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# THE CONSTRUCTION OF POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITY: THE CASE OF IMMIGRANT WORKERS IN SLOVENIA\*

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## ABSTRACT

This article deals with the political subjectivation and desubjectivation of immigrant workers in Slovenia. It explores ontic and ontological views on their subjectivation by framing them in the socio-historical context of post-Yugoslavian migration dynamics. At the ontic level a Critical Discourse Analysis of media texts is presented showing how the political subjectivation and desubjectivation of immigrant workers is constructed in public discourse. The article explores discursive strategies of victimization, reification, animalisation and subjectivation. The article explores the notion of (de-)subjectivation at the ontological level using the Laclauian logic of naming to explore the political representation process.

**KEY WORDS:** Naming, representation, (de-) subjectivation.

## LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE LA SUBJETIVIDAD POLÍTICA: EL CASO DE LOS TRABAJADORES INMIGRANTES EN ESLOVENIA

Este artículo trata sobre la subjetivación y desubjetivación política de los trabajadores inmigrantes en Eslovenia. Explora las perspectivas ónticas y ontológicas de su subjetivación en el marco del contexto socio-histórico de las dinámicas migratorias de la post-Yugoslavia. En el nivel óntico, se realiza un Análisis Crítico del Discurso de los textos de los medios en el que se muestra cómo la subjetivación y desubjetivación política de los trabajadores inmigrantes es construida en el discurso público. El artículo explora la noción de (de) subjetivación en el nivel ontológico usando la lógica del nombrar de Laclau para explorar el proceso de representación política.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Nombrar, representación, de (subjetivación).

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### I. INTRODUCTION

According to Rancière, politics is always a negotiation, a controversy, a struggle for the very recognition of the disadvantaged party's political existence. Rancière names this struggle for the existence of the political subject the process of political subjectivation<sup>1</sup>. This article aims to rethink political subjectivation in the light of the case of immigrant workers in Slovenia. I wish to show how political representation has worked in the case of immigrant workers and how it has influenced their political subjectivity. Furthermore, I intend to demonstrate the role public discourses have had in the construction of the political (de-)subjectivation of immigrant workers in Slovenia by critical discourse analysis of media texts. The notion of representation adopted in this article is two-fold. When speaking of representation, I adopt Laclau's understanding of the logic of political representation outlined in the following pages. However, this article analyses media representations of immigrant workers, and in this sense representation could be understood as it has been defined in cultural studies by Hall<sup>2</sup>. The decision in favour of an analysis of media discourse is grounded in the assumption that on the one hand the media represent, construct and "reflect" the dynamics of certain social phenomena, and on the other hand they also explicitly and implicitly take a precise political position when dealing with certain social phenomena. For instance, in the case of immigrant workers the media adopted an advocatory role regarding immigrant workers and advocated for their rights as well as representing and constructing immigrant workers by framing them in a specific subjectivity. Therefore, both instances of representation are important in what will be presented in the following analysis.

Firstly, this article challenges concepts of subjectivation by questioning the classical notion of political representation and placing it in the context of contemporary critical theoretical reflections. The article aims to explore the media construction of immigrant workers in Slovenia by showing how the process of representing them politically influences their political subjectivation.

Secondly, the article reflects the contribution of Laclau's theory of political representation, in which political representation is strongly associated with the identification and political subjectivation process.

The aforementioned perspective on subjectivation and representation will be applied to the Slovenian case of immigrant workers and their movement IWW (Invisible Workers of the World). In exploring this process I will focus on the language and discourse level. Selected media texts on

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1 Oliver Davis, *Jacques Rancière*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 84.

2 Cf. Stuart Hall "The Work of Representation" in *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, ed. S. Hall. (London: Sage, 1997), 13-74.

immigration issues will be analysed with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approaches. Using the logic of representation, I will show how political subjectivity is created by applying the logic of naming and how (de)-subjectivation occurs in discourse by undertaking a CDA of media discourse, thereby reflecting on both the ontological and ontic aspects of political representation.

What follows is a contextualization of the situation of immigrant workers in Slovenia, in which a broader socio-historical perspective on the matter is given in order to provide an insight into the current issue of immigrant workers in Slovenia.

## II. CONTEXTUALIZING LABOUR MIGRATION IN SLOVENIA

After the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991, communist values were replaced by nationalist discourses that reaffirmed the territorial division of the former Yugoslavia and ensured that socio-cultural boundaries between the countries were firmly established. After a short military conflict, Slovenian identification politics began a process of differentiation from everything that signified 'the Balkans' i.e. - socialism, communism, and the perception of Balkans nationals as ethnically different. Since the 1990s the Slovenian pursuit of a fully constituted new national identity has given space to nationalist, traditionalist, and pro-European discourses with a strong orientation towards pursuing the so-called 'European ethos'. After its secession from Yugoslavia, Slovenia was constituted on the idea of democracy, while human rights supplied an element that was in harmony with the process of differentiation from the Balkans, and the approach to Europe<sup>3</sup>. Perceiving Slovenia as essentially European implied that it had acquired "the current style of metapolitics (that) teaches us ... that man and citizen are the same liberal individual, enjoying the universal values of human rights embodied in the constitutions of our democracies"<sup>4</sup>. The basic principle of the new Slovenian state, therefore, relied primarily on human rights, freedom, and democracy. "Europe" was seen as an idealized embodiment of democratic values that were also to be pursued in Slovenia in order to distance it from an undemocratic communist political regime. Generally speaking, the publically accepted assumption was that there should be no human rights violations in Slovenia or in Europe<sup>5</sup>, based on a belief in the automaticity of the progress towards "equality" and "democracy" that Slovenia had made by joining the EU. As previous

3 Cf. Andreja Vezovnik, *Diskurz*. (Ljubljana, Fakulteta za družbene vede, 2009).

4 Jacques Rancière, "Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization" in *Identity in Question*, ed. John Rajchman (New York, London: Routledge 1995), 69.

5 Cf. Jasminka Dedić, Vlasta Jalušič and Jelka Zorn. *Izbrisani: organizirana nedolžnost in politike izključevanja*. (Ljubljana: Peace Institute, 2003).

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analyses have shown<sup>6</sup>, there is a widespread belief in the idea that Slovenia is founded upon human rights, which started to be automatically implemented on its entry to the EU.

Despite the general assumption of interconnection between Europe, democracy, and human rights, the story of immigrant workers tells a completely different tale, as democratic standards and human rights remain aspirations, and not yet political practice. To use Laclau's terminology, at this point the idea of a democratic Europe functions as a myth; a space of representation or a principle of understanding in a given situation, the features of which remain beyond what can be represented in the space created by the given structure. The objective condition for the formation of a myth is a dislocation of the existing social structure, which undoubtedly occurred in Slovenia on its secession from Yugoslavia. At that time, the myth of democratization penetrated a dislocated and contingent structure. Its aim was to suture the dislocated field by forming a new space of representation, by constructing universal ideas, such as human rights, which actually carried out hegemonic operations. In a certain way the myth of democratization still struggles to become a stable social imaginary as the myth of Slovenian national foundations is still the prevalent paradigm.

The process of symbolic differentiation of Slovenia from "the Balkans" mostly affected the first and second generation of Ex-Yugoslavians who had been living in Slovenia since the 60s or since the 80s when immigration from other Ex-Yugoslavian countries was at its peak<sup>7</sup>. Apart from various forms of discrimination in everyday life and in the media, ex-Yugoslavians in Slovenia suffered severe violations of human rights. In 1992, 25,000 ex-Yugoslavians (known as the Erased of Slovenia since 1995) were illegally erased from the Register of Permanent Residence of Slovenia resulting in their loss of citizenship. This political act was a grave human rights violation<sup>8</sup>. However, the process of Slovenian Europeanization was ambivalent to a certain extent, as on the one hand a strong othering of the Balkans occurred, while on the other hand Slovenia had to be loyal to European discourses on democracy and human rights. Within this framework Slovenia welcomed Bosnian refugees during the Balkan war.

