Denise Ferreira da Silva,
Toward a Global Idea of Race,
Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007,
380 hlm.

Theorists of race and racialization in the past decades have been overly relying on the history of racism in North America (United States, Canada, and Mexico) and Europe. While the historical specificities of North America and Europe are immensely useful to theorize race and racialization, most of these works fail to understand the complexities and nuances of race relations outside these dominant regions, and worse, make dangerous universal assumptions based on their Euro-American subjectivities—repeating yet another epistemic violence that Gayatri Spivak once reminded us. Nonetheless, today the world is becoming more connected than ever, and critical theoretical framework that bridges the multiplicity of ideas of race is direly needed. However, is a global idea of race possible? In 2007, Brazilian American philosopher Denise Ferreira da Silva published *Toward a Global Idea of Race,* a dense yet insightful and innovative exegesis that can be immensely important for scholars and researchers of race in the Global South.

Silva begins by asking why, despite the centuries-long history of colonialism and racism, there is no global outrage yet, and why existing theories on race and culture, which govern racial difference, fail to make sense of different contexts of race in other national narratives. For her, the deployment of existing theories on race and racial difference may have done damage despite its valuable productivity in social justice projects. Bringing philosophy, history, and anthropology together, the nucleus of her argument is that the post-Enlightenment logic of modernity goes unchallenged, even when it is deployed by the strongest critics of racial injustices. She believes that existing theories overlook the roles of post-Enlightenment philosophy of man and science that govern both ontological and epistemological (onto-epistemological) conditions in which race is understood: "Failing to grasp how the racial produces modern subjects

(even though we have no doubt that it does so), I think, results from how we know it" (p. 3). And even when postmodern theorists argue for the end/death of the subject, the subject does not automatically disappear (p. xx). In other words, Silva insists that the modern subject and racial subject are always interrelated. Silva's *Toward a Global Idea of Race* addresses the blind spot in contemporary theories of race (racial formation, subaltern/postcolonial, and postmodern theories—to name a few) that makes the post-Enlightenment logic of modernity assumed universal and transparent.

This onto-epistemological blind spot can create what she argues is "productive violence"—a double-edged weapon that punishes the global subaltern while demanding global justice (p. xix)—which she wants to unveil by taking into account *globality* and *historicity* as paramount ontological moments. Silva returns to the arsenal of the *transparency thesis* (onto-epistemological assumptions on which post-Enlightenment modern thoughts are based) to provide a framework that makes visible what she calls *analytics of raciality* (the "apparatus of knowledge" based on the science of man—example: existing anthropological and sociological analyses of race/culture) that prevail under the context of globality and historicity. To argue that the transparency thesis that produces the *transparent "I"* ("Man"—ontological figure) is a problem, she begins by discussing the context that manufactured the *transparency thesis* in Part I (*Homo Historicus*). In the Introduction, Silva insists that we need to displace the *transparency thesis* rather than replacing the history of the science of man because the science of man is never outside the *transparency thesis*: "the strategies of the modern Will to Truth, the tools of science and history, remain productive weapons of global subjection" (p. xix). Silva's strategy is to look at how science and history create the modern subject, which is the root of all exclusions, instead of focusing on racial difference that has been done in different social science fields. To do this, Silva traces the onto-epistemological trajectory back to post-Enlightenment philosophy (pp. xxx-xxxi). In Chapter I, in which she foregrounds her argument prior to Part I, she maintains that scientific universality haunts historicity

(p. 16); as a result, the analytics of racial subjection abandons the *transparency thesis* and its role in creating dominating power—a contradiction that Silva takes very seriously in the book. "To unravel the contradiction haunting critical analysis of racial subjection," Silva argues, we must question "the scientific minds that let 'prejudices' and 'ideologies' colonize the domain of 'truth'" (p. 15), and to ask the question "requires that the racial be placed at the center of the critique of modern representation" (p. 16). While Silva is clear on how focusing on exclusion in racial formation analysis overlooks the universality of the science of man, her reading of Spivak's postcoloniality is surprising but convincing. For Silva, while criticizing the domination of subaltern subjects, Spivak actually still benefits from the transparency thesis because reliance on the representation of the modern subject is still crucial to rewrite "indigenous place" (p. 14). Instead, what Silva aims to do is to avoid repeating the same analytics of raciality by turning to the onto-epistemological formation that presumes the representation of modern subjects. Silva does this mainly in Part I, where she analyzes two main ideas fundamental in her argument. First, she excavates Descartes' self-consciousness in two scenes of reasons (regulation and representation) that are continuously reproduced in modern text. Second, she returns to Hegel's dialectic of "spirit" and Kant's notion of transcendental to highlight the privilege of the universal reason that frames the *transparency thesis*. Silva calls this *transcendental poesis*—Hegel's use of Kant's transcendence to render reason a transcendental force.

In part II, Silva discusses the regimen of production of analytics of raciality. She introduces what she calls the *strategy of engulfment*—"the scientific concepts that explain other human conditions as variations of those found in post-Enlightenment Europe" (p. xvi) and *productive nomos*—"the conception of reason that describes it as the producer or regulator of the universe" (p. xiv) introduced by science—which is central in producing analytics of raciality. She traces how modern science that establishes the ground for race relations (anthropology, sociology) projects "the others of Europe" into obliteration. What she mainly argues here is that the notion

of raciality is an effective tool of *productive nomos* because it renders the irreducible and unchangeable signifiers (racial/cultural) as primary signifiers of human difference—particularities that cannot be immersed in Hegel's notion of "Spirit." However, by encompassing globality as a crucial ontological moment, Silva shows that the *productive nomos* of post-Enlightenment Europe relies on references to the others of Europe (p. xl). In other words, post-Enlightenment Europe creates a global context that is politically "uneven," yet the others of Europe are still needed to maintain the pursuit of post-Enlightenment reason (p. 118). As a result, even when postmodern theorists attempt to blur modern subjectivities, productive nomos still produces "new subjectivities" that govern the writings of the global subaltern. In her words, "Like other products of scientific signification, they have become 'nature' itself, objects and subjects of critical projects that, holding onto the desire to 'discover' and 'control' a yet-to-be-uncovered 'truth' or 'essence,' refuse to engage their own effects" (p. 170).

