods of research and writing, I tried to remain alert to the "inseparability of affect and interpretation" (Liljestrom and Paasonen 2010, 2).

While I deliberately turned to terms such as "visual representation," "visual art,"

and "visual media" in order to emphasize and dwell upon the particularities of spaces of knowledge production such as painting, drawing, video, photography, television and film, I consider the exclusive reference to the "visual" as a reductive descriptor, which reasserts the division of the sensorium into separate modes, re-instates the predominance of the visual (Mitchell 2005, 257) and ultimately may seem to contain all encounters, meaning, and sensitivity at the level of the eye (Bruno 2008, 146-147). In this sense, all the visual art projects that I looked at for the writing of this dissertation were viewed close up. Finally, geographical inquiries into visual representations of urban space resulted in the formulation of concrete questions about the construction of particular visions of the three cities, the aesthetics/politics behind the choice of locations and of the working subjects that come to represent Newark, Berlin and Sibiu. My analysis also focuses on the spatial relations between places and workers and upon the visual and narrative techniques that set the contexts for visibility and prompt the viewer to engage in the urban atmosphere and with the lives of the characters (Da Costa 2003, 194-200).

## **2. 1. Women, as the subject of visual representation and feminist research**

The problematization of the category of "woman" as the subject of feminist research has been at the core of Women's and Gender Studies inquiries for almost three decades. In her groundbreaking *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction (Theories of Representation and Difference)*, Teresa de Lauretis (1987) insists on the differentiation between women as historically-specific individuals and the fictional construction of "Woman" as a category of many dominant Western cultural discourses (Chaudhuri 2006, 63). De Lauretis writes:

On the notion of sexual difference as an opposition of female to male, Woman to

Man, or women to men, an opposition along the axis of gender, earlier feminism built not only its understanding of power relations as a one-way relation of oppressor to victim, colonizer to colonized subject (one spoke of women as a colonized population, of the female body as mapped by phallic desire or territorialized by male discourse), but also its strategies of resistance and struggle, which were primarily in two directions. One was toward equal status: accepting the definition of woman as biologically, emotionally and socially complementary to man but demanding the same rights--without considering how "the rights of man" vary with the social relations of race and class that determine the existence of actual men (de Lauretis 1988).

De Lauretis builds upon the theoretical ground laid out by Simone de Beauvoir and Michel Foucault, arguing for the use of gender as a representational analytical category. This move enables feminists to work outside a binary gender paradigm that locks women in the subject positions of the oppressed, victimized, and marginalized. Her argument for the pluralization of the subjects of feminism emphasizes the "differences within women" and the need to recuperate women's agency through new conceptualizations of power, enabling feminists to pursue more nuanced accounts of women's subject formations through engagements with films and literary texts, but also with representations constituted through everyday interactions, social movements, political circumstances, and policy making.

By looking at the categories of the "3<sup>rd</sup> world women" and the "women of color," Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan add another layer to the discussions initiated by de Lauretis. Grewal and Kaplan point out that the figure of the Third World woman and the

woman of color stand in for racialized and sexualized difference within the category of women. Grounded in a universalist conceptualization of patriarchy and reductionist discourses of development and activism, these categories render insignificant the economic and social inequalities faced by women within the national contexts of the First World, erase transhistorical and cross-cultural variations in gender relations, and conceal the socio-historical realities and specificities of women from the Second and Third Worlds (Grewal and Kaplan 2001, 2006).

The terms "global woman" and "global women" have emerged to name a more recently identified category (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2004). Nevertheless, my argument problematizes the association of the term "global" with ideas of "common difference." The idea of a "common difference" between the women of the global North and the women of the Second and 3<sup>rd</sup> Third Worlds constitutes a representational gesture that further reifies the category of "women." In this process women across the heterogeneous and multi-faceted First, Second, and Third Worlds and thus, within the many cultures and societies that compose these geopolitical spaces, are shown to have diverse needs and agendas. Grewal and Kaplan write that "relations between women become just as complicated as those between societies or between nations" (2000). The multi-sited research methodology of this project make it possible for me, first of all, to explore emerging representations of cities and women workers, whose lives, families, intimacies, and labors are no longer contained within spaces delineated by the national boundaries of the Cold War era.

Second, the engagement with visual representations in the context of a multi-sited research agenda gave me the opportunity to acknowledge the plurality of women's

experiences across lines of geopolitical division and, more importantly, demonstrated how the category of gender itself changes in a world with changing boundaries. For instance, the documentary films that I selected for the site of Sibiu (Romania) show how the possibility or impossibility of transnational labor migration is predicated on one's ethnic identity and its signification in the national context of Romania and the larger transnational context of the European Union (EU). In the case of Berlin (Germany), through a juxtaposed reading of a web art project and the video manifesto of sex worker, I show that even after transnational work migration has been actualized, arriving in Berlin (Germany) as a worker from the East (as opposed to arriving from the West) radically affects one's experience of work, potential for success or vulnerability to life-threatening failures. Finally, by focusing on the documentary rendering of a social action program for young girls in the city of Newark, I show how notions of gender and race are remade in the context of a postindustrial city in the United States, where the notion of gendered mobility prompts associations with urban safety, educational attainment, and career advancement.

While the structural inequalities of the neoliberal global economies create comparable inequality across geopolitical divisions, such as the global North versus the global South, the West versus the East, or the First World versus the Second and Third Worlds, another goal of my research is to attend to the specificities of historical, political and socio-cultural circumstances (Grewal and Kaplan, 2006 70) that enable the production of the representational texts selected for this research project. Thus, in relation to the term "women," I am concerned with how this particular category comes to operate in specific, localized instances, and in relation to class, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and citizenship as

well as at the intersection of colonialism, neocolonialism, development, modernization, state-run communism, and neoliberal capitalism.

## **2.2. From multi-sited comparative research to a transnational approach**

A multi-sited comparative methodology is thus sensitive to the diversity between and within countries, communities, organizations, and communities of knowledge producers.

The first limitation of this methodological framework is posed by its potential reproduction of modernist assumptions, which construct impenetrable boundaries between " 'areas' presupposed by the comparative framework" (Grewal and Kaplan 2006, 70). The second limitation of comparative methodologies is posed by the internal homogeneity that it might suggest within the designated spaces or units of comparison. Uma Narayan describes this tendency as "package pictures" of national and cultural contexts (Narayan 2000). Such tendencies tend to construct essentializing renderings of "culture," which make invisible historical changes, internal variations, and external commonalities. Third, since comparative methodologies emerged and developed within disciplinary boundaries, they still rely on unquestioned notions of nationhood, statehood, rationality, and colonialist episteme (Grewal and Kaplan, 75).

In order to circumvent these limitations, labor historians have proposed a transnational comparative approach (Fink 2011, Hanagan and Linden 2004, Seigel 2005). A transnational comparative methodology further transforms the categories operative within comparative approaches so that they are responsive to epistemological critiques developed in the interdisciplinary fields of feminist, postcolonial, and cultural studies. By foregrounding the transnational city as the primary scale of its analysis, this project attempts to challenge the "methodological nationalism" (Wimmer and Schiller 2002) that

sits at the core of cross-national comparative analyses. Alongside labor historians, I argue that a transnational methodological approach is necessary in order to show that nation-states are no longer the only agents who enable or disable the working opportunities and movements of people. Second, a transnational methodology places a clearer emphasis on how the arrival of representational texts and moving bodies at a particular site changes social, political, affective, and cognitive landscapes. Third, a transnational lens allows for the identification of site specificities, by highlighting how the representational practices are connected to histories of colonialism, racialized formations, and current economic needs.

### **2.3. Feminist transnational perspectives on representations of working women in the age of global capitalism**

For the past decade, feminist scholars from around the globe have argued that transnational and interdisciplinary approaches are better vehicles of knowledge production around, and methodological and mobilization responses to "[t]he changing nature of migrations and global flows of media and capital" (Grewal and Kaplan 71-72). As anticipated by Ong's analysis, the scale of the transnational does not materialize outside regimes of power. Grewal and Kaplan write: "Transnational conditions signal dissimilar circuits of culture and capital, and it is these circuits that link patriarchies, colonialisms, cosmopolitanisms, racism, and feminism" (2002, 74)

At the heart of the conceptual and methodological reformulations put forward by feminist transnational scholarship lies the notion of "linkage." First, the concept of linkage allows for the understanding of the trans-border mobility of people and ideas in ways that do not suggest a resulting homogenized field, but rather emphasize moments of

interconnectedness as well as instances of divergence among people who encounter each other or live in similar circumstances. Second, as a substitute for comparative methodologies, the notion of linkage problematizes the construction of neatly delineated boundaries that separate nations and cultures; and further, it troubles representational registers that map the world onto the binary model of center-periphery. Third, the analytical category of transnational linkage marks a departure from the internationalist episteme that conceives of nation-states as "discrete and sovereign entities" (Grewal and Kaplan 2006, 76) and does not address sufficiently modern constructs, such as national identity and belonging.

What are the implications of these reorientations for feminist knowledge production? Grewal writes:

Thus the question of cosmopolitan knowledges, feminist and progressive, is one that is important in the transnational making of knowledge producers (including academicians and activists or those who combine the two realms of work), who cannot escape neoliberal conditions of possibility but can, as changing, contingent subjects not be incapacitated by this neoliberalism (Grewal 2005, 4).

Thus, while searching for instances of resistance to neoliberal ideology, I remained alert to the fact that, like myself, documentary film makers, artists, and cultural workers are also: propelled across and repelled from political, disciplinary, theoretical, institutional, or methodological boundaries, and are in turn shaped by these movements in accordance with circuits of power that critical transnationality theories work to acknowledge and understand (Kapusta-Pofahl 2008).

A critical feminist transnationality perspective applied to the study of the representations

of women workers and contemporary cities draws attention to modes in which "dissimilar" circuits of culture, labor, information, and capital are linked with historically localized patriarchies, colonialisms, neocolonialism, cosmopolitanism, development, racism, and feminisms. Second, the visual art projects that I situate at the center of this dissertation are read side-by-side with textual materials produced by urban governance agents, transnational development agencies, and community groups, as well as through academic discourses from the fields of feminist and critical race theory, critical geography, and sociology. Third, by engaging with images, knowledges, and affects produced about women and their urban environments in diverse parts of the world, my inquiry aims to highlight how "women workers" become gendered, classed, and racialized laboring subjects involved in complicated relationships between nations and regions of the world (Grewal and Kaplan 2006, 79). My methodological transnational lens is intended to capture the inequality and exploitation effects inherent in global circuits of information, capital, and labor. In the case of Berlin (Germany), Anna Krenz's *Polish Wife* and Julie Ostertag's *Under the Red Umbrella* are two projects that engage with the affective, geopolitical, and economic forces that create the conditions of transnational sexualized labor in the New Europe. Viewed side by side, the two projects present two stories of women from different parts of the world, a young former social worker from the U.S., who works in Berlin's sex industry and a mathematics professor from Poland who falls in love with a man from the former East Berlin and works as a cleaner in Berlin. These instances, while drawing upon the uneven locales of the two women and their unequal relations to changing global economic and political structures, thematize the limits and potentialities of the discursive formations of sex-workers, trafficked women, and

undocumented workers. Last, but not least, Krenz's *Polish Wife*, Rastko Petrovic's documentary film, *Independence*, and Mark Benjamin and Marc Levin's *Brick City* foreground representations of women who are also mothers. The portraits of Jadwiga (*Polish Wife*), Razvan's mother (representing the invisible figure of the transnational labor migrant woman in *Independence*), and Jayda (*Brick City*) compose a multifaceted representational milieu, where one could contemplate the plurality of narratives that produce women's diverse localities, as well as new work/social/care formations such as transnational motherhood and transnational families. Finally, from the viewpoint of critical representational analysis, but also from the perspective of an interdisciplinary feminist pedagogy, my methodological framework is attuned not only to recognizing representational instances that trouble the totalizing character of categories by rendering plural the experiences of women workers across space, but also by making explicit the material-discursive processes accounting for shifts in gender, racial, ethnic, class, national boundaries. The visual art projects that I will discuss in the subsequent chapters are themselves instances of material-discursive participations in the production, contestation, and expression of such categorical boundaries.

#### **2.4. The notion of boundary: further methodological implications**

As anticipated in the previous section, the notion of linkage can be used as an analytical tool alongside that of boundary. To recapitulate, the notion of linkage can challenge the static demarcations that have been drawn between identities, nations, and even genders and that are inherent to comparative frameworks. Second, at the level of representational analysis, linkage analysis can foster an understanding of "the connections among nations, patriarchies, colonialisms, racisms and feminisms but also . . . [to] destabilize the forms of

hegemony that underwrite the production of knowledge in the modern period " (Grewal and Kaplan 2002, 73-76).

In *Unthinking Ethnocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam argue for a "relational methodology." Such a methodological approach would require the researcher to position herself and her subject as objects of study "at once within, between, and beyond the nation-state framework." A relational methodology also enables the excavations of categories for meanings that are not necessarily visible on the surface.

Meanwhile, Marxist scholars working in the field of new political ecology turn their attention to the material elements of the city. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson write that cities "are not separate, hard, literally 'concrete' but also relational, in process and alive" (2010, 7). Expanding the scope of the linkage or of the relational paradigm in order to include the materialities of contemporary urban contexts invites the reconsideration of terms such as "material" and "cultural" themselves. As pointed out by feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz, network sociologist Bruno Latour (2005), and urban geographers Alan Latham and Derek McCormack (2004), the material world is neither inert nor external to culture. While arguing for the rematerialization of the study of cities, urban scholars still maintain in their analytical focus some classical Marxist concerns such as the analytics and politics of class and the processes and effects of capitalist commodification. Such reappraisals of materiality and, implicitly, of historical materialism, nevertheless enhance our understanding of cities. By recognizing the material effects, and thus the agency that the "material base" has in the world's transformation, culture and matter can be seen as part of processual assemblages of relations, effects, matters, and affects which, according

to Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson, are most potently articulated "in processes we call cities" (2010, 10).

Thus, this chapter makes a case for a methodology that challenges the notion of boundary in the operations of geopolitical and national separation, the marking of disciplinary fields and the work of differentiating the world into binary categories. The visual art projects I analyzed in this dissertation challenge, cross, resist, and in certain instances, reassert or recreate all of these boundaries. Academic knowledge production and visual arts converge in that they project epistemic imaginations, extract knowledge, and perform representational work.

For the field of feminist knowledge production, with a view to its inherent boundary-crossing, Lorraine Code proposes the term "ecological thinking"—a modality of thinking that allows for "[s]tretching the limits of imagination" while being "respectful of boundaries, yet committed to boundaries-crossing in the interests of understanding the links, acknowledging ruptures, translating responsibly across local differences to preserve and extend meanings at the same time" (1998, 80). Thus, in reading, viewing, and writing about these projected epistemic re-imaginings of gender, race, sexuality, and class, I also sought to foster an openness, respect, and reflexivity that would break away from the cementation of these categories into what Sneja Gunew has deemed "increasingly universalized and un-nuanced" categories of analysis (2004, 64).

### **3.1. Representational analysis: the case of documentary film**

This dissertation sets out to analyze images and stories about women workers and in transnational spaces. Building upon Stuart Hall's conceptualization of meaning making, Lisa Cartwright and Marita Sturken state that meaning is created within contextually

embedded relations among "producers, viewers, images and texts. This relational formation of meaning imposes limits to the interpretive agency of any member of these groups" (2001, 56). Terry Threadgold (1990) pointed out that, most of the time, representations make differential claims to factuality. If representation as a process is considered "as reference, referring to something else, something 'real', outside significations, something which is not *made* but *is*," working with representations runs the risk of taking them for granted as realities (1990, 2).

In his pioneering text, "Encoding, Decoding," Hall identifies three modes of reader/viewer participation in the process of meaning making. The readers, viewers, or audiences may align with the "preferred reading" (1980, 136) and thus unquestioningly receive the dominant meaning of a text or image as encoded by their producers. At the opposite end of the response spectrum, Hall places decoders who reject, disagree or ignore the dominant registers of meaning making. According to Hall, they operate under "an oppositional code" (1980, 137) and their reading and viewing subverts and works against dominant meanings. In relation to dominant readings and oppositional readings, Hall formulates a third possibility, consisting of:

a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules—it operates with exceptions to the rule (Hall, 1980: 137).

Cartwright and Sturken explain that this is a process of interpretation that preserves dominant meanings attached to the image, text or artifact under consideration, but it also brings into play "our own memories, knowledge, and cultural experiences," allowing for a

conceptualization of "cultural interpretation as a struggle in which the viewers/ readers are not passive recipients of meaning" (Cartwright and Sturken 2001, 56-57). Lila Abu-Lughod's media ethnographies and Ien Ang's research on audience response studies are examples that illustrate these arguments.

Inquiries into meaning and meaning making cannot be dealt with comprehensively within paradigms of realism and intentionality. Evaluations of good fits between intended and decoded meanings, as well as appraisals of representational accuracy or distortions, make for limited critical engagement. Representations are ultimately the meanings that human beings give to them based on their experiences in the world and this makes representations reflective and constitutive of plural social realities. For this reason, representations do not emerge through passive reflection, but they are the result of active, creative and interpretative engagements with the world.

Hall's examination of representational practices takes the analysis of cultural texts, artifacts, and practices beyond the limits of textual analysis by connecting it to larger structures of power. Informed by a Marxian conceptualization of power and subjectivity, the central questions of inquiry in the eyes of Hall and the cultural theorists of the Birmingham School are: "*Who* has the power, in *what* channels, to circulate *which* meanings to *whom*?" (Jhally 1997). Hall's approach to representations creates analytical considerations that account simultaneously for questions of structural over-determination and human agency. At the same time, it places a strong emphasis on the power differentials that exist among the individuals and groups who share, make, circulate, and otherwise engage with meaning making.<sup>2</sup> The value of attending to the power relations

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<sup>2</sup> As previously stated, the space of cultural production and the space contained by shared conceptual maps have been radically expanded beyond the limits of the nation-state. New media

that structure fields of meaning production and circulation is undeniable, as it enables an understanding of the mechanisms that account for the subordination of some texts and images in relation to other texts and images which are front staged based on the interests of capital. The analytical framework proposed by Hall enabled me to ask: What new subjectivities of working women are circulated through the circuits of global cultural events? How do normative constructions of femininity and masculinity factor into these articulations? Are the working subjects represented in isolation or in collective structures mobilizing for labor justice? How do differences among the three geopolitical locations further complicate these questions? How does gender interact with other constructions of difference and what are the latter's localized inflections? Ultimately, Hall's approach allows us to understand whether particular constructions of difference are mobilized in the service of exploitation, towards the consumption of cultural and economic difference, or towards progressive social justice goals (Nagy Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007, 89).

### **3.2. From a genealogical approach to discourse analysis**

The method of representational analysis outlined by Hall does not account for the genealogies that sustain the categories, ideas, beliefs, and emotions of the present day. A genealogical account may converge with an analysis of "the interests that inform the narrative" and a questioning of the "values that sustain the discursive formation" (Hawkesworth 2006, 70). Most importantly, genealogical inquiries provide strong evidence for the claim that "what is taken for granted— objects, ideas, values, events, and institutions—have been constituted contingently, discursively, practically" (Hawkesworth 2006, 70). Notions of truth, realism and facticity, when deployed in relation to

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and communication technologies, as well as the restructuration of labor emerging with the so-called new global economy, are two of the factors that account for this transformation.

representations of cities, nations, citizens, etc., are in fact closely connected with "strategies of civil governance" (Cohen 2002, 317).

The official narratives of the cultural events that represent the context or circulation for the specific projects that I write about here stand, at times, in stark contradiction with scholarly works and social activist accounts articulated around the same entities: the post-industrial city, livelihoods, urban development, work, and social change. However, their portrayals of workers, jobs, work opportunities and workspaces, and for that matter of lack of work, do not necessarily unfold towards a critique of neoliberal global capitalism. First of all, the power of spectacle hijacks these images and, through the logic of the spectacle, renders them consumable and profitable, yet not necessarily political (Debord [1967] 1995). Such operations of depoliticization are most visible in Marc Levine and Mark Benjamin's documentary film, *Brick City* (2009), Julia Ostertag's *Under the Red Umbrella* (2008), and Charlotte Gregoire and Anne Schiltz's *STĀM- We Are Staying* (2006). At the same time, the circulation of the other two visual projects through circuits of touristic consumption<sup>3</sup> means that they too were incorporated into the operations of development through tourism, and thus were potentially co-optable into the operations of the spectacularization of difference for purposes of touristic consumption.

Second, as urban theorist Philip Cohen pointed out in his analysis of contemporary discourses of race and class (2002), within such spaces of circulation, strategies of making spectacularly visible those deemed deviant intersect with strategies of making invisible those who are disadvantaged: "the power of making a spectacle out of those who are

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<sup>3</sup> The 2007 Sibiu European Capital of Culture, the feminist new media show 2009 Hack.Fem.East, and the 2009 Berlin Porn Film Festival.

visibly different has increasingly been complemented and even supplanted by the power to render invisible those whose faces do not fit the positive image being created for the promotion of the greater civic good" (Cohen 2002, 317). Similarly, Foucault's notion of discourse demands that we question the power relations at work within and outside practices of representation in ways that enhance the explanatory force of theories of gaze and audience studies. Discourses provide the perimeters and parameters for understanding, speaking about, and representing the world within a particular cultural context at a specific historical moment. The limits of discourse are the limits of what can be known, imagined, and said about things its subject. Discourses of development, gender and sexuality, morality, criminality, sexuality, race and ethnicity, or multiculturalism represent broad social domains that combine multiple texts and practices, vary across times and socio-cultural locations, and define how particular categories are understood and performed (Cartwright and Sturken 2001, 93-94). It has been repeatedly pointed out that all discourses are *occasioned* (Gill 1996, 142, Richardson 1996, 155 and Rose 2005, 158). This means that there are no trans-historical, trans-contextual or universal accounts about things (Richardson 1996, 155). What the contemporary city *is* and who is the worker of the global economy are not questions that can be answered by universal statements or by statements with claims to representativeness. The insights provided by discourse analysis show that such qualities are themselves produced within the context of the research. By acknowledging that "All discourse takes place in specific social circumstances" (Rose 2005, 158), I align my research with questions about how the new accounts that respond to these questions are constructed. The changes that the global economy has brought about in the structures of the contemporary city and the lives of

contemporary urban dwellers instigate the emergence of discourses that would inscribe bodies into the subjectivities of the new era. I argue that these discourses are *occasioned* by the events of the year 1989, which marks the dismantling of the state-planned economies of Eastern Europe and the USSR and thus, the entry into an age of truly global capitalism, if ever there was going to be one. What does the city become in response to this political and economic transformation? And what discourses work to legitimate the current gendered and racialized transnational divisions of labor, the feminization and racialization of transnational care and reproductive labor, and the restructuring of employment from full-time, decent- paying stable jobs into de-unionized, part-time or temporary jobs (Klein 2009, 475)?

The statement that all discourse is "occasioned" also means that all discourses unfold in specific social circumstances. The site specificity of discourse is closely tied to my commitment to interdisciplinary, comparative research. However, it is not only the geopolitical location and the material relations of Sibiu, Berlin and Newark that matter, but also the institutional locations from where the visual art projects I discuss here pronounce and project their stories and images (Rose 2005, 158). For the purposes of my research, attending to the institutional location of statements led to several considerations. All these projects circulated in spaces of transnational encounter, consumption, or investment, thus it is also institutional location that directs the analysis toward questioning the mechanisms that construct the text's claims to authority, objectivity and truth. In line with this, my analysis highlights the formal, rhetorical, and citational elements in the structure of these artworks. Media forms such as the documentary film, the website, and the blog often carry a high "truth" value. As Gillian Rose notes, "[t]he second way in

which the social context of discourse production matters is in terms of the audience assumed by images and texts" (2005, 159). Documentary films use interviews and "real life" footage to enable the narrative mode of realism. By using a combination of personal narratives and photographs, blogs too convey a sense of unmediated experience, authenticity, and realism. The renderings of these forms are generally seen as minimally distorted and thus closer to the realistic depiction of people, experiences, and situations.

For the past four decades, feminist scholars have engaged critically with standards of knowing that exclude knowledge produced in marginalized locations or articulated at the micro-scale of everyday life. Thus, my research shows that the interrogations of epistemological hegemony also need to engage with the appeal of knowledge derived from testimonials, first-hand narratives, and documentary images within certain contexts of knowledge production and contexts of transnational consumption.

### **3.3. An analysis of silences, invisibilities, and hypervisibilities**

It is at specific times and in specific places that discourse formations around particular issues evade logic, coherence, and comprehensiveness. Such moments are important to look at, as they open up a perspective on the power struggles among various possible arguments and interpretive possibilities (Potter 1996 in Rose 2005, 156). An engagement with the cultural milieu should follow not only what is enunciated, enunciable, named and namable, seen and visible — but also to silences and invisibilities. Foucault writes:

Silence is not absence of discourse. It is a space of different articulation. Silence itself—the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers— is less than the absolute limit of discourse,

the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies. There is no binary division between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses (Foucault [1978] 1999, 518).

Discursive absences and invisibilities are telling in the context of my examination of gender, ethnicity, class, and race formations, as well as for my critique of binary categorizations such as developed/developing, urban/rural, public/private and productive/reproductive. I consider the field of visual arts to be one of the knowledge production fields participating in the articulation of the aforementioned categories of discursive practice alongside academia, policy making, social activism, and politics. My methodological commitment to discourse analysis led to the enlargement of the pool of my sources. As previously stated, the call to examine the institutional contexts of production and circulation of the five visual art projects included in my research oriented me towards sociological literature and institutional documents engaging with Sibiu, Berlin, and Newark, as well as towards monitoring the print and online media, in search of the responses of audiences and critics.

Some of the projects I write about point to spaces of silence and invisibility within the discourses of policy, politics, and governance; these join in perpetuating these silences and invisibilities. Immigrant rights activism, progressive policy making and feminist

sociological research on transnational circuits of care have addressed the experiences of female migrant workers in the receiving countries of the global economy in an effort to document emerging transnational class divisions, degrading work conditions, and restructured modes of femininity and masculinity (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, Poo 2009). The directing of the analytical gaze to the receiving end of the economic assemblage leaves the circumstances and the subjects who stay at home outside the cone of visibility. Petrovic's *Independence* (2007), renders visible the realities of a transnational family as they unfold within the space of the sending country. While the mother is "at work" in Italy, the film carefully documents small details from the lives of her eleven-year old son, Razvan, his sister, father, and aunt over the course of several days. Petrovic's intervention exposes the geopolitical power relations behind the deceiving, "mythical" constructions of neoliberal ideology such as "job flight," "unrestricted mobility within the European space," "development through tourism," and "neoliberal policies as alleviators of poverty."

The transnational comparative framework of my research demonstrates that, particularly within circuits of consumption of cultural difference, visibility is not necessarily an attribute of emancipatory politics (Collins 2005, Hammonds 1999). Hypervisibility and invisibility actually operate in conjunction, as mechanisms of racialization and marginalization. The operations of hypervisibility are best illustrated in the construction of the racialized "black city" of the documentary film *Brick City*. Closely following news media constructions of Newark, *Brick City* highlights the rising incidence of youth and gang violence in spectacular terms, intensifying the general anxieties about the "inner city" of postindustrial times through explanations foregrounding "the 'breakdown of the family'; lone mothers, absent fathers, lack of parental discipline and a

loss of respect for family and community" (Jarvis et. al 2009, 16). Once again, what is left out in this portrayal of Newark-- and needs to be brought into the account--is, for instance, the city's thriving black middle class, the flourishing and vibrant ethnic Portuguese residential and business communities of the Ironbound neighborhood (Li in Jarvis et al, 2009, 36) or the city's relational assets of knowledge production that were present in the academic spaces of Rutgers University and the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ) during the first decade of the new millennium.

### **3.4. The researching "I" within the context of feminist research and affective viewing**

Reflexivity is the paradigm that both feminist theorists and critical theorists mobilize in their attempts to provide critical reflections on their research practice problems (Rose 2005, 160). Foucault's theoretical insights alert researchers to two components. The first is: that by producing research one participates in the same operations of discourse formation that one engages with critically. In an effort to reclaim a non-universalist form of objectivity, feminist standpoint theorists elaborated new standards of evidence that include, make visible, and ultimately account for the presence of the researcher (Harding 2004, Hekman, 2004, hooks 1990 and 2004, Longino 1999, Narayan 2004 and Smith 1999). For instance, Sandra Harding's engagement with claims to objectivity and value neutrality led her to the formulation of the methodological concept of *stronger objectivity*. Through this concept, Harding operates a double intervention: not only does she stress the need for the incorporation of the voices of marginalized others within the knowledge production space, but furthermore, in a gesture of refutation of value neutrality, she states that the voices of marginalized others should serve as the starting point for building knowledge (Harding in Hirsch and Olson 1995,

Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007, 8). Self-positioning, autobiographical writing and the general upholding of oppositional political and knowledge-producing subjectivities such as the proletariat, women, or the oppressed are rejected within Foucauldian methodological paradigms, for they are seen to recreate and sustain the discourses of power (Alcoff 1988 and Rose 2005). Despite the paradigmatic discontinuity between discourse analysis and affective theories, I will use the call for "reading with great care for detail" in discourse analysis as a point of comparison and transition into the third section of this chapter, namely the evaluation of methodologies that mobilize notions of affect and embodiment.

### **3.5. Close reading and close viewing with affect**

In a 2010 edited volume titled *Working with Affect in Feminist Readings: Disturbing Differences (Transformations)*, Marianne Liljestrom's and Susanna Paasonen set out to explore the inseparability of affect and interpretation. The "feminist readings" gathered in the volume avoided formulating a paradigm of "materiality, affect and embodiment in opposition to textual analysis" and placed a strong emphasis on "their interrelations as intimate co-dependence" (Liljestrom and Paasonen 2010, 2). *Working with Affects in Feminist Readings: Disturbing Differences (Transformations)* informed my research and writing process as my dissertation deals with affect within a plurality of conceptualizations and methodological deployments. Like discourse analysis, affective reading too adduces close looking, reading, and viewing. What does closeness mean in this new analytical context?

It has been argued that the designation of film, photography, television, painting, graphics, and web design as visual media is a misnomer. W.J.T Mitchell (2005, 257) and

Giuliana Bruno (2008) point out that what we usually designate as "the visual" always involves other senses. Mitchell urges the recognition of the sensorial plurality within the visual modality. Bruno takes this a step further and points out not only the indivisibility of the sensorium but also its embeddedness within and continuity with the material world. Bruno's analytical gesture foregrounds the continuity of visual arts with the spatial art of installation and architecture. Recently formulated in the field of visual culture, such critiques are genealogically in line with the work of the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose concept of flesh expresses the self-enfolding, inseparable and living quality of the subject-object relation. By establishing the possibility of pre-discursive experience, Merleau-Ponty imagines an ontological position that makes the living subject continuous with the material world and inherently open to it (Grosz 2001). Susana Paasonen defines close looking as a methodology that acknowledges the power and materiality of images and recasts the practices of looking and reading in terms of an encounter between bodies, "be these bodies human or animal, bodies of objects or thought" (2010, 69). David MacDougall deems that looking is "more deliberate than seeing and yet more unguarded than thinking" (MacDougall 2007, 7). The closeness of the mode of looking described by Paasonen reaches beyond the careful attention to detail that the practitioners of visual discourse analysis espouse. In this case, closeness stands in for both embodied-ness and embedded-ness. Such modes of close looking and reading have been developed conceptually and practiced methodologically within a field that has come to be described by the term "affect theory." Encounters between bodies entail affect. At the same time, affect connects bodies, intensifies their sensations and leads them on paths to knowledge. Isobel Armstrong argues that affects are inseparable from interpretations.

Working with affect means acknowledging instances of being impressed or overwhelmed by the images, in Paasonen terms: "their power to resist attempts at readerly or visual mastery, the ways in which images move and resonate with the bodies of those facing them, as well as how these movements figure in the interpretations and theorizations made" (Paasonen 2010, 69-70).

Affects become a significant methodological tool because they are forces that run alongside signification (Massumi 1996), that throw signification off balance and move individuals into becoming other than what they are (Bruno 2000). For the cultural theorist, attending to affects is important because they exceed linguistic limits, which render discourse analysis insufficient. Affects are deemed to enable a better understanding of the world, but, most importantly, they are seen to hold the potential towards restructuring social meaning (Hemmings 2005, Massumi 2002 and Sedgwick 2003).

Among affects, some are seen as more capable of challenging the hegemonic meanings and dominant social orders than others. Jason Dittmer identifies three affective modalities that preoccupy scholars in geopolitical and critical security studies: contagion (it relies on environmental cues and circulates among people), amplification (intensification and prolonged duration of experiences through exposure to media and popular culture) and resonance (the synchronization and resultant intensification of multiple affects) (2010, 94). David Halperin (2002) and Elspeth Probyn (2000) explored the enabling forces of empathy (the operations of empathy are looked at in detail in the third chapter of this dissertation through an analysis of Ratcko Petrovic's employment of close-ups in the documentary film *Independence*).