However, this act turned out to be more one of hostility<sup>9</sup> than of hospitality, by which the power of the Slovenian hosts was exercised over the Bosnian guests. These power relations were analysed at the public

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6 Ibid., Andreja Vezovnik, »Kritična analiza političnih diskurzov o izbrisanih v žanrih mnenjske zvrsti« *Družboslovne razprave* 26 (64) (2010): 45-62.

7 Janez Malačič, "Labour Market Immigration in Slovenia: from Immigration of Citizens to the Employment of Foreigners" *Naše gospodarstvo* 54 (1-2) (2008): 45-53.

8 Cf. Neža Kogovšek Šalomon, "Pravni vidiki izbrisa iz registra stalnega prebivalstva". (PhD diss., University of Ljubljana, 2011).

9 Cf. Jacques Derrida "Hospitality" *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*. 5 (3) (2000): 3-18.

discourse level. During the 90s, media discourses in Slovenia were full of discriminatory and xenophobic talk when reporting on Bosnian refugees in Slovenia<sup>10</sup>. However, in the last decade, the Slovenian media started introducing the self-serving morality of pity and victimhood that had also been adopted by the international community<sup>11</sup>. Although the rhetoric on Bosnian refugees changed, the general xenophobic climate against other groups of ethnically Non-Slovenians (asylum seekers, illegal immigrants, Roma, the Erased etc.) persisted. This vivid mixture of xenophobic media discourses was sporadically interrupted by seemingly more democratic ones, exemplified by the human rights discourse that has become the predominant paradigm in left-wing (according to Slovenians<sup>12</sup>) public discourse and the media over the last decade<sup>13</sup>.

In the most recent period, explicit hate-speech, discriminatory and xenophobic rhetoric may no longer be detected, especially in what is popularly known as the “left-wing media”. The reason for its disappearance lies primarily in the strengthening of the public discourse on democracy and respect for human rights. This shift is especially evident in the aforementioned case of the Erased, whose rights were championed by the “left-wing” media using a human rights discourse<sup>14</sup>.

Migration issues in Slovenia must be understood within this framework. The issue of immigrant workers is very complex and is constituted by its social, economic and legal dimensions<sup>15</sup>. The social history of economic migrations in Slovenia could be highlighted in one sentence: “from immigration of co-citizens to the employment of foreigners”<sup>16</sup>. The quote implies that what had previously been seen as an innocuous flow of economic migrants from the less to the more developed ex-Yugoslavian republics since the 1960s, had become a key ideological problem from Slovenian independence onwards<sup>17</sup>.

10 Cf. Marjeta Doupona Horvat, Jef Verschuere and Igor Ž. Žagar. *Pragmatika legitimizacije: Retorika begunske politike v Sloveniji, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. (Ljubljana: Peace Institute, 2002).

11 Cf. David Campbell *National Destruction: Violence, Identity and Justice in Bosnia*. (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1998), Cf. Erica Bouris *Complex Political Victims*. (Bloomfield: Kumarian Press Inc., 2007).

12 Here I adopt the popular division between “left-wing” and “right-wing” media in Slovenia. While the right-wing print media (Reporter, Demokracija) are implicitly or explicitly politically connected with “right-wing” political parties and were founded in the transitional period, the “left-wing” is so-labelled because it has continued to exist since the socialist period when it played a critical/alternative role in the press (Mladina) or indeed was the national press (Delo, Dnevnik).

13 Ibid.

14 Cf. Vezovnik, »Kritična analiza«.

15 I summarize the issue by using material posted by the IWW workers’ rights organization. Accessed August 17, 2012, <http://njetwork.org/lzhodisca-in-zahteve-IWW-Nevidni>

16 Malačič, »Immigration«

17 I do not wish to idealize the status of former co-citizens in Slovenia before the secession from Yugoslavia. The social distance existing between Slovenians and immigrants from other

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According to statistics gathered by the Slovenian Employment Service, Slovenia issued 85.302 working permits in 2008, 58.750 in 2009, 40.688 in 2010, and 27.010 in 2011<sup>18</sup>. According to Slovenian employment legislation, an immigrant worker can obtain one of three different statuses: the posted worker permit, the seasonal worker permit or the temporary worker permit. These may be replaced by an individual working permit. However, this becomes possible only (1) after the immigrant worker has been working for the same employer continuously for two years and (2) if the worker has completed at least a fourth-grade education. The policy is supplemented by the quota system managed by the government that directs immigrant workers to sectors in need of them<sup>19</sup>. All these measures militate against immigrant workers achieving equality with Slovenian citizens. These legal barriers are complemented by the strategies of cunning employers, who tend to lengthen the period required for their workers to gain personal working permits by moving them between different firms, changing their legal statuses and by other manipulations that make the worker completely dependent on his employer.

The economic dimension derives from this legal status and is a significant component of the economic immigration issue. The legal inferiority of immigrant workers leads to (1) unpaid and underpaid extra working hours<sup>20</sup>, (2) harassment and extortion, (3) unpaid leave, meals and sick leave, (4) denial of the right to the 13<sup>th</sup> salary, (5) and changing working visa, equipment and training costs for the immigrant worker.

In turn, the economic and legal factors are complemented by social segregation: a low quality of life due to poor nutrition, long working hours, poverty and inadequate living conditions in special housing, leading to the complete removal of the worker from the rest of society. Workers have to reside in special housing and often even in containers. Their housing is segregated, overpriced, unsuitable in terms of space and living conditions as well as overcrowded. Workers cannot choose from the alternatives on the market because their life is completely managed by the construction companies for which they work. Consequently, the housing regime allows an efficient control over the immigrant workforce<sup>21</sup>.

The media, especially the "left-wing" media, has been covering the issue of immigrant workers since 2009. We now no longer face explicit

republics existed before 1991. However, after 1992 this social distance was legitimated in law and policy.

18 Accessed August 17, 2012, [http://www.ess.gov.si/trg\\_dela/trg\\_dela\\_v\\_stevilkah/zaposlovanje\\_tujcev](http://www.ess.gov.si/trg_dela/trg_dela_v_stevilkah/zaposlovanje_tujcev)

19 Polona Mozetič »Nevidni delavci sveta: zaposlovanje in delo "neevropskih" državljanov tretjih držav in režim delavskih domov" *Časopis za kritiko znanosti*, XXXVII (238) (2009): 34.

20 Most immigrant workers work in the construction sector for between 200 and 240 hours per month for a salary of around 500 euros. Barbara Bezec »Migracije in lateralni prostori državljanstva" *Časopis za kritiko znanosti*. XXXVII (238) (2009): 23.

21 Cf. Mozetič, »Nevidni delavci«

xenophobic or nationalist rhetoric, but rather an advocatory discourse. In one way or another the main feature of advocatory discourse is the advocacy of immigrant workers' rights. Therefore, articles in defence of the rights of the immigrant workers were selected as advocatory. My analysis addresses advocatory discourse by analytically dividing it into two periods. In the first period the subjectivity of immigrant workers was almost absent in media texts. Their voices rarely appeared and they were almost exclusively constructed as victims. In the second period, IWW (Invisible Workers of the World) has emerged as a bottom up initiative. In this period the media have started to represent immigrant workers' voices and construct them as political subjects. As media discourses reflect public discourses on subjects as well as constructing them, I consider advocatory media discourse a relevant source for the following analysis.

I now turn to the theoretical and methodological framework that requires further clarification before introducing the empirical part of the article.

