

**PERFORMATIVITY OF THE SUBJECT: WOMEN AND NEOLIBERAL  
GOVERNMENTALITY IN CROATIA**

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Faculty of Humanities

**2018**

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**Word count: 83009**

## ABSTRACT

### **Performativity of the Subject: Women and Neoliberal Governmentality in Croatia**

The thesis examines the effects of neoliberalism on women in Croatian society by exploring contemporary, neoliberal subjectivity. In order to grasp the novelty of neoliberalism, this project critically engages with Foucault's understanding of neoliberalism and governmentality, in addition to the themes from Laclau's theory of discourse, poststructuralist theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis. By mapping neoliberal discourse in Croatia, this research examines the performativity of gendered neoliberal subjectivity. Following Laclau's definition of discourse as 'nothing which in a narrow sense relates to texts but the ensemble of phenomena of the societal production of meaning on which a society as such is based', the analysis is extended by interviewing women of differing socio-economic status and exploring their experiences of neoliberal discourse. Examining the opinions of participants on feminism in Croatia, their experiences of stress and fear in neoliberal context and, finally, their perception of the neoliberal imperative of activity, the project demonstrates that neoliberal discourse, at certain times, favours emphasising a gendered identity, but quite often the performativity of neoliberalism suppresses our gendered identification. The thesis invites us to think gender in its full complexity as it demonstrates that there is no simple categorisation or conclusion when it comes to the relation of gender and neoliberal governmentality, thus portraying an ambivalent role that gender occupies in neoliberal discourse. While relying on the interviews, the project provides an insight into the process that contributes to establishing *our* contemporary subjectivity. Finally, the research makes it explicit that neoliberal discourse acts as the contemporary *social* link, thus showing that we are nowadays bounded by maintaining neoliberal values, thereby structuring a particular form of society.

**Key words:** discourse, gender, governmentality, neoliberalism, performativity, subjectivity

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Many thanks to the interviewees for dedicating their time to help this research understand contemporary society.

I would also like to thank Prof Brian Heaphy and Dr Sophie Woodward for supervising this project. Thanks to Dr Jason Glynos and Dr Peter McMylor for examining the thesis.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge that this project was supported by the President's Doctoral Scholar Award and School of Social Sciences PhD Studentship, awarded from Sociology in the School of Social Sciences at the University of Manchester, and the Economic and Social Sciences Research Council North West Doctoral Training Centre Studentship [grant number ES/J500094/1].

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the effects of neoliberal governmentality on the women in Croatia. Neoliberalism is explored as a set of meanings or, in other words, as a discourse that constitutes our contemporary, neoliberal identity. By analysing this set of contemporary meanings, the research contributes to understanding performativity of gendered neoliberal subjectivity. Following a governmentality approach, the project acknowledges that 'the fundamental point of anchorage of the relationships, even if they are embodied and crystallized in an institution, is to be found outside the institution' (Foucault, 1982: 791). The fundamental point of anchorage is to be found in a particular form of governmentality, while governmentality could best be seen as a historically specific discourse that provides an anchoring point for a multiplicity of existing power relations. In this perspective, government is seen as 'a work of thought. And it was through thought, not through brute reality, that rationalities of social government began to crumble' (Rose, 2004: 140). The questions that arise out of such an approach are how should we understand this work of neoliberal thought, what type of subjectivity it structures or, in other words, how is contemporary subjectivity performatively constituted? In order to explore these questions, the project critically engages with Foucault's understanding of neoliberalism and governmentality, in addition to the themes from Laclau's theory of discourse, poststructuralist theory and theoretical psychoanalysis. Such a theoretical framework enables this thesis to grasp the novelty of contemporary society. Following Foucault's work on ordoliberalism, neoliberal capitalism is conceptualised as a socio-economic system significantly different from liberal capitalism. It is made clear that 'neo-liberalism is not Adam Smith; neoliberalism is not market society; neoliberalism is not the Gulag on the insidious scale of capitalism' (Foucault, 2008: 131). Laclau's theory of discourse provides the thesis with an understanding of discourse in which discourse is seen as always already material and, *vice versa*, materiality is seen as always already discursive. When such a perspective on discourse is adopted, there is no need for operating with the notion of discursive-material practices. The hyphen has been lost in the process of establishing a suitable epistemology for a contemporary theory of discourse. Theoretical psychoanalysis is deployed not in order to 'open' the neoliberal subject but to explore the individual as always already social, as 'a knot of social ties, a network of relations to the others' (Dolar, 2008: 17). Finally, poststructuralist theory, radicalising our understanding of



performativity, provides me with conceptual apparatus necessary for abandoning the idea of feminine essence and exploring how neoliberalism is, as a social system, performatively constituted.

The analysis is extended by interviewing women of differing socio-economic status and exploring their experiences of neoliberal discourse. Firstly, a group of women that are of high socio-economic status, such as managers in the private sector and secondly a group of women that are of low socio-economic status, such as textile workers. In accordance with a post-Marxist perspective, the research does not conceptualise these two groups as classes. This, however, 'is not to deny the centrality of economic processes and its centrality is the result of the obvious fact that the material reproduction of society has more repercussions for social processes than do other instances' (Laclau, 2005: 237). Using socio-economic status instead of class as a criterion to structure my research sample is simply to acknowledge 'that class struggle is just one species of identity politics, and one which is becoming less and less important in the world in which we live' (Laclau, 2000a: 203). The experiences of participants, as the thesis shows, differ both across the socio-economic groups and within a particular socio-economic group. While all of these experiences reflect neoliberal governmentality, the thesis identifies certain patterns that cut through the socio-economic status of participants, thereby making the traits of neoliberal governmentality more apparent. The recognition of these common points, shared across the socio-economic groups in my research, is fostered by not focusing primarily on the classed identity of participants. In this light, the chapters of my thesis based on the interviews explore the opinions of participants on feminism, their experiences of stress and fear in neoliberal context and, finally, their perception of the imperative of activity characteristic of neoliberal governmentality. Such choice of chapter themes was a pragmatic one as, simply, these areas have proven to be rather illustrative when it comes to understanding what neoliberalism is. While exploring the participants' opinions on feminism we get a chance to clarify the relation of neoliberal discourse and feminism, including the perception of the collective character of feminism in neoliberal context. Focusing on stress and fear in neoliberal setting allows us to explore performativity of the subject by examining how neoliberal imperatives are accommodated by the interviewees. Analysing whether these imperatives are experienced as stressful or if stress is seen as something that motivates, in addition to exploring the role of fear in establishing

contemporary subjectivity, brings us closer to understanding neoliberal discourse. Finally, examining how the women in Croatia perceive the imperative of activity provides us with a better understanding of what makes neoliberal governmentality an active governmentality and what type of performativity such governmentality structures. Throughout these chapters it is shown that, in neoliberal context, gender occupies a peculiar role. Gender enters the accounts of participants mostly when their appearance of mastery over various social demands, fostered by neoliberal discourse, is hard to sustain or on those occasions when mastering gendered issues can be utilised to work towards establishing a position of mastery characteristic of neoliberal discourse. On other occasions, gender is excluded from the interview accounts of participants, where it is important to recognise that excluding gender is often linked with establishing oneself as a modernist subject relieved of any particular characteristics of cultural identity. Gender, taking this into account, plays an important role in the performativity of contemporary subjectivity, both when it is included and excluded from the narratives offered by the women in my research. The participants, however, are *not* chosen as they represent neoliberal subjects *par excellence*. The thesis acknowledges the productive character of neoliberal discourse and, following this train of thought, conceptualises as neoliberal subjects *all* the people living in societies where neoliberalism has been established as a hegemonic discourse. The participants, prospective readers of this research and myself are, therefore, *all* conceptualised as neoliberal subjects.<sup>1</sup> This should be seen as a methodological position that, on the one hand, fully acknowledges the productive character of discourse in relation to *our* neoliberal subjectivity and, on the other hand, invests no denunciatory efforts in its research design.

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<sup>1</sup> Spivak (2006: 115), in one of her interviews, claims 'everybody is into training for creating the best, most self-deceived, most benevolent exploiter. Everybody is into leadership'. When I quote her words at academic conferences, sometimes I get a comment that not everybody is into leadership, followed by empirical examples of those who are considered not to be into leadership, such as SYRIZA's 'the people', Corbyn's 'the many' and so on. Spivak, of course, has not fallen prey to such positivistic reasoning in which her point would probably be recognised as legitimate only if it were to be presented as a colourful power point chart detailing empirical findings on a representative sample of the world population. Her point, let us make it clear, is *not* empirical. This perfectly corresponds to my point that everybody is the neoliberal subject. It is not to say that everyone benefits from leadership equally nor it is, on the other hand, to try to find out who is more and who is less into leadership. On the contrary, Spivak is talking about a contemporary subjectivity and, I am quite sure, would see herself as a part of 'everybody' which, at the same time, has nothing to do with saying that she is into celebrating leadership as a virtue.

The choice of Croatia as a focus of my project benefits the thesis in two major ways. First, it reminds us that, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as *the* neoliberal discourse. There are only neoliberal discourses, all based on a certain common set of meanings that serve as a *genus proximus*, but also bearing particular contextual specificities which act as their *differentia specifica*. This makes it impossible to swiftly draw general conclusions on the neoliberal discourse regardless of the contexts in which it has constituted. Second, acknowledging the lessons of postcolonial theory, the thesis does not conceptualise Croatia as a postsocialist country, a temporally and spatially isolated episode that will eventually, if it keeps on developing 'properly', join 'homogenous empty time' (Benjamin in Bhabha, 2009: 95) of modernity. Following the idea that 'the Balkans is the unconscious of Europe' (Dolar in Bijelić, 2011: 1), what is considered to be postsocialist Croatia might best be seen as 'a symptom through which the inherent contradictions of liberal democracy became visible' (Salecl, 2002: 77). Bearing this in mind, my research and the insights from the fieldwork in Croatia are not restricted to former socialist countries but act as a mirror for neoliberal societies. Decisively breaking with any innocence attributed, internally or externally, to postsocialist societies, this project argues in favour of understanding Croatia as a contemporary neoliberal agent, *while* recognising its geopolitical and other specificities.

In addition to the introduction and conclusion, the thesis consists of six chapters; three focusing on the research design of the project and three drawing primarily on the interviews conducted in Croatia. The first two chapters of the thesis situate my research interest by developing a theoretical framework that will be used in the project. The first chapter, *Approaching Neoliberalism*, brings together diverse approaches that will be deployed in order to explore the novelty of neoliberal subjectivity. Claiming the economy as an objective of sociological analysis, thinking of Marxism as one of many possible hypotheses and questioning the differentiation between the infrastructure and superstructure of society, the classics have 'opened' the economy for social analysis. Continuing these efforts, discourse analysis has refined our theoretical apparatus. Adopting Laclau's (in Jessop and Sum, 2013: 131) understanding of the discursive 'as the social as such', this chapter makes it clear that my understanding of discourse moves beyond critical discourse analysis. Laclau's *post-Marxist post-Marxism*, along with its rejection of economism and the demystification of the category of class, is identified as a suitable approach for my

thesis. Critically examining Laclau's model of emancipation, I argue in favour of recognising ethico-political challenges that accompany the rise of neoliberal subjectivity. In order to clarify the term 'neoliberalism', the chapter draws on the distinctive points between neoliberalism and liberalism as elaborated by Foucault (2008) in his lectures at the Collège de France. The chapter then focuses on governmentality as an approach dedicated to reconstructing macro-power issues starting with the analysis of the micro-power 'on the basis of men's actual practice, on the basis of what they do and how they think' (Foucault, 2009: 358). This project draws on the experiences of participants in order to reflect on neoliberal governmentality and refrains from producing enlightened lessons for the participants to use, thereby taking seriously the lessons of postcolonial theory. The chapter shows in what ways this thesis engages with psychoanalytically informed concepts, such as choice, ideology and anxiety, in order to situate the experiences of participants in a larger picture of neoliberal condition.

The chapter *Feminism and Neoliberalism* explores the ways in which this research uses feminist theories to understand the effects of neoliberal governmentality on the women in Croatia. It is argued that feminist theoretical framework constitutes a productive meeting point of numerous theoretical fields, such as poststructuralism, postcolonial theory, psychoanalysis and so on, which makes it suitable for an approach adopted in the thesis. The importance of theoretical work is emphasised, while theoretical and activist approaches are seen as different forms of the one and same category, namely 'political writing' (Bhabha, 2009). The modernist understanding of power as repressive is exposed as an impasse and it is claimed that poststructuralist approaches can help us to confront uncertainty and ambiguous political horizons that characterise neoliberal society. Poststructuralist feminism is put forward as a perspective that enables my project to account for a productive character of power while examining the relation between neoliberalism and gender. The theory of performativity, initially developed in linguistics, has been radicalised in the framework of poststructuralist feminist theory. The practices of performativity have been extended and are no longer limited to particular forms of speech, which provides this project with conceptual tools that allow us to examine the performativity of a social system, namely neoliberalism. Furthermore, poststructuralist feminist theories have broken the causal link between sex and gender, conceptualising the body as a discursive formation without an essence. A

rigid anti-essentialism, as proposed by Mouffe (1993), is adopted in the thesis as it is identified to be conceptualisation of the subject that, while not implying the impossibility of the representation, runs contrary to neoliberal resignification of the feminist critique. The chapter conceptualises the category 'women' as a provisory analytical category that must be situated in order to enable the production of knowledge. Recognizing that the subject does not exist before the process of signification, the thesis focuses on ways the signifier 'women' is temporarily fixed in contemporary Croatian society, relating that to the effects of neoliberal discourse.

The first part of the chapter *Contextual and Methodological Outline of the Research* focuses on the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the establishment of neoliberalism in Croatia. The aim of this section is to provide some key contextual contours relevant for contemporary Croatian society. It is argued that the explanations relying on a primordial ethnic hatred in order to explain the dissolution of Yugoslavia act as a substitute for a productive critical reflection. Theoretical approaches that draw on psychoanalytic insights, emphasising an inherently fantasmatic life of power, are identified as an illuminating perspective on the breakup of Yugoslavia. The global crisis that hit Croatia in 2009 is seen as a trigger for the implementation of austerity measures and the dominance of neoliberal discourse which emphasises individualism combined with active government intervention in society. In the second, methodological part of this chapter, it is argued that, in accordance with a governmentality approach, the research explores how neoliberalism enables and disables the individual's agency, how it frames different aspects of society and how it provides rationalisations of governing. Developing insights offered as a part of a governmentality 'tradition' further, the thesis does not reduce neoliberal society to market society but it focuses on the psychic life of power, examining the prominence of neoliberal discourse primarily as a shift in subjectivity. In this context, the chapter explores Latour's methodological imperative of keeping the social flat and links his critique of micro-macro dichotomy with the approach taken in my thesis. Analysing other methodological implications of Latour's perspective, the chapter argues against a narrow, positivistic understanding of the empirical, making it clear that there is no significant epistemological difference between 'theoretical' and 'empirical' chapters in my project. These chapters are characterised by a different style of writing, but written with the same aim, namely exploring performativity of the gendered subject in a

neoliberal context. The chapter also details my fieldwork, research sample and the structure of the interviews.

The first chapter based on my analysis of the interviews with the participants, namely *Perceiving Feminism*, identifies different patterns in perceiving feminism in Croatia by exploring how the participants in my research see feminism. First, positive opinions on feminism are analysed. Usually provided by the women of lower socio-economic status, these opinions are seen as a reflection of a wider critical consciousness on gendered issues and a more institutional influence of a civil society with a large number of non-governmental organisations in Croatia. Second, the chapter focuses on the opinions of participants who perceive biology as a limit of feminism. It is explored how the limit of feminism in biology is performatively constituted by claiming that feminism is limited by biological constitution of women and men. Such claims, articulated both by the women of lower and higher socio-economic status, are analysed not as an indicator of a regression to pre-modern values but as a part of liberal reasoning, an essentially modern epistemology. Third, the chapter examines negative opinions on feminism, mostly articulated by the participants of higher socio-economic status. In this context, feminism is largely rejected in its more collective dimension. The research argues that this is primarily caused by the reluctance of participants to align themselves with a group of people who are dissatisfied with neoliberal norms as this would indicate a shattered mastery over social imperatives. While the participants in this group shy away from feminism, they nonetheless emphasise the importance of gender equality. In fact, they often challenge the production of sexist norms themselves, thereby portraying a complex relation between feminism and neoliberal discourse. Finally, the chapter focuses on a predominant position on feminism among the participants in my project. Cutting through the socio-economic status of participants, this set of opinions on feminism could best be summarised as a nominal acceptance of feminist efforts followed by reflection on feminism situated in-between indecisiveness and indifference. It is argued that such opinions on feminism correspond to an epistemic change introduced by neoliberal discourse.

The chapter *Stress and Fear* explores how neoliberal discourse is experienced and constituted among the participants by examining how they perceive stress and fear in their everyday lives. The women of higher socio-economic status mostly see stress as a motivating factor and as a part of their daily routine of

excellence. These participants do not deny that they are experiencing stress or that their job is stressful, but they make it clear that what characterises them is the mastery over stress. On the other hand, the women of lower socio-economic status report experiencing stress as a difficulty that accompanies their everyday lives. Within this group, where the appearance of neoliberal mastery is shattered, the participants identify a gendered dimension of stress. The women of higher socio-economic status provide no account of gender as a factor in experiencing stress, fostering the modernist belief that autonomy of the individual has an absolute superiority over the particular characteristic of cultural identity. With an exception of an emphasised fear of illness among the participants of higher socio-economic status, a rather similar pattern is present when it comes to experiencing fear. While mapping their differences, the chapter argues that the two structural positions on stress and fear, those occupied by the women of low and high socio-economic status, are not detached. It is argued that the women who are struggling with stress and report a range of fears, thereby acting as a constitutive outside in the context of neoliberal performativity, have a crucial role in the relational construction of the mastery that the women of high socio-economic status have claimed. Critically engaging with Sloterdijk's (2016) analysis of stress, the chapter argues that neoliberal society is not a monolith, large scale body but neither has it fallen apart, leaving behind only a set of enclaves. Rather, neoliberal society is understood as a fragmented collective that consists of multiple units.

The final substantive chapter of my thesis, namely *Activity and Neoliberalism*, focuses on the imperative of activity that characterises neoliberal governmentality. The experiences of participants who have worked as a part of active labour market policies are analysed. The women in this group do not perceive the imperative of activity, on which these policies are based, as something desirable. In contrast, they argue that these policies are damaging for their current status of educated and young people, characterised by an inadequate salary, and that the imperative of activity is largely serving as a cover for exploiting young employees. Active labour market policies postpone the autonomy of employees and prolong the period of dependency on their parents and employers, thus reminding us that, with her maturity postponed, the active citizen is a highly infantilised citizen. The chapter draws on Sloterdijk's (2001) and Žižek's (2008) understanding of ideology in order to explain why we, as neoliberal subjects, abide by neoliberal imperatives that are

often perceived with an ironic or cynical distance. It is argued that ideology is not at its most effective as a consequence of blind obedience exercised by subjects. What makes ideology effective is exactly a certain ironic or cynical distance that we have established in relation to a particular ideological process. While active labour market policies are primarily targeting young and educated people, the chapter also focuses on ways some of the more mature participants have framed 'those people' who are not as ready to internalise the neoliberal imperative of activity. 'Those people' are conceptualised by the participants as passive subjects, those who have failed in the performativity of neoliberal governmentality as an active governmentality.



## 2. APPROACHING NEOLIBERALISM

The following chapter, in addition to the chapter *Feminism and Neoliberalism*, constitutes theoretical framework of my research. Rather than merely drawing out the relation between gender and neoliberalism, my theoretical framework actively produces a path towards improving our understanding of contemporary neoliberal society. In the context where politics 'has failed to confront the transformations that gradually have emptied out its categories and concepts' (Agamben, 1996: x), it is the aim of theory to invest these concepts with contemporary meaning.

Early sociologists and social philosophers had provided us with a conception where the economy is seen as a field suitable for social inquiry. For this reason, their work presents a constitutive point for a further critique of neoliberalism. Claiming the economy as an objective of sociological analysis, thinking of Marxism as one of many possible hypotheses and questioning the differentiation between the infrastructure and superstructure of society, the classics have introduced the economy in social analysis. Radicalising this, various studies of discourse make it apparent that the economy is indeed a social field, with a notable perspective being initially put forward by Laclau and Mouffe (2001) and developed by the Essex School of Discourse Analysis (Critchely and Marchart, 2004; Devenney, 2004; Glynos and Howarth, 2007; Marchart, 2007). With his understanding of the discursive 'as the social as such', Laclau (in Jessop and Sum, 2013: 131) makes it clear that debates on discourse do not necessarily limit us to linguistic categories. Rejecting economism and demystifying the false primacy of class, Laclau has formulated his post-Marxist position, thus showing the potential of discourse analysis as a social theory. Adopting a discourse analytic approach enables me not only to rethink a wide range of fields relevant for my thesis, such as Marxism, liberalism, the economy, ethics etc., but to conceptualise neoliberalism as a system of meanings that is constantly in the process of becoming. Contrary to a widespread perception of neoliberalism as a part of our common sense, my theoretical framework shows that deciphering its meaning is far from being a straightforward issue. Drawing largely on Foucault's work, distinctive and common points in the relation between liberalism and neoliberalism are clarified. Emphasis is put on the German type of neoliberalism, questioning the opposition between individuals and neoliberal state, but also the common perception of neoliberal state as an

embodiment of minimal governing (Foucault, 2009, 2008). Exploring governmentality, it is argued that neoliberalism owes its existence (along with its institutions) and strength to a particular form of subjectivity. The chapter also focuses on postcolonial theory in order to explore the existing ambiguities surrounding the Balkans as a signifier (Todorova, 2009, 2004; Spivak in Horvat, 2006) and make it apparent that the experiences of participants in this research are not used to produce policy guidelines but to enhance our understanding of neoliberalism. Finally, I turn to theoretical psychoanalysis for a more thorough examination of neoliberalism, not merely at the level of individuals and their psychological constitutions but at the point in which the individual is considered to be indistinguishable from broader social ties. Developing insights provided by the Ljubljana School of Psychoanalysis (Dolar and Žižek, 2002; Salecl, 2010, 2005, 2002; Zupančič, 2008, 2000; Žižek, 2009, 2008), this project understands ideology not as a false consciousness but 'as a support our "reality" itself' (Žižek, 2008: 45). The chapter examines anxiety, arguing that it is a systemic feature of neoliberalism which regenerates the economy and acts in a conservative manner, thereby effectively preventing radical social change and fostering the performativity of neoliberalism.

## **2.1. Socio-economic reasoning of the classics**

Thinking of capitalism as a social product is not a novelty and the classics of sociology had already engaged with the economy using sociological apparatus. However, the classics have also provided us with a set of limitations when it comes to approaching social phenomena and there is no reason for hiding or respectfully omitting what was excluded by the classics. In a sociological context, of course, the relevance of Weber's (1949) methodological work and lectures on vocation, namely *Politics as Vocation* (2004a) and *Science as Vocation* (2004b) is of the essence for understanding the context in which the analysis of the economy as a social product enters the discipline of sociology. He was concerned with building a new discipline, a separate field of scientific activity with its distinctive object of inquiry and methodological rules. Weber (2004b: 27, emphasis in original) is rather clear when he claims that 'science today is a profession practiced in specialist *disciplines* in the service of reflection on the self and the knowledge of relationships between facts and not a gift of grace on the part of seers and prophets dispensing sacred goods and

revelations. Nor is it part of the meditations of sages and philosophers about the *meaning* of the world'. Therefore, sociologists must deal with facts and no value judgements are welcomed. Even more so, 'whenever an academic introduces his own value judgement, a complete understanding of the facts *comes to an end*' (Weber, 2004b: 21, emphasis in original). Of course, Weber was by no means alone in this discipline building project. Sociologists and social philosophers, such as Comte (2009, 1877), Durkheim (2001, 1966, 1952), Saint-Simon (1952) as well as others should not be overlooked, but it was Weber who clearly drew the boundaries and, without leaving much space for a debate with his adversaries, bluntly claimed 'to anyone who is unable to endure the fate of the age like a man we must say that he should return to the welcoming and merciful embrace of the old churches' (Weber, 2004b: 30). Such sociology is not for everyone to join, it is not a democratic project. Quite on the contrary, it is suitable only for men who can disregard their emotions and deal with scientific truths. Bearing in mind the aforementioned ideas, it should be acknowledged that work of the classics is not only an inevitable reference but a constitutive point for a further critique that will insist on rethinking epistemology (Adorno, 2013; Rorty, 1980), breaking disciplinary boundaries (Baudrillard, 1994; Lyotard, 1993), and questioning the distinction between mythical and scientific thinking (Latour, 1990; Lévi-Strauss, 2013). Thus, reading the classics that established sociology as a scientific discipline enables us to understand and evaluate the basic points of later critique, mapping a history of the present thought on neoliberalism.

### **2.1.1. Claiming the economy**

The classics, as I have already claimed, firstly made us think of the economy as a sociological issue. Marx claimed that 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class' (Engels and Marx, 1978: 473). With these words, the economy has received an introduction to social theory, an introduction that has influenced both Marxist and post-Marxist approaches to contemporary theory. Indeed, 'when Marx wrote that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles", this was not a description of social history that was more accurate than other descriptions. The concept of the class struggle is an example of a "new signifier", one that reveals a hitherto invisible dimension of social reality, and gives us tools to think it' (Zupančič, 2017: 139). Marx, then, made the economy a social

issue *par excellence*. However, these tools to think about the economy as a key ingredient of social reality, especially as developed in those more orthodox Marxist approaches (Bernstein, 1993; Kautsky, 1971; Luxemburg, 1971; Plekhanov, 1992), are often characterised by a dialectical vision of capitalist development that is meant to reach its resolution in the establishment of communist society, understanding the economy as an infrastructural registry and seeing ideology as a process accomplished with a false consciousness.

Simmel (2004: 411), well before the cultural turn in theory (Franklin *et al.*, 1991; Hall, 1999; Hall *et al.*, 1978), questioned some basic Marxist concepts, such as the inevitability of revolution, claiming that 'passionate and aggressive class hatred does not emerge where the classes are separated by an unbridgeable gulf, but rather at that moment at which the lower class has already begun to rise, and when the upper class has lost some of its prestige and the levelling of both classes can be discussed'. He considered Marxism as yet another theoretical framework, one of many possible hypotheses. What is even more interesting, and often overlooked, is that Simmel also provided a critique of the welfare state, coming from the position that might be labelled as a Leftist one. This can be seen in his emphasis that

the apparent equality with which educational materials are available to everyone interested in them is, in reality, a sheer mockery. The same is true of the other freedoms accorded by liberal doctrines which, though they certainly do not hamper the individual from gaining goods of any kind, do however disregard the fact that only those already privileged in some way or another have the possibility of acquiring them (Simmel, 2004: 443-444).

This is where he engages in a radical critique as he goes further than the usual Leftist critique of education (for example, see Liessmann, 2006). To apply his ideas to a more contemporary environment, it is not enough to remove educational fees and make more libraries freely available. That would be 'in reality, a sheer mockery' as people do not share the same cultural capital or, in other words, are not equally privileged to use such resources (Bourdieu, 2013, 1986). Simmel's ability to change his standpoint in order to see theoretical weaknesses that are far from obvious, thus avoiding alternatives that only appear to be solving pressing issues, provides us with

a valuable methodological skill. We have not needed to wait until contemporary times to think things thoroughly and in a rather creative way.

However, it was Weber (1965) who, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, provided a truly radical critique and fostered sociological interest in the economy. Using the example of the Protestant ethic to show how a certain cultural context enables capitalism and to demonstrate a key fault of the orthodox Marxist (Bernstein, 1993; Kautsky, 1971; Luxemburg, 1971; Plekhanov, 1992) differentiation between the infrastructure and superstructure of society, he achieved nothing short of a theoretical breakthrough. Even though this distinction is usually used to describe orthodox Marxists in a summarised manner, it is as well one of the main characteristics of classical liberal economic theory (Locke, 2010; Ricardo, 2004; Say, 2001; Smith, 2005). Therefore, it is more appropriate to say that both orthodox Marxist and liberal conceptions of the economy have lost their explanatory power, indicating why Weber is a relevant author both for neo-Marxist Frankfurt School and neoliberal Freiburg School. Later on, with Laclau's (2007) and especially Foucault's (2008) work, this uncomfortable proximity between liberals and Marxists becomes more comprehensible and can no longer be easily overlooked.

Finally, when Weber (1978a, 1978b, 1965) is examining the economy, he is not simply dismissive of capitalism but is trying to understand how it operates, what kind of social context enables such a system etc. In his analysis, rationality is not a total category or, in other words, it cannot be simply labelled as a good or bad thing. Rather, it is a social phenomenon explicated in its dialectical fullness. The classics, while acknowledging the harmfulness of capitalism, are fascinated by its character. After all, Engels and Marx (1978: 475), in their *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, claimed that 'the bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part' and dedicated a significant part of *Manifesto* to fully elucidate the fascinating power of capitalism. Both 'ruthless criticism of everything existing' (Marx, 1978a) and, not any less important, a constant effort to understand the ideology that underpins neoliberalism present a desirable approach for my project.

## **2.2. Discourse analysis and neoliberalism**

Poststructuralism presents a loose network, if it could be even called so, of theoreticians who are dedicated not to merely abandoning but rethinking universally applicable concepts put forward by the intellectual and political tradition of

Enlightenment or, in other words, by the classics. Bearing in mind that poststructuralism is a label that is ascribed to a very diverse range of theorists, it is more productive to deal with the precise concepts that constitute an important part of poststructuralist framework (such as critique of epistemological totality, scientific objectivity, acknowledging the plurality of identities, abandoning the idea of grand narratives and universal solutions), instead of debating the label itself. Nonetheless, I agree with Laclau (in Avgitidou and Koukou, 2008; Butler *et al.*, 2000) in accepting poststructuralism not in a sense of embracing the impossibility and implosion of meaning but as an intellectual effort focused on demeriting the ambitions of modernity.

### **2.2.1. Critical discourse analysis**

Considering that poststructural terminology, due to the complex character of its inquiry, is often far from being self-explanatory, making it clear what we mean when we refer to discourse is a fundamental step in building my research position. When discourse or discourse analysis is mentioned, it is often considered that critical discourse analysis (CDA) is being discussed. My research is interested in some ideas developed as a part of this tradition, though I find CDA's perspective on discourse overly based in linguistics. For example, van Dijk (2001: 99) is interested in 'stress and intonation, word order, lexical style, coherence, local semantic moves (such as disclaimers), topic choice, speech acts, schematic organization, rhetorical figures'. For him, discourse analysis is never completed because 'a "full" analysis of a short passage might take months and fill hundreds of pages' (van Dijk, 2001: 99). Discourse is here understood literally as a written text or speech and analysis is imagined as the scrutinising work done by a scholar with a proper background in linguistics. Such understanding is close to one promoted by Meyer (2001: 23) who, in a usual CDA manner, claims that 'there is no typical CDA way of collecting data', but nonetheless makes it clear that 'linguistic expertise is obligatory for the selection of the items relevant to specific research objectives' (Meyer, 2001: 29). However, CDA scholars do apply their approach to discourse when examining social phenomena and are not focused purely on language. For example, Fairclough (2001: 128) proposes understanding capitalism as 'a distinctive network of practices part of whose distinctiveness is the way language figures within it - its genres, discourses and styles'. Even though such conceptualisation is of interest in the context of my

research, it still operates with discourse as something distinguished, though most of the time uncomfortably, from what is considered to be the reality.

In addition to the strong interest in linguistic analysis, there seems to be a general agreement between various CDA practitioners with respect to the ideal of scientific objectivity. It is often made clear that CDA is openly political and strives towards emancipatory goals. Van Dijk (2001: 96) claims, 'CDA is biased - and proud of it'. According to Wodak (2001), the political inclination of this method is due to the interest in critical linguistics, specifically Habermas and more broadly the Frankfurt School. Being openly political is what I value about these scholars as they are not claiming to be scientifically objective. The other way round, they are unambiguously rejecting the whole notion of being unbiased. Feminist epistemology radicalises this critique, claiming that 'the problem with the conventional conception of objectivity is not that it is too rigorous or too "objectifying", as some have argued, but that it is *not rigorous or objectifying enough*' (Harding, 2004a: 128, emphasis in original). The problem with scientific objectivity is that it operates both too narrowly and too broadly. Initially introduced by the classics, limiting any value judgement in research has, paradoxically, resulted in a decreased level of objectivity in social analysis. Objectivism does not dismiss all values in its desire for neutrality but only those interests that are not shared within a particular scientific community. This is why sexist values have historically penetrated scientific research and often do not enter the category that should be controlled as a part of the value-neutrality norm. On the other hand, objectivism is conceptualised too broadly as it proclaims that all value judgements should be thoroughly removed from research, relying on Weber's (2004b: 21, emphasis in original) well-known warning that 'whenever an academic introduces his own value judgement, a complete understanding of the facts *comes to an end*'. However, not all interests are equally detrimental for research, for example gender equality, even though it is explicitly political, should not be purified from research designs. To tackle these issues, Harding (2004a: 136) proposes 'strong objectivity which requires that the subject of knowledge be placed on the same critical, causal plane as the objects of knowledge. Thus, strong objectivity requires what we can think of as "strong reflexivity"'. The conventional understanding of objectivity relies on a conception where science is presented as a field of human activity isolated from social context. Considering that science is conceived on liberal values, conforming to objectivity, in the orthodox sense of the word, can only prove

to be damaging for research. My research recognises that there is no methodology without ideology and, therefore, is openly political. This, however, is not to promise that my research will result in a certain set of practical guidelines for a political action. My project is political in a sense of conforming to the norm of strong reflexivity which effectively means that I do not see myself as a researcher who examines the objects of knowledge, in my case the Croatian women, but include my own subjective position in the research design. In other words, I am not merely observing a certain political context but am also taking a particular role in the neoliberal system. In turn, my situatedness appears throughout the thesis and in relation to the phenomena on which the participants reflect, thus expanding the critical and methodological scope of my project.

In addition to its political character, Jäger's (2001) contributions to this type of discourse analysis are what this project finds to be the most valuable in CDA. Contrary to those analysts heavily inclined to linguistics, it can be said that he is examining discourse from a more philosophical and sociological perspective. Therefore, Jäger (2001: 36) puts forward the idea that discourses are 'not second-class material realities, nor are they "less material" than the "real" reality. Discourses are rather fully valid first-class material realities amidst others'. This is definitely a move from structural linguistic analysis dealing with intonation, word order and so on towards understanding in which examining discourse effectively means analysing society.

### **2.2.2. The discursive as the social as such**

Such understanding, where the discursive is seen as the social as such, more fully emerged with the work by Laclau and Mouffe (2001), especially with their *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* which clearly articulates a theory of discourse that is not based on examining formal linguistic categories. They reject the distinction, which can still be found vaguely articulated in Foucault's (1978) work, between non-discursive and discursive practices. This is why Laclau (in Jessop and Sum, 2013: 131) says 'by "the discursive" I understand nothing which in a narrow sense relates to texts but the ensemble of phenomena of the societal production of meaning on which a society as such is based. It is not a question of regarding the discursive as a plane or dimension of the social but as having the same meaning as the social as such'. What is important



to note here is that, for Laclau, discourse *is* material and the economy is seen as always already a social category. In other words, to examine the social is to examine the economy. Such an approach takes us well beyond socio-economic reasoning of the classics as there is no need for the hyphen that connects two respectfully separated spheres of inquiry. The hyphen has been lost in the process of establishing a suitable epistemology for a contemporary theory of discourse. Thus, analysing discourse is to deal with a broader process of establishing meanings in society. Following this approach and understanding of discourse as 'historically specific systems of meaning which form the identities of subjects and objects' (Howarth, 2000: 9), I see neoliberalism as yet another discourse. A hegemonic discourse, but nonetheless a discourse. Therefore, in my research, neoliberalism is not presented as an inevitable, fully formed fact but as a system of meanings that is constantly in the process of becoming.

### **2.3. Post-Marxist post-Marxism**

The novel conception of discourse is far from being the only useful concept in the framework laid down by Laclau and Mouffe (2001). Their post-Marxist perspective is largely adopted in my project. Being post-Marxist, in the way Laclau and Mouffe are, should by no means be understood as a simple disqualification of Marxist theoretical contributions. Quite on the contrary, they aimed to develop an improved theoretical standpoint based on the critique of Marxist concepts while acknowledging the significance of other theoretical legacies and, most obviously, Laclau and Mouffe (2001) explicitly rely on Gramsci to articulate their theory of equivalence. Their post-Marxism is in no way anti-Marxism, which is why they claim 'if our intellectual project in this book is *post-Marxist*, it is evidently also *post-Marxist*' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 4, emphasis in original). However, they do reject Marxist belief in the objective determination of history which is to be completed by the revolutionary workers and their sympathisers. Laclau (2007) even goes so far as to map the parallels between the theological tradition of Christianity and Marxist belief in eschatological agents embodied in the revolutionary class of the proletariat. This is where he demonstrates that Marxism is quite often operating with beliefs and is getting increasingly closer to becoming yet another eschatological system, thereby challenging its explanatory power. Furthermore, Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 177) reject economism, the belief that 'from a successful economic strategy there

necessarily follows a continuity of political effects which can be clearly specified'. Thus, they highlight a deficiency of a shared, Marxist and liberal belief in the economy as a source of salvation. Acknowledging this critique of both intellectual traditions, which are usually considered to be completely opposed, is to start thinking of commonalities between Marxism and liberalism.

In accordance with the rejection of economism, Laclau (2000a, 2000b) is dedicated to demystifying the category of class or, more precisely, its false primacy which continues to be a significant part of contemporary political theory (Fraser, 2013; Harvey, 2007; Tyler, 2013; Žižek, 2000a, 2000b). His most compelling arguments are those based on the observation that class has lost its articulating potential, as the key axis of collective identification, due to the proliferation of particular identities, such as race, gender, age and so on. After this articulating dimension is lost, it remains unclear what class signifies in contemporary society. Laclau (2000b: 297, emphasis in original) reminds us that, in Marx's theory, class is not just one among many struggles based on a particular identity but must have a strong potential for articulating various particular demands or, in his words, 'the Marxist notion of "class" cannot be incorporated into an enumerative chain of identities, simply because it is supposed to be the articulating core around which *all* identity is constituted'. He thinks it is wrong to claim that class still has a primacy in society but that we just need to use a more open minded approach when establishing the criterion of what belongs to class and think of it as an enlarged community of people. In his opinion, even if such an inflated concept of class is accepted, class politics is effectively made meaningless. Such fictional community is constituted on the basis of accumulating various characteristics while connections between the subjects of this alleged unity are far from being clear or, to put it in orthodox Marxist terms, while class consciousness is missing. This is not to argue that the category of class should be completely abandoned or referred to only by using a code name, such as conflict theory, materiality or similar euphemisms. It is to acknowledge 'that class struggle is just one species of identity politics, and one which is becoming less and less important in the world in which we live' (Laclau, 2000a: 203). Thus, it is the matter of rethinking rather than rejecting Marx's concepts that characterises Laclau's post-Marxism.

Having primarily Žižek in mind, Laclau (2000a, 2000b) insists that the notions such as class and class struggle operate as a fetish for some contemporary

theorists, providing their work and lives with a false sense of meaning. Basically, if Marxist revolution is rejected as theoretically weak, a void opens at the centre of contemporary ethical theory and, in this context, Laclau (2007: 123) claims that 'someone who is confronted with Auschwitz and has the moral strength to admit the contingency of her own beliefs, instead of seeking refuge in religious or rationalistic myths is, I think, a profoundly heroic and tragic figure'. This, in my opinion, could be seen as a precise diagnosis of contemporary theoretical weakness. Reflecting on this quotation, it seems that Laclau is stating that theoretical work has come to an impasse, i.e. is unable to provide alternatives, leaving us once again confronted with the unresolved issue of emancipation. In Laclau's case, religion and rationalism cannot provide alternatives as they are seen as myths. The question that arises is, therefore, where should we look for the alternative? Laclau does not turn mute when confronted with the issue of social change but proposes his model of emancipation.

Firstly, Laclau (2000c: 55, emphasis in original) makes it clear that 'if there is going to be the subject of a certain global emancipation, the subject antagonized by the general crime, it can be *politically constructed* only through the *equivalence* of a plurality of demands'. He does not stop at this point but provides a detailed explanation of how this chain of equivalences is formed, emphasising the importance of an analytic distinction between the empty and the floating signifier. In Laclau's own words, 'if I have called the general equivalent unifying an undisturbed equivalential chain the *empty signifier*, I will call the one whose emptiness results from the unfixity introduced by a plurality of discourses interrupting each other the *floating signifier*' (Laclau, 2000b: 305, emphasis in original). To illustrate this model using feminist struggle as an example, Mouffe (1993: 87, emphasis in original) argues that feminist movement, with the accompanying demands it poses, 'should be understood not as a separate form of politics designed to pursue the interests of women *as* women, but rather as the pursuit of feminist goals and aims within the context of a wider articulation of demands'. Therefore, feminism is in Laclau's model of emancipation acting as always only one of many floating signifiers situated in a certain chain of equivalences. The empty signifier, on the other hand, occurs as a certain excess, something else that unifies and represents every demand without identifying with any in particular or being reducible to a sum of all demands in a certain chain of equivalences, thus being 'a signifier without a signified' (Laclau, 2007: 36). The empty signifier does not need to be explicitly articulated in gendered

terms, i.e. it can be labelled simply as 'radical democracy', because 'it is the empty character of these anchoring points that truly universalizes a discourse, making it the surface of inscription of a plurality of demands beyond their particularities' (Laclau, 2000a: 210), including those put forward by feminists. Viewed in this way, it is ensured that the demands based on gender, ethnicity, class, age etc. will not be mutually exclusive and exhaust themselves, intentionally or not, in overriding their different but equally valuable demands (Mouffe, 1993). It could be said, firstly, that this model ensures that the call for anti-essentialism with respect to subjectivity is taken seriously and consistently implemented in the emancipatory struggle. Secondly, it is a model of emancipation where a particular struggle always occupies a certain position in the chain of equivalences, without harming or being harmed by other social struggles. This is a very skilful way to resolve the tension between abandoning the essence on which the so-called identity politics is based and the possibility of acting in a political manner.

Adopting a post-Marxist perspective, my research nonetheless does not proceed by seeing how contemporary society might fit in this model or by exploring possible routes for achieving emancipation. Rather, it departs from the emancipatory tradition (Andreadis *et al.*, 2017; Katsambekis and Stavrakakis, 2014; Stavrakakis *et al.*, 2017), whilst still deploying Laclau's model of emancipation, but in a rather different way to the one that he proposes. Focused on understanding what I see as an ethical void, introduced by Laclau (2007) in his *Emancipation(s)*, it explores what we can *learn* about contemporary society by examining the incompatibility of his model and neoliberal subjectivity. Such an approach does not bring us swift alternatives. It is radical precisely in Marx's (1978b: 60) sense of the word, where 'to be radical is to grasp things by the root'. Rather than anxiously burying it with false alternatives, my project makes this ethical void even deeper by working towards *understanding* neoliberal condition in its full complexity, thereby offering a radical approach to neoliberalism.

## **2.4. The void**

Coupled with Laclau's tragic figure who dismisses rationalist and religious narratives, Foucault's conception of the subject as an entrepreneur of herself is making the ethical void even more explicit and complex. In Laclau's case, religion and rationalism cannot provide alternatives as they are seen as myths. Even more

uncomfortable for his conception, it is far from clear what kind of demand could eventually occupy this structural position and successfully stand as 'the general equivalent unifying an undisturbed equivalential chain' (Laclau, 2000b: 305). The empty signifier cannot be simply ignored as less relevant because, according to Laclau (2000b: 306), 'there is no future for the Left if it is unable to create an expansive universal discourse, constructed out of, not against, the proliferation of particularisms of the last few decades'. In keeping with his post-Marxist view, Laclau (2000a, 2000b) acknowledges that the empty signifier will not inevitably occur and emphasises the need for an active struggle that would lead to a set of emancipatory populist movements. However, the reasons why the empty signifier is effectively missing remain under-theorised as his focus is on examining existing populist movements and reflecting on their emancipatory potential for the future actions of the Left. Rather than analysing why the empty signifier is missing, Laclau is overwhelmed by the possibility of its creation. In a way, he acts according to Mannoni's (2003) well-known psychoanalytic formula 'I know well, but all the same...' Laclau knows well that the empty signifier will not inevitably arise, but all the same believes it will and acts according to his belief. In that spirit he devises the model of emancipation and invests his further efforts in its potential. Consequently, the empty signifier is increasingly beginning to function as an eschatological resource in his model as there is the impression that it will eventually crystallise out of the multiple social struggles, thus bringing about emancipatory change in society. In the same manner, Mouffe, during her talk at a recent conference in London (*Socialism, Capitalism and the Alternatives: Lessons from Russia and Eastern Europe*, organised by the University College London), stated that, while struggling for the populist movement to emerge and radical democracy to be established, it seems that we have lost democracy altogether. She recognises this as an unintended consequence and hopes for a constitution of the populist movement on the level of the European Union. Therefore, even after democracy itself is lost, a more thorough reflection on why the empty signifier is not arising is seen as unnecessary. In contrast, I take a different approach, fully recognising that the empty signifier is not an eschatological instance that will inevitably crystallise. This, in turn, enables me to take a less activist approach and focus on the reasons why the empty signifier is missing.