Affect has also thus emerged as a methodological turn in the fields of human

geography, geopolitical research, and critical security studies. Non-representationality emerged as a mosaic of theoretical and methodological concerns primarily located in the fields of human and cultural geography, yet connected to wider genealogies traceable in the fine and performing arts, cultural studies, the humanities, and the social sciences, the sociology and anthropology of the senses, bodies and emotions, science and technology studies, contemporary continental philosophy, political ecology, ecological anthropology, and biological philosophy (Vannini 2014, 3). Hayden Lorimer describes non-representational theory as "an umbrella term for diverse work that seeks to better cope with our self-evidently more-than-human, more-than-textual, multisensual worlds." (2005, p. 83) For geographer Nigel Thrift, the non-representational project, rather than orienting its inquiries toward representation and meaning, is concerned with rendering "practices, mundane everyday practices that shape the conduct of human beings towards others and themselves in particular sites" (Thrift 1997, 142, Patchett 2010).

Non-representational theory focuses on registers of practice that exceed representation, thus foregrounding the nonhuman, the "more-than-human," and the material world—all the elements within which the social is emplaced (Patchett 2010, Valentine 1999, Thrift 1997). While the sources, aims, and parameters are increasingly difficult to trace with precision, it is important to acknowledge that all these research efforts move toward the articulation of a "more democratic relationship between conceptual and empirical work" (Patchett 2010, 2). Such reformulations of the tenets of cultural geography lead to a more pronounced emphasis on the agentic capacities of the material (Amin and Thrift 2002, Anderson 2004, Patchett 2010). The need for a turn away from the cultural (hence meaning and the representational) towards practice and the

material is arguably necessary in order to address the "fixed," "repetitive," and "dead" character of representation:

Ordinarily, representation is bound to a specific form of repetition: the repetition of the same. Through representation, what has already been given will come to have been given again. Such is its fidelity: to give again, and again, what has already been given, without deviation or departure. Such is its fidelity to an original that is fated to return through a profusion of dutiful copies; an original whose identity is secured and re-secured through a perpetual return of the same and whose identity is threatened by the inherent capacity of the copy to be a deviant or degraded repetition, a repetition that may introduce an illicit differentiation in the place ostensibly reserved for an identification (Doel in Vannini 2014, 7).

It has to be emphasized that such critiques of representation are valid mostly in relation to positivist paradigms and practices of knowledge production. The feminist critique of positivism, together with the methodological critiques occasioned by the poststructural turn and cultural turn in the social sciences, have already addressed the epistemological claims for mimetic representability, realism, and truth by persuasively thematizing aspects of power, agency, subjectivity and reflexivity. However, the opening of the methodological toolkit of geography, and of all social sciences for that matter, towards the materiality of the body and the material, more generally, constitutes an interesting path to pursue.

There is a general awareness that non-representational research entails an orientation toward the experimental through "questions of style, form, technique, and

method" (Lorimer 2008, 6). However, an explicit answer to how non-representability can reconfigure the methods of social research has not yet been formulated. In the case of geography, Alan Latham argues for the juxtaposition of linguistics-centered data collection methods (in-depth interviews and focus groups) with other methods, more apt to access the intangible dimensions of practices, in order to create a methodological montage. Once again, it is important to emphasize the continuities that exist between the ideas of hybrid and montage methodologies and the arguments for methodological pluralism already put forth by feminist epistemologists in general, and feminist geographers in particular <sup>4</sup>

It may be that both the critique of representation and the methodological tool kit of the social sciences are, in fact, part of a rhetorical strategy to reorient the field of geography away from "studies of discourse, representation, and narrative" (Dittmer 2010, 96). As part of this rhetorical repertoire, the framing of this new turn as "non-representational theory" may in fact appear exclusionary, as it may imply that taking affect seriously could happen only at the expense of language and emotions. In order to avoid the exclusivist undertone of the term "non-representational," the term "more-than-representational" was introduced as a way of restating and clarifying the premises of the affective turn.

The clear-cut distinction between affects and emotions, and the isolation of the first as an exclusive object of study through the separation of the experience of emotions, re-assert the marginalization of personal emotions and refuse, once again, "to look at individuals' bodies and experiences, and instead focuses on the transhuman relationships"

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<sup>4</sup> See the turn towards more inclusive and creative methods of data collection and data analysis, or relational modes of knowing developed by feminist social scientists (Patchett 2010).

(Dittmer 2010, 97). From the perspective of emotional geographies, as well as from that of cultural discursive critiques, the notion of power enabled by the affective model is limited in scope. Dittmer writes: "with affect power resides with whoever can set in place the environmental infrastructure to affect populations, and everyone else is subject to them" (2010, 97). It is ultimately the universalizing tendencies inherent in affective models that erase powerful distinctions between the complex positionalities and relations that subjects and individuals have in relation to power (Hsieh 2008).

Affective accounts and problematizations of power are increasingly relevant to media analysis. The audio-visual media could be largely understood as part of our environment. Thrift points out that the old and new media are tightly connected with the production of "new means of manipulation by the powerful" and the infiltration of our precognitive selves by the powerful (Thrift quoted in Dittmer 2010, 98). Media are largely considered a part of the environment. Thrift points out that we live in environments that mediate the intentions of the powerful into our pre-cognitive selves. For example, Sean Carter and Derek McCormack argue that the 9/11 attacks actualized an affective pool that has provided leverage to justifications for military interventions by the United States (2010). The efforts oriented towards ensuring national security ended up generating an enormous reservoir of feelings of insecurity and, in effect, made citizens feel more insecure. In relation to popular culture, screen violence elicits powerful affective responses from its viewers. It is important to emphasize that affect theorists differentiate between affects and emotions:

The point here is not just that we see more and more images of violence acted out on screens of various kinds. Rather, the point is that the very nature of violence,

and the manner in which it is conducted, is organized at least in part to work through the affective logics of mediated spaces, whether this is through tactics of 'shock' and 'awe' [the blitzing of Baghdad in 2003] or suicide bombing. (Carter and Mc Cormak quoted in Dittmer 2010, 95).

Issues of security and violence are pertinent to my analyses of documentary *Brick City*, where the acoustics of gunshots and police sirens, as well as the sight of bloodstained sidewalks amplify the sense of urban insecurity and urban fear usually associated with the city of Newark in popular media? In the case of *The Polish Wife*, the issue of sex trafficking in women enables transnational and gendered inflections of fear and insecurity, particularly in relation to labor migration.

By engaging with the writings of visual arts professor and practitioner, David Hornung, my final methodological considerations address the use of color at this intersectional point among the representation, the discursive, and the non-representational. Art practice and critical approaches also account for color at the intersection of the physiological, psychological, cultural, sociological, and even the political (Michael James in "Foreword" to Hornung 2005, 7). Starting from Matisse's statement that pure colors "have in themselves, independently of the objects they serve to express, a significant action on the feelings of those who look at them," (Matisse in Hornung, 2005, 128) David Hornung, in his 2005 book, *Color, A Workshop Approach*, embarks on an exploration of the relations between colors and specific psychological, experiential, and meaning making responses. The author distinguishes between color as symbol and color as "analogue" (Hornung 2005, 129). For instance, in Julia Ostertag's documentary film *Under the Red Umbrella*, the color red can be seen as deployed for its symbolic association (through a

shared cultural experience) with the sexuality and passion that connote prostitution; it could also be read in terms of its symbolic associations with socialist struggles—a theme that is inherent in the film’s intention to re-signify prostitution as work. On the other hand, the color red also arouses feeling apart from these symbolic associations. Red is warm light with longstanding physical associations to heat, fire, and warmth. It is not a random occurrence that in Anna Krenz’s installation featuring her web-art project *Polish Wife* (Berlin) the color red is the dominant attribute of the space. Moreover, the subdued lighting and the implicitly diminished visibility of the environment build up a sense of vulnerability and apprehension, two affects in direct connection to the experience of the trafficking of women. Each of the three case studies that follow this chapter will explore such considerations more specifically.

As anticipated by Julia Kristeva in her juxtaposition of color and musical rhythm, color never occurs in isolation. Color is always linked to matter, form, shape, interval, texture, visual density, quality of containment and edge. Thus, it is also through this inter-relational character, with sharp or fluid edges, with saturation, hue and contrast, that color can mobilize a sense of excitement, pensiveness, melancholy or alarm within the visual field (Hornung 2005,130). Hornung concludes his exploration by re-stating the elusive relation between color and human response. He deems that working with color in order to enhance meaning requires poetic imagination, which he poses in opposition to processes of reasoning and as an outcome of the artist’s unconscious mind. Kristeva’s analysis of the affective power of color, like most of her work on language and representation, relies on a psychoanalytical methodology as well. Read through Freudian terminology, color is articulated across a triple register of visual perception that specifies its link as instinctual

force to external visible objects; its eroticizing force of the body via "visual perception and gesture" and the co-optation and rendering of these forces by forces of censorship "as a sign in a system of representation" (Kristeva 1980, 210). For Kristeva, color is able to mobilize the "more chaotic and potentially threatening play of visual differences" as they are experienced by the pre-Oedipal child whose vision has not yet been "hierarchized into its dominant position in the organization of the other senses" (Grosz 2010 (1994), 135).

While color is not liberated in itself, pictorial practice can emerge as a "process of liberation *through and against the norm*...[and] an order (a signified) turned graphic while permitting and integrating its transgressions" (Kristeva 1980, 215). Moreover, color can be the element that shatters the unity of signification (Kristeva 1980, 215). Colors, painting, and by extension, the visual arts function as "a hinge between the semiotic corporeal flows and symbolic imperatives of organization and coherence" (Grosz (1994), 135). While art does not necessarily enable radical moments of political change and it most often provides a rather "politically harmless outlet for the social expression of impulses that may otherwise prove threatening to social, Oedipal organization," it nevertheless holds the potential of "becoming a revolutionary force" (Grosz 1994, 135).

### Chapter 3

#### **Leaving Sibiu: Ethnicity, Gender, Race, and Work Migration in Anne Schiltz and Charlotte Gregoire's *STĀM – We Are Staying* (2007) and Rastko Petrovic's *Independence* (2006)**

Tipografilor Street stretches out one block away from the fortification wall.

Tipografilor's sidewalks, like most of the streets downtown, have asphalt-paved sidewalks bordering a road covered in cobblestones. It's the summer of 2009 and walking the streets of my childhood feels oddly different. I recall the painful falls onto the granite of the road when as a child I would run across it and stumble over the crest of a stone. The memory my grandmother's tentative steps across the same cobblestone road as we walk to the Natural History Museum, and the feel of her nervous grip on my arm come back to me as I suddenly realize that the even surface of the asphalt has been replaced by rough-edged cobble stones on the sidewalks of my childhood's street (Lovin, Field notes, Sibiu 2009).

Anca and I are getting ready to take her newly arrived son for a walk. "We'll take the stroller" she says, "with the new sidewalks it'll shake a lot...but there's not much we can do about it." Half-jokingly, she admits that the cobblestones shortened the life of her shoes. She is ambivalent about the changes that Sibiu has undergone for 2007 Sibiu ECC. While happy to see the city doing well by comparison to other industrial cities, which have crumbled in ruin, she is disillusioned with the confinement of most improvements to the downtown area

of the city, their rather cosmetic character, and the accompanying increasingly prohibitive costs of the tourism-targeted restaurants and cafés (Lovin, Field notes, Sibiu 2009).

After several hours at the Astra Library, I walk back to my brother's place. I take Cetatii Street [Fortress Street] (the street by the fortification wall) to avoid the touristy crowds that at this time of the year fill up the downtown avenue of Nicolae Bălcescu. By the gangway that links Cetății Street to Tipografilor, several German-speaking young men wear garments that are reminiscent of the clothing featured in the engravings depicting medieval Sibiu in the Brukental Museum's collections. Some of them stroll around, others are engaged in woodwork. On the left side of the street several wooden horses and small chairs for children are on display for sale (Lovin, Field notes, Sibiu 2009).

As a global hub of production, a celebrated Eastern European tourist destination, and a migratory site from which migrant workers and ethnic Saxons continually depart and return, Sibiu occupies multiple positions within the global circuits of the new economy. Its recent regeneration as a European cultural capital relies on the production of ethnic identities that could be smoothly mobilized toward the operations of neoliberal economics. This chapter problematizes the commodified category of "ethnic difference" for its erasure of the different histories of colonialism and of their resultant unequal ethnic and gender positions in relation to global economic precariousness and cultural racialization. I begin the chapter with an exploration of the significance of the year 2007 and the investment of Sibiu the 2007 European Capital of Culture (ECC). A critical

engagement with the vision for economic development encapsulated in the European Capital of Culture initiative and with the views put forth by Sibians, local administrators, professionals, and academics involved in the implementation of 2007 Sibiu European Capital of Culture (SECC) will preface my close viewing of the representational work of two documentary films presented at the Astra Film Festival, one of the pillar events of 2007 SECC: Anne Schiltz and Charlotte Gregoire's *STĀM - We are Staying* (2007) and Rastko Petrovic's *Independence* (2006).<sup>5</sup> I situate the concepts of ethnicity, culture, and work and their re-articulations against the backdrop of contemporary conditions of globalizing economies, European geopolitical remapping, and transnational mobility, which are reinforced by the logic of commercial multiculturalism and development through transnational cultural tourism. Because meanings are produced, circulated, and resisted across texts, events, contexts, and media, my arguments emerge from an inter-textual reading that places the representational work of *STĀM* and *Independence* side by side with statements and documents by local, national, and transnational actors and institutions that pertain to its contexts of circulation and valuation. The methodological lens of discourse analysis is complemented by non-representational analysis of these two documentary films and the documents that were produced during organizing and implementing the 2007 SECC enabling me to follow the articulation of "ethnicity," "culture" and "work" within a historically specific assemblage of contexts and relations, thus referencing the interpersonal dynamics captured by these documentary films along with local cultural contexts, national and transnational cultural-economic structures, local, national, and transnational politics. Ultimately, my argument is that in the context

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<sup>5</sup> Both documentary films were recognized with awards. *STĀM* was awarded the Special prize of the Jury and *Independence* was awarded the Special Jury Commentation in the Astra Film Festival 2007 film competition.

of the eastward enlargement of the European Union (EU), the European Capital of Culture (ECC) program stimulates the cultural production of commodifiable constructions of ethnicity and cultural diversity, which are readily capitalized upon through transnational touristic consumption of cultural difference, and which also obscure class and ethnic inequalities.

### **1.1 The making of ethnicity and culture**

In order to avoid the trappings of essentialism and to highlight ethnicity's historical character, Roger Brubaker proposes a theoretical model that de-emphasizes the importance of experiences of cultural, religious, or linguistic boundedness (which, in the author's view, constitutes the rhetorical scaffolding of most ethnic conflicts and ethnic violence) in order to foreground a constructivist approach that pays attention to the historical formation of cultural categories, their embeddedness in organizational and institutional practices, and their relations with political interests and contingent events (Brubaker 2002). For Brubaker ethnicity is "proposed, propagated, imposed, institutionalized, discursively articulated, organizationally entrenched and generally embedded in multifarious forms of 'governmentality' " (2004, 13). This is not to exclude the scale of the individual and the context of every-day life. In Brubaker's terms, the category of ethnicity is also formed and transformed at the level of micropolitics by the very ways in which people internalize and appropriate, subvert, elude and evade, challenge, and transform categories imposed on them (Brubaker 2004, 477). A focus on the processes of category formation destabilizes understandings of ethnic identities and ethnic groups as stable socio-cultural entities, which incorporate and reflect homogeneous collective actions, intentions, and values (Brubaker 2004 162, 164). The

latter definition constitutes, in Brubaker's view, the discursive ground that sustains the reification of ethnic difference. Such meanings are often deployed by "ethnopolitical entrepreneurs" and resurface in "ethnopolitical practices," which further consolidate "ethnicized ways of seeing (and ignoring), of construing (and misconstruing), of inferring (and misinferring), of remembering (and forgetting)" (Brubaker 2010, 40). Meanings attributed to ethnic difference are also "used to allocate rights, regulate actions, distribute benefits and burdens, construct category-specific institutions, identify particular persons as bearers of categorical attributes, 'cultivate' populations or, at the extreme, 'eradicate' unwanted 'elements' " (Brubaker 2010, 26).

At the same time, processes of "ethnicization" are synchronous with those of nation-state building. Jan Nederveen Pieterse argues that the regimes of visibility established during times of nation building cast the term "ethnic" over "new subjects [...]" whereas established subjects of the dominant group remain outside the field of vision" (Nederveen Pieterse 2008, 25). Ethnicities are thus produced within specific political contexts and are reflective of power relations among different groups within the space of the nation-state. Has the unprecedented mobility of capital, people, images, and goods across national boundaries enabled the formation of meanings that bypass the logic of the nation? Has the hegemony of the self-other mode of representing difference been destabilized? Have modes of pluralism, self-representation, hybridity, dialogue, and reflexive representations become more prevalent in today's regimes of transnational visibility? Who are the ethnopolitical entrepreneurs of today? What ethnopolitical events do they orchestrate? S.P. Udayakumar argues that while global capitalism "seeks to override the national and cultural boundaries, it does promote local difference"

(Udayakumar 2011,88) through the mobilization of fragmented elements that are easily transformed into saleable goods for the world market, such as "ethnic food," "ethnic music," and "ethnic artifacts" (Fusco 1994 and hooks 1994).

The ECC program was launched in 1985 with the anointing of Athens, Greece as the first capital of culture. The characterization of Athens as the cradle of "Western civilization" is an important trope of the story of the origins of European identity—a story tightly entangled with nineteenth century ideas of unilinear progressive history and Western European civilizational superiority (Bernal 2001). By way of deconstructing the, by now, consecrated association of the origins of European culture with the locale of ancient Greece, and Athens in particular, Herbert Read draws attention to the fact that the "cultured Greeks [...] had good architects, good sculptors, good poets, just as they had good craftsmen and good statesmen," but it never occurred to them that all these practices could be bundled up together and made into a separate commodity. Hence, the ancient Greeks "had no word for culture" (Read [1963] 2002, 10). As the author further notes, this is exactly what would later be "given a trademark by their academicians, [as] something to be acquired by superior people with sufficient time and money, something to be exported to foreign countries along with figs and olives" (Read 2002, 10).

The transformation of culture into a commodity has had profound effects on the social, political, and ideological dimensions of our twentieth and twenty-first century lives.<sup>6</sup> In the urban environment, from the later 1970s onwards, and in particular with respect to Western European cities, the commodification of culture has been intertwined with policies and practices of development through cultural tourism. In order to address

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<sup>6</sup> Even so, claiming a relation of absolute identity between the two renders invisible a host of social and individual practices that result from local and heterogeneous, creative and agentive signifying engagements with commodified cultural objects and events.

the urban effects of the outmigration of jobs and industries, the relocation of the middle classes to suburbia, the subsequent development of shopping malls on the outskirts of cities, as well as the rise in car dependency, urban administrators, planners, and policy-makers turned to culture-led strategies of urban renewal. "Cultural investments" were supposed to lead to so-called "urban renewal" in the form of "profits, jobs, and physical regeneration" (Binns 2005, 1). The cultural production and cultural consumption-oriented models that informed such renewal initiatives proved to be at least partially flawed. While enjoying undeniable growth, mostly due to the 1980s rapid rise in entertainment consumption, the cultural production sector could not compensate for the job loss incurred by cities due to the outsourcing of manufacturing and heavy industry (Matarrasso 1996, Binns 2005). At the consumption end of the process, things are no less problematic. Another sought-after outcome of this kind of "cultural investment" is an aesthetically rich, culturally vibrant, hospitable, clean, and safe city, which both attracts a mobile middle class of knowledge industry workers and functions as a competitive entity on the stage of transnational tourism— one of the significant post-industrial growth industries.

Athens, Florence, Amsterdam, Berlin, and Paris all became European capitals of culture, drawing upon the excellence of their arts and architecture. Among European cities, Glasgow broke with the pattern of association between cultural capital cities and high culture, while drawing upon the EEC title as an opportunity for an "image change." By the turn of the new millennium ECC had been recognized as a form of hard-branding with lasting effects on urban marketing (Evans in Binns 2005) and, in Luke Binns' rather satirical formulation, "a city's equivalent to having letters after one's name" (2005, 3).

The start of the new millennium was marked by the extravagant designation of no less than nine cities, three of which--Bergen (Norway), Warsaw (Poland), and Prague (Czech Republic)—were representing non- EU countries at the time. By 2007, at least one city from each of the EU member states had been granted the EEC title; thus, the program took on an inclusionary ethos and was reshaped into a twinning project that brought together cities from the EU and European cities outside of the EU space. The tendency to conflate the geographical European space with the supranational space of the EU (often instantiated in the deployment of the term "Europe" in order to refer to the European Union) has enabled the discursive exclusion from European-ness of the states, cultures, and economies that are situated outside the boundaries of the EU. Pairing up European cities from within and without of the EU addresses this conflation by making visible through circuits of cultural consumption distant national and transnational spaces that are less visible to the so-called center.

The title of ECC was bestowed on Sibiu for the year 2007, which incidentally, coincided with the second wave of the fifth EU expansion and thus with the inclusion of Romania in the EU. Sibiu was paired with the city of Luxembourg, the latter representing the EU founding member state of Luxembourg, while the former was potentially thought of as representative of the non-EU space. Sibians welcomed the coincidence between Romania's EU integration and the 2007 Sibiu ECC with pride and eagerness to present their hometown as an unequivocally deserving European space.

## **1.2. Towards cultural diversity by way of urban re-medievalization**

The idea that the Transylvanian city of Sibiu could become one of Europe's Capitals of Culture is attributed by many to Klaus Johannis, the mayor of Sibiu since

2000. A closer look at the materials documenting the event suggest that the idea was first articulated as early as 1998, when the Romanian Ministry of Culture proposed that Sibiu host an upcoming UNESCO conference. Although the city did not fulfill the requirements of the conference organizers, the evaluators were taken with the old city's charm and suggested that Sibiu and Luxembourg share the same EEC spot in 2007. The similarity between the Luxembourg dialect and the one spoken by the Saxon population of the Transylvanian city tied the two places together, serving as evidence of the twelfth century eastward migration of the inhabitants of the Moselle, the Eifel and the old Duchy of Luxembourg regions (Szabo 2007,1). The project was enthusiastically embraced by local administrators from Sibiu and Bucharest who finalized and submitted an application that was agreed upon at ministerial level in 2002 and presented at the European Council at the beginning of 2004.

Romania's pre-accession negotiations to join the EU constituted a lengthy process. The country's official application for EU membership was submitted in 1995 and, after eight years of legislative, human rights, and economic reforms, the 2007 eastward enlargement was eventually scheduled at the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003. In April 2005, the Treaty of Accession between Romania and the EU-25 was signed at Luxembourg's Neumuenster Abbey. As already mentioned, co-occurrence between Romania's EU accession and Sibiu's EEC appointment excited the residents of Sibiu and made 2007 an opportunity to assert the country's often times contested Europeaness and to showcase the unique beauty of their home. The city's diasporic Saxon citizens shared Sibians' enthusiasm. They joined in the general spirit with their "borderless local patriotism" and "non-territorial pride" (Hajdu 2007, 2). Mayor Johannis eloquently

conveyed these local and transnational feelings of pride, elation, and support of the EEC project in his characterization of the event:

The occasion presented to Sibiu-Hermannstadt to be European Cultural Capital of 2007 in partnership with Luxembourg and Luxembourg Grand Region is for us an opportunity to present our city, our way of life, and the creativity of all the communities which live here in an attractive complex program. We invite you to stroll along the streets and into the squares of the Historic Centre, with its Gothic arcades, Renaissance houses, and elegant Baroque churches as well as Art Nouveau buildings. There you can meet artists and their creative products, there you can taste our cuisine and wines, or visit the museums that preserve beautiful art collections. Our city awaits you to discover its music, dance, theatre, visual arts, and other events which move out of our cultural halls into the most challenging settings: in the streets and squares, lofts and cellars, fortification walls and churches (Johannis 2007).

Most cultural studies and anthropological definitions explain culture as "the signs, objects, activities, structures, and institutions through which we make meaning and pleasure from our social and material environment, express and define ourselves, and communicate with others" (Gunster 2003, 5). Culture emerges from and changes along with our creative encounter and interaction with, in the context of this chapter, cultural commodities. Culture does not consist of things in themselves, but "the many practices, habits, thoughts, feelings, and desires that shape, define, and give substance to everyday life" (Gunster 2003, 5). Mayor Johannis, in his turn, launched his invitation for everyone to visit 2007 Sibiu EEC by rendering explicit the cultural practices that produce the city

and by promising that one's efforts to travel to the EU's new outskirts will be worthwhile as they will yield an encounter with a realm continuous with that of "European civilization." Without explicitly deploying the term culture, the context for Mayor Johannis' words renders his enumeration of Sibian "ways of life," Sibians' creativity, their cuisine, and Sibiu's architectural environment as a definition for the term culture. Strikingly, the attractive qualities that the Mayor delineates are mostly represented by the city's old colonial architecture to the exclusion of the city's less marketable and more recent communist state-built environment. Johannis's list is peculiarly similar to the one generated by Read in his critique of the commodification of culture. While Johannis identifies the same constitutive elements of culture, his invitation carries none of Read's critical thematization. Couched in the language game of intercultural exchange, the social, cultural, and material entities of Sibiu are framed as commodities to be consumed by national and transnational tourists "with sufficient time and money" to seek out such encounters (Mead 2002, 10). The few paragraphs excerpted from my field notes point out some of the effects of the uneven financial investments, the prohibitive costs of leisure and entertainment for the local working-class population and the emergence of other unexpected costs that the Sibians within the old town's perimeter incurred in the process of the re-medievalization of their neighborhood.

With the branding of Sibiu by its Saxon medieval origins, not only does the notion of culture become reified but also, at the same time, the notion of ethnicity becomes devoid of its relational and historical character (Nederveen Pieterse 2007), instead becoming a prop for touristic decorum. Such renderings of cultures and ethnicities as static, ahistorical, neatly packaged and separated sets of attributes and

practices, as pointed out by Uma Narayan, are replete with analytical errors and produced as the direct consequences of national and colonial relations of power (1997, 2000). First of all, they derive from and feed back into essentialist notions of ethnic and national identity. Second, by foreclosing explanations that foreground the processual nature of these categories in terms of "identification" (rather than identity), the constructed, ongoing, relational, and institutional formation of these categories, together with the agency of those involved in their production, are rendered invisible. Third, the category of "ethnic subject" comes to bear normative valences embedded in static definitions. Feminist scholars have effectively engaged such aspects, for instance, by criticizing the consigning of women to the role of repositories and the reproducers of "culture" (Narayan 1997, Yuval-Davies 1998). Lastly, close attention should be paid to the unbalanced relations of power that exist among the producers of identity categories, to ensure that the agendas and interests of institutional, cultural, economic and political elites could be identified and challenged with a view to socio-political change (Narayan 1997). The architectural and demographic equivalences established between the C12 Saxon settlement and the conditions of 2007 Sibiu, or by extension Transylvania, obscure the historical character of ethnic formations, the specificity of current ethnic relations, as well as their differentiated entwinement with processes of settlement, migration, minoritization, and racialization, which produce different effects on the life opportunities of specific groups. The label of "unique multicultural life" casts the touristic transnational imaginary as a relationship of equivalence among ethnicities, for example between the lives of the Roma and Saxon dwellers of contemporary Transylvania or between the latter two and Romanian ethnics. I aim to move the discussion in this chapter beyond the happy

multiculturalist gloss on the city's old architecture and its "different ethnic communities and unique multicultural life" (Johannis 2007) to the contemporary production of cultural diversity for consumption.

The goals of the EEC program for the years 2007 to 2013 are stated in the following terms: "to promote cross-border mobility of those working in the cultural sector; to encourage the transnational circulation of the cultural and artistic output; and to foster intercultural dialogue."<sup>7</sup> Through its commitment to showcasing local cultural resources and to increasing the transnational mobility of cultural producers and consumers the ECC does create opportunities for international and intercultural encounter. At the same time, the goals of the program are in line with the overall neoliberal agenda for economic development. The trope of cultural encounters is, in fact, the key marketing slogan of contemporary examples of development through transnational tourism. The 400 million Euros, which represent the EU's contribution to the implementation of the program is seen as "a serious cultural investment" in "celebrating Europe's cultural diversity and enhancing [its] shared cultural heritage through the developed cross-border co-operation."<sup>8</sup> More and more contemporary spaces grow intricately connected to global circuits of local specificity (Sassen 2006). They are simultaneously traversed and constituted by swift movements of global finance, corporate operations, media productions, and hyper-mobile elites, artists, and the slower and less frequent movements of tourists, migrant workers, and refugees. Artists and cultural workers are critically involved in the production of transnational spaces and transnational encounters. Part and parcel of the global tourism infrastructure, they clear the ground

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<sup>7</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/doc411\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/doc411_en.htm)

<sup>8</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions>

upon which the histories, geographies, livelihoods, symbolic, and material cultures of particular places are transformed into touristic attractions. In the process, cultural difference becomes a commodity to be pursued by transnationally mobile subjects. Cultural critics Hamid Naficy and Teshome H. Gabriel point out that what is achieved by the proliferation of such versions of cultural diversity and cultural difference is "the democratization of consumption and not of representation" (1993, ix). Furthermore, as Sharon Zukin emphasizes, in the production of space for touristic consumption, "history is appropriated and de-contextualized in a world of signs signifying affluence in the illusory breadth of consumer choice" (2007). Following Zukin's suggestion, I will continue with a brief account of the Sibian and Transylvanian population history.

### **1.3. A case of subsidized "diversity"**

Sibiu is now one of the most economically dynamic urban sites in Romania. While its population is mostly Romanian, the communities of ethnic Hungarians, Germans, and Roma are recognized as essential to the city's identity, as is its reputation as a multicultural site of harmonious inter-ethnic relations. Nevertheless, how ethnically diverse is Sibiu after all? Data from the city council show that out of a total population of 155, 045, 94% of respondents identify as Romanian, 2% as Saxon, 2% as Hungarian, and 0.4% as Romani. In the light of the rather uneven breakdown of its population by ethnicity, Sibiu's reputation for multiculturalism has been at times questioned. To address this, I propose a critical reading of the *Study on European Cities and Capitals of Culture 1995-2004 (SECCC 1995-2004)* by Palmerin Rae Associates and specifically of the extent to which it deploys the self-other binary in discursive production of ethnic positions within the context of Sibiu.

In 2004, the year of its publication, the *SECCC 1995-2004* could only offer a projected analysis of what the ECC might mean for Sibiu. Particularly interesting for my analysis are the categories of geopolitical, national, and ethnic identity that the report refers to. In times of exceptional geopolitical re-mapping, such terms are articulated into statements that reflect old and new modes of colonization, marginalization, minoritarization, and racialization in the same discursive instance. As its title indicates, the study's evaluations of the ECC's organizational and management aspects, financial investments, social impact and economic and touristic outcomes is grounded in empirical data only for the 1995-2004 interval. The report's claims morph into speculative forecasting as far as Sibiu is concerned and these are its predictions:

For Sibiu, the status of European Capital of Culture presented a real and major chance to continue and intensify the restoration of the town's rich architectural heritage and infrastructure. But will it be enough to revive what once used to be a cultural and economic hub in its own region? Sibiu's strength lay once in its ethnic German population and also its Europe-wide cultural, but foremost economic connections, combined with a series of privileges – cultural, religious, legal and territorial autonomy. All that is history – after massive emigration, diversity in Sibiu is more imagined than real. The next year should be an instrument to revive the town's cultural life in a European context. More than 200 projects and 100 cultural events to be held in Sibiu in the course of the whole year sounds ambitious and *is* almost impossible to carry out with the limited resources available. It is however safe to assume that the subsidized diversity won't really be sustainable, for simple reasons of capacity. [...] It seems that in the case of

Sibiu the well-known point of criticism that the year as European Capital of Culture is used by the respective cities mainly for gain in profile and less to further the idea of European culture holds water.

Thus, the report's anticipatory evaluations signal a poor fit between Sibiu and the goals of the ECC. This lack of fit is derived discursively, from certain relations of valuation and signification. First, the value of Eastern European space – Sibiu's increases thorough its association with populations from Western Europe – i.e. Germans. Second, the 800-year-long process of geopolitical change undergone by Transylvania both altered the positions of various ethnic groups in relation to power and radically changed what might have constituted, at a particular historical moment, Sibiu's "strength." But Palmerin Rae and Associates stop short of historicizing these issues and the reader of the report might thus be left wondering, like myself, about the works and lives and Sibiu's other citizens. In the authors' view, Sibiu's best chance to success is conditioned by a journey back to a time of more auspicious demographic composition. In a more subtle register, the discursive logic of the old empires that represented assimilated territories as *tabula rasa* and rendered irrelevant the population already inhabiting the land they conquered is also discernable in these statements.

