

Neža Lipanje

## THE ACT OF ERASURE: ŽIŽEK'S PSYCHOANALYTIC DISCOURSE IN THE NATIONALISTIC CONSTRUCTION OF THE 'OTHER'

### ABSTRACT

*The administrative erasure of 25,671 persons in February 1992 represents a highly symbolic act in the process of forming the Slovenian nation-state, namely as a way of inventing the internal enemy. By analysing Žižek's psychoanalytic discourse on Balkan identity structures we question the intellectuals and their alleged autonomy. The aim of the text is to show that every order is conditioned by its non-entirety, in the sense that in the assumed 'whole' there is always at least one element that is excluded yet, at the same time, it appears as a link which establishes this very system.*

**KEY WORDS:** *act of erasure, liminal phenomena, national identity production, psycho-analytic discourse, Slavoj Žižek*

### **Akt izbrisa: Žižkov psihoanalitični diskurz v nacionalistični konstrukciji »drugega«**

### IZVLEČEK

*Administrativni izbris 25.671 oseb februarja 1992 razumemo kot simbolno dejanje v procesu nastajanja nove slovenske države in slovenske nacionalne identitete, in sicer kot enega izmed načinov izumljanja notranjega sovražnika. Z analizo psihoanalitičnega diskurza Slavoj Žižka, s katerim je avtor hotel pojasniti specifiko balkanske identitetne strukture, opozorimo tudi na vlogo intelektualcev in preizprašujemo njihovo avtonomijo. Namen besedila je pokazati, da je vsakršen red bistveno pogojen z ne-celostjo, in sicer v smislu, da v predpostavljeni »celoti« vedno obstaja vsaj en element, ki iz nje izpade, ki je dojet kot »Drugi« in kot tak izključen, vendar pa istočasno deluje kot člen, ki ta isti sistem šele zares vzpostavi.*

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** *akt izbrisa, liminalni pojavi, konstrukcija nacionalne identitete, psihoanalitični diskurz, Slavoj Žižek*

## 1 Introduction

This paper<sup>1</sup> aims to explain on a specific example, how every order or system is substantially conditioned by non-entirety, in terms of that in the assumed "whole" there always exists at least one element that falls out of it, it is understood as "Other" and as such it is excluded; however, at the same time, it appears as a link, which finally forms and establishes this very system<sup>2</sup>.

Our main thesis postulates that the administrative erasure of 25.671 persons in February 1992 also represented a highly symbolic act in the process of formation of the Republic of Slovenia, namely as one of the manners of inventing the Other. As such, it was constitutive for Slovene independence and the formation of the Slovene nation-state and mechanisms of the Slovene national identity, where all three processes are marked by the logic of the binary – "us", the included opposed to "them", the excluded. The aim of the first part is to place the erasure in a wider social context and expose some specific discursive formations of the then-emerging Slovene national identity, which enabled the erasure and prevail even nowadays in the Slovene post-socialist society.

After analyzing the erased from the perspective of liminal marginal phenomena and clarifying the understanding of production of Slovene national identity structures within the nationalistic creation of the internal Other – *foreigner*, the second part will focus on the discourse of one of the most famous Slovene intellectuals, philosopher Slavoj Žižek, described by some as the "most well-known Slovene export product" (Glavič 2011). In order to fully comprehend his theoretical attitude towards concepts of "homeland" and "Sloveneness", we consider it crucial to first examine his extended version of psychoanalysis of the Balkans in general. Through his theory, supported with Lacan's psychoanalysis, Žižek directly internalizes the Eurocentric symbolic order, taking the position of a universal signifier and falling into self-balkanizing racist and chauvinistic discourse, which, instead of categorically condemning the erasure, only reproduces current dominant nationalistic regimes of truth. Thus we wish to address the role of intellectuals – as part of the ideological state apparatus – whose autonomy, regardless the level of their alleged critique, is always marked by pronounced relativity (Williams 1998).

## 2 The erased as a liminal phenomena

On 26 February 1992, without any prior notification, more than twenty-five thousand Slovene residents were simply erased from the Slovene permanent resident registry. Administrative act of erasure, due to which approximately one percent of Slovenia's residents lost all social and economic rights, arising from the permanent resident status, occurred without any legal basis. The consequences for those, who were directly affected by this

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1. This article draws from my Master's degree thesis, entitled *Power of discourse/Discourse of power: Psychoanalysis of the Balkans as a postcolony* (Lipanje, 2012).
  2. See Šterk (1998), Žižek (1980).

action, as well as the society itself, remain highly indicative to-date<sup>3</sup>.

