

European Dream

“Keep bangin’ on the wall”

Carla Cruz

A B S T R A C T

This paper discusses ideas around European identity, the ideal of free movement, and the building of ‘Fortress Europe’ through artistic work I developed between 2005 and 2006; and endorses feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti’s idea of “becoming minoritarian” as an antidote to constructing an European identity based on old and new xenophobic and racist ideas, supported through my experience of leading the feminist exhibition project All My Independent Wo/men between 2005 and 2013, as a similar project of operating from the margins as a place of potentiality.

K E Y W O R D S

Europe, art, immigration, nomadic subjectivity,
becoming minoritarian.

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In 2006, I did a residency in Finland – VAASA, where I set myself the goal to better understand what means to be European, and what better way to do it than to travel to a faraway European country and try and understand if we share the same vision of what it means to be European. 4,000 km away from home, what I found was the same generalised fear that our comfortable lives would be taken away by foreigners – nearby neighbours or those crossing the Mediterranean. After living for nine years in the United Kingdom, with Brexit looming, I am back in Portugal and thinking how those arising concerns have come to occupy a central stage in Europe in the midst of a humanitarian crisis.

In this paper, I will be revisiting my queries about European identity and the ideal of free movement, and the building of 'Fortress Europe' through artistic work I developed between 2005 and 2006, and calling upon feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti's idea of "becoming minoritarian" as an antidote to constructing an European identity based on old and new xenophobic and racist ideas.

Fortress Europe

Keep bangin' on the wall
Keep bangin' on the wall
of fortress europe!

– Asian Dub Foundation, *Fortress Europe*

At the turn of the twentieth century, political theorist Chantal Mouffe (1993, 3) affirms that "our societies are undergoing a deep process of redefinition of their collective identities and experiencing the establishment of new political frontiers." If, according to Mouffe, before the collapse of Communism in the East, Western democracies could position themselves as us – democrats – against them – communists

– without that defined 'them', the necessary "friend/enemy frontier is taking a multiplicity of new forms linked to the resurgence of old antagonisms – ethnic, national, religious and others." (*Ibid.*). Moreover, if, for Mouffe, it is very difficult for the moderate right and the left to redefine a 'them', the radical right has already found its enemy. "It is provided by the 'enemy within', the immigrants, which are presented by the different movements of the extreme right as a threat to the cultural identity and national sovereignty of the 'true' Europeans." (*Ibid.*, 4).

We're the children of globalisation
No borders only true connection
Light the fuse of the insurrection
This generation has no nation
Grass roots pressure the only solution
We're sitting tight
'cause assylum is a right
Asian Dub Foundation, *Fortress Europe*

In 2003, as the UK electronica band Asian Dub Foundation (2003) was releasing their fourth album, *Enemy of the Enemy*, the European Union (EU) was celebrating 10 years of the Single Market and its 'four freedoms': freedom of movement of goods, services, people and money (europa.eu). However, for my generation, free movement within the EU felt to be more about commodity circulation than people's. As the EU took down barriers between its member state's borders, the borders to the outside world were growing. Moreover, as Rosi Braidotti (2004) affirms, "the redefinition of European boundaries coincides with the resurgence of micro-nationalisms at all levels in Europe."

Keep banging on the wall of fortress europe
Keep banging
Keep banging on the wall of fortress europe
Asian Dub Foundation, *Fortress Europe*

The 2005 incident at the Melilla Wall¹ – the physical barrier between Morocco and Spain, built specially to contain immigration – which saw hundreds of sub-Saharan African migrants trying to climb over the fences, some to die at the hands of Moroccan security forces, exacerbated that feeling of living in Fortress Europe. In the same year, I made the sculpture *EUROPA* (Cruz, 2005), fig 1.² The sculpture, resembling an illuminated shop sign, fails to switch on permanently, commenting on my feeling of a failing European Union, which forsakes people in need, as a threat to internal prosperity and peace.



