



Picture: Natalia Kulka

# Killing sympathy<sup>1</sup>

## About Jodi Melamed book *Represent and destroy: Rationalizing violence in a new racial capitalism*<sup>2</sup>

Anna Zawadzka

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the book *Represent and destroy: Rationalizing violence in a new racial capitalism* by Jodi Melamed. The author of the book identifies and describes three different theories of race, all officially antiracist, which over the last seventy years successively enjoyed dominant status in the United States, meaning that they have been produced and reproduced by state institutions and initiatives. The three theories are racial liberalism, liberal multiculturalism and neoliberal multiculturalism. Jodi Melamed argues that their purpose was, first and foremost, to legitimize the capitalist exploitation of colored people, both locally and globally. As Melamed examines the critical attitudes to the dominant approach to race in the USA, and how their polemical potential has been contained, she demonstrates how post-war antiracist ideologies have limited the understanding of racism and provided the foundations for and normalized new forms of racialized violence.

**Keywords:** racialization; racism; racial liberalism; racial radicalism; capitalism; multiculturalism; Jodi Melamed; United States of America.

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Jodi Melamed in her book *Represent and destroy: Rationalizing violence in a new racial capitalism* (Melamed, 2011) examines three successive theories of race, all officially

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1 The phrase “killing sympathies” is the title of one of the chapters in the book by Jodi Melamed and a reference to the plot of Chester Himes’s 1955 novel *The end of a primitive*.

2 I would like to express my gratitude to Denise Grollmus for pointing out this book to me.

antiracist, which enjoyed the dominant status in the United States over the last seventy years, meaning that they have been produced and reproduced by state institutions or initiated by the state. The three theories are *racial liberalism*, *liberal multiculturalism* and *neoliberal multiculturalism*. The author convincingly argues that the main purpose of these ideologies was, first and foremost, to legitimize the capitalist exploitation of colored people, both locally and globally. As Melamed examines the critical attitudes to the dominant approaches to race in the USA, and how their polemical potential has been contained, she demonstrates how post-war antiracist ideologies have limited the understanding of racism and provided the foundations for and normalized new forms of racialized violence.

This text starts with a brief presentation of the three ideologies Melamed describes, and the historical contexts of their respective introductions and containments. This is followed by the review of what I find to be valuable descriptive and analytical categories proposed by the author of *Represent and Destroy*, and an attempt to explain why she focuses on such specific tools of the reproduction of the dominant discourse as literature and literary studies. The article ends with considerations on which processes taking place in modern Poland can be understood better thanks to the book by Melamed.

Melamed takes a historic and processual approach. She describes which factors formed the context of changes in the discourse on race. She believes that culture provided the fundamental realm for the transmission of racial ideologies. She does not approach culture as a field of free expression and creative individualism, but a field of formation of society and individuals, which is strictly related to other fields of this formation. In her approach, culture is both an integral and an indispensable element of the political and economic order, because the cultural texts being promoted allow the social order it imposes to be legitimized in the eyes of individuals and internalized by them. Culture also offers individual and group identities which seamlessly fit the frameworks that are imposed and guarded by states, with the elementary framework being, according to Melamed, capitalism. Finally, Melamed's book can be classified as a discourse analysis. She does not approach discourse as an autonomous phenomenon governed by internal dynamics, but as a tool to either legitimize or undermine the theories a state implements at different levels: economic, urban, educational, and so on.

Jodi Melamed's reasoning, which is presented in the following three subsections, is based on the proposition that racialized, institutional and systemic inequality is a necessary condition of modern capitalism in general, and of the hegemonic position of the United States in particular. Following Cedric Robinson, who names race the "meta-discourse" of modernity, Melamed approaches race as a historically fundamental component of capitalism, because the capitalist system, based on nation-states, colonialism and imperial domination, was able to establish itself precisely due to a racialized social structure. As evaluative properties were attributed to specific neutral features, people and communities were organized in a hierarchical order. In other words, thanks to *racialization*, capitalism allowed capital to accumulate in the hands of Whites.