The answer, I claim, can be found when Laclau's notion of political frontier is critically examined. In his later work, Laclau (2005) focused on populism, providing a conceptualisation in which 'populism is, quite simply, a way of constructing the political' (Laclau, 2005: xi). The novelty of his position is precisely in his re-evaluation of populism as he does not reject it from a well-known moralist standpoint but sees it as a necessary condition for a collective agency. Laclau (2005: 89, 231) elaborates the interconnection between his model of the chain of equivalences and populism, arguing that

the destiny of populism is strictly related to the destiny of the political frontier [...] Frontiers are the *sine qua non* of the emergence of the 'people': without them, the whole dialectic of partiality/universality would simply collapse. But the more extended the equivalential chain, the less 'natural' the articulation between its links, and the more unstable the identity of the enemy (located on the other side of the frontier).

Laclau is aware that the enemy of global emancipation cannot be easily addressed and, in this respect, Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 158) argue that the antagonisms provoked by a global capitalism should be used in order to 'constitute new forms of radical subjectivity on the basis of discursively constructing as an external imposition - and therefore as forms of oppression - relations of subordination which until that moment had not been questioned'. Parallel to this, the Left should actively work on preventing the fall into pure particularism of demands, always bearing in mind that neoliberalism has an immense capacity to absorb various struggles and resignify them to serve neoliberal ends. To illustrate his argument, Laclau (2005: 73-74, emphasis in original) provides an example of 'in embryo, a populist configuration' in which

there is an accumulation of unfulfilled demands and an increasing inability of the institutional system to absorb them in a *differential* way (each in isolation from the others), and an *equivalential* relation is established between them. The result could easily be, if

it is not circumvented by external factors, a widening chasm separating the institutional system from the people.

In his opinion, what might be born out of such constellation of power relations, where the people are increasingly separated from the institutional system, is the global subject of emancipation.

This is where the crucial problem inherent in his model of emancipation is situated. The enemy is not just becoming increasingly unstable as the equivalential chain extends but the enemy that would make his model effective literally does not exist in neoliberal society. The main reason why the empty signifier is missing should be sought in the proliferation of neoliberal subjectivity. When a Foucaultian perspective is adopted, 'the identification of an institutionalised "other"' (Laclau, 2005: 117) that subordinates and oppresses, necessary for establishing the political frontier, proves to be an obsolete task in neoliberal era. However, this is not to say that the political frontier, essential for the functioning of Laclau's model of emancipation, does not exist anymore. The way I understand it, this frontier is internal to neoliberal subjects or, in other words, the enemy and the person who should resist the system are simultaneously embodied within the figure of neoliberal subject. Thus, subversion is subverted by the lack of its addressee and, rather than confronting 'an institutionalised "other"' (Laclau, 2005: 117), the political frontier manifests in self-confrontation. This is why, even though people are fully free to express their revolt and actively resist, it remains unclear against whom are they revolting. The neoliberal state does not operate as a separate body, but neoliberal subjects are perpetuating the system themselves, through their choices, embodying the productive character of power (Salecl, 2010). If Laclau's aforementioned figure becomes tragic (and heroic) as it refuses to seek refuge in rationalist and religious narratives, Foucault's conception of the subject as an entrepreneur of herself, taking away the repressive instance of power that could be straightforwardly blamed for the suffering in contemporary society, is making the ethical void even more explicit and complex. It poses some uncomfortable questions about the heroic character of Laclau's figure as it examines the productive character of power, thereby challenging the innocence of neoliberal subject and her role in the perpetuation of neoliberalism.

Acknowledging this, my research is not an attempt to identify or reconstruct the Enemy. This project is concerned with ways the women I interviewed constitute

themselves and get constituted as neoliberal subjects. In the context of my research, this means exploring the ways women experience the tension between trying to meet neoliberal imperatives and rebellion against the *status quo* in which they cannot establish satisfying existence. Understanding the government of gendered self in a deeply contradictory context, marked with the neoliberal performativity on the one side and the internal political frontier on the other, is what comes to the forefront of my research.

## **2.5. Neoliberalism**

In order undertake such research it is essential to focus on the meaning of neoliberalism. In contemporary literature neoliberalism is mostly used to signify liberalism in current society. This liberalism, situated in a new temporal environment, is often described as notorious due to its social consequences. For example, in his book *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey (2007: 7) claims that 'the first experiment with neoliberal state formation, it is worth recalling, occurred in Chile after Pinochet's coup on the "little September 11th" of 1973' and that neoliberalism gained its academic reputation after the Nobel Prize was awarded to both Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek. Naomi Klein (2007), in her well-known book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, is using the term neoliberalism as a synonym for the Chicago School. In both of these works, there seems to be a continuity from liberalism to neoliberalism, with only a formal, terminological change occurring. It is not clear why they introduce this new term, especially as it is not self-explanatory and it intriguingly implies something new. The issue is mostly not apparent to the reader as one is overwhelmed by reading about the harmful consequences of neoliberalism, which often results in an instinctive moral judgement and makes the difference between neoliberalism and liberalism even more blurred. This is, of course, not to say that their work is not valuable. Far from it, the vivid case studies they use to describe neoliberalism and statistics they provide are both interesting and ensure a solid basis for a further theoretical work. However, these studies cannot help us to understand what neoliberalism is. For this we must look across disciplines and towards those more theoretical approaches. Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France present us with more than a solid starting point for developing a theoretically sophisticated understanding of neoliberalism and its novelties.



When Foucault (2008) is examining neoliberal thought, it can be said that he identifies two main pathways. Firstly, there is the German model which developed as a response to the collapse of Nazism and is concerned with the reconstruction of the state. Secondly, there is the American model which has arisen mainly as a critique of Roosevelt's government and so-called Keynesian social policy, but as well as an opposition to the interventionism and social aid brought mainly by Truman's and Johnson's government to tackle poverty and segregation. The distinctive points between neoliberalism and liberalism are elaborated in Foucault's (2008) analysis of the German model of neoliberalism or, in more common terms, ordoliberalism. Ordoliberalism begins with the journal *Ordo* being founded in 1936 and by the economist Walter Eucken forming the school called the Ordoliberal or Freiburg School. This school, which Foucault most often has on his mind while referring to neoliberals, emerged as a response to the collapse of Nazism and is primarily concerned with the reconstruction of the state. My research will rely mostly on the German model because it represents a theoretically sophisticated conception of neoliberalism and because it largely informs contemporary neoliberal reasoning.

### **2.5.1. *Do-not-laissez-faire***

Compared to liberals, ordoliberals reject the liberal notion of *laissez-faire* and think of it as a naive naturalism. They are well aware that there is no such thing as a biological human impulse to compete and, therefore, there is nothing *a priori* in human behaviour that would, if exercised freely, be a sufficient condition to develop a proper capitalist society. The neoliberal subject is thus largely relieved of socio-biological presuppositions and neoliberals indeed carefully avoid the pitfalls of essentialism. However, this is not to say that neoliberals reject any kind of internal logic in competition. On the contrary, they see competition as an outcome of the interplay between social inequalities. This is crucial if we want to understand their position on inequalities in society. Neoliberals do not see any problem with social inequalities, but rather think of inequalities as a generator of progress. Therefore, it does not make much sense to expect from neoliberals to tell us how to create society without inequalities. This is why their answer to the question of who is an unemployed person, 'he is not someone suffering from an economic disability; he is not a social victim. He is a worker in transit. He is a worker in transit between an unprofitable activity and a more profitable activity' (in Foucault, 2008: 139), should

merit a more comprehensive analysis rather than a superficial moralist rejection. Neoliberals would, in an ideal case, only provide aid to those people that find themselves in a state of affairs where they cannot consume sufficiently to participate in the play of inequalities. Even more so, they would not be particularly interested in what exactly caused their impoverishment. From their point of view this is unimportant as what really matters is how to get the poor back in the game, so that the whole society can be disciplined by the logic of competition. Another consequence of such policy approach is that 'it involves an individualization of social policy and individualization through social policy, instead of collectivization and socialization by and in social policy' (Foucault, 2008: 144), thereby rejecting the traditional notion of aid as an act of collective solidarity. It can be said that neoliberals want to create society in which the internal logic of competition or, in other words, the interplay of various inequalities would be set in action.

However, it should be made clear that neoliberals have no intention to actively intervene in the internal logic of competition, but are seeking to change the structure of society in order to make it a more conducive environment for competition. This is why Foucault (2008: 120) claims 'pure competition must and can only be an objective, an objective thus presupposing an indefinitely active policy. Competition is therefore an historical objective of governmental art and not a natural given that must be respected'. It is primarily at this point that the transition from passive to active governmentality takes place. Neoliberal policies ensure that society is permanently perfecting its playground for inequalities between the individuals. Consequently, *'laissez-faire'* is turned into a *do-not-laissez-faire* government, in the name of a law of the market which will enable each of its activities to be measured and assessed. [...] It is a sort of permanent economic tribunal confronting government' (Foucault, 2008: 247, emphasis in original). This once again calls for a famous quote from *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Engels and Marx, 1978: 476) 'all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned', as there is no such structure in society where the logic of the market fails to penetrate. This, as has already been argued earlier in the chapter, is ultimately achieved not by repression but through a productive character of power, by a production and perpetuation of a new subjectivity obsessed with self-entrepreneurship.

### **2.5.2. Abolishing the economic reductionism**

In addition to this, the orthodox Marxist differentiation between the infrastructure and superstructure is also re-evaluated by neoliberals. However, neoliberals could not simply reject it as a Marxist relic because liberal theory also conceives the economy as a separate sphere in society. Foucault, by adopting a genealogical approach, illuminates the similarity between Marxism and liberalism. Due to his analysis, similarities between these two traditions have become apparent. This strongly influenced my approach as my research strives towards situating both Marxism and liberalism, as systems which form the intellectual context of neoliberalism, on a broader discourse plane. Neoliberals see that it is simply not possible, as in classical liberal theory, to maintain a strict boundary between the state on the one side and the economy on the other. The economy is enabled by the social context and cannot be isolated as a pure category on which it is subsequently possible to implement certain policy solutions. For Foucault (2008: 163) this is so obvious that he even claims 'I am embarrassed to point it out, is that instead of distinguishing between an economic belonging to the infrastructure and a juridical-political belonging to the superstructure, we should in reality speak of an economic-juridical order'. What distinguishes neoliberals from liberals is precisely their awareness of the economy as a social product and their willingness to base their conception of neoliberalism on this insight. They label a liberal approach as passive and are more than willing to intervene, once again, not in competition itself but in the conditions where competition is situated. From this perspective, of understanding society as an economic-juridical order, we can see what Röpke meant when he stated 'the free market requires an active and extremely vigilant policy' (in Foucault, 2008: 133). That is why neoliberals often refer to this new liberalism as a 'sociological liberalism' and 'positive liberalism' (in Foucault, 2008: 146, 133); sociological as it is trying to change social structures and positive to emphasise the need for an active governmental approach.

### **2.5.3. Neoliberal subjectivity**

Subjectivity, in the perspective marked by the rejection of economism, is not something that belongs to the category of superstructure, being no more than an elusive reflection of the economy. Rather, it is a first-order issue, the engine power of neoliberalism, producing and perpetuating neoliberalism with its institutional

structure. This is not to say that institutions do not exist in neoliberal society or that they are completely purified of any sovereignty. Of course, neoliberal institutions do exist and are not simply relieved of acting in a coercive manner, which is illustrated by numerous studies (Fraser, 2013; Gill and Scharff, 2011; Harvey, 2007; Klein, 2007; Tyler, 2013). However, this does not contradict Foucault's work, which is not about ignoring institutions. After all, Foucault (1980: 122) made it quite clear:

I don't want to say that the State isn't important; what I want to say is that relations of power, and hence the analysis that must be made of them, necessarily extend beyond the limits of the State. In two senses: first of all because the State, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations, and further because the State can only operate on the basis of other, already existing power relations.

Neoliberal institutions are not the final point of analysis and, accordingly, neoliberalism cannot be explained simply as the accumulation of micro-institutional settings. Rather, neoliberalism owes its existence (along with its institutions) and strength to a particular form of subjectivity, self-governing through freedom (Rose, 2004, 1996). Discipline does not disappear but takes a new form, proliferating through the freedom of neoliberal subjects, paradoxically acting as a productive instance in the process of subjectification.

Foucault (2008), therefore, does not lose the individual from his theoretical scope. He sees the liberal subjects as concerned mostly with the supply and demand of labour resources. This, for him, is the main characteristic of *homo oeconomicus*. On the other hand, the neoliberal subject is not a passive one nor satisfied with a simple exchange, but rather takes an active role. She has a motivation to go further and make herself ever more competitive. For that reason, such subject is, in Foucault's (2008: 226) words, 'an entrepreneur of himself'. Understanding why this entrepreneurial subject has emerged is possible only if we remind ourselves that neoliberals insist on using competition as a benchmark for all aspects of human behaviour 'and, thanks to this analytical schema or grid of intelligibility, it will be possible to reveal in non-economic processes, relations, and behaviour a number of intelligible relations which otherwise would not have appeared as such - a sort of

economic analysis of the non-economic' (Foucault, 2008: 243). In other words, the neoliberal subject is personally pushing the boundaries of economic analysis, consequently auto-colonising aspects of her life that were traditionally situated outside the competition playground.

#### **2.5.4. Commonalities**

Despite all the aforementioned differences, both liberalism and neoliberalism share Adam Smith's (2005) belief that humans cannot deliberately achieve a collective good because the totality of economic processes eludes our knowledge and the best thing one can do is to lawfully seek her or his interests, while the collective good will appear as an unintended consequence. What can be observed from such presupposition is that the progress is a matter of belief in the internal logic of competition, which will eventually benefit society in general. As Smith (in Sloterdijk, 2013a: 203) is sure that 'in a well-ruled state where the wastefulness of the unproductive is kept in check, there will inevitably be a general state of affluence that will be tangible even in the lowest classes of society', neoliberal subjects simply need to work on their competitiveness and wait for the beneficial results on the macro-level of society. Their self-entrepreneurial spirit is not only utilitarian but also ethically valid.

Additionally, both neoliberalism and liberalism use rationalist discourse, attributing the highest value to the category called reason. According to this way of thinking, reason, impersonal and homogenous by its nature, is fully capable of transcending the limitations of culture and is, then, inherently universal (Parekh, 2008). Consequently, both neoliberals and liberals do not see their values as a product of specific social context but as derivations of the reason that should be, if conducted in a rational manner, the universal outcome of any analysis. Following this discourse, they share the modernist belief according to which the autonomy of the individual has an absolute superiority over the particular characteristics of identity. This is why they think that universal human reason can fully substitute religious, ethnic, gender and other specificities, making them obsolete. Insisting on the importance of, for example, gender identity is - from their perspective - missing the hierarchical value of reason or, in other words, the act of an unreasonable person (Parekh, 2000). For a gendered analysis, such as that of my project, this is relevant as it explains why it is not contradictory to talk about gender inequalities in neoliberal

society. Gender, while being excluded from the rationalist perspective in order to make space for universal human reason, nonetheless remains a factor in our everyday lives. Gender, therefore, is not erased from society but excluded from a particular, rationalist perspective on society. Foucault's take on neoliberalism reminds us that neoliberalism is a set of meanings that structure its own epistemology. Once this is acknowledged, we can explore a specific role gender has in this epistemology.

## **2.6. Exploring governmentality**

Nevertheless, Foucault's work is not relevant for my project merely as it offers a more philosophical explanation of neoliberalism. Considering that he is above all, as Spivak (1988: 280) says, 'the master of discourse analysis', what is really important is his methodological approach rather than the specific object of inquiry. My research primarily draws on his concept of governmentality, which links forms of governing and certain modes of thought, while exploring how specific knowledge and representations in society provide the rationalisation of power by defining problems and instruments for governing (Anders, 2005; Larner and Walters, 2004a). Studying governmentality implies reconstructing macro-power issues, such as the state, starting with the analysis of the micro-power 'on the basis of men's actual practice, on the basis of what they do and how they think' (Foucault, 2009: 358). This is why, in his work, he understands the state as a practice, a plurality of governmentalities, while government is not presented as an institution but as 'the activity that consists in governing people's conduct within the framework of, and using the instruments of, a state' (Foucault, 2008: 77, 318). Thus, when Foucault is examining transition from liberal to neoliberal governmentality, he is trying to establish how certain strategies of governing personal life became prominent. He is not asking for radical breaks, such as revolutions but is precisely mapping the genealogy of *status quo*. Examining the evolution of the concept, he is exposing neoliberalism in its fragility. By exploring neoliberalism, one can see beyond its hegemony and acquire the understanding that society was not always neoliberal, it used to function with a dissimilar ideological system and, in future, people might as well organise themselves in a different manner.

Considering the novelty of his approach, it is not surprising that it has inspired many research traditions. Foucault's influence can be seen at its most

obvious in the Governmentality School and a closely related tradition of the anthropology of the state. The Governmentality School is a loosely connected network of scholars, initially gathered around the publication *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Burchell *et al.*, 1991). Walters (1996: 214), who is usually considered to be a representative of this school himself, even argues that governmentality approach 'is not so much a "Foucauldian" approach to politics as a series of thought-experiments made possible by "Foucault effect"'. Indeed, governmentality scholars develop Foucault's framework of governmentality in various fields of human activity (Anders, 2005; Bröckling *et al.*, 2011), quite often changing it up to a point where it becomes hard to relate their interpretations to those initially put forward by Foucault. However, this network of scholars is quite productive in its diversity and provides interesting perspectives while experimenting with the meaning of governmentality. For example, some scholars look at how freedom is used as a governmental technology or, in other words, they examine governing through freedom (Rose, 1996) and focus on the everyday life (Burchell *et al.*, 1991; Nadesan, 2008). Others change the scope and apply governmentality to explore globalisation and international relations (Haahr and Walters, 2005; Larner and Walters, 2004b). Examining states as actors who are self-governing makes international relations, the field otherwise heavily saturated with a developmental discourse (Boone and Duku, 2012; Morgan and Olsen, 2015; Schwittay, 2015), more appealing. These scholars observe processes such as the integration of new members in the European Union, border regulations, immigration policies etc. and my project draws on these studies in order to situate Croatia using a novel perspective. The anthropology of the state is mainly focused on analysis of the state as practice (Arts *et al.*, 2009; Burawoy *et al.*, 2000; Gupta and Sharma, 2006; Scott, 1998). By mapping a micro presence of the state, these studies remind us that the state is not above society. Rather, it is perpetuated and produced as a part of our everyday interactions or, in other words, the state is primarily a practice.

What is especially relevant for my research is that these studies situate Foucault's concepts while making it apparent that his ideas cannot be applied in straightforward way or used as a blueprint. The researcher needs to fully acknowledge the context and situate Foucault's concepts in that context. This is why discourse analysis is not just any analysis of text or social phenomena seen as texts but requires a delicate and rigorous approach. In line with the approach taken in my

project, governmentality scholars quite often refrain from offering clear value judgements or alternatives as a part of their studies. This might confuse the reader as we usually expect a study to be completed with a certain 'verdict' on the object of inquiry. However, it would be mistaken to see this as a deficiency on the part of these researchers. Discourse analysis is at its most productive when it goes beyond good and evil, conducted 'merely' to identify multiple, often contradictory, meanings. For that reason, this thesis might also leave the reader asking herself 'fine, but what is to be done?' Such indeterminacy can be enabling, and it has allowed me to leave the imperative of activity behind for a moment and focus on answering a far more radical question. Rather than asking *What is to be Done?* (Lenin, 1990), this thesis asks how have we done what we have done? How are we producing and perpetuating contemporary, neoliberal condition? Finally, the contributions of the Governmentality School and the anthropology of the state exemplify how Foucault's ideas can be used in case studies to produce fresh insights into contemporary society. While this project draws heavily on certain Foucauldian concepts and is itself a case study, it is not limited to the approach of the Governmentality School, as will be explored further in the chapter *Contextual and Methodological Outline of the Research*.

## **2.7. Employing postcolonial theory**

Engaging in a case study dealing with gender and neoliberalism, which is what I do in my project, implies ethical difficulties that are well-known points of concern in postcolonial and feminist literature. An ambiguous epistemological status of the experience characterises poststructural thought, which is also relevant for the feminist research as it deals with the experiences of women (Harding, 2004b; Weedon, 1987). Considering that I examine how the Croatian women experience neoliberalism, this issue is directly relevant for my research.

It is widely understood that the study of the experiences of women should be employed to serve feminist aims, while at the same time bearing in mind that feminist aims are rather diverse and at times even mutually exclusive (Collins, 2004; Hartsock, 2004; Hirschmann, 2004). With a strong focus on discussing the variety of feminist demands, sometimes it remains overlooked *how* we should use experiences of women or, more precisely, what is it exactly that we want to explain by exploring these experiences. Even more importantly, it often remains unclear to whom are we



addressing what we are exploring. The experiences of participants in my project help this thesis to understand how a hegemonic discourse operates in society. It is not the aim of this research to produce guidelines for exploited women, benevolently letting them know how to conduct themselves. The researcher should not act as an educated spokesperson and play a representative role. In other words, 'you don't work to give the subaltern a voice. You work against subalternity itself' (Spivak in Brohi, 2014). Thus, this project draws on the experiences of participants in order to reflect on neoliberalism and refrains from producing enlightened lessons for the participants to use. My approach follows Harding's (1991) notion of traitorous identities and uses it in order to further develop its scope. Harding argues that the researcher should abandon, betray his or her identity in order to learn from the experiences of marginalised. In the context of my research, this does not, of course, mean swiftly abandoning my identity and becoming a marginalised woman. While I will mention and situate my own experiences at certain places, thus acting in conformity with the norm of strong reflexivity, I will not engage in a more significant 'privatisation' of this thesis. That would be a little more than making it an autobiographical piece and in this sense I depart from Harding's idea of traitorous identities which, at least to a certain extent, implies a discourse of confession, of self-narrating extensively. This research understands taking traitorous identity as a move from providing aforementioned enlightened lessons, nowadays institutionalised in a form of various departments and centres for Global Governance, International Development, Social Policy and Intervention etc., towards *understanding* contemporary relations between gender and neoliberalism. Such identity is traitorous in that it, in the context where the boundary between the academia and international civil society can hardly be recognised, allows itself to learn without being urged to act. The margin, in this context, appears as a rather productive position. It is a position from which one can grasp the logic of neoliberalism without rushing to provide 'empirically grounded' policy guidelines and getting lost in the imperative of activity.

Considering that the importance of context is of the essence for postcolonial theory, I see it as useful to emphasise the problems with the false alternatives to neoliberalism that are on offer. My research recognises that there are no universally applicable political solutions (Guha, 1987; Spivak, 2012). As they are situated in a specific context, social problems are always particular and, for this reason, any political solution must be respectful to the context in which it intervenes.

Furthermore, it does not suffice to simply implement the law, let alone 'soft' policy recommendations produced by the international civil society, in order to enact a more radical social change. One should ask for much more as the desires of people need to be rearranged in order to achieve any effective change. In other words, the political potential of subjectivity should be engaged for social change to take place. Thus, what is necessary is 'aesthetic education [...] training of the imagination in epistemological performance through a rearrangement of desires' (Spivak, 2012: 125). There are no simple or instant solutions for harmful effects of neoliberalism or other social problems that have accumulated throughout time and it goes without saying that no project cycle is long enough to enact social change on its own. By exposing delusions of grandeur, postcolonial theory reminds us that social change is necessarily a situated *and* collective political effort.

In addition, postcolonial theory is used in my project to situate Croatia in a historical context and rethink some fundamental concepts of my analysis, as my methodological chapter will detail. Drawing largely on Said (2003), Todorova (2009, 2004) examines the position of the Balkans regarding to the West, claiming that the Balkans is not simply seen as Other but as an incomplete self. To radicalise her claim, it can be said that 'the Balkans is the unconscious of Europe' (Dolar in Bijelić, 2011: 1). When this perspective is applied, a set of interesting points can be identified. For example, looking at various dictionaries, we can see that to 'balkanize' means 'to break up into small, mutually hostile political units, as the Balkans after World War I' (Todorova, 2009: 33). The term itself is a fantasmatic reference as 'when the term was coined, at the end of World War I, only one Balkan nation, Albania, was added to the already existing Balkan map; all others had been nineteenth-century formations. [...] To this post-World War I legacy should be added Yugoslavia, whose creation was, technically speaking, the reverse of balkanization' (Todorova, 2009: 32-33). However, this is not to say that people who are using the word balkanisation nowadays are some sort of colonial advocates. Simply, the term has entered in the everyday usage as a brute social fact, thus becoming a part of normal, everyday epistemology. This project draws on postcolonial theory in order to rethink issues that are nowadays considered to be a normal part of our everyday life, such as 'balkanization', and are for that reason rarely brought into question. For example, the way in which the postcolonial framework is applied creates the space for a different understanding of post-socialism. When socialism had fallen, not only

the countries that were socialist, in a sense that they declared themselves as committed to socialism as a socio-economic system, were influenced. The fall of socialism had a global impact and, therefore, every country nowadays is in a post-socialist state of affairs. Thus, postcolonial theory is not only relevant for the so-called Third World, as if these countries exist as episodes in the process of becoming the West, but can be used as a theoretical framework to address contemporary phenomena worldwide (Prakash, 1990). More precisely, postcolonial theory is here to question our everyday life, to trouble and unpack the history of 'everyday', 'normal' state of affairs.

## **2.8. Psychoanalysis as a theory of neoliberal society**

Considering that postcolonial scholars often draw on psychoanalytic concepts (for example Bhabha, 2009), one frequently comes across references to psychoanalytic theory while reading postcolonial literature. Psychoanalysis expands our scope by enabling us to trace the distinctive traits of neoliberal subjectivity. This is not simply to claim the need for psychoanalysis as 'Foucauldian theories describe neoliberalism's ideal rational actor, but without a notion of unconscious process, these analyses offer only a partial sense of how neoliberalism is psychically lived' (Layton, 2014: 165). Psychoanalysis, in the way I deploy it, is not only about the individual's unconscious. It should not be mistaken for an intellectually privileged discourse on the individual as 'for psychoanalysis there is no such thing as an individual, the individual only makes sense as a knot of social ties, a network of relations to the others, to the always already social Other' (Dolar, 2008: 17). What psychoanalysis offers this project is not a glimpse in the interior life of the neoliberal subject but, rather, the notion of barred totality, of the inexistent Other (Evans, 1999; Fink, 1995; Žižek, 1999). My research engages with psychoanalysis not in order to 'open' the neoliberal subject but to develop our understanding of neoliberalism in general, to explore ways in which the neoliberal subject is implicated in the Other and *vice versa* (Šumič, 2016; Zupančič, 2008). Linking Foucault's conception of neoliberal governance and psychoanalysis, this project makes further efforts in definitely breaking with a tradition of following 'the interpretive procedure [that] enacts and reenacts a selective process by which broader social and symbolic meanings are separated off from the economic thus producing the effect of the ostensible autonomy of the economy' (Butler, 2010: 149). Employing both

perspectives enables me not only to argue that neoliberal subjects are 'governed through freedom' (Rose, 2004: 72), which would not be much more than supporting Rose's development of Foucaultian theory, but to go a step further and examine how governing through freedom operates in everyday life, and how neoliberal subjectivity is performative of the economy.

### **2.8.1. Ideology as a support for our 'reality' itself**

What is especially relevant for this project is the work of scholars who form, or are closely related to, the Ljubljana School of Psychoanalysis (Dolar and Žižek, 2002; Salecl, 2002; Zupančič, 2008, 2000) and are focused on theoretically applying psychoanalytical concepts, mostly developed as a part of Lacan's understanding of Freud, in order to examine contemporary phenomena. One of the topics they analyse is ideology, which is not understood in orthodox Marxist terms as a false consciousness but rather as 'a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our "reality" itself: an "illusion" which structures our effective, real social relations' (Žižek, 2008: 45). Furthermore, Žižek (2008) claims that there is no neutral, unbiased perception of reality because every person needs to have a certain ideological affiliation in order to give a meaning to the context in which she is situated. Therefore, claiming that a particular perspective is purely scientific as it deals with brute social facts would not be above ideology. On the contrary, such claim would be ideologically saturated exactly due to its attempt to deny it by invoking the brute social facts. Read in this light, Weber's claim (2004b: 21, emphasis in original) that 'whenever an academic introduces his own value judgement, a complete understanding of the facts *comes to an end*', appears as an ideological statement. In this case, the ideology in question, of course, is positivism. However, this is not to say that ideology prevents us from understanding reality and that we need to devise different and creative methods for grasping reality. Reality is 'perfectly knowable: the subject of desire knows no more than that, since for it reality is entirely phantasmatic' (Sheridan in Lacan, 1994: 280). In other words, there is no reality without the dreams, reality itself is a phantasmatic structure. Drawing on these insights, my project acknowledges that it is impossible to escape ideology. That would effectively mean leaving the field of discourse and establishing a perspective that is above all social relations or, in Haraway's (1988: 582) words, performing 'a god trick'. Rather than abandoning ideology altogether, as if that would

be possible, this research maps the current ideology that structures our existence, namely neoliberal ideology.

However, nowadays it can be heard that we are living in the time when big ideologies do not exist anymore, the Cold War had finished a long time ago, the myths of our past are finally debunked and we are now faced with a sobering, relentless reality of the economy (Fukuyama, 2012, 2004). Such claims are based on the notion of the economy as a separate field of human conduct that exists outside the phantasmatic structure. This, however, is not a sign that society is effectively becoming post-ideological but, on the contrary, that neoliberal ideology is so omnipresent that even its mere existence can be denied. As mentioned earlier, the ideology of rational conduct is internalised through the choices people are making in their everyday lives. Furthermore, neoliberal government of the self is fostered through a discourse of emergency which proclaims issues that are not economic as less important (Agamben, 2005). In a way, it has come to appear inappropriate to insist on gender equality while there is an economic crisis. This suspension has developed into a stable policy, in other words 'the voluntary creation of a permanent state of emergency (though perhaps not declared in the technical sense) has become one of the essential practices of contemporary states' (Agamben, 2005: 2). Thus, gender equality appears to have been suspended, which is presented as an emergency measure, active only until the economy recovers. Bearing in mind that the financial crisis of 2008 has been present for almost a decade, my project will not examine the crisis as an emergency but as a normal functioning of neoliberalism, yet another stage in capitalist development. In accordance, my focus will shift from tackling the gendered aspects of crisis to exploring the government of gendered self in neoliberal normality.

### **2.8.2. Anxiety and neoliberalism**

In the Ljubljana School of Psychoanalysis, another prominent subject of analysis is the freedom of choice. Choice is understood as a governmental technology, but this time the inquiry is going a step further, examining the interconnection of choice and anxiety in neoliberal context (Salecl, 2010, 2005). The neoliberal imperative can be summarised 'the self-made man is independent from social constraints. With sheer determination and hard work, he could rise above the social and economic conditions into which he was born [...] obstacles only help to

shape him' (Salecl, 2010: 20). These words immediately correspond with our everyday life and it could even be said that the neoliberal imperative is a part of our common sense. We are aware that society often demands the internalisation and respect of many, often contradictory norms. However, when it comes to understanding the full scope of meaning that stands behind its contradictory character, if one is interested in going beyond a mere and simple dismissal of neoliberalism, the task proves to be a rather complicated one. Going into the details of neoliberal imperative is exactly what distinguishes Salecl's (2010, 2005) work on the interconnection of neoliberalism and anxiety. She identifies one of the reasons why the neoliberal imperative is contradictory as lying in the inability of neoliberal subject to simply change the social and economic conditions in which she has found herself. There are no instant fixes for these conditions that form the context of our existence. This is often not just neglected by the neoliberal subject but foreclosed as 'we are asked to see our whole lives as one big composite of decisions and choices' (Salecl, 2010: 1), even though there is no amount of persistence that can improve harsh living conditions immediately. Considering that this impossibility of swift fixes is foreclosed, those who find themselves in an unsatisfactory context are shamed for not being skilful enough to improve these conditions as they anxiously struggle to change their situation, enhance their competitiveness. This is one of the most obvious reasons why the neoliberal imperative produces anxiety.

The neoliberal imperative is underscored by the assumption that the neoliberal subject is not just the self-made man but is, more precisely, the man made purely out of rational choices, which does not leave any place for irrationality in one's life. Analysing love choices, Salecl (2010, 2005) argues that one does not merely choose a love partner rationally, judging his or her qualities before making the final decision. On the contrary, we fall in love and this is where the 'choice' is made, mainly on the unconscious level. In order to meet the neoliberal imperative, after the 'choice' has been made, we rationalise why we have 'chosen' that exact individual and not someone else, thereby retroactively creating a rational basis for our 'choice'. This rationalisation is especially present when the relationship has come to its end and when we do our best to rationally explain to ourselves our own love 'choices'. This negation of irrationality is seen most clearly when one, after the breakup, is confronted with the question, situated somewhere in between flattering and comforting, such as 'how could you be with that person, you are so nice and

smart compared to him (or her)?' Or, in other words, 'how could you be so irrational in love choices, why have not you chosen more rationally, in the way you usually conduct yourself?' Salecl (2010: 49) makes it clear that neoliberal subjects can repress their drives and desires, leaving the impression of completely rational individuals but, at the same time, coming from psychoanalytic perspective, she understands that 'eventually they will reveal themselves in the form of idiosyncratic behaviour, slips of the tongue, even illnesses'. For that reason, she aligns herself with the psychoanalytic approach that does not seek for the truth of subject looking deep into her in order to reveal the essence of existence but, quite on the contrary, recognises that 'the road whose goal it is to observe the precept *γνῶθι σεαυτόν* [know thyself] runs *viâ* the study of one's own apparently accidental actions and omissions' (Freud, 2001a: 211). Psychoanalysis spots those brief moments, the slips of mind in which the repressed becomes obvious, reminding us that we are all necessarily underachievers when it comes to the neoliberal imperative. Anxiety thus, on the one hand, enforces the ideal of rational subject, reminding us that we should behave more responsibly but, on the other hand, simultaneously betrays the irrationality of neoliberal subject as it shows that her attempt to reinvent herself as a purely rational being always already fails.

### **2.8.2.1. The missing creator of anxiety**

While identifying why neoliberalism breeds anxiety, the question that arises is who stands behind the neoliberal imperative, who is issuing such contradictory and anxiety provoking demands? I argue that the place behind the neoliberal imperative is fundamentally empty. There is no unitary power that imposes neoliberal values. It is exactly this emptiness that neoliberal subjects find agonizing and react to with anxiety. Contrary to Salecl's argument that the true terror of choice and the generator of anxiety is not knowing what is lost by choosing in a particular way, I argue that the terror of anxiety is above all due to the missing creator of neoliberal imperative.

Building her argument, Salecl (2010: 1, emphasis added) argues that 'in today's consumer society we are *not only required* to choose between products: *we are asked* to see our whole lives as one big composite of decisions and choices'. Even though this claim is basically accurate, the formulation 'not only required [...] we are asked' seems to be taken too literally in Salecl's work and it leaves us with the

impression that there is a unitary power that requires something from the neoliberal subject, that asks her to behave in a certain manner. Accordingly, if the neoliberal subject is asked to do something, she is just fulfilling the requirement, adapting her behaviour in order to accommodate a certain imposition. However, in Salecl's (2010) formal argument about choice, there is no mention of where these impositions are coming from. In order to approach this issuing authority, it seems to be more productive to look at her less formal work on choice, as articulated in Salecl's (2011) animated lecture on the paradox of choice, a clear and helpful introduction in the ideology of choice. Near the end of her lecture, she says:

At some point this subject starts believing that he is not simply a proletarian slave but that he is a master, that he is in charge of his life and that's very important ideological turn which sort of allows, you know, the system to go on and creates more and more, let's say, kind of a submission on the side of people (Salecl, 2011).

Here she approaches the submission process, the one that neoliberal subjects fail to comprehend as they are led into thinking that they are the masters instead of soberly realising that they are actually the proletarians, where 'ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness' (Engels, 1978: 766). Even though Salecl does not explicitly name it, it is right to finally name this body to which she implies that people submit, and is on the other side of proletarians, as the state. We are again confronted with a very sophisticated variation of Marx's (1978c: 539) conception of the state as 'a special organism separated from society', the instance that issues the imperative, making neoliberal subjects so anxious.

This is where I disagree with Salecl and claim that anxiety would be much less prevailing if the enemy of neoliberal subject would be so easily identifiable, if the state were to exist in a form that would take the responsibility for the neoliberal imperative off the chest of neoliberal subject. What Salecl undermines is a basic Foucauldian understanding that 'power not only acts on a subject but, in a transitive sense, enacts the subject into being' (Butler, 1997: 13) or, in other words, that the neoliberal imperative is not simply repressive but is productive of a particular type of subjectivity. This is the exact place where Foucault's understanding of neoliberal



subject should be employed in order to develop and radicalise psychoanalytic insights on anxiety. Returning to Salecl's (2010: 1) words 'in today's consumer society we are not only required to choose between products: we are asked to see our whole lives as one big composite of decisions and choices', one can see that these neatly correspond to Foucault's analysis of neoliberals, who, 'for the first time, ensure that the worker is not present in the economic analysis as an object - the object of supply and demand in the form of labor power - but as an active economic subject' (Foucault, 2008: 223). As it was argued earlier in this chapter, the passive subject, concerned with a simple exchange is, in Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism, *homo oeconomicus* and is considered to be the subject of liberalism. On the other hand, he understands the subject of neoliberalism to be 'an entrepreneur of himself' (Foucault, 2008: 226), approaching his entire life as a limitless playground of rational choices. The neoliberal subject willingly adopts the neoliberal grid of intelligibility and scrutinises various spheres of her life in order to increase her competitiveness, including those previously understood as parts of one's private life and on that basis largely excluded from market calculations. Foucault (2008) therefore realises that neoliberalism is primarily producing the change on the level of subjectivity as *homo oeconomicus*, which he sees as a passive subject of liberalism, has now become an entrepreneur of herself, an active subject of neoliberalism.

#### **2.8.2.2. Enjoy!**

Constantly met with anxiety, it is more understandable why it happens that 'while we obsess about our individual choices, we may often fail to observe that they are hardly individual at all but are in fact highly influenced by the society in which we live' (Salecl, 2010: 13). Rather than examining the systemic features of anxiety she is experiencing, the neoliberal subject is busy working on her competitiveness, anxiously trying to become a more successful self-entrepreneur. The neoliberal subject is therefore governed through anxiety or, more precisely, is self-governed through anxiety, experiencing active governmentality as anxiety-ridden governmentality. The conservative but also productive nature of anxiety operates here as free floating fear relentlessly pushing the struggling subject to re-establish the shattered appearance of self-mastery. However, once the appearance of self-mastery is achieved, it is not time to take a break and recollect. On the contrary, it is now finally time to leave the superficial appearance behind and truly become an

entrepreneur of herself. This is, of course, an impossible task but is nevertheless fully present as an objective in contemporary society. The fact that the superego is insatiable does not make the subject's desire to satisfy its demands obsolete, quite the opposite.

What should the neoliberal subject do in order to get as close as possible to the ideal of self-entrepreneurship, what is the most appropriate way to choose? The neoliberal subject is here met with absolute silence, no strategy is offered that would alleviate anxiety, there is no grand state that would dictate one's life. There is only one order, that of the superego or, in Lacan's (1999: 3) words, 'nothing forces anyone to enjoy (*jouir*) except the superego. The superego is the imperative of jouissance - Enjoy!' The neoliberal superego is not demanding ascetic conduct and high moral virtuosity from the neoliberal subject. On the contrary, 'superego is the reversal of the permissive "You may!" into the prescriptive "You must!"' (Žižek, 2004), so enjoyment is now ordained rather than merely permitted or, as Žižek (2004) puts it, 'you may enjoy, but because you may, you must'. Ordained enjoyment presents yet another layer of anxious contradictions as 'the moment our social duty largely coincides with what we are supposed to want anyway (happiness), it becomes abundantly clear that it is far from clear what we actually want. Be happy, it's only up to you' (Zupančič, 2006: 175-176). The neoliberal subject must not only scrutinise her entire life for competitiveness, she must also enjoy the entire process, experience it as a thrilling journey. Is not this thrill what we, as neoliberal subjects, are expected to experience on various team building or networking events? Complaining about not enjoying neoliberal experience is then not only self-confronting, as there is no one imposing it apart from neoliberal subjects themselves, but it is also to work against what is considered to be joyful, not being able to enjoy yourself decently.

The neoliberal subject is left to freely choose her path towards self-entrepreneurship and the only question now is how to make it to self-mastery, how to succeed in choosing properly. However, it still remains unclear against whom the neoliberal subject is measuring her success. She is not only comparing her achievements with other people that occupy a similar social position. That would not be so anxiety ridden as she would then realise that many people find it hard to accommodate the neoliberal imperative, would not feel so inadequate and, eventually, would become aware that choices are highly influenced by the social

context one occupies. A more precise question is, therefore, in front of whom does the neoliberal subject feel anxiously inadequate and experiences shame? I claim that it is an ideal entrepreneur of herself, a true self-master that the neoliberal subject seeks to become through her choices. The symbolic Other – in plain words 'the symbolic order (which is principally "our" economic order)' (Zupančič, 2008: 40) – is this instance that is going to find out about the 'embarrassing' lack of neoliberal subject (Salecl, 2010). The Other, of course, according to a fundamental lesson of psychoanalysis, does not exist. That, nonetheless, does not take anxiety out of our everyday life. Šumič (2016: 34) formulates this clearly:

For the inexistence of the Other, contrary to what might be expected or hoped for, is not in and of itself a liberating factor for the subject [...] Quite the contrary: in the absence of the master signifier which would render a given situation 'readable', the subject remains a prisoner, not of the Other that exists, but of the inexistent Other, better put perhaps, of the inexistence of the Other.

Thus, although the Other does not exist, the neoliberal subject is nevertheless relentlessly trying to guess what this Other wants from her and is anxiously trying to accommodate what she always only thinks is the Other's desire. Furthermore, desire is fundamentally insatiable, its final aim is nothing but its own perpetuation, which makes the aforementioned desire for being an ideal entrepreneur of herself particularly anxiety inducing for the neoliberal subject. Bearing this in mind, it should not surprise us that, as mentioned earlier, 'whoever attempts to submit to the moral law sees the demands of his superego grow increasingly meticulous and increasingly cruel' (Lacan, 1997: 176). Contrary to her expectations, instead of achieving self-mastery the neoliberal subject is crushed by self-confrontation, self-reproaches for her 'incapability' to enjoy self-mastery.

Bearing all of this in mind, my research argues that anxiety is not a side effect of the subjectification process but a key process in establishing neoliberal subjectivity. Neoliberal subjects are not just governed through their freedom, which is then only marked by anxiety, they are governed through anxiety as it relentlessly reminds the neoliberal subject that she has not yet done enough on herself, that she must improve her choices and become more competitive if she wants to feel less

anxious and lead what is understood to be a normal life. Anxiety, in this manner, both creates and enforces the neoliberal imperative, thereby acting in a conservative manner, preventing radical social change. Finally, anxiety reveals what results in self-confrontation which characterises neoliberal subjects, precisely the emptiness behind the neoliberal imperative, the lack of instance that would serve as an addressee of the dissatisfaction of neoliberal subjects.

### **2.8.3. Against 'wild' interpretations**

Due to the character of my project, some restrictions in using psychoanalysis apply. Engaging with psychoanalytic methods in social research, for example with the psychoanalytic principle of free association, might initially seem a rather creative and attractive approach. Such a perspective promises to bring to light those meanings that might not be as explicitly articulated by the participants during the interview and which we, for that very same reason, might find especially intriguing (Hollway, 2016, 2006; Hollway and Jefferson, 2008; Hollway and Lynn, 2010). However, such approaches can easily result in producing research insights highly resembling "'wild interpretations" made by so many psychologists and psychiatrists nowadays based on a ten-minute conversation or a handful of sessions with a patient' (Fink, 1999a: 158). My research is a case study that is drawing on the interviews with the participants in Croatia. However, it does not present an attempt to identify meanings that were hidden or even repressed (i.e. hidden both from themselves and me) by the participants. To make it perfectly clear, the participants are not my patients. Accordingly, while analysing the interviews, my research will not follow 'the psychoanalytic principle of free association, which assumes that unconscious connections will be revealed through the links that people make if they are free to structure their own narratives' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2008: 315). This approach has been widely criticised (Fink, 1999a; Parker, 2010) and is based on slightly tweaking therapeutically informed categories and swiftly applying these in social research. Such categories, in my opinion, should be left for therapists and exercised in a particular setting that has little to do with my research. Croatia is not my clinic, but merely the context of my research.

