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Biopolitical Other

In the beginning of this short text, which will discuss the question of the postmodern Other, I will propose that the post-Other, or Other in the postmodern condition, be called the biopolitical Other. The thesis is as follows: when we think about the question of the Other in the contemporary condition, which for want of a better definition and following Lyotard could be named postmodern, the dominance of the biopolitical Other can be observed on a global scale[1] .

In approaching the question of the biopolitical Other, I will not follow the path usual in problematizing the biopolitical. When thinking about biopolitics, the usual path begins with the creator of the term, Foucault, to theorists who adopted and somewhat changed its original meaning, such as Agamben and others. I will approach the term of the biopolitical Other using terms borrowed from political theory which problematizes notions such as State, sovereignty, Nation-State, Law, international Law. I will begin the analysis starting with some aspects of the notion of sovereignty, problematized in the 1920s by Carl Schmitt and relate it to the notion of biopolitics, recently popularized by Agamben. But the path to the notion of biopolitics will be slightly different than Agamben's.

In his approach to the question of sovereignty, Schmitt draws attention to the relationship between the sovereign, as the highest point of authority, with Legal order and Law. For instance, if we think about an imaginary genesis of the Legal order, we can observe an 'unthinkable' hole, a gap between the chaos of the pre-political, natural state and Legal (rational) political order.

Law order and legislative authority cannot originate from chaotic state of nature or war of all against all.

The contest between conflicted parties that are seeking the highest authority first has to end in order to establish conditions for the Legal order and Norm. This fact implies the pre-existence of the highest, indivisible point of authority, the point of sovereignty. In Schmitt's words: „Every general norm demands a normal, everyday frame of life to which it can be factually applied and

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which is subjected to its regulations. The norm requires a homogeneous medium. There exists no norm that is applicable to chaos. For a legal order to make sense, a normal situation must exist, and he is sovereign who definitely decides whether this normal situation actually exists. All law is 'situational law.' The sovereign produces and guarantees the situation in its totality " (13).

The opposite also applies: the sovereign watches over and generates the situation to which Legal order can be applied, so he can suspend the legal order in emergency situations in order to regain a normal situation. In Modernity, the suspension of valid law is based on a free act, sovereign decision about the state of exception: „Sovereign is he who decides on the exception" (Schmitt 5).

A logical conclusion ensues from these concepts: if the sovereign decides about the suspension of the legal order “he stands outside the normally valid legal system, he nevertheless belongs to it, for it is he who must decide whether the constitution needs to be suspended in its entirety” (Schmitt 7).

So the Sovereign is in a paradoxical position. He is at the same time inside and outside the Legal order, the Norm. At this point the Law is abandoning itself, relating towards an outside, incorporating it. Every Legal order is seeking to encompass and to “take the outside” (Agamben 18). The Sovereign, as the one with the power to suspend legal order, to decide about the state of exception, represents “the point of indistinction” (Agamben 30) between inside and outside, between chaos and a normal situation, between norm and the state of exception.

In Modernity the concept of sovereignty does not lose transcendence, it is restored as the “inner power of negation” (Balibar 140), self-determination and self-reference, allowing for the establishment of order on its own foundations, guaranteeing its own conditions. “Transcendence can never be dissociated from the radically antinomian figure of power” (Balibar 140), where the inside is transformed into the outside, order into disorder, norm into exception.

For Schmitt, the relationship between law and sovereign power which is ‘above’ the law (power which can suspend law) is historically materialized as the relationship between law and territorial division of the Earth in the concept of the Nomos. Sovereign power is always expressed through imposing a border and territorial division of the Earth. The antinomical figure of sovereign power is transfused into the system of territories and borders materialized by the modern State, and into the relations of war power and agreements between States. “The State is manifested as a historical

subject within institutionalized war and international order…"(Balibar 138). The system of States through the distribution of territory defines the inside and the outside, war and disorder, war and peace and the relation towards the Other (in this case the Other sovereign territory). Thereby, the State governs its internal territory as a homogenous whole in a sovereign manner, securing order. Schmitt shows that throughout the history of the State, sovereignty actualizes the primacy of the territorial dimension in grouping and naming the populace, having as a consequence the primacy of the border as the point of concentration of decision-making and power. However, the border is the key place where the usual legal state remains suspended. At the border the monopoly of legitimate violence takes on the form of "preventive counter-violence" (Balibar 140). In the system of States and the territorial division of the determined by the balance of power and the international order, the state of exception is localized at the border.