## Racial liberalism

In his essay *Everybody's protest novel* (Baldwin, 1949), James Baldwin argues that the abolition discourse embedded in religiousness was a mere transposition of the white supremacy ideology. Instead of perceiving blackness as a mark of sin, which justified violence against Blacks, the abolitionists saw sin in slavery, so angry protests against slavery (rather than against Blacks) became a tool of white salvation. Whites nevertheless remained the subject of abolitionism, along with their salvation, image and moral right. The permitted narration of black experience had to reinforce the exceptional humanism and magnanimity of white opponents to slavery. The framework of this sentimental discourse controlled what could and what could not emerge as a representative story of Afro-Americans. By analogy, the new discourse of racial liberalism was to underline the goodness of white America against the background of the geopolitical tensions of the Cold War.

The Cold-War division into capitalist nation-states and international socialism was racialized. On the one hand, the Soviet Union publicized racism in the USA as proof that the capitalist system headed by the United States was based on the western tradition of racial domination and would reproduce the ideology of white supremacy. On the other hand, the United States introduced the new capitalism under the banner of liberal antiracism and declared themselves to be a model of post-colonial justice. The ability to introduce equality between Whites and Afro-Americans was to evidence that the USA should be at the helm of the post-war reality. The new rhetoric argued that the wellbeing of the USA meant the wellbeing of antiracism, which served to silence those who opposed the domination of the USA.

The book *American dilemma: The Negro problem and modern democracy*, by Gunnar Myrdal (1944), formed the definition of race for the two decades of racial liberalism. It quickly became a bestseller and gained the status of a handbook, used by Congressmen, as well as a guidebook to US foreign policy. It enjoyed the appreciation of sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists alike. Myrdal defined racism in terms of a psychological and moral problem, as a matter of customs and prejudices of Whites. He deemed all other dimensions of racism to be marginal and temporary. In his opinion, antiracism was ensured by American values, such as liberalism, altruism, equality, individual rights and the free market. Myrdal's reasoning was followed by the state policy of launching various educational programs dedicated to combating prejudices. Prejudice was to be replaced by knowledge of the Afro-American way of living. The program spread new images, stories and narrations about America, an open and antiracist America this time. Yet, instead of choosing sociology to guard the new policy, as was usually the case in the USA, liberals opted for literature to perform this task. In their opinion, in contrast to sociology, literature had more emotional power to arouse sympathy. Around this time, state-owned media established literary awards, allowing racial novels to become bestsellers.

They were subsequently included in school reading lists. Efforts were also made to have them published in Europe to demonstrate antiracial progress and the rise of the decolonized nation. These books were dominated, first and foremost, by the thesis that the black psyche had been damaged and harmed by racism. The second idea fostered by this literature concerned the Afro-American culture being identical with that of white Americans. Third, it supplied numerous examples of Afro-American attachment to the USA.

This was the framework that any project of black American identity had to accommodate. This was a prerequisite for it to emerge and obtain support. Thus, Afro-Americans were required to conform to US nationalism and cultural standards. The granting or refusing of approval indicated which identities and lifestyles were sufficiently “American.” The American identity at that time, alongside the sexual, gender and economic standards it encompassed, was presented as the model enabling individuals to enjoy freedom from racism. It can therefore be easily surmised that this freedom was not experienced by people involved in the Pan-African movement, or black gays and black lesbians, among others.

### **Liberal multiculturalism**

The Civil Rights Act was adopted in the USA in 1964, making the Jim Crow laws null and void. After the debate that preceded the CRA nobody believed in the tales of desegregation and the good will of tolerant white people. The actual situation was illustrated by the urban ghettos of the colored. The collapse of racial liberalism was also strongly influenced by the different, and frequently conflicting, initiatives of Black Power, black feminism, Chicano nationalism, the organizations of Asians and Indigenous Americans, queer movements, colored women movements, Third World support movements as well as the New Left, which were all united in opposition against the dominant narrative. They all sought to transgress the model of assimilation into the white hegemonic culture, appealed to internationalism and demanded a model that would not be based on ethnic economic exploitation. Their activities undermined the official narrative of the USA as a country of salutary antiracism to such an extent that the narrative was no longer able to effectively legitimize the global domination of the USA. And such legitimizing narrative was needed more and more, as developed countries with the US at the helm started the economic conquest of the global South around that very time.