Second, the investment in the restoration and preservation of historical structures has become a means to boost the city's touristic potential. Sibiu's "rich architectural heritage" is hard to contest. However, Sibiu does not consist entirely of defense walls and towers, gates and artillery batteries, picturesque city squares and, in short, built structures from the Middle Ages or the aesthetically pleasing Baroque and Art Nouveau periods. Emerging as an industrial center at the beginning of the twentieth century, Sibiu further

underwent five decades of intensified industrialization under state-run communism, and thus features industrial areas and nine residential districts<sup>9</sup> of apartment buildings<sup>10</sup> that house a significant proportion of its population. These apartment buildings have suffered varied degrees of deterioration due to the passing of time and to economic restraints. As discussed by Beatrice Garcia and Gerry Mooney in their analysis of the 2004 Barcelona EEC and the 1990 Glasgow EEC, the EEC's modes of investment are bound to create divided cities. The lines of division fall between revived, beautified, and cosmeticized spaces ready to encounter the gaze of tourists in order to capitalize on their consumptive power (Harvey 2006, Mollenkopf and Castells 1991, Sassen 2006 and Parker 2004) and the peripheral perimeters inhabited by locals, which are left underdeveloped to a large extent.

Third, the "underdevelopment" of the city's touristic and event infrastructures prior to the EEC designation was seen as a serious shortcoming. Clearly, the city's visitors, on whose spending power the success of the event depends, could not be accommodated by its charming towers, gates, walls, bulwarks, tunnels, and plazas. What follows, interestingly enough, from the report is that the undeserving winner of the equation is Sibiu, which can boost its architectural restoration projects while stopping short of delivering "European culture" during the 2007 EEC.

While I argue that 2007 Sibiu ECC produced, first and foremost, a city of historic facades that disabled the potential for an encounter with the city's layered political histories, ethnic relations, and heterogeneous spatialities, I also believe that the vast array of events hosted under the 2007 Sibiu ECC umbrella opened potentialities for encounters

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<sup>9</sup> "Cartiere" in Romanian.

<sup>10</sup> "Blocuri" in Romanian.

that circumvented, at least partially, the logic of objectification, commodification and othering that tourism banks on. *STĂM —We are Staying* is a case in point. In spite of the Rae Palmerin and Associates' prediction that Sibiu's "lack of experience in managing large scale cultural projects, [...] insufficient funding, or the fact that Romania was just joining the European Union" (Alexa and Lache 2011, 1234) would undermine the project, 2007 Sibiu ECC, the first annual mega-event (Palonen 2011) delivered by one of the post-2004 EU accession countries, proved to be a success story (Alexa and Lache 2011).

With a program of events subsumed under the idea of multiculturalism and cultural heritage, ingeniously rendered through the logos: "City of Culture/City of Cultures" and "Sibiu-Young since 1191," and an urban marketing campaign developed and implemented around the "new tourism concept" (Alexa and Lache 2011, 1238, Richards and Rotariu 2010, 8), the ECC generated a significant increase in tourist arrivals during the year of 2007. According to Greg Richard and Ilie Rotariu's report, the total number of arrivals to the city showed an increase from 252,694 in 2006 to 327,924 in 2007. The number of foreigners in the city increased as well, from 68,732 in 2006 to 92,052 in 2007, with most arriving from Germany (23%), the Netherlands (22%), France (13%), Italy (8%), Spain (6%), the United Kingdom (4%), Luxembourg (3%) and Austria (3%). The evaluations of the general growth of tourism in Sibiu show a substantial increase in the supply of hotels and other accommodations. Last but not least, if its task was "to represent Europe for Romanians and Romania for the Europeans," Sibiu succeeded. In 2007, Sibiu ranked number five, after Paris, Athens, Rome and London on the scale of the image of the city as a cultural destination (Richard and Rotariu 2010). All

in all, the qualitative data of the study shows that the vast majority of the interviewees included in the evaluation felt that ECC had a positive impact on Sibiu, emphasizing "an improvement in the image of the city, bringing the city closer to Europe, the economic impact of the event and improvements to cultural facilities." Fewer people tended to agree that the ECC contributed to more social cohesion or improved the overall quality of life (Richard and Rotariu 2010, 38, 43, 66).

## 2.1 *STĀM—We Are Staying: An intersectional account of difference*

A wide-angle shot frames two young women traversing the idyllic countryside landscape. Ruth and Natalia walk down green rolling hill, then cross a sun burnt meadow to finally halt under a towering solitary oak. A full shot shows the two friends, sitting in the shade the tree's crown; as the wind rustles through the leaves and amidst sharp cricket chirpings, they launch in the following conversation<sup>11</sup>:

Ruth: Pai, io nu-s nici sasoia [self correcting]...nici nemtoica, nici romanca, io-s sasoica. Si-n pasaportul meu scrie ca-s nemtoaica, da'...de ce... Cum se zice?! Is... ah... mostenire... [hesitating] Asa, cum se zice? [I'm not German, nor Romanian. I'm Saxon. On my passport it says 'German.' But...well...how shall I put it? Um...our ancestors...How do you say it?]

Natalia: Cetatenie? [Citizenship?]

Ruth: Nu. Cum se zice?!...Asa... Abstammen, stii, de neamt. Dar asa nu sunt nici neamta. Nu ma tin nici romanca si nici nemtoiaca, ca nemtii-s, dupa mine, alt... alt... alt caracter [stammering], asa... cum se zice?!...Noi suntem asa o...o...[No, how do you say it, we are descendants, you know...our origins...of

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<sup>11</sup> The conversation is carried out in Romanian. The English translation consists of the English subtitles of the documentary film.

German...But different...they've got a different character, a different...how should I say...we are kind of, like...]

Natalia: Colonizati! ["Colonizers!"]

Ruth: Nuuu. O...Cum se zice?! O...No, tu, cum se zice, Natalia? [No, how should you say...How do you say it, Natalia?]

Natalia: Pai de-aia, eu stiu ca daca te duci dintr-un sat intr-altul, zice ca te duci sa te colonizezi intr-un... intr-alta tara. [Well, I know that when you go from one village to another, they say that you colonize it.]

Ruth: Nu...nu...asa e o natie... o natiune pentru noi... [No. More of a nation, you know...a nationality. Our own nationality. In your passport you can't say that you are a Saxon. That doesn't work.]

Natalia: Nationalitate

Ruth: Nationalitate pentru noi. Ca nu poate sa zica in pasaport ca-s sasoica. Nu mere. Ca no! Dar de ce suntem noi sasi? De ce venim din Germania sau de unde venim...de pe acolo pe langa? De aia am ala... natio (se intrerupe) Da eu am si, si, stii? Eu am si nationalitatea romaneasca si nemteasca. Si, de exemplu, daca esti numai roman, trebuie sa ai ori romaneste, ori nemteste. Si daca vrei nemteste, trebuie sa renunti la romaneasca si trebe s-o cumperi pe nemteasca. Si, daca nu iti mai place de nemteasca, poti iara sa renunti la nemteasca si sa te...sa-ti cumperi iara...[And why are we Saxons? And why do we come from Germany? Or from I don't know where, over there...I am Romanian and German. I have both nationalities. But if you're Romanian without being a Saxon, you have to give up Romanian nationality, in order to buy German nationality. And if you're not

happy with it any more, you can give it up again, and you can buy back Romanian citizenship.]

Natalia: - Cetatenia romana...Si eu in buletin is trecuta romana, nu rom sau asa, cetatenia romana, nationalitatea romana. [On my identity card I'm Romanian, and not Gypsy, or anything else. Romanian citizenship...Romanian nationality.]

Ruth: Da. Pai, si eu asa...De exemplu, acum, in pasaportul romanesc – roman si in pasaportul nemtesc - german. [Me too: on my Romanian passport, I'm Romanian and on my German passport, I'm German. So you could say that I have two citizenships.]

Natalia: - Da, cetatenia germana.

Ruth: Da asa poti sa zici ca am doua...

Natalia: Cetatenii.

Ruth: Cetatenii.

Ruth: Voi sunteti...[You are the...]

Natalia: - De aia de casa [We have a home....]

Ruth: Unii –nu...Da'poi si-n Romania's mai multi țigani, nu? (Natalia aproa)...Is țigani de matase, is corturari, țigani, baiasi...[And there are many types of Gypsies aren't there? Silk Gypsies, Nomadic Gypsies.]

Natalia: - Is mai multe natiuni, nationalitati de țigani. Noi suntem din aia ce nu mergem nici cu linguri, nici sa merem sa cersim sau asa, cortorari [There are several nations. Gypsy nationalities. We are not the ones with spoons, nor the ones who beg, nor nomads.]

Ruth: Voi sunteti țigani...moderni (rad impreuna) ...asa ca romanii... [You're

modern Gypsies.]

Natalia: Țigan e ala care nu e om... [He who is not a man is a Gypsy.]

Ruth: Da

Natalia: Asa s-ar zice mai bine. In fata lui Dumnezeu toti suntem egali. [That's what you should say. We are all equal in the eyes of God.]

Ruth: Da, dar fiecare are nationalitatea lui. [Ruth: "Yes, but everyone has their own...their own nationality.]

The scene is an excerpt from Ann Schiltz and Charlotte Gregoire's ethnographic documentary film *STĂM- We Are Staying* (2007). The film won the Astra Film Special Prize for its participation in the Astra Film Festival, Sibiu-Romania during the 2007 Sibiu European Capital of Culture (2007 SECC), for enlarging the understanding of such contemporary phenomena as "social and ethnic belonging, migration, money, rural life, and the search for one's roots" through its portrayal of Ruth (a Saxon woman) and Natalia (a Romani woman) as well as through the exploration of their relationship (Astra Film Festival Catalog 2007, 57). Ruth and Natalia's inquiry into the meanings of the terms German, Saxon, Roma, Gypsy, and Romania mobilizes their knowledge and experiences as residents of a Transylvanian village and ethnic, national, and transnational subjects of post-Cold War Romania and Europe. Their locations at the intersection of gender, class, ethnicity, and race shaped the conditions and opportunities for their local and transnational location and mobility, as well as their critical understanding of their own identities and positions within contemporary geopolitical power structures. The soundtrack of the conversation is first synchronized with the two women's leisurely stroll. The camera's wide-angle view shifts to a medium shot, then

stops at medium close-up to show Ruth and Natalia sitting by a solitary old tree, their backs against its massive trunk. Their words are cogent, yet tentative, when the logic of citizenship, national identity and ethnicity is interrupted by the particularities of their own locations. Their dialogue often splits into moments of silence as they realize that some occurrences—such as Saxon and Roma identity cards and passports, as opposed to Romanian ones, do not exist. While their exchange is indicative of a mutually acknowledged commonality of experience and location in relation to the order of the nation, Natalia's responses to Ruth's recurrent question, "How do you say it?" are never the right ones. They do agree that their group identity is rendered invisible by the nation's technologies of governmentality: there's no passport that would "say that you are a Saxon," no ID that would say "Gypsy, or anything else," and no "Gypsy"<sup>12</sup> passport" either. As they rush to corroborate each other's statements ("Me too" confirms Natalia, "Us too" upholds Ruth) their desire for a mutual understanding and perhaps recognition of a common ground becomes apparent. Rather than a commonality of experience, the two identify their shared position as ethnic minority groups within the contemporary nation-state, Romania in Natalia's case and both Romania and Germany in Ruth's. Neither of the two women uses the category of ethnicity as a descriptor for her position. To compensate for its absence, Ruth formulates a cumulative definition that includes one's origins, heritage, and lineage, one's ancestors, shared values, culture and identity, ideas and feelings about one's actual or imagined native land. Natalia opts for the term

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<sup>12</sup> Natalia opts for the term Roma/Romani in the original Romanian version: "Noi nu suntem trecuti Romi. Uite in buletin." I will return to this alteration in the translation later in the chapter. Particularly within the framework of documentary film, this slippage in translation indicates *STAM's* alignment of its category production work with the commodifying multiculturalism reliant on the circulation of familiar and easily recognizable ethnic, cultural, and racial tropes.

"nationality" and vacillates in her analysis between its denotations of citizenship and group identity.<sup>13</sup>

Ruth's journeys to and from Malancrav and the duration of her current visit structure the documentary film as it unfolds on the screen, while framing the observational and interview footage that compose her portrait and that of the second protagonist, Natalia. The two women's recountings of past events subtend the duration of Ruth's summer visit as her recollections reference recurrent departures and returns since the time of her initial emigration, while Natalia's shed light on the effects that the advent of neoliberal capitalism has had on her life. Schiltz and Gregoire describe the premise of their film in the following terms:

This is a film that explores the contradictions in their relationship and questions our understanding of social and ethnic belonging, migration, money, rural life, and search for one's roots (Astra Film Festival 2007, 57).

And:

We wanted to go beyond a simple portrait of two women who have nothing in common except for being 'Transylvanian': one being a Roma woman without a future or economic possessions and the other a Saxon who works abroad and is financially independent. [...] It was important to us to use the film as a means of reconsidering this opposition that almost seems to come to mind naturally. We tried to tell the story of two distinct lives linked by a common location and history as well as by friendly neighbor relations, and whose destinies confront, overlap, intersect, and meet each other. (Schiltz and Gregoire, *STĀM* Project Proposal)

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<sup>13</sup> Her word-choice could be explained linguistically through the fact that, particularly prior to 1989, ethnic minority groups were designated by the Romanian phrase "nationalități conlocuitoare" ["cohabiting nationalities"].

*STĀM* is thus a film that documents the lives of women. To render Ruth's and Natalia's differentiated lives and life opportunities, as well as their uneven capacities for transnational mobility and access to citizenship, Gregoire and Schultz develop an intersectional analysis of gender and ethnic location (Krenshaw 1991, Valentine 2007). Ruth and Natalia are women and minoritized ethnic subjects within contemporary Romania. However, their belonging to two different ethnic groups with different genealogical trajectories with respect to the racial and ethnic formation of the old empire as well as the modern nation shapes their capacities and incapacities. Gregoire and Schultz's intervention is valuable at multiple levels. First of all, it fills a gap in the knowledge produced around contemporary phenomena of work, migration, and transnational mobility by addressing important specificities of women's lives (Hanson 2010). As already noted by feminist geographers, due to the lesser representational visibility of women's experiences in mainstream social sciences, transnationalism is narrated in a masculinist register. Along with James Clifford, Geraldine Pratt and Brenda Yeoh argue that the epistemic privileging of displacement and traveling to the detriment of placement and settlement led to the construction of a diasporic subject who is inherently masculine (Pratt and Yeoh 2003, 159, 162). They argue that looking at transnational mobility through a gendered lens would shed light on the particulars of women's transnational mobility, as women seem to cross national boundaries "less freely or have more socially embedded or encumbered spatial experiences" (Pratt and Yeoh 2003, 161). Pratt and Yeoh's analysis runs the risk of articulating a gender analytic which reduces the heterogeneity of women's positions in relation to (dis)/(en)abling opportunities and the meanings they attach to their travels, re-settlings, circular

migrations, imposed, desired, or arrested transnational mobilities. Through their parallel explorations of the meanings that Ruth attributes to her transnational mobility and her affective attachment to Malancrav and the meanings that Natalia attributes to the circumstances that arrest the possibility to fulfill her dream to work in Spain as a seasonal agricultural worker, Schiltz and Gregoire enable an intersectional analysis of gender, ethnicity, race, and citizenship in relation to transnational hypermobility and immobility.

## **2.2. Ruth: an incomplete story of unhindered mobility**

The excerpt of the dialogue that I included in the introduction of this chapter offers a glimpse into Ruth's view on her emigration, relocation, and planned return, primarily in relation to the national institution of citizenship. She narrates the story of German-Romanian dual-citizenship in a vocabulary of choice, purchase, and consumer satisfaction. Through her rendering, citizenship becomes equated with a good that can be secured through a gesture of unhindered individual agency and a matter of rational choice. Her probing into the meanings of identity, ethnic or national, shifts the definitional ground of what makes one "Saxon" or "German" from one's relations to the nation-state into the realm of affective responses and social ties to one's native land. By eliciting this analytical dialogue between Ruth and Natalia, *STĀM*'s directors enabled the articulation of an account of identity and transnational citizenship that links together rational and affective elements as well as determinist and agentive valences. Ruth's rumination on the character of the Germans from Germany and the disjuncture contained in the fact that minoritized ethnicities and citizenship, while essentialist ("they've got a different character"... "everyone has their own nationality") and primordialist ("we are descendants, you know...our origins") in nature, are not utterly stable on that ground as it

tentatively connects together cultural meanings, symbolic resources, economic interests and political choices through her affective and rational evaluations. Ruth's expansive optimism in relation to the transnational mobility of a generic Saxon or, respectively, a generic "Romanian without being Saxon" is deceiving. Unfortunately the directors missed the opportunity to delve deeper into the historical character of her hypermobility and dual-citizenship. While Ruth's Saxon-ness had certainly equipped her with the means for a more fluid navigation of the post-Cold War European terrain than those of her fellow Romanian or Romani neighbors, the privileged position that enabled her circular mobility between the two nation-states that granted her citizenship is not transhistorical.

The parameters of the ethnic Germans' emigration from Romania changed across time. The end of WWII, along with Romania's switch in allegiance from Nazi Germany to the Allies, resulted in the evacuation of approximately 100,000 ethnic Germans. At the same time, the ethnic Germans who had served in the German army often did not return to Romania after the war. During the decades that followed WWII, ethnic Germans from Romania moved to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) by means of Red Cross-mediated family reunification procedures. The question of how to represent the German communities from the Eastern bloc in relation to the German nation so that their "return" and integration into FRG's body politic could be enabled was answered by maintaining access to German citizenship by descent with *ius sanguinis*. This enabled FRG to foster blood links with ethnic Germans from outside the West German nation, *Aussiedler*, and of course, from the Democratic Republic of Germany, *Übersiedler*. These policies together with the communist threat of possible discrimination, deportation, or forced labor (Koranyi 2009) enabled ethnic Germans to claim the right to "return" to West

Germany, a nation-state imagined as mythical motherland on account of a strong ethnic identity. The Germanness by descent principle created the conditions for ethnic Germans to obtain not only citizenship, but also financial support and access to programs that would have facilitated their integration (Koranyi and Wittlinger 2011, 102). Diplomatic relations between FRG and Romania and a new agreement signed by the two countries in 1978 further facilitated the emigration of between 10,000 to 15, 000 ethnic Germans a year in return for per capita monetary compensations paid to Romania by FRG. In spite of these high figures, the procedure for leaving Romania was difficult as it entailed discrimination and job-related sanctioning of other family members during the application process. Furthermore, the ethnic Germans' mass emigration actually took off after the collapse of the state-communism regime in 1989. At this stage, the applicants were no longer required to renounce Romanian citizenship and surrender their Romanian passports; they could also retain their jobs while waiting to be granted *Aussiedler* status. The *ius sanguinis* law of citizenship was kept in place until 1993 to ensure that FRG and later, the unified Germany, kept open the option for *Ubersiedler* and *Aussiedler* "re-settlers" to gain full citizenship. After 1993, ethnic Germans from Romania no longer had the smooth access to *Aussiedler* status that characterized the early 1990s (Ohliger and Munz 2002, 53-54, 62). The citizenship law of 1993 made migration to Germany more difficult. That same year marked a turning point in terms of ethnic German immigrants' access to the labor market, housing availability, and social integration programs. The reunification of Germany and the arrival of ethnic German immigrants from the former Eastern bloc intensified the competition for jobs and public housing among the ethnic Germans, foreign workers, and lower- working- class, native-born Germans. Ethnic

German immigrants, along with other immigrants, began to serve as scapegoats for various domestic social and economic problems, discourse which further strained the newcomers' process of social integration (Ohliger and Munz 2002, 62).

Recurring questions probe Ruth's decision and the circumstances of her emigrations. Multiple ones explore her desire and goal to return. She returns because Germany is not what she imagines, the local Germans were different from what she expected, and the realization that Malancrav was her home. These discoveries gave her the courage and determination to undertake the economically risky project of a permanent return to Romania. I argue that Ruth's "realization" invites further explorations. An intersectional analytical lens oriented towards her life and work in Germany would have enhanced the understanding of her transnational life as an ethnic minoritized subject of Romania, as well as Germany. I am convinced that Ruth's "realization" is rather overdetermined. As a transnational subject myself, I know that the decision to return home reaches further than just the consideration of affective attachments. Communication barriers, lack of social support networks, limited cultural proficiency, and scant opportunities for political agency usually complete the tableau of return incentives. In the case of German immigrants from Romania, it is argued that their high level of language proficiency (92% are fluent in spoken German and 80% in written German) could not have contributed to the social distance that they experience while in Germany. These are some of Ruth's comments on women's sexuality and reproductive rights: "Girls nowadays have no shame. Things used to be different a while ago." Sociological research has indicated that ethnic Germans tended to preserve "older traditions, customs, mentalities, and attitudes" in their home countries and consequently, "immigration to Germany [was]

experienced as a transplantation to a modern, or even postmodern, culture and society" (Ohliger and Munz 2002, 66). A tendency of the post-1990 *Aussiedler* population to withdraw into the sphere of family, and seldom exercise their rights to political participation granted by their full citizenship, further accentuate their social distance from the locals. James Koranyi's interview data with émigrés living in Germany corroborates these observations. His interviews referred to disjunctures between a land envisioned through Goethe and Schiller's poetic representations of three centuries ago and the actual, contemporary Germany; they also expressed skepticism in relation to a relatively quickly achieved economic prosperity; and not the least, the perplexity caused by sudden immersion in a discursive environment shaped by Holocaust memory/ German guilt and "their own strong notion of victimhood" along with "their depoliticized memory of Saxon involvement during war" (2009).

### **2.3. Natalia's Story of labor, racialization and transnational immobility**

While Ruth's story is prompted by the directors' questions about her emigration and return and woven together with the threads yielded by Natalia's, Ruth's mother's and Ruth's own analyses of migration, resettling, citizenship, and return, Natalia's story of immobility does not have the benefit of contributions from multiple voices. Against the backdrop of the post-Cold War fluid navigation of the European space, Ruth is never asked to comment on Natalia's impeded transnational mobility. Stuck in Malancrav, in spite of her dream to emigrate to Spain as an agricultural worker, Natalia seems to be an un-actualized transnational subject. If she does not get to traverse any European borders, it is, at least in part, because transnational effects foreclose her life opportunities. The discrimination against the Roma is endemic to both the national space of Romania and

the transnational one of the EU. The job instability, the consequent unemployment that followed the restructuring of the state-run centralized economy of Romania by free-market neoliberal principles (Borcila and Nae 2009), and the implicit dismantling or privatization of public social services such as child care are case in point.

The father of Natalia's son Andrei left Malancrav for Germany two months before the boy's birth. Though he acknowledged paternity and helps financially, he never returned. Natalia knows that his sister opposed their marriage "because we're Gypsies and they're Saxons." Two years before the filming of the documentary, her own father, still alive at the time, vetoed her decision to go and work in Spain: "He said that I should stay here and raise the little one." Natalia stayed to care for her father during his final illness. She was supposed to inherit her parents' house in return for caring for them while they were sick, old and dying but after their death her brother's family moved in with her and Andrei, refusing to accept Natalia's agreement with her parents. She dreams of having a place, a house, of her own. Schiltz and Gregoire's portrayal of Natalia's life once again employs an intersectional analysis that accounts for the gendered and racialized conditions that inflect her life circumstances, opportunities, and choices. Schiltz and Gregoire's analysis finely captures how gendered racialization is re-asserted in her social and socio-economic interactions with Ruth and Ruth's mother. Since her young age, Natalia has worked on the land owned by Ruth's family and helped with the domestic chores of their household. Numerous close-ups of Natalia's strong hands grinding, stirring, kneading, carrying loads and caring for her son are reminiscent of Tina Mondotti's photographs of women laborers. Such images of Natalia's working life, along with similar ones depicting Ruth and her mother, create a strong visual statement about

the physicality and round-the-clock nature of women's work. However, Natalia's industriousness may not be easily visible to her employer and Ruth, who are quick to restate associations of Gypsy-ness with laziness and lack of work discipline. When Natalia extends an invitation to them to join her and her family at the gate where they were watching the village children playing a game of football, Ruth replies: "No, we don't have time. We've got lots of work to do." To which Ruth's mother adds: "You lot spend your days hanging out around here." There is thus a clear disconnect between depictions of Natalia at work and such statements that produce Natalia's story as a racialized representation of a Roma woman, at odds with her everyday life.

Key to such racializing discourses is the association of Gypsiness with laziness, illiteracy and the propensity towards unregulated sexual activity. Despite the fact that Natalia is shown articulating a cogent analysis in response to the questions of her interviewers, reading a bible, and testifying to her history of formal employment, *STĀM* does not lead to a historicized understanding of the two women's different relations to poverty, education, racial prejudice, and transnational (im)mobility. Questions and answers that delve deeper into the conditions of Natalia's in-actualized mobility beg to be formulated. Despite a mythical Gypsy cosmopolitanism still claimed by a segment of the Romani people, sociological studies of the issue caution against the impulse to romanticize their lives. Romania's transition to the market economy increased the rate of poverty in an uneven fashion and impacted especially upon the segments of the population with lower levels of education, such as the Roma. This, and the generalized racial prejudice against the Roma, drove the latter to seek new economic opportunities abroad (Sandu 2005, 561). While the Roma constitute the minority group most connected

to the ethnic Germans' networks, quantitative and qualitative migration research indicates a significant presence of Roma in the German field of circular migration (Sandu 2000, 2005). Natalia's planned destination is Spain. Despite centuries-long relations between the Roma and Saxons, moving to Spain seems a much more coherent life strategy to Natalia than moving to Germany. Further explorations of the disabling force of racialization are needed to account for the assemblage of gender and racial elements that disable the transnational mobility effects of certain networks, be they friendship, kinship, or neighborly relations. The directors' portrayal of Natalia as a literate, hardworking mother, and their emphasis on the fact that she had never had an abortion, do little to expose the forces that have contributed to the formation of this resilient subject position, such as segregation, exclusion, oppression, violence, state brutality and, in the case of women, sterilization and rape (Oprea 2012).

#### **2.4. What is in the name of a racialized category?**

Ultimately, translation details indicate that *STĂM* is more readily co-opted by the politics of commercialized multiculturalism than an anti-racist political agenda. In the scene that shows the two women probing the categories of ethnic, cultural, and national identity, Natalia states in Romanian, "Si eu in buletin is trecuta romana, nu *Rom*<sup>14</sup> sau asa, cetatenia Română, nationalitatea Română;" which the subtitled translation renders as: "On my identity card I'm Romanian, and not *Gypsy*,<sup>15</sup> or anything else. Romanian citizenship ...Romanian nationality." The slippage between Rom [Roma] and Gypsy is not a mere translation error. Opting for the term Gypsy instead of Roma bears political implications. The deployment of the term Roma [Rom] in Natalia's statement serves to

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<sup>14</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>15</sup> Emphasis mine.

self-identify her as a subject within national and supra-national institutions of citizenship and, implicitly, to acknowledge the significant outcome of a two-decade long civil rights struggle carried out on linguistic grounds, which resulted in the adoption of the politically correct term Roma as a descriptor of Natalia's ethnic identity. Roma scholar and activist Alexandra Oprea draws attention to the fact that Roma communities have used "Roma," a word that gained currency in Europe in the late 1990s in the context of the Romani civil rights movement, "since time immemorial." Oprea rightfully argues that replacing the pejorative "țigan" with the word "Roma" is not just semantics: "Words and language are powerful. They affect how we see the world, how we think. (This is why colonizers imposed their language on the peoples they colonized.) To control what a group is called is to control what is thought about that group as well as what that group thinks about itself" (Oprea 2012, 13). Oprea argues that like "țigan," the word "Gypsy" and its variants is in all languages a pejorative misnomer. While, perhaps, in the Northern American context the word "Gypsy" is less offensive, it nevertheless preserves injurious connotations, which are rooted in its European background. In Romanian, the word for gypsy, "țigan," is commonly used as a negative epithet to sanction someone who is perceived as behaving in a loud, rowdy, rude, insolent, untidy, or dishonest manner. Oprea further argues that the gendered difference in these racializing linguistic formations is significant and that they are imbricated with the logic of enslavement and exploitation: "The bulk of stereotypes we do share with Romani men: both men and women are considered lazy, belligerent, vulgar, unwashed, and criminal. [...] Although both of us are hypersexualized, Romani women have the added vulnerability of rape, which is justified through these stereotypes surrounding the *țigancă*'s sexual appetite [...]"

First, a *țiganka* is not a woman, and she is thus not accorded chivalrous treatment. She is a nagging beggar, a foul-mouthed street sweeper. She's aggressive, pushy, and dirty. Even in her old age, she retains her masculine qualities. These are the stereotypes that allowed for her enslavement and they are the stereotypes that justify state brutality toward her" (2013, 16).

In her conversation with Ruth, Natalia's words attempt to unearth hidden misconceptions about this category through the lens of her insider knowledge and life experiences as a Romani woman. Towards the end of the scene Natalia wistfully states: "Țigan e ala care nu e om [...] așa s-ar zice mai bine. Așa s-ar zice mai bine. În fata lui Dumnezeu totii suntem egali." ["He who is not a man is a Gypsy. . . That's what you should say. We are all equal in the eyes of God."] While Ruth is quick to amend her friend's statement about equality in God's eyes with an account of ethnic difference, Natalia's comment is a critique formulated in response to racism and attests to her aspirations to be treated equally (Oprea 2004). A 2010 study carried out by Fundatia Alaturi de Voi (By Your Side Foundation), showed that only 10% of the interviewees agreed with the statement that Roma are "human, just like other people."

*STĀM* sheds light on the production of Natalia's racialized subject position through the Saxon women's statements and modes of address, as well as through the kin and labor relations among them. However, this analysis does not provide the viewer with a more complex understanding of the larger contexts of the production and circulation of these stereotypes. The recourse to the term Gypsy as a translation for *Rom* [Roma] renders invisible not only the one important outcome of the post-Cold War Roma mobilizations, namely the vehement resistance that this change encounters among the

majority Romanian population, but also the transnational conditions which have fueled these contestations since Romania's accession to the EU. Ruth's responses to the questions about her reasons for emigration point to a separatist ethos that posits a hierarchy of ethnic identification which devalue Gypsy-ness and Romanian-ness in relation to Saxon-ness: "There were lots of reasons for which I left. All the Saxons have left. I'm a Saxon. What am I still doing here with all these Romanians" or "My friends were asking: Why stay in Romania? There are only Gypsies there." The conflation between Gypsy and Romanian is a significant ethno-national concern among ethnic Romanians. If Roma people experience marginalization and racialization within the boundaries of Romania, Romanians themselves experience such marginalization in the Western European countries where they emigrate primarily for economic reasons. As Alina Vămanu and Iulian Vămanu found, the Roma are often represented as short-circuiting the logic of representation, and positive image making, that Romanians are at pains to project about themselves within the EU. The shame and frustration of being Romanian is thus relinquished effectively to the Roma people once more, who are scapegoated and deemed undesirable both within the Romanian polity and within the EU.

### **3.1. Postsocialism and transnational mothering: Rastko Petrovic's *Independence* (2006)**

In agreement with Gerry Mooney's critique of Glasgow 1990 and Beatrice Garcia's commentary on Barcelona 2004, I argue that the EEC urban revitalization has rarely benefited the actual inhabitants of the EEC cities. Most of the time, the transformations referred to are deployed for the purpose of diverting attention away from the major structural inequalities that characterize many of the ex-industrial cities of

Central and Eastern Europe in such a way that the power relations that create these cities are rendered invisible.

