

Artan
Sadiku

Contracting a radical democracy in the Balkans: The 'return of the people' as a possibility for a leftist inauguration of politics

Bionote

Artan Sadiku is a theorist and activist from Skopje and holds a PhD in political philosophy. His primary interests are theories of the subject, feminism and radical practices in politics and arts. He works at the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities in Skopje, where he lectures at the gender and cultural departments and is actively involved with the Leftist movement Solidarnost and Cultural Club Syndicate.

Abstract

My aim is to strengthen the argument against the dereliction of the notion of democracy – as it has resulted in the Balkans and elsewhere and to provide a thesis that a radical political change in the Balkans requires the occurrence of a political event by which a new social contract can establish itself as a genuine expression of the will of the people, or more precisely a new mode of state as a result of a new balance of class antagonisms. Reaffirming the notion of the people against its political correlative – the citizen, I aim to prove that the 'return of the people' – as concept is crucial for the radicalization of the concept of democracy which enables the leftist politics to be inaugurated into the political proper.

Artan Sadiku

The transition process in the Balkans was aimed at structurally transforming the society through dismantling some of the structures that resembled the socialist mode of organisation and introducing new practices within those that corresponded to the 'western' political mode. This process was carried out under the guise of a universal promise of freedom, a freedom that was repressed by the socialist state apparatuses and which was about to be realized primarily through the implementation of the free market, which as the main societal drive of development would generate and disseminate the freedom throughout the society. This promise of freedom performed the substantial ideological exercise of interpellation for individuals who found themselves not only embracing a new ideology, but also representing the apparatuses of its reproduction. The trouble with the use of the term ideology that the Balkan societies were quite overwhelmed with, was solved through the employment of the already invented vision of post-ideological societies and world, which on the other hand represents the most sublime ideological claim.¹ The main political ideal in the undertaking of

1 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 27–31.

the transition in the Balkans fully embarked on the Fukuyamian claim of the end of history, thus providing itself with a universal legitimacy as a result of the prevailing neoliberal ideology across the globe.

The ideology of 'the end' nowadays establishes itself as a form of obstacle for the collective social progress, since there is nothing better, nothing more advanced to be attempted. Against this claim, it is possible to exploit this idea (of 'the end') for our emancipatory purposes only if we implement this concept within our concrete predicament. And, as a result of it, we ought to introduce a unitary critical position which is inaugurated in the political field as a criticism of a certain end, an 'end' which is the result of the transition in the Balkans, a final result of all that to what our democracy has resulted. Such a position is of utmost political importance today because of what is still being propagated today as a long process of hard social sacrifices in the name of a transition towards a democracy. The manner in which the propagation of democratization is conducted, attaches it the character of a utopian project. On the other hand, there is a tendency to blur the strong presence of current social and political system and hierarchy by announcing simultaneously the new transition for the purposes of European integration. Two decades after the break-up of Yugoslavia, the argument of continuous transition falls short of facts since it ignores the firmly established system of ideological apparatuses and almost the monolithic reproduction of the neoliberal ideology in this period.

My aim is to strengthen the argument against the dereliction of the notion of democracy – as it has resulted in the Balkans and elsewhere and to provide a thesis that a radical political change in the Balkans requires the occurrence of a political event by which a new social

contract can establish itself as a genuine expression of the will of the people, or more precisely a new mode of state as a result of a new balance of class antagonisms. Reaffirming the notion of the people against its political correlative – the citizen, I aim to prove that the 'return of the people' – as concept is crucial for the radicalization of the concept of democracy which enables the leftist politics to be inaugurated into the political proper.

One is undoubtedly troubled by the fact of an almost unanimous acceptance in the Balkans of the new neoliberal ideology against the previous 'communist idea,' a fact that immediately signals two subjective possibilities. First, being the one that a proper subject in Althusserian terms, had occurred as a result of the communist ideology in the Yugoslav society, but that political subject was restricted from expressing its free political will at the moment of the collapse of the socialist regime, thus being left outside of the new social contract that was inaugurated as an ideological *event*. The second possibility is that the communist ideology had failed to produce the socialist ideological subject and therefore the system had to rely heavily on repression in order to insure its proper dogmatic functioning. This would mean that the Yugoslav subject was already interpellated through the neoliberal ideology and it is precisely as a result of its ideological reproduction through the subjects that it produced the failure of the system. The Althusserian concept of interpellation, which I use to describe the subject as a product of ideology, describes the process through which the ideology addresses the abstract pre-ideological subject by what it effectively produces the same as a subject proper.