The fight for a narrative other than the current one to break into the mainstream was waged by means of protests, boycotts and street riots but, first and foremost, it took place in the universities, where it was expressed, for instance, by the endeavors to establish departments of Black studies, ethnic studies, Asian-American studies and Native American studies. The calls to open universities to colored people, who were mainly in the ranks of laborers at the time, were accompanied by the demands that curricula are

updated to account for their experience, that is to have them present the history and cultures of respective exploited groups. But the transformation of universities was accompanied by yet another process: extinguishing Keynesianism. As the policy of full employment was coming to an end and the relative prosperity of US citizens was no longer part of the official agenda, the USA was in need of a new narrative about social solidarity and new identity models. The state exploited the ferment sown by universities and took over their critical potential, including racial issues, in its legitimization of a new economic order. This time multiculturalism became the guiding motto.

Multiculturalism was founded on the thesis that America was apparently composed exclusively of immigrants. First, there were white immigrants, now colored ones were added to the picture, to present the United States as the embodiment of the model of global diversity. The ideology of liberal multiculturalism was supposed to make Americans accept the fact that capital was leaving the country, since this was done in the name of cosmopolitanism. The US investments made in the South were interpreted not as the revival of imperialism but the outcome of a fair pluralist system, where a neutral free market allowed culturally diverse nations to enrich themselves. The state sanctioned the policy of official antiracism, which became part of external US operations. Capitalism appeared to be the only conceivable antiracist system; thereby the US model of racial integration assumed the status of a universal model that everybody can take advantage of, as long as they submit to US domination.

The new ideology was transmitted by literary anthologies and their interpretations supplied by literary studies. These interpretations frequently did not have much in common with the actual content of the books. The most important aspect was the racial identification of authors, because great importance was attached to obtaining “first-hand information.” This allowed multiculturalism to additionally back itself up with the categories of representation and authenticity, and to amplify the voices of the formerly oppressed. Second, literature was expected to teach a racially diversified history, thereby presenting the multicultural development of America. An important role was played by the stories of “good overcoming evil,” or the successes of the civil rights movement, which evidenced the triumph of the minorities. This triumph allegedly allowed racism to be overcome with individuals and groups having won dignity due to being fully incorporated into US democracy. Third, multicultural literature was presented as a cultural “property” which belongs to Non-Whites. Thereby, the consumption of the racialized products of culture allowed its consumers to obtain the status of being antiracist.

Consequently, although white students did not have contacts with colored communities, and they were soon about to assume privileged professional positions, they had the sense of being on the “right side of the force.” Liberal multiculturalism allowed them to simultaneously, and seamlessly, identify with the fight against racism and profit financially from the racist social structure. They saw themselves as being neutral: they did not have a specific culture, and even if they did, it was one of multicultural Americanness.



Educated in colleges, they perceived themselves as enlightened in terms of race and accused of racism the lower classes. The lower white classes in turn blamed Coloreds for every evil. The actual problem, namely the impoverishment of the lower classes – which encompassed mainly colored people – resulting from the withdrawal from Keynesianism, avoided being addressed.

## **Neoliberal multiculturalism**

The project of global capitalism was in full swing in the mid-1990s. The free flow of capital, the deregulation of the financial and corporate sectors, the primacy of speculative capitalism, privatization of land and resources, international financial institutions with the instruments to pressure nation-states to implement the policy and ideology of the free market – Melamed names all this the “neoliberal independence” based on the assumption that the market distributes resources and organizes life better than the states. The neoliberal calculation became the decisive force in the everyday lives of individuals, and neoliberal multiculturalism became a unifying discourse, holding a monopoly on rationality and recognizing as rational only those practices that served to reproduce capitalism.

The number of manifestations of conventional racism has not dropped at all. The number of incarcerated black males in the USA is disastrous. The free market has generated “zones of new slavery,” where working conditions are brutal to the point of frequently becoming lethal. Racialized individuals are subjected to hyper-exploitation and denied access to any capitals. Due to international regulations, market circulation practically means the North sucking out the resources of the South. At the same time, multiculturalism presents neoliberal policy as key to a postracist world of freedom and opportunity.

In the third stage of capitalism, official antiracism has become somewhat deracialized as the slogans of “open society,” “economic freedoms” and “consumer diversity” are stressed. Mobile individuals with high capital can enjoy comfortable lives regardless of their formal status (country of origin) and skin color, but the lower classes are practically deprived of the opportunity to tap into numerous goods that formally are their rights. The former are classified as rational citizens of the multicultural world. The latter – as backwards and irrational. The multicultural, global citizenship has obtained the status of a racialized privilege. Due to geopolitical circumstances, it is mostly Whites who have the chance to enjoy it.