Rasko Petrovic's *Independence* (2006) was also screened during the 2007 edition of the ASTRA Film Festival. Petrovic turned his documentary lens towards workers' districts. The neighborhoods of Independența, Vasile Aaron, and Ștrand are urban spaces, which are never conceived as objects of touristic gaze. For that reason, they are never included in the touristic circuits of investment, revitalization, and transnational consumptive exploration (Urry 2002). Petrovic's documentary film, *Independence*, was screened at one of the most central cultural events of 2007 Sibiu ECC. *Independence* disturbs, however, the logic of the representational exclusion of the local population and their neighborhoods, which cannot be assimilated by touristic commodification. Such operations of capitalist valorization and devalorization through circuits of touristic consumption also preoccupy other artists from the region. In Hungary, for example, artist Tamas Kaszas organizes guided tours of Dunaújváros, in order to acquaint the wider public with the material presence of the exemplary socialist town.<sup>16</sup>

Petrovic named his documentary film, *Independence*, after the name of a peripheral workers' district situated in the south of the city, Independența. Răzvan, the ten or eleven-year old protagonist of the film, lives in a small apartment in the

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<sup>16</sup> Kaszas's project is relevant to the methodological discussion of my research not only because of the disturbance it produces in the field of representation, but also due to its medium of embodied participatory experience. Furthermore, the *Dunaújváros guided tours* experiences, which are evocative of the author's shared with tourists his memories of socialism, further indicate the loss incurred by the progressive imagination with the occurrence of the hegemonization of neoliberal ideologies. Kaszas writes: "The scenery that surrounded me was excellent for communicating clear and pure ideas. I liked the posters and coats of arms made with modern design, whose inspiring force radiated a kind of positive energy. I was enthused by their optimism and the image of the future they were foretelling. Although the scenery has since dissolved, nothing that I could be inspired by has taken the place of those ideas. The symbols have proven to have no real content behind them; they were only fabrications serving to conceal something."

Independența district, with his sister and father. Halfway through the film, Răzvan asks his father how far away Italy is and what means of transportation would he use to go to Italy. Viewers thus learn that Răzvan's mother is at work in Italy. The names of the protagonists indicated to me that Răzvan's family belongs to the ethnic Romanian majority of Sibiu. His mother's transnational work trajectory to Italy is that of many other local working women, who chose Italy for the linguistic resemblance between the two romance languages. I argue that *Independence* continues the story of transnational migration started by *STĂM*, by documenting the family life of a Romanian woman from Transylvania, Răzvan's mother, as it unfolds in her absence.

*Independence* was created in the 2006 Aristoteles<sup>17</sup> workshop and premiered at the 2007 AFF's Student Program to much positive acclaim. Collete Piault, anthropologist and member of the AFF jury, applauded the film for its nuanced presentation of "everyday up-close scenes from Răzvan's daily life," which created "a portrait with the subtlety of a work of fiction" (NAFA newsletter 2007).

The film unfolds without much of a plot and its narrative structure strings together moments from Răzvan's vacation in the summer of 2006, outlining the timeline of the film: his father's birthday party, a visit to his aunt with the purpose of taking a hot shower; his infatuation with Oana, a girl who is the same age as himself and lives in the next block; a frightful visit to the dentist's office, accompanied by his sister; and an intensely emotional phone conversation with his mother. Proceeding in a non-representational fashion, *Independence* records Răzvan's movements through his

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<sup>17</sup> Aristoteles Workshop Association (AWA) is a training and development center that aims to promote creative documentary filmmakers in Central and Eastern Europe. The organization was established in 2005, with material and conceptual support from the French/German cultural TV channel *Arte*, and continues to offer a hands-on approach to documentary filmmaking along with an ongoing tutoring system.

neighborhood, among his friends and in relation to them, among his family and, once again, in relation to them. In the absence of voice-over and interview footage, the textual modality is reduced to a minimum, which enables viewers to get a sense of immersion in Răzvan's routine interactions and daily activities, as they emerge in his moods and feelings. *Independence* also resists the biographical modality. What viewers learn about Răzvan is fragmentary and conveys no sense of "individual wholeness" or "hermeneutic coherence" (Vannini 2014, 4).

### 3.2. Răzvan's Sibiu

Several film critics described *Independence* as an example of cinematic portraiture. Such an assessment is adequate, since there are only a few frames from which Răzvan is absent. I argue, nevertheless, that *Independence* could also be approached as a work of urban portraiture, raising questions such as: How do Petrovic's representations disturb the regime of visibility premised by the logic of transnational tourism? What kind of city and what kind of residents does *Independence* bring forth for a visual encounter?

A screening of *Independence* was one of the 200 events of 2007 SECC. It told a story that did not fit seamlessly with this mega-event's tendency towards displaying remedialization and commodified ethnic diversity. The film restores the historical timeline by integrating the communist state period through the presentation of the pre-1989 architectural space as well as by focusing on present-day spaces that ambiguously depict the failures of the former regime alongside the impoverishing effects of the new order of neoliberal global capitalism. Most importantly, *Independence* enables a mode of transnational encounter through which Razvan's summer links several possible levels, from that of the individual to those of the family, the city, the nation, and the globe. The

relationships that Razvan sets in motion, and the background of his movements, orients the viewer towards an appreciation of everydayness, which is produced by economic, political, and cultural factors that connect to national and transnational levels.

His family's tiny apartment, the staircase of the apartment building where he hangs out with other boys from the block, the dilapidated industrial building that he explores to pass the time, a run-down tractor abandoned near a deserted industrial building, the block, the street, the larger neighborhood, the city, which he crosses by public transportation or in his father's car, and the city's downtown, where he runs errands and shops for his father's birthday, all these create a network of spaces, activities, and affects. In becoming acquainted with them, viewers are prompted to ask questions about the reasons behind the collapse of industrial infrastructures, about the new structures of the national and transnational labor markets about the effects of transnational labor migration on the lives of those who leave and those who stay (Regulska 2001, 2009), as well as about the transformation of the city in response to tourism-oriented urban development policies.

### **3.3. Against the relics of the old communist times or the postsocialist abjection**

On the morning of his father's birthday, Răzvan's list of chores included paying the phone and cable bills. Deciding to redirect the money away from bills and toward a present for his father, Răzvan skips the stop at Mihai Viteazu Avenue and heads downtown, to the stores on he Nicolae Bălcescu Avenue, one of the most picturesque places in old Sibiu. Petrovic's camera work speaks the language of his representational priorities. The camera does not seek to rest on any of the beautiful buildings that Răzvan passes and never cuts away from the boy. I interpret this directorial choice as a deliberate

decision in opposition to the aesthetic capitalization on the architectural spectacle of "remedievalized" Sibiu.

The urban portraiture of *Independence* is, in fact, a matter of disagreement among critics. Film critic Iulia Blaga appreciates the informative yet non-didactic manner through which Petrovic enables the viewer "to understand, even as a visiting tourist, that there are many children whose parents are working abroad" (2007). Blaga also acknowledges that *Independence* is an urban documentary portrait of Sibiu, while she is critical of the elements that Petrovic chooses in order to construct his depiction. "I would have liked to see fewer relics of the old communist times," states the critic in a parenthesis that briefly interrupts the concluding line of an otherwise very warm review.

Blaga's remark is, nevertheless, fair and symptomatic of the saturation of the post-1989 representational field with cinematic renderings of the horrors of the communist age.<sup>18</sup> Her observation prompted me to ask the question of how we can represent the cities of Central and Eastern Europe in ways that do not render the failures of the former regimes in commodified and spectacular packages that ultimately normalize and naturalize neoliberal global capitalism. Art theorist Cristian Nae argues that such representational regimes are intertwined with geopolitical discursive formations that have emerged in Western Europe since the dismantling of the state-socialism regimes of Central and Eastern Europe. Nae emphasizes "the discursive formalization of the present-day sociopolitical condition in a syntagm such as *post-communism* runs the risk of reducing it to a generic image, reified within the confinements of unavoidable prejudices" (2006, 191). What is at stake is not only a case of misrepresentation due to "unavoidable

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<sup>18</sup> It has to be noted that, in other locales, the state-run communist past has been integrated into the circuits of cultural consumption. The House of Terror in Budapest (Hungary) was set up in 2000 and exhibits artifacts of the dictatorial regimes of twentieth century Hungary.

prejudices" toward state-run communism as the only large scale alternative system to Western capitalism. At the same time, such representations perform analytical and attributive distortions, which ultimately serve the logic and operations of neoliberal global capitalism. The questions that emerge at this juncture concern why phenomena such as unemployment, poverty, and infrastructural collapse would be attributed solely to the economic inefficiency of state-run communist regimes and their centralized planned economies and not also to the subsequent two-decade long reign of neoliberal and free-market principles and practices?

Blaga's syntagm "relics of communism" and her irritation vis-a-vis the saturation of the media environment with such imagery is indicative of a transnational politics of representation articulated not only after, but also in response to, the end of the Cold War. The Apple Dictionary defines the term "relics," as "remains, corpses, bones" or the medical "cadaver." Jennifer Suchland turns to Julia Kristeva's theorization of the abject in order to locate the position of "postsocialism" in the representational field. Abandoned infrastructures and deserted buildings thus constitute the ever-present corpse of the deceased "state-run communism." In Kristeva's view, the corpse "is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life" (Kristeva in Suchland 2013, 8). This is coupled with another concern, namely that within the space of the New Europe, the consumption of images that document and attest to the economic crisis of Central and Eastern Europe follows the logic of voyeurism. Suchland writes:

The voyeurism of the filmic gaze is of postsocialist abjection [...] Postsocialism is represented as the quality of being an embalmed corpse. Like Lenin's body, postsocialism lies there with no future outside its reference to the past.

Postsocialism cannot generate new meaning, but can be used repeatedly as a reminder of failure and someone else's triumph (Suchland 2013, 369).

Clearly, poverty, unemployment, loss of prospects, instability, double and triple work shifts for women, and transnational labor migration constitute life circumstances of many Sibians in post-1989 Romania. However, while "the abjection of postsocialism" as a representational register allows the visibility of critical socio-economic problems of the current day, their definition as "failures of the postsocialist state, and not the common economic policies that fuel precarious labor across the globe" (Suchland 2013, 370) short-circuit any path to imagining ways out towards alternative futures.

### **3.4. Transnational work migration: from the scale of the body to the trans-national scale**

*Independence* also eschews entrapment at the micro-level. Petrovic's renderings of Răzvan and Sibiu make visible lines of division within the city as well as points of connection between the city and its "outside." David Harvey's argument that global capitalism materializes at the level of the urban in the form of cities divided between cosmopolitan elites and impoverished populations holds both analytical and political power (Harvey 2003) in this context. *Independence* complicates this picture by showing how the divided cities of neoliberal global capitalism are agentively tackled by the working classes in ways that are at once localized and part of a transnational order. Even in the absence of footage featuring Răzvan's mother or an explicit foregrounding of her relocation to Italy for work, the film enables a more nuanced account than the representational regimes that subjectify the workers of the so-called developing world as passive victims of the current global order. The unstated insights that *Independence*

enables converge with the findings and observations of feminist geographers and sociologists.

For example, Helen Jarvis, Jonathan Cloke and Paula Kantor examine the difficult articulations of subjectivity and agency in the practice of gendered transnational mobility. They question the connotations of empowerment, purposefulness, and freedom of movement that this term evokes and appear concerned that these associations might obscure the pressures that motivate people to search for work across the national border, as well as the fact that the majority of migrating subjects undergo life experiences that are "stressful, involuntary, insecure and potentially dangerous" (Jarvis et al. 2009, 158). They also point out the relevance of the class dimension to transnational mobility, by showing that "voluntary travel increases with affluence, whereas enforced travel increases with poverty" (Jarvis et al. 2009, 161). Furthermore, a rational choice model or personal preference type of explanation further obscures the complexity of transnational work migration. The so-called "choice to migrate" exceeds explanations that focus on the individual. Such decisions are made at the intersection of gendered moral values and gendered social pressures, enabled or hindered "culturally specific aspirations and logistical constraints" <sup>19</sup>(Jarvis et al 2009, 161).

The push-and-pull of economic factors is not gender neutral. Neither is it blind to ethnicity, racialized positionalities, and colonial histories. Economic neoliberalization produces in different ways not only locales, but also their gender regimes (Regulska 2009). Economic policies promote or hinder the migration of women and men in differentiated ways. Sylvia Chant thus found that concerns over reproductive labor within

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<sup>19</sup> The comparative analysis of Ruth's actualized hypermobility and Natalia's desired yet impossible work migration to Spain as depicted by *STĀM -We are Staying* is a case in point.

the household represent a more significant factor in determining household migration decisions than do push factors associated with wage labor (Chant in Jarvis et al. 2009, 177). The pull factors of the receiving economies are also gendered, as they tend to attract the migration of women for the sectors of domestic and care work and of men for agricultural and construction work (Regulska 2004).

Răzvan is growing up in a household with two parents working for wages, one locally and the other one transnationally, in Italy. The domestic labor of this household has been redistributed among those who stayed in Sibiu. The family's apartment is neatly kept and crammed with nice furnishings. His father contributes his own care and domestic work to the household. He gently wakes Răzvan up in the mornings or attends to his hygiene by taking him to his sister's for hot showers. Răzvan himself proves to be rather self-reliant and his contributions, such as making the bed, fixing breakfast and paying the bills are important. Visual clues indicate that cooking was taken over by his sister, as are other instances of care work, such as taking the boy to the dentist. His mother's migration to Italy indicates that it would be impossible for the family to subsist on only one salary. The film also subtly captures the fact that Răzvan's family situation is not unique. This is an instance of the feminization of global labor migration, as it is Razvan's mother who is at work in Italy. Women from Romania have thus joined the ranks of female workers from developing countries and fulfill the care needs of the developed world, while performing transnational motherhood for their own children.

Reproductive and care work, at home or in another country, becomes the crux of transnational gender redefinitions and emerging transnational class-divisions. Romania is considered at the moment to be the sending country of about 2.5 million migrant workers.

The number of transnational women who are migrant workers has steadily increased since the fall of state-run communist regimes. Moreover the fact that women's jobs have disappeared from the local labor market points to the gendered effects of the post-1989 economic restructuring. The economic transition tended to favor the conservation of men's jobs through the state-subsidized deferrals of heavy industries' privatizations, as opposed to the free-fall privatizations of the lighter, feminized sectors of the economy (Regulska 2012).

Răzvan's mother's transnational work and the affects generated by it turns Sibiu into a space that can at least be "lived well" by her family. Răzvan's living standard, mobility, and consumer power within the city result, at least partially, from his mother's transnational labor mobility and the revenues that her labor generates. While differences in scope matter, Răzvan's journey downtown to pay the cable bills or to buy a present for his father's birthday represent small practices of consumption, which blur the conspicuous division lines discussed by Harvey, or at least make it possible to also account for the conditions that can overcome such lines of division. Last but not least, Petrovic's portrait of Sibiu lets the viewer understand that the boundaries of contemporary cities are not fixed and traceable anymore; they flow with the movements of images, capital, work, workers and revenues, energies, human bodies, and their loves and longings.

### **3.5. Close-ups: empathies and political potentials**

What makes viewers care about Răzvan and the larger socio-economic circumstances of his life? How does *Independence* engage its viewers? Is this engagement different from what feminist and critical race theorist, Saidiya Hartman,

describes as a modality of "making the other's suffering one's own" (Hartman 1997, 19)?

In relation to the geopolitics of the Cold War, Susan D. Moeller notes that once that Soviet Union and its Central and Eastern European proxies ceased being the "bad guys" of international affairs, and the United States public lost its compass in relation to "who needs protection," portrayals of the children of the post-communist world as the innocent, pure victims emerged to "fill up the American empathy vacuum" (2001, 1).

*Independence's* power to affect viewers emotionally lies with Petrovic's directorial use of Razavan's close-ups. During the age of silent film, about a hundred years ago, film theorist Bela Balazs praised close-ups for their extraordinary expressive and emotional capacities. He wrote that "it is the heart, not the eye" (Balazs 2003, 117) that perceives the faces in close-up shots. They have a lyrical character and an ability to address the heart directly. Thus they can make one see affectively. Balasz argued that close-ups deepen the viewers' visions of life as they reveal "what is really happening under the surface of appearances [...] something unseen and unseeable from 'normal' distance...through 'normal' engagement [and] normal encounter" (Balazs 2003, 117). The spatial alteration performed by close-ups is relevant for understanding both the kind of knowledge and the processes of knowing that such revelations make possible. The contraction of space that close-ups produce expands space inwardly into the cinematic protagonists' feelings. Balazs writes: "We find ourselves in another dimension: that of physiognomy...[I]n the isolated close-up of the film we can see to the bottom of a soul by means of such tiny movements of facial muscles which even the most observant partner would never perceive." (Balazs 2003, 122). Varying in their depth, Petrovic's close-ups

reveal Razvan's joy, happiness, pain, curiosity, sleep, anger, confusion, excitement, love, care, focus, pride, and longing for his mother.

*Independence* also includes sporadic close-ups of Razvan staring awkwardly at the camera. Whereas such close-up shots could have been easily edited out, Petrovic did not omit them. From a theatrical perspective, these moments could also function as instances of direct address; in this case, a mode of drawing the audience into the events on the screen and thus enabling a more involved spectator. If Balazs is right about the potential of the close-up shot to lead the viewer to capture the protagonists' most minimally expressed emotions and most swiftly passing affects, perhaps it could be argued that the multiple close-ups of Razvan would lead audiences to seek an understanding of Razvan's life in the city of Sibiu that transgresses the limits of touristic imagery and experience. The close-ups showing Razvan staring into the camera, mildly amused, mildly confused, or mildly irritated, show him to be in silent dialogue with himself, the film's director, and its audiences. These close-ups also show Petrovic's acknowledgement of the intrusiveness his filmic endeavor. The relationality produced by its close-ups prevent *Independence* from reproducing the cliché visual trope of the Second and Third Worlds' "victim" children. The fact that Răzvan is growing up in post-communist Romania, in a transnational family, does not generate a story of dispossession or neglect. Rather, it prompts viewers to careful consideration of the particulars, agencies, costs, and opportunities of his life under the current circumstances of geopolitical and economic restructuring.

#### **4. Conclusion**

*STAM* and *Independence* trace the live events of three families of different

ethnicities in contemporary Sibiu. In spite of its intersectional lens, Schiltz and Gregoire's documentary research and exposition do not escape the self-other registers of representation of ethnic and racial difference. The scene in which Ruth and Natalia discuss the complexities of ethnic identity and citizenship also signifies through its visual symbolism. A majestic tree dominates the mise-en-scene and Ruth and Natalia are heading towards it. The symbolism of the tree, regrettably, resonates only too closely with primordialist, and thus fixed, conceptualizations of ethnicity. *STĀM* comes close to articulating a documentary representation which accounts for the multiple and diverse linkages and connections that ethnic, racial, and national subjectivity formation entails in the social, cultural, economic, and geopolitical contexts of contemporary Europe. However, this register is short-circuited at several significant moments, as is the case, for instance, of the linearity of the tree symbolism, with the limited scope of questions that address Ruth's understanding of the historical conditions that facilitated her formation as a hypermobile dual-citizen and with the questions that address Natalia as an already racialized subject. The film's title flattens the circumstances that enable the two women's presence in Malancrav and the film itself, in spite of deploying an intersectional lens that is sensitive to elements of gender, ethnicity and race, does not succeed in bypassing fixed understandings of identity. Instead, it ends up simply reproducing demographic categories with invisible genealogies of production. The meanings and inherent enabling forces of Ruth's Saxon-ness and Natalia's *Gypsy-ness*<sup>20</sup> do not elude temporality and geopolitical spatiality. Such categorical formations are stabilized and part and parcel of the socioeconomic-political "hide-and-seek" game that global capitalism plays with racial and ethnic minorities (Udayakumar 2011, 89). As indicated by the directors' own words,

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<sup>20</sup> Emphasis mine.

*STĀM* fits into "the broader context of European expansion of a subject that comes up daily in public debates and which is likely to affect audiences with an interest in the countries of Eastern Europe and the fate of their inhabitants."<sup>21</sup> The film was screened and awarded the Special Prize of the Astra Documentary Film Festival in 2007—the year when the Eastern European city of Sibiu hosted the festival as one of Europe's Capitals of Culture, after it had been produced in Luxembourg, Sibiu's Western European twin host, and had benefited from the support of the *Fond National de Soutien a la Production Audiovisuelle*—Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and Luxembourg and Greater Region European Capital of Culture 2007.

Coco Fusco links the economy of ethnographic vision to the early days of the imperial conquest, when " 'aboriginal samples' of people from Africa, Asia, and the Americas were brought to Europe for aesthetic contemplation, scientific analysis and entertainment. Those people from other parts of the world were forced to take the place that Europeans had already created for the savages of their own Medieval mythology" (Fusco 1997, 145). Nowadays, Sibiu could be seen as the borderlands' capital of the new empire, while the Astra Film Festival has built a reputation as an international center for documentary film. In a more benign fashion, yet still within the logic of colonial practices of expansion and visual encounter, *STĀM* caters to the Western European fascination with otherness and its consumption of static and packaged versions of culture.

On the other side *Independence* brings its viewers in proximity with questions that challenge the normalization of neoliberal and free-market capitalism as the only alternative to the state-socialism past. I argue that Petrovic's portrayal of Sibiu and the visibility he offers spaces not intended for touristic gaze also eludes the display for

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<sup>21</sup> [www.langenachtderwissenschaften.de/archiv/.../technische-Daten.pdf](http://www.langenachtderwissenschaften.de/archiv/.../technische-Daten.pdf)

spectacle and commodification of "the relics of the old communist times" (Blaga 2007).

The images of Sibiu that Petrovic presents are fragmentary and immediate to Răzvan's presence while his mother is away at work in Italy; they depict the spaces that Răzvan inhabits in quotidian life, spaces created by Răzvan's everyday life, movement, loving, work, pain, playing, dreaming and pondering along with his family and friends.

*Independence* captures the rhythms of Sibiu as they traverse the lives of Răzvan, his sister, and his father. The film's focus on the everyday experiences of Răzvan's family resonates with the interest of feminist scholars in everyday life. First of all, this conceptual and methodological orientation creates discursive room for the experiences, practices, and meanings of women, men and children. It also brings to the fore the "taken for granted 'habitual' connections of time, space, place and codes of conduct" and most importantly, it is "a means of recognizing a situated embodiment in the social and organizational dimensions of urban life" (Jarvis et al. 2009, 144, Regulska 2004).

Documentary films informed by such theoretical underpinnings are significant in the contemporary transnational moment as they remind publics "while some aspects of everyday life may be familiar to us, this does not mean that we understand the everyday realities of everyone everywhere" (Jarvis et al. 2009, 144).

The framing shots are never panoramic and thus are never conducive to totalizing and generalizing effects. By eschewing a totalizing effect, the tableau that emerges as Sibiu's portrait resonates with Manuel Delanda's definition of the urban as "an assemblage of spatial relationships among persons, networks or organizations and physical infrastructures such as buildings, streets, and other conduits for the circulation of matter and energy" (2006, 6). *Independence* gives Sibiu an identity that is in-process and

thus re-works it by conceptualizing the city as space that is being produced under the impact of multi-scalar agencies. It is precisely the fine cinematic interweaving of the intimate, social, and global political and economic, that makes *Independence* successful in enabling a mode of seeing that eludes the spectacularization, objectification, and commodification that the touristic vision relies upon.

## Chapter 4

### Arriving in Berlin: Gender, Transnational Class Formations and Sexuality in

Anna Krenz's *The Polish Wife* (2008) and

Julia Ostertag's *Under the Red Umbrella* (2009)

The old rules no longer applied, and the new ones only took hold gradually. In this transitional situation the East Germans' attitude to life transformed rapidly, their hunger for everything on offer mingled with hopes and fears—their country was changing and they knew it. The democratization of state and society during the GDR's [German Democratic Republic] last months opened up many opportunities. In autumn 1989, there was an explosion of civil rights activity in the GDR. People campaigned for their interests and set up associations and civil rights groups at the grassroots level. They became self-reliant, established representative interest groups and deposed the remaining SED-PDS [Party of Democratic Socialism] officials. Some activists campaigned for the conservation of their cities; other started newspapers or championed education and employee rights. They often received spontaneous, non-governmental help from West Germany and discovered many different facets of the previously forbidden West (*We are the People—Peaceful Revolution 1989/90* 2009, 90).

#### 1.1. Berlin: global hub for visual arts

Berlin today is the home of over 600 commercial galleries, numerous museums, cultural organizations and both commercial and non-profit events; a city where the arts have been generously supported by public funds as well as through private investment,

for more than a decade; the destination of numerous art tourists, dealers, curators, and last but not least, the new residence of choice for artists from around the world. As the site of the Berlin Wall, a physical border that, until 1989, cut the city in two, with one half in the capitalist world and the other in the Communist bloc, Berlin is a site rich in signifying and affective potentialities. It is usually argued, therefore, that the cityscape of Berlin is caught in unending cycles of demolition, re-demolition and reconstruction," (Seltzer 2003, 63) as well as projects of identity reinvention and border revision (Tan 2008, 138).

After the 1989 reunification, Berlin engaged in processes of social, economic, ideological and spatial integration of its Western and Eastern sides into a global city. Prior to 1989, the two sides materialized—spatially and socially--under different sets of ideological forces. According to art historian and sociologist Pelin Tan, the old histories of East and West Berlin had been inscribed in their "architecture and urban representation" (Tan 2008, 138). Thus, the first step in the post '89 transformation of city was "erasing [the] past communist traces in the urban and architectural texture, either by presenting this erasure in the service of *revanchist* urbanism or by opening the inner city to international capital" (2008, 138). The economic and ideological reforms went hand-in-hand with the implementation of this dualistic blueprint of devastation and preservation. The demolition of the Berliner Mauer (Berlin Wall), the Palast der Republik (Palace of the Republic) and other buildings representative of what has been described as the GDR modern architectural style (Kuhrmann 2009) cut vast empty spaces into the city at various points in time during the past twenty years.

In this chapter, I engage with images and narratives that constituted the identity of Berlin in 2009, two decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall. When I encountered Berlin

in that moment, the city was being celebrated primarily as the capitol of a successfully reunified Germany, and secondarily the queer capitol of Western Europe. I argue that against the backdrop of this celebratory tableau, the heteronormative and patriarchal pressures that shaped the lives and work experiences of women who arrive in Berlin in search for work were rendered invisible.

Anna Krenz's multimedia installation, *The Polish Wife* and Julie Ostertag's short documentary film, *Under the Red Umbrella* are the two projects that redress such moments of elision, and thus constitute the focus of my analysis in this chapter. My writing about these two projects is first contextualized by my engagement with the larger field of art and cultural events during my fieldwork. By way of conclusion, I highlight the value of the interventions performed by Krenz and Ostertag, by placing their works side by side with two other documentary films, which tackle the issues of women's mobility and commodified intimacy.

## **1.2. Berlin: "then and now"**

Many of the art projects and cultural events that I encountered during my five field trips to Berlin in 2008 and 2009 drew on the celebration of the two decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Klaus Wowereit, the governing Mayor of Berlin, wrote in the opening pages of the 2009 exhibition magazine *We Are the People—Peaceful Revolution 1989/90*:

For Berlin, 2009 is a year of commemorations of the moving events of 20 years ago, when the Peaceful Revolution finally toppled the Berlin Wall [...] The Peaceful Revolution of the autumn of 1989 brought about fundamental changes,

not only to Berlin and Germany, but also to Europe and the world as a whole  
(Wowereit 2009, 7).

As shown in the epigraph drawn from *We are the People—Peaceful Revolution 1989/90*, at the beginning of this chapter, the transformations that the city of Berlin and its dwellers had undergone during the twenty-year interval since the end of the Cold War are framed in terms of the aspiration to achieve a better future. The spatial heterochrony of the city of Berlin is stated in between the lines. Nevertheless, what seemed to be described as the future of the city was in fact the present of West Berlin. Several exhibitions and large-scale outdoor posters depicted photographically people and scenes from pre-1989 Berlin side-by-side with their photographic renderings twenty years later. For instance, at the Berlin Hauptbahnhof, an outdoor exhibition showed tilt-shift images of the old Berlin versus the new Berlin; the exhibition *A Turbulent World, Telling Time—Contemporary Photography and Video Works from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Germany*<sup>22</sup> included Christian Borchert's series *Die Familienporträts, 1983-1993* (Family Portraits, 1983-1993); Angela Fensch's photographic essay *Frauen Portrats Kinder 1989-2005* (Portraits of Women and Children, 1989-2005), which was on display at the *Übergangsgesellschaft: Porträts und Szenen, 1980-1990* (Transitional Society. Portraits and Scenes 1980-1990) also employed a "then versus now" representational formula. First, a representational formula concerned with Berlin and Berliners then and now renders invisible the interval in between - the actual experiences of transformation in the realms of politics, social relations, economic practices, and ideas. Second, the "then and now" formula tends to indicate that the

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<sup>22</sup> *A Turbulent World, Telling Time—Contemporary Photography and Video Works from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Germany* was curated by Jule Reuter and opened at the Akademie Der Kunste, Berlin.

population of Berlin consists of the same Berliners as two decades ago, thus rendering invisible the post-1989 influx of immigrants, who seem to be invisible within the body politic of contemporary Berlin. The two visual arts projects that constitute the core of this chapter, Anna Krenz's *The Polish Wife* and Julia Ostertag's *Under the Red Umbrella*, shift the representational terrain towards the immigrant subjects of Berlin.

Projects and programs that strayed from the "then and now" formula were nevertheless present. *The Museum Fur Film und Fernsehen* (Museum of Film and Television), presented *Wir waren so frei...Momentaufnahmen 1989/1990* (Moments in Time 1989/ 1990). Organized in the form of an open archive, the show presented photographs, television and documentary footage, both professional and amateur, from October 1989-- the time of the fall of the Berlin wall and the subsequent reunification of Germany.<sup>23</sup> The curatorial contextualization of most of the materials on display was rather minimalistic, with an added emphasis on the documentarian gesture. For instance, a media installation simultaneously streamed news broadcasts from Paris, London, New York, and Moscow. They all cover the fall of the Berlin Wall. One of the news anchors states: "the fall of the Berlin wall means a lot for the East Berliners because they now can travel." The reductive character of the news anchor's interpretation is striking. At the time of its original airing, such "news commentary" must have signaled to audiences in the Eastern part of the city the discursive incommensurability between the two geopolitical locations. In 2009, I read the multichannel video installation re-presenting the 1989 news footage as a document of the very opening of the transnational information space towards the space beyond the Iron Curtain or as the founding act of a dialogical space for the

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<sup>23</sup> The *Moments in Time 1989/1990* project also features an online digital archive at: <http://primary-sources.eui.eu/website/wir-waren-so-frei-momentaufnahmen-19891990-moments-time-19891990>.

production of media knowledge; at the same time, this was a gesture that enabled a retroactive understanding of how news media relies on the production and circulation of familiar, reductionist and simplistic tropes in their coverage of international affairs for the audiences of the global North.

The second installation featured in the exhibition consisted of two video channels simultaneously projecting documentary footage on two screens that faced one other. The significance of the 1989 events and their economic, political, and social effects are discussed by residents of the former East, on one screen, and by former West Berliners on the other. For many of the East Berliners, the fall of the Berlin Wall meant an opportunity to reform social democracy through the elimination of totalitarianism and surveillance. Some of the West Berliners expressed their fear that the citizens of the former East Germany would become a burden on the prosperous West German economy, due to their being prone to laziness and dirtiness. The articulation of racialization in relation to geopolitical location and work formations are readily observable here. Finally, several East Berliners expressed their surprise at the swift disappearance of the East German flag and currency and at the unquestioned adoption of West Germany's trajectory and national markers along with the free market ideology.

### **1.3. Berlin: gender and sexuality**

Between "then" and "now," the city of Berlin fashioned itself not only into a hub of global arts but also into a city where sexual diversity is welcome. Modern Berlin has often been represented through gendered and sexualized tropes and images. In her 2003 book, *Representing Berlin*, Dorothy Rowe argues that the representational sexualization

of Berlin in Weimar Germany<sup>24</sup> arose at the intersection of several factors: nineteenth century urbanization, the effects of WWI, radical changes in the position of women and lastly, the emergence of anxieties vis-a-vis women's presence in the public sphere. The rapid growth of the city and a new openness regarding female sexuality came to be perceived as threatening to the values and the norms of the times. The press of the early twentieth century described the city of Berlin and the sexuality of its women as destructive of "the masculine subjective identity already traumatized by war" (Rowe 2003, 2). At the intersection of these two registers of fear and anxiety (urban modernity and gender transformations), the city of Berlin began to be signified as "feminine" and its femininity was often times represented through discourses and imagery of illicit female sexuality (Rowe 2003, 2-7).

Nowadays Berlin maintains some points of representational association with tropes of bold sexuality but the subjectivity and identity registers have significantly changed. Jennifer Petzen describes contemporary Berlin as:

the capital of queer Germany, [...] one of the more popular destinations for queer Europeans tourists as well as German queers in search of a more tolerant place to live [...] the city [that] has an openly gay mayor, Klaus Wowereit,<sup>25</sup> [...] several regular gay publications, well over 100 queer-identified establishments, and a long history of queer activism and entertainment (2004, 21).

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<sup>24</sup> The Weimar Republic refers to the period in German history that started in 1919, after the 1918 German Revolution, and ended in 1933, when Adolph Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. The constitution of the Republic was drafted at Weimar because the city of Berlin was going through major social unrest and thus its circumstances were deemed too volatile and unsafe for the meetings of the National Assembly.