In order to move inside the current predicament in the Balkans we are confronted with the challenge of providing and a viable political explanation regarding

the political subject, or more precisely, answering the question of the origin of a possible political content in the current Balkan subject. I claim that there was a failure of the socialist system and that was that it failed to incorporate the political will of the citizens that were politically subjectivized through the communist ideology. The system was lacking behind the subjects it had created and it is because of this tension that the people in the Balkans requested a political change in the late 80es.

The expressed will for change by the people in the socialist states was interpreted as a will for a proper ideological change, as a will for the neoliberal system to be installed. It was a resonance of the ideological gesture of faking the popular will of the Eastern Germans gathered at the Berlin Wall. The event of destruction of the socialist system and establishing of the neoliberal system of the free market can be treated as an act of establishing a new social contract because this swift change resembles the Badiouan political event which according to him can occur in the form of a social contract.² But, can this social contract which in the formal sense of a change does fulfill the criteria of being a new one, amount to the totality of the expressed wills of 'the people' of the Balkan in the midst of the political change? The answer of this question brings us to two possible modes of treating the social contract. First is that the social contract is always already embedded in the formal political system that is put into place and thus is simultaneously a product and a representation of the social contract. This mode represents the more classical approach to the theory of social contract which in the Balkan context can prove problematic when taking into consideration that large parts of the society have been

initially excluded from the decision on the establishment of the new neoliberal political system and as a result they are nowadays prevented from their capacity to genuinely express their political will. Approaching the Yugoslav project from a gender perspective, we can claim that it was a scene of a grand political battle of emancipation against the traditionally patriarchal heritage of the previous kingdoms and at the same time a sophisticated cultural resistance of the gender asymmetry by the silent nationalisms. Thus the political conditions for the expression of the will for a new social contract remained a captured within the male monopoly of political will. The second mode is that which detaches the social contract from the political system and thus points to the tension between the will of the people and the system which is a 'ban' on the will.³ This tension at the same time is the perfect field for politics proper to occur. As Ranciere puts it, everywhere where there is tension, where there is friction, there is the site of the occurrence of the political. It arises as a result of the pressure that certain social groups mount on the society and the system in order to incorporate their will and can thus amount to radical and substantial changes in the political system as a result of that will. We can identify two groups as bearers of the potential for a radical change in the Balkans: the first group is a 'traditional' group in the sense of the persistent presence of the potential for radical political change since it is a subject of a constant historic 'ban' and this group consists of the totality of women in the Balkans; the second groups is a 'new mainstream group' in the sense of the reaction reappearing in the labor conditions which resets the situation to the pre-socialist predicament for the workers as a class-group.

2 Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2005), 344–354.

3 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. D. Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

In order to gain a preliminary insight on the possible presence of any kind of a social contract in the Balkan context nowadays, I believe we should adopt a non-traditional approach to the idea of a social contract – one that frees itself from the initially constructed constitutive character that precedes any other establishment of structure. Disregarding the formal and temporal requirements, I believe we should concentrate the search on the 'will expressed' of the people, simply because the eventual presence of a will can shed light to the social material required to build the will a home – in the form of a political system. Therefore, my thesis supports the position that rather than betraying the whole concept of the social contract, since societies today function even without a significant presence of a visible contractual event, we should look at the effects of the manifestation of what is most fundamental of the contract – the will. Rather than static search for the initial establishment, I propose a dynamic extraction from the current situation. Such a quasi non-essentialist approach does not render the idea of the social contract irrelevant, but on the contrary it attempts to employ the importance of its most fundamental in the politics of the day. A fundamental which I believe is inherent for any kind of social existence.

Three important questions appear in the immediate undertaking of extraction of the will from the current operational mode of our society, those being: Who expresses the will – where can its source be located? How is the will expressed – where can we read the will? How is it effectuated – if there is no contract, how does the current political system achieve a hegemonic status? The answers to these questions can represent a 'Terms of reference' of the social will, thus enabling us to identify whether a contractual effect is present without an actual contract and whether that effect is properly implemented in the form of a political system.