Historically, such legal order is founded on the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, which introduced the primacy of territorial division in contrast to religious division, and the taming of the war (subduing war to national goals and proscribing means and rules of war). The most important contribution of the Westphalian system is the end of wars of destruction and war of extinction by means of limiting war.

The concept of 'justus hostis' (with the criminalization of the internal enemy), the equal enemy, is separating war from any substantial reasons, such as justice, belief or religion (Odysseos and Petito 7).

The relation with the Other is defined through the balance of power and war force and the conflict and antagonism between sovereign entities.

Symbolical Level

This relation of antagonism and negation can also be observed on the symbolical level. For instance, in Hegel's interpretation, antagonism, Negative relation, conflict, and war are the key factors in building (collective) individuality and self-consciousness[2] (in other words, collective identity).

Speaking about sovereignty in the “Elements of Philosophy of Right”, Hegel states that the individuality of the sovereign State as the exclusive being-for-itself which can have an indefinite negative relation toward itself, appears as the relation toward other states. He gives two moments of sovereignty: 1. The indefinite negative relation toward itself is the sovereign exceptional state which abolishes all singularity and Law, the indefinite right of the sovereign to dispose of the lives of his subjects, 2. The negative relation toward the self appears as the negative relation toward the Other through war and antagonism (Hegel 359-361).

Hence, during war the subjects sacrifice their own individual lives for the "immortal" material and symbolic being of the state and the people, name, nation, the Lacanian Master signifier. Here we have the image of the “ethics of the Master” (Zupančić, “Ethics”) who puts his life on the line in order to gain freedom and self-consciousness.

In this interpretation, to gain its own identity, political community must be in a relationship of negation towards the Other, such as the relation between Us and Them. The Other, defined through the relation of negation, is a symbolically articulated Other, because symbolic relation is differential. The identity of each element is defined through the difference towards an opposite element. In a symbolic relation each element stands as a whole. In this case that integrity is materialized in a state apparatus, homogenous territory, the previously described system of states and the territorial division of the Earth through international Law. The being of a stable sovereign state secures transcendence and stability of a symbolic identity. Every sovereign entity as a transcendent power has its one symbolic identity with a transcendent feature (as Benedict Anderson pointed out). Therefore, the Other is symbolically articulated and is defined by the differential relation.

After 1914 three major processes led to the transformation of the Westphalian system of states: the appearance of the space-less and ‘generic’ international law and its institutionalization, first through the League of Nations and then the United nations, the changed meaning of war, collapse of imperialism and the domination of the United States in the sphere of international relations (Odysseos and Petito 11).

Postmodern Condition

What is the situation today, in a postmodern, global world after all these changes?

Many authors suggest that the logic of the modern sovereign State as a territorially determined container of power, bounded by borders undergoes a radical crisis and change. The generation of power within “the global network society” (Castells) follows a spatial logic different than that of the border-determined territorial modern sovereign State. Power is not territorially limited; it spreads through 'space of flows', creating a deterritorialized network system of power, controlled at intersections. Hardt and Negri speak of a new sovereignty, the Empire, as a decentralized and deterritorialized apparatus of government, which has open borders. The Empire governs hybrid identities and adjustable networks. The borders determined by the logic of sovereignty become delocalized and deterritorialized, losing their previous function (and getting a new one).

On the ideological level, the politics of negation of the Other and the classic ideological political engagement and practice was replaced by the politics of inclusion of the Other, tolerance towards Differences, deconstruction of the One (One Idea, One culture, One community), inclusion of the subaltern and repressed.

However, as some authors suggest, the politics of inclusion of the Other respects the Other only if he is similar and stripped of all antagonism, placing him in the realm of the Imaginary (Badiou 24, and Zupančić, “Ethics” 225-226).