A highly distinctive action of a government in a newly formed independent state was directed towards a specific group of people. Their situation can be compared to all so-called marginal, liminal phenomena, characterized by being "neither here nor there", but always remaining "somewhere in-between", marked by the concept of exclusion and thus treated as dangerous or threatening to the stability of the existing order, whose task is thus to hide them, to shroud them (Stojić 2007: 149-152). The erased individuals virtually came to occupy a "non-space" of some sort overnight: "They are the Erased, non-persons, who are therefore beyond any border and do not exist as social or political subjects" (ibid: 148). Moreover, in order to effectively approach the phenomena of the erased a specific perspective has to be taken into account since "something is recognized as having an existence only in retrospect, retroactively, when it is articulated in language, acquiring a place in a recognized interpretative practice" (Šterk 2013: 855); this »interpretative practice«, as notes Stojić (2009), or the discourse in this case being a part of, subjected to and entirely dependant on the »higher« discourse on the "Sloveneness". The erased *per se* have no meaning whatsoever.

The key feature of all liminal phenomena, which can also help us clarify the phenomenon of the erased is their impurity. Mary Douglas (2010: 69) highlights the anthropological understanding of dirt as something out of place. This definition implies: a) a series of *regulated relations* and b) a series of violations of that system. *Dirt* presupposes a system and it is always a product of planned categorization and classification. Respectively: »In short, our behaviour as far as dirt is concerned, is a response that judges every object or idea, which might shuffle our esteemed classifications or oppose them« (ibid.: 70). Thus, as Šterk emphasizes (1998: 89), a conceptualization of anything requires at least one concept, which is impossible to conceptualize and task of which is only to confirm others in their existence.« Or as Lacan (1970) once said: ».. in a universe of discourse nothing contains everything /... / The idea of the unifying unity of the human condition has always had on me the effect of a scandalous lie.«

Dirt is a relative, normative construct and not a standardized concept. Its meaning and the meaning of its antipode (purity) is inherently unstable and interpretatively indefinite. Filth indeed "includes all rejected elements of systems we regulate" (Douglas 2010: 70), which is, if we think thoroughly, in fact a condition of establishing any order and system, respectively.

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3. For those with the republic citizenship of RS, the independence of the Republic of Slovenia automatically meant obtaining of citizenship of the newly formed Republic of Slovenia; Article 40 of the Citizenship Act of the Republic of Slovenia determined that all citizens of other Yugoslav republics, who had permanent residence in the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, had the right to apply for citizenship within six months. The erasing or withdrawal of permanent resident status occurred to those who, due to any reason, did not manage to gain new citizenship (they did not submit an application; their process was stopped; application denied...). In most cases, the erased were those, born in other republics of former Yugoslavia, who has both Yugoslav citizenship, as well as citizenship of one of the other republics of former Yugoslavia, and lived in the then Socialist Republic of Slovenia, where they had also registered permanent residence (Kogovšek et al. 2010: 9-19).

Dirt is always found at the periphery of the existing order, on the border. This border is otherwise without dimensions, however it contains elements of areas, which it divides, the sacred and the profane, thus all marginal phenomena turn out as *impure, unclear* and are attributed the status of the *special* (Leach in Stojić 2007: 149); simultaneously *dangerous* and hence *powerful*. For if one type of power derives from the centre of a structure, then some other power is reserved for phenomena on less articulated and peripheral areas of the same social order (Douglas 2010: 154).

Julia Kristeva (2002) understands filth, together with food, taboo and sin, as one of the elements through which *abject* is manifested. In psychoanalysis, abject is understood as a phenomenon between subject and object, and is used as a criterion for defining the marginal, peripheral complex phenomenon, which is not and cannot be part of the symbolic order (Mojsova Čepiševska 2008: 121). Since it is located at the periphery, it is simultaneously in danger and at the source of power. The same, according to Douglas (2010: 145-147), is valid for processes of marginalization and for people excluded from social patterns, sentenced to a state of non-integration and who thus become non-definable; because they shift from one state to the other, in this period of in-betweenness they represent a danger for themselves, as well as others.

In which manner can this be related to the erased, who, as we are aware, became precisely that at a precise moment – in the time of Slovenia's formation as nation-state. Can they be perceived as ultimately disruptive, *impure Others* or *inadequate elements* in the process of establishing a new order, and who, in line with theory, had to be removed – in this case literally erased? Was the act of erasure thus merely initial flaunting of the new authorities and as such inevitable, in terms of trying to "internally purify" the emerging Slovene national identity and thus lay foundations for a new system, a new society?