Pertinent to the questions on the will is the issue of freedom in its formulation and expression. Having again in mind Althusser's concept of interpellation and that it is always the subject proper that expresses the 'will' we can claim that the idea of the social contract is subordinated to ideology. Without entering again into the discussion on ideology, I propose to treat the social contract as a mode of reproduction resulting from the interdependency of social structures. Thus, 'the will' can be formulated as an expression of social relations in existence – expression of a political will of women remains a politics of the liberal market competition ideology: more representation, integration, recognition and affirmation against the hegemony of patriarchy. This again might seem that the contractual effect is merely a reflection of what is already socially established. But, if we try to think this in Althusserian lines we come to think of the dynamics of interplay and interdependence of practice - which is always an expression of will and possesses a degree of autonomy (freedom as the means to freedom), and structure - which creates the legal context for the practice to legally exist, as opposed to establishing the precedence of will over structure. Here we should always bear in mind that the final constitution of the social contract always already represents the total assemblage of competing ideologies within a society, which is always and by no exception class patterned.

Answering the first question requires the answer on the concept of the people. This is because the will is always located at the individual (his/her deeds and practice) and it is immediately linked with the second question of the mode of its expression. This link has to be established in order to be able to identify the will which is a genuine (political) expression for the purposes of a contract – contractual effect. After setting this as a theoretical filter for elaboration of the practices, we have therefore filtered

the individuals (collectives) that through that particular kind of practical political expression (of the will) become 'a people' for the purposes of the contract. We have to go from the second question to the first one. The distinction of the political practice from other human practices makes it possible to identify the presence of a contractual will. While we can claim that all human practice reproduces the dominant ideology, it is only the expression of a particular political will which can amount to a will for the purposes of a social contract, which can be in tension with the established political system. Treating the social contract in the lines of a Badiouan event, I claim that we can equate the concept of people in midst of an event with the concept of people for the purpose of the social contract. When Badiou claims that in the midst of an event, the people is made up of those who know how to solve the problems that the event imposes on them, it seems logical to claim that when social structures are formed, the contract is established by those people who bring those structures into existence. I use the concept of people instead of citizens in order to mark a theoretical/political difference. While the citizen is the one who is defined by his relation to the law/system (established social contract), the people is the pre-law/system subject, the political sovereign proper subject capable of introducing a radical political change. But as explained below, the concept of the people and citizens are correlative, since it is the people who express the will and who by virtue of that will immediately become citizens. There is no subject outside of the political. This difference has practical relevance as well. As long as subjects conceive themselves as people they set up the theoretical horizon for the expression of their genuine political will – beyond the politically restrictive law. Herein, fostering a feminist politics which conceives itself as a politics of the people does not fall within the legal restrictions put on citizens – inaugurated through the

system of maintaining patriarchal asymmetric powers, and therefore enables one to pursue a radical political vision which does not fight for a more progressive law, but for a new society that sets up new laws for its citizens.

We can claim that today in the Balkans we have a social contract which is to be found in the (contractual) effects produced by the expression of the will by those who actively participated in the transition process towards *democracy*. But, is this kind of a social contract in line with the Rousseauian idea and is it not undemocratic to claim that a minority of political elites of man who participate in the political process of establishing the new political system can represent the genuine will of the people!? At this point the Žižekian definition of the today's political challenge that is not the one of representation of the majority, but the creation of a new majority, becomes substantially relevant. This contention upholds the thesis that a social contract always exists, if not clearly established, than at least it can be extracted in the shape of contractual effects. But, what matters is the amount of people included in drafting that contract, or legislating as 'a people.' An invitation for mass participation in expression their political will would amount to masses entering the political sphere and confronting today's mass depoliticization. The effectuation of the will would go through the dynamics of political practice affecting the structures, which on the other hand set up the context for the practice, opening a progressive process of ever expanding process of adding new articles to the contract. Every time an article is added a new contract comes into existence. But what are the other options available for a quite different process of a democratic contracting of political systems in the Balkans!?

It is not only the problem of a minority that through participation in the political event of system change

in the Balkans established what is today conceived as a social contract put in action, but it is the democratic character of this will which is undermined as a result of the substantial change in the capacity of being 'a people' for the purpose of social contract (through political expression of a will) of a large part of the society. I consistently use the term 'people' in order to point out the importance of the act which brings them (the people) into being as such, in a similar manner that Rousseau does in *The Social Contract*.⁴ If the social contract emerges as a product of a popular sovereignty through collective expression of will, it supposes that the locus where the act of such an expression takes place is empty of any kind of political system that determines in any way the mode and nature of the expression. It is because of this that the proper expression of the will of the people that establishes a social contract always remains a generic expression which acts as a sovereign will. In that sense, the establishment of the social contract is not a contract that emerges within any established social or political hierarchy, but it is a contract of the body of the society with each of its members. The mode of the transition in the Balkans involved only a small portion of the population (the male political elites) in drafting the new system that was later presented as a result of the general will, while the generic character of the expression of the will of people does not call a certain political action but it only establishes the equality of all persons in the expression of the general will which unanimously addresses the whole of the society.⁵ It is relevant to intervene at this point via a feminist critique. The battle between the concepts of people and citizens is radically important for feminist politics. The women historically