### III. THEORETICAL PATHWAYS

The fundamental theoretical concept of this article derives from the notion of discourse and the understanding of the political. In Laclau's theory both are closely related to notions of antagonism, hegemony, and the empty signifier. The political will be considered ontologically primary. In classical political theory, politics and political reality are closely bound to citizens' rights, elections and institutional forms of political representation. Politics is understood to be a separate system (parliament, labour unions, political parties etc.) called the political system that seems to function independently from society, culture etc. I wish to introduce an alternative understanding of the political. I believe that all fields where decisions are made (the private domain, the economy, science, everyday life) are fields of political conflicts and struggle – the subpolitical<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, the political cannot be reduced to the political system (political reality) but has to be understood as inherent to every society. I will thus be building upon Lefort's idea that "... the political is revealed, not in what we call political activity, but in the double movement whereby the mode of institution of society appears and is obscured in order to define the political."<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, like Gramsci, Schmitt, Lefort and also Laclau, I see the political as ontologically primary to the social. While the political is constitutive of the social and represents the moment of decision in an

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22 Ulrich Beck *The Reinvention of Politics: Rethinking Modernity in the Global Social Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 97-104.

23 Claude Lefort *Democracy and Political Theory*. (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988), 11.

ontologically undecidable terrain, the social is a consolidated field of social practices<sup>24</sup>.

At the same time the article deals with another ontological notion, *discourse*. The notion of discourse I introduce here is two-fold. First, discourse is understood as “the discursive field”, meaning the ontological category in which each object is always already a discursive object<sup>25</sup>. Within this perspective I have adopted Laclau’s theoretical vocabulary, as it will allow the problem to be seen from a wider interpretative view.

However, a methodological apparatus for the concrete analysis of discourses is missing from Laclau’s theory. Although, “Laclauians” or the so called Essex School undertake empirical studies<sup>26</sup>, they have not developed a common methodological approach for the analysis of concrete discourses. Therefore, for this purpose I adopt CDA approaches in order to explore discourse as an empirical category. In CDA, one or several discourses represent only one of the possible objects within society, whereas the others could be the economy, law, different institutions, and so on.<sup>27</sup> However, the division of social objects is mostly analytical for the purpose of this article. Framing discourses as separate objects in society is only an analytical tool, as discourses always exist in relation with other objects. They emerge from, relate to and constitute other social objects and belong to the broader “discursive field”. Although I am aware of the epistemological, ontological and theoretical differences between the theoretically heterogeneous field of CDA and Laclau’s post-structuralist and/or post-marxist theory of discourse I do not have the space to discuss them at this point<sup>28</sup>. However, in this article, I use CDA as a strictly linguistic and methodological tool to analyse concrete discourses and do not adopt CDA theories on discourse, and use Laclau’s theory of discourse instead.

Within Laclau’s field of discursivity, we usually deal with many different articulations<sup>29</sup> of the concrete discourses that I will frame empirically using CDA. These concrete discourses are usually aimed

24 Ernesto Laclau “Ideology and Post-Marxism” *Journal of Political Ideologies*. 11 (2) (2006): 112.

25 Ernesto Laclau *On Populist Reason*. (London: Verso, 2005).

26 Cf. David Howarth and Jacob Torfing (eds.), *Discourse Theory in European Politics: Identity, Policy and Governance* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). David Howarth, Aletta J. Norval and Yannis Stavrakakis (eds.), *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000).

27 Cf. Foucault, Michael *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*. (New York: Phanteon Books, 1971) and Norman Fairclough *Discourse and Social Change*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

28 Cf. Andreja Vezovnik, *Diskurz.*; Andreja Vezovnik, *Diskurz*: Foucault, Laclau ter zapopadanje dihotomije med diskurzivnim in zunajdiskurzivnim. *Šolsko polje*. 20 (5/6) (2009): 25-46; Andreja Vezovnik. Kritična diskurzivna analiza v kontekstu sodobnih diskurzivnih teorij. *Družboslovne razprave*. 24 (57) (2008), 79-96.

29 Articulations are all the practices that put different discourses in certain (often antagonistic or hegemonic) relationships while changing them as a result of the articulation. The structured totality that is the result of articulatory practices is seen as the field of discursivity. Cf. Ernesto

at the hegemonic position, and are therefore in constant antagonistic relationships. In the case of immigrant workers the neoliberal discourse on the exploitation of immigrant labour was in a constant *antagonistic relationship* with the advocatory discourse expressed in concrete political *demands* aimed at solving the status of immigrant workers. These demands may be very particular, such as for better working conditions, better salaries and housing; or more universal, against the neoliberal appropriation of the workforce, against the exploitation of workers, for democratization, for human rights, etc. Similar demands were expressed by various Slovenian pro-human rights groups and organizations (especially IWW) and were vigorously supported by the advocatory discourse appearing in the “left-wing” press. As Laclau explains, all of these similar demands tend to be interlinked to form a *chain of equivalence*. As it works towards a common interest, this chain forms a common opposition to an oppressive regime or another antagonistic discourse. Within one such chain of equivalence, usually one demand emerges strongly and becomes the signifier for the whole chain – and may be considered an *empty or universal signifier*<sup>30</sup>.

The empty signifier is the bearer of a demand that emerges as universal in a particular chain of equivalence and therefore institutes universal meaning in the given circumstances. Such a demand is always part of a broader discourse (the advocatory discourse in this case) and works as a *nodal point* around which discourses are articulated. When this happens, such a signifier begins to function hegemonically. Therefore, the empty signifier represents the demands of a whole chain, while at the same time it retroactively constitutes the very same demands. This operation is called the *logic of naming* in which the process of representation – i.e. the relationship between representatives (advocates) and the represented (the workers) – is not transparent and one-way, but rather constitutes the identity of the represented themselves<sup>31</sup>.

#### IV. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In the empirical part of this article, I will mainly focus on concrete discourses that will mainly be analysed methods from CDA, which, as already suggested, will be used to analyse advocatory discourse. By drawing on specific authors who work with CDA (Fairclough, Reisigl & Wodak, Richardson), I aim to show the relationship between socio-cultural practices and media texts or discourses and to reveal how social knowledge,

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Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).

<sup>30</sup> Laclau, *Populist*, 131.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 101-117

and hegemonic and power relationships are reproduced and legitimized in media discourses<sup>32</sup>. I do not uncritically embrace CDA in order to analyse the linguistic level of discourse, as there are many heterogeneous approaches to it that vary in how they define their conceptions of language and/or discourse. Rather, I focus on the aforementioned authors and their work on how vocabulary, grammar, and discursive strategies<sup>33</sup> contribute to the linguistic realization of an advocacy discourse and the collective identity position it creates for immigrant workers.

I will thus present a discourse analysis of 117 journalistic articles published in the Slovenian press, including articles published in areas such as national news, society and business, and in special editions on Saturdays, when articles most frequently appear as feature stories. I was not interested in the classic nationalist and xenophobic rhetoric appearing mainly in the “right-wing” media, as it has already been extensively analysed, and chose to analyse only media that has its roots in the largest socialist print media<sup>34</sup>, of significant public relevance due to its visibility, large readership and long tradition. I analysed print and on-line versions of articles from two leading Slovenian print media organizations in terms of readership, production and number of on-line news readers - *Delo* and *Dnevnik*<sup>35</sup> and the critical political weekly *Mladina*. An analysis of op-ed press on the issue of the Erased<sup>36</sup> has shown that *Delo*, *Dnevnik* and *Mladina* are comparatively more oriented towards promoting democracy, human rights and Europeanisation, and are publically known as “left-wing” papers and were therefore selected for our analysis. The fact that notions of democracy and human rights are frequently considered as self-evident and unproblematic in such media was a further motivation to select them for my analysis. Along these lines, Richardson states that:

... the sourcing and construct of the news is intimately linked with the actions and opinions of (usually powerful) social groups; it is impossible to select and compose news without a conception of the target or intended audience; and, while *possible*, I believe that it is flawed to consider issues such as contemporary democratic politics, social values and the continuing existence of prejudice and social inequalities without reference to the formative influence of journalism.<sup>37</sup>

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32 Cf. Fairclough, *Discourse*.