### 3 Slovene national identity production and formation of the "other"

The key to understanding the circumstances that allowed the act of erasure lies in the connectedness of the process of forming the internal Other with terms, such as (neo)racism, chauvinism and, above all, nationalism. Or: if we wish to comprehend how an authority in a certain moment manages to "normalize" such a radical type of act as erasure, we first need to sincerely ask ourselves, who the Slovenes actually are and what being a Slovene means to us. Because whatever Sloveneness is, it exists only in relation to (important) Others or:

*Members of a nation are more or less not similar to one another; it is about their feeling, as if they were closer to each other in comparison with Others. National identity thus has no meaning in itself, it gains meaning only in confrontation with other nations* (Bajt 2010: 203).

It is a fact that differentiation on grounds of nationality in the process of forming of the Slovene national identity was present as early as the national movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus we cannot perceive this as something that began with Slovenia's official

independence, however, it is of key importance that after 1991 such division became the established practice of the new state (Bajt 2010: 202).

Furthermore, it is also crucial that in the case of Slovenia, formal citizenship and sense of belonging in terms of national identity simply cannot be considered equal. Bajt (ibid.) emphasizes that being a Slovene citizen is one thing, while being a member of the Slovene nation is another: the categories do not necessarily overlap. In addition, Slovene citizenship is founded on the concept of ethnicity and not territory – in the opposite case, those with permanent residence in Slovenia would automatically also become (wholesome) citizens, and not the “erased”<sup>4</sup>! Exclusionary policies that marginalize all minority groups, are thus not merely part of “people’s” discourse<sup>5</sup>, but part of state practice that repeatedly acts according to nationality or (neo)racism (ibid: 197), in the background of which there is always

*... a sort of justification of difference between us and others, most frequently specified as ‘them’, who are, because of one reason or another, not only ‘different’, but also ‘worse’, and should be – in the name of some principle – one way or another, preferably ‘finally’ eliminated (Kuzmanić 1999: 62).*

The role of nationalism is to unify, homogenize the national community within the borders of nation-state (Bajt 2010: 196). For those who obtained citizenship, the “included”, the act of erasure also brought symbolic value and some sort of superiority over those that remained “excluded”. The real “value” of Slovene citizenship was thus the feeling of dignity and “security”, which it gave to all “locals” – citizens, as opposed to “foreigners”, non-citizens<sup>6</sup>. In these terms we can understand the erased as *anti-citizens*, placed opposite of the Slovene citizens and Slovene citizenship in general, which they – precisely with their exclusion – finally defined (Zorn 2008: 54). In this respect, the erasure certainly “succeeded”: “Sloveneness” immediately became (more) unified, homogenous and “pure”. However, who are/were the significant big Others of the “Slovene”? Whose “views” built the mechanisms of the Slovene national identity? First direction towards which the emerging Slovene identity turned was most definitely the West, or more precisely, Western Europe. The second, equally important, were the Balkans. The intertwining of these discourses occurred simultaneously, although they were sometimes contradictory and ambivalent. It is crucial to understand that in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Europe created its

4. See Kuzmanić’s analysis of the Slovene post-socialist “drinking” discourse (1999).

5. The exclusionary and degrading attitude towards all minority groups, who become marginalized and stigmatized, is present and highly problematic – be it the Roma, migrants, gays, lesbians, Muslims or single-parent families.

6. One needs to mention that the newly emerged “foreigners” were sometimes absurdly given this label, since the erased could be considered Slovenes, spoke Slovene, were attached to Slovenia etc. – briefly, they had and “fulfilled” all requirements that would “make” a person member of a nation. But not a member of Slovenes. In order to become the “real Slovene”, even this was not sufficient. More on the related concept of “archaic-ethnic” in Bajt 2010.

internal<sup>7</sup> "Other", the Balkans, a term imbued with derogatory connotations: barbaric, primitive, divided, weak. Since the independence onwards, "Sloveneness" is thus more and more defined as part of Europe, "European tradition". The politics in the before- and after-independence period thus became pro-European, the essence of the Slovene identity being linked to the pre-Yugoslav history, because that is the true "identity" of the Slovenes, after all, "we" have always been Europeans regarding culture and religion! In this sense, Slovenia's accession to Europe became naturalized, this being something completely "natural" for Slovenia as a European country (Bakić-Hyden in Vezovnik 2009: 164-165). In the meantime, "Europe" as the Other mostly acts as a myth, promising a better life, democracy, economic development, in a nutshell, a civilization, and thus shifts into the imaginary<sup>8</sup> (Vezovnik 2009: 151). In this sense, according to Dolar (in Vezovnik 2009: 163), the identity of "Sloveneness" got caught in the "alternative between phantasms of domestic myths and the phantasm of 'Europe' on the other side."