Acknowledging this, some terminological changes have been necessary. In my interviews, I referred to stress, rather than anxiety. Such choice was motivated by the assumption that the participants could perceive stress both as positive and

negative, while this was unlikely for anxiety. In the media, it is often said that stress could be positive, but there is no mention of positive anxiety. With such terminological choice, we are likely to get a more nuanced perspective on ways the neoliberal imperative is experienced, exploring it in its both repressive and productive character. This also enables my research to question whether we can clearly distinguish these two modes of neoliberal power, namely repressive and productive. In addition, I am aware that anxiety, for Freud (2007: 348), 'is free floating fear, which is manifested either as an attack or becomes a permanent condition. The patients cannot tell what they are afraid of and connect their fear'. From this perspective, anxiety is not an ordinary fear, where one can clearly identify who or what is causing the unpleasant feeling. Rather, Freud (2001b: 164-165, emphasis in original) continues, 'anxiety (*Angst*) has an unmistakable relation to *expectation*: it is anxiety *about* something. It has a quality of *indefiniteness and lack of object*'. However, such an understanding of anxiety is not particularly suitable for the interview as a research method and trying to apply it in such context might not take us closer but further away from Freud's intentions as it would likely result in what Freud (2001c) criticised as "'wild" psychoanalysis', namely a set of rushed conclusions offered by amateur's attempt at psychoanalysis. Freud's sharp difference between fear and anxiety, criticised for various reasons (Fink, 1999a; Lacan, 2016; Zupančič, 2000), will not be maintained in my research. When it comes to actual conversation with people, what would be required in order to eventually unearth this indefiniteness, as conceptualised by Freud, is some sort of a rather individually focused, most probably therapeutic inquiry. Such an approach, for which I am not skilled, would take my thesis further away from its primary interest, namely the interconnection of neoliberalism and gender. For that reason, I will concentrate on the interconnection of stress and neoliberalism which will show how the participants accommodate the neoliberal imperative and what role does fear have in the performativity of neoliberal subjects. While doing so, however, I will grasp some of indefiniteness and expectation that Freud had on his mind when describing anxiety, primarily when the participants reflect on their expectations regarding their future.

However, neither of these amendments to my psychoanalytically informed conceptual framework is to say that my research will not further engage with psychoanalytic concepts and that social research in general should not draw on these or that they are relevant only to the clinic. Such reasoning would be to openly deny

the contributions of theoretical psychoanalysis, including those most relevant for this thesis, especially those of Ljubljana School of Psychoanalysis. There is no contradiction here as no representative of this school presents himself or herself as a practitioner of clinical psychoanalysis. Rather, they explicitly claim that their interest is in theoretical psychoanalysis. It should be noted that Laclau's approach was heavily influenced by psychoanalysis (see especially Laclau, 2005; Laclau and Mouffe, 2001), which is nowadays continued by the authors who belong to or are close to the tradition of Essex School of Discourse Analysis (Glynos, 2014, 2012; Glynos *et al.*, 2012; Glynos and Voutyras, 2016). In accordance, when not exploring the interviews directly, this research will nonetheless continue with examining some psychoanalytically informed concepts, such as ideology and anxiety. This will bolster the analytical categories that my research deploys in order to situate the interviews that I have conducted in a larger picture of the neoliberal condition. In addition to conducting interviews, it is also through such, more theoretical analysis that my project gets closer to our everyday, neoliberal condition.

### **3. FEMINISM AND NEOLIBERALISM**

When gender is introduced into the analysis of neoliberalism, the theoretical approaches explored above get not only further illuminated but radicalised. Neoliberal subjects are embodied, so the discourse is always inscribed on the body. However, neoliberal discourse does not simply mark the body but produces it. In other words, while the emphasis is put on the fact that neoliberalism is after all embodied (Fraser, 2013; McNay, 2009, 1992; Tyler, 2011), it is necessary to recognise that there are no bodies preceding discourse (Butler, 2004, 1999; Mouffe, 1993). Poststructural feminism, in this context, appears as the most suitable perspective for my thesis. Taking performativity beyond the sphere of linguistics, and expanding our understanding of what counts as a performative practice, Butler's (2015, 2011, 1999) work provides the conceptual apparatus needed to formulate the question of how the gendered self is performatively constituted in the context of neoliberal governmentality. On the one hand, gender is enabled by neoliberal discourse as the productive character of power establishes embodied subjectivities (Butler, 1999, 1997). On the other hand, gender is denied because neoliberalism operates with governmental measures that are understood as gender-neutral and centred upon individuals, with no attention to their gender (Azmanova, 2012; Bauman, 2005). Even though gender is simultaneously produced and denied by neoliberal discourse, this chapter shows that this contradiction does not undermine neoliberalism. Conversely, it enables the system to become adaptable and partially resignify feminist critique in order to absorb its transformative potential (Fraser, 2013; Gill and Scharff, 2011). In such context, Mouffe's (1993) rigid anti-essentialism is identified as a conception of the subject that runs contrary to neoliberal resignification of the feminist critique. The chapter argues in favour of adopting a poststructural feminist framework as its focus on a productive character of power, compared to modernist theories that conceptualise power primarily as repressive, is more suitable for exploring the complex context in which the performativity of neoliberal subjectivity takes place. Poststructural feminist theories recognise that the government of neoliberal self is not gender-neutral as women also accommodate hegemonic discourse with respect to their gender, thus occupying particular subjective positions. Our identities influence ways we decode discourses, thereby governing ourselves and being governed by certain discourses in a particular way. Neoliberal discourse and gender are, in this perspective, always already

intertwined. Such theories, therefore, do not deny the category of 'women'. What is at stake is contextualising the category of 'women' that would otherwise remain an empty, provisory category (Butler, 1999; Spivak in Rafaty, 2014). The chapter argues that my project achieves this by exploring not women in general but the women in Croatia, thus situating the analytic category of 'women' in the research context of my thesis.

### **3.1. Revisiting performativity**

While exploring neoliberal postmodernity, this research follows Lyotard's (1984: xxiii, emphasis in original) usage of 'the term *modern* to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse [...] making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth.' Already with Adorno and Horkheimer's (1997) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the narrative of modernity had gained an illuminating portrait of its ambivalence. During the 1960s and 1970s social critique radicalised and the grand narrative of modernity began to crumble. With the rise of postmodernity, or late modernity, what was hidden behind the big story of modernity has gradually become visible (Bauman 1997, 1993; Lyotard, 1984). Identities suppressed by the process of establishing and maintaining grand narratives of modernity had begun to act as bases for articulating various demands for recognition, thus proliferating in society and redefining the meaning of politics (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). The question of subjectivity had come at the forefront of social theory and, therefore, it can be said that what really occurred was "'the death of the death of the subject"; the re-emergence of the subject as a result of its own death' (Laclau, 2007: 21). As a consequence of such changes, orthodox understanding of nation and ethnicity were challenged, and tradition was labelled an invention (Anderson, 2006; Hobsbawm, 2012a, 2012b). Concern shifted to the issues that were usually understood as less serious due to their uncomfortable proximity to the body, namely sexuality and gender (Irigaray, 1985; Kristeva, 1987, 1984). Postcolonial theory critically engaged with the norm, namely the West, exposing the basis of grand narrative and making it clear who has carried the weight of universality (Guha, 1987; Prakash, 1990; Said, 2003). Unity was challenged by multiplicity, universality by particularity and the diversification of theory made possible.



In this context, feminist theory has constituted as a productive meeting point of numerous theoretical fields, such as poststructuralism (Butler, 2011, 1999; Mouffe, 1993), postcolonial theory (Bhabha, 1999; Spivak, 2012, 1988) and psychoanalysis (Salecl, 2002; Zupančič, 2017, 2016), thus providing a truly interdisciplinary perspective on society. As a product of thinking across these academic fields, Butler's (2011, 1999) work on gender performativity has most significantly influenced how this project will understand the constitution of neoliberal subjectivity. Butler (1999: 12), while demystifying the category of 'sex', clearly states that 'sex could not qualify as a prediscursive anatomical facticity'. With this, she breaks with a well-established reduction of sex to a biological fact, showing that sex is discursively constituted and thereby opening this category for further social inquiry. In this process, of course, the causal link between sex and gender is broken. However, Butler does not stop at this point but applies the theory of performativity, initially developed in linguistics, in order to explain how gender is constituted. In fact, what she does is far more than merely applying the theory of performativity as understood by Austin (1962: 11, emphasis in original), whose interest was in considering some cases 'in which to *say* something is to *do* something; or in which *by* saying or *in* saying something we are doing something'. His focus was situated in a rather formal linguistics and Austin (1962: 14) was quite anxious to emphasise that 'the uttering of the words of the so-called performative, a good many other things have as a general rule to be right and to go right if we are to be said to have happily brought off our action'. In his analysis, he offered a rather exhaustive list of such things or, more precisely, conditions that must be satisfied for the performative action to take place. In her approach to performativity, Butler is less schematic and exhausting. Aware that 'within speech act theory, a performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names', Butler (2011: xxi) expands this concept quite significantly while refusing to limit performativity to speech acts. Initially, thereby reviving Austin's idea of performativity, she developed it in the context of constituting gender. In short, this was to say that gender attributes are not simply expressive but are fixed only temporarily and through constant, repetitive practices. In her more recent work, she is rather inclusive in her understanding of what could be qualified as the practices of performativity. These are no longer limited to individual gendered practices, but now include a significantly wider range of practices, such as speech, silence, immobility,

movement, the people amassing on the street and so on. While this might be perceived as performativity taken well out of proportions, and I am quite sure that Austin would not recognise himself in her analysis, Butler (2015: 174-175) makes a strong point in her book *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* by inviting us to 'remember that vocalization is also a bodily act, as is sign language, and this means that there is no speaking without the body signifying something, and sometime the body signifies something quite different from what a person actually says.' Those performative actions examined by Austin were embodied and the fact that he, in line with his time, was not especially focused on this aspect of performativity does not change this. Embodiment, again in line with the context in which he was writing, was excluded from Austin's epistemology. Butler, therefore, does not merely distort Austin's analysis but radicalises his theory.

What is also important to emphasise at this point is that the practices of performativity are repetitive practices that require significant amount of time and reiteration to be effective. It could even be said that:

What differentiates this concept of performativity from the classical, linguistic one is precisely the element of time: It is not that the performative gesture creates a new reality immediately, that is, in the very act of being performed (like the performative utterance 'I declare this session open'); rather, it refers to a process in which sociosymbolic constructions, by way of repetition and reiteration, are becoming nature. (Zupančič, 2012a: 3)

That being said, it is quite clear that Butler by no means implies that we can now take whatever gender position we prefer at a certain point, thus reconstituting our identity as we wish. Next to the practices of discursive self-constitution, she emphasises the importance of concepts such as erasure, exclusion, abjection, violent foreclosure and so on that nonetheless impose certain conditions in the context of performativity. For a critique of the omnipotent subject who decides on his gender *ad hoc*, thus happily existing as a fluid occurrence, we should look no further than Butler (2011: ix, emphasis in original) herself:

For if I were to argue that genders are performative, that could mean that I thought that one woke in the morning, perused the closet or some more open space for the gender of choice, donned that gender for the day, and then restored the garment to its place at night. Such a wilful and instrumental subject, one who decides *on* its gender, is clearly not its gender from the start and fails to realize that its existence is already decided *by* gender. Certainly, such a theory would restore a figure of a choosing subject - humanist - at the center of a project whose emphasis on construction seems to be quite opposed to such a notion.

What is important here for my project is that Butler strikes a certain balance in her analysis. While acknowledging agency of the subject, she nonetheless takes care to clearly distance herself from a traditional, humanist understanding of the subject. More plainly said, the subject is neither omnipotent nor relieved of any agency and it is with such a perspective that we can arrive at a more nuanced understanding of power relations in contemporary society.

In my research, performativity is primarily examined in relation to choices contemporary subjects are making in their everyday lives. Considering that my project analyses interviews conducted with participants in Croatia, my focus will mostly be on performative agency at the individual level. It is for that reason that I do not explore those more collective manifestations of performative agency, such as the people amassing in a performative way. This is not to say that, in this way, I conveniently steer clear of what Butler has been accused of doing, namely overly expanding the notion of performativity. The way I see it, she has not gone too far with her take on gender performativity (Brickell, 2005; Fraser, 2013; Lloyd, 1999; Nussbaum, 1999). Butler has, and quite ingeniously so, revisited and radicalised this initially linguistic approach, thereby making it appealing for contemporary social theory. While being focused on the individual manifestations of performativity, my project will not, however, lose the broader social context from its scope. On the level of the subject, this implies that 'the question of agency is not to be answered through recourse to an "I" that preexists signification' (Butler, 1999: 183). In other words, there is no micro without macro level of society and *vice versa*. Butler makes it clear that there is no speech act without the body, but we should also bear in mind

something far more fundamental, namely that there is no subject without society. In the context of my project, it will be argued that there are no subjects pre-existing their choices, what we have today is the 'choice-enabled person' (Salecl, 2010: 115). My research understands the everyday choices neoliberal subjects make as the main performative resource of neoliberalism. These choices will not be explored as practices exercised by the humanist subject in the process of establishing his omnipotence. On the other hand, neither will they be presented as a mere cover for submission on behalf of neoliberal subjects, especially as it is acknowledged that neoliberal subjects are quite often keen and anxious to make choices that enhance their competitiveness. Workshops on leadership are fully booked nowadays. Choices, in accordance with Butler's take on performativity, will be examined in their ambivalence. This will enable me to explore power in its multiplicity, rather than conceptualising a particular locus, for example the state, as the source of power in general. While doing so, my research will look at how subjectivity is produced as a part of our everyday life which is understood to be saturated with micro-power relations that represent a strong basis for a hegemonic system of meanings.

### **3.2. Abandoning the prediscursive**

From this, however, it does not proceed that my research draws on work of a feminist author, namely Butler, not in order to examine gender but rather to get closer to other concepts of my interest, such as subjectivity, performativity, discourse and so on. This would miss my point introduced earlier, where I clearly stated that I see gender theory as a productive intersection of various theoretical approaches that focus on a number of concepts that I explore. As understood in my research, gender theory is inseparable from these concepts and it is exactly by examining gender that my project revisits fundamental categories of contemporary theory. One of these categories is the body and it is exactly in Butler's work that we can see how the understanding of discourse has been developed in the framework of gender theory. While offering her understanding of sex, Butler (1999) provides us with a radical critique of Foucault's notion of the body, where 'to be radical is to grasp things by the root' (Marx, 1978d: 60). Interestingly, as Butler (1999) claims, Foucault has never undertaken a proper genealogical analysis of the body itself. Even though Foucault (1984: 83) did state 'the body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas)' and declared that the final aim of genealogy is 'to

expose a body totally imprinted in history', he was nevertheless anxious to add 'and the process of history's destruction of the body'. The question that Butler (1999: 165) raises is what is there to be destroyed: 'by what enigmatic means has "the body" been accepted as a *prima facie* given that admits of no genealogy?' This is where it becomes clear that Foucault's romanticism of a prediscursive, innocent body prevented him to proceed fully with his methodological approach. This romanticism can be easily observed, as Butler (1999) points out, when Foucault (in Barbin, 2010: xiii) analysed the pleasures of a French hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin, invoking 'the happy limbo of a non-identity'. Even when he was, during one of the interviews, asked to elaborate his idea 'that we should counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures and knowledges, and that the point of focus for the counter-attack against the deployment of sexuality ought to be a stress on bodies and pleasures' (Mort in Foucault, 1979: 21), he simply replied 'on that point, unfortunately, I do not have the time, and I'm not sure whether I would be capable of further comment' (Foucault, 1979: 21). The prediscursive pleasure, unjustly excluded from the scrutiny of his discourse analysis, functions as a sort of romanticised state of affairs that is eventually supposed to provide a point of departure in devising his ethical position. However, it seems that Foucault eventually realised the difficulty of developing this idea further and, in a large part, abandoned it in his later work on cynicism and the aesthetics of subject (Foucault, 2011, 2010). If we want to contribute to governmentality studies by gendering the approach, as I think is needed, it is necessary to consistently implement genealogical analysis, conceptualising the body as a discursive formation without any essence. This can, in turn, provide a solid basis for devising a gendered perspective on neoliberal technologies because there will be no ambiguously defined body implying a romanticised essence and determining the limitations of gender as an identity.

### **3.3. Engaging with neoliberal 'messiness'**

Where the understanding of neoliberalism in the broad feminist literature is concerned, it appears that a more activist approach is largely preferred and, due to a sense of urgency, theoretical reflection is somewhat hindered. This, as we have seen with Harvey (2007) and Klein (2007), is not just a characteristic of the feminist literature but holds for contemporary critical approaches to neoliberalism in general. Basically, neoliberal discourse relentlessly introduces the logic of competition in

society and feminists are pressured to respond to an increasing number of demanding issues. For example, Gill and Scharff (2011: 11-17), in the introduction of a reader they edited, *New Femininities. Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, do not see it as necessary to elaborate on the theoretical justification for using the concept of neoliberalism. By doing so, they align themselves with a now well-established tradition of understanding neoliberalism as a radicalised and contemporary form of liberalism. While this is, of course, a perfectly legitimate interpretation, it significantly differs from my understanding of neoliberalism. The difference here is not merely a formal, terminological one. Our understanding of the content of neoliberalism is fundamentally different. While Gill and Scharff (2011: 5) declare that 'neoliberalism is a concept that animates many of the chapters in this collection', they engage with the content of this concept only briefly, saying:

Broadly speaking, it [neoliberalism] is understood as a mode of political and economic rationality characterized by privatization, deregulation and a rolling back and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision that rose to prominence in the 1980s under the Reagan administration in the US and Thatcher's premiership in the UK.

Clearly, their focus is not on drawing genealogies of neoliberalism or questioning whether there was something before the Reagan administration and Thatcher's premiership that could be characterised as neoliberal reasoning. Neither are the authors anxious to unpack the epistemology that stands behind neoliberalism and ask, for example, how have we come to a point in which privatisation and deregulation are considered to be normal or even beneficial for society and, whether we want to admit that or not, quite welcomed by a popular sovereignty. However, the reader consists of contributions focusing on themes such as neoliberal pregnancy (Tyler, 2011), beauty (Lazar, 2011), sexuality (Gill and Harvey, 2011), fashion (Press, 2011), ethnicity (Bose, 2011), citizenship (Ryan-Flood, 2011), migration (Erel, 2011). These contributions effectively deal with a range of phenomena in neoliberal context, often providing many engaging and illustrative examples. Although these authors do not understand neoliberalism in the same way as my project does, their work still informs my research as they are nonetheless exploring

contemporary subjectivity. Such work opens a number of topics for further inquiry, thereby inviting me to understand these coming from a different perspective. In the approach taken in this thesis, it is *liberalism* that is characterised exactly by 'privatization, deregulation and a rolling back and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision', while *neoliberalism* is recognised as an active governmentality. Surprisingly, even some feminists, who are analysing Foucault in his own terms, portray neoliberalism and government intervention as mutually exclusive. For example, McNay (2009: 57) claims that 'the fear that drives neoliberal thought is one of excessive state intervention'. She is anxious to distinguish ordoliberalism from neoliberalism, where neoliberalism is 'a more "complete and exhaustive" generalization of the market form throughout society' (McNay, 2009: 59) or, in other words, a relentless system that disregards any collective values. Such understanding is problematic as it reduces neoliberalism to market society, while it fails to show what is *new* in neoliberalism. Furthermore, the difference between ordoliberalism and neoliberalism is introduced by McNay (2009) and not, as she claims, by Foucault. It is precisely through the analysis of ordoliberalism *as* early, German neoliberalism that Foucault (2008) explores the aforementioned differences between neoliberalism and liberalism. This omission is especially interesting as McNay (1992) dedicates significant effort to carefully examine which of Foucault's concepts are suitable for further feminist analysis. For example, she sees his understanding of the body as particularly useful because it, in her opinion, maintains a certain balance between essentialism and social constructivism. Furthermore, she explores Foucault's notion of the individual as an entrepreneur of herself, in whom the productive power is embodied, and considers the ethical implications that such a perspective on the subject implies. However, when it comes to Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism as a distinctive socio-economic system, she is providing the reader only with a partial perspective, where neoliberalism is considered to be a radicalised form of liberalism. This is almost a standard perspective on neoliberalism in feminist literature and broader contemporary critical theory, against which Foucault (2008: 131, *emphasis added*) is warning us 'neo-liberalism is not Adam Smith; *neoliberalism is not market society*; neo-liberalism is not the Gulag on the insidious scale of capitalism'. This can also be observed in Fraser (2013) who has, on the one hand, historically situated feminism in relation to capitalism and mapped the changes women experience under neoliberalism. She is well aware that feminism might be

absorbed by neoliberalism and emphasises the dangers that capitalism poses to feminism by showing how a part of the feminist movement has been misused as an ideological support for neoliberalism. In addition, she is dealing with the relation of critical theory and gender, arguing for a conception of power that is broader and not limited purely to bureaucratic, institutional contexts. On the other hand, she contrasts 'state-organized capitalism [...] in which states played an active role' with 'a new form of capitalism: post-Fordist, transnational, neoliberal' (Fraser, 2013: 212, 211). The title of her book, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis and Beyond* (2013), already implies that neoliberalism will be examined as a passive, non-interventionist governmentality or, using more traditional terminology, liberalism.

Again, this is not to say that feminism has nothing to say about neoliberalism. Quite on the contrary, all the aforementioned authors, as I have stated, analyse the interconnection of gender and neoliberalism. Rather, it is to argue in favour of a perspective on contemporary operations of power which would account for a complex relation between the state and contemporary subjects, thereby enhancing our understanding of neoliberalism. From this it does not follow that we should deny all modernist contributions. Bearing this in mind, I agree with Moi (2001: 57) that 'the whole liberal tradition and indeed the Marxist humanist tradition, with their antediluvian views on individual agency, freedom, and choice, were quite capable of fighting racism, sexism, and capitalism before post-structuralism came along' and it is not my aim to deny the victories of modernist thought. However, in the era of postmodernity, it seems to me that modernist thinkers are staging Kafka's well-known novel *The Castle* (2009), where the protagonist is in an honest but exhausting search for the centre of power, presented by Kafka as the authorities. This centre of power is constantly eluding him, always proving to be only a false promise. It is in this respect that I propose we should accept that there is no centre of power, even though it inevitably means losing the sense of duty to fight the Power. For that reason, I see neoliberalism as a qualitatively distinctive system, where the micro-presence of the state is achieved by a productive character of power, through a process of subjectification, making the conceptualisation of the state as a centre of power effectively redundant. It is true that we often find 'poststructuralist work on sex and gender to be obscure, theoreticist, plagued by internal contradictions, mired in unnecessary philosophical and theoretical elaborations' and it goes without saying



that 'poststructuralists have yet to show how their politics (as opposed to their theory) differ from that of their feminist predecessors' (Moi, 2001: 58-59). However, I see this as a necessary step of any theoretical progress and can only hope that the energy that is currently invested in looking for the centre of power might be what is needed for further victories of poststructural theories.

In the context where poststructuralism quite often gets characterised as theoreticist, while I agree that we should bring in the 'messiness' by conducting empirical research (Larner, 2003, 2000), it is important to emphasise that engaging with theoretical 'messiness' is a necessary step if we want to *understand* contemporary society. However, it would be wrong to say that researchers like Larner (2000) ignore theoretical debates on neoliberalism. Not at all, Larner emphasises multiple perspectives on neoliberalism, asks for a more complex understanding of the phenomenon and clearly states that various types of neoliberalism should be examined along with the hybrid character of contemporary politics. She is distinguishing analyses that portray neoliberalism as a policy framework, those that see neoliberalism as an ideology and, finally, perspectives provided by governmentality approaches. However, she does not say which one is the most appropriate to explore neoliberalism but chooses to embrace all of the aforementioned perspectives on neoliberalism, ultimately arguing for the neo-Marxist and socialist-feminist analysis enriched by the governmentality insights. Bearing in mind that such combination of approaches is rather contradictory, she recommends focusing on empirical research as something that will ultimately show us what neoliberalism is. As I mentioned earlier on in this chapter, Weber (2004b: 30) claimed that 'to anyone who is unable to endure the fate of the age like a man we must say that he should return to the welcoming and merciful embrace of the old churches'. It is my impression that Larner is trying to come to a clearer theoretical orientation by returning to the welcoming and merciful embrace of the old methodology. This is why I am fairly sceptical about the advice that 'the analysis needs to be grounded in a detailed investigation of the case in order to make visible the messy actualities of new forms of governance' (Larner, 2000: 16). I would have no problem with this advice if it were to imply situating a theory of neoliberalism in a particular context with the help of empirical research. This, however, is not to try and 'ground' discourse as if discourse is something that must receive its anchorage point in materiality through empirical work, so that it does not evaporate in the thin

air of superstructure. In my research, as it has already been argued, discourse is seen as always already material and, *vice versa*, materiality is seen as always already discursive. Furthermore, for situating our understanding of neoliberalism, we first need a theory of neoliberalism. Thus, what provokes my scepticism is not Larner's advice *per se* but the risk of this advice being taken in a sense that the understanding of neoliberalism can be achieved, rather than fostered, by conducting empirical research. My disbelief seems to be well justified as, in contemporary academic production, there is a lack of reflection on what neoliberalism is, while there are plenty of 'careful, detailed empirical studies of neoliberalism "on the ground" and "in action"' (Gill and Scharff, 2011: 7) that conflate neoliberalism and liberalism. Improving our theories is essential and the blind spots of our theories will not disappear with a turn to what is nowadays widely understood to be practical, empirical research.<sup>2</sup> Investing our efforts solely in various new and creative methodologies will merely make these deficiencies less apparent (Kara, 2015; Horst *et al.*, 2016; Mannay, 2016; Marres, 2017; Pink, 2015; Rose, 2016). We should always remind ourselves of Kant's (1991: 61) injunction 'it is therefore not the fault of the theory if it is of little practical use in such cases. The fault is that there is not enough theory'. Seeing that existing theories of neoliberal subjectivity do not answer questions arising out of our everyday life in a satisfying manner, my research does not just turn to the interview as a method of getting closer to contemporary subjectivity. One cannot get closer to *neoliberal* subjectivity by conducting interviews if he or she considers neoliberalism to be a radical form of liberalism. Recognising this, my project also engages with theory in order to approach

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<sup>2</sup> To illustrate what is at stake here let us imagine, purely as an exercise of reasoning, Kant saying to his peers: 'You know, after publishing *The Critique of Pure Reason*, I feel that I should turn to some creative methodologies. The old school of philosophical thinking no longer fits me really...' Such reasoning would straightaway appear as a pure absurdity. Or imagine the University of Königsberg asking Kant to introduce certain 'empirical element' in his work in order to grasp social reality in a more innovative way (if he would prefer to continue with receiving funding for his philosophy). I am sure that Kant would have no idea what they are into.

Let us now return to the context in which this research has been conducted, namely the Department of Sociology at the University of Manchester. In the United Kingdom (and beyond), it is a widely known fact that it is virtually impossible to receive funding for a PhD project that has no 'empirical element' (such as interviews, surveys, ethnographic observation and so on) respectfully outlined as a part of its research design. This, however, cannot be reduced to the neoliberal ideology of austerity. We all know that conducting various 'fieldwork activities' is far more expensive than producing theoretical work from one's accommodation. In this context, the ideology that demands respect is, above all, positivism. Being a PhD student today, one can indeed get a first class experience of what Marcuse (2007: 15) framed as 'the radical empiricist onslaught'.

neoliberal practice, thereby working towards breaking a reified difference between 'theoretical' and 'empirical' work. Neoliberal epistemology will also be explored as this is from where the technologies of governing draw their approval or against which they are considered to be damaging for contemporary politics. The focus on the legitimising theory enables me to move beyond understanding neoliberalism as an Other of feminist critique. Actually engaging with neoliberal 'messiness', while expanding the examined field of power, this thesis aims to generate new knowledge on the interconnection of gender and neoliberalism.

### **3.4. Political writing**

Even though it might be intuitive to distinguish between the empirical and theoretical messiness, this distinction can be maintained only so far. This issue has a prominent place in contemporary critical theory, though it is often presented as a problematisation of the difference between theory and practice (Bhabha, 2009; Spivak, 1990). Can we reasonably talk about practice that is not a part of any theoretical framework and, on the other side, can we have a pure theory, isolated from any empirical practices? While exploring this question, Bhabha (2009) is not clearly distinguishing between theory and practice but is debating both as the modes of political writing. This is relevant for my thesis, first, as it reminds us that every form of writing is political writing. My thesis, as an academic form, is situated in a particular political context marked primarily by a tradition of postsocialist scholarly research, following which Croatia would be examined as the postsocialist Other of Europe (Einhorn, 1993; Grødeland *et al.*, 2001; Grzymała-Busse, 2007; Hann *et al.*, 2002; Karklins, 2002; Watson, 1993; Wolchik, 1991). Critically reacting to this political subtext, the thesis explores Croatia as a contemporary, neoliberal political entity. Second, exploring the aforementioned question shows the limit of distinguishing the chapters of thesis that focus on theoretical and methodological framework of my research from those based on the interviews with the women in Croatia. The chapter *Contextual and Methodological Outline of the Research* takes this discussion further and argues that 'theoretical' and 'empirical' chapters of my thesis should best be understood, without implying any profound epistemological difference, simply as different forms of writing. Reflecting on the difference between theory and practice, Bhabha (2009: 32) argues:

There are many forms of political writing whose different effects are obscured when they are divided between the 'theoretical' and the 'activist'. It is not as if the leaflet involved in the organization of a strike is short on theory, while a speculative article on the theory of ideology ought to have more practical examples or applications. [...] The difference between them lies in their operational qualities. The leaflet has a specific expository and organizational purpose, temporally bound to the event; the theory of ideology makes its contribution to those embedded political ideas and principles that inform the right to strike. The latter does not justify the former; nor does it necessarily precede it. It exists side by side with it - the one as an enabling part of the other.

When this quotation is read, it can be noticed that a specific terminology is built around this issue in order to make a certain compromise. Theoretical and activist approaches are not seen as pure, clearly delineated categories but simply as different forms of the one and same category, namely political writing. The distinction between a leaflet and a speculative theory of ideology is introduced, based on an explanation that 'the difference between them lies in their operational qualities' (Bhabha, 2009: 32). What is skilfully avoided is a reduction of the whole debate on theory and practice to a purely terminological misunderstanding.

This can help us to properly understand the famous feminist slogan 'the personal is political' as it relates to postcolonial and feminist theory. 'The personal is political' is a catchphrase used in 'a specific expository and organizational purpose, temporally bound to the event' (Bhabha, 2009: 32) and it is exactly how it should be understood. It is not there to be taken literally, presented as a feminist oversimplification and elevated to a weak point in feminist theory (Lovenduski, 1986). Quite on the contrary, what is important is the context in which this slogan is devised as it is coined to fit activist purposes. Nonetheless, the catchphrase 'the personal is political' is enabled by a certain theoretical position and it has a specific place in (a second-wave) feminist theory (Pateman, 1989, 1983; Phillips, 1991). However, it should be immediately added, this theoretical position is also enabled by the saying 'the personal is political' as 'it exists side by side with it [...] like the recto and verso of a sheet of paper' (Bhabha, 2009: 32). In accordance with this, the

critique of this slogan should be addressed to a mode of political writing, in this case of feminist theory, while a catchphrase should not be presented as a mode of political writing that exhausts feminism in its totality. Of course, this displacement has a function of discrediting feminist theory and, when feminist theory is disqualified simply by representing it as a slogan, it is quite clear that this is not done in a constructive manner, even though the problem with this might not be immediately obvious.

The issue of separating theory and practice is also articulated within feminist theory, with the benefit of feminism in mind. This can be seen at its best when Spivak (1996) wrote a comment on United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing, providing a critique of what she calls matronising practices by white and diasporic feminists. Her position cannot be briefly dismissed as a destructive remark on the UN in general as she clearly states that 'one is not against the UN effort in principle' (Spivak, 1996: 4). Quite the opposite, she situates this problematic in what is seen as a prominent problem of feminism and politics in general nowadays, arguing that 'we are witnessing the proliferation of feminist apparatchiks who identify conference organizing with activism' (Spivak, 1996: 4). Reading her words, one might say that this claim is relying on a false distinction between theory and practice, conference organising and activism. However, she does not naively fall in this trap, even though that might seem to be the case if we read the aforementioned words without an appropriate scrutiny. What Spivak has in mind is similar to Bhabha's notion of the modes of political writing. She is criticising the act of mistaking one form of political writing for politics in general, presenting a particular mode of political writing as universally applicable. In this spirit, Spivak (1996: 4, emphasis in original) continues:

They [feminist apparatchiks] often assume that altogether salutary debate *in the conference* will have necessary consequences in the lifeworld of oppressed and super-exploited women. The connection between state- and local-level implementation and the legal force of UN documents is a moot issue. If you asked the largest sector of the electorate in large developing countries where elite NGOs do not often penetrate: what is the United Nations and what effect will

a document framed here have on your daily life [...] you wouldn't get much of a rise.

Drawing on Bhabha's terminology, it could be said that the way some feminists at the United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing write their politics is not comprehensible to those women in developing countries who act as the addressee of this mode of political writing. For that reason, Spivak (1996: 4) asks a group of Bangladeshi fieldworkers, who were on their way to Beijing, 'do you have any idea how you will be matronized by white and diasporic feminists? Can you get behind their herding smiles? And why, in your opinion – with all your hands-on experience of international exploitation – is it necessary to tabulate our state and local problems at the UN?' The value of Spivak's comment is primarily in a lucid recognition of a certain subtext, heavily marked with a colonial burden, in a political writing of the group she labels as feminist apparatchiks. Once again, this is not a matter of disqualifying feminism but confronting it with its own subtexts and modes of political writing, thus working towards improving feminist critique.

Bearing all this in mind, I recognise that my research itself is also a mode of political writing, structured according to a certain grammar. My project refrains from continuing a tradition of postsocialist scholarly research (Corrin, 1998; Einhorn, 1993; Watson, 1993; Wolchik, 1991) that presents women as struggling in a specific, postsocialist context where the old socialist mentality disables the emancipation of women, reminding the reader that communism is not something to flirt with in future. Radically breaking with such a perspective, I analyse gendered subjects in Croatia and this is where feminist and postcolonial theory meet in my project. What my thesis presents is, drawing on a claim that 'the Balkans is the unconscious of Europe' (Dolar in Bijelić, 2011: 1), a certain form of reality check by confronting the neoliberal norm with itself. Croatia, therefore, is not examined as the postsocialist Other of Europe but as a contemporary, neoliberal political entity. This is where, in Bhabha's terms, the operational quality of my project is situated. The aim is to show that the neoliberal self has a gender, while simultaneously rejecting the notion of the postsocialist gendered Other. Exploring how gender is performed in a neoliberal context is itself a form of political writing that exposes the fragility of neoliberal norm, examining it in its ever-changing character, reminding us that the system is always only temporarily fixed and for that reason open for alternatives.

### **3.5. Neoliberal resignification of the feminist critique**

More should be said about the way feminism can be used as 'a key ingredient of the new spirit of neoliberalism' (Fraser, 2013: 220) or, in other words, resignified to serve neoliberal ends. This is relevant for my thesis as it presents a possible distortion that should be taken into account when developing a research design. In my opinion, an approach that conceptualises women in a way that does not completely abandon essentialism is especially prone to instrumentalisation by neoliberal discourse. As a consequence of flirting with essentialism, feminist discourse could be co-opted by neoliberalism and deployed to foster neoliberal governing technologies. Acknowledging this, my thesis dispenses with an essentialist perspective on the subject.

In order to illustrate the process in which essentialist and neoliberal discourse work hand in hand, we might want to turn to a growing body of critical development studies literature and especially their critique of micro-crediting practices (Budgeon, 2011; Maclean, 2015, 2013; Rankin, 2001). Within this 'tradition', it is recognised that the perspectives on women that might appear to us as 'benevolent' or not that important to analyse can be neatly fitted in neoliberal framework and used in order to devise governmental technologies. For example, 'an essentialist view of the gendered nature of risk, which associates a preponderance for risk taking with high levels of testosterone, and therefore masculinity' (Maclean, 2015: 2) can be read as acknowledging the advantage and, consequently, value of the feminine subject. Such reasoning is completely in line with the one promoted by the development experts and the policies they devise to tackle the problems of the Third World. One of these measures is micro-credit or 'the provision of loans on the basis of a social collateral guarantee [...] that appeals to international financial and development institutions by creating a "win-win" situation in which credit can be extended by handing over administrative control to group members, hence reducing risk and costs for the institution' (Maclean, 2013: 455). Continuing on this line, if we perceive women as the subjects with a more balanced and, paradoxically, rational approach to the economy, where 'hypermasculinity is defined by risk taking and an aversion to its feminine other - regulation' (Maclean, 2015: 9), it is only logical for women to play an important role in the allocation of micro-finance loans. For this reason, the poverty lending agencies in the Third World favour women as the borrowers of their loans. Even more so, micro-credit is considered to be 'a veritable panacea for poverty

world-wide' (Rankin, 2001: 18) as the money invested in the loans is more likely to be successfully returned and the women are, in such reasoning, provided with a basis for their emancipation. The women have access to the capital and are those who are now choosing how to manage their wealth (Condon, 2001). Furthermore, it is understood that this empowered position has resulted in an almost postfeminist state of affairs, so the women do not need to be that obsessed with achieving equality anymore. Their focus can shift to other issues and they can now enjoy the fruits of their right to freely choose how to express themselves (Budgeon, 2011). Besides, they have finally reached the stage in historical development in which they actually have a choice about how to act and are ultimately responsible for their own destiny.

However, it is usually overlooked that the women's mobility is fairly limited and it often turns out that it is the men who really deal with the income (Rankin, 2001). In addition, as the crediting organisations want to maximise the return rate of their loans, the women are organised in borrower groups and asked to mutually review their micro-enterprises. The peer pressure is here to provide a sort of collective guarantee, fostering the environment of a constant surveillance in these groups. In addition to the differences in class, ethnicity and sometimes caste (Rankin, 2001), such pressure is weakening the solidarity of the women allegedly emancipated by borrowing. Most importantly, the role of the state is usually overlooked when discussing micro-credit policies. For example, Fraser (2013: 222) claims 'micro-credit has burgeoned just as states have abandoned macro-structural efforts to fight poverty, efforts that small-scale lending cannot possibly replace'. From her perspective, micro-credit is yet one more case in which the state is being 'removed' from society as a consequence of the neoliberal imperative to minimise the state. This is especially interesting because Fraser (2013) dedicates a substantial effort to examining how neoliberalism has appropriated or, in her terminology, 'resignified the feminist critique' and, therefore, one would also expect her to examine how neoliberalism has resignified the state. Nonetheless, in other instances, the state is not left out from her perspective. She is in favour of socialist-feminist approaches and argues for an 'anti-neoliberal anti-étatisme' (Fraser, 2013: 226), where étatisme is understood as bureaucratic managerialism that should be subordinated in the process of empowering citizens. In her prescriptive model of feminist critique, it seems that the state is reduced to a medium for a participatory democracy or, as Fraser (2013: 226) puts it, 'the crisis of neoliberalism also offers the chance to break



the spurious link between our critique of étatism and marketization. [...] The point, however, is not to dissipate but to strengthen public power. Thus, the democracy we seek today is one that fosters equal participation, while using politics to tame markets'. Fundamentally, her perspective does not seem to be significantly different than portraying the neoliberal state in well-known Marxist terms as 'a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' (Engels and Marx, 1978: 475). Elsewhere, in line with the approach to which I am sympathetic, while examining how development is governed, Rankin (2001: 19) claims that 'through this so-called "grassroots" form of financial engineering, economic liberalization has entailed not "deregulation", but a re-scaling of state power to the local level'. Following this view, my research will examine the process of rescaling the state in neoliberalism. More precisely, it is my aim to map how the state penetrates the social structure in order to expand the field of competition and, while doing so, maximises its role in society. The project puts a special emphasis on what I see as a prominent challenge for contemporary feminist thought, namely using specific feminist discourse as a governing technology for rescaling the neoliberal state.

### **3.6. Call for a rigid anti-essentialism**

Feminist theory does not necessarily need to conceptualise women in terms of responsibility, regulation, accountability or inscribe any essence that will eventually result in certain ways the subject acts. Critique of the notion of 'a rational economic woman' is particularly instructive in this instance, emphasising that 'microcredit as a governmental strategy is all the more pernicious in its appropriation of feminist languages of empowerment and solidarity to alternative (and fundamentally conservative) ends' (Rankin, 2001: 30). Taking this into consideration, it would be significantly less likely for a feminist approach which clearly and unambiguously rejects any kind of essentialism to be resignified in neoliberal ends. This is why Mouffe's (1993: 88) claim that 'the critique of essentialism and all its different forms - humanism, rationalism, universalism - far from being an obstacle to the formulation of a feminist democratic project, is indeed the very condition of its possibility' is fully accepted and actively implemented in my research. The subject is seen 'as constituted by an ensemble of "subject positions" that can never be totally fixed in a closed system of differences, constructed by a diversity of discourses among which there is no necessary relation, but rather a

constant movement of overdetermination and displacement' (Mouffe, 1993: 77), which is to straightforwardly reject any essentialised notion of women. It goes without saying that the idea of a pre-social feminine entrepreneurial spirit cannot have any place in such theoretical framework.

Nevertheless, in the literature dealing with feminism and neoliberalism, there are conceptions of subjectivity that are not wholly ready to dismiss essentialism. For example, McNay (2014: 69) claims that Mouffe is using 'a rigid anti-essentialist logic' and later on explains that 'any potential that Mouffe's ideas may have for radical politics, however, is significantly undercut by the narrowly linguistic terms in which the process of identification is conceived and which forecloses sustained consideration of related issues of disempowerment and mobilization' (McNay, 2014: 81). Her conceptualisation of the subject, which should no longer surprise us, is both essentialist and Foucaultian. She tries to strike a certain balance, arguing that Foucault's theory 'is a way of conceiving of the body as a concrete phenomenon without eliding its materiality with a fixed biological or prediscursive essence' (McNay, 1992: 17). Indeed, Foucault does leave enough space for a prediscursive essence to be operable in feminist discourse and this is exactly, as it was argued earlier in this chapter, why his understanding of the body is not adequate for my research.

Such, 'balanced' position on essentialism is quite prominent in feminist theory. Diana Fuss (1990), in *Essentially Speaking*, argues in favour of such a perspective. While her book might seem as an essentialist manifesto, what is really at stake is far more complex. Fuss (1990: 40) is not merely proclaiming herself to be an essentialist but 'seeks to redress the critical imbalance between essentialism and constructionism, while my own position balances precariously between the two'. Thus, she takes a 'balanced' position, being careful to steer clear of arguing in favour of any biological conceptualisation of essence. She makes it quite clear, 'my own position, throughout this text, is that of an anti-essentialist who wants to preserve (in both senses of the term: to maintain and to embalm) the category of essence' (Fuss, 1990: xiv). *Essentially Speaking* (1990), therefore, could be read as a manifesto for a 'balanced' position of essentialism. More precisely, it is an argument in favour of judging essentialism on a case by case basis, depending on its political effects. Essentialism is emphasised if it enables political action and, on the other hand, it is tamed if it proves to be detrimental for achieving political aims. Drawing on Fuss,

McNay (1992: 21) summarises this perspective arguing that 'rather than labelling a text as essentialist and therefore bad, feminists should ask instead if a text is essentialist, what motivates its deployment, how and why is it invoked and, most importantly, what are its political effects'. Even though such proposal sounds inclusive of both essentialism and social constructivism, I think that such a 'strategic' approach is not adequate because it can easily end in legitimising essentialism, which makes feminist theory more likely to be taken over by neoliberal discourse.

This perspective might appear to bear some resemblance to Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism which stands for 'a strategic use of essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest' (Spivak in Morton, 2003: 75). However, strategic essentialism is only a temporary activist 'weapon' and should not be understood as a building block for a theory. It cannot serve as a basis for a treatise. In addition, the concept cannot be easily separated from a broader postcolonial context and the issue of subalternity. Spivak (in Morton, 2003: 75) does not fail to emphasise that 'a strategy suits a situation; a strategy is not a theory', fully aware that using strategic essentialism is saturated with various contradictions and difficulties. Even more so, she finally argues that strategic essentialism 'was meant to signal that while huge intragroup differences may exist, it is important to strategically bring forward a simplified "essentialised" group identity. I took it back because it becomes a formula to follow and justify everything and anything' (Spivak in Brohi, 2014). Strategic essentialism, therefore, was meant as a concept that enables politics during certain critical situations, while clearly understanding that identity politics is fundamentally impossible as there is no essence on which it is possible to base this identity struggle. However, considering that this concept is, as any other, always open for reinterpretations and is inevitably cut loose from its owner's objectives, it has become yet another source of legitimation for the normality of politics relying on essentialised identities. Bearing all this in mind, the notion cannot be used to provide a theory of the subject.