33 Cf. Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*. (London: Routledge, 2001)

34 Cf. Igor Vobič, »Global Trends of Online Journalism in Slovenian Print Media“ (PhD diss., University of Ljubljana, 2012).

35 Vobič, »Global Trends«, 10.

36 Cf. Vezovnik, *Diskurz*.

37 Cf. John E. Richardson *Analysing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

I therefore analysed texts published from January 1st 2009, when the first feature stories on the immigrant workers started to appear in Slovenian media, until December 31<sup>st</sup> 2011, when the collection of empirical data was completed. The analysed texts were obtained from press clippings found in the on-line databases of these newspapers. All articles that included the key-words *immigrant, immigration, immigrant worker(s), SCT, Vegrad*<sup>38</sup>, *IWW (Invisible Workers of the World)*<sup>39</sup> were included in the analysis. 20 such articles were found in Mladina, 34 in Dnevnik and 63 in Delo. The arguments that follow include examples of statements taken from the 117 articles that emerged from CDA as the most illustrative enunciations of the different aspects of advocacy and IWW discourse.

In the first part of the analysis I will show how the empty signifier of human rights that emerged from advocacy discourse affected the desubjectivation of immigrant workers, and I will demonstrate how workers' demands were retroactively constructed by the advocacy discourse. I will claim that a primarily democratic demand of the workers was suppressed mainly because the empty signifiers of democracy and human rights were those that most strongly emerged from the advocacy discourse. The advocacy discourse ultimately boiled down to a victimizing humanitarian discourse that suppressed the workers' democratic demands and their political subjectivation. I shall now focus on the desubjectivation of immigrant workers, first presenting how immigrants are constructed as victims showing how this happens at the language level, especially with the discursive strategies of victimization, animalization and reification.

## V. DESUBJECTIVATION

### VICTIMIZATION

I have previously stated that the "left-wing" advocacy media discourse of Europeanization descends from the universal ideas of human rights and democracy. I will now show how the advocacy discourse boils down to victimization and humanitarianism at the language level by analysing the rhetoric of human interest stories.

One of the basic features of human interest stories is the attempt to elicit empathy from the reader for the feelings of the group that is being represented. In the case of immigrant workers this operation usually takes place through the narration of their life stories. Such rhetoric works by appealing to readers by means of constant references to everyday human

38 SCT and Vegrad are two main construction companies and the most publically disputed.

39 In Slovenian language the key words are *migrant, imigrant, imigracija, priseljenc, delavec migrant, SCT, Vegrad, IWW, nevidni delavci sveta*.

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life, regardless of ethnic or class affiliations<sup>40</sup>. Everyday life is a common and fundamental feature of our existence, and appealing to the audience at this level seems to be a permanent fixture upon which meaning can be constructed. "The central focus of these story-type(s) is on individuals caught up in untoward and often uncontrollable circumstances which bring radical dislocation to the procedures and routines of everyday life. The emphasis on such stories is regularly narrated through a focus on relatively well defined 'characters' and often inflected through some reference to 'personal tragedy'"<sup>41</sup>. By framing the story in terms of individual workers, the reader connects to and sympathizes with the subject represented therein. However benevolent this strategy might seem, it may have negative implications. Mainly, the basic operation carried out by such rhetoric moves the problem of immigrant labour from the political to the existential level. Advocatory discourse puts the focus on the individual tragedies of the workers and at the same time completely omits discursive representations of their political activity. At the discourse level this leads to the desubjectivation of a political subject. The following example shows how the rhetoric of human interest stories works.

(1) *"I survive with the help of the Red Cross and social assistance. I have been in Slovenia for 33 years, I served in the army at Škoffa loka. I have lived whole my life here. I have torn food away from my mouth so that I could send money to Bosnia to my wife and children, now I cannot even do this. I cannot go on, because my heart aches so much that I want to cry."* (Delo, 23. 9. 2010)

The above example is a worker's personal narration introduced to make the reader more sensitive to the problems of immigrant workers. In order to direct the Slovenian reader's identification with the worker he is constructed on the basis of his ethnic affiliation. He is almost portrayed as a Slovenian, as "one of us". In this way the author attempts to include the immigrant in the Slovenian imagined community. This is further strengthened by his stating he served the army in Slovenia and has been living in Slovenia for the past 33 years. Therefore, he seems distant from his Balkan origins as he only sends money to Bosnia. The narration portrays a common story of the worker's daily life as a struggle for survival. Conversely, this moves the reader's attention towards the existential and private topics particularly revealed by the reference to the ascetic worker's everyday life. What seems to be important for the immigrant worker is reduced to surviving mechanisms in order to meet his bread winning obligations. Although poverty might not be common to all readers, the worker's personal narration aims at providing the reader with some common identification points, namely trying to survive by working hard and trying to take care of the family. This

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40 John Langer *Tabloid Television. Popular Journalism and the 'other news'*. (London in New York: Routledge, 1998), 30.

41 *Ibid.*, 35

is also achieved by the use of the metaphors of tearing food away from his mouth, meaning big sacrifices and heartache, and severe emotional pain.

Metaphors are conceptual instruments that embody otherwise amorphous or remote concepts in ways that the public can readily understand. Metaphors allow readers to grasp an external, difficult notion of society, such as poverty, in the terms of a familiar life experience. Therefore, metaphors can be a means for politicians or the media to gain social control<sup>42</sup>.

Lastly, the above example clearly illustrates how the story is constructed in terms of framing. By framing the story with individual workers' stories, the focus is moved from immigration as a primarily political matter to immigration as a private matter. This is successfully done by adopting the rhetoric of human interest stories.

Another mechanism of catching the reader's attention is represented by the following headline: (2) *The hunger strike of deceived Kočevje workers as a metaphor for what will soon be the future of half of Slovenia.* (Mladina, 19.3.2010). The headline appeals to the Slovenian community by threatening it with the fate of the immigrant worker. In order to create a greater impact on the reader, dramatization is also achieved by the use of hyperbole – 'half of Slovenia'. In contrast with the previous example calling for empathy, the headline creates a point of identification based on threat and sensationalism. Both discursive strategies produce strong points with which the average reader easily identifies.

Workers' personal narrations of were frequently complemented by views on the matter from unionists, Red Cross workers, politicians and social workers. The following example is a quotation by a Slovenian social worker who expresses her view as follows:

(3) *"The workers who come to us are decrepit, they do not have anybody to borrow money from. They express intense distress and regret about having to ask the municipality for help, as they have worked hard for years and years. Above all they are most concerned that they will not be able to pay the bills. In the past few days those we already helped in August have come back. They tell us that they do not have even one euro left, that they cannot provide for their families...and that despite this they are very polite and mild-mannered. I couldn't imagine that someday we would need to face such severe distress"* says Mrs. Verbič who was really touched by the stories of poor Vegrad workers. (Dnevnik, 5.10.2010)

In addition to the aforementioned division of the private and the political, in the above example, the rhetoric of human interest stories has a stronger impact on the reader by using a direct quotation by a Slovenian social worker. In this case Mrs. Verbič works as the identification point so the

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42 Ana Otto Santa "Like an Animal I was Treated': Anti- Immigration Metaphor in US Public Discourse" *Discourse Society*, 10 (2) (1999): 195.