What are the consequences of the described condition?

The identities of modern political communities (nation-states) that were based on relations between power, war and force, as Schmitt described, are losing their symbolic effectiveness (Levi-Strauss’ term). The transcendence of sovereignty is no longer established through the relation with the Other. Therefore, symbolic identity is losing its transcendent feature. The logic of postmodern power is not based on a differential relation towards the Other. The power relations are 'flowing through the network' and not exclusively through the relationship with the Other. The logic of postmodern power, and not just philosophical critique, is deconstructing the One, taking away its transcendent feature.

Consequently, the effectiveness of the Master-Signifier (the identity of the nation for example), established through war and power relations between sovereignties, is lost in a globalized or 'postmodern' World. In more general terms, as Badiou, Žižek, Zupančić, following Lacan suggested, we can observe a complete downfall of the Master-Discourse or grand ideological narratives (as Lyotard concluded) or, in Nietzcshe's terms, the rise of nihilism and the dominance of the university discourse, expert knowledge.

The question is what happens with the transcendence of sovereignty as the zone of exception, the point of indistinction between norm and the state of exception, the inside and the outside, the law and force that was localized within the borders and territory in the previous system? The transcendence of sovereignty is not lost; it is blended with the norm, causing the overlapping between the state of exception and the normal (Agamben). The negativity of transcendence, the state of exception transfuses outside the borders and becomes blended with the normal state. The suspension of law becomes a rule. The violence of the sovereign becomes the rule and transfuses outside the borders, outside the division between the internal and the external, order and disorder. The external becomes the internal and vice versa.

That fact completely changed the nature of war (Hardt and Negri, "Multitude").

As Hardt and Negri pointed out, the political project of modern theories of sovereignty was to put an end to civil war and the constant state of war by isolating war at the margins of society, the borders, and limiting it to exceptional times. Only the sovereign authority could wage a war and only against another sovereign power.

"War was expelled from the internal national social field and reserved only for external conflicts between states" (Hardt and Negri, "Multitude" 6). The enemy was a sovereign entity, the equal iustus hostis, who was localized temporally and spatially.

Today's wars are waged not against political communities or even real individuals (who is Osama bin Laden?) but against abstract ethical enemies - evil itself, destruction, death, genocide, atrocities, murderers, criminals, killers, terrorists, enemies of humanity etc. These enemies are everywhere and nowhere, they are here and nowhere, now and forever.

As a consequence, Hardt and Negri conclude, the limits of war are rendered indeterminate, both spatially and temporally. That kind of war has to be won every day, forever, it must involve continuous exercise of violence and power.

“War has thus become indistinguishable from police activity” (Hardt and Negri, “Multitude” 14). Preemptive security wars are the perfect example of converting war into police action.

In the era of globalization the differences between police actions and war and inner and outer uses of force has vanished.

”The state of exception has become permanent and general; pervading both foreign and homeland relations” (Hardt and Negri, “Multitude” 7).

Permanent state of exception includes the continuous will for violence, force and destruction.

Will for Violence as a Form of Nihilism

In a passage in “Beyond good and evil” Nietzsche links ““goodwill” – a will to the actual, violent negation of life[3] with a metaphoric notion of the “newborn ‘Russian’ nihilin” (Nietzsche 100). More generally speaking, when he analyses the notion of nihilism in “The Will to Power”, he defines nihilism in a form of “powerful destructive force” as “active nihilism” (Nietzsche, “The Will” 17). So, the permanent state of exception as the continuous will for violence, force and destruction can be defined, in Nietzsche’s terms, as “active nihilism”. How can we understand this claim?

For better understanding, I will approach the question of active nihilism and nihilism in general through the logic of will (or desire).

When Hegel defines free human will in “Elements of Philosophy of Right”, he exposes the basic fact that every determined object of the will (desire) is underlined by pure Negativity, Nothingness, Void (embodied in Lacan’s object petit a). Put differently, the substance of human will (desire) is the lack of substance, pure Negativity.