The goal of Slovene independence was thus a shift from the "periphery" to the European "centre", civilization; also, or mainly, in the symbolic sense. Thus we need to contemplate about the erasure as a *performance*, exceptional display of the sublime postcolonial authority, with which – in order to prove how truly "European" it all of a sudden became, or rather, in their terms, always has been – it simply wanted to "Europeanise" other Balkan nations and "bring them closer to civilization". Or, as Stojić suggests (2007: 151), that "erasure was only the initiation (as a purgative purifying machine of some sort) into civilization"; a sort of a "civilizing mission" of the new Slovene government, a shallow "parade", exposing nothing but explicit in-authenticity, tremendous insecurity and incredible weakness – in fact, its powerlessness.

For what else can one expect from the newly established authority in a contemporary postcolony if not the absurd obsessive insisting on its coherence, stability, autonomy and righteousness? It is precisely this "banality of power" (Mbembe 2007: 209), which enabled structural violence, namely act of the erasure, and whose goal was to convince Slovenes (and the authorities themselves in the first place) that Republic of Slovenia was now a new "Master", the new "alpha male" of the region (and most importantly, that it should act like one).

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7. If the European "external" Other was the Orient (Far East, the Arab world, etc.), then their internal Other were the Balkans. Europe always perceived the "external" Other with respect, the external other is otherwise "foreign" and intimidating, but consistent. On the other hand, for Europe, the Balkans were always marked with fragmentation and incoherence; in short, the Balkans are imperfect, lame, and for the European "we", an "internal" Other.

8. It should not be forgotten that, during that time, in some discourses, Europe also acted as an extremely "dangerous" Other, who could threaten Slovene sovereignty and autonomy and devour "us". See Vezovnik 2009.

## 4 Intellectuals matter! Do they really?

In order for any construct to become effective and perceived as "real and true" the process of formalization needs to take place, which is essentially the act of incorporating (abstract) constructs into scientific knowledge, while knowing there is no such thing as "objective" or "neutral" scientific knowledge (Foucault 2001). This process always involves experts, intellectuals and academics, who are "officially" considered autonomous, yet their autonomy very often proves as shallow, or rather extremely relative - even when they are perceived as radical and oppositional. Williams (1998) claims that the "trick" about institutionalized intellectuals or universities as institutions is merely about their internal reproduction conditions and the fact that they managed to develop the criteria to determine these exclusively, because of the privileged position they themselves enjoy. Thus, what gives authority to intellectuals is precisely the fact that they belong to the specific institutional position, which is a position of ultimate power. In this view, then, we should understand and "study" them as the "big Other"; Lacan's "*le sujet supposé savoir*"; "a subject supposed to know":

*What enables a constitution of an authoritative function, the subject supposed to know, is an irrational belief that one has a privileged insight into the ontological level of the order of the Other, the symbolic reality /.../. In this sense SSS<sup>9</sup> takes upon itself to save the entire symbolic order from the knowledge of its inconsistency and powerlessness; the function of the subject supposed to know is to conceal the fact that the big Other exists only to the extent that the subject presupposes the Other as an ideal order - a system, logic or discourse which assures the meaning and consistency of the subject's argument and action (Šterk 2013: 858).*

In other words: the Other is a form of a shield that protects the symbolic reality. A fierce belief in 'It' that supposedly knows better and guarantees meaning and sense - no matter the level of subject's own doubt or confusion - makes life bearable. Yet we all know no such mythical entity as a big Other truly exists. And very often nor do intellectuals' independence and genuine critique. Williams suggests that very often the knowledge produced by universities as institutions, is considered allegedly "critical" (yet very often fails to be genuinely such) (1998: 219). In consequence, even the practices that come across as relatively autonomous merely "reproduce the order (the hegemonic social order, N.L.) in its most general terms", or "/ ... / these (autonomous practices, N.L.) at least do not oppose or challenge it" (ibid., 216). Therefore, a deep understanding of the concrete position and situation of universities and their scholars is crucial. The fact that they often seem far away from the cultural and social hegemony does not suggest the knowledge they produce manages to be "critical", "independent" or "radical" - most often its autonomy is remarkably relative and ultimately subjected to reproduction of dominant practices and regimes of truth, for they (institutionalized universities and "their" intellectuals) are also "rulers and managers" (ibid.).

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9. *Le sujet supposé savoir.*

Hannah Arendt's analysis of anti-semitism (2004) offers at least an additional insight to consider, when she points to a historical example of connection between conformism of the educated German Jewry of the late 19th century and their somehow ambiguous social existence on one hand, and newly-found focus on individual and the well-being of bourgeois society on the other. In a society that both despised »ordinary« Jewish community yet admired and felt almost perversely attracted by the »exception Jews«, Jewish intellectuals were left puzzled in having to smoothly alternate between the two behavioral patterns to the extent of having to pretend to »be a man on the street and a Jew at home« (Gordon in *ibid.*: 88). With »Jewishness« becoming a certain type of »psychological quality«, a sum of personality traits, it does not come as a surprise that this constant jiggling between identification and differentiation resulted in specific conformism and had not led to substantial critical rebellion (*ibid.* 87-88). »The less one thought of them as equals, the more attractive and entertaining they became«, wrote Arendt (*ibid.*: 90), in times when the middle class was increasingly focusing on individual private lives and destinies and becoming highly interested in everything mysterious and different (*ibid.*: 189)<sup>10</sup>.