have been forced to fight for their equal rights as citizens (the right to vote for example) because their primordial status of being 'a people' has been eternally rejected. The position of the 'people' who expressed their will was always reserved for man – leading to male conditions of politics, within which women had to integrate and fight for more rights.

The sense in which I use the term people also differs from the one in which the terms people and citizen are merely historical inventions as mediating terms for the concept of the Cartesian subject. In contrast to Rousseau who uses the term people to name those who are collectively associated with the sovereign and who individually call themselves citizens, I use the term people in order to address those who become such by way of exercising their free and equal right of expression of their will that counts as a general will for the mode of social organization or political system. It is only after the exercise of that right that the people become citizen by virtue of the law that they have brought into being with themselves. The processes of becoming of the people and the citizen should be correlative in that they establish a legal subjectivity which is equal to the political pronouncement of their will. By adopting such a standpoint I do not refuse Balibar's claim that the universality, as a perquisite for the expression of a proper political will, could come to the subject only by way of the citizen.⁶ The expression of such will, which is outside of the current frames of the 'social contract' produces the tension, which is to be seen as a class antagonism due to the grip on the will expressed by a tiny minority of the elites, can amount to a rise of a new political sphere.

4 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (London: Penguin, 1968).

5 Alain Badiou, *Polemics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Verso, 2006).

6 Étienne Balibar, "Citizen Subject," in *Who Comes After the Subject?*, ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (London: Routledge, 1991), 45.

Addressing directly the people as a synonym for the people in their Hobbesian state of nature, without the political system to prescribe their positions as citizens, allows us to elevate the discussion on the democratic event in the Balkans from the site of the particular states (which grant the people their citizenship) to the adequate site of the Balkans itself. The necessity for upholding this approach is further explained in the text as a requirement which is crucial for my thesis that the Balkans itself is the lowest instance in which a radical political change can emerge.

In order to be able to claim a new, democratic social contract in the Balkan countries we must take into account that the generic character of the will to be expressed requires this 'equality of all' and it is exactly at this point that we face the greatest political challenge in the Balkans today. Is it possible to draft a new contract that will inaugurate a (new) democracy in the Balkans within the prevailing social and political conditions!? In order to answer this question we must look at the political capacity of the people in the Balkans which is the precondition for their equal and free expression of will that addresses the political system. The conditioning the political capacity (of will) of a great number of people in the Balkans is a direct result the two main drives of the transition: (1) the implementation of *the new* market economy through privatization of the public services and property and commoditization – of the individual life, female sexuality and (2) the maintenance of *the old* traditionalisms in the culture – nationalism and social relations – heteronormativity and patriarchy. A majority of exploited labor, oppressed woman and other social groups being prohibited from belonging to 'the people' put into question the democratic character of the established political structures. In the two decades after the establishment of this system in the Balkan countries

there is an evident tendency to constantly exclude these groups from the policies through a constant decrease of their rights by what their everyday life practices are increasingly illegalized. A direct result of such a process of exclusion is the mass depoliticization of citizens.

A research carried out in Macedonia by the Movement for Social Justice "Lenka" that analyzes the legislation on labor during the transition period from the independence in 1991 until 2010 finds that no matter which political parties were constituting the government, they always legislated laws that shortened the rights of workers and not even once there was a law passed that added to those rights. In an explicit move against the workers, the current political systems in the Balkans have effectively restricted their legal capacity, which within the current hegemonic conviction that the politics in the parliamentary democracy is allowed only within what the law prescribes, has resulted in a loss of sense of politics for thousands.

It is obvious that we are not talking of politics of minority movements, because women's movements have never been such – they represent half of the population. As is the challenge in other parts of the world, feminism in the Balkans is in no way to be essentialised to its locality and culture, since "women, because of their long absence from the scene of knowledge and art, have been incompletely civilized, with no transcendence of their own, and for that reason they still bear within them a coming political potential: they have been integrated into management and into capitalism, but not so much into its political forms."⁷

7 "Sonogram of a Potential," *TIQQUN* #2, no. organ of liaison within the imaginary party: zone of offensive opacity (2001), <https://tiqqun.jottit.com/>.