He writes: “The will contains a) the element of pure indeterminacy or of the ‘I’’s pure reflection into itself in which every limitation, every content, whether present immediately through nature, through needs, desires and drives, or given and determined in some other way, is dissolved; this is the

limitless infinity of absolute abstraction or universality, the pure thinking of oneself (Hegel 37). The possibility of the absolute abstraction of every determinate content of the will is connected to excessive attachment to a particular object, some Cause that stands for the void of Nothingness.

As Žižek pointed out, “that it is crucial to bear in mind the co-dependence between detachability from any determinate content and excessive attachment to a particular object that makes us indifferent to all other objects…an object which…acts as a stand-in for the void of Nothingness…It is the very formal structure of the reference to Nothingness that enables us…to become ‘passionately attached’ to some Cause…”(Žižek, “The Ticklish” 107-108).

This reveals a basic fact concerning human desire (or will); “it is always mediated by Nothingness: the true object-cause of desire is a ‘metonymy of lack’, a stand-in for Nothingness (for Lacan object petit a)” (Žižek, “The Ticklish” 107).

But this possibility of abstraction of every content and object can be set as a goal of the will. So, in certain situations man can (or rather) will Nothingness.

Hegel was well aware of this possibility: 1. “If the will determines itself in this way, or if representational thought [die Vorstellung] considers this aspect in itself [für sich] as freedom and holds fast to it, this is negative freedom or the freedom of the reason. This is the freedom of the void, which is raised to the status of an actual shape and passion” (Hegel 38).

One way of defining the ‘postmodern condition’ is to observe the downfall of the Master-Discourse, the atmosphere of disbelief in some higher Cause, the end of grand ideological narratives, or to explain the impossibility of creating supreme universal (transcendent) values (as I tried to do in this paper). Those definitions are similar to Nietzsche’s definition of nihilism. For Nietzsche nihilism means the devaluation of supreme (transcendent or ideological) values; the lack of common, universal Cause, Meaning of Being (Nietzsche, “The will” 11) .

In this 'nihilist condition' will is deprived of its precious (valuable) object - sublime Cause, Meaning etc. Without the defined valuable object, Nothingness becomes the object of willing. As Nietzsche said: „it (will) needs a goal-and it will rather will nothingness than not will“ (Zupančić,” The Shortest” 64).

Hegel points out the fact that when willing Nothingness (through the freedom of the void) is set as a goal in the political domain, it is only a fury of destruction: "…but if it turns to actuality, it becomes in the realm of both politics and religion the fanaticism of destruction… Only in destroying something does this 'negative' will have a feeling of it's one existence [Dasain]" (Hegel 38). When this fury of destruction cannot be converted into something positive (a new value) it coincides with Nietzsche's notion of "active nihilism".

This means that the continuous (normalized) 'active nihilist' state of exception, the will for violence, this ongoing antagonism cannot be symbolized by ideal Cause, Meaning, grand ideological narrative etc. Negative will for destruction does not open any new symbolic debt establishing a new social bond. If the continuous 'active nihilist' state of exception means killing individuals, for victims there are no symbolic redemptions or notions of sacrifice because, in a 'nihilistic atmosphere', there is no higher Cause to sacrifice for. The possibility of dying in a lawless state without the chance of sacrifice coincides with Agamben's definition of homo sacer. Homo sacer is a man (person) who can be killed (without punishment, like in a lawless state – state of exception) but not sacrificed[4] .

As a consequence, we can observe the global visibility of violence (violence across borders), "cruelty" (Balibar 125), and atrocities that cannot be symbolized. They exist on the level of the Lacanian Real.

One way in defining the Lacanian Real is through the logic of the relationship between abstract elements.

If we observe the relationship between elements or poles, on the level of the Real, relationships are characterized by direct overlapping of opposite poles (elements); each pole directly crosses to its opposite; each pole is in itself already its own opposite (Žižek, "The Sublime" 194).

The Sovereign, as I defined it earlier, is on the level of the Real. The Sovereign, the one who has the power of suspension of the legal order, or the appearance of the state of exception, is on the level of the Real because it represents the point of indistinction between the outside and the inside, between chaos and normality, between rule and exception. When the state of exception overlaps

with the normal, as today, on the political level, the relations between entities are transferred to the level of the Real.

