

trans-formation of the earlier, more or less patriarchal slavery, into a system of commercial exploitation” (Marx 1990 [1867], 658-9). Is it a coincidence that when turning to the history of the VOC, Marx also especially highlighted the fate of “the young people stolen”? Starting from his sparse remarks on the VOC, we can see not only Marx’s acute interest in the global nature of exploitation and accumulation, but also his attentiveness to the threads that connected capitalism’s history to its present.

## Notes

1] For a wider discussion of Marx’s notes on Indonesia, see Anderson 2010.

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## Weak Resistance

Eva Majewska

A child in the dark, gripped with fear, comforts himself by singing under his breath. He walks and halts to his song. Lost, he takes shelter, or orients himself with his little song as best as he can. The song is like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, center in the heart of chaos. Perhaps the child skips as he sings, hastens or slows his pace. But the song itself is already a skip: it jumps from chaos to the beginnings of order in chaos and is in danger of breaking apart at any moment. There is always sonority in Ariadne’s thread. Or the song of Orpheus.  
(Deleuze and Guattari 1981, 311).

The most popular image of political agency has been shaped according to the Western, white, privileged, heterosexual, colonial, male Self, rightly criticized by Gayatri Spivak as a figure that not only always strengthens itself while promising its own dismantlement, but also – and perhaps more importantly – as one always producing its “others” in a catachrestic process of self-restructuring practice (Spivak 1999). According to this image, to which the Marxist historiography and theory of revolution is no stranger, resistance should be seen as a masculine, heroic form of agency, in which the right is unambiguously discernible from the wrong, and wins, usually in a “David vs Goliath” style. Contrary to this description, the weak – and here another strand in Marx’s texts comes to mind – are usually strong in numbers, their agency being far from heroic, their ethical qualities are precariously unbalanced and hybrid, their gender – a trouble, and their origins – unholy.

As depicted by James Scott, the weapons of the weak are ordinary, and demand persistence rather than strength (Scott 1985). In peasants’ protests, in long marches and peaceful sit-ins, articulation is rather basic and the pronunciation of postulates usually does not meet the highly bourgeois requirements formulated in the classical theories of the transformation of the public sphere (Habermas 1989). The weak sometimes constitute forms of counterpublics, they are genuinely “counterpublics of the subaltern” – of those whose emergence and marginalization take place

simultaneously. Nancy Fraser discussed feminist counterpublics as an example of what she called “subaltern counterpublics”, but she never mentioned the catachrestic structure of subaltern (Fraser 1990). The concept of weak resistance emphasizes the oppression and resistance, the appropriations and dissimulations always present in the process of the making of the subject of other. Weak does not mean impossible. It means resisting.

As we might remember, the new beginnings in Deleuze’s and Guattari’s thinking are not marked by heroic masculine figures claiming their rights by fighting for them (Deleuze 1977). They actually start in a Kafkaesque moment of deception and weakness, in confrontation with an overwhelming fear or danger, where what is scariest is perhaps the possibility of literally anything happening. The little song the boy depicted by Deleuze and Guattari starts singing marks a transformation, begins a new constellation, a new assembly. It is not a triumphant anthem of a new nation opposed to a clearly defined enemy. It is a silent tune aimed at survival, not at victory. And yet things unfold in an unprecedented way. These are risky practices, of a deeply ambivalent character – Deleuze and Guattari comment: “This synthesis of disparate elements is not without ambiguity. It has the same ambiguity perhaps, as the modern valorisation of children’s drawings, texts by the mad and concerts of noise.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1981, 350). They also suggest a particularly weak character of territorializing practices, arguing that “we can never be sure we will be strong enough, for we have no system, only lines and movements” (ibid.). Territory, here, refers to a new constitution, a response to fear, and initiates a new entity and agency without the hegemonic claim.

The new territory should be imagined as one beyond private and public. The new territory is still or “always already is” common (see Hardt and Negri 2009). This means it belongs to everyone, but it also means it is ordinary, not exceptional. In this, it reminds us of those always already situated in positions of precarity for the Western subject to emerge (Lorey 2015). Weak is also the connection between generations of the marginalized, as in Walter Benjamin’s *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, where the messianic image of redemption is hijacked to serve the disappropriated masses and to reinterpret the legacy of historical materialism. The weak

resistance is therefore one that presents itself as a new territory, as the unexpected reconstitution of the dark matter of the excluded suddenly presenting its agency on the stage of history.

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