Figure 1

Who doesn't run when they're feel the hunger
From where to what to when to here to there
People caught up in red tape nightmare
– Asian Dub Foundation, *Fortress Europe*

Following theorist and activist Franco Berardi (2010, 3), “Europe is wealthy because it has historically managed to valorize competence, and not just competition, to welcome and integrate other cultures. And, it must be said, it is also wealthy because for four centuries it has ferociously

exploited the physical and human resources of other continents.” Europe, wealthy because it integrated/exploited other cultures, in its endless attempt to become; and us, its newly moulded citizens wondering what it means to become European, are we moulding to its image? And what image is that?



Figure 2

In 2006, fellow artist Ângelo Ferreira de Sousa and I sent a call to other European-based cultural workers:

Dear friend

We invite you to take part in the project

"Europe – where are you?"

For the project we ask you to take a picture of yourself or others hitchhiking to Europe.

1. write EUROPE on a cardboard
2. place yourself holding the card on the side of a road, as if hitchhiking.
3. document it on photographic form.
4. send it with good printing quality to: euro_pa@megamail.pt

¹ Built in the 1980s after the entrance of Spain to the then CEE, improved and extended in the 1990's, the Melilla wall consists of 11 kilometers of parallel 6-meter high fences topped with barbed wire, with regular watch posts and police patrol. Underground cables connect spotlights, noise, and movement sensors, as well as video cameras. Its height was doubled after the 2005 incident. (European Commission, 2005, 70).

² Presented for the first time at the exhibition *16 salas 16 artistas* – Laboratório das Artes, Guimarães, 2005.

Figure 1. *Europa*, light-box, 51 × 71 × 13 cm, Carla Cruz, 2005. (Photo by Carla Cruz, courtesy of the artist)

Figure 2. *Europe – where are you?*, photography, Carla Cruz & Ângelo Ferreira de Sousa, 2006. (Photo by Francesco Ventrella, courtesy of the artists)

At the time, the suspicion was that most European citizens felt Europe was elsewhere, or at least the Europe signified by the EU. Berardi goes on to affirm that there is an aesthetic of the European Union, which is a cold one. "The European Union was born in the aftermath of World War II with the goal of overcoming old nationalist and ideological passions, and here lies its progressive and pragmatic nature. Lately, however, this founding anti-mythological myth seems to have been blurred, confused, forgotten." (Berardi, 2010, 4) The prosperous and peaceful image of the European Union, with its glass and concrete buildings, whitewashed history, has also played a more conservative, and perhaps dangerous role, according to Braidotti (2004, 135), which is "the European Union project as a self-appointed centre, which universalizes its own reading of 'civilization'."³

In the same period, I made the installation piece, *European Dream* (Cruz, 2006a)⁴, fig 3, which comments on the idea of the American Dream transposed to Europe, and on the arising of the migration crisis. The piece is composed of an altered Moroccan carpet, European blue, that conceals the text EUROPEAN DREAM, and a sound piece that includes audio recorded on the ferryboat between Algeciras and Tangier, and on the streets of Tangier, mixed with radio samples from European radio stations and European Baroque, Trance and Flamenco music, alluding to the crossings between the two continents.

³ See current discussions in Portugal on the superiority of European cultures as a proof of this central role and its dangers. The sociologist Paulo Mendes, wrote the following for the Portuguese newspaper *Público*, in response to a polemical and racist article, for the same newspaper, by Maria de Fátima Bonifácio: "Of the whole web of prejudice of the article of MFB, I would highlight its only positive point: it helped to bring the subject of racism and discrimination out of the closet to be discussed by the Portuguese society and made us leave behind that unrealistic idea that there is no racism in Portugal or, alternatively, that our racism is milder than in other countries." [my translation] (Mendes, 2019).

⁴ Made for the exhibition *Cityscapes*, curated by Miguel von Haffe Pérez, Plumba Gallery, ARCO Madrid Art Fair, 2006. The carpets used to make the piece were bought in Chefchaouen – Morocco, 2006.