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reader may identify with her feelings rather than with the socially distant feelings of immigrant workers. Here workers are constructed as innocent docile victims. They are first of all “decrepit”, but “they remain very polite and mild-mannered”, “they regret having to ask the municipality for help”. The construction of docile victims can be also interpreted as a call for the reader’s empathy. As the worker is no longer constructed as a job stealer but rather reduced to a helpless victim he does not represent a threat to Slovenian society and can be pitied.

While in the first example the reported speech comes from the worker, the third example above presents the narration of a Slovenian social worker. In both examples, the human interest rhetoric is also achieved by the explicit intertextuality shown in Mrs. Verbič’s and the worker’s reported speech. Fairclough<sup>43</sup> believes that quoting a first person narration gives the reader the impression that the statement is important or dramatic, as well as creating a stronger impact on the reader<sup>44</sup>. The enunciations gain extra credibility through reported speech, especially because they both describe the impact of the situation on their feelings “*I cannot go on, because my heart aches so much that I want to cry.*”

From this perspective, a linguistic construction of the workers as victims is particularly evident. Interestingly, the workers are never called to any kind of political action. When political actions such as strikes are involved, texts tend to represent leaders of labour unions as political subjects, while workers are omitted again. I will now show how the desubjectivation of workers was radicalized by their reification and animalization.

### ANIMALIZATION

In order to strengthen aspects of victimization and otherness, a comparison of workers to animals is frequently made. The connotations of assigning workers features and actions traditionally associated with animals should be abundantly clear. Otto Santa<sup>45</sup> states that in the west a purported ‘natural’ hierarchy has been articulated to justify social inequality. “In its full extension it subordinates other living creatures to human beings ...”<sup>46</sup> The use of biological determinism is used to maintain social advantage over immigrant people. The most frequent discourse strategy in this case is analogy. Reisigl and Wodak state that:

... analogies are rhetorical techniques employed for equating predication and argumentation strategies.

43 Cf. Fairclough, *Discourse*.

44 Richardson, *Analysing*, 105.

45 Otto Santa, “Like”, 201.

46 *Ibid.*

Making explicit and implicit *comparisons*, or drawing *analogies* between actual events and fictitious ones, often fulfills a persuasive function similar to the invention of unreal scenarios that are designed to function as an 'illustrative example' in an argumentation. They additionally serve to minimize or exaggerate.<sup>47</sup>

In the case of immigrant workers we mostly face two types of analogies. Those explicitly and directly comparing the immigrant worker to an animal and those implicitly implying that workers adopt animal behaviour or that describe actions that humans usually adopt towards animals. In the first few examples I provide explicit analogies. Most frequently workers are compared to dogs.

(4) [workers are] *worth less than a dog*<sup>48</sup> (Delo, 23.9.2010)

(5) *I worked for 40 years all over Europe, now I am leaving like a dog.* (Dnevnik, 6. 10. 2010)

(6) *If one works from seven to seven one do not need anything more than a bed, a chair and a table as in the evening one is tired like a dog.* (Delo, 10. 2. 2012)

(7) *Queen Hilda used to threaten us like dogs.* (Dnevnik, 5. 10. 2010)

(8) *We were packed into the rooms like the livestock that is transported on trucks.* (Dnevnik, 31. 1. 2009)

When characterized as animals, immigrants are portrayed as less than human, which sets up unmistakable divisions of expectations. In example 4 the analogy of worker as a dog is even radicalized. Dogs are less than human and in this case metonymically speaking workers are less than dogs. While a dog can be man's best friend, loyal and well treated as a pet, here the connotation is exactly the opposite. In example 5 the worker sees himself as being loyal to "Europe" (his master) for 40 years (expressing longevity), but now he is forced to leave humiliated *like a dog*. Especially in example 4 and 6 the comparison with dogs comes from common Slovenian idioms. For instance "tired like a dog" means being exhausted from hard work. The interpretation on the connotative level clearly expresses the following. The value of life is highest for humans. Animals are owned and due to the hierarchy of life based on progress they can never be human. Their inferiority is inherent. This is made even more explicit in example 7 when the manager of the construction company Vegrad - Hilda Tovšak is represented as the Queen, namely the master, while the workers are compared to dogs. This implies humans have complete control over animals, from ownership to use as a food source or in this case as a work force. Animals are either domesticated, or are wild and consequently outside the dominion of human society, and can be hunted<sup>49</sup>. Therefore, the act of capturing the animal for

<sup>47</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse*, 109

<sup>48</sup> All bolds added by A.V.

<sup>49</sup> Otto Santa, »Like«, 202.

some purpose and having it “kept” in inhuman conditions is expressed by example 8 – *packed in like livestock* – where one of the workers compares their living condition to the poor conditions livestock suffer during transportation.

On the other hand we face implicit analogies describing actions that are commonly attributed to animals (*to roam, to be fed*) or adopted by humans when treating animals (*to be driven off, to turn out*).

(9) He was **roaming** different building sites in Eastern Europe for 18 years already. (*Dnevnik*, 31. 1. 2009)

(10) How many of Vegrad’s workers **are being fed** in the public kitchen of the worker’s housing (*Dnevnik*, 15. 12. 2010)

(11) Marko did not let himself be **driven off** back to Bosnia (*Delo*, 10. 2. 2012)

(12) The new owner of the housing could quickly **turn out** the workers (*Dnevnik*, 14. 7. 2011)

In example 9 an explicit analogy could be: he was roaming like a stray dog. Although in this case “stray dog” is omitted the comparison of worker to dog is clear enough because “roaming dog” is a common expression in the Slovenian language (slo. *potepuški pes*) with a negative connotation. In example 10 the workers “are fed” instead of “workers are eating”. Here workers are again the passive object of an active subject (the ones who feed them). Although here a concrete agent is omitted, as we do not know who is feeding the workers, the passive position of being fed implies that workers are dependent on those who feed them. Therefore, workers are symbolically put in the same dependent position as dogs or animals that need to be fed by humans/masters.

In examples 11 and 12 phrasal verbs are used. Workers are driven off or turned out. In Slovenian language both phrasal verbs (slo. *nagnati, odgnati*) are again most often used when describing the action of a human removing invasive and fastidious animals (flies, insects, stray dogs or cats). Again the analogy is implicit as a direct comparison of workers to animals is not made, but is made clear enough by using phrases common in Slovenian language. Along this lines Walton states “Analogies are often extremely powerful forms of persuasion to a particular audience because they compare a [particular] issue to something the audience is very familiar with or has a very positive [or negative] feelings about.”<sup>50</sup>.

What appears to be a radicalization of the discourse on workers by comparing them to animals is in fact their total objectivation within it. If animals, though subordinate to humans, are still animated, objectivation or reification is the most extreme discursive strategy of dehumanization.

## REIFICATION

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50 Richardson, *Analysing*, 163.

Therefore, the last linguistic operation that I wish to emphasize here is the reification (also known as objectivation) of workers. Fowler<sup>51</sup> claims reification occurs when processes and properties assume the status of objects. In advocatory discourse, the reification of the workers most frequently appeared where companies were represented as actors while workers appear as the victimized subject of their actions.

(13) *“For more than 12 years I have been working for SCT, but I never got a permanent contract. Now they have sacked me. They are throwing me out of the housing. They are threatening and insulting me. ... They fired me. They owe me my last salary...”* (Dnevnik, 10. 2. 2011)

In the example presented above we again face the worker speaking in first person and describing the actions taken towards him. He describes “being sacked, thrown out, threatened, insulted, fired” etc. Although, in a strict linguistic sense ‘the worker’ is not being metonymically or metaphorically replaced by the object, grammatically he becomes the object of various actions taken by the subject (SCT – a construction company). The subject – SCT – is a personification metonymy as the name of the company, therefore an object, stands for people managing the company. Reisigl and Wodak<sup>52</sup> point out such metonymies are used to make those who are socially responsible for discriminatory actions anonymous or to emphasize the perspective of the object of the action (the worker) instead of that of the subject (SCT). A similar example of metonymization of the actor with the company is the following: (14) *Vegrad housing will not yet throw them out on the street* (Dnevnik, 5. 10. 2010). In this case the objectification of the workers is made more explicit in terms of action taken towards the workers as the object. Usually objects and not persons are thrown out by humans.