Post-Other as Biopolitical Other

But, what about the Other in the current condition?

So, in the current condition we have a dominance of the Other, or post-Other, on the level of the Real. The post-Other is the radically different, completely other Other which is characterized by two opposite poles which are directly overlapped. This radical Other comes in two 'formless' shapes, it is at the same time the monstrous, threatening Other and the decomposed, scattered Other. For instance, the post-Other enemy is at the same time the absolute, monstrous, superhuman enemy, ontological enemy and non-human, banal or subhuman object of ethical pity and compassion. At the same level, the post-Other brings destruction, death, horror, but when observed differently, it is weak, decomposed, victimized, the object of help.

Dominant perceptions about Iran are a good example of post-Other. Iran is observed as a neo-Nazi, radical Islamic nuclear power full of killed, abused, sentenced-to-death women.

Humanitarian war perfectly represents the dialectical unity between the threatening monstrous Other and the decomposed, victimized Other, the subject of pity and compassion. It is waged against a destructive, killer agent (state, terrorist) in order to protect victimized groups and individuals.

Furthermore, in ethnographically and anthropologically well-documented cases of institutional policies and public opinions toward immigrants, foreigners, and asylum seekers the world over, two directly interchangeable extremes are visible. They are at the same time the subjects of threat and endangerment to security and objects of compassion and pity, scattered people, the sea of bare (physical) humanity (Fassin, Rajaram and Grundy-Warr).

Elaborating in Nietzsche's terms, the threatening monstrous Other is the active nihilist Other, the Other that denies life actively and truly, the Other that wills Nothingness, violence and destruction, such as a suicide bomber. The other side of this destructive post-Other, this active agent, are the

decomposed remains, the powerless, victimized, pitiful, scattered Other, the sea of bare physical humanity, the Other who is decomposing and disintegrating.

Why did I call this post-modern Other biopolitical Other?

Because post-Other is emerging only in so far as life is a referential point of politics, when politics is dominantly biopolitics[5] .

Analyzing the origins of biopolitics and adding to Foucault's thesis, Agamben argues that biological life is becoming a referential point of politics only through the relation towards the Sovereign and his power of inclusion/exclusion, inner/outer that defines the political. He states that "It can even be said that the production of a biopolitical body is

the original activity of sovereign power. In this sense, biopolitics is at least as old as the

sovereign exception" (Agamben 11). A part of his analysis traces the origin of bare life and biopolitics in the Western political and metaphysical thought and tradition. For him, biopolitics is as old as the sovereign exception and can be traced in archaic politics. I will not argue with Agamben's historic analysis[6] but I will try to explain how and why bare life has become the effect of sovereign power.

Arguments in this paper try to point out that bare life as such emerges in a normalized state of exception (but as a form of nihilism) and from the foundation (and degradation) of modern political communities that I have described. Life emerges as a dominant political value only from dominant nihilism and, vice versa, nihilism is endorsed by the centrality (biopolitical care) of biological life.

The logic behind this statement is as follows: when all supreme, transcendent values (Causes, Meaning of Being) are devaluated, the neutral 'field' of Being emerges. Because there is no valuation left only the integral equality of Being remains. "Life designates the integral equality of Being" (Zupančić, "The Shortest" 87). Pure or bare life emerges only 'against' the nihilist lack of transcendent value.

After losing the valuable goal, will finds itself in a position of willing nothingness with neutrality of life in the background. Because there is no value of life outside life it negates life from outside (excluding it), without the possibility of creating new values or values within life itself. The

devaluation of supreme values creates a nihilistic attitude towards willing Nothingness, an active nihilistic approach which can only negate life, “to the actual, violent negation of life”, excluding it. This active nihilist exclusion is a part of a nihilist ‘neutral’ stance which already includes life, making it the locus of political power.

This is another path to Agamben’s ‘formula’ of bare life: bare life is life that may be killed (without punishment in the state of exception) and yet not sacrificed (to some symbolic Cause, Order etc) (Agamben 12). Also, it sheds a slightly different light on Agamben’s thesis that: “together with the process by which the exception everywhere becomes the rule, the realm of bare life -- which is originally situated at the margins of the political order -- gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, bios and zoe, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction“ (Agamben 12).