On 8th of April 2010, the Macedonian Parliament passed the law on anti-discrimination which excluded discrimination based on sexual orientation as a legal basis to sue the offenders. From the elaborated perspective of the social contract, this move was defended publicly as if it was against the public will to grant such rights to gays and lesbians. The political system represented in the parliament did claim its sovereign right to legislate in the name of the 'people' while that legislation did not correlate with the will of that part of society to which it explicitly addressed. When Balibar explains the process of how the beings are simultaneously people, citizens and subjects he insists that there must be an exact correspondence between what the citizen legislates (through the expression of the will which establishes the sovereign) and what the citizen obeys (as a subject of the sovereign power).⁸ In this case we are confronted with the lack of correspondence between what the citizen surrenders from their natural freedom with what they gain as legal persons. It is here that Agamben's claim that the original political relation is not one that is founded on a virtual social contract, but one that is a ban. He argues that the political system is established by the very operation of the sovereign power which is not founded on a contract and which regulates life even to the point of excluding certain forms of it from what is legally possible.⁹

What we witness today in the Balkans is a great obstacle in attempting to sketch out any kind of theoretical conclusion regarding what is to be termed as a social contract of a general will in the countries, especially because the mechanisms for the people to act as sovereigns are considered to have been consumed with their initial expression of their political will for a change

of the socialist regime. What is currently taking place can be described as a unilateral operation of sovereign powers in the Balkan countries which constantly actualize the political within the societies through Agamben's *ban*. It is exactly the 'ban' that constituted the core of transitional policies in the Balkans that followed the logic of restricting of as much citizens as possible from the access to public healthcare system and public education - through constant cutting funds and changing legislation and expelling the citizens from what used to be a public space and now is a private property. It is through the operation of the sovereign power that the two important aspects of citizen's life (education and healthcare) are constantly pushed beyond the law, into the deregulated competition of the 'free market' where women have to compete as equal men - since the terms of the market are exclusively a masculine ideological construction.

Radical possibility – the only Balkan possibility

If the current political conditions in the Balkans push us to the conclusion that the social contract is nowhere to be found, then the act that we must undertake is to move forward by analyzing the possibilities of new radical democratic acts which will inaugurate the event of a social contract. How can therefore a new contract come into existence in the Balkans and why it is the Balkans and not the particular countries, the site for the political event which can amount to a new social contract? To start this act we must again go back to the crucial moment of the change of the political systems in the Balkans. If, as elaborated above, this change did not correspond with the proper expression of the will of the people, it would mean that there has not been a genuine political event - therefore no political change in the status of people has taken place. Given the circumstances in which the

8 Balibar, "Citizen Subject."

9 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

change took place in the Balkans, we witnessed the site of the political being hijacked by small political elites, who after this act, have succeeded in their claim that the political system shaped in their interest represents the product of a general will – a social contract. After two decades of building a hegemonic status, the post-transitional political system has failed to fulfill a basic democratic requirement, that of incorporation of the will of people in the very mode of the political structure. They have been thrown again into the bulk of legal networks, into the tiresome process of translation of ideological codes/discourses in order to shape a proper systemically logical/legal leftist politics.

The argument that has been consistently advocated by the ruling elite is that the representation of the general will is duly ensured through the process of free elections. This argument has indeed narrowed the democratic procedure of expression of the political will of the people to a mere choice of the personalities who will exercise the already given sovereign power of the established political system. The will expressed for the representation through elections cannot be equated and cannot count as a social contract. For Rousseau and Badiou, the general will cannot be represented by the available modes of political systems. For them, politics is not an issue of representation through electoral system in a political system, but about the presentation of a people to itself. Thus, the main challenge in our context is the presentation of the peoples of the Balkans to themselves. The dramatic events that occurred throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2014 represented such a presentation of the people to themselves. The system was thrown in an out of joint position from which it could not claim the social contract, the established representative institutions, because they were simply burning. What followed was a recuperation of the state institutions

within the space left vacant due to the lack of institution new efficient structures by the people's plenums in the Bosnian cities. But the new social conditions remain in existence, the people of Bosnia now represent something else in relation to the legally defined citizen.