Fairclough<sup>53</sup> states there are a number of choices available for the representation of social actors (participants in social processes). If social actors are included there is a significant difference if they appear in an activated or passivized role (e.g. actor or affected). The workers are consistently passivized (represented as the object of the actions of others), thus the implication is that they are incapable of political agency. On one hand we have the workers as the object of action (object of threatening, sacking, dismissing etc.), while on the other hand are the agents (the construction companies) carrying out the action (throwing them out). This operation is based on the dichotomization of activity/passivity, subject/object, and is therefore a strategy for establishing power relations. Clearly, in the common imaginary, companies have complete power over the workers.

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51 Roger Fowler, *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press*. (London: Routledge; 1991), 80.

52 Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse*, 9.

53 Norman Fairclough, *Textual Analysis for Social Research* (London: Routledge 2003), 222.

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Even more explicit objectifications are present in example 15: (15) *Jasmin is one of the long chain of workers that have wound from Bosnia to Slovenia for the past century* (*Dnevnik*, 31. 1. 2009). A person – namely, the worker Jasmin is objectified as being a part of a long winding chain, a metaphor frequently used for describing immigration. Besides metaphors, metonymies also play a significant role in objectification.

The next example is a metonymization in which parts of the body (hands) stand for people (workers).

(16) *Amongst the republics of ex-Yugoslavia that supplied us with hands, Bosnia and Herzegovina have finally consolidated their first place and have become the main reservoir of working force for Slovenia.* (*Dnevnik*, 31. 1. 2009)

By focusing on hands that represent the act of manual work, this metonymy reduces the complexity of a human being to only one aspect of his existence. The emphasis on the immigrant's manuality is complemented with reducing a nation – Bosnia and Herzegovina – to a reservoir. Workers again assume the status of objects stored in reservoirs. Usually reservoirs store water or oil as a resource waiting to be exploited. Metaphorizing Bosnia as a reservoir is problematic because it implies that Bosnians are an inexhaustible source for a cheap workforce waiting to be exploited by Europe.

Portraying the workers as objects deprives them of their power, subjectivity, and activity. In all the cases presented above the object (the worker) is passive and is used by those in power (Slovenia, construction companies etc.). Therefore, the power relations can be read clearly from how the object is positioned towards active subjects. The potential subjectivity of a political actor (the worker) is reduced so that he or she adopts the position of a passive object or victim of the construction companies and economy.

### **DISCUSSION: IMMIGRANT WORKERS AS THE VICTIMS OF ADVOCATORY DISCOURSE**

Firstly, I will question the advocatory discourse that we have just analysed that has emerged from an understanding of human rights as a universal signifier. As shown, the main features of the advocatory discourse are victimization, animalization and reification. I have shown that these rhetorical features tend to represent the immigrant worker as politically desubjectivated. Immigrant workers are constructed as victims calling for pity and passive objects who are denied active political engagement, placing them within the field of humanitarian discourse. However, before entering a detailed discussion the reader should be reminded that this failed attempt to advocate the human rights of workers took place in the Slovenian transitional socio-political context. As I have mentioned before,

during the transitional period there was a widespread belief in the fact that Slovenia is founded upon human rights, which were to be automatically implemented once Slovenia reached a European level of democratization. However, human rights and democracy also appeared as mandatory goals in the EU integration process in order to limit the space for xenophobic and discriminatory discourses and practices that appeared to be significant side effects of the transition. The advocacy discourse therefore somehow worked within the frame of human rights by pursuing the process of normalisation. As defined by Watney,<sup>54</sup> normalisation means allowing the worker's immigrant "Balkan" identity into mass media representations only in strictly codified forms that do not threaten the general public and media users but rather protect them from potential destabilization. Within the media repertoire of strictly delimited and defined images, mobilising notions of decency, human nature, normality and the like, immigrant workers were not constituted as something horrifying and threatening, but as helpless victims who did not have the political power to destabilize the majoritarian community. Although the advocacy discourse descends from this benevolent naturalisation and human rights perspective I will now show how this might have a negative impact on the worker's subjectivity. To do so, it is necessary to show the paradox of the concept of human rights itself. Agamben, following Arendt, stresses that

...the very rights of man that once made sense as the presupposition of the rights of the citizen are now progressively separated from and used outside the context of citizenship, for the sake of the supposed representation and protection of a bare life that is more and more driven to the margins of the nation-states, ultimately to be recodified into a new national identity.<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, human rights have meaning only as a condition of the civil rights originally based on the nation-state. However, the huge increase in immigrant workers working without permits or on temporary permits in Slovenia and in the rest of Western Europe is a significant phenomenon that highlights a new framework in which nationality is no longer the basis for issuing human rights. In the case presented the separation between humanitarianism and politics is the final phase of the separation of the rights of man from the rights of citizens<sup>56</sup>. As the first part of my analysis of the advocacy discourse has shown, human rights have lost their political power and have become humanitarian rights. Immigrant workers are

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54 Cf. Simon Watney "Moral Panics," in *The Media Studies Reader*, eds. Tim O' Sullivan and Yvonne Jewkes. (London: Arnold, 1997), 124–133.

55 Giorgio Agamben *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 132-133.

56 *Ibid.*, 133

therefore subjects of humanitarian investment, coded as victims, compared to objects and animals. They seem not to have or fight for their political rights, but are encouraged to appeal to their right to victimhood.

The ongoing distinction between the humanitarian and the political is, in Agamben's view, the most extreme phase of the separation between human rights and civil rights. The advocacy discourse on immigrant workers that relies on the supposed universality of democracy and human rights in Slovenia is therefore not political, but rather social and humanitarian. The absence of the political in the first part of the analysis is evident, mostly in the failure of the advocacy discourse to construct the workers as active political subjects. Instead, the workers are represented as victims, leading eventually ultimately to their reification and animalization at the language level.

The problem of the humanitarian perspective adopted by the advocacy discourse is that the immigrant worker's human life can only be understood in the terms of Agamben's bare life<sup>57</sup>. The conceptualization of workers from Agamben's perspective shows that the workers are not unlike Agamben's *Musselman*, a radically de-subjectivized human being who lives in the paradigm of *Homines sacri* – those who can be killed, but not sacrificed, as sacrifice always means a symbolic inscription. "Precisely because they were lacking almost all the rights and expectations that we customarily attribute to human existence, and yet were still biologically alive, they came to be situated in a border zone between life and death, inside and outside, in which they were no longer anything but bare life"<sup>58</sup>. I have shown how advocacy discourse clearly places immigrant workers in this border zone. The advocacy discourse reduces the worker's life to bare existence by describing their poverty, poor nutrition and health as well as their poor living conditions. This codification deprives workers of any other subjectivity by reducing them to their biological status. Being represented as the living dead and reduced to the existential level means being deprived of any political meaning. This representation is therefore, in solidarity with the forces against which it declaratively fights. Along those lines, Rancière notes that human rights become the rights of those without rights. As in the case of the workers, their rights,

... appeared more and more as the rights of the victims, the rights of those who were unable to enact any rights or even any claim in their name, so that eventually their rights had to be upheld by others, at the cost of shattering the edifice of International Rights, in the

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57 Ibid.