Universities play a key role in granting this privilege. They offer to the international, well-educated and multilingual population of polyglots leadership courses and the discourse of bringing reforms and aid which teaches students to racialize the groups and individuals subjected to exploitation. The identity of the “multicultural global citizen”

is, again, primarily forged by literary studies. They have redefined literary sensitivity so as to appreciate the literature of other cultures, which distinguishes the citizens of the multicultural world from the object of their concern: the backwards and peripheral “others.” According to modern literary interpretations, literature is to familiarize elites with deprived populations, thereby preparing the former for their civilizational mission. Business schools, departments of political science and nursing colleges, all recommend literature as an easy way to top up your competences, adding a global component to them.

## Race, racism, racialization

The book by Jodi Melamed is devoted to the frequently sophisticated manners of concealing, neutralizing or justifying racial inequalities. It perhaps lacks a chapter that would describe those inequalities. Somewhat underestimating the power of the ideologies she describes, Melamed writes as if her readers knew perfectly well that the currently dominant discourse of race is overshadowed by the violence exercised against colored people, and what forms this violence assumes.

Similarly, throughout the book Melamed never defines the concept of race, which is crucial for her reasoning. Nevertheless, it can be reconstructed by reviewing the descriptive and analytical categories she employs. The notion *racial liberalism* is used very often. She understands this as the first stage of the post-war capitalistic order as well as, more broadly, the social order, founded on the racial division of labor and capital, whose purpose is to maintain the global hegemony of the US and retain the privileges locally enjoyed by Whites. It is not a political philosophy or social movement, but rather an actually existing regime applying a discourse of race to draw epistemological borders which determine what is and what is not a “racial issue,” and what questions and answers are conceivable within these borders, as well as to anoint its supporters as moral authorities in the field of race and racism.

The term *racialization* is as important to understand Melamed’s reasoning as *racial liberalism*. Racialization consists in processual constituting of different values attributed to individuals depending on the material circumstances they happen to operate in and their geopolitical situation. The process presents itself as an utterly rational and axiologically indifferent procedure allowing for individuals to be sorted with reference to differentiating criteria. Melamed argues that the framework of the post-war antiracist discourse replaced the former difference, related to skin color, by such categories as poor – rich, advanced – backwards, moral – immoral, legal – illegal, rational – irrational, central – peripheral, law-abiding – criminal, liberal – anti-liberal, multicultural – monocultural, and so on.<sup>3</sup> Melamed approaches race as a cultural procedure of neutralizing inequalities which is implemented by the privileged group.

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<sup>3</sup> Racialization which goes beyond skin color is discussed, among others, by Katarzyna Czarnota in her study “Kontenery socjalne jako przejaw segregacji społecznej” [Social containers as a manifestation of social segregation] (Czarnota, 2014).

The mechanism Jodi Melamed examines reminds of that described by Pierre Bourdieu with reference to class: she investigates the instruments of legitimizing structurally generated inequalities in the conditions of official policy of equality, and how these instruments operate. Bourdieu analyzed how unequal access to capitals is legitimized by the category of taste and the modern education system, which selects students according to their hereditary cultural nobility. Melamed demonstrates how the discourse of multiculturalism and diversity, accompanied by a politics of recognition based on representation, serve to conceal the racialized division of labor and racist violence, including economic violence first and foremost. This discourse allowed racism to be defined outside of its financial context, thereby concealing its economic dimension. By this token, US antiracism, which replaced white supremacy, made the racialized distribution of power and resources something indispensable, natural and raising no moral reservations.

In the aftermath of World War II, the overt violence employed by the state as a tool of individual subordination was no longer justified. Melamed follows Bourdieu's footsteps as she determines that for racial violence embedded in the foundation of the social structure to operate efficiently, its nature has to be disregarded. Such disregard is generated by employing *new racial procedures*. This is another significant notion in Melamed's reasoning. The *conventional racial procedures* naturalized the wellbeing of one group while excluding or exploiting those whom the capitalist discourse labeled as less worthy or unable to catch up with modernity. Melamed understands the *new racial procedures* as the activities related to generating knowledge and ensuring the state monopoly on rationality. Racial systems of knowledge reinforce the historically determined definitions of subject, community and interpersonal relations that are desired by the state and present them as the only definitions possible. "In a society in which normative power is pervasive, control over the means of rationality is as important as, if not more important than, control over other social forces" – Melamed writes (Melamed, 2011, p. 11). By way of legitimizing some content as rational and delegitimizing other as aberrant, the *new racial procedures* have institutionalized successive liberal antiracisms of the United States. The specific tool employed for that purpose was literature.