This challenge is to be articulated nowhere else but in the political itself. Given the process of mass depoliticization, the main emancipatory act in the Balkans today seems to be the politicization of the citizens in order to claim the capacity of being a people who express their equal political will as a will that precedes – or in the given Balkan context, is even indifferent to the established political system. The quest for a social contract or a democratic contact in the Balkans thus becomes a genuine issue of re-rendering the political itself. This political issue is to be located exactly in the tension between that what is established as a political system and the will of those who are consistently denied of their capacity to shape it according to their will. This is what Ranciere calls a politics proper when he describes the phenomenon which occurred for the first time in history in Greece when the members of the demos, who had no firm position determined part in the political system, beyond the protest of what they suffered as a result of being expelled and requested that their will be recognized as an equal claim with that of those in power, they claimed that they represented the whole people.¹⁰ Žižek claims that this act of a particular part which is a non-part (I claim that ideologically the women are a non-part of the political - refused in the very act of democracy/politics), from the viewpoint of the system, is the gesture of politicization of those who were left outside of the formal politics. It is in this sense that he claims that politics and democracy are synonymous.¹¹ Thus the process of contracting a new

10 Jacques Rancière, *La Mésentente* (Paris: Galilée, 1995).

11 Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 2000).

democracy for the Balkans involves a destabilization of the established system arising from the politicization of those against which the prime political relation is established in the form of the Agambenian ban.

The political subjectivization of those who are banned from the genuine expression of their political will in the Balkans today can only occur as a result of a proper political event. The argumentation that I use here relies on Alain Badiou's concept of subjectivization. Since the will of women and workers and other marginalized groups in the Balkans cannot be represented at all, and even less through the process of counting votes that only aims the legitimization of certain groups to exert power in the name of the sovereign who establishes a rule of the majority against the egalitarian concept of the social contract, it is only that through the opening that a proper political event provides that these groups can be politically subjectivized and thus present themselves as people. A proper political event for Badiou is an event that appears out of the void of the situation, which in the Balkan context is the space left outside the law by the sovereign power, an event which inaugurates a new political truth which means nothing according to the laws of the situation. It is then up to the subjects to recognize this event as such and to link themselves with it eternally via their fidelity to the event that produces them as political subjects, as militants of the new political truth.¹²

Having in mind that after the change of the political system in the Balkans we did not encounter a political subject that would act as a militant of the new truth, but to the contrary, we are witnessing mass depoliticization of citizens, I claim that the change of the systems did not amount to a proper political event, and as such

it could not produce a political truth. One could also argue that those who participated in the event of the change of system did actually represent the whole of the people, but it is precisely the nature of the event that it did not occur out of the void, that it was nothing new (since it was already present in the 'west'), and that the novelty was just a pretext for a minority to exercise the power in the name of the sovereign over the majority, disregarding the egalitarian principle, that renders it insufficient of categorizing it as a proper political event. When a political claim is made by a people in the midst of an event who see themselves as representatives of the whole of the people, this claim is substantially tied to the Universal via the egalitarian idea that all those who agree on the new law will later be equally subordinated by that law.

It is only through political events that the women and labor can claim to represent the whole of the Balkan people and it is exactly through their politicization that a tension with the established political system does amount to a politics proper. This undertaking in the Balkan context is not without its contextual obstacles. Nationalism as one of the main by-products of the transition in the Balkans does play an important role in fundamentally splitting the social material not only in the Balkan as a region, but also inside the separate countries. It is because there was not a political subject born out of the event of the change of the system in the Balkans, that the gap created by mass depoliticization was loaded with nationalism. This loading substituted the political expression of the will of the people with the nationalist idea of ethnicity as a ready given social contract. Since it was not a result of a proper political event, in order to reinforce its status as a social contract of the people belonging to a certain ethnic group, the nationalist ideology had to bring in the historic myths

¹² Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001).

and narratives which were enforced through the image of 'the other.' It is because of the reinforced image of 'the other' in the Balkans that a particular group will always fail in its claim to represent all the people in events that could amount to proper political events, since they are always recognized as being tied to only a certain ethnic group which does not represent all the people. When ethnocentric states re-appeared in the post-Yugoslav political and geographical space, the ethno-nationalist reaction to the feminine was twofold: first as an internal repression within the ethnic groups – in line with the traditional patriarchy which fueled nationalism for centuries and second as external attack on females of 'the other' as a means of warfare during the Yugoslav wars.