<sup>25</sup> In 2001, Berlin elected Klaus Wowereit, an openly gay man and Social Democrat, as its mayor. Wowereit came out at a party congress with the famous words: "Ich bin schwul, und das ist auch gut so." ("I'm gay and that's just fine.")

Important cultural landmarks in Berlin such as the Gay Holocaust Memorial, the Schwules Museum (Gay Museum), the widely attended June gay pride parade, several LGBTQ street festivals, and several LGBT film festivals, including the Berlin Porn Film Festival, have undoubtedly altered the heteronormative texture of the city, queering its spaces with non-conformist gender practices and sexualities. While these new queer formations ought to be acknowledged and praised, it must also be noted that the newly emerged cityscape is intertwined with the logic of global capitalism and the commodification of identity for touristic consumption. Even when discussions of sexuality remain confined to the agenda of LGBTQ tourism, important things are omitted. The Gay Holocaust Memorial has been vandalized multiple times. Feminist groups have questioned the masculine gendering of the memorial through the exclusion of persecuted lesbian women by the featuring film footage of only gay men kissing and not lesbian women as well. In spite of counterarguments about the lack of documentation of the victimization of lesbians under Nazism, the debates concluded with the decision that the Memorial would include the kissing lesbians. Lastly, the mainstream media representations of the afore-mentioned events consistently render ethnic queers invisible, thus ensuring the preservation of assumptions that gay is always white or German, while immigrant and ethnic subjects are coded straight, Muslim, Turkish, and homophobic (Wong 2011, 1985).

Nanna Heidenreich, the director of the LesbenFilmFestival (Lesbian Film Festival), confirmed the significance of such exclusions. She stated that "these issues [...] need to be tackled at a queer film and video festivals [...] for the LesbenFilmFestival, one fundamental liability is that there is no Turkish German or Muslim woman on the

programming team" (2010). Among the constitutive forces that fuel these discriminatory practices and contribute to their discursive articulation, Heidenreich cites the German citizenship law—"a law still based on the *ius sanguinis*, the law of blood, which makes almost the entire migrant community non-citizens without the right to vote" (2010).

The celebrations of the two-decade anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall were conducted under the banner of "A World Without Borders." What are the borders that are being shored up even as the city of Berlin is being celebrated as an epitome of "A World Without Borders" and as the "Queer Capitol of Germany"? Who are subjects who continue to be confined by normative gender and sexuality arrangements? How do such subjectivities intersect with new transnational class formations? How are they embedded within larger societal transformations, such as the collapse of the state-run Communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe, the eastward expansion of the European Union, and the ongoing shifts in the media and communication technology landscape? My goal in this chapter is to explore cultural works of sexuality and intimacy that emerged at the same time with the restructuring of state-run Communist economies. In this chapter I turn my attention to heteronormative sexualities and intimacies such as they are articulated in Anna Krenz's *The Polish Wife* (*Hack.Fem.East*, Kunstraum Kreutzberg/ Bethanien, 2008) and Julia Ostertag's *Under the Red Umbrella* (Berlin Porn Film Festival, 2009) particularly because such sexual subjectivities are rarely featured when Berlin is depicted through tropes of celebratory LGBTQ sexuality.

### **2.1. *The Polish Wife*: general considerations**

I encountered Anna Krenz's multimedia installation *The Polish Wife* in one of my research trips to Berlin, at *Hack.Fem.East*, a 2008 exhibition curated by Tatiana

Bazzichelli and Gaia Novati at Kunstraum Kreutzberg/ Bethanien.<sup>26</sup> Bazzichelli and Novati sought to present, in *Hack.Fem.East*, experimental and artistic practices of artists and activists working in digital networks in Eastern Europe. The projects included in the exhibition were selected in order to address three main topics: media, art, and hacking. Bazzichelli and Novati thus situated women and projects in which women play an important role at the center of their curatorial vision.<sup>27</sup>

Anna Krenz is an artist whose work was an excellent fit for the goals of *Hack.Fem.East*. She was born in Poland and studied art and architecture in both Poland and the U.K. Since 2003, she has lived and worked in Berlin. Her art engages with social and political issues related to gender, the environment, racial and cultural stereotypes, and religions. Krenz's multimedia installation at Kunstraum Kreutzberg/ Bethanien had its own room. A computer was placed in the middle of it. The room was darker than the other exhibition rooms. Curtains made of red lace divided the room and enclosed the computer in its own space. The image from the computer screen was projected onto the wall on my right. Sporadic drawings and stretches of text populated the other walls. As I browsed through the room, looking at them, I came across the following invitation:

As Poland joined the European Community on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2004, there is a great joy among the Western Men. Now as the markets are open with Poland, there are better possibilities greater opportunities to buy a Polish Wife. For this occasion there was an amazing SALE of Polish Wi[v]es in Berlin [...]. One could come

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<sup>26</sup> *Hack.Fem.East* was sponsored by Hauptstadtkulturfonds and had the support of Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen.

<sup>27</sup> They also aimed to provide a platform for further networking by accompanying the exhibition with the following concurrent events: two days of conferences, a publication in newspaper format, and a website.

and buy a Polish Wife at the ZERO Gallery in Berlin. It was the first ever SALE of Polish Wi[v]jes abroad. We'll keep you informed of where the next great SALES are!!! 09.05—22.06.2008—Hack Fem Fest- Kunstraum Kreuzberg/ Bethanien (Krenz, Kunstraum Kreuzberg/ Bethanien, Berlin 2008).

Krenz's web art project *The Polish Wife* engages critically with the commodification of Eastern European women's bodies, labors, and identities in the geo-political context of the New Europe. The project's main component, the Polish wife website, has remained online and continues to puzzle those who encounter it when they perform a Google search for Polish women.

*The Polish Wife* resonates with works by other Central and Eastern European feminist artists who engage critically with the co-optation of women's bodies in the circuits of global capital, the constructions of "legitimate" and "illegitimate" bodies, and the emergence of new work and intimacy formations that undergird such bodies. The possibilities for resisting or reimagining the representational and political practices that stabilize/frame bodies are also the topic of Tania Ostojić's *Looking for a Husband with an EU Passport* (2003). During a three-year long performance project Ostojić submitted her own body to regimes of practice required by transnational marriages in order to test the effects of the newly shored up borders of neoliberal globalization. Elsewhere Ostojić works within the space of the Grunau-Kopenick deportation prison in Berlin in order to research and expose the many intricacies of German asylum laws and their gendered effects. Ostojić describes the situation of the women whom she encountered this way: "[they] are still not married, and they don't have any status or any rights in Germany, and they end up in these jails. There are also many cases of trafficking, and sex workers,

coming mainly from Eastern Europe and North Africa" (2009, 23). In 2005, Ostojic's big scale poster, known as *European Union Panties*, displayed her own crotch wearing a pair of blue underwear with the EU symbol, a circle of yellow stars. The photograph was intended to comment on the situation of non-Western women who are allowed to cross the borders of the EU only in exchange of their sexual intimacy and work.

## **2.2. "Order a Polish Wife": an instance of transnational gendered objectification**

On the home page of *the Polish Wife* website,<sup>28</sup> the visitor has the option to assemble the body of their ideal Polish wife by choosing from: four types of hairstyles, four body types, four outfits, four sets of legs and four sets of arms that represent four types of work. Feminists have denounced the dismemberment of the female body in advertising and cinematic representation for a long time. The dismemberment of the female body in the interactive context of this webpage mimics the interactive process of commercial websites that sell custom-made products. Advertising scholar Anthony Cortese points out that when advertising depicts women's bodies without faces or heads, what is implied is a valorization of sexually objectifiable parts of the female body at the expense of the female subject's intellectual capacities and individuality. Cortese writes: "When women's bodies are separated into parts, women cease to be seen as whole persons" (2008, 42). Krenz offers "the face of the Polish Wife" as a subsequently developed "new" feature: "Now available- Get your wife a FACE!"<sup>29</sup> Once the website visitors arrive on the *Polish Wife's Face* webpage, they notice that the seemingly multiple choices are in fact generated through mere repetition. All that is offered is one mask, which is displayed in a series of six items, each item being captioned with the following

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.annakrenz.net/polishwife/make\\_polishwife.html](http://www.annakrenz.net/polishwife/make_polishwife.html), available February 22, 2014.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.annakrenz.net/polishwife/face.html>, available February 22, 2014.

text: "beautiful Polish face."

Krenz articulates a multi-layered critique. First, she calls attention to the commodification of Polish women's bodies and labors in the context of post-1989 transnational marriages. Second, she questions the representational registers that inform these practices and normalize the relations of power. Advertising is one field that relies heavily on constructions of gender, race, ethnic and national identities (Cortese 2007). Certainly, the images that advertising produces and circulates convey little about the lives of real people (Kilbourne 1999, 2000, Klein 2001). What advertising puts forth are ideas and figurations that are limited in scope and easily identifiable?

So, what subjectivities and identities does *The Polish Wife* challenge? The captions that accompany the dismembered corporeal elements articulate a critique of the subject formations that emerge at moments of transnational encounter. The image of a body with big breasts and wide hips is captioned "fruitful mother nature" and thus points to women's biological reproductive labor. The slimmest body is advertised as the "humble version, so that her husband can feed her," and points to the difference in wealth between Western and Eastern Europe, as well as to the "savior" subjectivity mentality that some Western European men take on when entering these relationships. As previously hinted, the arms and outfits<sup>30</sup> of the "Polish wife" signal the labors of the new transnational migrant sub-proletariat: cleaning, domestic services, sex, waitressing, and entertainment work. The representation that Krenz thus criticizes is that of a natural beauty, a sensual or even hypersexualized woman, who knows how to please a man and

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<sup>30</sup> The four choices of outfits are: a one-shoulder asymmetrical cocktail dress captioned, "Elegant, fashionable, so you can surely take her out"; a negligee nightgown described as: "The traditional Polish outfit for visits abroad;" the maid's outfit described as "The working uniform"; and finally, a sleeveless nun robe captioned, "the humble version."

how to serve him.

## **2.2. From the scale of the body to the transnational scale: "The Polish Wife**

### **Extras!!!"**

The second page of the website, titled "Polish Wife Extras!!!,"<sup>31</sup> details the virtues of Polish women and the added benefits that come along with procuring a Polish wife. This page complicates Krenz's analysis by situating the Polish wife within larger discourses and practices of global capitalism and by proposing a critique of the spatial reorganization of social and economic relations that followed the enlargement of the European Union.

Saskia Sassen and Doreen Massey argue that the flows and movements of globalization allow individuals multiple and diverse ways to access power. Krenz is acutely aware of the power differentials that shape these points of entry. She addresses questions of agency by challenging the attribution of exclusive control over consumer choice and entrepreneurialism to Western European men and by providing instances when deliberate and strategic manipulations of gender and national stereotypes are set in motion by Polish subjects. What for the male customer is a choice of style, for the Polish wife may be mask, costume, or drag. I argue that Krenz is aware of these negotiations as well as of the transformations of spatiality and temporality brought about by new media and communication technologies. Her web pages, while seemingly giving full control over choice to the Western consumer, also provide disorienting clues to gender and national stereotypes, through deliberate manipulation. The excerpts below illustrate these points by tackling the kind of agency that women exercise in the contexts of these transnational "convenience marriages" and through their embeddedness within the

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.annakrenz.net/polishwife/extras.html>

transformational circumstances of Poland's economy:

At the beginning of the 21st Century women in developed countries seem to be aware and confident about their position in society. In the world of colorful magazines, they are emancipated cosmopolitans, living in modern apartments, with good jobs and a car. The lucky ones even have a MAN. In developing countries it is a little different (Krenz, Kunstraum Kreutzberg/ Bethanien, Berlin 2008).

And:

Many men from Western Europe seem to be interested in women from Eastern Europe. In recent years many men have travelled either to Poland or Ukraine in order to find a perfect woman [...]. Today many women in Poland are rich enough so as not to need a wealthy foreign husband to pay for them. However, there are still the ones who are not rich and for whom a Western husband is an opportunity to get out of the poverty of their lives. It is very often that rich and lonely men from Western Europe and poor women from Poland sign a contract, called a marriage, which fulfills their dreams. The man gets a beautiful housemaid and the woman gets luxury and financial stability. For this agreement, based on pure opportunity and use, women leave their homes and travel to an unknown land. Often they do not speak the language they are completely dependent on their masters. This is migration based on the desire, even longing, for a better life (Krenz, Kunstraum Kreutzberg/ Bethanien, Berlin 2008).

Concerns about the fact that migrant women end up being socially and economically dependent on their husbands are justified, yet they need to be carefully looked at through

a lens that does not completely obliterate an account of women's agency. Kathrine Robinson's anthropological research on the life and work realities of mail-order brides problematizes analytical projects that focus exclusively on the exploitation of these women and thus reconstruct explanations that rely on dualistic global power relations and on female subjects that operate on the naïve understanding of the circumstances and agencies of the current global order (Robinson 1996).

Thus, the Polish wife, with her biological make-up and cultural qualities (feminine, sensual, Catholic, perhaps an exceptional mother) is imagined as just another product among other newly accessible Central and Eastern European consumer and investment opportunities.<sup>32</sup> For Western European men, Polish wives are also entry points into the now open markets of the region. Polish wives give them the opportunity to actualize the subjectivity of global investors. Krenz writes:

It is very interesting to make business contacts with Poland. If you get a Polish Wife, why not trying to set up a business with/in Poland? Poland is a great country for Western businessmen. Extra pleasure, extra money! Find out here what you can import - export to Poland (Krenz, Kunstraum Kreutzberg/Bethanien, Berlin 2008).

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<sup>32</sup> Felicity Schaffer-Gabriel (2012) shows that the discourses that emerge within the scope of cyber-marriages frame "Latin American and other 'foreign women' as having the right biological make-up and cultural grooming...as more feminine, traditional, and better mothers." Schaffer-Gabriel's findings corroborate the conclusions drawn by Christine So in her research of Asian mail-order brides' migration to the US. So argues that discourses of global capitalism, as well as relations of global consumption and production, are entwined with racialized and gendered ideas. She writes: "Asian women are imagined to be more firmly located within patriarchal familial structures and, paradoxically, are represented as being more suited than First World (usually white) women to maintain "traditional" family values" (2006, 395).

Such observations indicate that Krenz is well aware that both Poland and the Polish women who enter such intimate yet also economic arrangements, may not find themselves in difficult circumstances and that in some cases, negotiations with current power structures may put subjects in risky situations (Regulska 2001, 2004) as well as involve them in the production of the very conditions of their own exploitation.

### **2.3. Multiple scenarios of work migration to Berlin: "The Polish Wife Blog"**

The third component of Krenz's project is The Polish Wife's blog. While the previous pages are in English, the Polish wife's blog is the only page of the project restricted to a Polish speaking public.<sup>33</sup> The non-Polish speaker visiting the website is left to imagine narrative content starting from Krenz's cartoons. The transnational unintelligibility of the blog speaks to the isolation that transnational subjects experience when they relocate to foreign countries and foreign language environments. Furthermore, it speaks to the hegemony of the English language in the worlds of the Internet, politics, and art.<sup>34</sup> The effects of this linguistic hegemony are multiple, one being the foreclosure of the voice of the native informant, as the narrating character of the blog is constructed as one who is not fluent in English (Spivak 1999). In 2008, Google translate<sup>35</sup> included the Polish language for the first time. Thus, it could be argued that the "Polish Wife blog" elicited an extra translational effort from the English-speaking visitors to the website—an effort that mirrors the experience of immigrant subjects and their navigation of the lacunae of foreign linguistic and cultural terrains.

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<sup>33</sup> I was able to access the blog through the translational help of my friend and colleague, Dr. Magda Grabowska.

<sup>34</sup> The conceptual piece, "An artist who cannot speak English is NO artist," by Croatian artist Mladen Stilinovic suggests the tendency of English hegemony within the art world as early as 1992.

<sup>35</sup> <http://translate.google.com/>

Krenz's choice of cartoon drawings as a means of illustrating the blog is also telling. First, cartoon drawing, with its schematic lines, short-circuits the pleasure of looking at realistically rendered sexual and sensual content. Second, the cartoonish, hence schematic, renderings of Polish female characters, is a critique not only of the stereotypical representations of Polish women but also, very importantly, of the way migrants are abstracted and typified by the mainstream media and restrictive mobility and labor of EU legislation—which ultimately constitute the very practices that shore up new borders in a so-called borderless world (Regulska 2001, 2004).

The main character of the blog is Jadwiga, who, when we first meet her, teaches high school math in a small Polish town; she also blogs about her everyday life. Her blog does not narrate a personal life in a historical vacuum. Her entries reference Poland's accession to the European Union, the reunification of Germany, the re-structuring of these two countries' economies, the formation of new consumptive desires and the emergence of new survival practices. Krenz's female characters,<sup>36</sup> as rendered by Jadwiga's blog, sustain complex narratives that enable different stories of encounter with the city of Berlin and with transnational labor migration.

Jadwiga is a divorcee and a loving mother. She teaches mathematics at the local high school. Poland's economic transition combined with the economic constraints of single motherhood rendered her teacher's salary insufficient. She is forced to look for other sources of income and takes on private tutoring. In her first blog entry, dated May 29, 2004, she writes: "I give private lessons in math. Everything that I do is for Angelica, so that she is able to study some day and have clothes to wear." She is the only one who

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<sup>36</sup> Jadwiga is the central character and the narrating voice; Angela is Jadwiga's daughter; Monika is Angela's best friend; Jadwiga's best friend is Mariola; Jola is Jadwiga's cousin who lives in the suburbs of Berlin.

attends to domestic and care work in her household and family. She is thus a happy worker in both the private and public realms. She loves culinary experimentation. Teaching is her vocation and she takes it beyond the curricular boundaries of mathematics, her subject. At the high school, Jadwiga is the organizer of extra-curricular activities and special programs. Her romantic relationship with Andrej, the history teacher, also unfolds within the space of the high school. She has amiable relationships with her colleagues, and both her students and the administration of the high school value her work. Her best friend is Mariola, whose business acumen she admires. On a trip to Berlin (organized and paid for by her Mariola), Jadwiga meets Jurgen, an East Berliner with whom she strikes up a friendship that later on develops into a relationship. Her cousin Jola, who has lived in Berlin for many years, introduces her to the idea of working abroad as an undocumented cleaner. The weekly work commute from Poland to Berlin leaves her with 80 Euros a month after the deduction of travel costs, and the opportunity to sustain her romantic engagement with Jurgen.

The character of Mariola, who has been best friends with Jadwiga for a very long time, owns a profitable fashion boutique and is married to Roman, who works in the local government and is a vehement opponent to the accession of Poland to the EU. To supply her business, she travels to Berlin on a regular basis. She has good friends and reliable business contactss there. She knows the city very well and enjoys running her transnational small business.

Until Jadwiga travels with her daughter, Angelica, to Berlin for the first time, Jola is imagined as the "well-off cousin" who lives in Germany and sends expensive birthday presents. Jadwiga writes on May 27, 2004: "I meant to write about Angelica's birthday...

She was happy with the camera from Jola, my cousin. She was so surprised when I told her that we would go on a trip to Berlin. [...] Jola is doing very well. She has a house. She works in Berlin. She told me that one could make money here in spite of the high unemployment." Upon their visit, they learn that Jola's life is filled with hardship and isolation. From Berlin, Jadwiga blogs: "Jola opened up and told me that her life in a foreign country is not all good...She only married him because she didn't want to be alone...Because they don't live in Berlin, Jola has to commute to Berlin and the kids have to commute to school...Only her husband has a car and she doesn't have a driving license. She was crying. She says she was missing her family." In spite of her grief, alienation, and restrained urban mobility, Jola's know-how and contacts enable Jadwiga's transnational work mobility—an instantiation of mobility that nevertheless is informed by new transnational gendered class divisions.

Angelica is Jadwiga's daughter. She is 18 years old, a "straight A" student and a peaceful teenager, on very good terms with her mother and extended family. She loves rafting. She has a boyfriend and her interest in brand-name fashion items is on the rise. While in Berlin, she briefly pursues a young man whom she met online, Piotr, who is supposedly in Berlin on an internship. He cops out on their date after Jadwiga intervenes and changes the initial plans for the location of the date to safer ones. Angelica fails to get the boy, but the reader is led to believe that this is for the better.

Angelica is a close friend of a girl named Monika. The narrative and the visuals of the blog construct Angelica and Monika as contrasting characters. Monika is about the same age as Angelica. She is not a good student. Jadwiga deems that "She's of a different upbringing." The graphics of the blog show her consistently wearing skimpy outfits.

Monika's present for Angelica's birthday was a string bikini. This was no surprise to Jadwiga, who wrote in her blog: "That says who Moniczka is." Monika is thus constructed as a sexually precocious teenager, at least by comparison with Angelica. During their summer break, Monika takes a waitressing job in Berlin, and for the first time in their lives, the girls are out of touch for more than a month. As another month goes by, it becomes clear that Monika fell victim to human trafficking. On September 9, 2004, Jadwiga writes: "The school is a madhouse. The principal is terrified. I told him that I am going to Berlin, so maybe I could help." Jadwiga's last blog entry, three days later on September 12, reads: "I mobilized everybody. Jurgen helped me a lot. We didn't go to the police since I was there working illegally. Jurgen called them. The German police are looking for the girls, too...but they are not very involved. They said the girl ran away from home. Our police said the same thing. I asked Jola to call the head of the law firm; maybe he can help [she is referring to the company where Jola works as a cleaner]. He said that the disappearance of young women is ordinary here."

#### **2.4. "*The Polish Wife*": critical interventions**

I argue that the three elements of the project perform three analytical interventions. First, the critique articulated by the "Order a Polish Wife" webpage is consonant with feminist inquiries into the commodification of women's bodies under the regimes of patriarchal capitalism and relies on a similar binary representational regime: women-commodities-victims versus men-consumers-oppressors. Undeniably, such representational regimes are valuable for pointing out the huge power differentials among gendered, racialized, and geopolitically located subjects. Yet, at the same time, they reinscribe the limits within which women can imagine themselves as active agents.

The second component, the Polish Wife Extras page, offers an analysis of macro-structural economic changes, of their effects on women's employment, and of gendered and classed subject formations. It contextualizes the phenomena of transnational marriage and labor migration within larger socio-economic transformations, such as the dissolution of Central and Eastern European industrial and public sectors, the emergence of economic "opportunities" reliant on exploitable migrant labor and the creation of eastward investment opportunities for the countries of Western Europe.

Third, the Polish Wife blog tells stories in which women, technologies, affects, and economies connect in the actualization of a variety of life experiences, successes, and life-threatening failures. Monika's story speaks the loudest about the perils of transnational work migration. I myself kept anticipating a story of deception, entrapment, dreary domestic work, and coerced sexuality during the intervals while I was compiling the Google translation, as well as later on, while awaiting my friend's translation. This was in spite of the joyful and pastel colored cartoons that illustrate the blog, in stark contrast to the glum imagery of the posters for official anti-trafficking campaigns.

In the context of the European Union, the policies against the trafficking of women and girls aim to create stricter criminal legislation, to improve international police cooperation and to set in place more effective campaigns warning young women about the dangers of sex trafficking. Local and transnational networks of NGOs offer legal, social, and psychological counseling and reintegration support. Through Jadwiga's voice, Krenz channels her criticism vis-à-vis the inefficiency of such policies and programs. Monika's story is but one among five scenarios of transnational work migration. This fact shifts the function of the project from that of warning women against the risks of labor

migration to a space for exploring the question of how to enable women to migrate safely. Furthermore, Jadwiga's logs of her daily labor, paid and unpaid, as a professional woman, private tutor, single parent, daughter of an elderly mother, etc., alert us to the problems with representing the "home-nation" as a safe place, devoid of economic exploitation, and casts doubt upon the idea that "staying at home" is a viable alternative.

### **3.1. *Under the Red Umbrella*: A work-centered approach to sexual work**

*Under the Red Umbrella* is a short documentary film directed by Julia Ostertag, which premiered at the 2009 edition of the Berlin Porn Film Festival. Ostertag is an underground filmmaker from Berlin, who in the early 1990s took on the mission of challenging representations of female characters in film, particularly those constructed as sexualized and violent (Mernagh 2009). She studied underground film with the experimental film director, producer, and screenwriter Birgit Hein. Like her mentor, Ostertag runs her own one-woman film production business and directs, shoots, and edits her films. Her films, which have been screened and won awards at film festivals around the world, tackle themes of sexuality, individual life styles, and queer experiences. *Under the Red Umbrella* was shown during 2009 at queer film festivals and sex workers' conventions, such as the Sex Worker's Film Festival in London, the Sao Paulo Festival for Sexual Diversity, the Entzaubert Queer Film Fest and the Exground Film Festival, Germany.

*Under the Red Umbrella* combines the genres of documentary portraiture and manifesto in order to depict the life and experiences of a US queer sex worker in the cities of Berlin and London. The program of the festival introduces Ostertag's film this way:

*Under the Red Umbrella* is a visually and politically challenging portrait of an independent sex worker – a cliché-breaking declaration of sex work as a creative outlet and a chance for individual autonomy. The protagonist offers her personal view on a profession that is still stigmatized by society's norms and allows insight into a realm that is mostly hidden from public view (2009 Berlin Porn Film Festival).

A film critic praised *Under the Red Umbrella* for its representational work. K.J. writes:

In contrast to stereotypical media representations of the profession, neither victim nor a denunciatory soul striptease pictures are shown. The film maintains a respectful distance and focuses fully on the self-perception of the protagonist as a performer of characters in a chosen environment (K.J. at <http://www.julia-ostertag.de/umbrella.php>).

Highlighting of "the true subject of the film" and of "how all the separate elements in the film relate to and contribute to the theme, central purpose, or total effect," (Petrie and Boggs 2012, 348-349) constitutes the central tenet of the conventions of film criticism. The term "subject" designates one of the important concepts of the genre of film criticism<sup>37</sup> as well as being deployed by discourse analysis perspectives on film. From the vantage point of the film critic, the statements of intention made by directors are revelatory of the purpose, goals, and meanings of the films under discussion. Once these

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<sup>37</sup> Film criticism is not a homogeneous field. From delivering a verdict to creating a "sensory report" (Lane in Petrie and Boggs 2012, 346), film analyses emerging from this discipline could focus on technological achievement, acting work, the political, moral, social, gender, or racial statement that the film makes. Conceptually, the analyses could take the auteur approach, the genre approach, the psychoanalytical or more experimental and eclectic approaches (Petrie and Boggs, 2012, 347-361).

elements are identified, they constitute the standards against which the film is being evaluated (Petrie and Boggs 2012 349).

As announced by Ostertag's introductory lines, the unifying force of the film is its sole character, an independent sex worker who shares her views on the particulars of transnational sex work, the patriarchal gender norms that govern this industry, and her vision for the empowerment of sex workers. Ostertag wrote the script of *Under the Red Umbrella* in collaboration with her protagonist Sebastian Rodriques. My discursive analysis of *Under the Red Umbrella* is guided by the question of how and in what terms sex work can be talked about currently. What are the changes that sex worker subjectivities are undergoing?

### **3.2. Sex work discourse: Sex working subject**

The scholarly and activist literature engaging with the work and life realities of sex workers in the contemporary global sex industries unfolds along several thematic, analytical, and political directions. Within the interdisciplinary field of Women's and Gender Studies, the research agenda is currently dominated thematically by investigations of "Third World" women's sex work experiences and the incorporation of their work into local or Western urban economies (Dewey and Kelly 2011, Ehrenreich 2004, Kempadoo 2004, Wantenabe 1998). More and more attention and recognition is being directed at the "Third World" sex workers' actions and mobilizations against the injustices they face, through a broadening of the scope of the literature already documenting and critically engaging with the actions of sex workers' rights groups and organizations in North America and Western Europe (Kempadoo 2004, 212). Very often the themes that form the analytical core of such investigations are: the impact of

undocumented labor migration, the effects of temporary visas, verbal contracts, criminalization of prostitution, working conditions, the presence of external coercion and family pressure among the motivational forces, the availability of work alternatives at the local or global level, the emotional, physical, and health risks undertaken by sex workers, the impact of conservative moralities, the effects of maintaining home links, and the availability of information networks, peer support, and collective organizing (Alexander 1997, Augustin 2005, Brennan 2002, Correa et al 2008, Ditmore 2007, Ebbe and Das 2007, Kempadoo 2007, Klinger 2003, Parrot and Cummings 2008, Sanghera 2005, Sarikakis and Shaukat 2007, and Wantenabe 1998).

Scholarly and activist engagements with prostitution could be organized into six categories: 1) approaches that promote the recognition of prostitution as work (Ditmore 2007); 2) approaches that focus on promoting prostitutes' rights as human rights (Bell 1994, Wolffers 2003); 3) approaches that promote the empowerment of sex workers (Ditmore 2007, Wolffers 2003); 4) approaches that focus on rescuing women from sex industries (Bell 1994, Ditmore 2007); 5) approaches that consider all prostitution as a form of violence against women (Bell 1994, Gender Equality-EU 2011); and 6) psychological approaches that consider prostitution a form of addiction and/or the result of childhood trauma (Bell 1994).

The last three of these approaches are premised on the assumption that there is no woman who would engage in prostitution willingly, no matter what her circumstances might be. Such approaches are usually promoted with support from the conservative side of the political spectrum and rely on a moralizing conceptualization of sexuality (Ditmore 2007, 173). As previously stated, their goals are "protective" and their actions are

oriented toward the "extraction" of women and girls from contemporary sex industries. The discourse of such programs and organizations re-subjectify the women who manage to leave prostitution behind as "survivors." By not recognizing any degree of the women's autonomy, these approaches are ultimately further restricting women's capacity for self-determination. This terminological strategy further enables the symbolic incorporation of sex work into the larger discursive formations of violence against women (Bell 1994).

The first three approaches to prostitution are premised on progressive re-conceptualizations of notions of work, sexuality, crime, morality, and protection. The work-centered approach to sex work opens up a space for sex workers to organize on their own behalf and persuade governments to set minimum standard working conditions specific to sex work (Ditmore 2007, 173). The human rights approach to prostitution complements the first approach by strengthening the political subjectivity of the prostitute and by further legitimizing the prostitutes' struggles (Bell 1994, 102). The vocabulary and arguments put forth by the advocates of the human rights approach have been informed by epistemological shifts brought forward by the civil rights and New Left movements, the international women's and feminist struggles, and the lesbian and gay mobilizations. The human rights discourse articulated by sex workers combine claims for control of one's body with economic demands for pay equity and the request for the symbolic revaluation of their occupation. Finally, the empowerment approach conceptualizes the sex worker as agentive and as a subject capable of personal growth and able to work toward social change. However, the premise of this model can also be seen to imply that the sex worker or prostitute does not yet represent a political subject

that is fully constituted. This framework thus posits change as being conditioned by both the personal and the collective empowerment of the prostitutes, with a view to ultimately enable collective political subjects, who are to change the conditions of their work and those of their society at large (Wolffers in Ditmore 2007, 174).

### **3.3. *Under the Red Umbrella*: The work of re-signification**

The prostitute was constituted as a negative subjectivity primarily in the context of modernity (Bell 1994, Rowe 2003). Modern features such as contamination, moral depravity, and a complete divestment of agency have been inherited by contemporary versions of discourses on prostitution and its subject, the female prostitute. Feminist cultural critic Shannon Bell writes: "What lies at the heart of the prostitute discourse nowadays is the dichotomization of empowerment and victimization" (1994, 99). Ostertag and Rodriquez's re-signifying intervention is important because it firmly constructs the prostitute as a working subject. Through this gesture the director and the protagonist of *Under the Red Umbrella* do not only revalorize the subjectivity and occupation of prostitution; through Rodriquez's manifesto, they also participate in the formation of the sex worker as a political subject. Through these two interventions, the subject of the prostitute is dislocated from its associations with tropes of illness, contagion, idleness, and excess and is reconstituted within a space where sexuality is thought about in relation to gender norms, work, class, and the structures of inequality of the global economy. Rodriquez declaims:

But I think that sexuality is really one of the realms that people politicize last. Sex workers deserve respect. We are hard working men and women who provide necessary and valuable services. There have always been sex workers. We

deserve the same basic rights as other workers and more over we deserve some fucking props. I think that the stigma that surrounds sex workers is like the stigma that surrounds sexuality and gender in general. I think that the prejudices of society are reflected in the working conditions that most sex workers encounter. And the reason why workers are coerced and manipulated [...requires...] of changing kind of the patriarchal infrastructures in the ways that we talk about sex work has to do with changing those really base assumptions that people have about sexuality and gender. And I think until we have opened a dialogue and exchange and conversations about these things nothing will change because I think so many times people characterize sex workers as victims. Life in the new order, under global economy is so often dictated by daily injustices, hard compromises and defeat. There [are] so few opportunities to break free, to be unencumbered, to have a little space. At the end of the day sex work offered me breathing room from the daily tasks of a 9 to 5 existence. It gives me space to exist as I choose in the world. (Rodriquez in *Under the Red Umbrella*, 2009).