In order to reach a more thorough understanding of why a 'holistic' position on essentialism is quite often invoked in feminist theory, this whole debate should be situated in a wider context of tensions between structuralist and poststructuralist theories, but also in the history of feminist debates on the category of 'women'. Poststructuralist perspectives are often portrayed as ethically impotent or, in other words, unable to provide an anchoring point for political demands. McNay (2014:

79) eventually makes it clear that the main problem she has with Mouffe's concept of the subject is that it is 'closed off from the very practices that are supposed to give it its radical political impact'. In other words, the problem with Mouffe is that she fails to provide us with guidelines that are likely to result in a proper political action. There is no essence that could serve as an anchoring point of feminist politics in Mouffe's poststructuralism and this is what, according to McNay, closes it off from having a more serious political impact. One should then not be particularly surprised to see calls for a more 'balanced' position on accepting modernist and postmodernist frameworks, such as 'at this moment in history, our feminism need both Enlightenment and postmodernist agendas' (Harding in Nicholson, 1990: 101) or, in a clearer form, 'by criticizing lingering essentialism in contemporary feminist theory, we hope to encourage such theory to become more consistently postmodern. This is not, however, to recommend merely *any* form of postmodernism' (Fraser and Nicholson, 1989: 100, emphasis in original). It cannot be said that these authors treat poststructuralism as a theoretical perspective that should be straightforwardly rejected and forgotten as soon as possible. Questioning grand narratives, conceptualising power as more decentralised, exposing the notion of the humanist subject and so on are all poststructural contributions that are, at least nominally, acknowledged. However, while poststructuralism cannot be forgotten, it seems that it can neither be accepted without certain unease.

It seems that there are two main reasons that cause this reluctance in fully acknowledging poststructural theories. First, there is the impression that if essentialism were to be rejected in all of its forms, social phenomena would be reduced to nothing but discourse. In this way, it is argued, feminist theory would come increasingly close to constituting itself as yet another language game (Fraser, 2013; Fraser and Nicholson, 1989; Hartsock, 2004, 1997). Second is that a more rigid anti-essentialism is considered to be taking away a certain autonomy of feminist standpoint, abruptly bringing it in alliance with other social demands. Such disquiet is especially present in Harding (2004a, 1991, 1987), who 'is persuaded that there cannot be one feminist standpoint; the situations of women are too diverse. Yet she also sees problem with the postmodern alternative. On her reading, postmodernism posits fractured identities, an apolitical approach, and the rejection of any kind of knowledge that results in absolute relativism' (Hekman, 2004: 231). Harding recognises the validity and importance of social demands based on identities

other than gender, for example race, disability and age. In this respect, she accepts poststructuralist insights. On the other hand, she argues that the way these demands are portrayed by poststructuralist theorists might, rather than situating it in a wider and meaningful alliance, work against constituting the feminist political subject. In other words, it is considered that poststructural theories are bringing mess, rather than order in existing attempts to bring about social change.

The first cause of unease when it comes to poststructural feminism is largely about how we understand discourse. My research, as it has already been argued, does not conceptualise discourse as a second-class material reality nor does it reduce discourse to linguistic categories. There is no risk that my focus on discourse will overlook 'real material women' (Fuss, 1990: xiv) as, the way this project conceptualises it, discourse is always already material and, *vice versa*, materiality is always already discursive. The second cause of unease regarding poststructural theories, namely their supposed incapacity to articulate gendered demands with adequate political effects, seems to be a part of the wider issue, namely the (im)possibility of poststructural politics.

### **3.7. Poststructural feminism and politics**

In order to tackle these political difficulties, imposed by postmodernity and articulated by poststructural theory, Laclau and Mouffe (2001) have proposed their model of emancipation. The main problem with this model, as it was argued earlier in this chapter, is that the empty signifier, unifying and enforcing all the particular demands in a chain of equivalences, is nowhere to be found as it overlooks the productive character of power. Furthermore, what is also problematic, this model is presented in the work of Laclau and Mouffe (2001) as it seems that it effectively aims to explain not only feminist but literally every social struggle regardless of its temporal and spatial characteristics, all the way from Plato's republic to the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Bearing this in mind, it could be said that a call for a rigid anti-essentialism has been answered by a new grand narrative of emancipation, arguing in a manner respectful to poststructuralist terminology but turning mute when the poststructuralist emphasis on the importance of context becomes a subject of conversation. Certainly, at places, Laclau (2005: 101) claims that *the* emancipation, as in singular, is overly grandiose and naïve notion, arguing that 'if all emancipation must constitute itself as power, there will be a plurality of powers -

and, as a result, a plurality of contingent and partial emancipations.' On the other hand, he explores 'the subject of a certain global emancipation, the subject antagonized by the general crime' (Laclau, 2000c: 55). Finally, with the title of his book *Emancipation(s)*, this tension has gained its expression in a condensed form.

Reading this, one could be tempted to agree with McNay that the theory of signification leads us to an impasse and that we should be more reserved when it comes to poststructuralist theories. My thesis acknowledges that poststructuralist frameworks portray quite a complex picture of contemporary power relations. Within such perspectives, it is understood that there are no bastions of power that lead people into false consciousness. Neither is there a class, with which one could identify in a meaningful way, that is about to overthrow the bourgeoisie and establish the sane society. What this teaches us is that the understanding of power relations that accompanies modernist theories is an impasse in itself and that, if we want to act in a constructive manner, we will finally have to confront uncertainty and the ambiguous political horizons of contemporary society. There are no ready-made models for this; poststructural politics is a practice that is yet to be written. However, the complexity of social relations will not disappear by being ignored or, as Flax (1987: 625) argues:

Despite an understandable attraction to the (apparently) logical, orderly world of the Enlightenment, feminist theory more properly belongs in the terrain of postmodern philosophy. Feminist notions of the self, knowledge, and truth are too contradictory to those of the Enlightenment to be contained within its categories. The way(s) to feminist future(s) cannot lie in reviving or appropriating Enlightenment concepts of the person or knowledge.

Drawing on poststructuralist approaches, my research aims to unravel some complexities of contemporary social relations by examining the interconnection of neoliberal discourse and gender in Croatia. Admittedly, my project will not result in yet another model of emancipation nor will it provide a solid basis for policy recommendations. What it will offer is analysis of contemporary neoliberal discourse and, while I do recognise that analysis contributes to social change by improving our understanding of society, social change nonetheless remains a significantly larger

process than a PhD thesis or in fact any other form of academic work. In light of this, theories should not be rejected simply if they fail to provide immediate political solutions. Social change is not something planned at academic conferences and executed in academic publications. While acknowledging the necessity for a rigid anti-essentialism of the feminine subject, my research will take a step back from a necessity of theorising the emancipatory subject and explore how neoliberal context affects gendered subjects in Croatia.

### **3.8. Feminist epistemology and the subject of 'women'**

Even though my project does not aim to offer the grand solution for the problem of contemporary politics, it nonetheless deals with the category of 'women' in a particular research context, so it should be clearly stated what is exactly meant by examining gendered neoliberal subjects. My research acknowledges that the subject does not exist before the process of signification, there is no essence that should be carefully treated in order to realise its full potential. In other words, there is nothing prediscursive that dictates the subject's demands, so there is no reason to preserve the myth of monolithic, common femininity that can be straightforwardly represented. However, abandoning essentialism does not necessarily imply the impossibility of representation. While dealing with the issue of representation, Butler (1999: 9) argues that 'perhaps, paradoxically, "representation" will be shown to make sense for feminism only when the subject of "women" is nowhere presumed'. In accordance, it is not my aim to argue against a signifying category 'women' in general, but to understand it only as a provisory analytical category. So, 'yes, of course there are some general principles. And on the other hand, in order to *use* them you have to bind them to the conditions of the place where you are trying to get something done' (Spivak in Rafaty, 2014, emphasis in original). Conceptualised in this way, 'women' is always necessarily an empty category and nothing more, used only to orientate our understanding and enable the production of contextualised knowledge.

On a more micro-level of my case study, of course, the category of 'women' is significantly less problematic as it is clearly contextualised. My research focuses on the way the signifier 'women' is temporarily fixed in contemporary Croatian society, relating that to the effects of neoliberal discourse. What is analysed are not women in general but the certain women in Croatia, a precisely contextualised

relation between the signifier and signified, constantly keeping in mind that this relation is never fixed but always open to reinterpretations. Furthermore, my case study examines the formation of gendered subjectivity in neoliberal discourse, necessarily marked by specificities of Croatian context. My project fully acknowledges the lesson of feminist epistemology according to which it is not possible to isolate pure feminine identity because other axes of identification, such as ethnicity, age, sexuality and so on that also constitute the subject. In accordance, it will not be able to provide general conclusions on the interconnection of women and neoliberalism but strictly localised and thus limited insights. Of course, this is not as impressive as those promises that big narratives offer but it, on the other hand, neither does it leave the aftertaste that remains after one realises what is hidden by a false possibility of grand narratives.

Besides this, in the framework of feminist epistemology, the notion of experience has a central position. It has turned out that it is not so evident how the experiences of marginalised women should be incorporated in feminist theory, especially when it comes to actual empirical inquiry (Weedon, 1987). Feminist standpoint theory, as a branch of feminist epistemology, is particularly focused on this issue. It is understood that the experiences of marginalised women are a valuable scientific resource as they offer a perspective that, in most cases, cannot be provided from the researcher's point of view (Harding, 2004b). Following this initial argument, some feminists argue that marginalised women are epistemologically privileged and no feminist mediation is needed to show how instructive women's standpoint is (Smith, 2004, 1997). Such understanding is not predominant as a large majority of feminists see the experiences only as a starting point for producing further, feminist insights. It is most often not the question of women's but feminist standpoint. These two pathways should be clearly distinguished as they imply significantly different approaches, not so much methodologically but politically. Smith (1997: 393) argues that women's standpoint, compared with a feminist one, 'is not at all the same thing and has nothing to do with justifying feminist knowledge' but is focused on using the experiences of women in order to improve sociology as a scientific discipline. On the other hand, the scholars who are in favour of feminist standpoint theory are explicitly concerned with achieving feminist goals and situate their work in a broader framework of feminist struggle. As in the case of CDA, I support openly expressing the political dimension of academic work. However, the



feminist standpoint can be built using a variety of theoretical approaches, so there are standpoints developed around Marxist theory (Hartsock, 2004, 1997), postmodernism (Hirschmann, 2004), ecofeminism (Haraway, 1988), Black feminist thought (bell hooks, 1990; Collins, 2004) and so on. In short, the feminist standpoint is in fact a collaborative work of the marginalised women and feminists, inspired by certain theoretical traditions. Bearing in mind that I recognise the value of feminist standpoint theory, I build my own perspective relying on poststructuralist theoretical approaches.

While doing so, I do not presume that gendered neoliberal subjects necessarily perform some sort of subversive or normative performativity of the subject. In this respect, Walkowitz (1992: 9) reminds us that

Foucault's insight that no one is outside of power has important implications for expressions from the margins. Just because women are excluded from centres of cultural production, they are not left free to invent their texts as some feminist critics have suggested. They are not innocent because they are on the sidelines. They are bound imaginatively by a limited cultural repertoire, forced to reshape cultural meanings within certain parameters.

Thus, the thesis acknowledges that the women in Croatia are facing a limited cultural repertoire that might, drawing on the insights of psychoanalytic theory introduced earlier in this chapter, provoke stress among the participants. These limitations of repertoire, presented in my research as a neoliberal framework of choices, are not necessarily recognised by the women themselves but can be experienced as a personal failure due to the impossibility of making 'appropriate' choices.

What is also important to note is that feminist standpoint theory is not the product of a certain group of scholars who share clearly structured ideas on what feminist standpoint is, thereby constituting a school. This should be recognised as, otherwise, 'a less obvious source of contention arises from the way standpoint theory has developed independently within debates in several distinct disciplinary contexts, with their different discursive histories and contemporary concerns' (Harding, 2004c: 12). Various contributions to feminist standpoint theory have been gathered in the reader, edited by Harding (2004b), *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*:

*Intellectual and Political Controversies*. This reader has, in a way, retroactively constituted the field that we nowadays understand as a feminist standpoint theory. Most of the contributions that can be found in the reader, including those closer to poststructural theories, operate with a certain notion of an extra discursive point from which social relations could be examined in its materiality (Hartsock, 2004; Hirschmann, 2004; Ruddick, 2004). While it peaked with this reader, the debate on a feminist standpoint theory has nonetheless continued (Crasnow, 2009; Harding, 2009; Kourany, 2009; Rouse, 2009; Solomon, 2009). The implications of the term 'standpoint' continue to confuse. Standpoint theory is still quite often associated with elevating beyond the level of discourse, where 'standpoint' implies taking a position beyond discourse. However, this is by no means a reason for ignoring this epistemology as 'disturbing though virtually everyone may find one or another of its claims and projects, standpoint theory apparently is destined to persist at least for a while at a seductively volatile site for reflection and debate about difficult to resolve contemporary dilemmas' (Harding, 2004c: 13). Standpoint theory, in my opinion, could evade its destiny to 'merely' persist for a while. Essentialism, with which it is currently accompanied, is not inherent to this epistemology. One might as well think of a feminist standpoint that operates both within the existing discursive field and takes into account the materiality of gendered experiences, thus being in no contradiction with a rigid anti-essentialism. Standing within discourse with both feet, as otherwise is not possible even if we would like so to be, allows us to see how this discourse in which we are situated enables us, what epistemological and political resources it offers. Hekman (2004: 232-233), for example, argues that 'feminist standpoint theory can and, I argue, should be defined as a counterhegemonic discourse that works to destabilise hegemonic discourse'. However, such understanding of discourse is heavily underrepresented among the scholars associated with feminist standpoint theory. To avoid confusion, my research builds a perspective, rather than a standpoint, relying on the experiences of participants.

In this respect, a closely related question arises, namely what exactly is this hegemonic discourse in the context of my research? Clearly, we are talking about neoliberal discourse. However, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as *the* neoliberal discourse. Acknowledging the more general patterns that form neoliberal discourse, as explicated in this chapter, does not run contrary to the fact that there are only neoliberal discourses as every discourse is marked by particular contextual

specificities in which it has developed. Standing within discourse with both feet, therefore, is productive only if we are aware of the context that is being explored.

#### 4. CONTEXTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH

The following chapter brings together the contextual and methodological outline of the research. The contextual outline firstly discusses the dissolution of Yugoslavia. It is argued that psychoanalytically informed theories, compared to the perspectives that invoke a primordial ethnic hatred as an explanatory device, provide a critical reflection on the breakup of Yugoslavia. The narrative of a capitalist enjoyment, in addition to the idea of the 'theft' of enjoyment, are seen as important elements in understanding an inherently fantasmatic character of power relations that lead to the dissolution of Yugoslavia (Buden, 2012a, 2012b; Salecl, 2002). The chapter then explores the development of neoliberal discourse in Croatia. The prominence of neoliberal discourse, emphasising individualism and self-entrepreneurial ethics, corresponds to the global financial crisis that hit Croatia in 2009 and characterises Croatian accession to the EU. Questioning the role of gender in these contextual shifts, it is argued that both socialism and neoliberalism operate with conception of the subject as a modernist category with no particular attention to the gender. In socialism this subject was the worker, while in neoliberalism we are witnessing the rise of the individual. While this does not conflate the two social systems, it dispenses with the arguments according to which the post-socialist condition is marked by a regression to patriarchal values. Postsocialist state of affairs, in such a perspective (Einhorn, 1993; Grødeland *et al.*, 2001; Grzymała-Busse, 2007; Hann *et al.*, 2002; Karklins, 2002; Watson, 1993; Wolchik, 1991), implies a certain set of problems, such as corruption, nationalism, sexism, racism etc., that are generally seen as spatially and temporally bounded to former socialist countries, obscuring the characteristics which Croatia shares with other neoliberal countries. Exactly this is why, while analysing contemporary Croatian society, such understanding of postsocialism is not a productive methodology. Once again returning to the idea that postsocialist countries might best be seen as 'a symptom through which the inherent contradictions of liberal democracy became visible' (Salecl, 2002: 77), the chapter explores its methodological implications.

The second part of this chapter, which outlines the methodological approach taken in this thesis, argues that neoliberalism operates through dispersing and multiplying its governmental practices through individuals, more precisely through their freedom (Rose, 2004, 1996). Drawing on both governmentality studies and

Latour's (2005) work, it is shown that the micro and macro level of society stand in an indistinguishable, intertwining relation. Radicalising governmentality perspective, this project examines the prominence of neoliberal discourse not as hegemony of market values but as a shift in subjectivity. Further exploring Latour's ambivalent relation to positivism, the chapter engages with the meaning of the 'empirical'. Contrary to the positivist perception of the empirical, it is argued that the chapters of my thesis should not be read as if there is some sort of profound epistemological difference between the first three, 'theoretical' and the following three, 'empirical', chapters. These chapters, returning to Bhabha's (2009) metaphor explored in the previous chapter, simply present different writing styles. The chapter concludes with the details of my fieldwork, research sample and the structure of interviews.

#### **4.1. Historical context of the research**

##### **4.1.1. The dissolution of Yugoslavia**

When it comes to understanding the dissolution of Yugoslavia, a set of difficulties arise, especially as the field is troubled by primordialist theories that are typically accompanied by an apparent emphasis on the importance of understanding the historical context. While reading standard journalistic insights on the breakup of Yugoslavia, such as the one offered by New York Times in 1993, according to which 'the history of all the southern Slavs in the Balkans is a tangled tragedy of mass rape and barbaric slaughter, the product of the kind of ethnic hatred that perhaps only people who are closely related to each other could nurture so well for so long' (Whitney in Salecl, 2002: 11), a critical reader cannot overlook a discourse saturated by a sort of patronising compassion. While this is a journalistic discourse, Sloterdijk's (2013a: 7) remark on certain types of political theory and sociology as 'the continuation of journalism by morose means' is well placed in this context. However, as Todorova (2009: 20) notices, 'the rules of scholarly discourse restrict the open articulation of these prejudices'. One could, of course, find a number of academic references that invoke traumas hundreds of years old as an explanatory device for contemporary social relations. For example:

Dating as far back as 1389, the legendary Battle of Kosovo provides the mythological framework that informs and reshapes contemporary notions of Serbian (self)-victimisation and

martyrdom. Drawing on concepts such as 'cultural trauma' and 'cultural fear', Šuber argues that a blurring of the distance between past and present provides a fertile seedbed for ultra-nationalist politics and might help to explain current Anti-European sentiments. (Schäuble *et al.*, 2006)

One might as well seek the origins of anti-European sentiments in the character of contemporary liberal democracy. Schäuble *et al.* (2006) and her fellow fieldworkers, on the other hand, prefer to return to events dating 'as far back as 1389, the legendary Battle of Kosovo' to explain contemporary society. To provide one even more illustrative academic example:

Numerous scholars have shown the importance of understanding the local factors that made 'ethnic cleansing' possible in ex-Yugoslavia and continue to destabilize the wider region (Bax 2000, forthcoming; Bringa 1995; Cowan 2001; Duijzings 2000; Halpern and Kideckel 2000). A long history of 'clan' organization and vigilantism in the context of ineffective state power are certainly among the key common factors. (Hann *et al.*, 2002: 6)

The difference between the 'academic' account by Hann *et al.* (2002) and the aforementioned 'journalistic' one is precisely in the usage of inverted commas, where the inverted commas have no function apart from restricting the open articulation of primordialism. Note also how it is said that 'a long history of "clan" organisation' is 'among the key common factors'. It is not said that 'a long history of "clan" organisation' is the only factor of destabilisation; Hann *et al.* (2002) know very well that academics are expected not to be as vulgar as journalists. Such petty differentiation, in addition to the inverted commas, is here to formally satisfy what are considered to be some basic scholarly norms of expression, such as moderation in judgement and so on, thereby qualifying one's argument as 'academic'.

If Eastern Europe is said to be troubled by the 'local factors', such as 'cultural trauma' and 'a long history of "clan" organisation', one should ask which Europe is considered to be relieved of these issues in this perspective. In other words, in which Europe it is considered that these 'local factors' that had allegedly led to the

dissolution of Yugoslavia have not been present? The answer is, of course, Western Europe. In this context, it is important to note that there are well established university centres for Central European, East European and East Central European studies, while one cannot find a centre for Western European or West Central European studies. One cannot choose to apply for a degree at the department specialised for targeting alarming problems, such as nationalism, corruption, sexism, racism and so on in Western Europe or West Central Europe. There is no place for questioning the norm. In fact, the mere mention of Western European studies sounds odd, while Eastern European studies appear to be 'just normal'. Much 'as in the case of the Orient, the Balkans have served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the "European" and the "West" has been constructed' (Todorova, 2009: 188). In this spirit, the academic publication *Doing Fieldwork in Eastern Europe* (Schäuble *et al.*, 2006) informs us that 'globalisation and the on-going integration in Europe go hand in hand with the ethno-national tensions, increasing disintegration, and various identity-fundamentalisms in the troubled peripheries of Europe'. Reading these words, one could ask what is on the other side of 'the troubled peripheries of Europe' or, in other words, what is the centre of Europe? Is it Greece, also known as 'the Birthplace of Western Civilization'? According to Schäuble (*et al.*, 2006) and her fellow anthropologists, that is clearly not the case. In Greece, it said, they are still haunted by traumas hundreds of years old. Things are so bad there that even 'migration was labelled the return of the "brother Greeks" or "the Argonauts"'. A continuity from ancient history and mythology prevailed whereas modern political traumas were silenced' (Schäuble *et al.*, 2006). In such a perspective, of course, the centre of Europe is Western Europe. Then it could be asked are there no troubles in 'the centre of Europe'? One way to counter such understanding would be to highlight a number of ethno-national tensions, increasing disintegration and various identity-fundamentalisms in Western Europe. That, however, would be to miss the point as what is at stake is a fantasmatic construction that cannot be countered in an effective way by providing further empirical examples. If this was not the case, the debates on 'the troubled peripheries of Europe' would kindly cease to exist after, for example, Brexit was voted for in the United Kingdom. The discussions on 'the troubled peripheries of Europe' have continued precisely because, as Dolar (in Bijelić, 2011: 1) formulates it perfectly, 'the Balkans is the unconscious of Europe'. Thus, in order

to counter the understanding of Croatia as one of 'the troubled peripheries of Europe', my thesis explores Croatia not as a postsocialist but as a neoliberal country. This, in turn, makes it more apparent that the insights from my thesis are not limited to former socialist countries but act as a mirror for neoliberal societies. The centre of Europe is the troubled periphery of Europe.

The point, however, is not to stop debating the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Simply, as Todorova (2009: 186) puts it:

It would do much better if the Yugoslav, not Balkan, crisis ceased to be explained in terms of Balkan ghosts, ancient Balkan enmities, primordial Balkan cultural patterns and proverbial Balkan turmoil, and instead was approached with the same rational criteria that the West reserves for itself: issues of self-determination versus inviolable status quo, citizenship and minority rights, problems of ethnic and religious autonomy, the prospects and limits of secession, the balance between big and small nations and states, the role of international institutions.

The problem with the explanations that rely on primordial ethnic hatred is that, even though they have proven to be more than a solid basis for a career in academia, journalism and civil society, they effectively act as a substitute for any critical reflection. However, there are some theories that draw on psychoanalysis in order to explain the war which took place during the nineties and led to the breakup of Yugoslavia. These theories are, for numerous reasons, by no means widely accepted, neither in academia, civil society nor a broader public opinion. In this historical introduction, I present only a part of this approach which can and should be further developed by other theoretical perspectives in order to get a more accurate understanding of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. This is *a* history, only one of many competing explanations, offered while recognising that there is no real history waiting to be transmitted and authoritatively claimed in its factual innocence, even if it is purely for 'methodological purposes'. There is no practice without theory, but there also is no methodology without theory.

Drawing on Miller's insight 'that hatred of the Other is hatred of the Other's enjoyment' (Salecl, 2002: 21), it is understood that 'the aim of war is to dismantle the



fantasy structure of the enemy country' (Salecl, 2002: 21). Following such understanding, it could be said that individual republics in Yugoslavia started to promote the idea that their enjoyment was constantly being stolen by other Yugoslav republics. Yugoslav nationals, who were working in capitalist countries, introduced the narrative of a capitalist enjoyment, in a way acting as 'the heralds of future' (Buden, 2012a). Among many other factors, this contributed to individual republics gradually developing a perspective according to which enjoyment would be far greater if they were to leave Yugoslavia. When this finally happened and they were left on their own, it became obvious that this enjoyment was essentially a false promise. From such a perspective, the 'theft' of enjoyment, and not nationalism, triggered the war. More precisely, nationalism was triggered by the idea of stolen enjoyment and, once it was realised that there is no enjoyment waiting outside Yugoslavia, the rage of people was channelled through more promises about national utopia. It could be said that 'the ultimate lesson of the tragic entanglements of post-socialism is that some kind of fantasy is always in control, which is to say that the structure of power is inherently fantasmatic' (Salecl, 2002: 21). However, this fantasmatic component changes and, if the social situatedness of the economy is to be properly understood, these shifts should be incorporated into my methodology.

Women, of course, occupied a specific role in these happenings. Even though some feminist organisations did exist in Yugoslavia, the relation between socialism and feminism can be seen at its best at the moment when Women's Antifascist Front was terminated by the Party and a delegate explained this decision saying that such organisation would 'overly exclude women from collective efforts in solving social issues, supporting a false opinion that the question of the position of women is a some sort of separate women's question and not a question of our social community, a question of all fighters for socialism' (Čakardić, 2013: 21). Thus, let us not forget, Yugoslav society was a patriarchal one, where a modernist category of the worker could not bear any particular identity affiliations.

#### **4.1.2. From liberalism to neoliberalism**

Following the war, the idea of socialism was substituted by the affiliation to liberal capitalism, accompanied by an emphasis on the importance of nation building (Katunarić, 2003; Paić, 2011). However, it should be kept in mind, especially as this is usually overlooked, that Croatia had already existed as a republic and a

constitutive nation in Yugoslavia.<sup>3</sup> Croatia was not born after the war and maybe it is, in a way, most appropriate to see the war simply as a salient iteration of the nation. In accordance, when gender is considered, claims that a post-war Croatia is returning to patriarchal values (Koludrović-Tomić and Kunac, 2000; Tölle, 2013) are misleading as they imply that Yugoslavia was not a patriarchal society and that Croatia is now returning to some sort of pre-modern time. However, this iteration did encourage nationalist and patriarchal values and devalued the idea of secularism. It goes without saying that these contextual shifts reflected negatively on the position of women in society, fostering patriarchal fantasies regarding the role of women in the nation building process (Salecl, 2002). However, in a post-war period the harmfulness of privatisation process was still not apparent, owing largely to the general economic trends and the enthusiasm generated by achieving the independence from Yugoslavia (Katunarić, 2012; Paić, 2011). Bearing in mind that the idea of socialism was rendered totalitarian and abolished, fantasmatic structure shifted to what was seen as being the West, more precisely the 'Western capitalist cultural circle'. In that spirit, Croatia applied for the EU membership, which was experienced as a starting point of the journey on which Croatia was about to become as 'civilised' as other EU members. The EU was detached from its empirical content and started to operate as a synonym for the enjoyment that is to be reached as soon as possible, a fantasmatic structure. During this race for elusive enjoyment, nationalism, in its most manifest form, was repressed and a set of policies implemented, including those promoting gender equality (Azmanova, 2012; Lewis and Pascall, 2004; Spehar, 2012). Nationalist and patriarchal values were made latent, which, in turn, made them significantly harder to tackle. This civilising mission, due to its fantasmatic character, overlooked the victories that socialism had already won, such as wide access to education and health services, secularism, high standards of living and interpersonal conduct, industrialisation etc. (Katunarić, 2013) or, in other words and in accordance with modernist discourse, a high level of civilisation.

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<sup>3</sup> It can be argued that liberal capitalism existed in Yugoslavia well before its dissolution. In the beginning of the eighties, International Monetary Fund had imposed sanctions on Yugoslavia and a local version of austerity was implemented, which worked in favour of the idea that enjoyment is outside Yugoslavia. Capitalism, more precisely unemployment, and not socialism with human face, was the reason why the borders opened and Yugoslav nationals were allowed to work outside Yugoslavia (Buden, 2012b).

This state of liberal economic progress was interrupted by the global financial crisis that hit Croatia in 2009, which was followed by the introduction of new governmental technologies. Principally, this crisis triggered the implementation of austerity measures and, most significantly, ushered in the dominance of neoliberal discourse, emphasising individualism, combined with active government intervention in society. A new vocabulary, including flexibility, austerity, entrepreneurial climate, skills on how to sell yourself etc. was brought into use and got swiftly adopted by all dominant political parties (Katunarić, 2013). Austerity measures are understood as gender-neutral which centres upon individuals, with no attention to their gender. Their gendered effects are usually overlooked, which, however, does not make their effects any less real. This neoliberal de-gendering was perfectly illustrated by the former prime minister, who, while speaking for the The Social Democratic Party of Croatia Women's Forum, recommended women to 'fight, be better, smarter, more intelligent, more foxy and they will *forget that you are women*, they will be afraid of you' (Milanović in Hrt Vijesti, 2013, emphasis added), clearly sending a message that women should forget their gender and focus on the only thing that matters, namely self-entrepreneurship. On the other hand, neoliberalism has proven to welcome a number of feminist organisations in Croatia, operating not through restrictions, which characterised socialist approach to feminism, but by permissions and resignifications. For example, Centre for Women's Studies, which does not exhaust feminist thought in Croatia but is nevertheless the leading feminist non-academic educational and research centre in Croatia, is ready to claim, on its website (Centre for Women's Studies, 2016), that 'a programme of providing expert knowledges or expertise is an identity place of the Centre' and offer 'various expert knowledges (packets of educational services intended for women's organisations, bodies for implementing equality, parties)'. It goes without saying that there is no place for politics when expertise is available, no need for political interventions when experts have the solutions (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). Alternatively, it could be argued that this is exactly what neoliberal politics is, namely a competing ground of various experts. In any case, what remains unexplored is how a large majority of women, not particularly interested in expert knowledge, perceive the changes brought by neoliberalism. Breaking with the discourse of emergency, introduced by the crisis, and giving importance to issues

that are not economic, my research strives towards understanding these, political issues.

Finally, considering that Croatia has become a member of the EU during the 2013 enlargement, it is important to remember that this has also reflected on the fantasmatic structure of society. The process of conforming to the 'civilised' norm is completed, the Balkans is pushed even more to the East, Croatia has left Eastern Europe and joined Europe. Again, it seems that there is no great enjoyment in the EU waiting to be consumed. As the fantasmatic border has been breached, the empirical component gained its significance and it is slowly becoming obvious that there is no enlightened Europe dedicated to eradicating uncivilised practices. In this spirit, and in the same year as Croatia joined the EU, the referendum was organised, asking the voters to say 'Are you in favour of the constitution of the Republic of Croatia being amended with a provision stating that marriage is matrimony between a woman and a man?' (Election Guide, 2013) and, considering the outcome, gay marriage has been constitutionally prohibited.<sup>4</sup> It remains to be seen where the enjoyment will be situated in future and how will this affect the society.

## **4.2. Methodological clarifications**

### **4.2.1. Governmentality and beyond**

Once some key contextual contours relevant for contemporary Croatian society have been provided, when discussing my methodological approach and considering that my project is drawing on governmentality studies (Larner and Walters, 2004a; Miller, 2001; Rose, 1996), it should first be clarified how my research is influenced by some major ideas put forward by this 'tradition'. This approach recognises the role of networks of power that are formed through numerous everyday life interactions. These networks are not necessarily limited to institutional

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<sup>4</sup> Considering that gay marriage was already prohibited by the law, though not by the constitution, this was just an expensive exercise of conservative reasoning. However, what is even more interesting is the reaction coming from the Left, being focused mostly on how uncivilised are the values promoted by this referendum. Sadly, even in gay activist circles, such moralising discourse was not followed by questioning the institution of marriage. Even though it is clear that such prohibition is, of course, to be condemned, the presupposition that marriage itself is something desirable should also be explored in its ideological affiliations. On the other side, a conservative non-governmental organisation In the Name of the Family, which organised the petition that led to the referendum, realised that the modernist era is over. In accordance, they mocked with the meaning of uncivilised practices, simply pointing to the other EU members with similar, conservative regulations and, not without a great irony, called for a participatory democracy regarding every social issue, including gay marriage.

contexts but are for that reason not any less important. The fact that institutional coercion is not necessary for the networks of power to develop 'is not because we live in some consensual universe. It is because power also acts through practices that "make up subjects" as free persons' (Rose, 2004: 94, emphasis in original). We need to understand 'these practices [as] governed *through* freedom, to the extent that they sought to invent the conditions in which subjects themselves would enact the responsibilities that composed their liberties' (Rose, 2004: 72, emphasis in original). The examined field of power extends in its productive character and this understanding enables the realisation that institutions are not omnipotent or that they simply exist on the other side of human agency. This can introduce quite a radical change in our analysis of power. In the context where power is conceptualised largely as a repressive instance, it is almost a blasphemy to question the power of government and often the best accounts of such a perspective are found in novels, as such forms of expression are less obliged to respect established disciplinary premises. For this reason, a call for linking sociological insights and literature is a rather important one (Bahou, 1961; Howe, 1957; Lowenthal, 1957). It is only in novels that one can find such citation:

The touching thing with those who govern is that they are, next to their living spokespersons, so uncompromisingly sure that they are doing their job. The role of activity which is called public relations in what is called politics is that the role of a public relations agent is reduced to convincing the public that there still is some sort of difference between politics and public relations. In addition to this, hierarchically superior must be convinced - the prime minister / minister / president / whoever - that he is - the prime minister / president / whoever - and not he - a public relations agent - the one who is doing politics [...] whoever with a grain of salt in his head and who has not completely lost the track of time, can easily understand that, contrary to a widespread opinion, there is no political marketing but marketing that is, for marketing reasons, called politics. (Ivančić, 2014: 185-186)

Exactly this liberty of understanding that a more significant portion of power operates outside the macro institutional setting provides a basis for both governmentality studies and my own perspective. This has immediate ethico-methodological consequences as the role of governmentality studies 'is diagnostic rather than descriptive: they seek an open and critical relation to strategies for governing, attentive to their presuppositions, their assumptions, their exclusions, their naiveties and their knaveries, their regimes of vision and their spots of blindness' (Rose, 2004: 19). In my project, therefore, neoliberalism is not used as a curse word or portrayed as something that provokes immediate disqualification due to its unacceptable ideological basis and harmful consequences. This is not to deny immense suffering that neoliberal capitalism has caused throughout the world but is precisely to ensure that one is not blinded by harmful consequences of neoliberalism and therefore hindered in understanding what neoliberalism is. The focus of my project is on examining how neoliberalism permeates different fields of human existence, for example entrepreneurship or personal life. However, I would like to carefully distinguish this from exposing neoliberalism behind every field of human activity, thereby proclaiming any action or concept co-opted, contaminated by capitalist values and therefore not worthy of further consideration. Bearing in mind that 'neo-liberalism is not the Gulag on the insidious scale of capitalism' (Foucault, 2008: 131), I work towards dismantling simplistic depictions of neoliberalism. My goal is rather to show how neoliberalism enables and disables the individual's agency, how it frames different aspects of society and how it provides the rationalisations of governing, thus establishing what is always only the appearance of consistency. In addition, I refrain from elevating myself to the position of judge. Instead, I strive towards providing the genealogies and exposing the weakness of the sharp divisions on which a large part of academic work and public opinion is based. As Rose (2004: 20) puts it:

Perspectivism, here, is thus partly a matter of introducing a critical attitude towards those things that are given to our present experience as if they were timeless, natural, unquestionable: to stand against the maxims of one's time, against the spirit of one's age, against the current of received wisdom. It is a matter of

introducing a kind of awkwardness into the fabric of one's experience, of interrupting the fluency of the narratives.

Thus, rather than proclaiming 'the Gulag on the insidious scale of capitalism' (Foucault, 2008: 131), my project seeks to expose the system in its fragmentary nature, mapping the repetitive process through which neoliberal capitalism constantly re-establishes its hegemonic position and its consolidated appearance of a system. The emphasis on repetition is what makes my analysis poststructural, neoliberalism is not seen as a structure that should be uncovered from its phenomenological disguise, rather it is a matter of examining how it performatively establishes through repetitive practices, sealing its ruptures and regulating the field of discourse.

Those abovementioned 'things that are given to our present experience as if they were timeless, natural, unquestionable' (Rose, 2004: 20) or, in other words, covered by the process of repetition, should not be cynically disregarded as they have significant influence on the way reality is perceived. When Western anthropologists first visited socialist countries and conducted initial ethnographic research, one of their most significant findings was that life actually existed in its full complexity under socialist rule, i.e. people were really working, babies were actually born, gendered relations were indeed established, there really existed commercials for various goods and brands etc. (Verdery, 1996). This is not an ironic remark as it is often forgotten that government 'is a work of thought. And it was through thought, not through brute reality, that rationalities of social government began to crumble' (Rose, 2004: 140). Even in those countries that once were socialist and where one can still easily come across the people who have a first-hand experience of living under socialism, it is often proclaimed, especially by the young and liberal, that, for example, entrepreneurship or freedom are the products of capitalism. This is often emphasised honestly and is the product of naturalising practices, certain ways of neoliberal framing, as entrepreneurship and freedom were not any less or more real and true under socialist governance but were simply conducted and rationalised in the context of different governmentality. Both entrepreneurship and freedom are, therefore, provisory and empty analytic categories that make sense only when situated in the particular context that the researcher is exploring.

#### 4.2.2. Nothing is too empirical

Considering that governmentality studies are focused on the everyday life of power, 'the methodological point is this: it is, most often, at this vulgar, pragmatic, quotidian and minor level that one can see the languages and techniques being invented that will reshape understandings of the subjects and objects of government, and hence reshape the very presuppositions upon which government rests' (Rose, 2004: 31). In this sense, *nothing* is too empirical, it is just a matter of adjusting the optics and recognising a particular discourse and its points of entry in the broader field of discourse. When we can easily recognise clear, institutional neoliberal politics, laws and policies, it might be that we are too late to explore neoliberalism in its beginnings and that it is no longer the question of transition to neoliberal governmentality, which might well be the case in Croatia, but that we are dealing with already fairly established neoliberal system. This brings additional importance and value to the recognition of 'quotidian and minor level', as this is where discourse, while penetrating the macro level of society, establishes its hegemonic position. Here, in contrast to Rose's opinion that adopting the governmentality perspective means 'to stand against the maxims of one's time, against the spirit of one's age, against the current of received wisdom', in my project I would prefer to stand within the field of discourse and demystify the discourse from within, primarily as I understand that leaving the discursive field is not an option. Consequently, slightly moderating Rose's perspective, one's personal life can become his or her most accessible fieldwork.

For example, when I completed my initial studies in sociology, it became relatively clear to me that I would need to register with the Croatian Employment Service<sup>5</sup> and start looking for possible employment. Now, Marx (1981) was right when he, while debunking the fetish of self-valorising value, argued that money does not breed money but it produces surplus work force and, if one has any doubts on this, a simple glance on Greece should be more than enough. However, contrary to some Marxist expectations, I had a fairly warm and professional reception in the Employment Service. In what followed, nevertheless, is where one can see neoliberal discourse operating at its purest. Basically, I was firstly asked for some basic information, what have I done in my life work-wise etc. and when I had informed

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<sup>5</sup> The equivalent of Jobcentre in the UK.



them that I have completed graduate studies in sociology and that I volunteered at a local film festival, though admittedly doing nothing special but simply checking tickets, a woman employed at the Employment Service told me that she is now creating my profile. In a few minutes, an active job seeker profile had been created for me and I was registered as a sociologist and an event manager, the latter on the basis of my voluntary work.<sup>6</sup> Soon after this, it became apparent to me that there were no jobs to apply for, not even in my newly discovered passion for event management. However, I was required, on a fortnightly basis, if I did not want to lose my status of an active job seeker, to report what I have so far done in order to increase my chances for finding a job. Confronted with a rather strange situation in which one is asked to actively seek for a job that does not exist, I was still required to reflect on my desires and activities in relation to finding a job. In the meantime, I was showered with short and usually free courses on writing *curriculum vitae*, perfecting communications skills, improving group work capacities and, finally, with the offers for voluntary, non-paid work. From my example, one can easily see how 'the new citizen is required to engage in a ceaseless work of training and retraining, skilling and reskilling, enhancement of credentials and preparation for a life of incessant job seeking: life is to become a continuous economic capitalization of the self' (Rose, 2004: 161). However, when my example is more thoroughly examined, it becomes obvious that money is not really what the central issue of my autobiographic narrative is. How would we otherwise be able to explain that the Employment Service offers voluntary, non-paid work? Foucault's (2008: 131) emphasis that 'neoliberalism is not market society' has regularly been overlooked in governmentality scholarship. The primary value in neoliberal discourse is first and foremost activity, leading an active lifestyle, internalising the self-entrepreneurial grid of intelligibility by despising simple, passive unemployment, while striving towards active job seeking. Laid down in a more macro terminology, it is the matter of neoliberalism as an active opposed to liberalism as a passive governmentality. No problem if it is not active employment as active non-paid work will serve the requirements just as good. Of course it is true that you cannot pay for your living doing voluntary work but you are informed that, while you are waiting, someone else

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<sup>6</sup> Here, however, it should not be forgotten that this is, as so many phenomena in this project, by no means limited to a Croatian context. For a brief historical introduction to the imperative of active unemployment in the UK and the United States, see Rose (2004: 162-164). The chapter *Activity and Neoliberalism* further explores the neoliberal imperative of activity.

is doing something and that is the person who will eventually get a job as he or she was active while you were merely unemployed and waiting for the manna from the sky. How do you think that people get job anyways, simply by waiting, doing nothing? If you have taken non-paid voluntary job and are now unsatisfied, why are you whining, was not this your *free* choice? Did *you* sign the contract? After all, you can always leave. Maybe they will keep you there and you will eventually get paid, who knows.<sup>7</sup> Thus, it is precisely relentless activity that is in the essence of the so much needed quality of repetition that seals the cracks of neoliberal discourse. This, in turn, makes the sharp opposition between a contingent, everyday micro, on the one hand, and a serious, institutional macro level of power, on the other, effectively redundant.

Thus, everyday examples of neoliberal discourse are fruitful, one just has to be able to spot them, recognising the value of what only seems as a part of flat, uneventful daily life. To provide one more example, I have recently received an email from the University of Manchester, sent to all of its postgraduate research students, saying 'One in four of us will experience some sort of mental health problem in our lives, *anxiety*, depression or maybe that feeling "How did I get a place on a PhD programme - I don't belong, *someone* will find out!"' (Cauchie, 2016, emphasis added). One option is simply to ignore this email as yet another message from the University, bearing no analytic relevance whatsoever. The other option is to raise the crucial question which is here, in my opinion, who is going to find out that I am really kind of a fraud? It is not a supervisor as an instance of power, in which case we would not be able to talk about nothing more than a fear, as anxiety is not object related but acts as 'a free-floating fear' (Freud, 1920: 344) and is, in accordance with Freud's (1920) early analysis of anxiety, by no means identical with an ordinary fear caused by a certain object, for example a dog or a boss. Rather, I claim that it is the ideal entrepreneur of herself who is going to find out, a true self-master that the student herself is hoping to become through her choices. Using psychoanalytic terminology, the symbolic Other is this instance that is going to find about the student's 'embarrassing' lack (Fink, 1995). The Other, of course, according to a fundamental lesson of psychoanalysis, does not exist but the student is nonetheless relentlessly trying to guess what does this Other want from her and is

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<sup>7</sup> I am here reproducing neoliberal discourse. Contradictions are, it goes without saying, numerous.

anxiously trying to accommodate what she always only thinks is the Other's desire (Fink, 1999b; Šumič, 2016). Furthermore, desire is in Lacanian psychoanalysis understood as fundamentally insatiable, its final aim is nothing more than its own perpetuation, which makes the aforementioned desire for belonging particularly problematic for the student (Evans, 1999; Žižek, 1999). Thus, it is not the institution that will find out, the University instead honestly offers what is considered to be help in the email, offering online therapeutic resources, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, guided relaxation audio files etc. Is it then too easy to blame the University for producing anxiety among students (but also cutting salaries etc.)? After all, is not the University itself, as a fully established and, admittedly and without feeling like swearing while saying so, neoliberal institution, acting in the same manner as the student but through a different medium, namely ranking bodies, while anxiously trying to increase its excellence every year?

Neoliberalism thus transcends institutional setting, going beyond ordinary repression. Nowadays people abide to the imperative to be active subjects and what is usually not problematized in governmentality studies, which my project seeks to make clear, is that activity is almost synonymous with anxiety, active governmentality is anxiety ridden governmentality. The reason why such insight is welcome in my project is that I do not confuse neoliberal with market society, which is sometimes done in the governmentality studies (Arts *et al.*, 2009; Bröckling *et al.*, 2011), and I do not follow Foucault's somewhat mysterious refusal to engage with the psychic life of power. One should always bear in mind that the subject is not purely rational, capable of predicting the entire field of social or swiftly changing social context, so her choices necessarily fail to completely satisfy the neoliberal imperative of active self-mastery. This failure generates anxiety, which operates as a conservative neoliberal technology, relentlessly pushing the struggling subject to re-establish the shattered (appearance of) self-mastery. Once this is understood, the psychic life of neoliberal subject opens for examination, the interior of subject and the institutional dimensions of neoliberalism are exposed in their indistinguishable, intertwining relation. The interior of subject then, strictly speaking, does not exist. It is always already externalised or, in other words, social. This, once again, shows that one cannot simply make a distinction between institutional and everyday life of neoliberalism as the difference is blurred and every attempt to do so will inevitably end in oversimplifications and the reduction of the examined field of power.