I claim that it is not the ethnic composition of the Balkans that influences the political systems which do not represent the will of the people, but on the contrary, the ethnic tensions are a reflection of the political elites attempting to elevate the ethnic aspirations into national ideals and national ideal into regional Balkan politics. Thus, the politics of a new democracy for the Balkans is not to be founded within the solution to the current ethnic tensions as such, simply because they are a product of the political system established against the will of the people. The political challenge in the Balkans today is to recognize the common political ground of people as political subjects who politically express their will that produces the sovereign which is not a reflection of an ethnic claim. The women in all the Balkan states represent a people's potential which trespasses the ethnic boundaries because they have been a victim of the capitalist-nationalist ideology by virtue of their gender and not of an ethno/linguistic identity. The process of entering the true political site is not concerned with the ethnic issues as long as there are ethnic groups that as such are not expelled from the political.

I consistently speak of the Balkans in disregard of particular countries because I consider the Balkans itself as the lowest instance of a possible radical political change for several different reasons. Agamben's description of the original political relations as a relation of a ban and not of a social contract, in the Balkan context means that the establishment of sovereign powers (separate countries after the breakup of Yugoslavia) has aimed at splitting the fabric of the people of the Yugoslav federation exactly for the aim of introducing new sovereigns to be ruled by the political elites. While the people could have properly expressed their will within the existing federation, it was the political elites that refused to keep sharing the federative power and thus forced the people into smaller parts, restricting the site for their expression. Any new political subjectivization of the people in the Balkans would be a novelty in the sense that it radically escapes the splitting logic of the political elites of the Balkans through establishing a new site of the sovereign that would be the Balkans itself.

Another reason that makes this democratic movement into a new political site in the Balkans a viable one is the common inherited consequences of the transition. If the real economic categories of life are similar throughout the Balkans (high unemployment, exploited labor, discriminated women) it is only the logic of the ethnicity that keeps the Balkan people apart, which is the one that has been used to undermine the political capacity of these people through depoliticization, than their political subjectivization should run exactly on a path that escapes this logic. The act of popular expression of the will must always remain tied to a certain locality without establishing a particularity,¹³ that means that a political event that occurs in one of

13 Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject To Truth*, 1 edition (Minneapolis, MN: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2003), 111–112.

the Balkan countries no matter that remains within the locality where it happens, it has the potential to radically change the political composition of the whole of Balkans. It was recently that the occupation of the Philosophical Faculty of Belgrade by its students has sparked student movement in the Skopje University. This event provides that an act of expression of the will of students as one of the not-counted groups in the Balkan politics, no matter that it is tied to the local circumstances in Belgrade, does speak in the name of all students since it is properly recognized as an event with a universal value by the students from Skopje.

The traditionalisms that were introduced in the post-Yugoslav Balkan context in order to support the nationalist ideology of mutilating the proper political concept of the social contract with the idea of a contract among the people of a certain ethnic group reinvented the heteronormative values in the Balkan society. Before claiming that it is females that are today marginalized in the Balkans, it is rather more important to notice the process of heteronormative prescription of positions within the political system that marginalizes the universal concept of equality of the expression of the will of the people (that is of a group beyond gender identity) which if it had been expressed via a true political event would be maintained through the fidelity to this concept - equality as an axiom. It is because of the absence of the social contract, of the true political event, that the heteronormativity is introduced as a principle in the Balkans, which in the absence of the becoming of the people that introduce politics beyond gender identity, prescribes them gendered asymmetric positions within the political system.

We can claim that today we have a mutation of the concept of citizens because the people have not yet become such (people) via the expression of their will. Without the

people, the necessary correlativity cannot be fulfilled and therefore the citizens cannot be citizens proper, but they are merely such in the sense that they are subjects of law, which on the other hand performs the role of the ban to their citizenship which should be correlative to their becoming a people. The consequences for the women here are obvious – they are not even merely citizens, but rather 'citizens in attempt' since the law that they are challenging is to them a foreign material of which social relations are build. Or as we read in 'Don't Believe You Have Rights': "The difference about being a woman is that woman found her free existence by leveraging herself not on the given contradictions, present within the social body, but on the contradictions that each individual woman had inside her, and which had no social form to them before receiving one from feminine politics. We ourselves, so to speak, invented the social contradictions that make our freedom necessary."¹⁴