The re-signifying interventions performed by Ostertag and Rodriquez are multiple. First, their analyses address not only the sources of the stigmatization and the devaluation of sex work, but they also open a way of redefining sex work. Alongside their critique of the heteronormative and patriarchal structures at work in the devaluation and stigmatization of sex work, they also tackle the anti-sex discourse produced from within feminist praxis. Ostertag's project gives Rodriquez a public platform from where she can talk about her work activities, career choices, short-term and long-term evaluations of risk and benefits, her desires, the knowledge and the skills required by her occupation, as well as its costs.

In doing that, *Under the Red Umbrella* shifts the terms of the conceptualization of prostitution from the binary representational register of victimhood to a space of critical inquiry, where "the positives" and "the negatives" are held in tension for reconsideration (Bell 1994, 103). Second, Ostertag's documentary film constitutes a counter-discursive instance. Rodriquez, a sex worker and thus a subject who is constituted as an "other" within the current moral order, speaks on her own behalf, represents herself and conveys a clear blueprint for social change. Through the statements that she makes, Rodriquez not only challenges the operational conceptual maps of sexuality, she retraces the contours of her own subject position.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, Ostertag and Rodriquez's call for the recognition of prostitution as work elicits discursive changes not only in relation to female sexuality but also within the discourse of work itself. Marxist feminists and feminist political theorists have pointed out that discourses of the gendered division of work have been co-constitutive with discourses of the public sphere since the Enlightenment (Wollstonecraft 1992, Pateman 1983, Kaplan 2002, Pettman 1996). Feminist political theorists emphasized that the sphere of the public and that of the private are also categorized or coded by gender. The world of productive professional work and politics is ascribed to the realm of masculinity and the sector comprising reproductive, care, and domestic work is gendered feminine. This gendered division of labor is further reinforced by binaries such as paid versus unpaid work, providing freestanding subjects versus dependent subjects. As a consequence, women's domestic, reproductive, and caring labor is deemed marginal to

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<sup>38</sup> The film aligns with and serves as a continuation of the emergence of the prostitute's subject as a political subject in the 1970s. During the 1970s and the 1980s, prostitutes' struggles became visible in the US and internationally (Bell 1993, 102-104). Their claims were rooted in feminist discourses requesting women's right to exercise control over their own bodies, as well as in labor movements discourses, demanding the right to exercise control over one's working conditions.

production, since mainstream economic models place male-dominated activities (paid work in formal economies) and "masculinized" characteristics (autonomous, objective, rational, instrumental) at the center of the sphere of production. Women's work and feminized qualities are deemed economically irrelevant. Their work is done for "love," not for money, and characterized as voluntary, natural, and unskilled. Not only is women's work in the sphere of reproduction considered non-economic, there is also no acknowledgment that the social system could not survive without it. Another consequence of such discursive frameworks is the marginalization or exclusion of female workers from organized labor.

Rodriquez's demand for the revaluation of prostitution is not simply a demand for policy and legal reform.<sup>39</sup> Rodriquez insists on the affirmation of the skills and knowledge required by sex work, as well as on the significance of her work's outcomes. in order to enable a re-conceptualization of sex work as an occupation worth pursuing—an occupation which can be seen on a par with other occupations in the creative or care industries.

### **3.4. Rodriquez's perspective on sex work**

The camera follows Rodriquez as she walks through a deserted building in East Berlin. She has just finished a phone conversation with a potential client. On the phone, she described herself: "5.4, 110 pounds, small breasts, 32A, very petite, slender. I am an American." She explained that she was in Berlin for the weekend. In terms of services, she offers massage, domination, and being an escort.

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<sup>39</sup> The decriminalization and legalization of prostitution are two current projects on the agenda of activists, policy makers, and legislators worldwide.

Footage of her getting dressed for work demonstrates that the demands of sex work extend well beyond the temporality of the sexual act. Ditmore writes:

[s]ex work frequently consists of a great deal of activity before sex commences. And the work involved in sexual activity itself has many aspects, including stripping, engaging in sadomasochistic practices, acting out fantasies, or maintaining the illusion that sex is a matter of romance or pleasure for the worker (2007, 172).

The camera closes up on Rodriguez's underwear—a visual trope that frames the female body by reference to its entanglements with the modern history of the European female nude as well as with the body fragmentation of contemporary cinema and advertising imagery. The viewers are then oriented to Rodriguez's appearance in the opening frame of the film. She is getting dressed in a white embroidered shirt with long sleeves and puffy frilled cuffs. Rodriguez explains:

My clothes are kind of a kinky -- a uniform, which I put on, style, strip and wash afterwards, like any other worker in the new economy. Sex work, for me, is very much about artifice. It is an act. A character. A façade. A mask. I take it on and sell it in hourly increments to those who have the need, money, and social position to tailor order their desires. I offer necessary human contact and act like an outlet for things society deems taboo, offering clients things that they seek which fall beyond the realm of acceptability (Rodriguez in *Under the Red Umbrella* 2009).

Feminists have written extensively about the importance of the physical appearance, the personas that sex workers construct and perform, and the expertly honed conversational

and social skills that sex work requires (Biemann 2008, Ditmore 2007, 172, Day 2007, 38). Performing the kinky, the sophisticated, the hypersexual, or the girl next door is creative and aesthetic labor. "Crafting and projecting personalities" and "maintaining the illusion that sex is a matter of romance or pleasure for the worker" (Ditmore 2007, 172) resembles the work done by actors, performing artists, and fashion models (Day 2007, 172-191).

Watching Rodriquez shedding her street clothes and putting on one of her work uniforms grants voyeuristic pleasure. However, the voyeuristic gaze<sup>40</sup> invited by the opening frames is later interrupted by Ostertag's presence with the camera and by the politically charged questions she poses to the protagonist. While Ostertag's manipulation of objectifying shots as well as the phone conversation that opens the film seem to reaffirm the idea that physical appearance plays an important role in setting things in motion between sex workers and their clients, Rodriquez's explanations further emphasize the performative dimensions of sex work. Her insistence on the creative character of her work leads to the articulation of the following critical points. First, it shows an array of skills and activities carried out by sex workers in order to make their labor a source of reliable income. Second, the emphasis that the protagonist places on theatrical terms such as "act," "character," "façade," "mask," calls for a refutation of all the essentializing conceptualizations of the prostitute,<sup>41</sup> as it foregrounds the arbitrary relationship between the working subject and her work as well as a differentiation between intimacy and the performance of intimacy (Cohen et al 2013).

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<sup>40</sup> Laura Mulvey, John Berger, and Rachel Bailey Jones theorize the gaze as an act of looking that does not allow for reciprocity. Mulvey argues that gaze is always reliant on the visual objectification of the female body for the voyeuristic pleasure of male audiences.

<sup>41</sup> I refer here to discourses that construct the prostitute as a victim of child abuse or as a sex addict.

The costume is thus a significant trope of the new vocabulary proposed by the protagonist and the director of *Under the Red Umbrella*. The viewer is led to understand that Rodriguez's garments are part of her performance. Clad in black fishnets or red stockings, platform boots or high heels, Rodriguez's legs are the objects of repeated camera close-ups. Together with the shots that show Rodriguez applying make-up and lipstick, these sequences function as a visual refrain that periodically reasserts the aesthetic and performative elements of sex work.

Nonetheless, Rodriguez's analysis goes beyond a reconceptualization of sex work in relation to its aesthetic and artistic dimensions:

If you want to do this work in a way that's happy and sustainable, you can't judge people for their desires [...]. I mean, I think you have an obligation to help people explore their sexual fantasies and realize their desires in a way that's safe and sane and consensual, that's the beauty of BDSM [...] Some [clients] do have medical fetishes, some people want to get lost in the psychological role play. I am doing a lot of psychological role-play. I am doing a lot of psychotherapy, forced feminization and humiliation, lately. And for a lot of people it is about giving up a certain amount of control, which they have to exercise in their everyday lives

(Rodriguez in *Under the Red Umbrella* 2009).

The vocabulary of clinical psychology, psychotherapy and counseling is disorienting, yet it firmly positions sex work within the context of the self/body care.<sup>42</sup> Rodriguez explains:

Sex work is definitely emotionally draining but it's less emotionally draining than

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<sup>42</sup> Rodriguez also indicates that she is a social worker by training, which could further explain the confluence between the vocabularies of the two fields, social work and sex work, in her discussion.

other work I've done. I was a social worker for many years. And that work was much harder emotionally for me than sex work is because I have distance from clients. I'm not emotionally invested in them. And because sessions are so brief, it's just a few hours together with someone, it is much easier to maintain a level of emotional distance (Rodriquez in *Under the Red Umbrella* 2009).

Rodriquez's view on what her work entails, on her responsibilities in relation to her clients, as well as her evaluation of the emotional costs of her labor posits sex work within the life-improvement occupations, alongside psychotherapy, social work, life-coaching, and sexual education. This redefinition constitutes a powerful challenge to discourses of objectification and victimization, as well as to discourses that construct the prostitute as a deviant subject or carrier of disease. Moreover, it results not only in the re-appropriation of agency, skilled labor and creativity by the sex workers but also, through that, in the re-construction of the prostitute, or of the sex worker, as an agent of valuable, socially-oriented labor.

Sex-positive feminists such as Shannon Bell and Annie Sprinkle have also connected the prostitute with social roles usually attributed to healers, therapists, and educators. Despite the fact that the genealogies of these labors pre-date modern times and extend beyond the spatiality of the West, nowadays they are tightly interwoven with the forces that construct neoliberal notions of individualism, personal improvement, and service provision. Rodriquez's explanation of how she approaches, strategizes, and administers her work makes visible the complex entrepreneurial skills and the structural circumstances that are conditions for success in the industry:

There is definitely an average client and because of the hourly rate that I charge,

most of my clients are middle-aged, white businessmen...As an independent, I dictate the terms of exchange, the limits, boundaries, and hourly rate...My gender, class, social position, race, and nationality provide me with the privilege to seek out clients who respect these terms and turn down those that will not. I take only calculated risks and exercise a level of autonomy in my work which many sex workers do not have access to [...].

Sex work is a very loose term, but it runs the gamut between people who work in the street and people who work in clubs and people who work privately with their clients...and I never worked the streets and I never worked in a club, so I kind of got introduced to it as an independent and I always negotiated terms and conditions privately. So I think because of this I have had really good experiences in the sex industry in a way that other people haven't, because they weren't given the opportunity to work with collective sex work spaces, where there's women providing each other support [...].

Choice, consent and creative control, when they occur in an environment free of the management of pimps, offer the sex workers, though physically and emotionally taxing—[...] can be freeing. (Rodriquez in *Under the Red Umbrella*, 2009).

Rodriquez's critical considerations of hourly rates, client base and profile, location, negotiated terms of exchange that minimize risk, and the material conditions necessary in order to ensure the absence of coercion, not only demonstrate the complexity of her endeavor but presents attending to these concerns as straight-forward business management operations. Clearly, this discursive intervention is subsumed within the

central political goals of *Under the Red Umbrella*: the revalorization of sex work through a redefinition articulated around tropes of choice, agency, and creativity. The "redefinition" attempted by the project carries the generalizing limitations inherent to processes of category formation. Postmodern and post-structural feminist theorists have long called attention to the power relations at work in the production of any grand-narrative explanation of social reality (Haraway 1991, Hepburn 1999 and Layton 1998).

Ostertag's reliance on the performance and voice of one protagonist could be interpreted in several ways in relation to the social change agenda of her project and to feminist epistemological critiques. First, Rodriguez's self-identification as a transnational anarchist and leftist, "I am pretty active in anarchist and leftist circles in various parts of the world," provides the viewer with a key to interpreting her analysis in terms of a structural critique. Rodriguez's narrative, framed by the directorial vision of Ostertag in *Under the Red Umbrella*, could be seen as an instance of feminist knowledge production unfolding within the critical space of feminist standpoint theory. The interdisciplinary encounter between feminist standpoint theories and sociological inquiries in the realm of sex work led to significant methodological changes that emphasize the importance of documenting and including the voices of sex workers in all academic, service provision, and policy discourses and practices that are concerned with sex work. Ostertag's project breaks down the boundaries between theoretical discourse, activism, and artistic practice and "gives voice" to a woman who, by her very occupational practice, is positioned "on the margins" (Brooks 2007, 77). As argued by numerous critics, one of the pitfalls of the feminist standpoint is its genealogical link to the totalizing notion of "the experience of women" (Brooks 2007, 78). Ostertag's narrative and visual choices maintain the tension

between the necessity of attending to differences *within* the concept of "women" and the possibility of articulating a common position for sex workers so that they can take a stand and redefine their subjectivity, deconstruct the hegemonic meanings that associate sex work with victimhood and stigma, and enable discursive changes that could open up their access to better work policies and human rights protections.<sup>43</sup>

Gazing outside while straddling the frame of a tall window in a deserted building in East Berlin, Rodriquez is captured in a pose that is at once sexually charged, contemplative, and also expressive of power, control, and self-determination. The scene follows the opening sequence of the film: the phone conversation with the potential client. In the format of the voice over, Rodriquez delivers an analysis of her work experience in relation to locational structures. By stating that her "gender, class, social position, race, and nationality" offer her the "privilege" of being able to perform her work in conditions of comparative safety and autonomy, which are not available to "many sex workers," Ostertag and Rodriquez introduce from the first moments of their intervention the analytics of structural intersectionality.

## Conclusion

Krenz's *Polish Wife* and Ostertag's *Under the Red Umbrella* represent timely and important contributions to the current debates on work, sexuality, and transnational labor mobility. When these three notions intersect, discussions about sex work tend to focus on

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<sup>43</sup> After the screening of *Under the Red Umbrella*, I had the opportunity to converse with Julia Ostertag. One of the first things that I felt I needed to share with her was the fact that I found her film and Rodriquez's narrative very powerful in its deconstructive and re-signifying intervention. Ostertag smiled and told me that her initial plan was to create a documentary film around several women associated with a sex-work collective. The title of the film is meant to stand in as the name of the respective collective. Rodriquez was her first collaborator. While working together on interviews and filming, Ostertag became aware of the force of their filmed material and rethought her initial idea, opting to have Rodriquez serve as the sole protagonist of *Under the Red Umbrella*.

exploitation and the much spectacularized trafficking in women. The media consistently and prolifically circulates stories about teen girls forced into prostitution, who have to perform sex for money, under conditions of physical and sexual abuse at the hands of their pimps or traffickers. As previously stated, Ostertag and Rodriquez's vision for sex work as non-exploitative is laudable, particularly as they work against the globally pervasive representations of sex workers as always already victimized. In concert with Ostertag's *Under the Red Umbrella*, Krenz's *The Polish Wife* adds her valuable critique to discourses that situate at the core of transnational labor migration the risk of being sexually trafficked. In order to further highlight the exceptional value of these two projects, I will place them in dialogue with two other documentary films that have enjoyed significantly better distribution and much more sustained critical acclaim: Mimi Chakarova's *The Price of Sex* (2011) and Ursula Biemann's *Remote Sensing* (2001).

*The Price of Sex* and *Remote Sensing* explore primarily the topics of the global sex trade and sex trafficking. In order to gather their visual documents, analyses, and theories, the two filmmakers follow the routes of forced mobility that stretch across the globe in multiple directions, and trace the geopolitical geometries of the hubs of sex trafficking. They also share a critique of the lack of reliable data on sex trafficking and an interrogation of the boundaries between terms such as *sex trafficking* and *prostitution*. While they converge with respect to their topic of analysis and their visions of gender justice, Chakarova and Biemann opt for different aesthetic and representational approaches. Chakarova, a photojournalist by training and profession, develops *The Price of Sex* within a realist representational framework. By contrast, Biemann's departure from documentary realism allows her to experiment with representational modalities that

capture and render visible the evasive mechanisms of globalization: processes of global deregulation, transnational flows of finance capital, or the proliferation of communication and information technologies.<sup>44</sup>

Chakarova's politics of visibility rest on the premise that sex-trafficked women are what she calls the "faceless victims" of the post-'89 global economy. The strength of *The Price of Sex* lies in its capacity to show the over determined character of sex-trafficking. Chakarova bypasses the more confined arguments that tend to explain sex-trafficking as solely the product of the male sexual appetite or as a profit-maximizing form of prostitution. She sets side-by-side her protagonists' testimonies, the interviews with anti-trafficking and human-rights activists, and with public administrators; a representative of the Hellenic Police; a former club-owner from the red district of Aksaray (Turkey); two Turkish cops, who were also customers of the red district and avid travelers for the purpose of sex-tourism. Most of the interviewees point to the disappearance of work, the severe poverty across Eastern Europe, and to the sharpened asymmetries in economic wealth around the globe. Finally, Chakarova's several conversations with those few older people who didn't leave their childhood villages reveal that parents know little about the whereabouts of their migrant daughters and sons. *The Price of Sex* concludes with the presentation of the protagonists' final steps in their struggles with sex trafficking. For example, together with her mother, Olesia opened a legal case against her traffickers; on the trial day, the traffickers did not show up in court and the prosecution did not pursue them any further. Another woman, Jenia, is permanently disabled after a desperate attempt to escape captivity. She was sent back to

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<sup>44</sup> Ursula Biemann, "Reorganizing Women on a Global Scale: Remote Sensing," in *Ursula Biemann, Mission Reports: Artistic Practice in the Field, Video Works, 1998-2008*, ed. Jan-Erik Lundstrom, Angela Dimitrakai, and Wendy S. Hesford. (Bristol: Arnolfini, 2008), 35-46.

the village. In order to repay the losses incurred with Jenia's accident, the sex traders took her older sister back to Turkey. The final word goes to Vica, who escaped Dubai with the help of a client and was eventually deported to Moldova. Her advice to young women who are considering working abroad is to rethink their plans by trying to make do with local work opportunities.

Geographic information systems, scanning, radiography and remote sensing are the current optical technologies employed to track the flow of global economies. In *Remote Sensing*, Ursula Biemann takes the visual outputs of these technologies and juxtaposes them with images of women in order to account for the invisible gendered dimensions of globalization and to propose a feminist counter-geography. Along with her critique of the digital technologies of visualization, Biemann constructs a thought-provoking visual rendering of instances of national impoverishment as well as of strategies for economic development that rest on the exploitation of women's sexual labor. *Remote Sensing* does not capitalize on imagery or testimonies of violent coercion, captivity, immobility, and deportation. Biemann's video essay abounds in images of women on the move as she visualizes the digital information that gets generated with their journeys (bus, train, ship, and flight schedules, GPS tracking of moving vehicles, as well as visas and fingerprints), although she makes no distinction between the trajectories of those who travel safely and voluntarily and those who change hands from one sex-trafficking criminal cell to another.

During the follow-up discussion that we had in one of my Women's Studies classes after the screening of *Remote Sensing*, one of my students exclaimed, "But those girls, they knew nothing. All they knew is that they did it for money." She was reacting to

the interview with Naomi, a young woman who positioned herself as an entrepreneur—a subject able to make financially savvy choices. My student insisted that the young sex worker's outlook was determined by her lack of access to education and economic opportunities. This perspective, reinforced through the two films reviewed here, forecloses efforts to frame human trafficking as a human rights violation and to formulate solutions within the paradigm of labor and migrant rights. For both projects, accounts by NGO experts overpower the voices of the sex-trafficked women and sex workers, which reflect the NGOization of the field of activism (Kampadoo 2005). Furthermore, this renders invisible the fact that sex workers' associations (such as the one Rodriguez represents in *Under the Red Umbrella*), have proved to be the most successful vehicle for reducing the risk of trafficking (Parreñas 2012). Chakarova and Biemann do get across the views of sex-trafficked women and sex-workers. However, the scope of their expositions is limited by interview questions that frame the women through a lens of victimhood (Chakarova) and through a lens of prevailing agency (Biemann). Unlike Chakarova and Biemann, Krenz and Ostertag show the complexity of agency, subjectivity, and the struggles for subsistence within changing global economies. Rather than capitalizing on either the spectacular of victimhood or the uplifting feeling of empowered agents, the two artists explore new imaginaries and formulate new vocabularies. The latter might lead, in the future, to cultural changes and policy reforms that will enable women to cross borders safely when searching for work.

## Chapter 5

### Staying in Newark: The Gender, Race, Class, and Sexuality of Community Work in

#### Marc Levin and Mark Benjamin's *Brick City* (2009)

##### Introduction

In a scene during the first season of Marc Levin and Mark Benjamin's documentary series *Brick City* (2009), Jayda, one of the initiators of the mentoring program Nine Strong Women, meets with Mayor Cory Booker. Held during the mayor's monthly open-office hours, the meeting ought to enable Jayda to convey to the mayor the need for a program that addresses the needs of young women from Newark and to ask the well-seasoned public figure for guidance. Vibrating with enthusiasm, Jayda shares with the mayor details about how she started the program and about the non-profit that she would like to set up. To answer the mayor's inquiry about the mission of her organization, she emphasizes the issue of violence against young women and the lack of programs to address their needs in the city of Newark:

I know personally a lot of women have been murdered on the streets of Newark. Recently, we are under attack. You know, we are under attack. And I think there is not a lot of focus on just the ladies. I mean I'm glad there is for the males, because we need strong men. But we need strong women as well (*Brick City* 2009).

Mayor Booker's advice, delivered along with cupcakes for the ladies, is suffused with mystical tones, and surprisingly impractical.

You come to enter all... You are about to step in the darkness. One or two things is going to happen. And this is the definition of faith... God will send you

people...help you fly. You got a story to tell, you got the energy and the spirit that can do things other people can't do. You are who you are for a reason. So think now how you can unleash that what *empowered*<sup>45</sup> you. How can we *unleash that what empowered you*<sup>46</sup>? How can we unleash that? [...] You are resonating with the universe and the universe brings things to you to help back (*Brick City* 2009).

Jayda and Mayor Cory Booker are agents of urban transformation and two of *Brick City*'s main protagonists. Their brief exchange outlines the topics that structure this chapter: urban change in the city of Newark, NJ, and Jayda's activist work as a vehicle for constructions of neoliberal race, gender, and sexuality formations within contexts of postindustrial urbanity. This chapter continues the analysis of visual representations of workers and work during contemporary neoliberal times in urban transnational contexts. Taking as its subject Newark, a city formerly known for its "livability" but nowadays among the most dangerous cities in America, *Brick City* presents profiles of various individuals, community groups, and institutional agents, addressing both their work and personal lives, as they unfolded during the year 2008. *Brick City* was produced by the actor Forest Whitaker and praised as a groundbreaking documentary series by film and television critics. The first five-hour installment, which constitutes the object of analysis in this chapter, was aired on the Sundance Channel in September 2009. Mayor Cory Booker, Police Director Gary F. McCarthy, members of the Newark Municipal Council, and other local dignitaries attended the official premiere of *Brick City* at Newark Symphony Hall, on the evening of September 15, 2009. The series received a Peabody Award, the 2010 Golden Eagle Cine Award, and was nominated for an NAACP Image

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<sup>45</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>46</sup> My emphasis.

Award and an Emmy for Exceptional Merit in Nonfiction Filmmaking. Forest Whitaker anticipated that the significance of the series lay in its ability to represent not only Newark, but "a lot of cities around the country" and to portray individuals who "have decided to make a difference and a change" (*Brick City* 2009, extended features). In addition to Jayda, the film profiles a number of individuals and organizations as they embark on various projects of social change. These include groups of community activists such as the Street Doctors, the Crime Stoppers, the Street Warriors, and MAMOC (Men Against Murdering Our Children), the Integrity House-NGO, teachers, counselors, members of the advisory board of Central High School, members of the Newark police department, including Commissioner Gary McCarthy, Blood gang member Dashaun "Jiwe" Morris, poet Ras Baraka, singer Jon Bon Jovi, and last but certainly not least, Mayor Cory Booker.

The first season of *Brick City*<sup>47</sup> presents viewers with a selection of analyses, initiatives, and actions by citizens, law enforcement officers, city administration workers, gang members, and community activists directed at the city's high crime rate. Levin and Benjamin situate the "fight against crime" at the center of their documentary analysis and present it as the remedy to the decline of post-industrial Newark, which is nevertheless a city that did not give up and is still struggling to achieve its renaissance. This chapter engages with the representations of community work and the accounts of urban transformation put forward by *Brick City*. Described by its makers as a means to "make a difference" for the city of Newark, the representational work of *Brick City* is deeply consonant with the vocabularies of global neoliberalism, and yet its subjectifying work

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<sup>47</sup> The second season of *Brick City* aired in 2011. This chapter is concerned, nevertheless, only with the first season of the show, which aired in 2009.

reflects the local specificities of a site which was among the first to undergo its "(partially) destructive and (tendentially) creative moments" (Brenner and Theodore, 2002).

As Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore point out, the destruction-creation cycle of neoliberal urban transformation first promotes the destruction of the vocabulary and imagery of the post-WWII industrial working-class city in order to recast the urban as a space of disorder, home to dangerous classes and economic decline. The moment of creation favors "entrepreneurial discourses," policies promoting zero-crime tolerance, the "broken windows" approach to policing (Wilson and Kelling 1982) and discriminatory forms of surveillance, policies that counter social exclusion by reinserting individuals into the labor market and most importantly, the "mobilization of entrepreneurial discourses and representations focused on the need for revitalization, reinvestment, and rejuvenation within major metropolitan areas" (Brenner and Theodore, 2011 415). After placing in dialogue with neoliberal critiques arguments about subjectivity, agency, crime and social change formulated within the frameworks of feminist theory and critical race theory, I arrive at the conclusion that neoliberal ideologies sometimes overtly, sometimes subtly, build upon colonial racialized concepts of gender and sexuality. Such deployments can be deciphered in the hypotheses, assumptions, analyses, and solutions that *Brick City* proposes in its depiction of the contemporary post-industrial urbanity. Methodologically, this chapter mobilizes an audience-response analysis of online comments, my own affective close viewing, and discourse analysis, along with observations formulated within intentional and reflective representational frameworks.

The city of Newark is a space of vast, multiple, and diverse social, cultural,

economic, and political operations. The first section of the chapter is devoted to an analysis of the representations of the city. This section is once again grounded in theories of neoliberalism, race, gender, and sexuality and engages with on-line audience responses to the first season of *Brick City*. The second section of the chapter focuses on the discursive and filmic construction of Jayda, the central female protagonist of the series. Deciphering the contours of Jayda's character and her relations with the city of Newark led to the foregrounding of her labor as a community activist. I argue that the employment of focus on? her work as a community activist, is symptomatic of the neoliberal construction of the city as a site of danger inhabited by unruly racialized subjects.

### **1.1. Split opinions: 'making a difference' to an instance of 'civic pornography'?**

My generation has been about reintroducing Newark to the nation...The question is: Is this the reintroduction we wanted?<sup>48</sup> (Clement A. Price in Jones 2009).

...if I have never stepped foot in Newark and choose to see one of those documentaries what do you think my feelings toward Newark would be? (Rare. Intelligent. A Newarker<sup>49</sup> 2009)

I first watched *Brick City* before I lived in Newark. By the time the TV series premiered on Sundance, I had visited the city, or to be more specific, the downtown of the city, several times. I was attracted to the verticality of the urban environment. The residential high-rises clustered in the perimeter delineated by Hill Street, Broad Street, and

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<sup>48</sup> Clement A. Price, Professor of History at Rutgers University, Newark cited by Richard G. Jones in *Film Finds Hope Living Amid Newark's Troubles*, *The New York Times*, 09/21/2009

<sup>49</sup>Comment posted 11/05/2009

[http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2009/10/newark\\_middle\\_class\\_overshadow.html](http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2009/10/newark_middle_class_overshadow.html)

Washington Street, reminded me of the business districts of my home city, Sibiu, and of East Berlin in Germany. The rundown, boarded-up buildings on Market Street seemed to have witnessed Newark's decline and now they were awaiting a potential come-back as a prime real estate location. Broad Street and Market Street were bustling with street vendors, corner speakers, street preachers, hip-hop and R&B. The big inflatable union rats were ever-present, shifting location every now and then from across the street from City Hall to the Getaway Centre and often times protests took place on Broad Street, in front of City Hall. To me, Newark seemed to be a city where the operations of neoliberalism, while well under way, were still visibly contested. Mindful of the city's reputation, I rarely extended the space of my explorations beyond the Lincoln Park, the City Without Walls art gallery on Halsey Street, and the downtown Rutgers campus, the UMDNJ building and the Aljazira art gallery. Although *Brick City* did not provide my first introduction to Newark, the documentary series tackled issues central to my research on visual representations of the effects of neoliberalism on contemporary urban spaces and work formations. Further research indicated that Newark was not only one of the most notable cities grappling with racialized neoliberalization, but also an important site for the contestations of neoliberalism. Isoke identify writes: "[In Newark] black people have consistently fought to resist, re-appropriate, and redefine the racialized neoliberalization of the city. They have done this by initiating social movements and making political space to create opportunities for black political empowerment and socioeconomic advancement" (2013, 40). This chapter will thus evaluate the position that *Brick City*--a documentary series that claims to make a difference--occupies in relation to the contestation of, complicity with, or cooptation by neoliberalism.

The two epigraphs are excerpted from a collection of diverse audience responses. They foreground two important dimensions of representational analysis: the intentionality of the author and the affective impact. *Brick City* has been promoted as a story of social change, community activism, law enforcement, urban administration and city politics that is striving to raise Newark from "violence, poverty and corruption" and make it "a better, safer, stronger place to live."<sup>50</sup> The disjuncture between the uplifting tone of the producers' description, and its invalidation in the statements of Clement A. Price, the Rutgers Professor of History and notable local public figure who is also the blogger Rare.Intelligent.ANewarker, demands further consideration. What prompted Price to question the terms of the re-introduction that *Brick City* had imagined for the city of Newark? What accounts for the gap between an ideal that is acceptable to the residents of Newark and the one put forth by the makers of *Brick City*? Price's words link the affective reaction of dissatisfaction to the insider position of some of the commentators. On the other hand, Rare.Intelligent.ANewarker imagines himself viewing the series as an outsider to Newark in order to question the affects that would take shape for someone thus positioned. Where did *Brick City*, a project with seemingly laudable intentions, go wrong?

Urban historians and critical geographers have long argued that modern urbanism holds at its core the anxiety and fear of "dark spaces." Enlightenment thinkers imagined these spaces as caches of non-reason, disease, poverty, and lack of civility. Furthermore, "dark spaces" were feared for their capacity to contaminate the "light spaces" with plights (Vidler 2000, 2008, Raq Media Collective 2007). Feminist theorists and critical race

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<sup>50</sup> <http://brickcitytv.com>.

theorists have furthered this argument by drawing attention to the gendered/ gendering and racialized/ racializing that lie at the core of the construction of this spatial binary.

While working with the visual representations of Sibiu and Berlin, it did not occur to me that I would arrive at a point in my research when I would make a case for the representational invisibility of the middle class of one my sites. The media accounts of Newark are nevertheless situated within such scopic and narrative regimes. It is not surprising that during the film's premiere at Symphony Hall on Broad Street, a resident of the South Ward began shouting at *Brick City's* camera crew: "Go find a happy fucking story. Find some people having a good time and film them," instigated loud ovations and lengthy applause. David Giambusso of the Newark Star-Ledger newspaper also calls out the partial and selective visibility that the series affords to the city of Newark. In an article titled, "Newark's Middle Class is Foreshadowed by *Brick City* Documentary," Giambusso puts forth a counter portrait of Newark by mobilizing statistical data and interviews with Cory Booker, Mamie Bridgeforth,<sup>51</sup> Clement Price, Zinnerford Smith, Sherrell Dorsey, and Byron Clarke.<sup>52</sup>

While the city has one of the highest murder and unemployment rates in the state and visible signs of urban decay, it also is home to six universities, making it the biggest college town in New Jersey. Newark houses four major hospitals, the Prudential Center, a major league sports and entertainment arena, and the Newark Museum, the largest in the state and one of the most prestigious in the Northeast (2009).

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<sup>51</sup> Chair of the Social Sciences Department at Essex County College.

<sup>52</sup> Zinnerford Smith, Sherrell Dorsey, and Byron Clarke are middle class residents of Newark.

### 1.3. Making Black Subjects, Making Black Spaces

Each episode includes a brief commentary by Levin and Benjamin. In one of those features, they explain that crime became the focus of the documentary because, unlike Booker's efforts to bring business back to town, for example, it was easy to show visually. No doubt, *Brick City* would not be as compelling if the focus was on economic development<sup>53</sup> (Kepp 2010).