58 Ibid., 159.

name of a new right to 'humanitarian interference' – which ultimately boiled down to the right to invasion".<sup>59</sup>

I therefore agree with Agamben<sup>60</sup>, who states that the 'concept' of the immigrant worker and the figure that this concept represents should be firmly separated from the concept of the rights of man, and that we should consider the idea that the fates of human rights and the nation-state are bound together, and that the decline and crisis of one necessarily implies the end of the other. The workers must therefore be seen for what they are: a limited concept that calls into question the fundamental categories of the nation-state, from the link between birth-nation and man-citizen, making it possible to clear the way for a long-overdue renewal of these categories in favour of politics in which bare life is no longer treated as something separate, either by the state-based order or by human rights discourses.

In the second part of the analysis I will show how this changed when the IWW began to play a more active role, and workers gained political subjectivity. However, this was not a clear cut change in the discourse. The category of IWW activist and IWW activist/worker sometimes overlapped. Often IWW activists, who were not also workers, were seen as political subjects while the workers themselves were still constructed as victims. Although, this ambivalence was present, enough empirical evidence was available to confirm a change in worker subjectivity. Most importantly, workers began to be constructed not only as victims, but also as political subjects.

## VI. SUBJETIVATION

Especially in 2011, but in some cases even before then, the founding of IWW in Slovenia (in 2009) changed the dynamics of public and media discourses on immigrant workers. I will now show how the subjectivation of immigrant workers occurred in the media texts that I have analysed. Four major changes in discourse were evident. (1) Immigrant workers began to be represented as active subjects who demanded concrete rights, (2) those responsible for the violation of worker rights were not any longer pushed into the semantic background, (3) immigrant worker voices became more frequently represented in the print media through direct quotations (4) immigrant workers' demands began to be constructed as universal demands.

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<sup>59</sup> Jacques Rancière, "Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?" *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 103 (2/3) (2004): 297-298.

<sup>60</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 134.

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First, the subjectivity of workers changed from victimhood to an active political subjectivity with concrete demands. This was most evident in the change of nouns used to describe worker subjectivity, and the noun 'activist' started to appear in relation to immigrant workers.

(17) ... Armin Salihović, **activist** from the *Invisible Workers of the World (IWW) initiative and former construction worker who now fights for the rights of immigrant workers*. ... (Dnevnik, 31. 1. 2009)

The most frequent actions attributed to the workers are 'demanding', 'fighting', 'pressuring', 'persisting', 'deciding', 'speaking' etc. implying activity by the subjects and engagement with their rights.

(18) ... IWW **activist** Mirnes Alikadić. *The employer he was working for sacked him because he was speaking about the issue of immigrant workers on a TV channel*. (Dnevnik, 31. 1. 2009)

(19) According to the **activist** Irfan Bečirević, they **demand** that workers not be checked out of workers' housing, that the police not prosecute them and that they get paid what is owed to them as soon as possible ... (Delo, 11. 2. 2011)

(20) Workers of SCT: we **will persist** until the end (Delo, 9. 2. 2011)

(21) The assembly of the IWW invisible workers of the world ... **has decided** not to pay rent for a single room until Vegrad (in bankruptcy) repays them all its debts. (Delo, 2. 7. 2011)

Second, the antagonism between workers on one side and the oppressors (concrete construction companies such as Vegrad and SCT and the governments of Slovenia and Bosnia unable to come to a bilateral agreement on immigrant workers) on the other becomes clearly articulated. The violators of worker's rights are no longer pushed into the semantic background by metonymies as in the previous section.

(22) ... **company management** and the **country** are responsible, [IWW] addressed the companies, the state institutions and the public with a number of demands. (Dnevnik, 21. 1. 2011)

(23) SCT Workers<sup>61</sup> ... demand free residence in workers' housing until the rights that were violated by the **employer** and the **government** are respected... (Dnevnik, 9. 2. 2011)

Third, an increase of direct voicing of immigrant workers, especially when expressing concrete demands for their rights is evident. Worker's voices tended to be more present thorough direct quotations of their enunciations in the analysed texts. As stated before, Fairclough emphasizes that direct quotations may be used when the content of the enunciation is considered important.

(24) Begić: "... We will continue to **pressure the governments of Slovenia and Bosnia**, they are both responsible because they signed the agreement that allowed such exploitation" (Delo, 3. 3. 2011)

61 SCT was one of the major construction companies employing immigrant workers that was involved in severe violations of workers' rights.

Fourth, an interesting feature seems to be the attempt to articulate a concrete political demand and link it with other similar demands of other Slovenian NGOs. According to Laclau this articulation of discrete, but somehow similar democratic demands that exist separately in a society may form an articulation of equivalence that can create a stronger, more inclusive and more popular demand for workers' rights in general and constitute the 'people' as a potential historical actor<sup>62</sup>. Examples 25 and 26 show how this articulation of equivalence and possible universal struggle was represented by media.

(25) *This fight is not only for the rights of immigrant workers, but for the rights of all workers in Slovenia (Delo, 9. 2. 2011).*

(26) *They announced demonstrations in Ljubljana for the following Saturday, which other international organizations from civil society are also invited to. Demonstrations will also be attended by workers from Bosnia and Herzegovina and from other countries who have worked in Slovenia and were banished from the country. (Dnevnik, 25. 5. 2011).*

These are some characteristics of the change in the advocacy discourse on immigrant workers. I will now offer a theoretical insight into the process of subjectivation by focusing the discussion on the logic of representation by showing how representation works in relation to the political (de-)subjectivation of immigrant workers.

#### **DISCUSSION: IWW AS A CHANGE IN NAMING**

What is involved in a process of representation? Essentially the *fictio iuris* that somebody is present in a place where he or she is materially absent. For instance, this might be an actual place, like parliament or a more symbolical space such as the public political field or even the space created for immigrant workers by the media in news articles. In the first part of the analysis, I showed that since immigrant workers' demands were absent from the public field, the advocacy press tried to play the role of their representative by articulating a specific media discourse on victimhood. Representation is the process by which somebody else – the representative (advocates for immigrant workers' rights) – 'substitutes' and at the same time 'embodies' the represented (immigrant workers). The conditions for perfect representation would be met, then, when the representation fully and faithfully reflects immigrant workers' demands. However, this assumes that immigrant workers' demands would be fully constituted prior to the representation process and that the role of the representative is exhausted by his or her intermediary function. For Laclau, representation is always

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62 Laclau, *Populist*, 74.

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a two-way process: the relationship goes from the represented to the representatives and vice versa. This contrasts with classical understandings of representation, such as that of Rousseau<sup>63</sup> that understand representation as a one way, transparent and direct relationship, whereas the core of Laclau's theory is precisely the negation of the conceptual nature of representation. Laclau aims at understanding representation by using the Lacanian logic of naming.

Within this framework we can no longer speak of fixed correlations between the signifier and the signified or between representatives and the represented. What is required at this point is to dismiss Rousseau's descriptivist views on political representation and to adapt Laclau's anti-descriptivist view in which the unity of the subject, for instance the immigrant workers' collective demands, is not based on its essence, but is merely a retroactive effect of naming, that is, of the process of representation. When immigrant workers are involved in the process of representation with their advocates, the logic of naming is already being implemented. The identity of immigrant workers therefore is not pre-constructed and based on some essence, but rather is the union of workers as a subject by naming, and the process by which the name becomes the foundation of what is named<sup>64</sup>.

This analysis has aimed to show this shift. In the advocacy discourse, the immigrant workers' name was the Victim, because in the process of representation the advocacy discourse retroactively constituted this name. On the other hand, when the IWW entered the picture, the name of immigrant workers changed, and the IWW became their new name and the foundation for their political subjectivity. This name change clearly demonstrates Laclau's claim that the relationships between the signifier and the signified, between the representatives and the represented are not set in stone. However, it also reveals how the name of immigrant workers changed when the immigrant workers themselves became involved with their two different representatives.