## Why literature?

Melamed is not so much interested in literature, as in evidencing that literature has played an exceptional role in forging and reproducing the state's racial order. Since Harriet Elizabeth Stowe published *Uncle Tom's cabin* in 1852, literature has been anointed in the USA as a credible source of knowledge about racial differences. Even today, the institutions of literary studies in the United States are instrumental in the promotion of novels where race is presented as a cultural and psychological rather than political and economic issue, and a matter of the emotions, ignorance and irrationality of individual



protagonists which can be resolved by propagating such values as diversity and respect for difference. Through out the stages of capitalism that Melamed describes, the epistemological work of literary studies boiled down to three distinct functions: producing liberal antiracism as an element of national culture; training the readers' skills to understand racial differences in the appropriate way; and helping them to internalize liberal antiracist standards as an element of their self-identification, or even mission. The latter was addressed particularly to the higher classes. Appealing to the distinction by way of cultural consumption, the higher classes were promised that reading *racial novels* gave an opportunity to become almost intimately familiar with "the other." Highly ideologized knowledge was labeled as authentic accounts.

The literary production on the topic of black experience on a mass scale, and on commission of the state, as it were, was discussed by James Baldwin in the above-mentioned essay *Everybody's protest novel* (Baldwin, 1949), from which Melamed borrowed the title of her book. Using the examples of award-winning US literary works on racial issues, Baldwin argued that they participated in forging a post-war order which represented and simultaneously destroyed what it represented. By producing and propagating a specific approach to race, literature has helped establish a new national "common sense," thereby discrediting everything which was not embraced by this common sense despite constituting the experience of colored people.

The discourse of literary studies interpellated not only the readers, but also those who were read about. Whereas literature supplied Whites with packages of knowledge that conformed to successive racial *common senses* and with comfortable identities of the "righteous," this same literature pointed to Non-Whites the admissible interpretation and problematization of the elements of their biographies and paths of life. Literature helped to force the racialized individuals to articulate their own history in a specific way. In order to be heard, it had to meet certain requirements, the primary one being the affirmation of the current racial order: until the late 1960s – racial liberalism, and later – multiculturalism. Only such stories were classified as credible and set as the example against which the irresponsible rest was judged.

### **Feigned conflict, or the *canon wars***

The field of literary studies was the area of conflict between *assimilationist pluralism* and *positive pluralism*, which found its expression in the *canon wars*, waged from the late 1960s to the 1980s. The division was between those who defended the set of *Great Books* as a bulwark against cultural relativity, or as "excellence against mediocrity" on the one hand, and the advocates of the thesis that culture is multicultural, with all its constituencies deserving representation.

The former opted for assimilationist pluralism, which recognized the multiple and diverse social groups in the United States, but attributed cultural primacy to one of them

and gave the white culture the status of a standard everybody else should strive for. The knowledge developed by the antiracist social movements of the 1960s, and inspired by materialism, which found its expression, among other things, in the attempts to expand university literary canons, was perceived by the followers of assimilationist pluralism as harmful opinions of separatists aiming to destroy the nation. The language used to describe the new academic majors was borrowed from pre-war European fascists: Black studies and ethnic studies were named an “insult to the Academia.” The Western literary canon was looked up to as a guarantee of the moral and intellectual advancement of humanity. And since assimilationist pluralists believed that the canon of global literary works they guarded was apolitical, they deemed everything referred to as “political” worthless by definition.

The other party to the canon wars promoted positive pluralism, celebrating the irrefutable co-existence of multiple cultures. They treated literature as an opportunity to experience the wonderful diversity of the United States in esthetic terms. The intended white readers could reinforce their democratic identity by reading, for instance “a novel penned by an Indigenous American.”