Appearance of bare life as the locus of politics is co-independent with the normalization of the state of exception, but as a form of nihilism.

After these conclusions, what can be said about biopolitics? As Foucault stated, biopolitics cares about life. I can add that biopolitics cares about life in a specific ‘nihilist’ way. It cares about life which is under the constant threat of annihilation and disintegration; it represents

some kind of affirmation of that ‘disintegrating’ life. But what kind?

It cares about life in s specific nihilist way through “passive nihilism”.

In Nietzsche's work active nihilism is always accompanied by its 'passive' counterpart, “passive nihilism[7] , but not as one next to the other or active 'and' passive nihilism as separate entities but rather one as a reaction to other, passive nihilism as a defense against active nihilism in a unity, where one is 'at the same time' the other. So, 'against' the newborn Russian nihilin who is violently negating life there is a “sedative of skepticism, paralysis of the will“. As Zupancic pointed out: “Nihilism 'as such' is the configuration wherein the will (or desire) is captured in the alternative between directly 'willing Nothing(ness) itself' and not willing. In this sense, nihilism is not a general category that then falls into active and passive nihilism; it refers to the very tension spanning the space between these two figures or alternatives - it does not exist outside this space. Active and

reactive nihilism are mutually co-dependent and, as such, they constitute what is generally called nihilism“ (“The Shortest” 66-67).

The affirmative process is a reactive force of passive nihilism which is not active in a strict sense, but represents some form of a “tranquilizer” (Zupančić, “The Shortest” 135), trying to counterbalance the destructive force of pure negation. This passive-affirmative process is the foundation of the biopolitical care about life through various discourses and the power-knowledge relation.

I will not go further into the analysis of the various aspects and consequences of the biopolitical Other’s dominant appearance or into some alternatives for the current condition.

To briefly conclude, the post-Other is the biopolitical Other, the de-localized Other who is questioning the foundations of contemporary politics and challenges political and philosophical thought.

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[1] This does not mean that the other 'forms' of Other are totaly erased. The statement is pointing out prevailing global tendency.

[2] Dialectics of gaining self-consciousness start with imaginary genesis through antagonism between master and slave in “Phenomenology of Spirit”. In other words, with negative relation towards the Other.

[3] It is useful to ask: why is Nietzsche referring to life when he analyses the notion of nihilism, why life is referential point of nihilist negation? I will address this question later in the text.

[4] I intentionally used this definition of the homo sacer because in the chapter “Homo sacer“, where Agamben traces the origins of that notion from the archaic Roman law it is plainly stated: “The sacred man is the one whom the people have judged on account of a crime. It is not permitted to sacrifice this man, yet he who kills him will not be condemned for homicide; in the first tribunitian law, in fact, it is noted that "if someone kills the one who is sacred according to the plebiscite, it will not be considered homicide." This is why it is customary for a bad or impure man to be called sacred.“ (Agamben 71) When interpreting this statement, Agamben produces further generalization claiming that this statement “preserved the memory of a figure of archaic Roman law in which the character of sacredness is tied for the first time to a human life as such.“(71) Fest’s definition of ‘homo sacer’ is the basis for Agamben’s definition of ‘bare life’: “the life of homo sacer (sacred man), who may be killed and yet not sacrificed. „(12)

[5] Defining biopolitics Foucault stated that on the threshold of Modernity, biological life entered the political domain in a way that it was being subjected to explicit calculations of State power and the ongoing power-knowledge relation. Unlike the classical deployment of power, where the Sovereign was the master of death taking lives of his subjects, modern power is on the level of life itself; caring about life, controlling it, fostering, calculating with its processes etc. (Foucault 143)

[6] It requires a careful analysis of texts and sources.

[7]„ Nihilism. It may be two things:a)Nihilism as a sign of enhanced spiritual strength: active Nihilism.b) Nihilism as a sign of the collapse and decline of spiritual strength: passive Nihilism.“ (Nietzsche „The will“ 17)



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