When the aforementioned examples are examined, it becomes obvious that neoliberalism largely operates through dispersing and multiplying its governmental practices through individuals or, to be more precise, through their freedom. Understanding this, Rose (2004: 48) asks 'but what are the relations between these micro-practices and what men "call "government"' in great buildings and capitals'? [...] Clearly a plan, policy or programme is not merely "realized" in each of these locales, nor is it a matter of an order issued centrally being executed locally. What is involved here is something more complex. I term this "translation". This is, in my opinion, a nuanced contribution to flattening the social (Latour, 2005), the approach which I will examine in the text that follows, in the field of governmentality studies. However, the applicability of Rose's concept of 'translation' is limited to liberal governmentality, where both the government and subjects are understood as passive, while a respectful boundary is maintained between the state and the economy, thus requiring a translation process. Neoliberal governmentality, on the other hand, is characterised by a radical break with the idea of such delineation and is fundamentally active, indeed realising itself immediately in neoliberal subjects. The metaphor of translation is simply not radical enough to accommodate the epistemological shift brought by neoliberalism, since it is still based on an understanding in which neoliberal subjects and neoliberalism are seen as two hierarchically separated levels in society. It is not quite the case that the microphysics of neoliberal government is dependent on the role that 'small' people have in 'the system'. Rather, neoliberal subjects *are* neoliberalism or, to be more precise, neoliberalism is above all a form of subjectivity. This is the fundamental message of Foucault's work on neoliberalism. It is *a shift in subjectivity* that is essentially new in neoliberalism, turning it into a system that is immensely flexible and resistant to subversion.

#### **4.2.3. Keeping the social flat**

In his book, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Latour (2005) deals with the issue of keeping the social flat. Considering that Foucault's conceptualisation of power as acting capillary is of the fundamental importance for my project, Latour's approach, which avoids straightforward proclamation of the omnipotent status of hierarchies, requires further examination to clarify my methodological approach. In this context, Latour (2005: 176) claims 'it's

not that there is no hierarchy, no ups and downs, no rifts, no deep canyons, no high spots. It is simply that if you wish to go from one site to another, then you have to pay the full cost of relation, connection, displacement, and information. No lifts, accelerations, or shortcuts are allowed'. Considering that Latour often uses vocabulary that is playful, some of his concepts might be hard to follow and, as a consequence, risk a simple rejection or admiration. Or, what is maybe a more significant issue, the reader might end up not being really sure whether Latour is being serious or is he joking. When Latour (2005: 46) discusses actor-network theory (ANT), he explains that 'an "actor" in the hyphenated expression actor-network is not the source of an action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it [...] it's never clear who and what is acting when we act since an actor on stage is never alone in acting'. Realising that the social sciences very often operate with reified notions, he is ready to expose these processes of reification and to move away from taking the concepts such as society, system, global feature, structure, actor etc. without further and more detailed examination. He criticises the social sciences for adopting and operating with many faulty dichotomies and, what is probably most important for my research, he significantly contributes to exposing the problematic distinction between micro and macro level of society. When Latour's (2005: 176, emphasis in original) perspective is adopted, 'macro no longer describes a *wider* or a *larger* site in which the micro would be embedded like some Russian Matryoshka doll, but another equally local, equally micro place, which is *connected* to many others through some medium transporting specific types of traces'. This insight makes his work relevant for my project as it breaks with identifying the macro level with the omnipotent instance of institutional power and, on the other hand, equating the micro level with the place where 'ordinary' people reside in their impotence and innocence. What makes his position more consistent is that Latour (2005: 76) is not trying to find the compromise between macro and micro, thus acknowledging that 'there are divisions one should never try to bypass, to go beyond, to try to overcome dialectically. They should rather be ignored and left to their own devices, like a once formidable castle now in ruins'. Such an approach, in turn, contributes to relieving one's position of *ressentiment* and saves time that is otherwise spent on the unnecessary repetition of old, dated debates or the demystification of fetishized concepts that hinders theoretical novelty.

Following his rejection of the micro-macro dichotomy, Latour (2005: 178), with his claim that 'capitalism has no plausible enemy since it is "everywhere" [...]' Yes, Wall Street is connected to many places and in this sense, but in this sense only, it is "bigger", more powerful, overarching', joins the aforementioned debate on the missing enemy of capitalism. He remains critical of a standard scientific journey to emancipation, where the role of the researcher is confused with an instance that provides guidelines on how to act, while forgetting that his or her primary interest should be understanding society and not debunking false-consciousness of participants followed by the prescription of ideal assemblies. Here, even though Latour (2005) makes no such mistake in his book, it must be clearly stated that the microphysics of power does not in any way imply that, bearing in mind that King's head is now cut off, all subjects, regardless of their social position, are to be seen as equally responsible for the perpetuation of neoliberalism. To say, as I do in my research, that we are *all* neoliberal subjects is not to say that we all benefit from neoliberal system equally or that we are all equally dedicated to its perpetuation. Such understanding would be an oversimplification that does not derive from my theoretical framework in any way and I would like to emphasise that such a perspective is not adopted in my project. However, when the microphysics of power is taken in its full potential, it becomes clear that there neither is the Centre of power that takes away all the responsibility for the consequences, interpreted as beneficial or detrimental for society, of neoliberal politics. If the analysis is to be undertaken in order to expand the field of power we aim to outline, we should not stop at producing the analyses of King's head and its various reincarnations, adopting a well-established Marxist position (Fraser, 2013; Harvey, 2007; Klein, 2007; Tyler, 2013). Instead of conducting analysis until King's head is cut off, my research starts with such premise.

#### **4.2.4. Sublimating *libido sciendi***

Returning to Latour's interesting proposal to keep the social flat, it is now the question how is this actually employed in analysis and it is here that my approach parts ways with his recommendations. Latour (2005: 68) invites researchers to act in accordance with ANT's slogan 'follow the actors', to "'follow the actors in their weaving through things they have added to social skills so as to render more durable the constantly shifting interactions'". When we bear in mind his 'new definition of

social as a fluid visible only when new association are being made' (Latour, 2005: 79), this appears as a reasonable strategy for analysis. My problem with Latour's position arises when he makes it clear, on several places in his book, that he literally intends to follow the actors, conducting a purely empirical investigative research. This, following the directions of author, is done with a help of three notebooks where the researcher describes the empirical field in details, ensuring that ANT is scrupulously followed. Even more so, Latour (2005: 123) often provides compassionate accounts of the anxieties that zealous social scientists are experiencing, for example:

How does one make sense of this mess as it piles up on our desks and fills countless disks with data? Sadly, it often remains to be written and is usually delayed. It rots there as advisors, sponsors, and clients are shouting at you and lovers, spouses, and kids are angry at you while you rummage about in this dark sludge of data to bring light to the world.

Reading these words, one can be easily misled in thinking that he or she is living in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in the middle of the era when the great fantasies of Enlightenment were naturalised and not in the time in which postcolonial studies have exposed manifold problems of scientific reasoning.

Further on, however, recognising that the approach he is proposing requires time, Latour (2005: 122, emphasis in original) jokes:

If there is something especially stupid, it is a method that prides itself in being so meticulous, so radical, so all encompassing, and so object-oriented as to be totally impractical. This is not a sociology any more but a *slowciology*! Zen masters can puzzle over the many conundrums of their austere discipline, but not the writer of a sociology treatise. Either she proposes a project that is affordable and manageable or we sue her for disinformation.

ANT is, as he makes it clear in the book, *slowciology*. At the same time, however, he argues that *slowciology* is perfectly fine with the fact that what is wanted is a

practical, smart, manageable, project-oriented approach that is always ready to satisfy the desires of modern man, 'advisors, sponsors, and clients [are] shouting at you'. According to Latour (2005: 123-124, emphasis in original), apparently that is 'excellent because *there is no better way*' and 'a book on ANT, written by ants for other ants, has no other aim than to help dig tiny galleries in this dusty and earthly one'. The problem with this is that such galleries simply do not suffice and such compromises are not radical enough as they co-exist with events such as the *Philosophy and Literature Bad Writing Contest*, where the apparent lack of style was attributed, among others, to Judith Butler (in Fischer, 2016) on the basis of her sentence:

The move from a structuralist account in which capital is understood to structure social relations in relatively homologous ways to a view of hegemony in which power relations are subject to repetition, convergence, and rearticulation brought the question of temporality into the thinking of structure, and marked a shift from a form of Althusserian theory that takes structural totalities as theoretical objects to one in which the insights into the contingent possibility of structure inaugurate a renewed conception of hegemony as bound up with the contingent sites and strategies of the rearticulation of power.

Reading theoretical texts takes significantly more time than the 'tiny galleries' that ultimately conform to a project-oriented approach can ensure. These are simply not slow enough. If sufficient time was invested for an honest understanding of Butler's text, the sentence above would not appear as an unapproachable example of bad writing but as a concise account of poststructuralism and its fundamental move from the structure, namely repetition. Sadly, it seems right to say that 'when people demand simpler language, they often are demanding simpler thoughts' (Spivak in Brohi, 2014), which is in direct confrontation with understanding complex social phenomena. For that reason, if we refrain from slowly learning in the field that is developing on the other side of 'advisors, sponsors, and clients', more thorough understanding of society will unfortunately elude our efforts, while the debates on



style, method fairs and poster exhibitions will increasingly replace the understanding of ideas and meaningful cooperation.

Considering that Latour is attached, although ambivalently, to saving the practical and scientific discipline of sociology, utilising his concept of keeping the social flat in social research, due to the imperative of practicality, becomes synonymous with a straightforward description of empirical facts. This can be seen at its best when Latour (2005: 47, 208) simply disqualifies psychoanalysis, saying that 'inventing a hidden social drive, an unconscious, would be a sure way of reintroducing this ether of social that we try to dispense with [...] subjects are no more autochthonous than face-to-face interaction'. The problem with the unconscious is, therefore, that it implies interiority which cannot be swiftly examined and transformed into a set of insights that would be manageable. The unconscious is even more problematic due to the fact that it is not on the surface and, following Latour's understanding of flatness, not in accordance with the imperative of keeping the social flat. Here I disagree with Latour, not because of the easily refutable attempt to swiftly eliminate psychoanalysis by reducing the entire field of psychoanalysis to essentialism, but for the reason that face-to-face interactions do not mean a lot if we do not know how to interpret such relations. In other words, if fieldwork is all there is, the result is a simple description and not of a sophisticated, noble kind that Latour imagines but rather a fairly simple, obvious and limited one. If Latour were to engage with psychoanalysis more extensively, he would maybe come across Freud's (2001d: 16) essay in which he reflects on authors who argue:

Just as there are processes which are very vividly, glaringly, and tangibly conscious, so we also experience others which are only faintly, hardly even noticeably conscious; those that are most faintly conscious are, it is argued, the ones to which psychoanalysis wishes to apply the unsuitable name 'unconscious'. These too, however (the argument proceeds), are conscious or 'in consciousness', and can be made fully and intensely conscious if sufficient attention is paid to them.

Freud is illustrative at this point as he presents a figure usually associated with psychoanalysis and, for that very same reason, dissociated from social sciences. The

reason for this dissociation is, as it will be argued later on, a particular understanding of 'empirical' in social sciences. However, is not Freud's position here very similar to Latour's? After all, he briefly recognises Freud's efforts, paying nominal respect to psychoanalysis, but then proceeds with a flattening epistemological approach in which the rule is literally 'what you see is what you get' or, in other words, what you cannot follow is simply someone's fabrication. What such a perspective does not recognise is that following or examining what you see in details, no matter how good you are in investigative journalism, fails to provide a way to understand facts and is for that reason, paradoxically, in the great risk of being empirically wrong. The more one abides by the positivist rules of empirical work, the more likely is he or she to misunderstand the exact facts in whose understanding positivism is taking such a great pride. Freud (2001d: 16, emphasis added), realising this, continues:

The reference to gradations of clarity in consciousness is in no way conclusive and has no more *evidential value* than such analogous statements as: 'There are so very many gradations in illumination - from the most glaring and dazzling light to the dimmest glimmer - therefore there is no such thing as darkness at all'; or, 'There are varying degrees of vitality, therefore there is no such thing as death.' [...] This will be seen if one tries to draw particular conclusions from them, such as, 'there is therefore no need to strike a light', or, 'therefore all organisms are immortal'.

Thus, what is endangered by refusing to engage with a theoretical, conceptual analysis is exactly the 'evidential value' that Freud mentions, as one cannot understand facts if there is no theoretical apparatus that can provide a certain, of course always only partial and limited, explanation. This matters not only for the understanding of psychoanalysis as what the researcher can literally see is always far from the entire picture.

To illustrate the relevance of epistemological status ascribed to facts, let us take Brexit for example. The referendum atmosphere was saturated with a positivist discourse on the importance of facts and then, after the result had proven to be on the leave side, the entire field of predictions and rationalisations based on facts crumbled. Interestingly, *The Guardian* published the article, *View From Wales:*

*Town Showered with EU Cash Votes to Leave EU* (Cadwalladr, 2016), which begins with the brief contextual description:

'What's the EU ever done for us?' Zak Kelly, 21, asks me this standing next to a brand new complex of buildings and facilities that wouldn't look out of place in Canary Wharf. It's not Canary Wharf, though, it's Ebbw Vale, a former steel town of 18000 people in the heart of the Welsh valleys, where 62% of the population - the highest proportion in Wales - voted Leave.

After the reader has been informed that Wales does not share the positivist concern for facts, the article continues and the author finally, in the amazing plot twist, realises that she is writing a report from 'a town with almost no immigrants that voted to get the immigrants out' (Cadwalladr, 2016). One could not ask for a better example contrary to Latour's rule 'what you see is what you get'. Precisely the opposite is the case with Brexit, the rule is turned on its head and now reads as 'what you see is exactly what you *do not* get'!

Even after the referendum, the interpretations and the coverage of the leave decision were not shattered in their religious dedication to facts. No analysis of fantasy entered the objective inquiry, no unconscious was permitted. Rather, it has been argued that the voters did not have access to true facts and that only if they were not misled into the false consciousness by the corrupt politicians, they would act reasonably and rationally etc. (Dearden, 2016; Dunford and Kirk, 2016; Piccaver, 2016; Wright, 2016). Once again the positivist approach has proven to be perfectly immune to facts. On the other hand, positivism's underside once again resurfaced in the form of liberal indignation leading to compassionate scapegoating or, in more operative terms, producing charts and maps of the rural and uneducated population that voted in favour of leaving the EU (Stone, 2016; Warnes, 2016). Only a day after the results were made public, University College London European Institute (2016) published the report *It's Brexit. A First Round of Reactions from UCL Staff to the EU Referendum Results*, where Dr Beasley-Murray informs us:

The results of the referendum tell us that many who voted Remain were predominantly young and educated and that their strongholds

were the University cities of London, Bristol, Oxford and Cambridge, Edinburgh and Exeter: experts, the liberal elite. The tragedy of the referendum is that many of those who voted out - those who rightly feel that they get a raw deal in modern Britain - were encouraged to do so by another elite: self-serving, mendacious, and illiberal.

Thus, the entire field of the social is exhausted by liberal experts who value facts, on the one side, and those who, due to their unfortunately somewhat reduced capacities or illiberal affiliations, fail to acknowledge facts, on the other hand. The privileged status of facts, however, remains intact.

#### **4.2.5. Ambivalences of *libido sciendi***

However, it would not be fair to portray Latour as a figure of orthodox positivist scientific reasoning. He criticises the reified concept of society, exposing it in its essentialism, arguing that 'like nature, society is a premature assemblage: it should be put ahead of us and not behind' (Latour, 2005: 171).<sup>8</sup> Moving away from seeing society as a third dimensional registry, he tries to reconstruct connections between the actors, manifold networks they form and perpetuate. It can be said that Latour is proposing or abiding by a position that is significantly different from the one employed by the sociology of social. In this spirit, quite radically, Latour (2005: 17) decides to distinguish his position from a 'discourse on method', preferring to understand his approach as a travel book approach because the 'the advantage of a travel book approach over a "discourse on method" is that it cannot be confused with the territory on which it simply overlays'. He makes it clear that ANT is not here to be applied, it is not yet another theoretical framework that can help the researcher to understand what is often conceptualised as the object of his or her inquiry. Furthermore, he abandons the entire notion of theoretical framework waiting to be

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<sup>8</sup> Here we should note that Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 95-96), well before Latour (2005), provided a new perspective on Thatcher's famous saying, and in my opinion a far more sophisticated one, arguing that 'we must begin by renouncing the conception of "society" as founding totality of its partial processes. We must, therefore, consider the openness of the social as the constitutive ground or "negative essence" of the existing, and the diverse "social orders" as precarious and ultimately failed attempts to domesticate the field of differences. Accordingly, the multiformity of the social cannot be apprehended through a system of mediations, nor the "social order" understood as an underlying principle. There is no sutured space peculiar to "society", since the social itself has no essence'.

applied during the fieldwork and promising to deliver scientific insights once the data is gathered. Accordingly, Latour (2005: 167) argues 'when inquirers begin to look away from local sites because obviously the key of the interactions is not to be found there - which is true enough - they believe they have to turn their attention toward the "framework" inside of which interactions are supposed to be nested - and here things go terribly wrong'. Thus, his position on theoretical work is not characterised by a simple rejection. It is more complex, situated somewhere between admiration and mocking despise. He is, at the same time, ready to claim that 'sociologists of the social are not abstract enough' (Latour, 2005: 186) and to admit 'I am, in the end, a naive realist, a positivist' (Latour, 2005: 156). This might be a part of his playful writing style, but it most certainly does not contribute to the clarity of his perspective. What is also important to note is that Latour, in his *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (2005), does not actually trace the interactions found at local sites, no actors are being zealously followed in his study. He is satisfied with recommending and passing this to other ANT scholars (Callon, 1988, 1986a, 1986b). On the one hand, Latour (2005: 123, emphasis in original) argues that the excessive production of academic reports, such as 'an article, a file, a website, a poster, a PowerPoint presentation, a performance, an oral exam, a documentary film, an artistic installation', is excellent as '*there is no better way*' for us. On the other hand, Latour nonetheless (2005: 124) leaves himself far more space than is allowed by such 'tiny galleries in this dusty and earthly one', opting for a far slower academic form, more precisely for a book that constitutes a theoretical critique of sociology. While this appears to confirm his status of a philosopher, his methodological recommendations seem to be here in order to back up his claim 'I am, in the end, a naive realist, a positivist' (Latour, 2005: 156). Understanding this, however, does not make his position less contradictory.

These contradictions, in my opinion, finally get resolved when the notion of 'empirical' is further examined or, to be more precise, when the question what counts as an empirical work is honestly answered. It is quite obvious that in contemporary social sciences one would not think of Freud when empirical work is discussed, even though, in his *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud (2002: 265, emphasis in original) makes it explicitly clear that 'this work has been purposely kept on a popular level, and intends only to ease the necessary acceptance of *unconscious yet effective* mental processes by citing a number of examples, while avoiding all

theoretical assumptions about the nature of the unconscious mind'. So, what exactly is the problem with Freud's work? If there are plenty empirical examples and almost Socratic dialogues offered, is it then purely that it takes more time to read Freud's texts and that our projects then cannot be manageable? Hardly, as Freud's book is extremely approachable, 'kept on a popular level'. Even more so, when we return to the imperative of keeping the social flat, Freud (2002: 202, emphasis in original) seems a perfect match with his methodological recommendation 'the way to carrying out the famous injunction to *know thyself* is through studying our own apparently fortuitous actions and omissions'. Freud's book, in sociological terminology, consists of a set of case studies, dialogues and observations. He examines the surface, cracks, slips of the mind where the subject in psychoanalytic theory becomes visible for a brief moment. However, in the circle of social sciences all this does not qualify Freud as someone who is conducting empirical work. The situation is not much different with Foucault as he usually counts as a theorist of the French (or, in other words, impenetrable and obscure) circle but rarely, if ever and then only in relation to archives, as someone who is doing empirical research. Admittedly, considering Foucault's work, I cannot delineate the part where he is doing empirical analysis and where he is dealing with the history of ideas. Simply, I do not see Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism as less empirical than his analysis of prison; discourse is not a second-class reality and to claim otherwise would be to miss an important message not only of discourse analysis but also of a large part of poststructural, postcolonial and psychoanalytic theory (which, according to Lacan, is a theory of discourse). The history of ideas is a first-class empirical work. His analysis of madness, prison, carnivals, graveyards, brothels etc. is not an ethnographical research but is the history of idea, prison seen as an idea, not as a materialisation of an idea but as an idea *per se*, a discourse. My research is the (of course very humble, limited both spatially and temporally) history of idea, the history of neoliberal idea in Croatia which is, at the exact same time, an empirical inquiry. This history of idea extends to my fieldwork, drawing on Foucault's conception of the subject, created by taking various subjective positions, and examining the performativity of the neoliberal subject through the interviews with the participants. It is in this sense that I understand the microphysics of power, as well as a derived imperative of keeping the social flat, so my approach does not deny the empirical contributions of Foucault's work on neoliberalism. Quite on the contrary, my project follows Laclau's (1991)

advice, according to which 'the assumption that there is something such as a "theoretical framework" that one applies to some particular empirical material [...] is totally insufficient in a PhD thesis, which is only successful if it manages to overcome the relation of exteriority between "theoretical approach" and "case study"', always bearing in mind the positivist implications of such assumptions. On the other hand, many social scientists, including Latour, understand the notion of empirical work rather narrowly. In order for an insight to qualify for the status of empirical, a certain method must be employed, understood precisely, and erroneously as Laclau (1991) argues, as 'a spread of orderly procedures to be followed in carrying out any particular research [...] unified in an established and orderly system of procedures called 'methodology''. This can come in the form of survey, archive examination, interview, observation etc., while the label theoretical is reserved for the insights that do not rely on the method, for example those presented as the history of ideas. To be more precise, what is at stake is the positivist understanding of empirical and, in my research, I do not follow such an understanding. Accordingly, I do not think that my fieldwork contributions are any less or more empirical than the theoretical debates I engage with as both serve the final aim of my project, which is to understand how neoliberal discourse operates. These are at best, as Bhabha (2009) argues, different styles of writing, there is no profound epistemological difference. Thus, I am rather happy to move across disciplines, use any insight that might help me with understanding my point of interest, not limiting myself to only one discipline, for example sociology, as it is only a matter of time when will it become apparent that blindly following only one approach, as Latour (2005) argued while criticising the sociology of social, fails to deliver. It is only when *libido sciendi* is sublimated that a sufficient energy is released as the researcher is not anymore required to anxiously question whether the produced insights qualify as scientific or not and can now carefully shift towards a more interdisciplinary approach. Or, to radicalise Latour (2005: 76), maybe the division between the theory and empirical work is one of those 'divisions one should never try to bypass, to go beyond, to try to overcome dialectically. They should rather be ignored and left to their own devices, like a once formidable castle now in ruins'. Such move would not only be radical in a strictly scientific circle of social sciences. Let us also not forget that a part of humanities shares a similar understanding and that there nonetheless are notable exceptions in

social sciences. Even within approaches inclined to discourse analysis, it is indeed a rare occurrence to find an emphasis such as Laclau's (1991):

A thesis in discourse analysis does not proceed through the formulation of hypotheses that one tries to test with 'facts' (whatever that means), but through the reconstruction of discursive sequences governing the action of social actors, which are at the same level as the discursive sequences that constitute the theoretical framework [...] the distinction between the theoretical and the empirical collapses.

If this proposition were to be accepted along with its final consequences, Latour would be relieved of his worries that ANT will be misunderstood as one of many frameworks that get applied to literally everything. This is not a simple call for more theory, yet another attempt to impose theoretical framework on empirical research, with the final aim of disqualifying ANT on the basis of its applicability. Latour's (2005: 141) standard remark 'No wonder! It isn't applicable to anything' does not apply here as mere formulation of such critique appeals to the distinction between theoretical and empirical work, the division that I have tried to expose in its narrow, positivistic understanding of empirical. Finally, in regard to Latour's concern for the destiny of sociology, it paradoxically might then just be the case that going beyond sociology, with which Latour himself has begun, is exactly what is needed in order for the discipline to deliver. Alternatively, it risks increasing usage of the adjective 'sociological' as synonymous with truism, correct but trivial insight, the identification that is becoming almost hegemonic in contemporary critical theory.

Acknowledging this risk, however, might lead us to yet another issue. My aim here is not to establish a strict disciplinary division between sociology, on the one side, and contemporary critical theory, on the other. One can find truisms across disciplines. These are by no means limited to sociology and contemporary critical theory is not immune to producing correct but trivial insights. After all, where does contemporary critical theory start and sociology ends? Othering might help us to constitute an answer to this question but will hardly be beneficial for social theory in general. In any case, it will not contribute to my research interests. While this thesis is formally in sociology, the project is not overly concerned with the extent to which



it reflects general trends in this discipline nor is it anxious to express its proximity to some other academic disciplines. My aim here is to explore neoliberal performativity and, as it was argued before, insights from any discipline that could contribute to this effort are more than welcome in my thesis.

In chapters that follow, one will find insights based primarily on the reflections offered by the participants in Croatia. It is in this sense that these might be seen as empirical chapters. Following the reasoning introduced above, these chapters are not empirical in a sense of being relieved of or opposed to the theoretical insights proposed in this and previous chapters. Quite on the contrary, as was discussed earlier in this methodological outline, there is no significant epistemological difference between 'theoretical' and 'empirical' chapters in my project. These might best be understood as chapters that are characterised by a different style of writing, but written with the same aim, namely exploring performativity of the gendered subject in a neoliberal context.

### **4.3. Fieldwork**

My fieldwork was conducted from September 2016 to February 2017 in Croatia, more precisely in its capital Zagreb.<sup>9</sup> The research examined the urban area of Croatia and one of the most developed parts of the country. Zagreb is the biggest city in Croatia with the population of around 800 thousand, while the total population of Croatia is about 4.3 million. Zagreb has been identified as a focus of my research as it is the political and economic centre of Croatia, so recent trends, including neoliberalisation, should here be seen at its most advanced form. These trends, due to their transformative character, explicate the interconnection of the economy and politics, making the fragility of discourse visible. It is also a city where I have lived and, therefore, I am aware of the context that shapes the subjectification process in the society. The constitution of liberal capitalism, the negotiation process with the EU, the recent EU membership and disillusionment with its content, all represent the specificities of Croatian context in the postmodern era, reflecting on the way neoliberalism and gender are perceived. Above all, on-going neoliberalisation

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<sup>9</sup> Before starting my fieldwork, the Chair of the School Postgraduate Committee had approved my application for permission to undertake fieldwork and the School of Social Sciences' Ethics Panel had approved my Ethical Declaration form in line with the Graduate School's guidelines.

constantly introduces new narratives which structure subjectivity and situate the aforementioned provisory category 'women' in Croatian society.

#### **4.3.1. Sample**

During the five months of my fieldwork, I interviewed two groups of women in Croatia. Firstly, a group of women that are of high socio-economic status, such as managers in the private sector and secondly a group of women that are of low socio-economic status, such as textile workers or the unemployed. Keeping in mind that I am comparing the experiences of women in relation to their socio-economic status, my aim was to interview about fifteen women respectively. Finally, I conducted fifteen interviews with the women of higher socio-economic status and twelve interviews with the women of lower socio-economic status. Socio-economic status was used as an indicator of 'successfulness' within a system, in my case study neoliberalism. A status is obtained and perpetuated if a complementary role is played in an appropriate manner. The women of lower socio-economic status could be thought of as having performed neoliberal roles less 'successfully', while the women of higher socio-economic status could be thought to have 'effectively' managed these roles. Thus, socio-economic status is not understood only as an 'empirical data', and by no means as an indicator of moral value, but as a sign of structural position that a particular person occupies in a neoliberal system. This research adopts a discourse analytic approach, which is why the sample is not quantitatively more extensive. However, on the qualitative side, I strived towards making it as diversified as possible. This means that I identified possible participants in various fields of professional activity, such as women in the media, academia, industry etc. Considering the age of interviewees, the sample ranges from a graduate student in her early twenties to a retired woman in her late sixties, while the majority of participants were in their mid-forties. Women of higher socio-economic status were contacted through the professional associations, while the women of lower socio-economic status were reached through non-governmental organisations. In addition to this recruiting method, potential interviewees were contacted directly.

#### **4.3.2. The structure of interviews**

The interviews explored three main topics, namely how the participants perceived feminism, their experiences of stress and fear, and their understanding of

the emphasised importance of activity. Insights gathered through the semi-structured interviews are dependent on the questions used in order to structure the discussion with the participants. Bearing this in mind, the interview questions were open-ended to allow for a conversation on the subject matters the participants come across in their everyday lives, while I was making our conversation more structured by directing the interview on the issues important for my research.

The interviews were structured somewhat differently considering the socio-economic status of the participants. The women of higher socio-economic status were asked to talk about their path to professional achievement, while the discussion with the participants of lower socio-economic status was more focused on the way they perceive their position in society. While doing so, it was not assumed that they find their position in the society as something with which they are necessarily dissatisfied. However, if they emphasised that they are experiencing certain difficulties, such as financial hardship, the interview would focus on the techniques they employed to overcome the current problems they faced. The reason behind 'modifying' the interview questions in this way was, first, to ease and open the conversation with the participants. Second, I was interested to see whether the participants of higher socio-economic status, following Bauman (2005), could be understood as 'individuals *de facto*', choosing what they desire because they have the token for doing so; money. It could be argued that choices made in the climate set by the neoliberal government brought them success and, accordingly, that they would then be more likely to conceptualise such a framework as their freedom, making the opposition of the individual and the state a false issue. On the other hand, women of lower socio-economic status have not 'succeeded' in the market game, as entrepreneurs, and their voices are rarely present in the public sphere. Poverty may be the point when women see that the current economic system is not suitable for them because choices that they can make within this platform cannot provide what they see as a satisfying life. It could then be argued that they have become reduced to being 'individuals *de jure*' (Bauman, 2005), having the freedom to choose what they do not want. In this context, the aim of my interviews was to explore whether the participants of lower socio-economic status perceive themselves as 'individuals *de jure*' or is self-entrepreneurship nonetheless something that they, like the women of higher socio-economic status, see as a virtue.

Apart from the aforementioned 'modification' of the interview design, the participants' understanding of the emphasised importance of activity was explored in more detail with the women who had a direct experience of working as a part of active labour market policies. In such cases, additional questions were added to the interview and these participants were asked to reflect on the meaning of activity in the context of these particular measures, share their (dis)satisfaction with these measures and so on. However, the women who had no direct experience of working as a part of active labour market policies were still asked to reflect on the importance of activity in some other context relevant for their everyday life. In accordance with the semi-structured design of my interviews, if they were to show a strong interest in discussing the issue of activity, the conversation would focus on their understanding of activity more extensively.

The individual questions in my interviews, for example those establishing the view of participants on the importance of autonomy and individualism or their understanding of the emphasised importance of activity, were followed by a question on the importance of gender or, in other words, being a woman in relation to a particular issue. In the end of the interview, the questions explicitly focused on the participants' view on feminism, relating to a previous part of the interview which, even though it often mentioned gender, was not explicitly concerned with the notion of feminism. Particularly, I was interested in discovering the role of gender in their identification and to explore do they think of gender as a common denominator that acts as the basis for the collective action or reject feminism as another form of collectivism that restricts their freedom and ability to make autonomous choices (Chen, 2013; Scharff, 2011). While doing so, it was my goal to examine their existing perception of feminism. The opinions and experiences of participants have guided my analysis.

Regarding the terminology that was used during the interview, keeping in mind that the participants most probably would not use terms such as 'neoliberalism', but simply refer to neoliberalism as the current economic system, particular care was taken not to impose the terminology derived from my theoretical framework during our conversation. Thus, I adopted DeVault's (1999) advice on 'strategic imprecision', refraining myself from framing the experiences of women in categories that I have already internalised and feel comfortable using. In other words, it was not my aim to

label and simplify their experiences in order to fit my theoretical framework, but to modify my theoretical position by reflecting on their experiences.

#### **4.3.3. Analysis**

In this research, the interviews are seen 'as a medium through which to express a variety of lived experiences and imagined futures' (Smith and Staples, 2015: 2). What results from these 'conversations with a purpose' (Burgess in Mason, 2002: 62) are reflections on lived experiences but also a range of desires and expectations of the time yet to come. Thus, while conducting interviews, I encountered various autobiographical insights which provided me with a better understanding of the way identities are formed in neoliberal discourse. At the same time, however, my analysis takes care to 'sidestep the tendency of some proponents of psychosocial research to tell us what the text really means because the researcher knows something beyond what the reader can see on the page or because the researcher "feels" something about it' (Parker, 2010: 157). In accordance, while conducting the interviews, this research was not looking for the essence of identity behind a narrative as 'the relationship between identity and autobiography is not that autobiography (the telling of a life) reflects a pre-given identity: rather, identities are produced through the autobiographical work in which all of us engage every day' (Lawler, 2014: 2). Thus, the aim of my analysis is not to determine who the participants 'really' are or who the neoliberal subject 'really' is. As I have already argued, my research conceptualises *all* the people living in neoliberal societies as neoliberal subjects, thereby precluding such denunciatory ambitions. The aim of my analysis is to explore how the participants in my research experience neoliberal discourse and see what the role of gender in this discourse is, thereby providing some insights into *our* neoliberal subjectivity.

In order to do so, my analysis uses the insights provided in the interview accounts as a basis for the following three chapters of my thesis. These chapters focus on the participants' perception of feminism, their experiences of stress and fear, and their understanding of the neoliberal imperative of activity. All three of these topics present important points in neoliberal discourse and illuminate the process of neoliberal performativity. Furthermore, such selection of research topics allows my analysis to move beyond focusing merely on the classed identity of participants. This, in turn, fosters the recognition of common points shared across the

socio-economic groups in my research. The analysis offered in each chapter starts with identifying a particular discourse of interest in neoliberal context, for example the discourse of neoliberal activity, and proceeds with tracing it across the socio-economic status of participants. In more sociological terminology, what is at stake is a thematic cross-case analysis. In this way, the analysis identifies certain discursive patterns that cut through the socio-economic status of participants, making the traits of neoliberal governmentality more obvious. At the same time, the research recognises and explores various differences in the experiences of participants both across the socio-economic groups and within a particular socio-economic group, bearing in mind that neoliberal norms are not accommodated in the same manner throughout society.

Finally, it is important to highlight that the interviews were fully transcribed and the transcriptions saved in a secure, encrypted computer and anonymised. The interviews were partially translated, focusing on the parts of transcriptions that are more relevant for my project, while confidentiality has been maintained by the removal of identifiers and the use of identity numbers or pseudonyms, breaking the link between the interview accounts and the participants.

## **5. PERCEIVING FEMINISM**

The following presents the first chapter of my thesis based on the interviews with the women in Croatia and it explores ways in which the participants perceive feminism in a neoliberal context. While reflecting on feminism, the participants explain their opinions on a subject closely related to their understanding of gender, which allows us to explore the relation of gender and neoliberal performativity. This chapter engages in discourse analysis of opinions on feminism that can be identified in the accounts of participants. The chapter firstly explores positive opinions on feminism, where the participants not only nominally accept but actively support feminism. While Croatian society is characterised by a large number of non-governmental organisations that foster such opinions, in accordance with governmentality perspective, it is argued that the positive valuations of feminism rely on a wider consciousness on gendered issues in Croatia. Following the analysis of these opinions, the chapter examines claims, articulated by some participants, according to which feminism has its clear limits in our biology. Such claims, put forward both by the women of lower and higher socio-economic status, are not seen as a manifestation of regressive, pre-modern thinking hostile to a more progressive discourse. On the contrary, these opinions are situated in a framework of liberal epistemology that legitimises biology as a limit of feminism. By doing so, the research grasps what is new, what is contemporary or, more precisely, what is neoliberal in such a position. The chapter then focuses on negative opinions on feminism. These opinions, contrary to the positive ones, were largely put forward by the participants of higher socio-economic status. It is argued that the participants in this group reject feminism in order to maintain the appearance of self-mastery characteristic for neoliberal discourse. They see feminism as a social movement that implies a collective dimension and, for this reason, runs contrary to their emphasis on individualism and mastery. However, the participants in this group are quite supportive of gender equality and, in this respect, the discourse of mastery and demands for gender equality do not seem to be mutually exclusive. Finally, the chapter is dedicated to what might be considered as a more unclear, grey area, the one that presents a rich but often overlooked field of opinions and is situated somewhere in-between positive and negative take on neoliberalism. Within such discursive space, this chapter identifies and explains what seems to be a predominant position on feminism among the participants in my project, namely nominally

affirming feminism but, at the same time, finding something inadequate, unsettling in feminism.

### **5.1. Positive opinions on feminism**

Positive opinions on feminism, while not prevailing among the participants, can be found in some accounts, usually provided by the women of lower socio-economic status. Here is an example of a positive opinion on feminism, put forward by Tihea, a participant of lower socio-economic status:

Well my opinion on feminism is an absolutely positive opinion. I think that absolutely feminism, as some sort of a stream or how should I call it, is an absolutely needed consciousness on the position of woman, the rights of woman...absolutely the position of women and the rights of women, especially when we witness that it is talked in public that, for equal work, women and men are not paid equally.

This account, which outlines 'an absolutely positive opinion' on feminism, is not followed by a note that feminism should be limited or that there are some types of feminism that are perceived by the participant as less appealing and so on. What we have here is a straightforward support of feminism as 'an absolutely needed consciousness on the position of woman'. Lidija, a younger participant, argues in a similar manner:

Me: What do you think about feminism?

Lidija: All the best.

Me: Yes?

Lidija: Yes.

Me: Would you identify yourself as a feminist?



Lidija: Yes. Well, I mean, you know, that we should all identify ourselves as feminists.

Me: What do you think about it in Croatia?

Lidija: I don't know. I think that, above all, feminism in Croatia, in a broader sense, is maybe completely misunderstood in its problematics...that it is belittled and that it is played on this, as they constantly call it on the Internet, a sort of westernised version of white women's feminism with its petty problems. In that respect it is belittled and I think that is completely wrong, of course.

Lidija thinks 'all the best' about feminism and even considers that 'we should all identify ourselves as feminists'. There is nothing causing unease here, she openly accepts and advocates feminism. Apart from providing a positive valuation of feminism, Lidija also uses terminology characteristic for gender studies, including a reference on disqualifying feminism in Croatia as a form of 'westernised version of white women's feminism'. She obviously has certain knowledge of feminism. Lidija has a master's degree but nonetheless her education was not in humanities or social sciences. Nor does she have a more formal education in the field of gender studies. Her opinion, albeit not being produced by a particular institution, constitutes a counter-discourse to the one that belittles demands for gender equality in Croatia as 'a sort of westernised version of white women's feminism with its petty problems'. This reminds us that discourse is more than merely a manifestation of institutional influence and such counter-position could best be understood, drawing on Tihea's account, as a part of a wider 'consciousness on the position of woman'. Such, critical discourse is not on the other side of what is known as a public discourse on feminism. Insights put forward as a part of general development of feminism worldwide are not limited merely to activist or academic groups. Rather, they circulate and form, in addition to other discourses on feminism, a public discourse in Croatia.

Jasna, a participant of lower socio-economic status, also offers an opinion that reflects familiarity with certain popular (mis)conceptions of feminism:

Most honestly, a lot of times I have repeated that I hate Clara Zetkin and what, for God's sake, has forced her on the streets to fight for her rights? That is the sentence that I repeat when, after working for eight hours, I take my child to free time activities and come back home, and then there is a dinner and also something to do for a union [...] I'm a feminist and my three and a half daughters, I say three and a half as the youngest one is eleven but she is also a feminist, not in a way that feminists are presented, long moustache and hairy legs, but in a sense of message for human rights, for workers' rights, for the equality of women but also of everyone else.

For Jasna, then, feminism is a fight for 'the equality of women but also of everyone else'. She understands feminism not as a part of a broader struggle but as a broader struggle itself. It is 'an absolutely needed consciousness on the position of woman', to use Tihea's formulation, that Jasna has passed on even to her youngest daughter and is what she now proudly emphasises. What is also interesting is that, before sharing her opinion on feminism, she mentioned Clara Zetkin as a figure who inspires her human rights activism. Clara Zetkin was a Marxist feminist mostly known as an early advocate of women's rights. While she was a rather prominent figure at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, one can hardly find a reference on Zetkin in contemporary political theory. How come it is then that Zetkin comes across Jasna's mind when she feels overwhelmed by her daily life? While a personal interest of participants should not be overlooked and it definitely partly explains their positive opinions on feminism, it is relatively hard to believe that Jasna, who spends a good part of her day working on a lower ranked position in industry, would spontaneously develop an interest in the work of Clara Zetkin. Later on in the interview, however, Jasna mentions that she sympathises and participates in the work of various non-governmental organisations, emphasising a rather productive activist scene in Croatia. By taking the work of these organisations into account, we could provide a better explanation than the one that would treat a strong interest in feminist theory exclusively as a matter of personal curiosity. At this point it would be hard to proceed without making a digression in order to briefly introduce some of the broader social context in which the participants are asked to share their

opinions on feminism. As this context contains an important factor that influences these opinions and situates the empty category 'feminism' in Croatian society, it would be a serious omission to take a shortcut here and simply continue with my analysis.

Croatia has a very active civil society with a very large number of non-governmental organisations. To provide just a few examples, indeed a very small fraction, of those more prominent organisations that operate in the capital of Croatia, Zagreb: Centre for Women's Studies, Center for Peace Studies, Human Rights House Zagreb, Women's Room, B.a.B.e. - Be active, Be emancipated, Multimedia Institute, Organization for Workers' Initiative and Democratization etc. Often these non-profit organisations cooperate with various unions and here I will mention just a few unions that also have women's section: Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia Women's Section, Tourism and Services Trade Union of Croatia Women's Section, Railway Worker's Trade Union of Croatia Women's Section etc.

These organisations are often a matter of dispute in Croatia. On the one side there are individuals who occupy key positions in these organisations and a majority of the participants in their programmes, workshops etc. Within this group it is argued that these organisations are mistreated by the state as they are underfunded and often not taken seriously. The point is made that this is not the standard of the EU and that, if Croatia wants to meet the EU standards, they should be funded more generously. Such a perspective is often adopted by the people who would identify themselves as Leftists or close to Left-wing politics. On the opposed side, it is argued that these organisations are using large amounts of money from the public budget for the purposes of individuals who are involved in organising what are in their opinion irrelevant and expensive activities. The point that is often made here is that those EU members, where such organisations are generously funded, simply do not exist or, if they do exist, there is no reason for Croatia to follow their example. This perspective, that gains increasing significance also due to the state of economy in Croatia, has become, at least the way I see it, prevalent. People are concerned with the level of funding these organisations receive from the public budget. These people emphasise that the public budget consists of the money that is deducted from their salaries, while no one bothers to ask whether they would like to support these non-governmental organisations or not. Some doubts are also expressed as to whether they are actually non-profit as some of these organisations do charge for attending

their programmes and, while heavily relying on active labour market policies, also employ young people. This argumentation is occasionally co-opted by right or even radical right wing supporters as it enables them to, while apparently basing their arguments on a reasonable need for saving public money, work towards achieving more radical conservative aims.

What sort of discourse do these organisations produce, what kind of values do they promote? Oversimplifying while making such a general point, it could be said that these organisations primarily support the first and the second wave of feminism but, as a rule, distinguish themselves from the third wave of feminism. The main reason for this seems to be primarily that the first and the second wave of feminism are, within these organisations, usually perceived as serious and dedicated political approaches on which a practical feminist struggle might as well be based, while the third wave of feminism is largely considered to be a vague orientation that, if it deserves to be called the wave of feminism at all, is primarily focused on the impossibility of thinking and saying anything, a general fragmentation of reasoning and philosophical terminology that obscures what is really at stake (for such reasoning, see also Fraser, 2013; Hartsock, 2004; Hennessy, 2000). What is really at stake for these organisations is a gendered class struggle. Such orientation could be summarised by the title of a speech by Clara Zetkin (1896) *Only in Conjunction With the Proletarian Woman Will Socialism Be Victorious*. The perspective of these organisations, and especially the understanding of poststructuralism as a general demise of any constructive efforts, finds its place in contemporary theory quite easily (Fraser, 2013; Hartsock, 2004; Hennessy, 2000). In addition, such emphasis on the first and the second wave of feminism, provides a support to the claim made by Fraser (2013), namely that the second wave of feminism is not simply a matter of past, merely the type of feminism that had been predominant before the third wave of feminism has taken over, but is, on the contrary, a relevant and contemporary feminist discourse.