The advocates of the “Great Books” made bizarre accusations against antiracist activists, but it was liberal multiculturalism which managed to bury the potential of the antiracist movement for good by allegedly representing it, while shifting the weight from materialism to esthetics. Literature was reduced to having a therapeutic role. Reading books from the multicultural canon allowed Whites to perceive themselves as members of the antiracist movement, while maintaining their consumer practices which supported racialized capitalism. Following Hazel Carby, Melamed observes that the college students who supported diversity came from the same schools, districts and houses that supported segregation. Hazel Carby wrote in *Cultures in Babylon*:

in white suburban libraries, bookstores and supermarkets, an ever-increasing number of narratives of black lives are easily available. [...] Indeed, those same readers are part of the white suburban constituency who refuse to support the building of affordable housing in their affluent suburbs [...] and who would fight to death to prevent their children from being bussed into the urban blight that is the norm for black children. For white suburbia, as well as for white middle-class students in universities, these texts are becoming a way of gaining knowledge of the “other,” a knowledge that appears to satisfy and replace the desire to challenge the existing frameworks of segregation (Carby, 1999, p. 253).

With the canon wars, the issues of assimilation, integration, representation and recognition established the horizon of thinking about race and antiracism at a time when economic privatization led the colored minority to the edge of the abyss. Multiculturalism became a strategy of abandoning the topic of racism: it made it possible to fail to identify the core of the problem, that is the widening economic gap between Whites and Non-Whites, the racial inequalities in access to power, and the police control over colored urban communities.

The canon wars were perceived as an element of the dispute between Democrats and Republicans, but, as its result, the third actor was destroyed, namely radical antiracism and the materialist criticism it proposed. The canon wars made it possible to transform the new knowledge produced by antiracist social movements in a way preventing it from threatening post-Keynesianism. The aim of both perspectives – assimilationist pluralism and positive pluralism – was the unity and stability of the state, achieved by means of marginalizing the idea of the autonomous, grass-roots organization of the colored population as an indispensable element for attaining material and political equality. Therefore, Melamed calls the canon wars a feigned conflict, whose real loser was *racial radicalism*.

Following the above-mentioned Cedric Robinson, the author of *Black Marxism: The making of the black radical tradition* (Robinson, 1983), Melamed refers as *racial radicalism* to the criticism of official antiracisms that emerged at their very beginning and undermined the universal imperative of the racial-liberal order, identifying what official antiracism removed from sight, namely racialized economic violence. Racial radicalism emphasized the inequalities formed by global capitalism. The voices of racial radicalism were invalidated, marginalized and falsely represented in each of the three stages of the official antiracist policies of the United States that Melamed describes.

Examining the history of individual works of literature and their receptions, Melamed argues that it is not always possible to separate liberal antiracism from radical antiracism, whether institutionally or discursively. The latter frequently sprouted from the former. Additionally, as was the case of liberal antiracism, literature was the mainstay of radical antiracism. The peculiar freedom of literature – freedom from the requirement to render truth – paradoxically enabled the authors of literary texts to describe the material dimension of social relations regardless of the dominant forms of expression. Literary studies most often made an active effort not to recognize these works, which typically were in opposition to the official antiracism because they described experience which was outside the scope of legitimate representation. The anthology *This bridge called my back* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015) exemplifies such a work.

### ***This bridge called my back***

Among the strategies of antiracist social movements of the 1960s and 70s was showing the continuity between the public and the private. It was not only about staging protests and demonstrations, but also about monitoring what was happening in the holy field of “private property”: who could buy houses, who could become a member of one club or another, who got which job, and so on. In other words, it was about the politicization of everyday life and demonstrating that it is determined by racialization. Tools of culture were primarily employed for this purpose: literature, theater, performance and journalism. The cultural field was approached not as a space where another society is visualized,

but as active practicing of society. The feminism of women of color played a crucial role here. It was expressed, among other things, in the anthology *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015), published in 1981 and reissued many times. This publication constituted an alliance between women of color as the foundation of a new, collective political subject. This purpose could only be achieved by demonstrating the liquidity, arbitrariness and continuous renegotiation of racial identities. The book's editors emphasized the overlapping of social determinants that are decisive for the financial and psychological conditions of women's lives, namely, race, sex, class and sexuality. The anthology opposed the Western knowledge, where individuals were conceptualized as autonomous, abstract and individualist. The authors of the anthology perceived the process of their social positioning and self-identification as exploitation, first and foremost, but one that is expressed jointly rather than individually. The feminism of women of color defined its objective in analogy to the Marxian "acquisition of means of production." Here, it was about the transition from a victim of exploitation to a subject of production. This time, production referred to knowledge and its tools. "Learning a habit of relating to others without epistemic violence" (Melamed, 2011, p. 106), as the editors of *This bridge called my back* postulated.