Figure 3



As the 'them', as Mouffe (1993) argues, is transposed from the former eastern European bloc to the right populist vision of the uncivilized immigrant, the vision of a welcoming nature of Europe is fading. Europe, the promised land of milk and honey, of entrepreneurship, where you could reap the fruits of your labour, is shedding its robe and showing its uglier face, Fortress Europe, where, as Braidotti (2004, 133) warns, Eurocentrism is being replaced by Europism – "i.e. the belief in an ethnically pure Europe."

Ângelo Ferreira de Sousa (2006) wrote for our 2006 exhibition *Jusqu' ici tout va bien*, fig. 2, the following:

...This land above geography, this Guantánamo, a territory between two walls is, as it is well-known, the worst place to be. The walls are older than skyscrapers. Nonetheless, both sketch the dances of fear, marking the Earth with this or that temporary, political power. Let's have a look at some examples: the Wall of China (c. 16-meter-high, 8-meter-wide, c. 2500-kilometers-long), intended to stop the entrance of the Mongols; Hadrian's Wall (c. 4.5-meter-high, 3-meter-wide and 118-kilometer-long), to prevent the entrance of Barbarians into the Roman Empire; ... Israel West Bank Barrier (438-kilometer-long

Figure 3. *European Dream*, installation with Moroccan Carpet, 142 × 220cm, and Sound Piece in collaboration with Marta Von ÓiÓai, Carla Cruz, 2006, private collection. (Photo by Carla Cruz, courtesy of the artist)

reaching at some points 8 meters of height), security for some segregation for others; Mexico-United States Barrier (a non-continuous 930-kilometer-long and 7-meter-high structure), intended to reduce the entrance of illegal immigrants from Central and South America into US territory. Barriers for barbarians. [...] On the grounded perspective of the nomad, or the new barbarian, the challenge of the wall is to overcome it.

‘Them’, these constitutive ‘others’, as Braidotti (2004, 132) explains, “constitute respectively: the second sex or sexual complement of Man; the coloured, racialized or marked other that allows the Europeans to pass off their whiteness as the defining trait of humanity.” Today, as Europe is struggling with multiculturalism and specially at a time of increasing racism, the myth of whiteness and the assumption of monoculturalism in Europe must be challenged. Braidotti (*Ibid.*, 136) states:

European history at any point in time provides ample evidence to the contrary: waves of migrations from the East and the South make a mockery of any claim to ethnic or cultural homogeneity in Europe, while the persistent presence of Jewish and Muslim citizens challenges the identification of Europe with Christianity.

In 2006, I wrote the following to accompany my solo exhibition *Fear+Desire*, at Platform Gallery, Vaasa:

Every year thousands of people leave their home towns, their countries, in search for a better life, a bearable life. These people normally travel from the countryside to bigger towns, from poorer countries to richer countries, from countries at war or with totalitarian regimes to democratic and peaceful countries. These people – migrants – are the motor of several high-income developed countries that wouldn’t be able to maintain the level of production and quality of life without them. After having been primarily countries of emigration for more than two centuries, many countries within the European Union gradually became destinations for international migrants. [...] in this millennium Europe is a continent at peace, at least within its borders. But that hasn’t been so for the last centuries. [...] This apparent peace is kept alongside a constant state of fear. But what are we most afraid of? Losing someone dear to us or one’s life, surely, comes first, but apart from that, what are Europeans afraid of? We are afraid of the unknown, uncertain and insecure. We are afraid of those who want the same as we do. Those who desire security and peace. We are afraid of those who invade our borders to live our ways, but not quite the same way. [...] (Cruz, 2006c).