What necessarily follows from this is that a democratic political demand is never *a priori*, but is shaped by the process of representation. The immigrant workers' democratic demand did not exist independently of the process of representation and it evolved during this process. At first, the workers made no democratic demands. Then, when the media discourse constructed the workers as victims, the only "demand" that they made was a cry for help and for the money fraudulent construction companies had taken from them. This changed when the IWW began representing immigrant workers and helped them to re-articulate their democratic political demands within the field of a critique of the social state, the neoliberal order, immigration policy and human rights. Workers suddenly adopted a

63 Cf. Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, (New York: St. Martins Press, 1978).

64 Laclau, *Populist*, 101.

more politically active position and their demands began to be articulated as democratic political demands beyond a victimized cry for help. When the IWW became the actual name of the political subject the distinction between those who were represented and those who were representing collapsed and we witnessed what was almost an overlap between the IWW and the immigrant workers as such. The articulation of more universal demands was the result of political activity by the IWW and its association with other similar interest groups who were fighting in the field of worker's rights and social justice in general. In this way we could speak of a retroactive (re-) construction of immigrant workers' demands. As soon as the representative (IWW) consolidated its relationship with the represented (the immigrant workers), the discourse of victimization disappeared and the workers started to gain political subjectivity and power.

However, as soon as an element takes on the role of representative, a hegemonic relationship arises. For Laclau the minimal object of analysis is not the actor, but its demand<sup>65</sup>. I have shown how demands were suddenly articulated as the IWW began to represent workers, which reflects my assumption that social groups, such as immigrant workers, are not homogeneous in the end. Their unity has to be understood as an articulation of democratic demands. Social actions may be seen as demands, as for Laclau<sup>66</sup> the subject is always a subject as a lack; it always emerges out of an asymmetry between the (impossible) fullness of the community and the particular nature of its place of enunciation. In this sense the demand transcends the actor and a particular element has to emerge as the carrier of the whole chain, thereby taking the role of the empty signifier. Consequently, this very same demand has to partially abandon its particularistic features and adopt universal features for at least a short period. In our case this universalisation of a primary particular demand of immigrant workers occurred as a result of the attempt to include all the workers and NGOs that would potentially oppose the same oppressive regime. In the case of immigrant workers, during the first period, the oppressive regime was identified as the construction companies, while in the second period of IWW activism the oppressive regime was broadened, mostly to include governments and the neoliberal system<sup>67</sup>. Once the forces that opposed the oppressive regime were constituted and a chain of particular democratic

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65 Laclau, in *On Populist Reason* and in more recent writings, argues that the minimal unit of social analysis is the category of 'demand', which presupposes that a social group is not a homogeneous group or reference point, but rather 'that its unity should...be conceived as an articulation of heterogeneous demands'. Demands, for Laclau, tend to start as requests, addressed to the institutions of power. Cf. Aletta J. Norval *Aversive Democracy. Inheritance and Originality in the Democratic Tradition*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

66 Laclau, "Ideology", 655.

67 In order to get broader information on the demands of IWW I consulted IWW's web page: <http://www.njnetwork.org/IWW-Nevidni-delavci-sveta> (Last seen 26.11.2012)

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demands was formed, the empty signifier emerged to create symbolic unity amongst the workers themselves or possibly with other NGOs with goals that were compatible with the immigrant workers' demands. In this sense the empty signifier works as the name and retroactively constructs the objects that are represented. I have shown in the first part of the analysis that the empty signifier of the advocatory discourse was "human rights" and/or "democracy". By questioning the political significance of such empty signifiers, I have shown how their universality missed the opportunity to represent political rights and constitute the political subjectivity of the immigrant workers that were being represented. When the IWW began to play the role of representative, the empty signifier began to take the shape of general workers' rights and anti-neoliberalism. Although we do not yet know what the outcome of the IWW's struggle will be, it is certain that the process of representation retroactively determinates its subjectivity.

In Laclau's words: "The process of naming itself, as it is not constrained by any a priori conceptual limits, is the one that will retroactively determine – depending on contingent hegemonic articulations – what is actually named."<sup>68</sup> Consequently, the logic of representation is not based on the idea of representing the "original", but on the logic of naming. The totality of the relationship between the represented and the representative can only be a horizon. Identity is created by a series of failed attempts to fully constitute an identity, so an identity may be partially fixed only phantasmatically. This logic assumes that any existing discursive practice or system is lacking at least one object, or that it is structurally incomplete, and it is this lack that activates and structures subjective desire<sup>69</sup>. Similarly, the logic of the empty signifier emerges as the universal signifier of a specific chain of equivalence. Consequently, a constant struggle and tension between the universality of the empty signifier that emerges as the representative and the particularistic features of the demands that are part of the chain of equivalence arises. If the particular feature of a demand is weak (for instance in the first period, workers' demands were reduced to a demand for salaries), the elements of the chain of equivalence are easily desubjectivated. This is evident in the victimization of workers that occurred in the advocatory discourse.

## VII. CONCLUSION

In this article I have focused on discourses on immigrant workers. The discourses that were analysed appeared in the Slovenian press from 2009 to

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68 Ernesto Laclau "Identity and Hegemony: the Role of Universality in the Constitution of Political Logics," in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, ed. Judith Butler et al. (London: Verso, 2000), 57.

69 Howarth, "Pluralizing"

2011. The focus was on an advocacy discourse that advocated for workers' rights and represented their demands. By putting the case of immigrant workers in its socio-political perspective, I have shown that the advocacy discourse became caught in strategies of victimization and desubjectivation. At the text level, this was evident in its strategies of victimization, animalization and reification. Although the advocacy discourse might publically appear to be a democratic act, my analysis showed that it has had negative implications on workers' political subjectivity. What actually happened during the process of representing workers was a predominance of universal signifiers over the particularity of the workers' demand for salaries, hence, one could speak of a failed representation. The process of representation did not allow the political subjectivation of the workers, but rather prevented them from becoming active political subjects.

However, in the second part of the analysis I showed how workers' political subjectivity was constructed when the IWW began articulating strong political demands. This was mostly most evident at the text level in the space given to workers' and activists' voices and their grammatical construction as bearers of various counter-hegemonic actions.

I have thus attempted to show the complexity of the political representation process and its influence on political (de-)subjectivation. Through the logic of naming and the empty signifier, my aim was to show how important representatives and their discourses are in the construction of the political subjectivities of immigrant workers in Slovenia. I have shown how advocacy discourses have their roots in a wider context of Europeanization, democratization and respect for human rights, and I have explored the ambivalence of an advocacy discourse that on one hand aims to advocate the rights of immigrant workers, while at the same time depriving them of political subjectivity.

My aim in doing so was to demonstrate the importance of the logic of representation in political subjectivation. In this sense it is important to stress that we have to understand representation as something that is articulated in the political. The process of systemic representation seems to be constantly failing – it bans actors from becoming political subjects, therefore representation should be broadly conceived. Although a demand expressed by people may be suppressed in the process of representation, this might not happen if we conceive the representative as coming from among the underdogs, as representation can work from the bottom up and include heterogeneous actors (the IWW) that are not necessarily part of the systemic political field.

In conclusion, the political demand constitutes the subject. According to Laclau,<sup>70</sup> subjectivation occurs within the logic of naming, that is, in a two-way process that flows from the representative to the represented.

70 Cf. Laclau, *Populism*

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Conversely, the constitution of the represented subject can never occur independently of those who are being represented. The function of representatives is never a direct and transparent reflection of the will of the represented. Here I have attempted to show what happens when the represented and the representatives are not passive agents, but rather what happens when they construct the subject that represents them. The function of representatives places the demand that they represent in another context than that in which it originally arose, and along these lines I have shown how this re-contextualization of workers' demands by those who represented them has shaped the workers' identity on a discursive level and how this identity is subject to change by the process of representation.

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