Neither the editors nor authors of this and other similar anthologies have identified reading and writing prose with political and social change, however. In the foreword to *This Bridge*, Toni Cade Bambara writes: "Quite frankly, *This Bridge* needs no foreword. It is the Afterward that'll count. The coalitions of women determined to be a danger to our enemies. [...] The work: To make revolution irresistible" (Cade Bambara, 2015, p. XXXI) Multiculturalism has postponed this irresistibility by declaring such literature as the anthology *This bridge called my back* a sufficient act of social and political transformation. After the canon wars, *This bridge* was read as a text of questionable quality, yet valuable as an act of expression of colored women. The book has been pacified by having been reduced to literature that arouses sympathy and respect for diverse identities.

## Controlled revival

The highest costs of the three antiracist discourses have been borne by the racialized communities of the United States in terms of their financial wellbeing. Jodi Melamed bitterly states that in modern USA everybody is an antiracist while racial oppression remains obvious and ubiquitous.<sup>4</sup> The fictitious character of antiracism referred to by

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<sup>4</sup> This text was written before the 2016 presidential election in the United States. The victory of Donald Trump, who made overtly racist statements during his election campaign, calls for a revisiting of Melamed's claim that antiracist identification is common in the USA. Consenting to overt racism, racism being employed as an effective tool to win popularity and the electoral promises of racial segregation all worked during the 2016 presidential campaign because they were framed as opposition to political correctness. This allowed Trump's voters to acquire an attractive nonconformist identity. The racist tradition Trump is drawing on has been forgotten also due to the concept of "post-racial society," which claims that race no longer matters, because its significance has been invalidated by emancipatory movements and this invalidation was then implemented by the dominant culture. In other words, the fact that Trump's racism did not discredit him may be interpreted as a confirmation

Melamed is nowadays exposed by the Black Lives Matter movement. Nevertheless, its springing up and impetus may be interpreted as the seed of the revolution Toni Cade Bambara referred to in the foreword to the above-mentioned anthology. The literature of radical antiracism, and its call for the solidarity of the excluded to enforce social justice, appears to be part of the traditions Black Lives Matter draws on. As early as the 1970s, the authors of this literature were expressing hope for what is happening today thanks to BLM.

This does not mean that the Black Lives Matter movement is not in danger of the same process that Melamed examines over the span of seventy years after World War II, namely of being esthetically kidnapped, reduced to matters of authenticity, identity and representation, eventually resulting in its revolutionary potential being pacified. Let us consider one example. At the beginning, raising hands symbolized protest against the contemporary racialized violence of the US police. Countless photos taken at protests staged by Black Lives Matter, especially on university campuses, feature Whites with raised hands. This may be interpreted as an act of solidarity with the dominated, but also as unjustified identification by those who actually belong to the dominant group. Such identification is both political and emotional corner cutting, and an act of avoiding confrontation with one's own privileges by way of manifesting one's convenient position of being among the just. Seeing Whites raise their hands, as if they risked being killed by the police as much as their Afro-American peers, makes it impossible to downplay Melamed's observation about students who were relieved to identify themselves as antiracist because it gave them the sense of being on the right side, and to benefit from the racialized social structure with a clear conscience.

The same mechanism applies to male feminism in Poland. A growing number of men declare themselves feminists, because declaring such an identity not only does not require them to abandon their misogynistic behavior and habits, or to reflect on the privileges they enjoy as members of the dominant group, but it actually allows them to conveniently continue such practices. The example of Polish male "feminists" shows how feminism is becoming a kind of a "boarding card": a convenient identification, a label allowing men to announce their cultural innocence.

Another abuse of identification is exemplified by the spontaneous but the same time symbolic adoption of the identity of the dominated that I encountered during the fieldwork conducted by the Ethnographic Archive on the memory of Jews and the Holocaust in the Polish peripheries. Listening to the anti-Semitic comments of the study's subjects, numerous researchers immediately identified with Jews, and demonstrated these sentiments in their evening sessions. They would describe their emotions when interviewing the respondents as if they themselves were – or had been – in the position of the humiliated and murdered Jews. This *ex post* voluntary joining the group of the oppressed seemed to be their means of avoiding the confrontation with agency (in all senses of the

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of Melamed's thesis that the order of racial liberalism has concealed racism to such an extent that overtly proclaiming racism is overlooked and its significance transposed.



word) and an expression of their reluctance to imagine themselves as individuals wielding social power rather than victims.