Welcome (Cruz, 2006b), fig. 4, is a performance piece, made during the artistic residency in Vaasa, where I created a live-sized cake, in the shape of a ‘racialized’ human body, as if it had been washed ashore, and invited the visitors to welcome him by singing the Swedish version of the happy birthday song, before joining in eating the

Figure 4



Figure 4. *Welcome*, performance, Carla Cruz, 2006, (Photo by Carla Cruz, courtesy of the artist)

⁵ Swedish is the second official language in Finland and spoken by the majority of fins living in Vaasa.

body-cake. The Swedish birthday song says⁵: Yes, you must live, yes, you must live, yes, you must live a hundred years.⁶ The performance was accompanied by Finnish mourning music. Both a wake and a welcoming party, *Welcome* was made to make those who joined in uncomfortable.

Waves of past migrations, exchanges with Northern Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia, count for multilayered identities in Europe. Nonetheless, the myth of cultural homogeneity and whiteness is crucial to the tale of European nationalisms. How can we counter the construction of the European identity based on old and new xenophobic and racist ideas? And which aesthetics can represent this identity?

On "becoming minoritarian"

Marginalized though we have been as women,
as white and Western makers
of theory, we also marginalize others because
our lived experience is thoughtlessly white,
because even our 'women's cultures' are
rooted in some Western tradition. Recognizing
our location, having to name the ground we're
coming from, the conditions we have taken
for granted – there is a confusion between our
claims to the white and Western eye and the
woman-seeing eye, fear of losing the centrality
of the one even as we claim the other.
– Adrienne Rich, *Notes Towards a Politics of Location*

Rosi Braidotti (2004, 132) proposed a look into the feminist theory of location as a conscious raising method which allows us to make sense of diversity. Unveiling the power of locations which one inhabits as the site of one's subject position is thus a project of political accountability. Braidotti

arrives at this argument about the European identity from her feminist philosophical theory of nomadic subjectivity as a process of "becoming minoritarian". Braidotti (*Ibid.*, 133) clarifies that "black women's texts and experiences make white women see the limitations of our locations, truths and discourses", allowing for a practice of accountability, of relational and collective activity of undoing power differentials. Braidotti goes on to clarify that a location is not self-appointed: "it is a collectively shared and constructed jointly occupied spatio-temporal territory." (*Ibid.*). Following her reasoning, acknowledging our embodied and embedded location can challenge Europe's self-appointed central position and reposition it as a periphery among many other peripheries — just like black feminists' work, like the one of bell hooks,⁷ has challenged the self-appointed centre of the white feminist experience. Braidotti's nomadic subjectivity project to redefine what it means to be-gendered-in-the-world, applied to the European Identity, proposes the possibility of re-locating it, of undoing its hegemonic inclinations. Thus, being "a nomadic European subject means to be in transit within different identity formations, but sufficiently anchored in a historical position to accept responsibility for it." (*Ibid.*, 137).

Understanding European identity as a 'location' could open up space for a different form of subjectification. If the construction of otherness constructs sameness, nomadic subjectivities as a constant critique to a centre – sameness – also disrupt otherness. Thus, the redefinition of the European identity poses the question of difference – same and other: in the sense of difference, not in different from, but difference as in making a difference, changing and challenging the perspectives. Braidotti goes on to say that

⁶ My translation of the original: Ja, må du leva, Ja, må du leva, Ja, må du leva uti hundrade år.

⁷ hooks (1984, 15), in her seminal book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, states, criticising white feminism, "As long as [...] any group defines liberation as gaining social equality with ruling class white men, they have a vested interest in the continued exploitation and oppression of others."

becoming minoritarian allows for a grounding perspective and possible flexible forms of citizenship that can disconnect nationality, citizenship and cultural identity, opening up for new symbolic representations and narratives of what it means to be/come European. For Braidotti, the practice of accountability (for one's embodied and embedded locations) as a relational, collective activity of undoing power differentials is linked to two crucial notions: memory and narratives. "They activate the process of putting into words, that is to say bringing into symbolic representation, that which — being so familiar — escapes self-consciousness and only be empowered in interaction with others." (*Ibid.*, 133). Likewise, together with becoming minoritarian we need new narratives and memories of what is to be European in a post-nationalist, decentered sense of the term.