With Williams's and Arendt's emphasis in mind, we are now going to approach the discourse of Slavoj Žižek on the Balkans' subjectivity in general (and Slovenes' in particular) as a telling example.

#### 4.1 Universal vs. particular

A lot has been said about Slavoj Žižek, the eccentric Slovenian Marxist philosopher, Lacanian psychoanalyst and a global star of cultural critique. What we are really interested in is the "Slovene" Slavoj Žižek, and the Balkan-related discourse he developed as one of the founding members of the Ljubljana psychoanalytic school, who was also politically active<sup>11</sup>. His theory is largely based on binary pairs and contributed immensely in the process of inventing Slovenia as a modern European nation state. Moreover, his discourse reflects a deep geopolitical division between the rational West and the pathological South-East, it is deeply self-orientalizing (self-balkanizing) and embedded in the legacy of the Enlightenment rationalism that functions merely as "little more than cultural preservation of Western imperialism" as Laclau put it (2008:51)<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, Žižek never publicly condemned or questioned the openly anti-immigrant policies of the Slovene ruling party and remained publicly silent on the issue of the erased<sup>13</sup>.

10 See also Arendt (1964) and Bauman (2006).

11 He served as an advisor to the Liberal Democratic Party after failing to successfully run for the seat on the collective presidency of the Slovenia in the 1991 elections (Bjelić 2009a: 506).

12 However, this is not to say that all Slovenian public intellectuals, who were active at the time simply failed to recognize state racism and/or to publicly condemn it. See Rastko Močnik (1998) and Tomaž Mastnak (2002), both of whom were Žižek's colleagues at the time.

13 On the other hand, he was very proud about the »achievements« of »his« LDP, also regarding the immigrants:

*What the liberal democratic party did was a miracle. Five years ago we were the remainder of the new social movements, like feminist and ecological groups. At that time everybody thought that we would be vanishing mediators. We made some slyly corrupted, but good moves and now*



When approaching Žižek's ideas on the specific Balkans' identity structure, we have to take a look at his version of the famous dichotomy between *particular* and *universal*. The very existence of one binary element depends upon the other, and vice versa, or "the catch of the Universal resides in what it secretly excludes", he himself claimed (Žižek 2005: 157). Laclau (2008) points out that the *particular* can never be(come) complete, since it arises only exclusively in relation to the *universal*. *Universal* is an empty *signifier*, it has no content, it is "just an empty place unifying a set of equivalential demands" (ibid.: 56). It is inconsumable with the *particular*, although it simply cannot exist without it. Instead, several different discourses, "truths", "meanings" compete, trying to make their own specific *particular* "win"; trying to put it in a temporary superior position, represented and interpreted in the *universal* form of a specific social reality. This creates a series of empty *signifiers* with the(ir) current *signified* always resulting from a concrete political struggle (ibid. 35).

Empty *signifiers* are basically *signifiers* with no *signified*. Thus, for an empty *signifier* to occur, there has to exist a certain "impossibility in significations as such", or rather a distortion of the entire structure (ibid.: 37). Andreja Vezovnik (2009: 150-151) effectively presents the role played by empty *signifiers* in the process of national identity building. In the period when Slovenia's national identity structure was being established, "Europe" became a concept with "extra added value", an idea with a surplus of meaning, nothing less but the new *universal*, an empty *signifier*. Since there was no unified approved consent of what "Europe" was and what it "meant" yet, various discourses, sometimes completely ambivalent, were competing, each trying to prevail and become the current dominant, hegemonic *truth*: yet "Europe" is and always has been just another *construct*; always changing and transforming, remaining vague in its nature and failing to ever get fully semantically stabilized. Thus, at the time, we were observing discourses advocating "entering the EU" on one hand, and the discourses of *particularism*, which derived primarily from the fear of losing independence and autonomy, on the other (Delo in Vezovnik 2009: 154).