Jodi Melamed's analysis can also facilitate the understanding of the phenomenon of the so-called revival of Jewishness in Poland (cf. Gruber, 2002; Lehrer, 2013), supported by mainstream institutions of culture and enthusiastically welcomed by Non-Jews. Melamed argues that by means of knowledge management and a specific diagnosing of racism, official state antiracisms actually served to uphold practices of racialization and a multitude of forms of racist violence. By analogy, the "Jewish revival in Poland" (as it is referred to by Americans who are usually enchanted by the phenomenon and sometimes stimulate it) may be interpreted as offering a formula of Jewishness which seamlessly integrates into Polish culture and neither demolishes its antisemitic component nor demands to work it through. The multitude of Jewish cultural festivals, where Jewishness boils down either to religion or to the esthetic and folk aspect of music, dance, cuisine and customs, allows Poles to assume the role of hosts who are amiably interested in the "other," and who exercise the morally right attitude of hospitality by means of taking part in such festivals. Numerous initiatives related to the revival of Jewishness in Poland both estheticize and exoticize Jews, making the difference between Jews and Non-Jews an object of fascination and celebration. The discourse of difference allows the majority to acquire an identity of being tolerant, while Jews remain at a distance sufficient not to infringe the sense of comfort and security of this majority, a sense which has been defined by antisemitism.

It is symptomatic that the "Jewish revival" has not triggered any interest in the political activity of Jews before and after World War II, or at present. The initiators of the Jewish revival in Poland are eager to refer to history, but they are most particular about taking such an attitude to the history of Polish Jews which does not reveal that the approach of Poles to Jews was among the key determinants of the Jewish lives. Jewish empowerment and subjectivization in politics, Jewish problematization of the majority–minority relation, that is their relations with Poles, Jewish claims to equality and, last but not least, Jews revealing the violence and their struggle against it – all that goes beyond the framework offered by the modern revival of Jewish culture in Poland because it destroys rather than ameliorates the comfort of the dominant group. Jewishness may only be perceived in terms of a specific faith or an attractive lifestyle. The literature of racial liberalism showed to Afro-Americans the borders of possible identification and problematization of their life experience, and the "Jewish revival" in Poland may be approached as the cultural procedure of assigning *a place for the Jew*: the process of shaping permitted minority identities under the supervision of the majority. "Permitted" is understood here as such identities which leave both the collective and individual Polish identity intact and even reinforced, by incorporating the component of being ready for multiculturalism.

Translated by Katarzyna Matschi

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### Zabójcza sympatia:

#### O książce Jodi Melamed *Represent and destroy: Rationalizing violence in a new racial capitalism*

**Abstrakt:** Artykuł stanowi omówienie książki Jodi Melamed *Represent and destroy: Rationalizing violence in a new racial capitalism*. W książce tej autorka wyodrębnia i opisuje trzy kolejne ideologie związane z rasą – wszystkie oficjalnie antyrasistowskie – które na przestrzeni ostatnich 70 lat miały w Stanach Zjednoczonych status dominujących, to znaczy były wytwarzane i reprodukowane przez instytucje i inicjatywy państwowe: rasowy liberalizm, liberalny multikulturalizm i neoliberalny multikulturalizm. Jodi Melamed dowodzi, że ideologie te służyły przede wszystkim legitymizacji kapitalistycznego wyzysku osób kolorowych, zarówno w skali lokalnej, jak i globalnej. Śledząc dzieje narracji krytycznych wobec dominującego rozumienia rasy w USA oraz sposoby wygaszania ich polemicznego potencjału, Melamed pokazuje, jak powojenne ideologie antyrasistowskie nie tylko ograniczyły rozumienie rasizmu, ale ufundowały i znormalizowały nowe formy urasowionej przemocy.

**Wyrażenia kluczowe:** urasowienie; rasizm; rasowy liberalizm; rasowy radykalizm; kapitalizm; multikulturalizm; Jodi Melamed; Stany Zjednoczone.

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Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw.

Author: Anna Zawadzka, Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw.

Correspondence: [annazawadzka@poczta.fm](mailto:annazawadzka@poczta.fm)

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