Finally, part III (*Homo Modernus*) breaks down how *analytics of raciality* work by contrasting the making of two national subjects: Brazil and the United States of America (U.S.) early postcolonial politics. This part clarifies how the global ontological context produces modern subjects, such as the anthropological desire that privileges scientific signification of *homo historicus*. By showing "how the racial subaltern subject is placed before (in front of) the ethical space inhabited by the proper national subject" (p. xl), Silva highlights the production of self-determination and universality in the U.S. social configuration as a manifestation of European liberal desire. She contrasts the U.S. social configuration to the production of national and democratic subjects in Brazil via the political discourse of miscegenation (racial mixing through sexual relation and procreation): miscegenation might be celebrated in the U.S. context as a progressive move toward the end of racism, but in Brazil, miscegenation is haunted by the desire to create a European national subject. In other words, racial mixing in the U.S. is a move toward a multicultural society, which is celebrated in the U.S. under different labels (for example, "melting pot"

and "salad bowl"), but in Brazil, racial mixing is an attempt to "erase" non-white bloodlines of indigenous and black people by making it "better" with European bloodline. Miscegenation in Brazil, therefore, is not outside the formation of national identity. The logic of obliterating the others of Europe and collapsing them under whiteness is immanent. Silva maintains:

> the silencing of the racial underclass in Brazil—which is the opposite parallel to the silencing of the class under the racial in the United States—relies not on the placing of the racial 'other' outside the place of the national subject, but on how the eschatological meanings of miscegenation produced a mode of racial subjection premised on the obliteration of the always-already affectable bodies and minds of the others of Europe (pp. 224-5).

This parallel difference exemplifies how *analytics of raciality* preserves the transparency thesis, refashioning the modern subject (*homo modernus*) signified by globality and historicity ontological context to shape post-Enlightenment modern representation (p. xli). In the U.S., racial difference governs the American subjects of modernity, while in Brazil, what connects "body, global region, and the mind" governs the Brazilian subjects. These may be different 'tools', but the mechanism—the arsenal—is the same and becomes less opaque when globality governs our understanding of ontology.

How does Silva's mapping of the analytics of raciality imagine future onto-epistemological possibilities? Silva concludes by reminding us that postmodern critique challenges universal reason but remains unable to escape the intrinsic universal reason on modern representation, and that "historicity cannot dissipate its effects" (p. 257), and these effects are violent. The approach she offers is to read modern representation in modern texts as scientific strategies that can "supplement, constitute, and interrupt" historicity and the transparency thesis (p. 258). She points out that "an effect of the signification of the socio-historical logic of exclusion is to keep the political-symbolic determinants of such events behind the veil of transparency"; tracing every "articulation of raciality" and "how it re-

writes the racial subaltern subject in affectability" is to address the violent effects from such rewriting and "redeploy the transparency thesis" (p. 267).

Silva's mapping of the *analytics of race* is bold not only because she is able to exhume and challenge the universal assumptions of power that haunt Eurocentric knowledge production but also to maintain healthy (and heavily needed) skepticism toward claims of liberation heavily adopted by the scientific pursuit of race and culture. I would read it alongside other work that attempts to decenter Eurocentric epistemologies and/or unravel the transparent effects of modern thoughts, such as Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, [2000] 2007). I would imagine that Silva's emphasis on globality may be mistakenly taken as an erasure of spatial particularities (as many critics of globalization have expressed). Still, Silva's view of globality is different from the rose-tinted early works of globality and globalization (such as Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). Instead, her mapping of the *analytics of raciality*, I would argue, still relies on spatial particularities, yet her approach is able to articulate the effects of the *transparency thesis* by taking globality as an ontological moment. In other words, Silva does not forget about spatial particularities—as we can see in her analysis of miscegenation in the U.S. and Brazil. The word "toward" in the book title is aptly situated in her framework.

Readers unfamiliar with North American history and anthropology will find her work dense, and readers without any training in philosophy may find her writing impenetrable, especially because Silva introduces many philosophical neologisms that even the book's generous inclusion of a glossary does not help much. Thus, it is best to keep in mind that Silva's goals require extreme theoretical heavy lifting. In my research, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* is fundamental in mapping the colonial desire to render postcolonial Indonesia as a modern subject, yet preserve a place like Bali as a pre-modern subject under the tourist gaze. My prelim-

inary research shows that the imagination of Bali as "the last paradise" in 1920s travel writing (see Powell, Hickman, *The Last Paradise, an American's 'Discovery' of Bali in the 1920s.* Singapore: Oxford University Press, [1930] 1989) not only glorifies the Dutch as a so-called best European colonizer but also preserves Bali as pre-modern subjects. I wonder how the desire to create an imagination of paradise in (post)colonial and global contexts plays out in the desire to preserve the *transparency thesis*. Writing Bali as pre-modern subjects and the anthropological desire to preserve it may have erased nuances that can identify the violence that exists in contemporary Bali, along with the intimacy of Indonesia's national subjectivity and the hauntings of European colonial historicity. Only by pursuing Silva's insistence on the globality of racial ideas can this endeavor be possible.

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