It was Cartesian dualism that gave rise to rationalism as "the one and only" hegemonic discourse in the Western world. Having to represent the external universality, proletarian body was no longer *particular*, instead it became a phenomenon beyond the differences between particularity and universality; this distinction was actually cancelled (Laclau 2008: 24). The truth is that *universal* got its body, yet this very body was in fact *particular* - embedded in Europe of the 19th century. So "Europe", all of a sudden, became both, *particular* and *universal* human essence. According to Laclau, Europe invented itself through the "universalization of its own particularism", which means that Eurocentrism and the pertaining hegemonic signifying practices were very much part of European colonial domination and had to be presented as a *universal* mission, something in favour of the

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*we are the strongest party. I think it was our party that saved Slovenia from the fate of the other former Yugoslav republics, where they have the one-party model. /.../ With us it's a really diverse, pluralist scene, open towards foreigners (of course there are some critical cases). But the changes of a genuine pluralist society are not yet lost (Žižek in Lovink 1996).*

entire humanity. The European *Others* were no longer fighting between particularism(s) of cultures, attitudes, identities, but ultimately within the battle between *particular* and *universal* on a *civilizational* level – what else, then, does the notion of *people without histories* stand for if not the fact that they are (were) unable to represent the *universal* as such (ibid.)?

If we return to Žižek's: the main problem of his theory is that it 'sterilizes' the Balkans; it detaches it from its specific historical, cultural and societal roots and characteristics and puts it into a 'glass cage'. He literally robs the Balkans of their *particular*. His understanding of potential *particularity* is entirely submitted to *universalism*. It is the moment when he recognizes himself as the big universal *Other*, intellectual, that enables him to take the role of the "Master", the one that – through language of psychoanalysis – managed to distance and "cure" himself of pathological traits associated with the native Balkans, and in doing so, gain a "higher", "bird's eye view" perspective on what was really going on in the region (Bjelić 2009a). Somehow, he becomes "colour-blind": in the same way that white is blind for the non-white, Žižek's *universal* is blind to *particular* of any kind (Koložova in Bjelić 2011b: 278). Interestingly enough, it is only so when it comes to conceptualizing "home" and "domestic" situation, the "domestic" "Other".

#### 4.2 Balkan = Das Unbewusste Europas

Žižek's main thesis, as Bjelić notes (2009a), is that the Balkans represent the European *unconscious*; the main reason for the assertion being the negative pathological Oedipal structure and the absence of the Cartesian tradition and symbolic (Eurocentric) Law of the Father. According to him, the Balkans had regressed into the pathological feminine substance, which could only be "cured" once the submission to the *universal* has occurred. Žižek's argument is based on Lacan's concepts of the *Real*, *Pre-symbolic*, *Symbolic* and on the distinction between a "tolerable" paternal enjoyment and dangerous feminine *jouissance* "a supplementary *jouissance*, which is beyond the phallus, a *jouissance* of the *Other*"<sup>14</sup>.

He claims:

*Europe puts and projects all its dirty secrets, obscenities and so on onto the Balkans which is why my formula for what is going on in the Balkans is not. People usually say they are caught in their old dreams, they cannot face ordinary post-modern reality. No, I would say they are caught into dreams but not into their own dreams – into European dreams. You know the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze had a wonderful saying where he says /.../ that if you are caught into another person's dream you are you are f\*\*\*\*\* (2008).*

Similarly thought Mladen Dolar when commenting on Freud's visits to the Balkans in the early 20th century:

*The catalogue of Yugoslav topoi in Freud could surely be extended, but there is already an outline of a pattern. Freud takes trips from the Centre to the outskirts of*

14. Lacan (1998).

*that disintegrating Empire. ... The Weltgeist on vacation meets its Other. Can one venture to say that Yugoslavia is the Schauplatz of the European unconscious, or that the unconscious is structured like Yugoslavia?*

The role of Dolar's Yugoslavia is dual: it symbolizes the European unconscious, and also represents the space upon which the dirty, hidden perverse European desires are projected (Bjelić 2009a: 507-508). Even Freud himself found the essence of Balkan subjectivity precisely by locating it outside of a specific mythological frame of psychoanalytic discourse. He argued that people south of the Austrian border simply lack the symbolic authority and thus remain pathological for their entire lives – which also means they remain un-analyzable throughout their lives. Ultimately, wonders Bjelić (2008), how is it possible that something outside the Symbolic order becomes the object of such vast human interest? If the means to explore an object supposedly do not exist, how is it possible then to establish an entire field of knowledge on that same subject (ibid.)?