When one is briefly introduced to the context in which the participants provide their opinions on feminism, it is no longer as surprising that Clara Zetkin, with writings such as *The Struggle Against New Imperialistic Wars* (1922), *Hail to the Third Socialist International!* (1919), *The Workers' International Festival* (1899) and so on, appears in the account of the participant quoted above. These organisations, through various programmes or workshops, introduce the people, who

have an interest in feminism or similar topics, to selected approaches in feminist theory, thus putting forward a particular perspective on feminism. What is sometimes achieved by these organisations is that the women who join their programmes or workshops are introduced to a certain terminology that helps them to explain to themselves what are they experiencing. By attending these events, the participants meet other individuals who might have a similar position in society and, through conversations, they sometimes realise that there is a certain number of people who share similar or even same problems. Tihea, a participant of lower socio-economic status, shared such experience:

Yes, absolutely, that [joining union activities] has helped me, it has helped me in particular. In fact, I have always had that somewhere in myself, in some sort of drawer placed aside, and when I had taken the way of union, considering that I had such energy, such will, such passion to join, to change, I was fortunately recognised in my union and I was included in two women's union schools that dealt also with feminism. There was a bit on feminism and this is where I have completely found myself, that was to me sort of 'aha Tihea that's it!' That's it, you are going in that direction.

Reading Tihea's account, it could be argued that these organisations fulfil the role of the Left, as understood by Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 158), because they 'constitute new forms of radical subjectivity on the basis of discursively constructing as an external imposition - and therefore as forms of oppression - relations of subordination which until that moment had not been questioned'. Women's union schools have indeed enacted Tihea to question her position in society and provided her with theoretical approaches that she can now use to interpret her own experiences in a different way, to put herself in a perspective. This, however, often takes a step further and ends up in discursively constructing an external imposition or, in other words, in creating the Enemy. This fits in well with activism promoted by these organisations as it relies on a clear picture in which there is a political frontier separating the oppressed, on the one side, and the Enemy, on the other. It goes without saying that the leadership of these non-governmental organisations

usually perceives themselves as being a part of the oppressed and resolutely deny that they have been flirting with the Enemy, namely neoliberal capitalism.

However, these organisations are usually not as sharply separated from neoliberal patterns of functioning. Jasna, herself a participant of women's union schools, reflected critically on the way unions operate, saying:

There is maybe a critique for unions as unions stick to their centres and don't collaborate together, which I think is absolutely unacceptable. There is the example of Germany, where, when pre-school teachers organised demonstrations...or they were maybe teachers, I can't remember now...however, then, I don't know - I'm now improvising - electric power industry, transport joined. And, until realistic demands of those teachers, pre-school teachers were fulfilled, there was no electricity, transport stopped. [...] That for me is workers' consciousness, and not that I'm a member of this party or that party and now I won't go with you as you are not a member of that party. There is this even in my union, such claims, as it is important for us to attract as many members as possible.

From her perspective, which is really the one of a critical insider, we get a glimpse on how unions function internally. The fact that some unions themselves operate as neoliberal subjects fits in well with those approaches in governmentality studies that are focused on more macro neoliberal agents. For example, governmentality studies of international relations conceptualise states as self-governing actors related by competition (Haahr and Walters, 2005; Larner and Walters, 2004). Such approaches are based on Foucault's (1982: 791) understanding that 'the fundamental point of anchorage of the relationships, even if they are embodied and crystallized in an institution, is to be found outside the institution'. The union, accordingly, is not the ultimate source of power, rather it is only one of many mediums of power, along with the government, neoliberal subjects, the state and so on. The anchoring point of power relations is not in organisations but in a nexus between particular ideas and the related modes of governing or, in more precise terms, in certain governmentality (Foucault, 1982). Bearing this in mind, it should not surprise us that some unions calculate and act in ways that increase their capacity for competition, 'stick to their

centres', try to recruit more members than the next union, isolate those members that could damage their established connections with political parties or, in short, 'don't collaborate together'. Jasna is annoyed by such logic of functioning, which is adopted also by the union she has joined, so it is not the case that she blindly follows the rules put forward by her union. Rather, she critically reflects and makes it clear that feminism, which she situates in a broader framework of fighting for workers' consciousness, should not go hand in hand with calculative reasoning.

In this context, it might as well be worth to return to the example of organisation that further illustrates the relation of neoliberalism and feminism. In the previous chapter, I had mentioned Centre for Women's Studies (2016), 'the first non-institutional educational centre in Croatia. It was founded by a group of feminists, theorists and scholars, peace activists and artists in 1995. The Centre provides an interdisciplinary program and expert knowledge on women's issues and is a meeting point for academic discourse, artistic practice, activist engagement'. On its website (Centre for Women's Studies, 2016), the organisation highlights that 'a programme of providing expert knowledges or expertise is an identity place of the Centre' and offers 'various expert knowledges (packets of educational services intended for women's organisations, bodies for implementing equality, parties)'. Could one ask for a more concise example of contradiction than the formulation the Centre provides itself, namely expert knowledges? This apparent contradiction, which is really the one between feminism and neoliberalism, is resolved once it is recognised that neoliberalism does not operate through restrictions, which characterised socialist approach to feminism, but by permissions and resignifications. Merely a vague echo is left of Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) emphasis that there is no place for politics when expertise is available, no need for politics when experts have the solutions. In a rather similar fashion, the Department of Gender Studies at the London School of Economics and Political Sciences (2018), promises their prospective students that they 'will benefit from guest practitioner seminars, workshops and classes led by experts in the field – Visiting Fellows and Professors, Activists in Residence and other members of the Centre, as well as by faculty from other departments at LSE'. Thus, in addition to academic staff, activists have also become an asset in attracting prospective students. Even more so, activists have been provided with a Residence and their respective field of expertise; they have become expertly active in the field of gender studies. Neoliberalism, as we can see, can also come with an appealing,

academic and activist look. You can now be subversive but, at the same time, rest assure that this is all contributing to your neoliberal portfolio. Furthermore, you can now engage in politics as it no longer implies a boring battlefield of ideologies but the competition of experts who all know what should be done. By becoming an expert you become a politician as well...the sky is the limit of neoliberal resignifications.

This, however, is not to say that these organisations are hypocritical as they are producing neoliberals while presenting themselves as subversive. It is to acknowledge the capacity of neoliberalism to resignify feminism and, what is even more important for this project, to make it clear that neoliberal discourse is productive, that it creates a particular form of subjectivity. True, some women do attend the activities of organisations that might be both feminist and neoliberal but, in turn, they might identify forms of oppression, relations of subordination which until joining a certain activity they had not questioned. If the Enemy does not exist in neoliberal society, various forms of oppression nonetheless do exist and maybe this can help the attendees to recognise these and act upon their recognition by resisting an instance of power, for example reporting an abusive husband etc.

Let us even assume that, in the case of the participant who told us about her experience with the women's union schools, no Enemy or enemy was recognised. Moreover, let us also assume, for which we in fact have some indications, that the union she has joined acts in a neoliberal manner. Even if both of these assumptions were true, it can hardly be denied that Tihea had left these union schools feeling encouraged and fulfilled, that her words do reflect certain excitement. We should return to her exact words:

I have always had that somewhere in myself, in some sort of drawer placed aside, and when I had taken the way of union, considering that I had such energy, such will, such passion to join, to change, I was fortunately recognised in my union and I was included in two women's union schools that dealt also with feminism. There was a bit on feminism and this is where I have completely found myself, that was to me sort of 'aha Tihea that's it!' That's it, you are going in that direction.



By joining activities of this organisation, she finally recognised what she has always been about, she has found her essence. These activities convinced her that her interest is the manifestation of an activist essence that had always been hidden somewhere in herself, 'in some sort of drawer placed aside', but was suppressed by the demands of her, fairly stressful, everyday life. She was, as she said, 'fortunately recognised'. The union had provided her with the conditions in which her essence could finally come through and, as a consequence, she exclaimed 'aha Tihea that's it!' She has 'completely found' herself, thereby performatively constituting her essence. This testifies to the productivity of discourse, where productivity is not understood in an ethical, progressive meaning but rather in a sense of creating certain subjectivity. The issue that feminism might as well be co-opted by neoliberalism does not change the productive character of neoliberal feminist discourse. Rather than making a judgment whether a particular organisation is true to its appearance, it is the productivity of discourse that presents the focus of my analysis. We should be consistent here and make it clear that neoliberal feminism is also a type of feminism and not, as Fraser (2013) argues, merely its sinister double or, in more precise terminology, non-feminism. It is one thing to be focused on the way feminism can be used as 'a key ingredient of the new spirit of neoliberalism' (Fraser, 2013: 220) or, in other words, resignified to serve neoliberal ends. However, it is quite a different thing to portray a picture in which 'we for whom feminism is above all a movement for gender justice need to become more historically self-aware as we operate on a terrain that is also populated by our uncanny double' (Fraser, 2013: 224). The terrain, as a consequence of neoliberal resignification, is not exhausted simply by feminism proper, on the one side, and its uncanny double, on the other side. Once the neoliberal resignification of feminism has been recognised, it is no longer meaningful to maintain a binary difference between 'we for whom feminism is above all a movement for gender justice' and 'a general discursive construct that feminists in the first sense no longer own and do not control [...] which can and will be invoked to legitimate a variety of different scenarios, not all of which promote gender justice' (Fraser, 2013: 224). The capacity of neoliberalism to resignify feminism introduces complexity into our positions, thus shattering the boundaries of 'pure' positions. In this sense, it should be recognised that being a feminist nowadays does not exclude abiding by certain neoliberal imperatives. Taking this into consideration, in the context of my research, we can say that some positive opinions

on feminism are particularly influenced by an active character of feminist scene in Croatia which, however, is not simply on the other side of neoliberalism. It would be an analytic omission to attribute positive valuations of feminism merely to an institutional framework that constitutes a feminist scene in Croatia. As Foucault (1982: 791) noticed, 'in analyzing power relations from the standpoint of institutions, one lays oneself open to seeking the explanation and the origin of the former in the latter, that is to say, finally, to explain power to power'. These organisations, then, rely on and utilise a wider 'consciousness on the position of woman', they are formed on top of existing power relations which they also modify. The interplay of institutional and non-institutional factors constitutes (feminist) discourses that circulate in society.

## **5.2. Biology as a limit of feminism**

Considerably different than being supportive of feminism, some participants argued that feminism has its clear limits. While analysing their accounts, it is essential to acknowledge that, when they state that there are limits to feminism, this often exceeds purely factual level and gains a certain normative value. More clearly, it is not that the participants merely argue that there are limits to feminism and perceive this as something undesirable. Conversely, these limits are frequently preferred by the women themselves, so these, apparently factual, limits are often accompanied by a fairly positive valuation. In the following example, provided by Martina, a participant of lower socio-economic status, we can clearly see the nexus between the 'factual' and normative level:

Well, what I personally like is that a father has his role of a guardian, a child looks at his father as a guardian, so that a woman, a mother can feel safe next to him, next to her men, as he is also like that, he is also built in that way, he also has muscles and a rougher voice, he is always the one with that stick and goes hunting, right? Now I exaggerate. I don't know are you married, do you have children or not, but you will see through your experience, a father will always be the first one who will say to a child 'no, no, we can't do this, end of story' and a woman slowly approaches the issue, so in this way, so in that way, then from one angle, then from

the other. And a woman gives what is necessary to a child and what is necessary to a husband as even this man, who is all sort of masculine, who is full of those male hormones, who is the warrior, he also needs that tenderness that a woman can provide. And a woman, on the other hand, gets that protection and that strength, firmness, when he says 'it is like this'. But then again he must have wisdom in himself, so that he can say 'it is like this' and that everyone would obey this then. It is complicated, but if you understand why has something been created, then it is easier to live with that. There is law, but there is also the spirit of the law, why has a certain law been introduced.

How should we understand this? What is 'the law' here, on the one hand, and 'the spirit of the law', on the other? Let us also not forget that Martina makes a remark 'now I exaggerate', reminding us that it is not really like this in contemporary society but that she is putting the relation between a man and a woman in a perspective. Or, more precisely, that it is not like this anymore but that a long time ago it was like this. Following her view, it could be imagined that before the social contract a man was there to hunt and a woman was there to take care, while a child was there to be taken care of by a mother and protected, along with a mother, by a father. There were no social prohibitions as society was not consolidated, so these roles were then not social but rather natural, mere continuations of natural impulses or instincts. In Martina's account, a husband is constituted on top of a figure which had preceded a husband as a cultural role, a figure 'who is all sort of masculine, who is full of those male hormones, who is the warrior'. It could also be said that in such state there were only natural occurrences which were later on, when the law has been made, respected and elevated to the spirit of the law. Thus, the spirit of the law appears in a consolidated form only after law has already been put in place or, in other words, it is created retroactively and in contrast to social regulations.

Rather than questioning the foundations of her perspective, I think that we should focus on the discourse of limits to feminism itself. Instead of looking behind the discourse, as if such structural place exists, I am interested in ways this particular discourse is produced and, not any less relevant, ways it performatively produces limits to feminism. What is important to note here is that the participants, rather than

simply identifying and then saying by what feminism is limited, are performatively establishing the limit of feminism in biology by making a claim that feminism is limited by biology. Bearing this in mind, instead of questioning whether this discourse is true, we should ask is this discourse even relevant in contemporary society? Is it produced by the participants? If it is, how do the women produce it? In the following account of Lucija, a participant of high socio-economic status, we get some further insight into this matter:

I'm not against it [feminism] but it should not be damaging for a woman and women's health as a woman must not...I don't think that a feminist should end up as a woman who is ill and who, I don't know, has a totally ruined hormonal system and a surgically treated thyroid. Then that is also not a healthy feminism. That is not what we wanted, right? We wanted to be respected, our voice to be heard, that, in a family, a man participates equally in house chores, same as a woman in the upbringing of a child...that is what we wanted, we wanted equality. But, you know, we don't need to go to extremes now.

Considering that Lucija argues that feminism has made certain contributions in the realm of gender equality, it cannot be said that she completely dismisses feminism. Her point is simply that feminism is limited by a hormonal system, thyroid or, in other words, by the anatomy of women. What goes against this anatomy she considers to be rather extreme as it is detrimental for the health of a woman; it exceeds bodily limitations of a woman and leads to an imbalance. What Lucija sees as 'a healthy feminism', where 'healthy' should be understood literally, is supporting gender equality. She makes this clear, saying 'that is what we wanted, we wanted equality'. Feminism, in her perspective, is something more than asking for gender equality, something that goes beyond a different but equal biological constitution of woman and man. Such, excessive character of feminism makes her say 'we don't need to go to extremes now'. Tanja, another participant of high socio-economic status, argues in a similar way, exemplifying her point:

I don't think that men and women are the same, nonetheless I think that feminism made something good and that is, therefore, it has emphasised the importance of a woman in society and her equality with men. However, it has also brought a lot more negative connotations [...] in the sense that we are now expected to deliver the same as men, and we are not able to do this. Thus, I will put forward a pretty simple comparison: I run and I will never be able to run as good as my male colleagues as I simply don't have the same constitution of muscles to run equally as good.

The problem that Tanja has with feminism is indeed very close to the one that Lucija has outlined. As it has proclaimed that biological constitution of women and men are the same, feminism 'has also brought a lot more negative connotations'. However, 'feminism made something good [...] it has emphasised the importance of a woman in society and her equality with men'. We can see that feminism, according to Tanja, was not always so radical, and it is not quite clear whether she understands such development as inherent to feminism, but the trouble she has with it starts precisely at the point when feminism asks for something more, when it goes beyond a different but equal biological constitution of woman and man. It is in this context that Tanja feels compelled to point out 'I simply don't have the same constitution of muscles'. Bearing all of this in mind, it could be said that she recognises some minimal feminist contributions, restricted to the field of gender equality, but makes it apparent that feminism, in its contemporary form, 'has also brought a lot more negative connotations' or, to be more precise, brought negative connotations *on itself* as a consequence of its radicalism.

It could be said that such perception of feminism is based on a misunderstanding of poststructural feminism (Butler, 2011, 2004, 1999; Mouffe, 1993; Weedon, 1987). Feminist authors inclined to poststructural theory are not proclaiming that woman and man are biologically all the same. What is questioned within such tradition is how biological are really biological differences or, more precisely, how should we understand the categories of 'man' and 'woman' if there is no biological essence that could serve as an anchoring point of identity. This is one way of explaining these accounts. Alternatively, the emphasis on biology as a limit of feminism could be explained by shying away from collective modes of

expression, such as feminism, and favouring individual empowerment. However, neither of these explanations tell us, first, why biology is used as a basis of the argument that feminism is limited and, second, on which theoretical tradition does this argument rely. It might be argued that we are, after all, dealing with a well-known and firmly rooted traditional discourse. Following such a perspective, there is nothing new here as we are simply once again faced with the arguments based on a true nature of man and woman, on certain natural essences that manifest in social interactions. These, of course essentialist, arguments could then be exposed as faulty and labelled as products of inadequate education, sexism or simply illiberal, pre-modern reasoning (Adamović *et al.*, 2014; Corrin, 1998; Einhorn, 1993; Watson, 1993; Wolchik, 1991). Accordingly, Martina's historical introduction quoted at the beginning of this chapter might be understood as a part of regression to pre-modern values, the beginning of which was allegedly marked by the transition from socialism, as a modernist discourse, to capitalism in Croatia. Situated in a more global context, this would then nicely fit in with a general increase of right-wing reasoning throughout the West. What would be left for the researcher to do, when he or she has come to such understanding, is to emphasise an increased need for a more progressive consciousness worldwide.

That, however, would be misleading. In my opinion, the discourse which portrays biology as a limit of feminism is not regressive but progressive, in the sense that we are not dealing with pre-modern but modern reasoning. So, what exactly exceeds traditional reasoning here? Engaging with psychoanalysis provides a more contemporary understanding of biology as a limit of feminism. While introducing psychoanalysis, Freud (2007) was focused on understanding the meaning of sexuality. However uncomfortable it might have been to explore sexuality well before the era of queer studies, Freud nonetheless published and gave talks that were preoccupied with apparently bizarre but in fact quite widespread sexual 'aberrations' and, even more blasphemously, he had put forward an understanding according to which a child has a fairly developed sexual life. In addition, Freud was nowhere near to being the prototype of a subversive queer academic as he engaged with all of these issues while taking a certain pride in being a proper academic bourgeois, presenting his psychoanalytic approach as scientific and rather serious. As Sloterdijk (2001: 294) nicely puts it, 'in immaculate prose and dressed in the best English tweed, the Old Master of analysis managed, while maintaining the highest respect, to talk about

almost everything that one does not talk about'. However, as Zupančič (2008: 19) argues:

What was, and still is, disturbing about the Freudian discovery is not simply the emphasis on sexuality - this kind of resistance, indignant at psychoanalytical 'obsession with dirty matters', was never the strongest one and was soon marginalized by the progressive liberalism of morals. Much more disturbing was the thesis concerning the always problematic and uncertain character of sexuality itself. Thus, even more powerful resistance (and the more dangerous form of revisionism) came from liberalism itself, promoting sexuality as a 'natural activity', as something balanced, harmonic in itself, but thrown out of balance by an act of 'necessary' or 'unnecessary' repression (depending on how liberal one pretends to be). If anything, this image of sexuality as something obvious and non-problematic in itself is directly opposed to the Freudian fundamental lesson which, put in Lacanian terms, could be formulated as follows: the Sexual does not exist.

Thus, contrary to what might be expected, the open-mindedness with which the progressive liberalism of morals is usually associated has not spontaneously resulted in 'opening' the issue of sexuality. Liberalism has framed sexuality as a perfectly natural, harmonious activity and this has, paradoxically, limited further problematisation of sexuality. Simply, if sexuality is considered to be non-problematic as it is only natural, what is there left to question? At this point we finally approach a more contemporary understanding of biology as a limit of feminism. Is not a liberal understanding of sexuality as a natural activity basically the same as the idea of biology as a limit of feminism? The argument, according to which biology is a natural limit of feminism, has its anchoring point in liberal reasoning. We should also bear in mind that Freud was surrounded by the puritanism of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and of Victorian England, where a liberal, permissive morality was not nearly as widespread as nowadays. Accordingly, we are not facing a regression to pre-modern values but, quite on the contrary, an essentially modern epistemology that legitimises biology as a limit of feminism. What the

participants seem to find concerning regarding feminism is that a part of feminist theory questions liberal conception of sexuality as a natural activity and claims that the Sexual does not exist or, if you want, that the Nature does not exist (Butler, 2011, 2004, 1999; Mouffe, 1993; Weedon, 1987). Some participants might find this quite worrying as such reasoning takes away a solid basis that legitimises one's way of life, it takes away the feeling that, after all, we are grounded by a natural purpose of our existence. If the body is relieved of its ontological primacy by arguing that the body is discursively constituted, the spirit of the law is exposed in its dubious character. Consequently, the law itself is open for questioning and a clear orientation in our lives, derived from biological necessity, becomes increasingly obscure. For a large number of people, regardless of their socio-economic status, this is not something desirable, quite the reverse. On the other hand, in a naturalising perspective, it is normal that biology poses certain restrictions to feminism. This is seen as only natural and, if we want to be in alliance with nature, then we should respect its law. The natural law is harmonious in itself and, if not abided by, we risk various disruptions to our functioning. Feminism, from this point of view, is heading towards dangerous disrespect of our nature and it therefore should not surprise us that the participants who adopt such a perspective think that it might be reasonable to limit feminism.

The fact that such, liberal discourse circulates in neoliberal society does not contradict my claim that Croatian society is a neoliberal society. Rather, it shows that neoliberalism is not called *neoliberalism* for no reason, it is not a completely new system but is rather structured on certain concepts developed as a part of liberal thought. What is interesting here is that biology enters the reflections of participants quite often and in an explicit manner. While this might not appear as anything special or surprising at this point, later on in my analysis we will see that biology is, almost as a rule, not discussed in the narratives of interviewees and especially not in those of high socio-economic status. However, biology enters the accounts of participants of higher socio-economic status once again, in the next chapter, when it comes to their fear of illness.

### **5.3. Negative opinions on feminism**

Further down the road of limiting feminism, we approach the participants who express negative opinions on feminism. These participants are mostly of higher



socio-economic status and, while such attitudes on feminism are in general not prevailing among the participants in this research, they are nonetheless present and intertwined with neoliberal discourse in a particular manner. Here is the example of my conversation with Bernarda, a participant of high socio-economic status:

Me: What do you think about feminism?

Bernarda: I abhor such sort of movements.

Me: Yes? What for?

Bernarda: Yes. I don't identify myself...as soon as I admit that I'm...as soon as I say...or no, if I were to think that I am a feminist, thereby I would admit that I'm less worthy and endangered and that I constantly have some problem. And, in fact, that would for me mean lying.

Following Bernarda's reasoning, to be a feminist is to openly admit your vulnerability. In the context of neoliberal normativity, the exposure of one's vulnerability can hardly be welcomed as it makes apparent that some problems exceed our capacities. This is also a good example of performativity as, in her point of view, by uttering that you are a feminist, you are *making* yourself less worthy and endangered. Bernarda also recognises that it is, in the context of performativity, perfectly irrelevant whether you are indeed having some problems. Regardless, by saying that you are a feminist, you are literally making yourself vulnerable. Bernarda argues 'as soon as I say...or no, if I were to think that I am a feminist, thereby I would admit that I'm less worthy and endangered and that I constantly have some problem. And, in fact, that would for me mean lying.' One does not even need to declare herself a feminist to endanger her status of the neoliberal subject; merely thinking about being one is to plant a seed of vulnerability. Nevertheless, Bernarda recognises the existence of gendered problems, such as sexual harassment, but says that she has not experienced any problems that she would attribute to being a woman. Supporting gender equality, as with the participants who see biology as a limit of feminism, is considered to be commendable.

A surprisingly similar account can be found in my conversation with Elena, another participant of higher socio-economic status, who, shortly after saying 'well, I absolutely don't think that I am, I'm not a feminist', provided a further explanation:

Well, for me, feminists are, in principal, the people who consider that they could not have succeeded in their career because men have always been some sort of an obstacle to them. I don't think so. I think that, in the beginning, I had a harder way because I was a woman, but I have nonetheless made it before all of those, let's say I have had three colleagues who were the same age as me, practically they got employed on the same day. I had a child before them. I had managed, three years before them, to complete my PhD. I have now become a senior lecturer, four years before them. So it is possible, it's not that it is impossible, even though a spoke has been constantly put in my wheel.

Interestingly, Elena perceives that there are gendered issues and reports that her career path was indeed more difficult due to being a woman. So, compared to Bernarda, she not only acknowledges the existence of gendered problems but also says that she has experienced these issues, making it clear 'I had a harder way because I was a woman'. This, however, does not make her appear vulnerable. Quite on the contrary, the fact that gendered problems do exist and that she has managed to solve them all by her efforts or, as Bernarda, even managed to completely avoid experiencing these at the first place, indicates that we are dealing with a quite potent subject. She is the subject who makes possible what other people consider to be impossible. 'So it is possible, it's not that it is impossible, even though a spoke has been constantly put in my wheel', right? After all, denying the mere presence of some gendered problems in society would, in Croatia, more likely end up being perceived as ignorance, rather than an accomplishment reached by making the right choices.

Elena perceives feminists as those women 'who consider that they could not have succeeded in their career because men have always been some sort of an obstacle to them' and are, for that reason, now resentful towards men. More precisely, they are resentful in their vulnerability. She is here rather close to

Bernarda, who said 'if I were to think that I am a feminist, thereby I would admit that I'm less worthy and endangered and that I constantly have some problem'. Shying away from feminism, in these cases, basically implies foreclosing one's vulnerability. The concept of vulnerability is also relevant for the recent work of Butler (2015: 210, emphasis in original), who argues 'we are, as bodies, vulnerable to others and to institutions, and this vulnerability constitutes one aspect of the social modality through which bodies persist. The issue of *my* or *your* vulnerability implicates us in a broader political problem of equality and inequality'. I can only imagine what Bernarda, abhorred by feminism, would say to me if I were to introduce her to Butler's ideas during the interview. Being quite explicit and open during our conversation, she would most probably ask me what broader political problem am I talking about? What equality and inequality? Who are *we*? I asked her what she thinks about more collective, social movements:

Me: And some other social movements, do you think about them in the same manner [as with feminism]? Some that are focused on achieving some collective rights? You generally don't identify yourself with such movements or?

Bernarda: I don't identify myself. It's kind of hard for me. Well, fine, we can ask for that...

Me: Abstractly?

Bernarda: But when it comes to a realisation, I don't see myself as a part of those people who go on barricades asking for something that they can, in fact, first solve each in their own gardens.

Reading her words, one can be pretty sure that Butler's (2015: 25) observation 'when people amass on the street, one implication seems clear: they are still here and still there; they persist; they assemble, and so manifest the understanding that their situation is shared, or the beginning of such understanding', would not be something that she would find appealing. Amassing on the street is foreign to Bernarda and she is ready to say so: 'I don't see myself as a part of those people who go on barricades

asking for something that they can, in fact, first solve each in their own gardens.' This, however, is not quite the same as to claim that there is no issue that deserves going on barricades. In Bernarda's perspective, something that people can solve privately, 'each in their own gardens', does not qualify as an issue that deserves to be resolved by amassing. Her point seems to be that one should not ask others to help with solving what she, if sufficient energy were to be invested, could solve on her own. However, there should not be much that the neoliberal subject, if she is to maintain the appearance of mastery, could not solve. Continuing on this line, it should not surprise us that the participants often argued that women are frequently contradictory while demanding their rights and, in fact, co-responsible for the state of gender equality. Here are two examples:

A woman would like to have a very big salary, to work very little, that a man takes care of her financially, after all he is a symbol, he must be behind there, a rock. And, on the other hand, she wants it to be acknowledged to her that she is smart but, above all, for her it is most important to be pretty. Let's decide what is important for her, what are her priorities. [...] They need to decide what do they want...what do they want, they can have it all somehow. They can want it all. It's not bad to desire but it is the question of being realistic, *it is a matter of choice*. (Bernarda, emphasis added)

Nowadays, I would say, both men and women are in some sort of intimate conflict of interest. Women would want more and, on the other hand, they are abhorred by men ironing, by her man ironing his own shirt. I don't understand that. [...] For me that should not be a conflict of interest, as I call this a family *management*. (Klara, emphasis added)

Solving a large number of issues, including those of gender equality, 'is a matter of choice' in Bernarda's and a matter of 'management' in Klara's words. What seems to be of the highest relevance for these women is the individual level; it is a matter of choice and by making a proper choice the neoliberal subject can make her life better. In such a perspective, choice is a part of self-management by which we can, if

deployed skilfully, successfully resolve our personal 'intimate conflict of interest' that could otherwise end up being erroneously conceptualised as an obstacle imposed on us by society in large. This individual level seems to be a preferred battleground of these women, one on which they achieve remarkable victories and meet various expectations. However, this is not merely a matter of acting as an omnipotent, humanist subject. It is precisely because we cannot be omnipotent that we have to make choices at all or, as Bernarda puts it, one 'can want it all. It's not bad to desire but it is the question of being realistic, it is a matter of choice'. Coming from a similar perspective, Elena, after arguing that 'women, in a certain point of their career, themselves give up their career. It is not that a glass ceiling is the only cause why they are, today in Croatia, not in certain leading positions', illustrates her point:

For example, why couldn't I go, it hasn't crossed my mind to apply, after having a baby, for a scholarship? I haven't even applied for that call simply as, in communication with my family, I have realised that no one wants that. I'll not go there alone for a year and leave my family here. Thus, it's some sort of family, a family situation has prevented me in that, I was not stopped by the atmosphere on the place in which I work.

Reading this, one could say that Elena does not take a broader social context into account and that she is rather focused on her individual destiny and 'family situation'. The way she sees it, it is not that a work atmosphere, reflecting broader social relations, has hindered her chances of applying for a scholarship. Not applying for a scholarship was a decision made by her and her family. Extending such reasoning, one could take a shortcut and repeat Thatcher's words 'who is society? There is no such thing!' (in Buden, 2012b: 104) and maybe even take a step further and remind the reader that she had also immediately added 'There are individual men and women and there are families' (in Buden, 2012b: 104). Elena's words could then be framed as something that, in a way, meets Thatcher's conception of world. What is at stake, however, is not so simple.

Thatcher's understanding that there is no society has by now been repeated myriad times by the critiques of neoliberalism (Buden, 2012b; Fraser, 2013; Tyler, 2013) and has, no doubt, exposed Thatcher's neoliberal affiliations. Nonetheless,

apart from unmasking her intentions, such critique of Thatcher has deprived the individual level of its importance. If reducing choice to a purely individual level denies the role of social, then merely repeating Thatcher's words that there is no society does the same injustice to the individual level. This problem is largely resolved once we stop conceptualising society as made out of the individual, on the one side, and the social level, on the other. I had made this point in my previous chapters and I will return to it briefly when this chapter comes near its end. Reading about the way Elena resolved her own situation with a scholarship, how she took the socially valued opportunity for professional improvement back home, reminds us that we are all bound to process social demands personally, often making quite important moves privately. These can be rather progressive as Klara, a participant of higher socio-economic status, reminds us:

I had come in Zadar, became a member of governing board, I was 27 years old. And a man came for a meeting as he had some kind of a problem, he was renting from us. At that point I was not in my office but I was in a place where a secretary resides, where it is her workplace, a secretary was not present. A gentleman had come in and said: 'I have a meeting with Miss Klara.' I said: 'You can sit here, I am Miss Klara.' That look [laughs] I will never forget as that was a sort of look, a mix of horror and disbelief, where a man literally had checked me out, from my head to heels, and said: 'You!?! You are Miss Klara!?' [...] I said: 'Yes, it is me.' [And he replied:] 'Well I haven't hoped for this.' I mean, after that initial shock, my cheekiness and rudeness kicked in, and I said: 'You have two choices: either you are going to stay at the meeting or you will leave through the doors. There is no third way.' The reply was: 'Well fine, as I'm already here.' [laughs] Yes...but, sadly, the consequence of such attitude was that he had left the meeting without solving his problem, that he nonetheless had to come once again.

It can hardly be denied that the way she handled that situation is emancipatory, and this should not be undermined simply as she is a woman of high socio-economic

status who expressed negative opinions on feminism. She could have also succumbed to a sexist narrative in which this 'gentleman' has tried to frame her existence. Nonetheless, she made a choice to confront his attitude, making it clear that his behaviour is not up to her standards and that, if he wants to talk with her, he will have to change his attitude. She gave him the ultimatum: 'You have two choices: either you are going to stay at the meeting or you will leave through the doors. There is no third way.' In fact, she took this a step further as, even after he had suppressed his sexist appearance, she decided that was still not enough and made him come to see her once again. It is not without pride that she said that 'the consequence of such attitude was that he had left the meeting without solving his problem, that he nonetheless had to come once again.' By refusing to adopt a sexist discourse that a senior client tried to impose on her, she most definitely challenged the production of sexist norms in society. She had not brought sexist norms to an end in general, as this is not something that the individual can achieve, but she did refuse to engage in a particular power *relation*. While doing so, Klara exposed a fundamentally relational character of power, depriving her client of a power position that he had intended to take since the moment he arrived at the meeting. In other words, she refused to know what her place is, thereby accepting all risks that such action implies, especially in a male dominated industry. In her account of this whole situation, the existence of social level is implied and Klara does not quite reduce what happened to the purely individual level, her perspective is not merely one-dimensional. It is more appropriate to say that she emphasises the individual level as this is, after all, where the neoliberal subject primarily experiences and tackles social issues.

Klara, nevertheless, is this very same person who had claimed 'I consider feminism to be a very extreme understanding of life and, according to some sort of my nature, I'm not prone to extremes of any kind'. This makes it clear that a woman who does not identify herself as a feminist can nonetheless recognise and challenge gendered problems. The neoliberal subject, therefore, might be unsupportive of feminism but can also work towards challenging a sexist narrative. What the abusive man introduced above had really tried to do was to challenge the idea that a woman, and especially a young woman, can achieve mastery at all. This is where he got a clear message from Klara - I am young and a woman but I am also a fully constituted master, so forget challenging my hard-earned mastery. What she said to him, in a

way, is: 'Forget that there is such thing as a feminine essence!' or, formulated differently, 'The fact that you are successful in business is *not* because of your male essence!' In this case, when it comes to gender equality, the aims of feminism and neoliberalism do not seem to be mutually exclusive but rather quite complementary. When some other aspects are considered, such as a more collective dimension of feminism as a social movement, the women of high socio-economic status show little interest because this runs against their understanding that the problems should best be dealt with privately, in their own gardens. Taking part in a collective action would be to align themselves with a group of people who are struggling, which would basically be to expose their vulnerability.

Opinions that portray feminism as something extreme should be taken in their full complexity and as a part of contemporary, neoliberal discourse of mastery. In addition to this, we should acknowledge that the women who express such attitudes might as well be, though are not necessarily, quite supportive of some feminist aims which they, however, do not frame as such because they find the collective dimension of feminism repulsive. Rather than merely dismissing people who express negative opinions on feminism, we should instead ask what role such opinions play in contemporary society, how such opinions fit within the identity of people who hold them, what does feminism mean, explicitly and implicitly, for these people etc. In other words, we should primarily learn about the systemic dimension of such reasoning.

#### **5.4. I am a feminist, but...**

After exploring negative opinions, we finally approach the predominant position on feminism among the participants. The following position on feminism cuts through the socio-economic status of various participants and is not purified of opinions on feminism described above. Traces of various reflections on feminism can be found within the account of a single participant and this should not really surprise us as we are dealing with people here. The participants, as any of us, have every right to be contradictory and indecisive. Accordingly, my analysis is not here to purify their accounts, but rather to identify some more accentuated opinions on feminism that can be found in the interviews I have gathered. Generally, this prevailing position on feminism starts with the premise that can be clearly seen in the interview with the participant of higher socio-economic status, namely Davorka:



Me: Do you disagree with something in feminism or do you generally support it?

Davorka: Well, no, generally I support it. Well, of course, this is the same as if you were to ask me what do I think about feudalism and the system of slavery.

A basic, nominal acceptance of feminism, then, seems to be a matter of common decency in Croatia. If you were to say that you are strictly against feminism, you would be perceived as somewhat primitive. Davorka puts it perfectly: 'this is the same as if you were to ask me what do I think about feudalism and the system of slavery', and we all know that supporting feudalism or the system of slavery is out of question. Let us also make it clear that one could claim that she is not against feminism but, at the same time, act in a non-feminist way and *vice versa*. However, as we are not looking behind the mask in this research, a relevant question at this point is why has it become almost indecent in Croatia to publicly say that you are against feminism?

There are two factors that could be offered towards explaining such atmosphere in society. First, there is the work of non-governmental organisations mentioned earlier in this chapter. These organisations take care to expose and publicly flag negative attitudes on feminism as indicators of primitive reasoning in Croatia. The imperative of political correctness is thus enforced and, consequently, public speech is expected to abide by certain norms. Second, the country had been socialist for almost fifty years and this has definitely left some marks on neoliberal subjectivity. Consistent with its socialist narrative, Yugoslavia cherished the idea of modernist subject, while a preferred incarnation of the modernist subject was, of course, a proletarian. As it was argued in the first chapter, the modernist subject reflects the modernist belief according to which rationality of the individual has an absolute superiority over the 'particular' characteristics of identity. In such a perspective, the universal human reason can fully substitute ethnic, gender, racial and other specificities, thus making them obsolete. This point should be slightly moderated or, more precisely said, situated. The example below, provided by a historian Klasić (2015), helps to illustrate what is at stake:

Take one black family that lives in Alabama in 1965 and ask them would they rather live in Alabama or in Opatija, Zagreb, Osijek or Belgrade. Blacks are a large part of population in that very advanced and, compared to Yugoslavia, a lot more democratic country, but they have almost no rights during 50s and 60s. Not to mention American Indians. When you look at it in this way, then I am sure that, if you were to ask a black family would they rather choose a daily life in which they cannot enter a bus at the front door, where toilets for the coloured exist or would they be in a country where there are no free elections but they can work, no one will beat them, they will be as all other citizens, they would rather choose this second option.

The modernist subject, as we can see in this example, has not been understood in exactly the same way throughout the world. It is an empty category that needs to be situated in order to become analytically productive. There are important contextual specificities and it could be said that Yugoslavia had grasped certain emancipatory traits of the modernist subject. Even though, as I have already mentioned, the Socialist Republic of Croatia was no doubt patriarchal, women were, according to the official socialist ideology, considered to be equal to men; both women and men were proletarians and this - and not sex - was seen as their essence. Socialism, after all, first introduced the right of women to vote in Croatia, it achieved internationally high rates of female participation in leading positions in society and it, well before capitalism, as the proletarian was expected to work (being a housewife has never really counted), pushed women in the public sphere (Adamović, 2011; Katunarić, 1984). The fact that we are now living in the era of postmodernity, as I have already argued in the second chapter, does not take one bit from the victories of modernist reasoning.

Bearing this in mind, it could be said that a nominal acceptance of feminism reflects some notable remnants of socialist ideology, on the one hand, and very active civil society in contemporary Croatia, on the other. Such nominal acceptance of feminism is usually followed by a position on feminism situated somewhere in-between indecisiveness and indifference. A good example of this is my conversation with the participant of higher socio-economic status, namely Dunja:

Me: What is your opinion on feminism?

Dunja: Well, feminism as an idea is, how I should put it, I think it's important. It was born out of a particular need...this is how I perceive it. To help, support women that they, in some way, find their place in society equally. So I perceive it positively.

Me: Do you identify yourself here, with it, or is that not that important to you?

Dunja: Well, it's not that important to me. I'm not active in that sense. I'll read things that have to do with feminism. I'm interested, I'm interested in that sociological, psychological sense, so I perceive it as some sort of positive phenomenon, but it's not something decisive to me in an activist segment.

Me: Is there this collective part that maybe turns you off or attracts you?

Dunja: Well, I have to admit, I don't know what to say. It's not that it turns me off or that it attracts me...I have no quality to attribute in that sense. But I haven't felt that need in myself, that I would maybe be more active or, I don't know, engage or concretely support...it's more on the level of idea...I don't know.

What we have here is in fact certain reluctance. Reflecting on feminism, Dunja says: 'I perceive it positively [*but*] it's not that important to me.' When it comes to putting a finger on what is causing this reluctance in straightforwardly accepting feminism, she remains indecisive: 'it's not that it turns me off or that it attracts me...I have no quality to attribute in that sense'. Jana, a participant of higher socio-economic status, shows similar reluctance when it comes to declaring herself as a feminist:

Me: What is your opinion on feminism?

Jana: I have no particular opinion.

Me: What does it provoke in you when you hear 'feminism'? Do you have some sort of relation?

Jana: Well I have some sort of relation. I think that it is, today, a matter of some sort of the past probably, it is something that happened in the past. I think, in fact, that men and women are equal, I was raised like that in every respect. If I think about it in that way, then maybe I think in that feminist way, and I'm definitely a supporter of certain feminist legacies. I am, but I don't emphasise that nor do I think about it.

For Jana, as we can see, it is not just about being supportive of gender equality, as it has been with the participants who have framed feminism as a sort of aberration. She claims 'I'm definitely a supporter of certain feminist legacies', but is then anxious to modify her position, saying 'I am, but I don't emphasise that nor do I think about it.' What is at stake is a step towards openly supporting feminism, but this step nonetheless comes with a certain surplus that, as a rule, remains unarticulated.

While reading these accounts, we might say that this is all again about the imperative of mastery, about the participants being reluctant to see themselves as feminists because an individual character of mastery does not leave much space for more collective modes of expression. Such explanations definitely hold to a certain extent. However, while being focused on the imperative of mastery, we might be missing something much simpler. Maybe the lack of support for collective forms of resistance is also a consequence of the participants grasping the logic of contemporary society as a part of their everyday lives. As it exceeds the limits of the interview as a choice of research method, this is not something that can be appropriately captured by interviewing people nor can it be claimed with an utmost confidence. To make it clearer, it might be that a large number of participants see that collective logic is not really adequate for dealing with the logic of contemporary society, conceptualised in my research as neoliberal logic. It could be that the participants do not categorically dismiss the collective level as they still think of it as important for social change but they experience what Spivak (2006) elaborates using

philosophical terminology, namely that neoliberalism has brought epistemic change, thus taking away the basis for those contemporary social movements that are critical of neoliberalism. For that reason, they might not be too interested in collective modes of expression, including feminism. One does not need to be familiar with Spivak's theories to experience the consequences of a fact that an epistemic change, which would alter the neoliberal mode of subjectivity and on which effective critical collectivities could be based, is currently missing.

It is time to recognise that we are not dealing with subjects who suffer under false consciousness. This, apart from being a dated - but for that reason not any less prevalent (Fraser, 2013; Hartsock, 2004; Hennessy, 2000) - psychologisation of the individual, is also highly patronising. There is no need for either and it is about time to shift our focus towards a perspective that treats neoliberal subjects as agents who see what is happening in the world in which they live. Seeing that collective logic is not promising in contemporary society is not a great political strategy that would, after finally expanding through the cracks of neoliberal system, resurface in its subversiveness. However, for the majority of people life is not about being subversive. Life is usually not led as a great emancipatory project and, if a large number of intellectuals take pride in being anxious about finding new modes of collective resistance, maybe they are neglecting the fact that not many people, outside of their cabinets, really care about this. Furthermore, it is not that they do not care as they are intellectually modest or limited to their egoistic worlds, but because they feel that such strategies have no future, that they do not correspond with their everyday lives.

Maybe the participants see that the individual and the collective level are not clearly delineated in neoliberal society or, in Foucault's (2009: 358) words, 'that there is not a sort of break between the level of micro-power and the level of macro-power, and that talking about one does not exclude talking about the other'? If so, such a position might be seen as a subversiveness of the individual level, as an active response to the demise of institutional power. From this perspective, the participants could be understood as the Cynics, which Foucault (2011, 2010) examined in his late work, who realise that they, through the practices of self-crafting, can work towards changing their existence. That should, then, not really be called subversiveness but superversiveness as the Cynics were not into subverting discourse but going beyond it, outgrowing it or, more precisely, superverting it. The participants would then turn

out to be the products of a Foucaultian reasoning, aware that 'one cannot subvert the "existing" - only supvert it' and always bearing in mind that 'human claims to freedom and self-determination are not suppressed by the disciplines, regimes and power games, but rather enabled' (Sloterdijk, 2013b: 152). From this point of view, their opinions on feminism would turn out to be quite progressive, as they would nonetheless be meeting the aims of feminism but would just be doing so differently, namely through the practices of self-crafting.

Such reasoning, which hyperextends Foucault's analysis of the morality of antiquity, would be yet another way to impose a discourse of subversion or, more precisely, superversion on the participants. If for the majority of people life is not led according to a union bulletin, then it is also not exhausted by making a work of art out of oneself. There is no need for framing the participants as proponents of certain discourses that fetishize subversiveness, regardless whether these are a part of Marxist, Foucaultian or some other tradition. Why should not it be enough to simply say that a large proportion of the participants, who say that they are fine with feminism but that there is something uncomfortable for them in collective movements, experience that collective strategies are not really working? As this is not something to which they are ready to dedicate their attention, they might not be able to articulate, using philosophical terminology, why they feel that these strategies are not enough. In my opinion, this is what, in part, fosters such opinions.

In this context, it might be productive to remind ourselves of Butler's (1997: 17) methodological clarification, offered as a part of her analysis of the relation between agency and a productive character of power:

That agency is implicated in subordination is not the sign of a fatal self-contradiction at the core of the subject and, hence, further proof of its pernicious or obsolete character. But neither does it restore a pristine notion of the subject, derived from some classical liberal-humanist formulation, whose agency is always and only opposed to power. The first view characterizes politically sanctimonious forms of fatalism; the second, naive forms of political optimism. I hope to steer clear of both these alternatives.