In attempting to think the political in the Balkans in the lines of a new social contract, we should bear in mind Zizek's criticism of the theory of social contract which he sees as a fantasy that covers over the brutal advent of the law. The outcome of the social contract (the free and equal persons) he says is posited as one of its prerequisites in which the constant threat of Hobbesian violence of all against all reappears in contract theory with respect to those who do not consent, who remain outside of it. Put in Balkan context, Zizek's criticism fully supports the argument that the exploitation, heteronormative and ethnic violence is a result of the current social contract. But, against the fetishization of politics without a social contract, I claim that there is a possibility for a social

14 "Don't Believe You Have Rights [translated as Sexual Difference]," *Libreria Delle Donne (Women's Book House)*, 1987.

contract in the Balkans that would be a product of the expression of the political will of the people in the precise sense in which Žižek sees politics as being synonymous to democracy.¹⁵

Marx corrects Hegel in his claim that history repeats itself twice with the remark that the historical events first occur as a tragedy than they repeat as a farce.¹⁶ The breakup of Yugoslavia was genuinely a tragedy for the will of the people, because the path in which it took place did not leave any space for that will to be politically expressed. The establishment of new countries in the territory of Yugoslavia was a clear farce in relation to the will of the people, because it was based on the interests of a minority composed of political elites that exploited the idea of nationalism in order to conceal the general will within the nineteenth century idea of national state which was supposed to perform as the new social contract of the people who were already deprived of their capacity to be a people. This capacity was substituted with the ethnic capacity through which they derived the subjectivity as citizens. It is that perverse combination of the concept of citizen and ethnicity which through the attempt to establish a kind of political correlativity between those two, resulted in ethnic cleansing and war with the other 'citizens.' Without the universality of the egalitarian principle of political subjectivization, the politics was carried out as a bare militancy of one particular against another.

I will conclude the argumentation on the political becoming of the people in the Balkans as a radical democratic challenge to the established political system, by reiterating the crucial points in my claim that a (new)

social contract in the Balkans is to be achieved through proper political events. It is from Alain Badiou that we understand that real events occur in politics, science, art and love, as unpredictable appearances that originate from the void of the situation and such establish new conditions of the situation, unknown before the event.¹⁷ Does this mean that it is impossible to engage politically for contracting a new democracy for the Balkans since the politicization of the people depends on the political events that cannot be planned, prepared or predicted, that would confirm Lyotard's doubt on whether a revolutionary discourse is possible at all!? If the establishment of a social contract through expression of the will of the Balkan people via which they bring themselves into becoming is of the same order as the true political event, than the political event is immanent in the people. The political challenge in the Balkans today can be formulated as a political undertaking of emancipation that fights the current neoliberal depoliticization. It is only through the political subjectivization that the current Balkan citizens can achieve the correlation with the concept of people which than can ensure a proper democratic drafting of a social contract. This process of politicization that leads to a free and equal expression of the will of the people in the Balkans will no doubt establish a new field for the political as a new political site that is *indifferent* to the particular political systems that cut through the social fabric in the Balkans today and create irrational antagonisms between the citizens of the same people. It is the fight for the political claim to politics as such, that the expelled groups of the void of the Balkan situation, through the local claim of the universal, can speak for the whole of the Balkan people, thus bringing them into being as such in the very Balkan instance.

15 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 189–190.

16 Slavoj Žižek, *First As Tragedy, Then As Farce* (London: Verso, 2009), 1.

17 Badiou, *Ethics*.

References

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by D. Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Badiou, Alain. *Being and Event*. Translated by Oliver Feltham. New York: Continuum, 2005.
- . *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. Translated by Peter Hallward. London: Verso, 2001.
- . *Polemics*. Translated by Steven Corcoran. London: Verso, 2006.
- Balibar, Étienne. "Citizen Subject." In *Who Comes After the Subject?*, edited by Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy. London: Routledge, 1991.
- "Don't Believe You Have Rights [translated as Sexual Difference]." *Libreria Delle Donne (Women's Book House)*, 1987.
- Hallward, Peter. *Badiou: A Subject To Truth*. 1 edition. Minneapolis, MN: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Rancière, Jacques. *La Méésentente*. Paris: Galilée, 1995.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract*. Translated by Maurice Cranston. London: Penguin, 1968.
- "Sonogram of a Potential." *TIQQUN #2*, no. organ of liaison within the imaginary party: zone of offensive opacity (2001). <https://tiqqun.jottit.com/>.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *First As Tragedy, Then As Farce*. London: Verso, 2009.
- . *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1989.
- . *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. London: Verso, 2000.