Curating locations

The artworks I made in 2005 – 2006 did not propose a new aesthetics or symbolic representation for Europe, European identity, or the EU. The different artworks attempted to bring to the fore a sense of unease of being/becoming European. Europe, as something that endlessly tries to actualise itself, to become, without accomplishing it – *EUROPA* (2005), fig. 1. European identity, as something which always exists elsewhere – *Europe – where are you?* (Cruz and Ferreira de Sousa, 2006), fig. 2. The EU, as the 'El Dorado' of Europe's others – *European Dream* (2006a) and *Welcome* (Cruz, 2006b), figs. 3 and 4.

Following Braidotti's nomadic subject theory, I came to understand the potentiality of becoming minoritarian through the feminist exhibition project All My Independent Wo/men (AMIW), which I led between 2005 and 2013. In 2005, I positioned AMIW within a larger feminist art historian project of visibility, that is, of inserting neglected artistic practices by wo/men in the art

canon. AMIW participant artists are people who identify as woman, man, and transgender, and who use their embodied position to produce artistic gestures. These are artists who see their artistic practices marginalised/or consciously marginalise their practice because of its subject matter and approach, but who also search for a different way of creating and circulating within art worlds. I used curatorial strategies to question the (in)visibility of these artists in the mainstream art world. From my located perspective, the mainstream art world was overlooking their artistic practices, and AMIW was a means by which to fight for their recognition. Through my experience of organising AMIW, I was increasingly confronted with the following question: what does it mean to want to inscribe radical art practices within the 'visible' art arena, i.e. the mainstream art world, knowing that the very construction of what is rendered visible or not is what actually needs to be challenged? I then understood that reclaiming a form of visibility without it being transformative of the structures in which it aims to operate runs the risk of absorption into the visible, that is, the art canon, without challenging it. I understood that in line with broader neoliberal procedures, in which differences are transformed into anodyne characteristics and quickly absorbed into an ever-growing pluralist yet commodified society, these practices of moving the invisible towards the visible centre could cancel out their political potential. Thus, after 2010, I became less interested in promoting individual artists and inserting them into a given visibility logic, and more interested in subverting that logic by recollectivising our practices. This is visible in my artwork *Conjugar no Plural* (Cruz, 2012), which attempts to represent AMIW's network of artists, fig. 5. It was then that AMIW's situatedness – in what can be perceived as the margins of the mainstream art world, to which I initially thought we had been relegated – became the place we wanted to inhabit. It might have been a marginal position if viewed from a mainstream logic, but it was the

centre of AMIW's counterpublic, and from there it allowed us to imagine new and uncommodified possibilities of being and making, not just within the art sphere but in relation to the world itself.⁸

Recognising the potential of the margins – Braidotti's notion of becoming minoritarian as an always changing and changeable position – allowed me to understand AMIW's situatedness as a source for critical artistic practice which challenges

reducing constructions of what is commonly seen or experienced to be a wo/man and what 'good' art is. The experience of coming to understand AMIW as a location, as defined by Braidotti, a "collectively shared and constructed jointly occupied spatio-temporal territory", leads me to believe that Braidotti's vision of the becoming-minoritarian of Europe is an effective/affective way to difuse the growing European xenophobic tendencies.



Figure 5

⁸ A counterpublic is, in essence, no difference from a public, in the sense that both are constructed through the same means, such as self-organisation and reflexive circulation of discourse. However, the counterpublic is capable of transforming political landscapes and creating space for voices that are marginalised and not heard (Warner, 2002).

Figure 5. *Conjugar no plural*, poster, Carla Cruz, 2012, (reproduction, courtesy of the artist)

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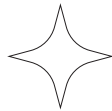
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EUROPEAN DREAM
"KEEP BANGIN' ON THE WALL"

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