Numerous public figures from Newark did not endorse the series. Cory Booker criticized *Brick City* for its narrow view of the city. Mamie Bridgeforth, professor of Sociology at Essex County College and former Newark city councilwoman, relegated *Brick City* to the genre of "civic pornography" (Giambusso 2009). Others who did not endorse *Brick City* point to the documentary's selective representation of life in Newark - a mode of partiality that responds to a demand for spectacular racialized entertainment (Benshoff and Griffin 2009, Hall 1981, hooks 1992, Spencer 2006).

Through an analysis of the codes and stereotypes mobilized in the articulation of black characters by Hollywood cinema, James A. Snead arrives at the conclusion that the medium of film enables representations to "insulate themselves from historical change, or actual counterexamples in the real world" (Snead 1997, 27) Snead argues that film takes on the societal functions previously performed by myths. Like myths, certain films preserve their power to compel and assume a "permanent, quasi-mythic status in a society's consciousness" (Snead 1997, 27). Aligning his theory with poststructuralist understandings of difference (unlike Claude Levi-Strauss, who emphasized the community unifying function of myths), Snead argues that nowadays myths "illustrate

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<sup>53</sup> <http://www.popmatters.com/pm/review/119346-brick-city/>

*social divisions*, exposing audience fantasies that are anything but communally shared. In a pluralistic society, myths –especially where they rely on the subordination of particular groups in society--are inevitably political and cannot enforce or sustain a uniform scheme of mythic reconciliation" (Snead 1997, 27). Complex social, political and economic circumstances are replaced, Snead further explains, with "a surrogate ideology of elevation and demotion along a scale of human value" (Snead 1997, 27). This is a racialized ideology, which divides the "scale of human value" into registers of signification that construct racialized subjects by associating blackness with demotion ("debased black"), and whiteness with elevation ("glorified white"). Looked at through Snead's lens of racial semiotic valuation, the assemblage of protagonists proposed by *Brick City* asserts and bypasses this logic. It bypasses it by documenting the work of a good number of African American community activists, City Hall workers and political figures, all of who are committed to making Newark better. While white as well as black subjects populate the realm of elevation, the realm of demotion is exclusively black and white protagonists always inhabit the former space. Crime, violence, and poverty thus constitute the traits of black Newark. The chief of police, McCarthy, takes on epic proportions as the white, upper-middle class hero. Already recognized for his work in law enforcement elsewhere, McCarthy comes to Newark in 2008 as an appointee of the Booker administration. Day in and day out, he works on lowering crime rates and restoring order to a black city in crisis. He is a white guy, but hearing him recounting his Bronx upbringing again and again attached to his character a kind of whiteness that preempts critical responses that could move the viewer towards understanding the racial character of police brutality, the criminalization of African American urban men, and the

operations of the prison industrial complex. *Brick City*'s artful rendering of the racial myth deserves analytical attention. I argue that it is beyond the analytical potential of content, representational, or discourse analysis to explain why it is that when so much of the entire series focuses on Cory Booker's vigorous leadership, street and community activists' truly wonderful efforts to better their community, and Jayda's efforts to launch and sustain the Nine Strong Women program, the ideas and feelings that get representational and affective preeminence are those that re-link urban blackness to gun violence, drive-by shootings, gangs, poverty, and ultimately, fear and danger.

The other filmic mechanisms of racial stereotyping discussed by Snead are representational omission and representational exclusion. They are the most prevalent tactics "in designing mass images of blacks" (Snead 1997, 27). Since "their manifestation is precisely absence itself" (Snead 1997, 27), they are difficult to mobilize in arguments that rest on positivist methodological assumptions; nevertheless critical theory and psychoanalysis have made a case for their value. Snead argues that the recurrent black absence from spaces of "autonomy and importance" and the representational exclusion of "blacks as lawyers, teachers, and doctors, in favor of far more arcane and restrictive black stereotypes" fixate and universalize the relation of black subjectivities to "positions of obscurity and dependence" (Snead 1997, 27). Black subjectivities and blackened urban spatialities develop in a tight representational knit.

Having lived at the corner of Broad Street and Hill Street for almost three years, I feel a certain familiarity with the city of Newark. I confess that throughout my stay I could not move beyond seeing Newark as a poor city. One day, returning from Rutgers-Newark where I was teaching, I took the elevator to the 18<sup>th</sup> floor together with one of

my neighbors. Emanuel was an aspiring politician, familiar with the difficulties that inner-city children faced in their quest for education. I mentioned the poverty of the city as an explanation to the underfunded and struggling education system. Emmanuel contested my general characterization of Newark as a poor city by pointing out that Newark International Airport, Rutgers, UMDNJ, Prudential, NJ Pac and the soon to arrive Panasonic were economic assets of the city. Why do the omission and exclusion of these assets occur in my own mental portrayal and affective resonance to the realities of Newark? It is not that my daily routes would not have brought them my way. I argue that the explanation ties the analytical apparatus described by Snead with the emergence of new meanings attached to the concept of the city and the normalization of neoliberal urban subjectivities.

In relation to contemporary modalities of the neoliberal and racial production of space, Isoke argues that the Central Ward of Newark illustrates racial dynamics central to American culture. Such neoliberal processes have transformed black majority spaces into both real and imagined "sites of danger and decay" (Isoke 2013, 55). Most of the occasions when Newark's history is narrated or visually portrayed, its "long and vibrant black urban culture" along with its "long history of black political activism, cultural work, and cultural expression" is omitted and excluded, so that " 'racial-ethnic wars' and political corruption" (2013, 55) take center stage. Isoke argues that unlike Harlem and Atlanta, which became Black Meccas in the public imaginary, Newark functions as a "blackened space" (Jackson 2001, Isoke 2013). The figuration of the Central Ward of Newark as a blackened space is still fueled by the affects and representations of the urban insurgencies of the late 1960s in the white imaginary, by the failures of the past 38 years

of African-American mayoral leadership, and by the well-established presence of black-nationalist organizations in the city. The questions that arise at this point concern why and how the discourses articulated around these modes of politics, over the years, translate into representations of jobless, gang-affiliated, and criminalized black subjects that convey a sense of danger or fear.

#### **1.4. The ghettocentric view**

The term "ghettocentric" has emerged in the works of cultural theorists Robin D.G. Kelley (1994), Ed Guerrero (1993) and Craig S. Watson (1998) as a descriptor of the political practices and experiences of racialized and marginalized urban, working-class subjects, particularly those that find expression in artistic forms such as gangsta rap (Kelley 1994) or Black cinema (Watson 1998). Moreover, the term encodes the historical specificity of the post-industrial socio-economic reality and encompasses, among other things: "the criminalization, surveillance, incarceration, and immiseration of black youth" (Keeling 2003, 33-46). Feminist critical race theorist Kara Keeling endorses the analytical value of the term ghettocentrism for its capacity to distinguish itself from the conceptions and politics previously encapsulated in the term of Afrocentrism. The term ghettocentrism signals a set of new contemporary urban experiences of blacks and immigrants of color, which unfold as a syncopated continuation of the 1960s and 1970s discourses and practices of Black nationalism. Keeling calls attention to hegemonic gender and racial articulations of black masculinity ("the thug") and black femininity ("the fine lady"), and identifies them as "fundamental mechanisms for rationalizing and reproducing ghettocentric social reality" (Keeling 2003).

According to ghettocentric social critique, "men" become "criminals" because "they are the ones who are supposed to make money, and when legal means fail, they find other means" (Keeling 2003). This view is expressed by Dashaun "Jiwe" Morris, member of the infamous Bloods gang, author, community and street activist, at various points throughout the five episodes of *Brick City*. When Dashaun and Jayda attend a community meeting convened in order to discuss issues of gang violence, Jayda points out the distortive lens that the media turn onto gang life and the negative role modeling influence that these images have on young boys. This scene allows for a critique of the media to be formulated, yet the ensuing editing and scene selection foreclose its meaningful development:

Jayda: I'm sure that everybody knows and understands that the media definitely portrays a crazy view about the gangs. You've got little homies, that's 13, 12, or 10 years old [close-up on her son] that's watching these movies and they see that we are so negative, all we do is drive-by and kill people [...] And that's what they think they want to do.

Woman from the audience: And you say it wasn't the gangs? So what was going on in Newark? Why would somebody shoot a 24- year-old woman on the street? And I'm thinking, where is the moral compass of our people?

Dashaun: We are dealing with people that only know frustration. They don't care about themselves and they don't care about you (*Brick City 2009*)

As an instance of rationalization, Dashaun's words are insightful in pointing to the structural conditions of post-industrial urban poverty, class and race segregation, and the upward redistribution of wealth. In conjunction with Jayda's observation about the

misrepresentation of gangs through media lenses, Dashaun's arguments could potentially shed light on the racializing and gendering work of neoliberal ideologies within the space of post-industrial urbanity. Levin and Benjamin render visible more instances where Newarkers complain about lack of access to employment, the disproportionate police harassment, violence, and heightened scrutiny oriented toward black subjects and in particular, black men (Threadcraft 2014). Most importantly, the resultant composite picture renders visible the conditions under which a sense of alienation and non-belonging comes to materialize among some of the young black men of Newark (Shelby in Threadcraft 2014, forthcoming). However, at no point over the course of *Brick City* does a voice from within Newark's political institutions or corporate entities attempt to engage in critiques of the racial bias that riddles their operations.

Instead, *Brick City* is committed to showing Newark as a world of new opportunities, which are brought into the city by a hardworking, hands-on, charismatic young mayor and his team of experts and counselors. *Brick City's* visual documentation fails to cast light on the way in which neoliberalism and deindustrialization have impacted the city. Neoliberalizing policies transformed Newark, one of the American cities with the steepest increase in the number of the "ghetto poor" (Jencks & Peterson 1991 in Isoke 2013, 53). The current racialized dynamics of neoliberal urban restructuring are continuous with the new racial segregation policies that emerged at the end of World War II, the "white flight" that followed the urban revolts of the late 1960s, and the subsequent racialized process of urban disinvestment and decline.<sup>54</sup> It is

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<sup>54</sup> But Newark should also be documented through a lens sensitive to longue duree histories of racial inequality.

important to state that although after World War II, some people of color were successful in getting access to education and employment (Lipman 2011, 13), labor unions and universities, nevertheless, remained grossly discriminatory in their treatment of the black population (Lipsitz 1998). The restructuring of the global economy further affected a vast majority of people of color, making them carry "the brunt of deindustrialization, cuts in social welfare, attacks on unions, and intensified policing" (Lipman 2011, 12-13).

Newark lost more than 81,000 manufacturing jobs during the 1980s. During the following decades, Newarkers witnessed the disappearance of all of the blue-collar jobs that used to hire the graduates of the city's public school. The dismantling of urban manufacturing voided factories, warehouses, and workshops, and added a dystopian feel to the city: "massive buildings became untouchable due to the likelihood of dioxin and other toxic emissions into the air, groundwater, and the prohibitive costs of clean-up" (Isoke 2013, 53). The white, middle-class population continued to relocate to the suburbs of New Jersey. Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese immigrants moved away from the inner city into the North and East Wards. The conservative restructuring of social programs impacted the poorer Newarkers so harshly that by the end of the 1980s there were an estimated 8,000 to 11,000 homeless people in the city.<sup>55</sup> Today, gentrification is being enforced as a means of development. On Broad Street, new condominium buildings and luxury rentals have replaced the dilapidated ones. At the time I left Newark, they were awaiting their tenants. Isoke points out that gentrification impacts negatively on the funding of the public school system and public programs:

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<sup>55</sup> The current estimations indicate 12, 825 homeless people state-wide (Star-Ledger , January 22, 2012)

While state and local governments have consistently decreased the amount of funds spent to support students [...] there has been a systematic increase in the amount of money spent to fund private and charter schools, law enforcement budgets, the expansion and "enhancement" of county jails and youth detention centers, and various surveillance measures in public schools like metal detectors, security officers, and security cameras (Isoke 2013, 40).

These changes are clearly made visible in the documentary footage in *Brick City*.

Particularly disturbing is the series' endorsement and coverage of school programs designed to foster discipline among the black male students of Newark. Why is that a bad thing? While Mayor Cory Booker himself is shown in his mentoring capacity, the need to foster academic achievement in Newark schools is largely unaddressed.

The neoliberal destruction of government as a mode of representative democracy and its substitution with a governance modality that positions appointed experts, managers, and judicial authorities as the orchestrators of urban administration and the designers of strategies for achieving economic efficiency, individual responsibility, low taxes and user fees (Miller in Lipman 2011, 13) is well documented by *Brick City*.

Nevertheless, *Brick City* includes no critical voices to probe this shift in the organization of political power, which has emptied the state of democratic accountability and has transformed the government into an agent of neoliberal global capitalism. *Brick City* also leaves unquestioned a neoliberal version of participation through appointment, as is the case with Gary McCarthy, the chief of police, or with Stefan Pryor, the city deputy mayor for development; there is also no mention of the implicit decrease in public participation in such institutions as public hearings, which allow citizens to express views and

grievances in a strictly regulated environment or through appointed advisory boards, thus rendering grassroots political participation devoid of decision making and the power to make social change (Lipman 2011). Many Newarkers perceived the election of Cory Booker as mayor in 2006 as a step away from the corruption that had become the *modus operandi* of the city's political administration. During the 2000s, the city finalized the construction of the New Jersey Performing Arts Centre (NJPac), the Prudential Center (the hockey arena for the New Jersey Devils), and numerous mixed-income housing developments. Newark's "renaissance" continues, nevertheless, to unfold under the orchestration of neoliberal solutions oblivious to racial justice principles or to the city's racialized poverty. The proximity of NJ PAC and the Prudential Centre to Newark Penn Station, the Light Rail, and the corporate towers, the frame of the train station on its North West side attest that these sites of cultural consumption cater to the white, middle-class suburban residents of New Jersey, who most likely hold jobs in the corporate offices of IDT, Prudential, or Wells Fargo. Rutgers University, the New Jersey Institute of Technology and the Seton Hall Law School employ others. Lastly, these sites also lure the millions of New Jersey commuters who use Newark Penn Station and Newark Liberty International Airport "to stop, spend, and consume within the [...] boundaries of the city" (Isoke 55). The spaces of middle- and upper- class employment and middle- and upper-class consumption, while part of the city's downtown, are well separated from the Central Ward areas, home to the Newark residents who live at or below the poverty line.<sup>56</sup> In the high-rises of the Central Ward, farther away from Penn Station, and

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<sup>56</sup> 28.4 percent of Newark's residents live at or below poverty line (Isoke 2013, *Newark in Focus: A Profile from Census 2000*).

predominantly inhabited by African-Americans, unemployment and poverty rates topped 40 percent in some census tracts.<sup>57</sup>

*Brick City* capitalizes on the poverty, the unemployment and the suffering that followed the city's deindustrialization and its subsequent neoliberalization. Gun violence, political work, law enforcement operations, and activist efforts provide the context for the articulation of stories of personal redemption and institutional success in urban development or crime reduction. I argue that ultimately, the depiction of Newark as "dangerous 'blackened spaces' " (Isoke 2013, 2) also renders *Brick City's* representational and affective interventions counterproductive to social change, even if social change is considered through the lens of the neoliberal project— more precisely, the city's development through attraction of capital, jobs, spending consumers, and wealthier residents.

#### **1.4. Further lines of division: Brick City's audience responds**

Documentary film representations are not mere recordings and reflections of particular spaces and subjects. The first season of *Brick City* was created from scores of hours of raw footage. Levin and Benjamin explained in one of the interviews included on the *Brick City* DVD that they had captured on camera five thousands hours. These fragments of experiences, events, initiatives, explanations, interpretations, and opinions constitute

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<sup>57</sup> 71 percent of the 56, 738 residents of the Central Ward identified as African Americans; 41.6 percent of the 36,931 African American residents of the Central Ward lived at or below the poverty line; the average per capita income for adults living in the Central Ward was \$11, 610. Of the 16, 732 African-American adult males, 46.5 percent were in the labor force and 29 percent figured as unemployed. Of the 16,732 African-American adult women, 47.6 percent were in the labor force and 23 percent figured as unemployed. While comprising up to 71 percent of the total population of the Central Ward, African Americans own 10.5 percent of the occupied housing units.

the limits of what *Brick City* can narrate and render visually about the present realities of Newark, its recounted past and its projected future (da Costa 2003, 191).

The online audience responses surveyed for this analysis confirm that, like many other post-industrial cities, Newark is experienced as "a divided city" (Harvey 2006). These lines of division are visible in the geography of the city and are traced along differences in wealth, race, ethnicity, profession, home ownership, and class. The urban portrait created in *Brick City* is criticized for its omissions and its reliance on spectacularized poverty, violence, and suffering. Other voices in its audiences endorsed it for its documentary evidence on gun violence and illicit drug activity. A few common threads are articulated in the online responses surveyed for this analysis: strong affective responses of anger and hope, the identification of a rift between the city's middle and professional classes and Newark's less privileged population, as well as the possibility of a brighter future for the city.

Table 1. Audience response analysis: Four categories of response to *Brick City*<sup>58</sup>

1. Accurate and timely portrayal of the city	
Writer points to one of the difficulties in fighting the illicit drug operations	"...innocent people get shot constantly kids, housewives and elderly whether it be a stray bullet or a robbery. dont tell me theres no innocent people dying because i see it with my own eyes. why dont you do me a favor and rat out a dealer in newark and see how it impacts you."
Writer proposes a standpoint theory/critique pointing to the privileged location of the elite criticizing the representational work of Brick City. Middle classes singled out for their privileged position in the field of public knowledge	"...what is the so called professors and civil leaders doing to curb the violence? giving speeches is the easiest thing in this world."

<sup>58</sup> The second column of the table contains quote from online bloggers and comments contributors. The grammatical errors reflect the original.

production.	
2. Misrepresentation by omission	
Writer points to the rendering invisible of the middle class spatiality of Newark. Middle classes conceived as belonging to a specific spatiality, separated from less "nice" neighborhoods.	"The truth is there are several VERY nice neighborhoods in Newark. The Ironbound, most of Forest Hill, the southeastern quadrant of Weequahic, the Ivy Hill section of Vailsburg, Society Hill, James Street Commons, and Downtown with 1180 and numerous lofts are all examples of the many excellent places for educated professionals to live in Newark."
3. Misrepresentation by the spectacularization of suffering and of the problems that the city experiences	
Writers point to the media's capitalization on Newark's urban problems at the expense of what is being attempted and achieved while trying to address these problems	<p>"I want you to know that I support and applaud all the efforts taking place everyday in Newark. Most Newark citizens are good people. I also agree that most of the publicity that Newark unfortunately gets is "civic pornography." Rather than complain, we should use this as a motivating factor so that one day (decades from now), we can look at all the naysayers and say, 'i told you so'."</p> <p>"Newark is a great city with the same problems every other urban area has. I have lived here for 25-years and never had any life threatening encounters."</p> <p>"I truly feel that Newark can turn this around. Remember, there will never be a point that we get to and say, "aahh....Newark is back." Cities do not work that way. They are dynamic organisms that always fluctuate from the norm."</p>
4. Brick City as an element of Newark's urban negative branding embedded in racial politics of a 'suburban state'	
The writer points to a middle class that chose to stay in Newark. This choice is seen to be indicative of their courage, optimism and care for the city.	"The socio-economic problems that have far too often been used (by suburban politicians aided by the media) to symbolize and 'brand' Newark as a lawless, incorrigible, hopeless 'Ghetto' and NOT solely due to its sizeable population of illiterate

	<p>and under-educated youths, gang members, illicit drug activity and users, impoverished house holds; those are the by products of the real and significant causes which are as follows...a majority of suburbanized state whose legislators and residents hold anti urban and anti minority (Black/Latino) views, inequities in the methodologies (pedagogies) and philosophy of teaching primary education (k-12) between suburban and urban school district, classcism, racism, de-industrialization and job off shoring and out sourcing due to globalization and other isms. These are the real culprits that contribute(ed) to the urban ills that are prevalent in the big beautiful city of mine. Kudos to the courageous, caring, and optimistic "Middle Class" home owners and renters who decided Newark was good enough for their hard earned monies and busy lives. at least they put their money where their is."</p>
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While a significant number of analyses of racialization focused their critiques on representations of black communities that incessantly articulate tropes of criminality, urban decay, and unsurpassable cultures of poverty and violence, I argue that my analysis of *Brick City* is important for its positioning of these articulations within the logic of the neoliberal restructuring of labor and its implicit production of racialized boundaries around specific urban spaces. In the context of Newark, the current stage of urban neoliberalization relies on affect-producing technologies of fear and danger. Along with knowledge-power technologies, affect producing technologies of fear and danger constitute maps, modes of urban management, the meanings and affective tones of the city's past, present and future. Raq Media Collective points out that technologies of fear and danger emerge from "sites of power: urban government, police, hospitals, court, civil groups, professional bodies and media managers" (2008). The individual, institutional,

and collective protagonists of *Brick City* emerge from sites of power, knowledge, and affect production. The media effects of contemporary technologies of fear and danger—"publicized court judgments, TV campaigns, new physiognomies of identification and information gathering" (Raq Media Collective 2008)—feature significantly among *Brick City*'s scenes. Protagonists, their actions, the sites that they inhabit and traverse, all of these come together in the actualization of the "event"—a significant element of the technologies of fear and danger. The association of the event with the attention-arresting force of both newness and spectacularity is inherent in the definition of the former. The production of the "event" has now incorporated the logic of risk and uncertainty, which transforms urban spaces marked by poverty into prime areas for the circulation of the images, stories, subjects and objects that constitute the event, resulting in the materialization of "an edgy, neurological feeling" (Raq Media Collective 2008).

### **2.1. Black women's activism in the city of Newark: A historical view**

My engagement with *Brick City* focuses on the work of the community activist, Jayda. I chose Jayda as a central character for my analysis because of the way in which she is positioned in the narrative of *Brick City*, at the intersection of several discursive frameworks. Levin and Benjamin introduce Jayda as a Newarker, Blood gang member, community activist, and a former convict. Because she is in a romantic relationship with a Crips gang member, and given the antagonism between Bloods and Crips, Levin and Benjamin employ the development of their relationship in a Romeo and Juliet formula. Unlike the original, Jayda and her Crip boyfriend Creep's love story goes through up and downs but it has, nevertheless, a positive, redemptive culmination, with Jayda giving

birth to their child, who also stands as a metonym for the future of Newark.<sup>59</sup> I argue that specific building blocks from the construction of her character, the visibility afforded to certain elements of her community activism, together with the exclusive sampling of Nine Strong Women as the only gender-sensitive activist initiative included in the series, limit the ability of *Brick City* to trouble or re-route the impoverishing and racializing operations of neoliberalism. Since *Brick City* renders completely invisible other feminist and anti-racist activist groups from Newark, it thus effects a narrowing of the discursive ground onto which alternative futures could be imagined.

Jayda is the third protagonist that Levin and Benjamin introduce in the first episode. She is only preceded by Mayor Cory Booker and Police Commissioner Gary McCarthy. After her segment, Mayor Booker's father, Cary Booker, briefly addresses the struggles of his time and outlines a generational bridge between the struggles of the present day and those from the era of the civil rights movement. The introductory sequence wraps up with footage from a meeting at the police department where crime statistics are highlighted. I argue that the chronological articulation of this introductory sequence is significant for *Brick City*'s framing of social change. First, violent crime is constructed as the most important current problem faced by the dwellers of Newark, and thus violent crime reduction is justifiably projected as Newark's number one priority. Second, the introduction of four protagonists creates uneasy equivalences between civil rights struggles and co-opted neoliberal modalities of social transformation. Finally, the

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<sup>59</sup> Jayda and Creep continue their engagement with media as they are the central protagonists of a spin-off, *Jersey Strong*, aired and produced by PIVOT TV. The PIVOT TV website introduces the show through the same Romeo and Juliet formula: "Reformed Blood (Jayda) and Crip (Creep) are a modern-day Romeo and Juliet romance in the hood - raising two kids while pursuing their careers and following their dreams. Jayda is working to build mentorship programs for young women in Newark, while Creep balances a day job in sanitation with his dream of launching a comedy career" (<http://www.pivot.tv/shows/jersey-strong>, accessed on December 12, 2013).

comparative juxtaposition of the 1967 unrest and the present day police and community mobilizations to address crime strips the two moments of historical context, and in so doing, renders the concept of "crime" as a factual reality rather than as a category that is constructed within contextually specific regimes of racial, class, and gender power.

Jayda, is constructed as a redemptive feminine subject who escapes the realm of destruction in order to reach out to achieve a new awareness, new growth and a new life, all fundamentally better than what came before. After traversing poverty, gang violence, and prison time, Jayda emerges as a voice that articulates concerns about young women's empowerment and about their futures. Before turning to the analyses of the main tropes that articulate Jayda's vision for social change, I will outline an account of feminist critiques of historical and contemporary constructions of black women's subjectivities.

Patricia Hill Collins' extensive research on representations of black people shows that after the dismantling of the slave economy, newspapers began depicting black women and black men as immoral and sexually promiscuous. Collins analytically describes such stereotypes and mis-representations with the term "controlling images" (Collins 1989, 1995) and explains that their societal and political function was to provide the ideological undergirding for the exclusion of black people from civil society. For instance, in 1807, a newspaper from Newark described a black woman exercising her right to vote in terms of "a strapping negress" (Isoke 2013, 41). Soon after, voters passed legislation that allowed only white male citizens to vote. New Jersey is also a site where, in 1852, an initiative to relocate free people of color to Liberia actually materialized. In 1862, the presence of black people for more than ten days in the state of New Jersey was criminalized. Isoke writes:

Rather than recognizing free blacks as citizens, many white New Jersey residents and lawmakers constructed blacks as a political threat, and a hindrance to the so-called natural economic and social progression of the state. When black people's labor was no longer necessary to whites they tried, again and again, to deport them (Isoke 2013, 43).

Half a century later, Newark starts to be advertised as a "city of opportunity" to black women and men confronting violent discrimination and economic exploitation in the South. Thus, between 1920 and 1930, Newark's black population increased by 129 percent (Isoke 2013, 46). As pointed out by Cunningham, Isoke and Price, Black people were excluded from the skilled and semi-skilled craft and trade occupations. Black men were hired as "carpenters, waiters, day laborers, porters, and doormen," while black women were confined as undocumented domestic servants and launderers. By the 1920s and 1930s, black workers were also excluded from or marginalized within organized labor. Given the systematic discrimination that African-American people faced, independent entrepreneurialism was a promising and effective means of upward mobility. Isoke shows that of the 3,500 black men employed in Newark "there were no black street car or rail transit workers, engineers, sales agents, firemen, or city or county officials. [...] only three were policemen, ten were apprentices in the manufacturing sector, eleven were physicians. Five were dentists, and three were attorneys" (Isoke 2013, 44).

Black churches, associations, literary societies, and schools challenged racist policies and practices. Historical records show black women's participating in volunteer relief work along with local black ministers. Black women social workers and school teachers were found in leadership positions of the Urban League and the National

Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Many others set up smaller community organizations and social clubs, or joined already active ones such as the Negro Women's Republican Club, the Colored Democratic Women's Division, or the League of Women's Voters (Isoke 2014, 45). Programs to promote literacy and civic education were set in motion as early as 1910. The New Jersey State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs also implemented programs that challenged the gendered racial violence against African-Americans, particularly "the lynching of black men, police harassment, and the sexual exploitation of young black migrant women who went into domestic work in white homes" (Isoke 2013,45)

During the years of the Great Depression, Newark's black residents were the first to lose their jobs. Many impoverished African-Americans did not have access to either philanthropic or public forms of relief. Perceived as a burden, the black population was targeted again by relocation policies. Despite the fact that black families comprised only 2% of the total public relief cases (compared with 75% for white Newarkers), their displacement and relocation to southern states was deemed as an appropriate policy solution by the white leadership of the city (Isoke 2013, Price 1975). Under such circumstances of hardship and discrimination, black Newarkers intensified and diversified their mobilizations by forming news journals, storefront churches, black business associations, Black Nationalist groups, civic organizations, and black workers' groups. A thriving and politicized black middle class started challenging the city's racially discriminatory public policies (Isoke 2013, 48).

By the 1950s, deindustrialization was well underway. By the end of the decade, 250 manufacturers relocated overseas; a decade later 1,300 new relocations overseas lead

to dramatic rates of unemployment among former factory workers. The 1967 Newark Rebellion erupted in a climate of resentment and tension between the black residents of the Central Ward and the city's governance. Isoke writes:

Thousands of disaffected youth, protesters, and Central Ward community members took to the streets. The revolt took the form of looting, massive destruction of private property (especially white-owned retail stores), non-violent civil disobedience, and vivid expressions of contempt for whites traveling through the riot-impacted areas (Isoke 2013, 51).

In 1970, poet Amiri Baraka set up the Committee for a United Newark (CFUN), a cultural nationalist organization that sought to address the systemic social, political, and economic exclusion of people of color through the cultivation of black political leadership and black community-based organizations and businesses (Isoke 2013, Woodard 1991). In spite of CFUN's general heteropatriarchal orientation, the organization's Women's Division was in fact a space where women led, organized, studied, established community programs and delivered educational services (Isoke 2013, Mumford 2007, Woodard 1999). While their ideological commitment was to cultivate Newarkers' black political consciousness, their work bridged Newark families with several other communities including public school teachers, young visual and performing artists, and activists. The Black Women's United Front grew out of the Women's Division and became a vibrant national network of black women activists taking on issues pertaining to black women's triple oppression at the intersection of race, class, and gender, the problems of working women, and the rights of women to practice self-defense, particularly against rape (Woodard 1999, 180-183).

At the turn of the millennium, Sakia Gunn's tragic death led black feminist activists into a confrontation that went beyond the violence against black women paradigm. The LGBTQ coalition, Newark Pride Alliance (NPA), opened public dialogues about the homophobic violence directed towards young lesbian, gay, and transgender Newarkers. They tried to build coalitions with local black churches, anti-violence groups, and civil rights organizations in order to fight together the interconnected issues of "HIV/AIDS, poverty, homelessness, and racialized gender street violence" (Isoke 2013,12).

In Levin and Benjamin's documentary film, Jayda is one of the heroes of the Newark transformation. Jayda's introduction in the first episode of *Brick City* is staged for great impact. She is on the stage of Symphony Hall, at the 2008 Gala of the Newark Interfaith Coalition for Hope and Peace and delivers the following heartfelt speech:

My name is Jayda. I am a member of Nine Strong Women and the Bloods [cutaway shots to outdoor neighborhood scenes of Bloods' gesturing gang identity signs]. We lost about maybe 13-14 bloods. There is a lot of things over the 10 years that I have done and I am not proud of [cutaway shot to capture audience reaction, Mayor Cory Booker's face expresses sadness and shock]. I've seen jails, I've seen the institutions, I've lived through the rapes, the banging as we call it. But I just can't leave it alone; I can't turn my back on it and act as it never existed, because now I have a four years old son. And now I see myself like maybe one day I could be somebody's wife. I am somebody's mother already. So what I do is every Wednesday I go and I counsel young ladies at a school, ninths graders [cutaway shot on the audience and Creep, who looks disheartened]. I am

in a relationship with a Crip now. I am a Blood and he is a Crip. I've never thought that I would even kick it with a Crip, much less than sleep with one every night, but I do. I know that, it's not that serious, and that's what I teach my ladies. We don't have to bang, just to prove a point. I don't even know what the point is" (*Brick City*, 2008).

Jayda is an essential protagonist throughout the five episodes of the first season. As foreshadowed by her introduction, the first episode of *Brick City* focuses on establishing Jayda's activist identity. She is shown speaking against violence at numerous events, as well as engaging with Newarkers who work in non-profit organizations or teach in Newark's public schools and high schools, in order to work together towards addressing the problem of city violence. Her voice communicates the urgent need to change Newark's future, while she comes across as a rather peculiar subject: the female gang-member as a promoter of peace.

The series opens with archival footage of the 1967 rebellion. It is important to recount the death toll of twenty-two African American lives--a consequence of the violent crisis management orchestrated by the Newark Police Department, the New Jersey National Guard, and the New Jersey State Troopers (Isoke 2013, Mumford 2007, Porambo 2007, Turner and Koles 2000, Tuttle 2009). The 1967 Newark rebellion is remembered as a double symbol. It is a historical symbol of the city's "anti-black racism and apartheid" (Isoke 2013, 51). At the same time, it marks the height of the so-called "white flight" or, in other words, the outmigration of the city's white residents to New Jersey suburbs.

## **2.2. Black femininities: From historical and contemporary neoliberal formations**

Feminist critical race theorists have long argued that media portrayals of black women have consistently depicted them through "subservient and often demeaning roles in American society" (Moffit 2010, 233). In her groundbreaking *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender and the New Racism* (2004) Patricia Hill Collins examine the "clusters of representations" (2004, 130) that organize the contemporary imaginary of black femininities. Collins's analysis of racialized feminine subject formation is also sensitive to the inflections that these constructs acquire when they further intersect with class, sexuality, location, and mobility. Working-class femininity is rendered through the figures of the sexualized black woman and the "Bad Black Mother." Middle-class femininities are articulated as three subject formations: the Black lady, the modern mammy, and the educated Black bitch. Politics of respectability and the so-called traditional American values such as family, faith, hard work and education are essential to the construction of these figures (Collins 2004, 144, 147).