There is a famous anecdote about a psychoanalyst from Trieste, Edoardo Weiss, asking his colleague Freud for a piece of advice in the case of a Slovene patient with a "thoroughly immoral Ego" (Freud in Žižek 1996: 8), who was allegedly not responding to therapy, suffered from impotence and was seemingly incapable of any proper sexual relations (Weiss in Bjelić 2011a: 317). Freud (in Žižek 1996: 8) concluded that the key to this problem did not lie in this particular patient but rather in the fact that the patient was Slovene: "... the Slovene, is obviously a good-for-nothing, who is not worth your trouble. Our analytical fails when faced with such people, our perspicacity alone cannot break through to the dynamic relation which controls them." If Weiss was expecting advice on how to diagnose the Slovene patient, what he received instead was an absurd geopolitical rambling on why psychoanalysis proves useless in certain cases. For Freud the problem lied in the fact that the Slovene belonged to a specific ethnic group, located outside (the very limited scope of) psychoanalysis. This is the reason why he claimed the (psychoanalyst's) effort was nothing but a waste of time. In fact, it is not about the patient not deserving the treatment but about him being incapable of it, which is something completely different. At this point, Žižek should finally have started to seriously question Freud's assumptions yet what he did instead was to incorporate them into his own argumentation.

In order to further support his thesis, Žižek states that the abnormal unconscious psychological dynamics of Slovene identity derives from "an excessive obedience" (2011: 63) and over-attachment to mothers in their "national fantasy":

*The "immoral" Slovene mentioned does not just embody the paradoxical way enjoyment and the Law are linked, but hides yet another surprise, which leads to the key of the Slovene national fantasy, to the theme of the "maternal superego," to the theme of the mother (not the father) as the bearer of the Law/Prohibition (Žižek 1996:55).*

The absence of the father, traditionally the bearer of the universal Law, enables national fantasy to form around the mother, prohibiting any external pleasures and creating a specific personality (disorder) with symptoms of immorality and impotence (Žižek 1996: 8-10; 54-55). But since "without a transgression there is no access to jouissance and /.../

that is precisely the function of the Law" (Freud in Lacan 1992: 177), meaning that without internalized (Symbolic) Law of the Father, neither proper and genuine transgression nor enjoyment can occur. In consequence, for one to be able to get analyzed, one has to be part of an Empire. Who is thus able to develop a "normal", "healthy" European subjectivity and emerge as a modern European subject is, according to both Freud and ŹiŹek, uniquely determined in advance almost as a fact - and one of those that can hardly ever change.

### 4.3 What about Slovenes?

We are arguing that ŹiŹek's theory is nothing but a clear example of a self-orientalizing, or rather a self-balkanizing discourse on the Other. Let's us explain why.

ŹiŹek regarded the former Yugoslavians (with the exception of Slovenes!) a primitive threat and vehemently approached criticism from Svetlana SlapŹak, a Belgrade-born anthropology professor based in Slovenia, as completely irrelevant, claiming that privileges enjoyed by a "foreign" professor outnumbered the ones he was given as an "indigenous" Slovenian:

*I never taught at any university in Slovenia, I am absolutely alone, without any research assistant. They just give me enough money to survive. My answer to Svetlana SlapŹak would be: why did she become a Slovenian citizen? Her very position is a contradiction of what she says. In a state of less than 2 million people we offered 100.000 non-Slovenians permanent citizenship, against terrible nationalistic resistance (ŹiŹek in Lovink 1996)<sup>15</sup>.*

Moreover, suspiciously enough, he failed to see that the reasons for bloody ethnic conflicts in Bosnia in the early 90s were to be searched for in "class relations" tension. Instead he focused on the absence of the Law of the Father and primitive women's pleasure, *jouissance*, which supposedly led to Balkan's perverse subjectivity. His main argument was that since the institution in the form of nation-state was lacking, the Bosnian father failed to establish a solid and grounded symbolic order. It should come as no surprise then, perfectly in line with this theory, that he supported NATO's intervention in Bosnia, arguing it was the only thing that could re-establish the Symbolic authority (Bjelić 2011a: 318). In this case he used the concepts of *pre-symbolic*, *Symbolic* and Lacan's paternal enjoyment (*pere jouissance*). This is how he commented on brutal rapes carried out by Serb soldiers against Muslim girls, with their fathers forced to watch:

*The scene provides the key to the constellation of the impotent gaze: the unbearable, traumatic element witnessed by this gaze is ultimately the feminine enjoyment whose presence suspends the authority of the big Other, of the Name-of-the-Father, and fantasy (the fantasy of the -'threat' woman is to be 'rescued' from) is a scenario*

15. Regarding his "controversial" position as both, public intellectual and political advisor, he continued lamenting: "Slovene media absolutely ignore me, there is never an article about me. On the other hand, if some nationalist poet publishes a small poem in some obscure Austrian journal, it's a big success in Slovenia" (ŹiŹek in Lovink 1996).

we construct in order to elude feminine enjoyment. /.../ 'A woman is being tortured-coited'. /.../ Why, then, is the observer passive and impotent? Because his desire is split, divided between fascination with enjoyment and repulsion at it; or – in other words – because his yearnings to rescue the woman from her torturer is hindered by the explicit knowledge that the woman is enjoying her suffering. The observer's ability to act - to rescue the victim-woman from the torturer or from herself - bears witness to the fact that he became 'dupe of his own fantasy' (Žižek 1994: 75).