This rather important point is consistent with Butler's (2011, 1999) emphasis that the subject is not determined but is constituted by discourse. Considering contemporary social theory, one can hardly come across such an approach that would reflect what Butler understands as 'politically sanctimonious forms of fatalism'. Far more often can we find anxious attempts to avoid 'politically sanctimonious forms of fatalism' which flirt with politically sanctimonious forms of optimism (for example, see Tyler, 2013). The reason for this is simple; in order to avoid being accused of adopting a pessimistic position, it might seem advisable to err on the optimistic side. In the worst scenario, you get accused of being an incurable optimist. My only problem with this is that it results in investing the *status quo* with subversiveness, thereby not telling us how things in society are but, rather, how the author would like things to be. This is a quite significant methodological omission. The fact that it is, mistakenly or not, based on optimism should not concern us. After all, 'the concepts pessimism and optimism have nothing to do with thought' (Agamben in Skinner, 2014). While my research does not proclaim the end of agency, it also takes care not to repeat this methodological omission. My aim is to provide primarily an understanding of what is happening nowadays and if this is already to flirt with 'politically sanctimonious forms of fatalism', which I do not think it is, then this fatalism strikes me as a rather productive and attractive way out of the church of subversion. In accordance, and regardless of how this fares on an optimist-pessimist scale, we should acknowledge that the predominant perspective on feminism nowadays, among the participants in Croatia, is the one of a nominal acceptance of feminism troubled by a disbelief in the collective level of struggle. This should, of course, also be recognised as a product of neoliberal condition. Whether this neoliberal product will turn against neoliberal performativity or will it remain at this level, namely at a fairly unstructured opinion that the collective level is no longer a relevant front, eludes the aims of this project. Rather than predicting how performativity will operate in future, the thesis is focused on understanding how neoliberal performativity operates nowadays, how neoliberal imperatives are experienced by the participants in my research.

## 6. STRESS AND FEAR

This chapter explores the performativity of the neoliberal condition by analysing how the participants in my research experience stress and fear in Croatia. For the women of higher socio-economic status, stress is experienced as a positive occurrence, in fact it could even be said that they strive on stress. On the other hand, the women of lower socio-economic status see it as a disruptive occurrence in their everyday lives. It could be said that the former group of participants live beyond stress, while the latter is living under stress. The participants of higher socio-economic status perform the discourse of mastery which extends to their perspective on fear. Apart from their fear of getting seriously ill, they report no anxieties regarding their future. For these women, the future is something that they have already mastered, while illness is something that could suddenly challenge and interrupt the mastery they have performatively constituted. On the other hand, the participants of lower socio-economic status report a range of fears and are rather concerned about their future. The chapter argues that these two structural positions are significantly different when it comes to experiencing stress and fear, but are related when neoliberal performativity is considered. More precisely, the experiences of women of lower socio-economic status, where both stress and fear are presented and identified as damaging, act as a constitutive outside of the neoliberal mastery over stress and fear characteristic for the experiences of participants of higher socio-economic status. This reminds us that neoliberal performativity is constituted not only through repeating various neoliberal norms, thereby in a way sealing neoliberal discourse, but also through exclusions (Butler, 2011; Spivak, 1990). Gender is also excluded from the accounts of stress and fear among the participants of higher socio-economic status. The chapter argues that this is largely a consequence of adopting a modernist perspective on the subject, characteristic both of liberalism and neoliberalism, which is based on understanding autonomy of the individual as superior over particular characteristics of cultural identity (Parekh, 2008, 2000). The participants of lower socio-economic status have reported gendered dimensions of stress and fear, thus questioning (neo)liberal discourse on the subject as the individual with no cultural identities.



## **6.1. Stress and neoliberalism**

### **6.1.1. Living beyond stress**

Stress, rather than being just a matter of individual struggling with his or her destiny, has a certain systemic dimension. Sloterdijk (2016), aware that analysing stress merely as a phenomenon situated at the micro level of society would be to explain the object of analysis only partially, questions the role of stress in creating and dissolving social relations. From his perspective, 'the large-scale-political bodies we call societies should be understood primarily as stress-integrated force fields, or more precisely as self-stressing care systems constantly hurling ahead. These only endure to the extent that they succeed in maintaining their specific tonicity of restlessness throughout the changes of daily and annual issues' (Sloterdijk, 2016: 6). Rather than being just a disruptive occurrence that is suffered by individuals, stress has a particular function in society, it maintains social cohesion or, as Sloterdijk (2016: 6) puts it, the 'specific tonicity of restlessness throughout the changes of daily and annual issues'. However, what happens when this tonicity fails to be maintained, when stress no longer acts in a cohesive manner? Then, according to Sloterdijk (2016: 8), we are confronted with 'the disintegration of the uncollectible collective into a patchwork of introverted clans and enclaves' and this patchwork, from his point of view, can hardly qualify as society. He explores how the levels of stress change in society, bearing in mind that stress is not static but rather always in the process of change. Basically, 'revolutions break out when collectives intuitively recalculate their stress balance at critical moments and reach the conclusion that existence in the attitude of submissive stress avoidance is ultimately more costly than the stress of rebellion' (Sloterdijk, 2016: 25). Consequently, people are less ready to tolerate stress as 'they feel the stress all the more keenly because they now measure their burden by raised standards' (Sloterdijk, 2016: 26). While Sloterdijk's analysis of the systemic nature of stress provides a fresh perspective on this otherwise heavily psychologised phenomenon (Buckingham and Clifton, 2005; Fernandez, 2017; Dyer, 2007), it operates with a fairly organicist conception of the collective. The collective, balanced by stress, might decide not to revolt, but, equally plausible, it might overthrow the existing order of stress. The collective can show 'maximal stress cooperation' (Sloterdijk, 2016: 25), but can also intuitively respond by rebelling. The problem is, however, that neoliberal society is not a collective as

understood by Sloterdijk (2016), which dramatically changes the implications of our analysis. As this chapter shows, there are multiple experiences of stress in Croatian society which does not result in the production of collective that operates as a large scale, monolith body.

Amongst the women of high socio-economic status, stress is, as Dunja said, 'more something that motivates. For me it is more motivating, maybe stress can momentarily be caused by the lack of time as there are the demands of the job and the need for solving or learning something new but more, generally, for me it is the quality of inducement'. In this account, stress maintains tonicity, it serves as a catalyser for business and it is something that motivates, rather than something that one suffers from. It is, as Dunja puts it, 'the quality of inducement'. Stress could annoy momentarily but above all it is a motivating factor, in any case a fairly positive occurrence. It is a stimulant of a kind for which people can be equipped for receiving productively. Or, as Bernarda puts it:

Well stress is there, but what is stress? There must be, you need a bit of stimulant to have something, to fight, you know. For an ant it is stressful every day to carry on itself a much more bigger weight and every day, and then he needs to feed...I mean a small ant, not to mention other animals that hunt other animals in order to survive. I mean, with us people it is a bit easier, we have shops and everything.

Thus, this implies, people are organised in order to accommodate stress in a constructive manner, we have it easier than animals. In this account people are, in a way, at the top of evolutionary chain. Shops and other aids could be seen as our evolutionary adjustments, yet another step in our natural progress. The rationale presented by Bernarda was implicitly evolutionary and it is not surprising that such rationales were formulated more explicitly by other participants of a high socio-economic status. Occupying a similar discursive position, Tanja makes it clear that 'stress is that because of what we live and stress is that because of what we have immunity, so stress does not need to kill us, it can also make us stronger'. What is at stake here is the discourse of mastery over stress that distinguishes a particular collective of self-mastering subjects that strive on stress, motivated by what

'ordinary' people might find overwhelming or see as negative. In fact, as Dunja said, 'there must be, you need a bit of stimulant to have something, to fight, you know'. Reflecting on their experience of stress, the women of this collective were ready to let me know that being extraordinary is something which is a part of their normal, everyday life. For them, managing stress is nothing special; it must be there and is just an aspect of their routine excellence.

Not all the participants who are successful in business saw stress as unproblematic. For example, Klara said:

In the morning, when a person wakes up, the first thing that crosses my mind is: Jesus, I am responsible for five hundred people and their families, around five hundred destinies. Then that is the pressure...are you going to make a good business decision which will not endanger the company but enable the continuation of stable business, that is what stress really does.

What emerges here as being stressful is the care for others; for your employees, 'for five hundred people and their families, around five hundred destinies', those relying on your capability to master stress. Foucault (2008) was aware that the neoliberal subject is not just responsible for herself; that would not really form a master, as a true master governs not just herself but also the others. Foucault (2008) exemplifies this in the relationship between mother and child in neoliberalism, an investment that the mother makes, resulting in reward both for mother and child. For the child the reward will be measured as a future salary. For the mother, on the other hand, 'neoliberals say, it will be a psychical income. She will have the satisfaction a mother gets from giving the child care and attention in seeing that she has in fact been successful' (Foucault, 2008: 244). This is not to imply that the women of high socio-economic status occupy the role of mother in relation to their employees. That would be taking Foucault's example of the relationship between mother and child in neoliberalism a step too far. The point is, rather, that the neoliberal subject is not expected to care just about herself but is situated in a network of social relations, where those relations that imply some sort of dependency are especially important. For Klara, stress is caused by the fact that she is responsible 'for around five hundred destinies' and 'then that is the pressure'. Those who are dependent on the self-

mastering neoliberal subject must be taken care of, must be skilfully governed, otherwise mastery is lacking and turns into a simple and limited selfishness, while the neoliberal subject is in fact not egoistic but responsible and autonomous. In the context of my research, however, it could be said that a psychical income of the participants is, above all, the appearance of mastery achieved through care for themselves and their employees.

Due to the character of business, even governing yourself and the others properly does not ensure a life relieved of stress. Nina, reflecting on hazards that are an everyday part of her job, said 'we are in a constant risk of injuries, this is such an industry, this can all blow up in the air right now and I had cases of death [...] right here in the production a guy was burned a few years ago and that, that is horrible [...] My phone rings during the night and the first thing I think is - all blown up in the air'. Bearing this in mind, it is not that the women who are considered to be successful do not experience stress. Neither are they trying to portray their job as easy or straightforward. Nina said 'we are in a constant risk of injuries, this is such an industry, this can all blow up in the air right now and I had cases of death', so the point is not that there is no stress but that stress is 'simply' a part of such business, 'this is such an industry'. The emphasis in their accounts is on mastery over stress, that they can transcend stress. These women are able to finish their job no matter what, be responsible for themselves and the others, thereby acting as role models in the world of neoliberal norms.

### **6.1.2. Living under stress**

Experiences of stress, however, are articulated differently by the women of low socio-economic status, as a difficulty that accompanies one's everyday life and not as a stimulant, not even to mention a catalyser for business. When asked how she is coping with stress, Tihea, who struggles financially, told me 'I come home in order to lay in a dark room and simply look, simply look at the emptiness...to the fact that I had sought psychiatric help which means that I was on the edge really, *under stress*' (emphasis added).<sup>10</sup> Her formulation, 'under stress', summarises the issue perfectly. Within this group, there are no descriptions of stress as something that provides a

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<sup>10</sup> It might be somewhat surprising that the participants mention psychiatric, rather than psychological therapy. This is largely as Croats can choose to visit a psychiatrist via Croatian Health Insurance Fund.

lively vigour. The women see themselves as literally being *under* stress, pressed by the demands they simply cannot fulfil, by the unreasonable requirements of their job. Or, as Biserka said, 'these are professions in which you are between hammer and anvil. Therefore, no one is setting you real...in your job no one is setting you real goals that you can achieve'. However, the responsibility for the others is still in place. Even though these jobs are not seen as prestigious and provide lower levels of income, the women are nonetheless expected to be responsible for the others, such as children in child care. In addition, 'no one is setting you real goals that you can achieve'; demands are set too high and this results in seeing stress as something destructive. According to Tihea, who works in child care:

That is such a stress, people are on the edge of stress as you are responsible for lives and you are put in impossible conditions and especially when you are expected to be simultaneously at two places. Meaning, I change the babies' diapers in the nursery, while the other two or three are, I don't know, biting, fighting, one leaves... You are constantly, every time under stress. Not even to say that there is a factor, when parents come to you and complain about some issues, whereas you are simply not to be blamed, you are simply not David Copperfield, you simply cannot be simultaneously at two places, neither can you have a magic wand for doing something.

Thus, the neoliberal imperative of responsibility for the self and the others who are dependent on you does not get relaxed the lower you are on the scale of socio-economic status. The others, in her case, are babies and, what might be less obvious, their parents. She is expected to satisfy both which then makes her conclude 'you are constantly, every time under stress'. In fact, Tihea feels as if she is asked to be a magician, but, as this is not the case, she makes it clear 'you simply cannot be simultaneously at two places, neither can you have a magic wand for doing something'. You simply cannot satisfy the neoliberal imperative of responsibility. As a result, those who are increasingly unable to meet the demands of neoliberal imperative, and are crumbling under stress, are exposed in their incapability of acting as masters, in their vulnerability.

It is only at this moment, when the neoliberal subject seems to be no longer capable of sustaining the appearance of mastery, that gender is permitted to enter the accounts of participants. This is when we realise that stress also has a gendered dimension and that the participants are in fact women, rather than simply individuals relieved of all identity affiliations. Tihea mentioned 'I, as a wife, mother and housewife, come home and cook, wash, clean, after the job I had done in the kindergarten and after the job that, additionally, exhausts not just physically but also psychically as you are responsible for those children'. The others, therefore, are not 'just' the babies and their parents, 'which exhausts not just physically but also psychically', but also her children and her husband. Here we can find a clear link between an unbearable stress she experiences, and because of which she sought psychiatric help, with her gendered roles; a wife, mother and housewife.

Such gendered accounts are rare and, even within this group, gender penetrates the discourse very reservedly. These women are indeed aware of the neoliberal imperative, they know that the neoliberal subject should not really have any gender and, if they want to establish themselves as such subjects, they should act like the participants of higher socio-economic status, whose aforementioned accounts of stress show no obvious traces of gendered experience. The gender neutral conception of the subject is, as was argued in my theoretical discussion, a common ground of neoliberalism and liberalism as both systems of thought rely on a rationalist discourse, attributing the highest value to the category called reason. Reason, characterised as impersonal and homogenous by its very nature, is fully capable of transcending the limitations of gendered culture as it is universal (Parekh, 2008, 2000). Such understanding is at the core of the modernist belief that the autonomy of individual has an absolute superiority over the particular characteristics of cultural identity. This is why universal human reason is capable of fully substituting religious, ethnic, gender and other specificities, thereby making them obsolete. Thus, insisting on the importance of, in this case, gender identity is, from both liberal and neoliberal point of view, missing the hierarchical value of reason or is, in other words, the act of unreasonable person.

Of course, an unreasonable person has no prospects of self-mastery. With neoliberalism we are therefore only witnessing stricter abidance by the modernist belief of an identity-free individual but, fundamentally, this appearance is nothing brand new, it has already been a part of liberal governmentality. Neoliberalism has

simply facilitated *this type* of individuality. I emphasise that we are dealing with a type of individuality because we should bear in mind that neoliberal individuality is nonetheless just one of many possible individualities, which sometimes gets overlooked and, as a result, individualism ends up equated with neoliberal capitalism (for example, see Baumann, 2006, 2005). Strictly speaking, there is nothing in individuality *per se* that denies gendered identities. Individuality has no essence and, accordingly, it is not something essentially neoliberal. Forgetting this, furthermore, is harmful for exploring how individuality changes across various governmentalities as it portrays individuality solely as a product of neoliberalism. Realising this, Foucault (in Rabinow, 1984: 22, emphases added) argued that 'the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from *the type of individualization* which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through refusal of *this kind of individuality*'. Thus, we are dealing with various forms of individuality, not all of which must necessarily be neoliberal or blind to gendered identities.

My project is not here to propose new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of neoliberal kind of individuality but, above all, to explore contemporary individuality, to make it more clear to ourselves what we are experiencing today.<sup>11</sup> Neoliberal intensification of liberal conception of individuality has occurred as a consequence of the internalisation of imperative of mastery. After this process of internalisation has significantly progressed, and this is where neoliberalism steps outside of liberal framework, it is no longer a matter of failing to meet some externally imposed imperative. Now it is more about letting yourself down as you have failed to meet your own wish to become a master, a successful neoliberal

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<sup>11</sup> This is by no means a weakness of my approach or modesty on my behalf. Nor it is to say that what is nowadays considered to be applied research is needed to take over where my analysis stops, in order to produce a practical, policy framework. I do not offer ready-made forms of new subjectivity not because I am content with the *status quo* but as I am aware that my position, of an individual, is a rather limited one. Understanding the history of present, however, is already to work towards changing the *status quo*. Foucault (in Rabinow, 1984: 22, emphasis added), let us not forget, was not talking about himself promoting new forms of subjectivity. He was operating with plurality, 'we have to promote new forms of subjectivity through refusal of this kind of individuality', fully aware that 'the good does not exist, like that, in an atemporal sky, with people who would be like the astrologers of the good, whose job is to determine what is the favorable nature of the stars. The good is defined by *us*, it is practiced, it is invented. And this is a collective work' (Foucault in Bess, 1988: 13, emphasis added).

subject. Such failure is also increasingly accompanied by shame which can be seen as 'the switch point where external controls are transformed into internal controls' (Sloterdijk, 2001: 168) or, in other words, a symptom of internalisation of neoliberal imperative. No wonder then that the women who participated in my research shied away from reporting gender as a factor in experiencing stress.

### **6.1.3. Fragmented collective**

Considering the participants' diverse accounts of stress, the problem with Sloterdijk's (2016) analysis of stress and social change becomes more evident. To recapitulate, he argues that 'revolutions break out when collectives intuitively recalculate their stress balance at critical moments and reach the conclusion that existence in the attitude of submissive stress avoidance is ultimately more costly than the stress of rebellion' (Sloterdijk, 2016: 25). Simply, there are no collectives that would intuitively recalculate and, after reaching meaningful conclusions at critical moments, make their moves. The neoliberal collective, exemplified here as Croatian society, is fragmented. This is not the same as to say that it does not exist but rather to argue that it does not exist in a sense that Sloterdijk uses it, as a monolith political body. After Sloterdijk's concept of organicist collective is taken away, his presumption of revolution loses its basis. Thus, what we have is not a wise collective that decides but a fragmented collective consisted out of multiple units, smaller collectives.

Some women in this fragmented collective find stress to be a motivating factor in their everyday life, others see it as a problem and quite a few end up in psychiatric treatment as a consequence of living under stress. When reflecting on stress, the women of higher socio-economic status did not mention those people who have failed to master stress. However, the women, who live under, rather than above stress, have a crucial role in the relational construction of the identity of mastery that the women of high socio-economic status claimed. It could be said that the women of low socio-economic status form the constitutive outside of neoliberal mastery, which is, in poststructuralist theory, understood as what must be excluded in order to ensure the internal coherence of what is included (Butler, 2011; Spivak, 1990). It is in opposition to those who fail in mastery that those who are self-presented as masters constitute their appearance.



The women of higher socio-economic status have reached their status according to some established, consensually maintained and widely internalised criterion of success. They appeared to assume that we all know about this criterion and that there was no need for it to be made explicit in the interview. In this sense, I was aware that being a part of postgraduate research programme at what is considered to be the prestigious university is also positioned according to this same criterion of success. Even more so, I am not just passively positioned, my choice of taking postgraduate research studies at the University of Manchester repeats this criterion or, more precisely, it re-establishes it while at the same time bringing something new along; it, in a way, updates this criterion. My position in society, therefore, implies that I have an awareness of what is happening in neoliberal setting, that the participants and I share some common ground of meaning. However, an explanation of neoliberalism does not mechanically proceed from this common ground as, in accordance with my theoretical framework, experiences have no automatically privileged epistemic status. What is important to think through, while analysing neoliberal performativity, is that 'the normative force of performativity - its power to establish what qualifies as "being" - works not only through reiteration, but through exclusion as well' (Butler, 2011: 140). It is not only that the women who take care to appear as masters establish neoliberal norms performatively by reiterating their mastery. This whole process of performativity requires a particular constitutive outside, it requires exclusions.

How should we then understand the position of women of low socio-economic status in Croatia? In accordance with their structural position, in relation to which the neoliberal subject establishes herself as a master, could it be said that they are situated on margins, where the neoliberal imperative has not yet penetrated or, if it did, has found nothing that could meet its demands? Is the constitutive outside subversive by a sheer necessity, as it is deprived of any means for satisfying the neoliberal imperative? Such conclusions would completely miss the point. The constitutive outside is not a structural position that is excluded from neoliberal rules. Care needs to be taken in analysing the relation of inside and its constitutive outside as 'this latter domain is not the opposite of the former, for oppositions are, after all, part of intelligibility; the latter is the excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former domain as the spectre of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility, its constitutive outside' (Butler, 2011: x). Thus, there is indeed something

uncomfortable in the constitutive outside as it exposes mastery in its fundamental impossibility, it haunts the neoliberal imperative and for that reason it must be excluded, it cannot enter the narrative of those women who present themselves as successful. However, the women who could be seen as a part of constitutive outside are outside only as long as they fail to establish themselves as the inside of neoliberalism. The road which leads to the inside of neoliberalism and becoming yet one of many masters is paved with neoliberal values. While the women who are successful in maintaining the appearance of mastery might as well take a break and relax, if only for a brief moment, those who form their constitutive outside have no such opportunity as they are expected to take immediate action and finally become this strong and responsible subject of neoliberalism. This is why the participants of low socio-economic status, contrary to Sloterdijk's expectations, do not really rebel. No grand revolution, that would redefine the levels of stress they experience, takes place.

#### **6.1.4. Fight for yourself!**

A dedicated effort to deliver, to fulfil the impossible goals of one's job and to meet the neoliberal imperative was evident in the accounts of interviewees. As Martina, while describing her job in dry cleaning, puts it:

There was this tempo that in two days it must be done, must be done means that you do not have enough time to process it properly and for it to be delivered as it should be. You have only one opportunity to process it ... that it goes through machine, that you iron it nicely and so. Done, it must go! [...] Of course, considering that you are limited by time, you do not do this as you would really like to and then it must be charged and a costumer must take it...and what should you say to the costumer then? This, this, some kind of *confrontation within yourself*, that sort of stuff I do not like. (Emphasis added)

Martina, therefore, is facing impossible goals. Her work must be done, where 'must be done means that you do not have enough time to process it properly and for it to be delivered as it should be'. The goal already contains its impossibility, so it is

literally an impossible goal. The responsibility for reaching it, however, remains in place; the service 'must be charged and a costumer must take it...and what should you say to the costumer then?' Martina is the one who is expected to take the responsibility for impossible goals and not the one who has created such goals, namely her employer. Impossible goals, contrary to what might be expected by following common sense, do not necessarily lead to rebellion, revolutions or swift changes at the level of society. In the interviews I had conducted there were no indications of such unfolding of events. Rather, the situation causes, as Martina puts it, 'a confrontation within yourself' and it is here that a particular, neoliberal logic of functioning takes place. Martina, an employee, does not really perceive the demands of her job as externally imposed by her employer. Rather, she internalises these demands, whereby the pressure to reach them becomes a matter of self-confrontation, rather than a confrontation with her employer. Otherwise, where would this feeling of 'confrontation within yourself' come from?

When this struggle becomes unbearable for the participants of lower socio-economic status, it is by no means rare that they seek expert, psychotherapeutic help. In most of the cases, the participants have not shared this with their colleagues but have kept their visits to psychiatrist to themselves. This is why, as the participants explained to me, they have not been judged by those around them. The interviewees are ashamed of publicly saying that they have sought help as these women are well aware of the neoliberal narrative that they are expected - and want themselves - to abide by. As Sloterdijk puts (2001: 168) it, 'shame is the most intimate social fetter, which binds us, before all concrete rules of conscience, to universal standards of behavior' or, more precisely, shame reminds us that we have internalised the neoliberal imperative and that we expect from ourselves to become neoliberal subjects, instead of being simply expected to abide by a certain set of impositions. Our vulnerability, made apparent by asking for psychiatrist's help, is most definitely not seen as a character trait of mastery and is therefore to be hidden in our public performance.

It seems that such institutional help has mixed effects but does not really change much for the majority of women who suffer under stress. As Tihea said, describing her experience with psychiatric help:

That psychiatric help...I cannot say that it has helped me but, then again, I cannot say that it has not helped me. What I wanted there when I had come, when I had come I wanted to find some mechanisms, some tools so that I can help myself, thereby not thinking of swallowing pills. How to find strength within myself and how to cope with stress. However, what is, let's say, the solution for me? The solution is to get away from the source of stress, if stress is your job which is conceptualised inhumanly.

Reading this account, we can see that Tihea clearly sees the limit of psychiatric help as the cause of her stress is her job. She makes it clear that 'the solution is to get away from the source of stress, if stress is your job which is conceptualised inhumanly'. At the same time, however, she must work in order to keep on earning. What she realised, basically, is that there are no tools or mechanisms that could resolve this tension and with which she could help herself. She had temporarily resolved this deadlock by taking a sick leave for a few weeks but, after this period had passed, she returned to her job or, in other words, to the source of her stress.

However, asking for help can have unexpected consequences. As an example, I quote my exchange with Biserka, who had visited a psychiatrist and had a fairly unusual but positive experience:

Me: So you asked for help and how did this help look like?

Biserka: Slap.

Me: What?

Biserka: She told me, first we had talked and then she told me, 'Why are you wasting my time?'

Me: This is what a doctor told you?

Biserka: Yes, 'I have a lot of patients here, who really need help, and you are smart, eloquent, learned, educated - *please fight for*

*yourself!* You know, when I had first came there then I was like 'Jesus God I need help in every aspect', but her reaction was fantastic, she pointed me in a certain direction a bit.

Me: What, that is it? Nothing else?

Biserka: No, no, no, of course there were conversations after this but what I want to say to you is that this...when you get shocked, so I was no longer shy, I was not miserable but I was shocked. And then a bit of aggression surfaces, you know. *You need to know how to fight for yourself!*

Me: Has this helped you then?

Biserka: To me, yes. (Emphasis added)

One way of interpreting this session with Biserka and her therapist is to point out that we can never really know what can help a person that suffers. A verbal slap, in such a perspective, could prove to be a witty psychiatric technique. However, instead of flirting with psychological approaches which see unconscious as a mysterious register (Hollway, 2016, 2006; Hollway and Jefferson, 2008; Hollway and Lynn, 2010), the account of exchange between the participant and her psychiatrist can be seen as an example of how a struggle for being a self-master persists without a break, even during a session with a psychiatrist. The way in which the participant presented her experience was also to let me know, and reconfirm to herself, that she was not the one which really needed help that much at the first place. She, in a way, overemphasised her incompetence for being the neoliberal subject, thus underestimating her capacity to fight for herself. From her interview account, we can see that the doctor made it clear to her that she is not just like those other patients, those who have failed in establishing mastery over their own lives. She is a part of no such collective as she is 'smart, eloquent, learned, educated' etc. She is not just like those others, who are doomed to dwell on the constitutive outside, she has solid chances for satisfying the neoliberal norm.

As her psychiatrist informs her, the neoliberal imperative spells as 'please fight for yourself!', therefore neoliberalism is not about fighting with or for collective. In his analysis *Stress and Freedom*, Sloterdijk (2016) does not seem to take this into account, which is somewhat surprising, especially when his earlier work is considered (Sloterdijk, 2013a; 2013b; 2001). However, he explains what happens if there are no stress forces that keep society together, when social cohesion is no longer maintained. What occurs in such, post-stress scenario is 'the disintegration of the uncollectible collective into a patchwork of introverted and enclaves' (Sloterdijk, 2016: 8) or, in other words, society ceases to exist, it falls apart. Drawing on aforementioned accounts by the participants, it does not seem that all we have in neoliberalism is a set of enclaves. Rather, neoliberal discourse frames certain collectives, particular groups that share similar structural positions and form *society* through their everyday interactions. In the conclusion of my thesis, it is explained how exactly I understand the neoliberal social link. In this chapter my aim is simply to map how the two positions in society on which my project focuses, those occupied by the women of low and high socio-economic status, are framed by neoliberal discourse.

When Sloterdijk (2016: 15) turns his focus to freedom, he acknowledges that 'when a reflective individual appears on the scene, breaking away from the dominion of collective customs and making itself subject to a higher law – be it Nature, a faith illuminated by a holy text, or the individual law of the search for happiness – research into the meaning of freedom is set in motion'. Neoliberalism is exactly this individual search for happiness which has broken away from the dominion of collective customs and has become a purely individual game. As we have seen, while it does appear at the collective level, there is no grand collective in this quest for happiness, you fight for yourself. This is a well-known point of liberal ethics and is, according to my theoretical framework, a common feature of neoliberalism and liberalism. As Smith (2005: 19) puts the logic of liberal (and neoliberal) ethics in lay terms:

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own self-interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of

their advantages. Nobody but a beggar chooses to depend chiefly upon the benevolence of his fellow-citizens.

What is novel in neoliberalism, in this context, is the intensity with which people abide by this ethical principle, how hard they fight for themselves and, when they fail, how hard they fall. What primarily contributes to this intensification is the internalisation of neoliberal imperative by subjects themselves. Contrary to the tradition of liberalism, there is no government which is strictly separated from the market but there are now neoliberal individuals who effectively represent micro-embodiments of neoliberal governmentality, thus internalising the neoliberal imperative.

The suffering of participants is not predominantly marked by repressive power, which does not seem to provide them with a relief. We can here see that, in contrast, neoliberalism largely operates through dispersing and multiplying its governmental practices through individuals. Biserka, reflecting on the stress she experienced, said:

I used to attribute this to my age. But later on, as I have been talking with people, I realised that it is not about my age but that we are all like this. What surprises me is that this begins, let's say, since turning thirty. It is no longer since turning forty-five or fifty but thirty, for women who started working when they were twenty [...] it gets accumulated, you can't, sadly you have no valve that you could open.

Biserka has realised that it is not her age that has made her increasingly struggle to cope with the stress she experiences. She used to attribute this to her age, but has seen that far younger people than her are also incapable for coping with stress and that nowadays there is 'no valve that you could open'. The accumulation of stress seems to be intensified by neoliberalism, due its penetration in the subjectification process. Examining the hegemony of neoliberalism, Spivak (2006: 115) notices that neoliberalism has successfully engaged subject-formation by acknowledging that 'the production of business culture [...] isn't just done through mobilization, it is done through children's education, step by step, carefully. [...] You have to do it in the

home, in acculturation, in teaching; everybody is into training for creating the best, most self-deceived, most benevolent exploiter. Everybody is into leadership.' Thus, for a social system to establish its hegemonic position it, above all, must penetrate subjective structures, thus becoming a part of the subjectification process. Accordingly, the earlier occurrence of stress which the participant notices can be attributed to the success neoliberalism has had with introducing a particular epistemic shift, a new way we think about and evaluate our own lives.

What about the participants of high socio-economic status who seem to accommodate neoliberal imperatives with ease? There was literally no mention of any psychological issues in their interview accounts. Can we be sure that they have no experience whatsoever with psychotherapeutic help? Of course not, there are no guarantees and I would be tempted to argue otherwise. However, in my project, like Parker (2010: 157), I 'sidestep the tendency of some proponents of psychosocial research to tell us what the text really means because the researcher knows something beyond what the reader can see on the page or because the researcher "feels" something about it (e.g., Hollway and Jefferson, 2005)'. What is important for my research, rather than getting to the fact of whether women of higher socio-economic status have visited psychotherapists or not, is how they present themselves, how they organise their appearance, how they perform the neoliberal imperative of mastery and, at the same time, what exclusions this entails and produces. Put another way, in my project I do not guess nor do I investigate what is hidden behind the mask of neoliberal appearance. On the contrary, I take the mask as my point of focus and proceed with exploring neoliberalism accordingly. This research is about neoliberal performativity, not unearthing of 'true human essence' but understanding how this essence is constituted through repetition and internalisation of neoliberal values, how the cause of neoliberalism is retroactively created by its consequences.

## **6.2. Fear and neoliberalism**

### **6.2.1. Being afraid**

Apart from stress, fear also has a particular and interesting place in neoliberal discourse. The women of low socio-economic status reported experiencing a range of fears regarding their future. When asked how they see their lives in ten or fifteen years, they provided a set of replies, ranging from depressive accounts to an ironic



stance towards their position in society. Biserka said simply 'Well, I hope I will be alive. [Laughs] That is the future', while Martina, after suddenly laughing for a moment, claimed 'I am looking how to find myself a burial place. No, really, so that my child doesn't have to pay for that, that I can take my time to see that...people of my age are already slowly dying and those things, sadly'. Here I mention that she was laughing not to decrease the seriousness of her words but to make it clear that she was not trying to overemphasise her hardship. She was simply making it clear to me what her life is like, without asking for any compassion on my behalf. There is, as I mentioned, also irony in the accounts that I have gathered. When asked about her retirement, Biserka said 'I hope, I imagine it as in those American movies, on cruising. I'm kidding.' This irony, along with the laugh of previous interviewee, might be taken as a sign of the participants resigning and giving up on themselves, accepting the status of 'unsuccessful' neoliberal subjects.

More appropriately, I claim, laughter and irony are here to express that there may be little they can do but that they see the absurdity of entire situation and do not intend to submit their final resource, namely sanity, to the altar of neoliberal imperative. As Freud (2001e: 163) insightfully noticed, 'humour is not resigned; it is rebellious. It signifies not only the triumph of the ego but also of the pleasure principle, which is able here to assert itself against the unkindness of the real circumstances'. By placing it next to neurosis, intoxication, self-absorption and ecstasy, Freud appreciated the role humour can play in maintaining our sanity. This, however, is not to say that humour magically makes all of our suffering disappear but rather that it belongs to 'the great series of methods which the human mind has constructed in order to evade the compulsion to suffer' (Freud, 2001e: 163). Accordingly, humour should not be, while analysing the accounts of participants, invested with some subversiveness and seen as a great political act. Rather, it should be understood simply as a strategy that the women who struggle use to laugh off, if only for a brief moment, the bitterness of their position in society.

In the accounts of women of low socio-economic status, gender and gendered issues appear to be relevant in their everyday life. Biserka recounted 'I hope that my husband's pensions will be enough', and this highlights how neoliberal subjects can be dependent on others. In the accounts of women of higher socio-economic status, this is never mentioned, giving the impression that they, even if they have partners or husbands, are perfectly independent from these individuals. Other desires similar to

the one quoted above, that seem to be pushed in the realm of 'traditional', can be found in the accounts of women of lower socio-economic status. Reflecting on her future, Nada said:

I don't see some sort of *my* life in ten years. I see...the only problem for me is that my daughter has not married and I don't know if she is going to get married, but I would like her to get married, so that she will not be alone, you know? That she has someone of her own and that she has a child as, look, she doesn't like to be alone, which is the worst thing...and then I would like her to get married, and then I would find myself there, you know?  
(Emphasis in original)

For the women who are successful in business, worrying about their daughter's marital status would be considered to be a characteristic of those people who are not as urban, independent, autonomous etc. or, more explicitly, those people who are not seen as successful in neoliberal terms. Not even to mention that saying 'I don't see some sort of *my* life in ten years' would be to openly admit a lack of autonomy which is so characteristic for neoliberal discourse. Bearing this in mind, we could paraphrase Freud and say that it is no longer a case that anatomy is destiny but now it could be said that autonomy is destiny. However, while interviewing those women of lower socio-economic status, one can still find experiences and desires that escape the performance of neoliberal mastery, thus rupturing neoliberal appearance and exposing our vulnerability.

### **6.2.2. Being fearless**

In the context of the expectations that the women of high socio-economic status have regarding their future, it seems that the very idea of future, as something that is yet to come, is challenged. For them, future is nothing that they are anticipating, their future has already been absorbed by their capacity of mastery and it is, therefore, not much different from their actuality. One brief exchange between Tanja and myself illustrates this vividly:

Me: How do you see your life in about ten, fifteen years? Is there something that causes stress for you or are you completely at peace with everything?

Tanja: I am at peace, yes.

Me: You are not afraid of anything?

Tanja: No.

Me: No?

Tanja: No.

For Tanja, there was not much more to add. Why would the future bother her if she is already in control of what is about to happen? In accordance, retirement, understood in a traditional manner as a period of life when one can finally take a break and have some rest, is not something that is appealing to the women of high business status. Tendency was to claim that they do not intend to stop working and, consequently, the distinction between future and actuality gets blurred. Brigita said 'I think that I am too infected by business so that I would simply say that in ten years I will not work. I will work, I will definitely work', while Jana emphasised that 'projects can always be done'. Thus, it is no longer simply a matter of lifelong learning and constant perfection of skills, which would be completed by the age of retirement. What is at stake is not lifelong learning but lifelong working, never losing the status of active subject that she has achieved or, to be more precise, has been constantly achieving by performing it meticulously.

A few women of low socio-economic status expressed worry about their retirement and pension. Tihea said:

Pension worries me a lot, considering that, when we look at the tendency of what is happening, if we look at how many young people are leaving, in fact how many will stay here to work and how will we at all...in fact will we be able to meet the retirement,

and when we get retired what will we get? [...] So that, after all, my money that I was, that was deducted from my salary I will not receive.

Compared to Tanja, Tihea is not at peace. Her worry is clearly formulated: 'When we get retired what will we get?' Biserka also expressed a similar concern, saying 'I'm not sure will that category even exist when I will be ready for that, I'm not sure will this category even exist, who will qualify for pension'. No such fear appears to exist amongst the women of high socio-economic status. When they will have reached the age of retirement, considering that they do not see their retirement as any significant change, they will still be working, earning and, if they find a better business opportunity, they could easily leave Croatia. As Bernarda casually dismissed any concerns about retirement: 'Pension? What can I do? What the state decides, so it will be. And if I will not like that, I will go somewhere else'. Basically, if she will not like her future, she will choose a different, more suitable one. The way she sees it, she has achieved high socio-economic status through the freedom of choice, so why should not she choose her future as well?

### **6.2.3. Fearlessness interrupted**

There is one thing, namely the fear of getting seriously ill, which the women of high socio-economic status reported as their concern, in a number of related formulations:

The only thing for me is that health serves me well. (Dunja)

If you have health, you will solve everything somehow. (Bernarda)

As far as I am healthy and that is it. (Nora)

Discomfort is for me mostly caused by various illnesses and deaths around me. (Jana)

The fear of being ill, however, as with so many phenomena analysed in this project, is not something characteristic exclusively for neoliberalism and people would report

being afraid of getting seriously ill in various social systems. Simply, illness is associated with suffering and hardship as it disturbs our everyday flow of life, it challenges our capability to act normally (Bell, 2000; Kelly and Millward, 2004; Martin *et al.*, 2011). The question is how is fear framed by neoliberal discourse and is there something new which is worthy of analysis? The fear of illness seems to be intensified by neoliberalism (Gill and Scharff, 2011; Salecl, 2010, 2005), it is especially present in the accounts of women of high socio-economic status and it, for this reason, enters my exploration of neoliberalism.

One way of explaining this occurrence of intensified fear would be to follow Baudrillard (1994), who argued that the cancer, with the proliferation speed of its cells, is the point when the capitalist finally realises capitalism's inner logic. Confronted with cancer, the capitalist finally gets confronted with the inner logic of capitalism which she can no longer maintain. It is at this moment that this logic proves to be damaging not only for those who are exploited by capitalism but for the capitalist herself. Cancer, as a serious illness, is something that, in a way, momentarily 'freezes' the one who suffers in a particular time and place. Mastery, consequently, gets interrupted and seriously challenged. She, as a master, can no longer be simply focused on the future of her business and travel extensively for business or leisure purposes. Nor can she be responsible and take care of the others like she was able to do before as her very own existence is now endangered. By getting ill, the neoliberal subject also becomes 'more embodied' and this body is often explicitly accompanied by a certain gender, and with this the notion of modernist subject, relieved of any identity affiliations, is disrupted. Limitations of the neoliberal subject can no longer be foreclosed once illness cannot be hidden anymore. If she is not to be blamed for being ill, then there is something that causes illness and what she cannot really control or, in other words, for which the neoliberal subject is not responsible. This lack of responsibility is not a proper characteristic of neoliberal subject and it is also here where the idea of omnipotent subject gets exposed in its ideological bias, in its proneness to neoliberal values.

However, when viewed through neoliberal optics, can the subject be seen as relieved of any responsibility for her illness? Hardly, as it is understood that the responsibility of self-entrepreneur is to keep her health in check and not to succumb to the limitations of her bodily existence. As Dunja, a participant of higher socio-economic status, argued:

Usually when some health situations are in question, to me it is usually a sign that I have maybe somewhere neglected some part of myself. Or that I have gone over my limits...the organism itself simply gives a signal, some signal of imbalance and that, OK, how about you return a little bit to, I don't know, yourself. Analyse a past period of time. What is it that would maybe be good to change, balance? [...] Simply as a little checking.

Illness, therefore, is seen as a consequence of going over one's limits, of neglecting a part of oneself or, in other words, of a temporary lack of responsibility for oneself. In accordance, if it is understood that the subject can influence her health by her actions, then she should act in a way that would take care of her bodily existence. Dunja, therefore, understands health issues as misbalances which should be sorted primarily by the return to oneself, by conducting 'a little checking'. When Dunja had actually gotten ill, she responsibly deployed aforementioned reasoning:

My first reaction was fear, worry about what will be, what this means now and so on. But then, somehow, I made it and whenever I can somehow I strive towards...OK, what does this situation tell me? What is it that I can do? What can I first and straightaway do? What will I do later on? In a certain way again, a little plan for acting.

Thus, being healthy or ill is also seen as a matter that she can influence with her actions and if this responsibility fails for a brief moment, it is time for a new plan of acting, an active and positive approach to deal with her illness. It is time to ask yourself 'What is it that I can do?' On the other hand, it could be said that taking care of yourself surely benefits your health and that this is not something specific for neoliberalism. That is indeed so and it is not my intention to deny this. In fact, Dunja's interview account largely draws on such an understanding. Furthermore, Dunja mentioned that she is particularly focussed on her health as she experienced cases of serious illness in her family and this should be recognised. It is my point to say that neoliberal discourse emphasises self-care, where self-care is no longer seen as something that could improve one's health but is effectively becoming a social

imperative. It is one thing to say that taking care of oneself can be beneficial for a person's health, but is quite a different thing to claim that illness can only be a consequence of the individual's irresponsibility. Related to this topic, Zupančič (2012b) tells us:

Recently I have, for example, seen some programme on cancer, where there was a lot of talk about how, apart from an appropriate medical care, 'positive energy' can help us to defeat that illness. Apologies for my sarcasm but, considering that the deceased have not been invited for the discussion, gradually a conclusion was formed according to which it is highly likely that there was something wrong with the positive energy and the attitude of deceased. That assumption has gone even further: if there was something wrong with their positivity, maybe there was something wrong with their character as well. In short, maybe they were not the best people: too bitter, negative, constantly unsatisfied...

When interpreting this programme, she proceeds in a way that departs from the approach I took earlier by following Baudrillard's metaphor of cancer as a sobering confrontation of the capitalist with capitalism's inner logic. Zupančič challenges the viability of entrepreneurial ethics by arguing that it is now out-of-date and is replaced by a more contemporary version of entrepreneurial ethics. More precisely, entrepreneurial ethics has therefore not been replaced but updated in a peculiar way. Zupančič (2012b) emphasises:

With this the following is important: it is no longer a matter of classical 'entrepreneurial' formulation according to which we ourselves are to be blamed for our misfortune and failures as we have acted erroneously or we have not acted at all. That formulation still, basically, presupposes a certain distance in which there is a space for the assumption of our own 'responsibility' and 'free decision', even though that space is very receptive for various ideological manipulations. It is a matter that the contemporary version really eliminates the notion of responsibility itself in a

classical meaning of the word and substitutes it with the idea of impaired, corrupted being: unhappy and/or unsuccessful are corrupted on the level of their 'naked life' and all of their erroneous acting or not-acting are derived from that with a certain inevitable necessity.

This is a productive and indeed up-to-date approach on neoliberal subjectivity. Compared to the explanation inspired by Baudrillard's reflection on cancer and capitalism, Zupančič provides a more radical analysis. She sees that what is at stake is not just the failure of mastery due to the incapability of neoliberal subject to choose and be responsible but the idea of corrupted essence that manifests in her illness. Illness, therefore, is not primarily the consequence of not being a good master but the sign that the individual in question was not meant to be a master at the first place. Or, in other words, that she has spent all this time pretending that she was a master, while in fact her biology had subverted this from the beginning, literally from the core of her existence. From this perspective, those who are ill form a class of non-masters, otherwise they would not get ill. On a conceptual level, this asks for further sophistication and Zupančič spots this straightaway, arguing that it is no longer a matter of

a certain socio-economic class, but increasingly a race for itself, a specific form of life. Actually we are the witnesses of a truly spectacular increase of racism, more precisely 'racialisation'. Which means, it is not simply a matter of racism in a traditional sense of hating the others but primarily of producing (new) races on the basis of economic, class and political differences or factors. And of segregation on that basis. This new form of discrimination is not racial in its starting point, there it is politico-economic; it, on the contrary, produces race as an organic essence that correspond to these or those political categories.