The middle- and upper-middle-class figures of the "Black Lady" and the class neutral figure of the "Angry/ Strong Black Woman" complement antithetically working-class black femininities. The "Black Lady" functions as a counterpoint to subject formations that foreground Black women's promiscuity. By rejecting the overtones of working-class sexuality while, nevertheless, staying in the workforce, Black women could potentially access middle-class and upper-middle-class status. To be successful in securing and maintaining their class position, Black women need to balance work and family responsibilities with intelligence, grace, hard work, determination, and a sensuousness well contained within the confines of the domestic space and of

heterosexual marriage.<sup>60</sup> The "Modern Mammy" is a representational kin of the "Black Lady." The images of professional Black women required a variation that would clearly articulate middle-class Black women's suitability for hard work. Resurrecting the representational relics of the figure of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries "Mammy," the image of the "Modern Mammy" recycles ideas of subordination to masculine authority and normalizes the notion that ambition and aggressiveness is needed in order to succeed in middle-class occupations. The masculinist spaces and ethoi of corporations, government, law, and the academy constitute the specific and exclusive channels that could circulate qualities of toughness, independence, acumen, and asexuality. The "controlling image" of the "Modern Mammy" is operational in preventing female subjects from "devolving" into bitchiness or into de-feminized versions of the "Mammy" subject. Thus, the figures of black working-class femininity are defined by an "unregulated sexuality and uncontrolled fertility" (2004, 130). Their construction relies on the objectification of the female black body. Historically, racialized objectification was employed for clear economic purposes, more precisely the appropriation of enslaved black women's productive and reproductive labor within the contexts of the colonization of the Americas, the plantation economy, and the transatlantic slave trade (Morgan 2004, Lopez 2006, Spencer 2006). More recently, during the post-civil rights era, these gendered and racialized modes of representation have changed. The historical figure of the Jezebel as a feminine subject of "unbridled sexual passion and eroticism that may often be experienced by white men" (Moffit 2010, 234) has morphed into contemporary variations that factor in various assemblages of class mobility, drug economies, and

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<sup>60</sup> The character of Claire Huxtable of *The Cosby Show* grounds Collins's representational analysis.

commodified sexuality (gold diggers/skeezers, crack hoes, female hustlers, sex workers, and bitches) (Collins 2004, 128).

Collins pays particular attention to the gendered and racialized vocabularies produced and circulated by the rap and the hip-hop industries. The figure of "Black Bitch" was introduced and then popularized through these musical genres, to the point where the phrase has become entrenched in "the realm of colloquial, everyday speech" (Collins 2004, 230). Collins argues that the associative reference to female dogs threads a web of significations that links the bodies and subjectivities of Black women not only to notions of unregulated sexuality but also ideas of uncontrolled fertility. Collins writes: "Female dogs or bitches 'fuck' and produce litters of puppies [...]. The thinking behind these images is that unregulated sexuality results in unplanned for, unwanted, and poorly raised children" (Collins 2004, 130).

These tropes and figures extend into constructs of the black family, as is the case of the "Bad Black Mother" representation. Traits such as abusive, neglectful, poverty stricken, single, young, drug user, reliance on public support, and inner-city resident get articulated in various racialized maternal subjectivities. In spite of the post-civil rights context of their formation, these figures are still informed by the ideologies and scopic regimes of the United States white upper and middle classes (Collins 2004, 130-132). The construct of the "Bad Black Mother" is crucial to the analysis of representations of work under global neoliberalism for three reasons. First, the centrality of drug usage in the construction of this subject sets BBMs at odds with the requirements of rationality, autonomy, and self-reliance which, as demonstrated in the first chapter of this dissertation, are the pillars of the neoliberal subjectivity. Second, the traits of autonomy

and self-reliance are further at odds with the crystallization of blackness as a racial marker of the category of the "welfare mother." As emphasized by Collins, this moment of articulation represents an annihilation of important socio-political gains of the 1960s, more specifically, the success of African American women in "challeng[ing] the racially discriminatory policies that characterized social welfare programs" (Collins 2004, 132).

The racialized image of the "welfare queen" performs multiple ideological functions within the neoliberal modalities of governance and divestment. First, it justifies the cuts in public funding for public services addressing the needs of inner-city black populations, by constructing them as lazy and undeserving. Second, it introduces a discontinuity in the valuation of domestic and child-care work, whether this work is performed by black mothers or white mothers. Thus, white middle- and upper-class women's choice to be stay-at-home mothers is encouraged, while black women's access to financial sources or public programs that would enable them to do the same is denied.

Third, the production of Black women as over-sexualized and hyper-fertile BBMs is rooted in the post-civil rights era socio-economic rendering of poor Black children as "superfluous as workers" (Collins 2004, 132). As Black children became at once too expensive for the state and redundant in relation to labor extraction, a new turn occurred in the production of racializing ideologies and social policies, requiring "poor and working class African American women [...] to have fewer children, often through punitive population control policies" (Collins 2004, 133). This constellation of racialized images of Black femininity is thus articulated within the "class system of the post-civil rights era" and deployed as an "ideology to justify the new social relations of hyper-ghettoization, unfinished racial desegregation, and efforts to shrink the social welfare

state" (Collins 2004, 137).

The reality of racialized poverty is much more complex than contemporary US media practices make it seem. Rendering poverty as a disreputable state has consistently relied on its association with Black populations. While African Americans are overrepresented among the poor, they do not constitute the majority of all persons living below the poverty line. Moreover the equation of Black populations with poverty is obscuring the United States legacy of institutionalized racism, which is of paramount importance for an inquiry into the causes and demographic distribution of poverty (Henderson and Tickamyer 2009, 50, 2002):

due to racialized presentations, the persistence of explanations founded in a culture, and the strength of race-based stereotypes such as "welfare queen," the face of welfare is Black. [...] By disregarding race based prejudices and discrimination in broader society, people of color are placed at a disadvantage in terms of successfully leaving public assistance programs and obtaining self-sufficiency (Henderson and Tickamyer 2009, 54).

As pointed out by Fujiwara (2005) and Weinberg (2000), the welfare system, since its inception, was built on exclusionary grounds, and the subsequent welfare reform legislation contributed to the disenfranchisement of Blacks and other people of color in the United States. For instance, Briggs (2002) points out that the "welfare queen" was a forceful controlling image for poor female immigrants from Puerto Rico. The ideas and policies known as "welfare reform" broke down the socio-economic safety nets launched in the New Deal and developed during the civil rights movement and the War on Poverty period (Henderson and Tickamyer 2009, 66). This has been ideologically achieved by

framing poverty as "someone else's problem," primarily a problem of citizens who have created poverty by "individual and collective group failure," and who can be most often identified as a "racial 'other' "(Henderson and Tickamyer 2009, 66).

Ultimately, the "Angry/ Strong Black Woman" is a binary subjectivity formation, which articulates onto the terrain of different class structures. The valued figure of the "Strong Black Woman" is tied to Black women's position of authority within the family—a position attained as a result of their double role of "principal breadwinner and principal nurturer within a world structured by racial discrimination" as well as through their proven capacity of "extraordinary strength, endurance, and resilience" (Wyatt 2008, 57). On the other hand, the "Angry Black Woman" solves some of the tensions that the figure of the "Strong Black Woman" creates for the ideology of gender. Kimberly M. Moffit explains that this binary figure is lodged in a gender normative system that "proposes that men are masterful and controlling, while women should be submissive and demure" (Moffit 2010, 234). Anger is thus rendered as "the intent to emasculate black men," but also as a medium for expressing "pent-up frustrations experienced by her (and her family) as a result of the social and political history that often impacts African Americans negatively" (Moffit 2010, 235). This association of anger with socio-political discontent deserves further attention, particularly in relation to contemporary neoliberal formations of subjectivity. In Collins view, "aggressive African American women create problems in the imperfectly desegregated post-civil rights era, because they are less likely to accept the terms of their subordination" (Collins 2004,138). Their anger is constructed as a ground for censoring acts of critique, resistance, and rebellion. Once again the controlling function of the gender ideology generates multidimensional effects at its

intersection with race and gender. Anger becomes a trope that is part of a longer chain of associations alongside unruliness, lack of discipline, disruptiveness and aggression.

Within the neoliberal system of signification, these associations annihilate the capacity of anger for social critique. Anger is thus integrated in the urban landscape of fear that is in need of neoliberal governance and, at the same time, it becomes the defining affect of what would be the "inappropriate" or "failed" neoliberal subject.

It is important to emphasize that the invalidation of anger as a gesture of social critique and the equivalence between strong independent women and the "controlling image" of the "Angry Black Woman" or, respectively, the "Black Bitch," bear consequences at the level of activism, policy making, and urban governance. Collins calls into question the disconnection of major African American organizations from a critique of "media images of poor and working-class Black women," as well as of "their actual treatment by government officials, the men in their lives, and strangers on the street" (Collins 2004, 138). Such racialized and gendered representational regimes isolate non-conforming young women in spaces of ridicule, harassment, and physical danger, as in the case of Sakia Gunn, whose rejection of the narrow conceptualization of appropriate black femininity led to her death (Collins 2004, 138).

The politics of neoliberal representation of working-class Blackness is also reliant on the self-other logic of colonial subjectivity formation, as well as on its racist libidinal and consumptive registers. The much circulated media representations of "the allegedly authentic Black culture associated with working-class and poor African Americans" (Collins 2004, 147) continue to perpetuate ideas of Black difference as articulated in relation to White norms and deployed for the consumptive affective intensification of

White and/or middle- and upper-middle class viewers from around the globe. According to Collins, "Black hip-hop culture, with images of urban neighborhoods as wild, out of control, criminal havens, its rap artists as self-proclaimed gangstas, and its rejection of conservative family values via young mothers with babies and no husbands" and "stories of Black promiscuity, depictions of Black women's sexuality" become central elements of commodified Black culture that convey a sense of excitement and danger that is comparable with:

what prior groups of Whites accessed by going on an African safari, visiting the naughty Harlem jazz clubs of the 1920s, or reading the travelogues of the survivors of these exploits. Identifying the actual "dangers" and excitement" of working class Black youth culture as authentic Black culture, and selling it to audiences in a global context, satisfied the demands of the global marketplace (Collins 2004, 147-148).

### **2.3. Jayda: a neoliberal agent of individualized transformation**

The theme of Jayda's community activism is substantially developed in the third episode of *Brick City*. The episode continues documenting the conversations that she initiated with stakeholders in Newark's political administration, economic development, and community activism sectors. These conversations continue contouring her profile as community activist but also start to convey a clearer vision for her project.

For instance during a meeting with David Kerr and Tanya Bennett at the Integrity House NGO, Jayda explains that she envisions her program addressing "every aspect of helping, with tutoring, mentoring, life skills." Interestingly, the exchange bears the markers of professionalized community activism as terms such as "niche," "vulnerability"

and "goals" make their way into the conversations through the comments of her interlocutors:

Tanya Bennett: Once you see these women who are at a vulnerable point, so the question is how do we make them stronger, so that when they are faced by the pimp on the street, or someone offers them drugs, to bring them together."

Jayda: "We need to bring them together.

David Kerr: What you are trying to do is a kind of a surrogate family. (*Brick City* 2009)

Jayda's vision is clearly articulated on the value of education and aims at enabling the young girls of Newark to achieve more academically. While these are laudable goals, there are already established programs that cater towards this liberal agenda of social transformation through education. The editing of the episode emphasizes that Jayda's program will be filling a gap that she and her advisers identified in the service provision for Newark's youth, namely the lack of programs for young women. The rules of the market that require perpetual newness have infiltrated the field of community service and activism. Jayda and the girls she intends to serve thus need to be constructed as a novel niche. Bennett and Kerr suggest that the program should be framed as a support network. While Jayda agrees with the value of togetherness, she reasserts her interest in pursuing activities that would reinforce the girls' valuation of education as soon as David Kerr makes a suggestion that her program become a potential "surrogate family," thus privatizing and depoliticizing community activism. Jayda restates: "I think that tutoring and education [...] to keep to their minds on education and how important it is...How important it is to go to college." While the camera rests for a second on David Kerr's face

to show his surprise at Jayda's emphasis, the conversation ends with Tanya Bennett's suggestion to name Jayda's program "Nine Strong Women": "What if we start with something called Nine Strong Women [...] the number is just a title but it could be 25."

This strategizing conversation shows an interesting divergence in the way community service is envisioned. Jayda reiterates her interest in focusing on young women's education. On the other hand, the stakeholders that Jayda engages in conversation have a tendency to bring young women's sexuality to the fore of the social change agenda. Todd Warren, counselor and Vice Principal of the Central High School is a friend of Jayda's, an adviser and supporter of her initiatives. This is his take onto Jayda's role:

There's no pay-day in this. You have to do it because it is right, because you believe. And if I didn't I would have quit by now. I know why people...women, when I was at the detention center, I was talking to one of the administrators and she was working with a young girl who had a bad odor and no one could understand where the odor is coming from. So she said that she took her to the doctor and the girl was 15 years old and had used condoms up in her vagina. So the questions is where was her mother ? [...] that's why people like you are important. You will get discouraged, you will get frustrated, but...people with kids depend on you. That's the only thing that keeps me going. We are needed (Brick City, 2009).

The sexualization of Jayda's service and activism agenda is squarely situated within the framework of controlling images discussed by Collins. At the same time, the scarcity of progressive sexual education programs could justify the position of sexuality at the center

of the service delivery agenda. The lacunae of the rather short analyses occasioned by *Brick City* locate the source of such problems at the level of young women's ignorance and leave unattended larger socio-political and cultural frameworks that shape it.

Sexuality and education get encoded together in narratives of girlhood at risk, always on the brink of death. The documentary footage from September 3, 2007, takes the viewers back to the Integrity Academy, for the first meeting of Nine Strong Women, and Jayda's first encounter with the young women recruited for the program. She addresses them:

Ladies... You all have to do something. You feeling me? You know... You get brought home, you bang bang, you fight. Everybody knows. I did it too. We got to switch around because we are ladies. But I think that everybody should maintain like at least a B average, 3.5 GPA. And even if it's not possible, that's what I want us to struggle for. [giggles among the girls] You got to be serious about this. If I didn't think you gonna be serious, I wouldn't have asked you to come. You know this is a responsibility that you all accepted it... if you wanna accept the responsibility. Don't put your lives at risk just to have friends, it's not worth it (*Brick City* 2009).

Images of the 2007 shooting of a young woman, her teenage daughter, and two of her girlfriends is intercut between Jayda's first address at Nine Strong Women and a sleepover for the girls in the program at her new apartment. The incident is discussed in terms of a drug-related crime, and one of the victims, thirteen-year-old Latrishia Carruthers, is introduced as a friend of one of the murdered girls. Jayda starts the sleepover with the following words:

We believe to stay strong, do what is right, but not wrong. We believe to accomplish our goals, to keep our head up and never fall. We believe that we are able to do whatever our mind sets out to do, and if we believe our dreams will come true.

Footage from Latrisha's wake punctuates the rendering of their sleepover. Latrisha's death interpolates the young women in the group as young women at risk, on the brink of death. But can her death be made into a teaching moment? To Jayda's question about the kind of person Latrisha was, one of the girls replies:

The kind of person that never bothers nobody. She had a mouth, you know what I mean. But all females has a mouth. [...] She didn't deserve to get what she got.

Even if God says that everything happens for a reason. What was the reason, only God knows. All we can keep saying is what? And why? And why? And why?

The conclusion that such a death is undeserved and unjustifiable gives Jayda room to reassert her view that Newark's social environment, as well as the social relations that the girls develop in the city, are risk factors that could lead to one's violent death.

Levin and Benjamin's search for "typical" characters isolates Keyla Miles as the "type of girl" at risk and then pursues the careful assemblage of traits, vulnerabilities, and accountabilities to support this identification. During a mentoring session, while developing her argument for prudent urban relationality, Jayda singles out Keyla's sociability:

I want to let you know guys that I'm so serious about this. Be careful about who you are around, who you call a friend, ...no why...[Jayda looking intently at Keyla]. You know why I look at you, because you have a beautiful heart and you

are gullible as hell. You would believe anything and that's the worst type of person to be living in 2008 Newark, New Jersey (*Brick City*, 2009).

Keyla remains in focus during the fourth episode of *Brick City*. Keyla Milles is the daughter of Jayda's guardian, Michele Miles. She is depicted as a young woman who is not able to distinguish the signs of safe social relations from those of dangerous social relations. This "incapacity" makes her into a main character of the Nine Strong Women plot. Jayda confesses to Michele Miles, Keyla's mother, that Keyla scares her. On another occasion Jayda makes Keyla's teenage moodiness into "a situation" that needs to be addressed. She argues again on what constitutes the right friends versus dangerous friends and links this notion to anxiety- provoking predictions of death. Jayda explains:

We have a situation. Come here. [To Keyla] Now look. A lot of people right here who think that they are your friends they are not your friends. This is hard like hell. I swear to God...Feel it. That knot is coming from the worries that my niece is giving me right now. If I didn't give a fuck about you, I wouldn't have this right now. I wouldn't be crying in my womb, thinking what the hell I am going to do? She is going to fucking hell herself right here, there. You know, I can't go to my niece's funeral (*Brick City*, 2009).

Keyla's articulation with notions of risk and death intensifies the affective tension of the Nine Strong Women plot. The emblematic young woman at risk, Keyla's portrait is further developed through the problematization of her so-considered precocious sexuality. Keyla's risky sexuality calls for a discussion between Michelle Miles and Jayda. Surprisingly, Keyla's usage of condoms is a worrisome indication of her sexual excess and precocity. Her mother tells Jayda: "Keyla is off the chains. I found condom

wrappers outside. There were messages on my phone at one in the morning saying: 'If I'm coming do you think your mother will hear us'" (*Brick City* 2009). Michelle is concerned that Keyla's is inconsistent with usage of "protection." Michele claims that in a text message conversation that she intercepted, Keyla responded to a girlfriend who inquired about whether she had used a condom in a recent sexual encounter: "It happened so fast, I don't know" (*Brick City* 2009). Jayda fails to respond to the performative comedic effect of Keyla's line. Instead she promises Michele to help: "I don't care how bad I was you always were there. I'm gonna do that with Keyla. You know what I'm saying" (*Brick City* 2009).

Interestingly enough, Keyla's relationship with her mother deteriorates during the filming of *Brick City* to the point where Keyla explores the possibility of moving in with Jayda. While Keyla is an important protagonist, the time allotted to rendering her own views is strikingly minimal. Jayda's questions to her are either absent or rhetorical, thus viewers get close to no insight into what Keyla might think about her life in Newark. She explains to Jayda that the reason why she wants to move out is "aggravation" with her mother's behavior – behavior that remains unspecified. All that she can squeeze in that is included in the final cut are the following words: "I'm not that bad. I'm with my friends and I'm just outside. I'm not doing nothing" (*Brick City* 2009) But Keyla's intervention seems not to belong to a dialogic space. Her presence in the scene and her words are just props for Jayda's message on risk and vulnerability. The words that she manages to squeeze out in her defense stir up new gloomy projections of failure, sexual danger, and individualized accountability:

Jayda: Your mother, when I was going through my little phase in life, she helped me a lot. You know, I went to jail. That couple of years you had not seen me, I was locked up. And your mother used to come and see me and stuff. Can you imagine that? I don't want you to ever get locked up. How would you feel? [...] Don't that, that, the sex thing...you want to have sex to be cool, or whatever the case is...don't let that stuff happen around you either. I want you to work on some things for me."

Keyla: O.K.

Jayda: Seriously...It's very dangerous nowadays. You feel me? (*Brick City* 2009).

Jayda's shift in focus from her initial emphasis on empowerment through education to iterative emphasis on danger, risk, and crime leaves a lot to be further specified in terms how empowerment could be achieved under conditions of fear and anxiety. If the city's social environment of violence and crime puts women at risk, Jayda's endeavor to spread the news about her program to the larger community at the intersection of Broad Street and Market Street could be seen as a logical step. Furthermore her veering away from an education agenda to the repetitive narration of her personal story is symptomatic of neoliberalism's requirement for a departure from systemic critique and collective action and its promotion of individual as the only scale of action, transformation, and mobility. Jayda addressed the crowd:

How are you all doing? I am Jayda, one of the leaders and founding members of a program called Nine Strong Women and here go some of my ladies right here, and basically what we are teaching these ladies right now is that they got to love themselves. Loving themselves, keeping each other tight. Stop letting these men

coming between us. Stop hating on each other. Give each other compliments and bring each other up. I think this is what we really, really need to do. Ladies we got to lay our bed to [unintelligible] We got to do that. I just want you, to let you know that I am located at the Integrity House, once a week. Whoever needs, I am there. That's really all I've got to say (*Brick City* 2009).

Jayda's street intervention is, in fact, telling in relation to the events in her own life, her current legal battle over charges of assault<sup>61</sup> and the relationship strains caused by Creep's alleged cheating, all dramatized for media consumption. Jayda's activism and her legal battle share center stage in Episode 4. Scenes of discussions of the prosecutor's preliminary plea bargain offer on Jayda's assault charge and footage of Jayda's lawyer Brooke Bennett negotiating her client's charges and their court appearance alternate with scenes documenting Jayda's activist work as the mentor of Nine Strong Women. In Jayda's legal battle, Bennett references Jayda's work for Nine Strong Women as proof of her transformation: "She does this mentoring of young kids off the streets. It's a 24 hour job for her" (*Brick City* 2009). In the end, although the medical documents attest to the gravity of Jayda's assault on her victim, Bennett is successful in bringing Jayda's legal battle to an end with a sentence of three years' probation without incarceration.

The only activity that brings the Nine Strong Women in the vicinity of educational empowerment is the visit of a guest speaker, Jazmin Andrews. She is there to be a role model for the young women from Jayda's group, through her own story of redemption and self-empowerment. She is a college student and a double major. She is majoring in Pan Africanism and sociology. The predictable triadic solution of good

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<sup>61</sup> Jayda, with the help of her lawyer, Brooke Barnett, is fighting a 2004 assault charge that that could potentially make her go to prison, *Brick City* offers no insight into the circumstances of the assault.

grades, controlled sexuality, and fear of getting shot structures her intervention, which is strikingly continuous with the general framework of the activism and service put forth by *Brick City*:

I'm a double major in Sociology and Pan Africanism. My fresh year in high school, I could say it was awful. My GPA was probably 1.0. And by the time I got to be a senior, my GPA was a 3.8. And that's because I worked because I wanted to get in school. Like I don't care what you want to do on the street. You don't want to catch nothing, so be careful, you don't wanna get shot, so watch what you do and keep your mind on the book though. Do not forget about school just because you are having fun on the street (*Brick City*, 2009).

While death is rendered as a continuing threat of the urban environment of Newark, *Brick City* concludes with scenes of celebration. Together with her mother, Pauline Jacque, Creep, Michelle, Kayla, Todd Warren and other friends, Jayda celebrates the birth of her new baby and having received a start-up grant for Nine Strong Women.

## **Conclusion**

What does *Brick City* bypass in its treatment of neighborhood violence and racialized and the masculinist post-industrial urban landscape? In this chapter I am not arguing against statements that assert that young African American women and girls lead their lives under persistently threatening and violent conditions, neither am I contesting the high rates of sexual victimization that occur among young women and girls from Newark. First, my argument calls attention to the unproblematized positioning of young women's sexuality as a site of social control within larger constructions of gendered and racialized neoliberal subjectivities. Rather than exploring the multiple meanings of sexual practice

and identity that might get articulated among the members of Nine Strong Women, Kayla's sexuality is marked as risky at the intersection of the discursive framework of sexual respectability and the anxious anticipation of death. While Jayda relentlessly points out that there is something inherently dangerous in Newark's environment, Levin and Benjamin, rather than pursuing arguments that link violence with "structures of gender, race and class inequality in distressed neighborhood," short-circuit the analysis by metonymically attributing to the city the identity of criminalized black masculinity.

Visual evidence of black suffering is oftentimes accompanied by statements that single out so-called "negative" cultural traits that are associated with Black Newarkers, as well as "risky" personality traits tied with various typified characters. These two categories of qualities become the target of social or personal change. In conjunction with the articulation of the collective racialized subject and that of the risky individual, alternative subject positions are enabled, such as the redemptive and self-redemptive women and men. The ideological functions of these constructs are multiple. Such racialized subjects are perceived to serve as corrective representational devices to racial stereotypes of Black people. The redemptive ideology serves as a strategy of black governmentality that further shores racial and class division lines. Lester Spence argues that such service, activist, and governance strategies create a conduit for members of the middle and upper classes "to control and police the behavior of poorer black citizens," and further to control the division of resources among the Black populations (Spence 2009, 143).

In anticipation of her meeting with Mayor Cory Booker, Jayda reemphasizes in a conversation with her mother, Pauline Jacques, that the importance of her program lays in

addressing the needs of a group at risk: "I'm going to stress to him the importance of a program for the females. You know we are at risk." Her mother too points to the value that Jayda's personal history adds to her program: "This is a serious matter, And you know, you are very affected in doing it because you lived many of it" (Brick City, 2009). To re-emphasize, the value of *Brick City* lays in rendering visible issues of intimate justice faced by women and girls in urban, low-income Black communities. However, individualistic solutions that prompt young women to isolate themselves and change their personalities will not make systemic problems disappear.

## **Conclusions**

This research project has explored the potential of visual arts to enable critical discursive resources and affective dispositions that advance feminist goals of social and economic justice in the context of global neoliberal capitalism. The dissertation argues that capitalist multiculturalism mobilizes visual arts in the production of commodified ethnic, racial, gender and sexual identities. These mobilizations are situated within larger contexts of urban development, contexts that vacate and reshape cities for touristic consumption, corporate occupation or gentrification. I sought to identify the potentials and limitations of affective theories, particularly in relation to questions of situated and localized subjectivities and agencies. My dissertation sought to investigate the mutually constitutive character of the affective, cultural, political and economic fields by situating at the center of its analysis visual art projects that engaged with the topical phenomena of neoliberal capitalist globalization. These included: changing labor practices, new modes of livelihood, and new gendered, racialized and classed identities.

The empirical framing of this research brought together the contexts of three transnational urban spaces: Sibiu (Romania) Berlin (Germany), and Newark, NJ (USA). These locations have distinct socio-political histories, which are currently crisscrossed by different transnational fluxes of capital, images, technologies, and people. Within the methodological framework of my research, visual art projects were approached as evidence in support of larger claims about the consolidation of neoliberal hegemony or the articulation of critical and affective resources that challenge this trend. Given the intricate relations between the political economies of urban development, creative

economies, and neoliberal governance, my research attested to the necessity of supplementing the visual and affective analysis with sociological observations of the urban dynamics.

Such observations allowed me to distinguish among site-specific representational politics. In each of the sites of my research I identified distinct modalities of subjectivity formation which were employed to challenge, resist or reinvent the meanings and affects that undergird the operations of neoliberal global capitalism. The differences as well as the commonalities between the trends of urban neoliberalization and site-specific articulations demonstrated the value of the comparative methodological approach that structured my study. Below I discuss my empirical findings and show their relevance to the main questions of this research project.

I start by explaining how the underdeveloped account of power and agency of affective theory and methodology weakens their explicative potential, especially when considered in relation to depictions of contemporary urban realities such as the overrepresentation of women among the downwardly mobile, low-paid, and exploitable workers of neoliberal economies. I discuss the implications of the hegemonization of neoliberalism as an ideology, development approach and governance paradigm for the contemporary representational politics of Sibiu, Berlin and Newark. I then examine the conditions of the emergence of new politics of urban space, which normalize notions of revitalization and infrastructure development for temporary touristic and corporate occupation and elides all possibilities for fostering livable cities for local populations.

First, at the outset of my research affective theory and methodology seemed to productively conceptualize, capture and render multiple relations and interactions among

humans, images, and physical environments. The question of agency was central to my research in a twofold articulation. On one hand, I asked how visual artists, who depict the human and physical worlds of contemporary transnational cities, account for agency. On the other hand, accounting for agency, the agency of the viewer was also essential to theorizing my own interpretive process as well as to the responses of critics and audiences. I argue that by foregrounding immanent possibilities for becoming and by downplaying the agency of individual or collective actions that challenge the structural conditions of inequality, affective frameworks can render irrelevant visual art interventions that are in actuality aligned with the standards of viable politics. Furthermore, the methodology of affective viewing rendered me as the viewer/ the interpreter/ the writer who produces knowledge about the visual art projects included in this dissertation from a universal viewing/intuiting/ writing position. In the context of my dissertation, the avenues that affect theories and methodologies opened, appeared to be too far removed from social, cultural and geopolitical grounds, and more importantly, from an account of uneven relations of power and situated positions of viewing, interpreting or knowledge production.

Second, most of the visual projects included in my dissertation were ambiguously positioned in relation to neoliberal vocabularies and affects: many of them while simultaneously seeking social justice, continued their entanglements with gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality and citizenship categories that undergird the inequalities, marginalizations and exclusions of the current time. Rastko Petrovic's documentary film, *Independence* presented a remarkably nuanced problematization of subjectivity in relation to questions of mobility and agency in Sibiu. Together with Anne Krenz's web art

project, *The Polish Wife*, Anne Schiltz and Charlotte Gregoire's *STĀM-We Are Staying* and Marc Levin and Mark Benjamin's *Brick City*, also posed the topical question of how to live well under the current conditions of inequality and social vulnerability. These projects avoided the construction of the one-dimensional figures of victimhood and proposed subjects-in-process who respond to the socio-economic transformations of the globalizing world in novel ways. Nevertheless, in the case of each project it could also be argued that the exclusive focus on the family enables a reaffirmation of privatized neoliberal solutions to reproductive work and social mobility. The most politically overt documentary films, *Brick City* and Julia Ostertag's *Under the Red Umbrella* further rely neoliberal tropes in character development of the protagonists invested with social change roles. The protagonist of *Under the Red Umbrella* is constructed as a sex worker who is able to mobilize the resources necessary to destigmatize the category of sex work and to make her entrepreneurial endeavors safe and profitable. *Under the Red Umbrella* singles out the voice of one individual and fails to reach the point at which new modalities of collective action are discussed or documented.

*Brick City's* focus on Jayda and her rendering as a representative figure of women's activism makes invisible the more politicized forms of community activism by women of color. Moreover, it delinks contemporary political and community work engagement from the rich history of radical critique in favor of solutions reliant on self-discipline and the inspiring power of role-models who have overcome suffering and marginalization through self-transformation. In spite of these ambivalent positioning in relation to progressive and neoliberal vocabularies and affects, the visual projects included in this dissertation restored the visibility of subjects, experiences, livelihoods,

and activism that are most of the time excluded from celebratory accounts of transnational touristic and corporate mobility.

Third, my engagement with the urban development blueprints, cultural events and visual art projects from Sibiu, Berlin, and Newark allowed me to advance the arguments that deal with urban inequality through analytical frameworks that foreground the instrumentalization of creative economies and gentrification. While pointing out the ethically indefensible investment in urban infrastructures for temporary occupation, it is important to restate the urban development transformations that each city underwent in preparation for the arrival of corporate capital, transnational tourists, and wealthier residents. Sibiu's rich centuries old architectural heritage became a brand identity marketing the city to international tourists as an Eastern European hub of culture and harmonious ethnic diversity. Berlin, a city reunified in 1989 after the opening of the Berlin wall, was fashioned into hub for contemporary arts; the deserted industrial buildings of East Berlin became real estate opportunities for artists and gallerists from across the world. For the past decade, Newark has strived to build a reputation that would enable a more effective capitalization on its assets: cheap real estate, an international air transportation hub, its proximity to New York City, and state-of-the-art entertainment spaces such as NJ Pac and the Prudential Centre. To achieve their goals for urban development, each city transformed elements of their particular socio-political histories into cultural resources.

Invented histories, along with commodified and depoliticized versions of difference and diversity, were placed at the core of their brand identity projects. I argued that in contexts of transnational encounter, which are predicated on deep transnational

class inequalities, documentary films and new media art projects are still holding the potential to create politicized publics. Web platforms can enable multi-linear arguments and bridge present-day narratives with historical accounts and imagined futures for social justice activism. Similarly, the implicit association of the documentary genre with realism could render documentary films as significant representational tools for consciousness-raising and for disrupting the dominant systems of belief.

These arguments require further inquiries into the mutually constitutive relations among specific media, aesthetic strategies and geopolitically located sites of artistic production, circulation and reception. Further explorations of the aesthetic strategies employed by feminist identified artists to challenge the dominant narratives of neoliberal ideology and critically engage with the contemporary conditions of precarity and exploitation constitute compelling new directions of inquiry.

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