Let us now focus on how Žižek theorized the characteristics of Bosnian subjectivity, while encouraging "his" Slovenes to break the incestuous bond with the archaic mother (the Balkans) and "open" themselves to father enjoyment and transgression. Žižek relied on Freud's father from the primordial horde, one that held all women and was expelled from the act of castration. Bosnian father embodied Pre-symbolic, primitive, the Balkan's Real, which kept enjoying the archaic attachment to the mother (Bjelić 2011a). But if we return to the momentum, in which Žižek seemingly managed to "cure" Slovene subjectivity, or at least showed he knew the right "medicine" (undergoing Lacan's psychoanalysis and submitting to Eurocentric Symbolic order), we cannot help but wonder: what happened to the infamous Slovene un-analyzability that Freud was speaking about? Did Lacan eliminate it? Was now the whole world (finally) able to be analyzed and thus "saved"? Absolutely not! The un-analyzable psychological structure of the Slovenes was simply transferred. Where? Onto other Balkan's populations and regions. In what manner exactly? By introducing Lacan's *pre-symbolic*; the un-analyzable Slovene was replaced by the Bosnian father as the primitive Other (Bjelić 2009b: 292-293): for the non-other peoples from the Balkans were perceived as pre-symbolic and therefore, a threat to the new Slovenia. What changed really? Nothing much, except for the fact that the foundations of the self-balkanizing colonialist Žižek's discourse are now finally fully explained.

The tragedy of social sciences lies in their proneness to get swallowed, chewed off and then mercilessly spit out by politics, only to transform into something much more powerful and something that goes beyond purely theoretical discourses. Žižek's psychoanalytic analysis proves painfully naive once deconstructed and 'debunked': the Balkans have so easily fallen out of the "right" European borders, out of the Eurocentric symbolic order and out of the presupposed "framework" that defined what being a healthy, modern European subject truly amounted to. Žižek's willingness to follow Freud's argumentation and failure to recognize its absurd and clearly biased assumptions, is precisely what marks the impressive authority of psychoanalytic discourse as such (however, what should not be neglected is that its power stems largely from its 'cooperation' with (neo)colonialist discourse).

## 5 Conclusions

The act of erasure in the process of Slovene nation-state formation and national identity building should be understood as the ultimate display of a newly established postcolonial authority and its vulgar, grotesque demonstration of power and violence on one hand, and its desperate need to be perceived as "real", "true" and "right" on the other. The identification, construction and "conviction" of the internal "Other", thus, function as specific

examples of such concrete attempts by the ruling power to confirm and establish itself as "relevant", also by targeting a specific group of people who – based on some politically motivated peculiar criteria -ended up first in the category of the liminal, impure and dangerous, and then in the group of the literally non-existent. In line with the theory – and with a great amount of cynicism - we could now claim that since every single social system requires at least one factor, which is impossible to conceptualize and task of which is only to homogenize, unify and confirm others (the majority) in their existence, the erased could be perceived merely as "collateral damage" in the process of new nation state formation; the one element that lay foundations for a new society.

It is "unfortunate" that even the discourse of Slavoj ŹiŹek, one of the most prominent public intellectuals, did not help very much in detecting this "systematic" error. On the contrary, it complicated matters even further. ŹiŹek's inability to see through the obscene brutality of the Slovene authority and his decision to remain silent on the act of erasure, which pushed more than 25000 people into a sort of a "black hole" of social reality, comes from his theoretical commitment to psychoanalytic discipline and its geo-political premises, which theorize the Balkans in terms of the abnormal, primitive and "dark" territory. Furthermore, what first appeared to be simply theoretical concepts, such as *Symbolic*, *Pre-symbolic*, *Real* and *primitive*, proved very convenient in that specific socio-political context and contributed immensely in creating the "internal Other", the "enemy", perceived as an "outsider" and a threat to the emerging Slovene national entity. Instead of recognizing the clearly colonialist foundations of psychoanalytic language as such, ŹiŹek internalized and incorporated this type of argumentation into his very theory. It is somehow paradoxical, then, to conclude that even the fact that we have tried to explain and understand the erased as a specific phenomenon and the circumstances surrounding it, and while knowing that psychoanalysis's relevance for political action is one of a limited scope (Sokolović 2012), we feel nothing but a strange disappointment: "with enemies like these, who needs friends"<sup>16</sup>, or was it, with leftist intellectuals like these, really, who needs the conservatives?

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<sup>16</sup>. *A reply: with enemies like these who needs friends* is an article by ŹiŹek, published in 2012.

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