Those who fail in establishing themselves as neoliberal masters are increasingly conceptualised as a specific race or, as Zupančič (2012b) puts it, 'a specific form of life'. Tyler (2013: 188, emphases in original), in a similar fashion, argues that 'it is



because the underclass are imagined as a race and not a class that poverty and disadvantage can be conceived as not economic or even properly political issues, but as a *hereditary condition, a disease*'. Thus, racialisation obscures broader socio-economic relations that underpin failed mastery, thereby establishing it as a form of inferior life (Lister, 2004; Nayak, 2003; Tyler, 2013). However, in this context, it is important to note that there is a difference between a hereditary condition and a disease. If the inferior form of life reflects a hereditary condition, we are dealing with subjects 'corrupted on the level of their "naked life" and all of their erroneous acting or not-acting are derived from that with a certain inevitable necessity' (Zupančič, 2012b). Responsibility of the subject is not really implied; it is a matter of destiny. On the other hand, when inferiority is seen as a disease, it implies certain neglect on behalf of the neoliberal subject and this is nonetheless a different scenario. In the latter case, the opinion below, shared by Lucija, a participant of higher socio-economic status, is telling:

I start from myself, look. Basically, my employer, my company has for me, during all these years, deducted a big amount of money that is paid towards the public budget from my salary, right? So every employer is deducting, for each employee, a huge amount of money. When you take a look of that times twelve months times how many years is person employed, we are really dealing with a very large budget, but for what is this budget going? I, for example, am not going to a doctor almost at all as I don't need one. I go to a dentist, where I again pay additionally, right? I have been in hospital once, when I was giving birth. And that is all, right? OK, there should be this, some sort of solidarity should exist, but I think that, for example, in the health system, that some sort of individual health care should be encouraged. That those individuals who are really rarely seeing a doctor, for example, maybe they should be given some sort of incentives, some sort of reliefs on their salary. So that people would be really interested in living healthy.

Quoting her idea on managing the health system is by no means to say that Lucija is focused on framing a certain group of people that neglect their health, and are for that reason often seeing a doctor, as a specific form of life. In fact, such people are not explicitly mentioned anywhere in her interview account. Rather, they are present as a constitutive outside of her lifestyle, as those who are not as interested in living healthy as she is. Lucija, therefore, simply expresses the possibilities that neoliberal discourse opens and techniques of governing that neoliberalism might as well adopt in regulating population, 'so that people would be really interested in living healthy'. Lucija, let us remind ourselves of the chapter *Perceiving Feminism*, argued that feminism could be detrimental for the health of a woman in its capacity to exceed bodily limitations of a woman and lead to a misbalance. She made it clear that such feminism is not 'a healthy feminism'. In her interview account above, furthering her focus on what she considers to be a balanced lifestyle, she advocates, to use her terminology, not encouraging a certain group of population through 'some sort of individual health care'. We can here see what it means to say that the subject is constituted by various discourses which are then centred in a complex manner (Butler, 2011; Spivak, 1990). Her account also serves as a reminder of how seriously discourse should be taken, which is in this project assured by understanding discourse as not any less or more real than reality.

Making a final turn to Baudrillard's metaphor of cancer as a sobering confrontation of the capitalist with capitalism's inner logic, it is important to note the novelty of neoliberalism in this context. What neoliberalism has 'achieved' is the dispersion of capitalist values, where its subjects have become capitalists of themselves. One does not need to be confronted with cancer to realise the inner logic of capitalism. This has indeed not happened overnight, it took a certain period of time for people to accept that 'being able to identify, articulate and sell your own skills is an essential, well, skill!' (Jobs.ac.uk, 2018a). While it still has not reached its full momentum in Croatia, a few decades ago in Yugoslavia, the idea that 'whether it's on a daily, monthly or yearly basis, all of us at some point in our lives have to try and sell ourselves to somebody else' (Jobs.ac.uk, 2018b) would be considered as a more or less accurate description of prostitution. In any case, the term 'capitalist' is no longer reserved merely for a rich owner of capital. Bearing this in mind, the fear of getting ill is *intensified* in contemporary society as being ill, when viewed through neoliberal optics, could be interpreted as a sign of corrupt essence. More precisely, a

sign that the one who fell ill does not belong to the form of life which is seen as predestined for business success, that she had anxiously but pointlessly aspired to business heights. The fear of illness, therefore, could be understood as a fear of being associated with those who are considered to be incapable of reaching mastery. However, with predestination one never really knows, it is always a matter of guessing (Ray, 1987; Weber, 1965), self-examination which opens the space for the fear of illness that would, by exposing self-mastery as a product of neoliberal performativity rather than the self-entrepreneurial essence, make this guessing obsolete. Against the background of this, neoliberal subjects are asked to be active, to show their self-entrepreneurial essence.

## 7. ACTIVITY AND NEOLIBERALISM

Adopting an active lifestyle, as an important component of neoliberal discourse, proves the successfulness of internalising neoliberal discourse. This chapter, the final one in my thesis, explores how the women in Croatia perceive the imperative of activity. It is explored how the participants, who have taken part in active labour market policies, understand the emphasis on activity in this context. The participants, the chapter shows, see through the imperative of activity. In fact, they expose active labour market policies largely as a cover for exploiting young and educated people. While their main problem with these policies is an inadequate salary, the participants argue that a lack of proper salary also presents an obstacle for them reaching autonomy. As a consequence of receiving rather low income, young people are increasingly dependent on both their parents and employers. The chapter links this with Sloterdijk's (2001) concept of 'the structure of postponement', according to which we, as neoliberal subjects, are increasingly postponing what we consider to be 'really living', thereby fostering the excessive production of neoliberalism. Following the introduction of various governmental techniques that delay our autonomy, it is argued that the active citizen has become a highly infantilized citizen. In this context, it is emphasised that neoliberal power operates primarily through advice, supervision, care etc. and is, for this reason, a pastoral form of power (Foucault, 2009). The chapter also focuses on understanding why we, as neoliberal subjects, while often recognising harmfulness of neoliberal discourse, nonetheless perpetuate this type of discourse. Following the understanding of ideology as put forward by Sloterdijk (2001) and Žižek (2008), it is argued that an ironic or cynical distance that subjects establish in relation to a particular ideological process is crucial for the effectiveness of ideology. What is important, from the perspective of neoliberal performativity, is not whether we believe in the imperative of activity but do we act according to this imperative or, in other words, have we adopted an active lifestyle. Finally, it is explored how the participants, who themselves portray activity as a virtue, see 'those people' who are not as keen to adopt an active lifestyle. The passivity of 'those people', the chapter shows, has an important role in neoliberal performativity, acting as a norm in opposition to which an active neoliberal subjectivity has performatively constituted.

### 7.1. Active labour market policies

While analysing neoliberalism, Foucault (2008) argued that the neoliberal subject is, above all, the active subject. The liberal subject, on the other hand, does not ever really internalise the imperative of calculability and, for that reason, Foucault saw liberalism as a passive governmentality. Thus, it can be said that Foucault saw a highlighted activity of the subject as a distinguishing feature of neoliberalism, while we should bear in mind that, as Rose (2004: 164) clarifies, 'it was not a question here of active involvement in public affairs, in local democracy, in the conduct of politics. Rather, the model of the active citizen was one who was an entrepreneur of him- or herself'. However, presented in this manner, one might be misled into thinking that the imperative of activity operates rather smoothly, as it has been internalised in on-going processes of establishing neoliberalism and it now only needs to manifest in various social phenomena.

Active labour market policies (ALMPs<sup>12</sup>) (Levačić, 2015; OECD, 2017; Rose, 2004; Walters, 1997, 1996) offer a rather illustrative example of Foucault's emphasis that neoliberal governmentality is primarily an active governmentality. In fact, one could nowadays hardly come across a more illustrative example. Introduced in Croatia in 2010, these measures are primarily reserved for fresh graduates looking for their first employment. If one would want to be a bit cynical, one could follow Rose (2004: 162) and say 'the so-called active unemployment policies emerging in Europe, Australia and the United States. These stress "active job search", maintaining "job readiness" [...] experts happily promote a whole range of little pedagogic techniques, training schemes, skills packs and so forth to seek to implant these aspirations in the unemployed self.' Leaving cynicism aside for a moment, it could be said that the main aim of these policies is to ease the transition from studying to

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<sup>12</sup> The acronym ALMPs will be used in the following text in order to ease the unpacking of active labour market policies. When it comes to abbreviating, we should not fail to recall Marcuse's (2007: 97-98) remark: 'Note on abridgment. NATO, SEATO, UN, AFL-CIO, AEC, but also USSR, DDR, etc. Most of these abbreviations are perfectly reasonable and justified by the length of the unabbreviated designata. However, one might venture to see in some of them a "cunning of Reason" – the abbreviation may help to repress undesired questions. NATO does not suggest what North Atlantic Treaty Organization says, namely, a treaty among the nations on the North-Atlantic – in which case one might ask questions about the membership of Greece and Turkey. USSR abbreviates Socialism and Soviet; DDR: democratic. UN dispenses with undue emphasis on "united" [...] The abbreviations denote that and only that which is institutionalized in such a way that the transcending connotation is cut off. The meaning is fixed, doctored, loaded. Once it has become an official vocable, constantly repeated in general usage, "sanctioned" by the intellectuals, it has lost all cognitive value and serves merely for recognition of an unquestionable fact.'

the market, in a way perfecting the skills of a young employee, thus making her more in line with practical skills that are required by the market. While implementing these measures, the Ministry of Labour and Pension System of the Republic of Croatia<sup>13</sup> (2017a, emphasis added) is 'particularly interested in fostering *activation* and education of the young and the long-term unemployed, and reaching a better employability of the unemployed through an aim-oriented education'. On top of this, these policies are here to motivate or, in more accurate terms, financially support those employers who decide to employ young and inexperienced graduates (Ministry, 2017a, 2017b). While this might seem as a win-win situation, the interviews I conducted indicate that the participants perceive the outcome of these measures as far less victorious.

### 7.1.1. Salary redefined

Among the participants, ALMPs<sup>14</sup> are mostly perceived as harmful, damaging for their current status of educated young people. Their dissatisfaction is quite openly expressed:

Me: What are ALMPs?

Sara: These are the evil. [Laughing]

Me: What kind of policies are these?

Sara: These are employment policies of our state, where, which sound awesome, like...so that the young can, as soon as they have completed their university studies, find a job and, in general, for

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<sup>13</sup> In further text just the Ministry.

<sup>14</sup> To be precise, 'active labour market policies' is an umbrella term for a set of different measures 'with the aim of enacting employment, additional education of workers and preserving jobs' (Ministry, 2017c). These are not restricted to the young and, in 2017, their exact number in Croatia has decreased from 41 to 9 (Ministry, 2017c). However, in this chapter I deal with only one of these measures, though by far the most well-known one in Croatia, namely 'occupational training without commencing employment'. Considering that the concept of 'active labour market policies' is the superordinate and a more commonly used term (OECD, 2017; Rose, 2004; Walters, 1997, 1996), I have decided to use it instead of the less well-known 'occupational training without commencing employment'. This will not significantly distort my analysis and will make the text more accessible to the readers who are not as familiar with the Croatian context.

the period of one year. [...] but these are mostly misused, in fact not misused but exploited.

Sara clearly shows what might best be called a double character of ALMPs, i.e. these measures 'sound awesome', but one mostly ends up 'not misused but exploited'. The main problem with these policies, as identified among the participants, is an obviously inadequate salary. In general, the employees who work as a part of ALMPs are legally required to work full time, for the period of up to two years, while being paid 2400 Croatian kunas (kn) per month.<sup>15</sup> Gone are the days when the salary of university educated person could ensure a normal or at least a basic living standard, as we can see in Sara's case:

Me: What can you cover with the income you receive monthly?

Sara: Well, I'm lucky as I live with my parents, so I, you know, don't pay for the food.

Me: Would it be possible for you to move on your own, if you were to want that?

Sara: No, no way, I mean there are no chances.

Me: You are then covering with it...?

Sara: Well, coffees [laughing]. I afford myself a little meal in some sort of restaurant [...] I buy myself a book, that I of course order online as they are more expensive in Croatia, and I'm managing to save a bit on the side...I mean, I'm trying to save.

The salary is, as we can see, no longer meant to cover one's elementary living expenses, namely rent and food. The meaning of salary is redefined in the context of ALMPs and it now effectively means a decent pocket money, as Darija argued:

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<sup>15</sup> Equivalent to around £280. The average salary in Croatia is currently around 8360 kn (equivalent to around £1000).

That is my pocket money, as I cannot afford myself to live on my own, so I live with my parents and then that is my pocket money, so that I don't have to ask them to afford me anything.

Such income, situated in limbo between a salary and a pocket money, causes rather odd feelings among the participants, as Lidija said:

Well, that is something that currently, to say at least, leaves me frustrated as I cannot save. I mean I can while I live with my parents...I feel like a rich person as I have a pocket money of 2400 kn and I don't pay the bills and I can do whatever I want with it.

As the amount of money slightly exceeds what is usually considered to be a generous pocket money, she can even save a bit. Adding complexity to this elusive notion of income, Sara shared with me that 'every month, on my bank account, I do not get my salary, but a "compensation for the unemployed". It is called like that'. This might as well be seen as a slight discursive lag in Croatian bureaucratic system and I am quite sure that the system will soon catch-up – it only takes a proper public relations officer, but it nicely shows a compensatory character of ALMPs. Sara is no longer unemployed and simply passive, but is now compensated with the option to be active, even if it means working full time for a pocket money.

This whole story is not foreign to me and I am by no means situated in some external space from where I am objectively observing how the young women in Croatia experience neoliberal market policies. As I have already mentioned in the chapter *Governmentality and Beyond*, I had myself attended a meeting in the Croatian Employment Service. Among other interesting information, I was presented with the option to choose whether I want to sign up for ALMPs or would I prefer to opt out. That was for me to choose, as a newly graduated and unemployed person is *not* automatically added to the pool of candidates, as is made perfectly clear in the frequently asked questions and answers section of the Ministry's website (2017d):

Q: Are there certain consequences if an unemployed person refuses to conclude the contract for occupational training?



A: The person who refuses to conclude the contract for occupational training is not being removed from the registry of the unemployed nor are her rights while unemployed discontinued or suspended.

Finding yourself, as both the participants in this research and myself had, in a situation where there are almost no jobs offered apart from those that operate under ALMPs, is indeed not something desirable. Furthermore, for any more decent job you need a working experience, while taking part in ALMPs requires 'only' a professional qualification. At the same time, nonetheless, working as a part of ALMPs is necessarily preceded by a free choice that is here to let the Employment Service know that you find neoliberal policies, at least nominally, desirable. If you want us to help, please first confess. After all, if these are not something that you want for yourself, then what was the point of signing up for ALMPs at the first place? In addition, you can always choose to be removed from the list of prospective ALMPs employees. No one is standing in your way but yourself.

### **7.1.2. The children of activity**

When asked whether they consider gender to be relevant in the context of ALMPs, the participants told me they think that both men and women experience quite similar issues and that there is not much to differentiate at this point. This could be explained by a universalising character of these market policies, where prospective employees are all (mis)treated in the same manner and perceived simply as a free and temporary workforce. In *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx and Engels (1978: 475) argued that 'the bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part. The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations'. Could it then be said that, in this context, the liberal subject, relieved of any identity affiliations, has appeared as an empirical entity? That it, paradoxically, took neoliberalism for the liberal subject to be born as 'modern industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the great factory of the industrial capitalist' (Engels and Marx, 1978: 791)? Such reasoning holds to a certain extent. The profit of industry, in the context of ALMPs, largely surpasses cultural particularities, including gender. No one is excluded; everyone has an equal right to take part in ALMPs. The industrial

capitalist, however, is not simply relieved of patriarchal mastery and there are places where gender appears in the context of ALMPs. For example, Sara highlighted:

The problem is that, what I really think it is, that a woman must, in some sort of my age, make a decision what to do. You know, I think it's a problem, which has to do with nothing but biology, that we, at one point, must...I mean it's not that we must...but if you want to have a child, you must have it in that sort of time frame. I don't want to have a child in my forties. I think that I should have it around my thirtieth, but then again it seems to me too short, five years since I've completed my university studies, to experience what I should experience, especially in these conditions, where I cannot afford myself anything.

In this account, Sara identifies something rather interesting. What is at stake here is not 'merely' the problem of making a decision on having a child. Indeed, 'young motherhood is constituted as a site of failure, not primarily because of a perceived sexual immorality, but because maternity signifies an unwillingness to work' (Tyler, 2011: 22). This, however, is not why Dunja is reluctant in her decision on having a child. This particular problem seems to be a gendered part of a more general narrative, more precisely the imperative of postponing our desires, putting them off until the time is finally right for us to go ahead and do what we really want. For reaching our aims we should firstly be independent, i.e. able to make our own moves by using our own resources. However, a young person does not have many options but to work as a part of ALMPs, while these very same measures seem to stand in her way of reaching autonomy. Darija complains about a similar issue related to her independence:

Me: What do you find to be the most aggravating about ALMPs?

Darija: Apart from the money?

Me: In general...so the money?

Darija: The money. That is the main thing. Well...sometimes it also bothers you that you don't really have independence. It's great that someone is standing behind you, that you are not taking full responsibility, then again it's also sometimes annoying that you cannot react independently as you would like to, that you are dependent on someone else.

ALMPs are prolonging the period of dependency, 'you don't really have independence'. That can sometimes be comforting, but it can also become a source of frustration. Like any other childhood period, after all. While Rose (2004: 161) argued that 'the new citizen is required to engage in a ceaseless work of training and retraining, skilling and reskilling, enhancement of credentials and preparation for a life of incessant job seeking: life is to become a continuous economic capitalization of the self', my research shows that this new, active citizen is also a highly infantilised citizen, literally the child of activity.

Many perplexing questions arise when ALMPs are explored. Why young graduates need any further training in order to satisfy market demands? Why is a degree no longer enough? If the university has not prepared students for a prospective career, what was the point of studying? If a further skilling is mandatory for almost any job nowadays, were they then deskilled while studying? The contradictions accumulate. Let us also not forget that one does not 'grow up' after being done with working as a part of ALMPs. This is how Ema, a university educated person, feels after completing her occupational training:

Well, I'm trying not to be frustrated. I'm trying all around, I mean I attend job interviews non-stop...that is my life, you know, constantly on job interviews. I volunteer a lot, as I'm gathering experience regardless of being paid or not. I don't want not to have the experience. I work, you know, I'm looking for jobs all around, both those that are and that aren't in my profession, and I somehow try to be, you know, positive about that I'll, one day, maybe have a decent salary.

As we can learn from Ema, completing five years of studies in addition to a year of occupational training can quite easily turn out not to be enough for a more relaxed, or should we dare to say passive, lifestyle. Quite on the contrary, now when she is done with both studying and training, she cannot do much more but to satisfy herself with voluntary work and only hope that one day she will work for a decent salary. It is always one more training to attend, one more experience to gain, one more unpaid job etc. before one finally gets a salary that enables her to settle down and establish a normal life, as a proper adult. Showing that neoliberal discourse does not implicate a suspicion of ends, Sloterdijk (2001: 94) describes the structure of postponement:

Before we 'really live', we always have just one more matter to attend to, just one more precondition to fulfil, just one more temporarily more important wish to satisfy, just one more account to settle. And with this just one more and one more and one more arises that structure of postponement and indirect living that keeps the system of excessive production going. The latter, of course, always knows how to present itself as an unconditionally 'good end' that deludes us with its light as though it were a real goal but that whenever we approach it recedes once more into the distance.

With her maturity postponed, the active citizen is a mature infant, a grownup baby. However, it is important to bear in mind that 'a baby recognised in a mature person is neither a delayed phase in its development nor a psychopathological occurrence, such as some sort of infantile regression, but a political being, *zoon politikon par excellence*' (Buden, 2012b: 40). While chasing for those real goals that must be achieved, so that she can at last 'really live', the active citizen is provided with a pocket money. A salary is, after all, reserved for the adults.

#### **7.1.2.1. Children of the revolution and their descendants**

Such neoliberal infantilisation has succeeded yet another process of infantilisation. More precisely, as this discourse still circulates, it is better to say that neoliberal infantilisation relies or leans on this, preceding system of meanings. With a legal introduction of democracy in Croatia, the need for a dedicated improvement, in order to fit democratic standards of the West, has been recognised. It has been

assumed that our democracy is still in diapers and that a certain upbringing for democracy will be necessary. This should then be followed by various exams of democracy which are here as we yet need to prove, to ourselves and the West, our democratic value (Buden, 2012b). Our democracy is, as it has been explained to us, still growing up. True, it is more and more mature, but it is still suffering from children's illnesses. It is still in baby shoes, but is making its first steps (Jović, 2010). There is hope, but no queue-jumping please! If disorder were to be allowed, balkanisation would befall us all...behave!

Paradoxes of such discourse are numerous. While exploring this process of infantilisation, Buden (2012b: 39) argued that 'the very language of postcommunism reveals the paradox that signifies the biggest scandal of recent history: the people who have just, in democratic revolutions of 1989/90., proved their political maturity have become babies overnight!' While the so-called Western world, Buden continues, was busy portraying communism as a vicious beast against which every available resource must be invested, those very same people, who are now presented as babies, defeated it almost with their bare hands. What the author also underscores, far more important for my argument here, is that the people who have taken a part in those revolutions have, as a consequence of such infantilisation, been relieved of any responsibility. They have literally become children of the revolution, babies.

Now, a baby is understood to be perfectly innocent and no sane person would hold a baby accountable for its actions. Noting this, it should not come as a surprise that, firstly, the responsibility for overthrowing communism had been taken away and the need for further skilling in democratic values stressed. Secondly, postcommunist society, 'as a "baby", [it] is responsible neither for the misdeeds of postcommunism, for the criminal privatisation in which the wealth of entire nations has overnight become the property of a few' (Buden, 2012b: 55). Thus, both achievements and misdeeds had been taken away from the people and they were left with the unbearable lightness of innocence.

However insightful Buden's (2012b) approach in *Zone of Transition: On the End of Post-communism* is, it seems to be more appropriate for the analysis of nineties or early two-thousands than of current society. For Buden, the zone of postcommunism is also the zone of neoliberalism, postcommunism *is* neoliberalism. In this project, nonetheless, I have decided to use the signifier 'neoliberalism' instead of 'postcommunism' – children of the revolution have now 'grown up' and this should

finally be taken into account. They have overcome 'children's illnesses' and passed their 'exams in democratic reasoning'. What's more, they have been allowed in the European Union. Things are so contemporary that even George Soros, the patron of postcommunist discourse, has decided to move his funds further to the East. Acknowledging this, there is no reason whatsoever to keep Croatia in some sort of postcommunist limbo. Furthermore, neoliberal discourse is not simply imposed by the so-called Western world and to deploy such a perspective, with which Buden flirts in his analysis, is to engage in yet another process of infantilisation. Decisively breaking with any innocence attributed, internally or externally, to postcommunist societies, this project argues in favour of understanding Croatia as a contemporary neoliberal agent, *while* recognising its geopolitical and other specificities.

This, however, is not to say that the discourse of infantilisation has now disappeared and that we should focus on more serious, neoliberal issues. The process of infantilisation has taken a neoliberal form and we should proceed with our analysis while taking this into account. ALMPs, as a neoliberal issue *par excellence*, present us with many opportunities to see how the young have become even younger. The individual working as a part of ALMPs, for example, is not only asked to attend further skilling but is appointed with a supervisor. After completing bachelor's and master's thesis, both carefully supervised, a graduate has once again found herself under supervision, where the supervisor is presented as a sort of moral lighthouse for the young that have found themselves lost in the cruel world of market. The employer is, in a way, a postmodern shepherd of his flock. At this point we should make it clear that neoliberal power is, above all, a pastoral power. Accordingly, it operates primarily through advice, supervision, care etc. (Foucault, 2009). The advice, however, is mandatory. One cannot choose to gain experience on her own *and* work as a part of ALMPs. Rather, she should seek an advice, always keeping one eye on the possibility of any additional feedback. If in doubt, as any child that knows how to behave, she should ask. There is also no reason for her not to seek advice from the experts in fellow neoliberal countries. Everything is online nowadays and, if she was only active enough to read Berkeley's Career Center *Tips for Internship Success* (2017), she would already know: 'If you aren't sure if it's OK to eat the donuts in the company kitchen, ask first'.

The supervisor, on the other hand, must provide continuous feedback, even when she feels that there is simply nothing further to advise (Salecl, 2010).<sup>16</sup> After all, the flock consist of the young and, following the Ministry's (2017d) encyclopaedic entry, 'as we are talking about young people, their main characteristic and the obstacle for entering the labour market is exactly the lack of work experience'. However, as with democracy, there is hope. ALMPs are here for you to 'make your first steps at the labour market' (Ministry, 2017c). Entry to the market is not blocked, it is merely postponed, so one just has to wait (Vadolas, 2012). But, again, no queue-jumping! The young should, while waiting, take any advice that is out there and patiently learn how to enter the mysterious world of labour market.

The neoliberal condition is, as we have seen, not any less paradoxical than the postcommunist one. One of ALMPs, which I mention here to further exemplify a paradoxical character of neoliberalism, comes with a curious name 'Permanent seasonal'. This policy, itself a fairly obvious contradiction in terms, is not called 'Permanent seasonal worker', but just 'Permanent seasonal'. This way it appears more relaxed and it seems almost as if the Ministry is trying to act kind of cool in order to be more in line with the jargon of young people. Due to its childish vigour, the youth, in contrast to their old folks, settles for no long term-commitment. The youth is free exactly due to its insistence on flexibility. It is the attitude that makes the youth young, and not some boring number, so naturally there is no age restriction when it comes to this particular policy. Furthermore, the policy is advertised in the booklet, published by the Ministry (2017a), where it is announced:

With the changes of criteria, the conditions for using the measure have been additionally simplified, so that the employer must keep a permanent seasonal for only one season in employment, compared

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<sup>16</sup> While this project is not focused on the interconnection of education and pastoral power, for the sake of breaking the relation between the author and his research, at this point it should be 'declared' that I am, myself, tutoring a number of undergraduate students, while being regularly supervised and advised. The feedback I give to the students, advising them how to improve their essays, is monitored by a course convenor who regularly provides me with a written feedback on my feedback. We are now talking metafeedback. On top of this, my work is carefully monitored via 'an online platform for academic staff, administrative staff and PGR students to record and track key progression milestones throughout the student's programme from the point of registration to examination' (University of Manchester, 2017). Academia is, let us not conveniently forget, a very fine example of both pastoral and neoliberal power.

to the previous period, when she must have kept her for three seasons.

If the language of postcommunism was scandalous, as Buden argued, then it has most definitely got a proper successor in neoliberal discourse. One is nowadays asked to be a permanent seasonal (worker), which could most accurately be translated into something like a permanently underpaid person, and the fact that working conditions have just become more insecure is put forward as a strategy to attract a prospective employee.

### **7.1.3. Ambiguous character of activity**

Noting this, while money might be one of the motives for working as a part of ALMPs, it is by no means the most significant one. We should look for the motivation for this practice somewhere else. Is it then activity? After all, the agent in the Employment Service taught me it is better to be active than simply idle, regardless of a salary. The participants were asked to reflect on the notion of activity in the context of ALMPs and it could be said with confidence that the idea of activity is by no means celebrated among the participants, as we can see from Darija's example:

Me: But when you say the policies of *active* employment, how do you see this active part?

Darija: It was active in my case as I was actually forced to go work there [laughing], but it turned out good for me, as for a lot of people it does not turn out good, as this *active* eventually turns out to be making coffee and such things, so I don't really have a good opinion on this idea. (Emphasis in original)

The emphasis on activity is, thus, recognised as a cover for exploiting young employees. Activity appears as something positive, a moral virtue, and definitely less malicious than exploitation. An employer can now take pride in taking a new employee, in actively contributing to the economy by participating in contemporary market policies, even if this actually means getting a free waitress in the office, for



'making coffee and such things'. Sara also argued that activity masks yet another process:

Me: When it's said that ALMPs are *active*, what does this active mean to you?

Sara: To me it means apparently reducing the number of unemployed people and in fact, you know, it is not really happening.

Me: You think they are introducing these to hide the number of the unemployed?

Sara: Yes, of course, in my opinion that is their main reason here. I mean we are counted as employed people where it suits them, where it doesn't suit them we are the unemployed. (Emphasis in original)

Activity, therefore, is perceived as a cover, mostly for the levels of unemployment in Croatia and the exploitation of young graduates who feel that, due to their education, they are entitled to a better living standard. The interviewees, as it can also be seen from the example below, see through this measure:

Me: What happened to you after this, at the end of your occupational training? Have they kept you, were there any signs that they will keep you?

Ema: There were some signs. However, they have not kept me. Neither me nor any other trainees.

Me: And what was the explanation for that?

Ema: Not looking for workers currently.

Me: Do you think that is true?

Ema: Workers are always needed, workers are always needed.

Me: And what did they do then? Employed new trainees?

Ema: New trainees. And every year a new round of trainees. And it will be like that as long as this measure goes on.

Ema's sober description of ALMPs' circular logic indicates that these measures are not only a dissatisfying experience while they last, for a year or two, but that they neither ensure much in the future. In order to realise this, one does not need to examine a number of cases in which the trainees were not employed after their training has come to an end. The outcome of such policies could have been predicted well before they were even set in action, simply by taking a brief look at how these were meant to be implemented. It would be rather naïve to think that employers would prefer paying a proper salary and employing someone full or part time, while they can get a free workforce. On top of this, we are not talking about any type of workforce but about young, educated and state-sponsored employees. Such reasoning would not only be simple but based on the peculiar conception of an employer as someone who is not really interested in making a profit, while, at the same time, the Ministry (2017a) underlines that ALMPs 'can be accessed by the employers who act in a profitable manner'. The interviewees are not naïve and, accordingly, they mostly do not even expect that they will be kept at the place of their occupational training, though sometimes they do hope for such, indeed very rare, outcome.

#### **7.1.4. Cynical reasoning and the imperative of activity**

If the participants clearly disregard the imperative of activity, does it then make sense to say that this is what neoliberal governmentality is about? If we do not believe in a certain ideological process, could then this same process be effective? In order to resolve this apparent contradiction, this research deploys understanding of ideology as offered by Sloterdijk (2001) in his *Critique of Cynical Reason* and later on popularised largely by Žižek (2008) in his capital piece *The Sublime Object of*

*Ideology.* In this perspective, it is argued that ideology is not at its most effective as a consequence of blind obedience exercised by subjects. For example, the individuals who were recognised by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia as dangerous for the system were not those who were distrustful or cynical in relation to communism. Rather, the Party was afraid and had never relied on those who truly believed in the idea of communism, actually read Marx's work etc. (Salecl, 2002; Žižek, 2008). What makes ideology so incredibly effective is exactly a certain ironic or cynical distance that subjects have established in relation to a particular ideological process. Being aware of this, there is no reason for us to hold a strong belief in the idea of activity. On the contrary, we can feel free to say that the imperative of activity is a joke. However, this ironic distance, maintained between the imperative of activity and ourselves, paradoxically brings us closer to neoliberal ideology. Irony, or cynicism, is exactly what is required for a proper decoding of ideological message and what ensures that subjects uphold by a certain set of proclaimed norms. Developing his understanding of ideology, Žižek (2008: 25) argues that 'the cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he none the less still insists upon the mask. The formula, as proposed by Sloterdijk, would then be: "they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it"'. The cynical subject no longer suffers from false consciousness, which makes this concept especially suitable for the approach taken in my project.

Could it then be said, in the context of my research, that the participants know very well that these market policies are a cover for exploitation and are here to disguise the level of unemployment, but still, they choose to participate? Could the participants be seen as cynical subjects? After all, what counts is that they are doing it, thereby perpetuating the norms or, as Salecl (2002: 39) puts it, 'normalization succeeds as long as people accept the discourse of power, even if they do not believe in the official ideology and maintain a cynical distance from it'. Cynical or not, it does not matter as the outcome, namely working as a part of neoliberal policies, is nevertheless the same.

I want to make it clear that this parallel should not be drawn in this way and no participant in my project ought to be seen as a cynical subject. Sloterdijk developed the concept of cynical reasoning in order to explore the general condition of contemporary society and, that being said, it would be pointless to empiricise this notion through some sort of psychological denunciation. Cynicism interests me as a

part of neoliberal condition and not as a character trait of any particular participant. More precisely, the reason why I engage with Sloterdijk's work here is to emphasise that while *we*, as neoliberal subjects, might not believe in the meaningfulness of certain social imperative, for example the imperative of activity, this nonetheless does not prevent us from abiding by it. Just the opposite, it often ensures that we are still taking a part in the game, thereby perpetuating the very same neoliberal rules from which we are often suffering. Neoliberal subjects are, therefore, repressed by their own freedom.

This, however, is not to pass a moral judgement and to imply, as if this would bring us a quick fix, that we should simply choose to abolish all neoliberal imperatives. Salecl's (2010: 115) claim, on which this research relies, that the neoliberal subject is a 'choice-enabled person' should be read together with her observation that 'medicine now glorifies the idea of choice and self-mastery. A doctor no longer plays the role of an authority, advising what course of action is best for the patient; now he often simply tells the patient what their options are, leaving them to make a decision and to give (or refuse) their informed consent' (Salecl, 2010: 54). Even though we are indeed free to choose, choosing not to choose between giving or refusing informed consent might result in ending our lives. The notion of performativity should not be used lightly and when discussing the performativity of choice we should always bear in mind that performativity consists of 'a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer' (Butler, 2011: 178). This project works towards 'the understanding of performativity not as the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names, but, rather, as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains' (Butler, 2011: xii). Being formed by choices does not mean that we can swiftly shift this regulatory context. We necessarily repeat existing norms while choosing, but the way we repeat these norms *might* contribute to gradually reworking existing power relations, thereby taking us beyond neoliberalism. Once again, there are no quick fixes for reworking power relations and to say that neoliberal subjects are self-governed through their choices is not to invest them with omnipotence. What such reasoning would omit is that our choices are always already situated in a certain regulatory context that exceeds the one who chooses. Ultimately, such reasoning would not be much different than the one that enables neoliberal imperatives, a fine example of which is Berkeley's Career Center (2017) advice for prospective interns: 'Don't be

sick or late often. Choose your sick days with care.' Both neoliberal and aforementioned understanding of choice rely on investing the contemporary subject with omnipotence.

#### **7.1.5. Lost in activity**

This discussion should not prevent us from asking what is apparently a simple and closely related question, namely who has structured this regulatory context, i.e. who is to be blamed for implementing neoliberal market policies? Is it simply the government? While the participants were ready to expose the background of such policies, they found it difficult to say who is responsible for a situation in which they have found themselves. One of the participants blames the state:

Me: Who do you blame for these policies, generally for your position now?

Lidija: The state.

Without any doubt, it was the state that has formally implemented these measures, more precisely it was the Social Democratic Party of Croatia. This, once again, makes it apparent that the government is not minimal in neoliberal society. On the contrary, and in line with the point of view adopted in this project, neoliberal government is distinguished from liberal government precisely in its willingness to actively intervene in order to make society a more suitable environment for market mechanisms. These interventions, nonetheless, should not be examined simply as a product of governmental think tanks, as a set of orders that have come from above. Rather, these should be situated in a broader neoliberal discourse which does not stem from institutions but from a particular set of meanings that have become hegemonic in contemporary society. Bearing this in mind, I have probed the issue of responsibility further:

Me: What do you think that they should have done?

Lidija: Well, you know, I think that the root of this problem is very deep...no, I don't know how to, I don't know where to start from.

It is this indecisiveness, a certain inability to identify the addressee of her own dissatisfaction which indicates that we should be more radical while analysing neoliberalism and see through the state in order to examine the contours of neoliberal governmentality. Another participant also expresses this lack of clarity when it comes to saying who is to be blamed for ALMPs:

Sara: It is not even that the employers are evil. You know, it's also bad for them, it's not easy for them to pay a *brutto* salary for someone.

Me: So it is the state that exploits here and not so much the employers?

Sara: It is hard to find out who exactly is exploiting whom. There are the employers who exploit, but they don't know it, as they think that they are paying you by the fact that you are working for them, as they are some sort of big shots...a lot of things are happening.

Sara, interestingly, identifies evil employers and the state as false bottoms, thus concluding that 'it is hard to find out who exactly is exploiting whom', it is hard to identify the source of power in neoliberal society. This happened even after I had, in an intentionally suggestive manner, asked her whether she thinks that it is the state that exploits. The power does not stem from evil employers or the state, as has been recognised by the interviewees. Rather, 'the fundamental point of anchorage of the relationships, even if they are embodied and crystallized in an institution, is to be found outside the institution' (Foucault, 1982: 791), in a particular governmentality. The source of power, strictly speaking, does not exist. What exist are numerous embodiments of power, not all of which are equally influential and neither of which can exhaust the entire field of power relations. For that reason, 'a lot of things are happening' that exceed our abilities to explain what is going on. Such experience of being lost in activity can be seen in my conversation with Ema:

Me: Why do you think this [not being able to find a job after her occupational training] is happening, why is this happening?

Ema: Well, I have no idea, you know, honestly. Because of too many things, you know, I think that is too complicated for us to even comprehend...simply everything has gone to hell, you know.

My analysis has also failed to provide a comprehensive theory of why has neoliberal discourse established. This, however, is not a downside of my research or Ema's reply to my question. There is no greater cause that would serve as an anchorage point of neoliberalism. In fact, it is not relevant to ask why neoliberalism has established, but what exactly a hegemonic set of meanings, in other words governmentality, consists of. While posing this question, let us make it clear, it is not presupposed that those meanings have established as they are more rational than other approaches still circulating in society. Certain governmentality is established not according to a greater rationality but through a set of practices that have contingently – not swiftly or accidentally – become accepted as rational. The superior rationality of neoliberal reasoning is, thus, retroactively constituted. This might leave us with the impression that, as Ema argued, 'simply everything has gone to hell' in contemporary society. Indeed, on a personal level this multiplicity overwhelms as neoliberalism has proven to be incredibly capable of deploying contradictions to serve its own perpetuation (Butler *et al.*, 2000; Fraser, 2013; Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). We might reject the imperative of activity, but we will nonetheless be active. ALMPs are clearly degrading, but we still bear in mind that we, as neoliberal subjects, ought to develop our skills constantly and become more competitive. The income from ALMPs does not satisfy our basic demands, but the alternative is to sit back home while others are becoming more and more competitive. Alright, it is not a salary, but a pocket money is better than nothing...

No matter how confusing it might appear when we think about our individual destinies, this multiplicity of contradictions seems to fit quite well under a common denominator of neoliberal discourse. Such everyday life, saturated with contradictions that lead us to conclude that this 'is too complicated for us to even comprehend', in fact portrays a highly organised, neoliberal society. With time, these contradictions might as well become somewhat less apparent as the tradition of neoliberalism is yet to be properly invented in Croatia. On the other hand, there are no guarantees for such an outcome and this is a fairly transformative lesson of the governmentality perspective (Arts *et al.*, 2009; Bröckling *et al.*, 2011; Burchell *et*

*al.*, 1991; Foucault, 1990). Things might take a surprising direction and a different discourse might as well take the place of a current hegemonic discourse. There is no inherent rationality behind neoliberal governmentality that must be respected due to its intrinsic qualities. However, as we will now see, neoliberal governmentality is currently developing without any major obstacles and has found its way into the process of subjectification since our early age, namely childhood.

#### **7.1.6. Fostering activation**

When we read that the Ministry (2017a, emphasis added) is particularly interested in 'fostering *activation* and education of young and long-term unemployed people, and reaching a better employability of the unemployed through an aim-oriented education', we should not be misled into thinking that such discourse has been simply produced by the government. Thus, it should not surprise us that we can find a rather similar discourse when it comes to children's upbringing. Paula, herself a rather successful consultant, told me about raising her son:

One example. My child, on Saturday, for the sake of independence, goes on his own to get bread in the morning. And he, on his own, prepares breakfast for us. And I leave him 10 kn to buy one loaf of bread. And I let him know what kind of bread. He returns with bread and with some kind of chocolate and says that he must return down there, in a grocery, to give a lady a few more kunas, as many as he owes. Well, now, that is something that makes me absolutely crazy. Meaning, my own educational activity of that financial management has failed with my own child. Well, you know, he lives here. And now we are practising, from Saturday to Saturday. We still haven't accomplished that he would buy just bread and that he would not buy anything else and that he wouldn't return down there to bring the lady some kind of money for the debt that remains. See, everyone lives like that here [...] Me, for example, I don't have a negative balance on my account, I don't have a credit card. Therefore, I don't have such a lifestyle.



Paula did not need the government to let her know that people should be developed 'through an aim-oriented education'. Quite on the contrary, during the interview she made it clear to me that the government is a part of the problem as it is, just like the majority of people, irresponsible with money. Furthermore, in her opinion, it is too late for austerity measures and the bankruptcy of Croatia is inevitable:

We will never make a radical reform as it cannot be done neither through our balance nor through the budgets of our ministries nor public enterprises and so on...for the same reason as it cannot be done in the collective consciousness [...] If you ask me where Croatia is going, it is bankruptcy. I absolutely claim that and it will surely be so.

For that reason she is discouraged and makes the remark 'Well, you know, he lives here'. This is what motivates her further to practice with her son and why she is 'absolutely crazy' about his inability to refrain himself from repeatedly falling into 'debt' for a chocolate bar. For Paula that is not just a banality of childhood, but a step towards something else, namely adopting an irresponsible lifestyle. Of course, she is aware that he is just a boy, but would still like him to practice and progress in a certain direction. A debt is a debt, no matter how insignificant it might appear. Paula is not inexperienced when it comes to making herself active and responsible. When she had suddenly lost her job, instead of waiting for something to turn up, she decided to create herself a new job:

I can't understand *those people* who are just waiting for someone to offer them a job. At the moment when I had realised where a niche in the market is, meaning what type of consultants will be in demand, I recognised that I don't have those skills and that I need them, so I decided to accept the offer that was financially humiliating. And I did my job really extraordinarily well. What I provided for my clients was two or three times more than what had been planned. I had to prove myself as much, which turned out very good in the end as I was straightaway in the first round for the next project. I passed some interviews just like that, just *pro forma*.

Now, this second part brings you a very large sum of money. But what should I have done at that moment, keep on sending my job applications? (Emphasis added)

Paula soon started her own business and became self-employed. Thus, she had accepted 'the offer that was financially humiliating' in order to create her future self, to prepare herself for a job in the company that she will run. Apart from demonstrating her skills as a calculative subject, she also made it clear that the discourse of inventing your own job is not 'just a discourse'. This discourse has, basically, structured her existence.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, these are the values that she would like to see developed in her own child. She does not want him to become one of 'those people' that just wait for someone to offer them a job. Later on in the interview, nonetheless, she did mention that she sympathises with 'those people' and that she had, herself, sent hundreds of job applications all around. In other words, it took her quite some time and a lot of effort to make herself properly active and to establish a proper distance from 'those people'.

'Those people' are now on the other side of her and other people who are like her, i.e. active and ready to create a job for themselves. They are significantly more than merely unemployed people (Dean, 1995; Walters, 1997, 1996). 'Those people' are passive subjects, not as ready to internalise the imperative of activity. If we bear in mind that liberalism is a passive governmentality, they could be understood as liberal subjects. Without a doubt, 'those people' are much closer to liberal than neoliberal subjects, but insistence on these terms might be misleading at this point as we could easily end up overlooking that, when active subjects refer to them, 'those people' come with a sort of tacit moral characterisation. Being compassionate, but also taking us a step further from sympathy for 'those people', Nada makes these tacit matters more explicit:

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<sup>17</sup> This is not to say that everyone can indeed invent his or her job. Lidija, working as a part of ALMPs, argued that the discourse of self-employment is 'a sort of elitisation again as it implies a certain stratum of people who belong to a higher intellectual stratum [...] but that simply excludes the mass'. It is important to remind that the aim of this research is not to expose the truth behind neoliberal discourse but to explore how are neoliberal imperatives experienced, how do these hegemonic norms structure our everyday lives.

There are no jobs. That is the worst. Kids would get employed, but they have nowhere to get employed, you know. Though there is one more thing, what is my opinion, that is my own personal opinion. My opinion is that people nowadays won't do just whatever, but instead they choose a job and they, how should I put it...There are jobs just to make it clear, there are jobs, especially here in Zagreb there are jobs, but people won't do just whatever. There. When I had been offered a grocery and a counter, I accepted straightaway. I was happy to get a job of any kind, but people won't do that.

By talking directly about their elusive surplus, Nada brings us closer to the meaning of 'those people'. It no longer remains as implicit that 'those people' are not just passive, but also kind of lazy and demanding. She is at first a bit hesitant and even emphasises that 'that is my own personal opinion', but then makes it plain: 'people won't do just whatever. There.' Nada emphasises that she has always been 'happy to get a job of any kind' and, bearing this in mind, she would like the character of 'those people' who 'choose a job' to be taken into account when examining the labour market in Croatia. From her point of view, 'those people' are always unsatisfied with what is on offer and, unlike her, they consider themselves to be entitled to a decent job straightaway.

Sara, the participant working as a part of ALMPs and mentioned previously in this chapter, expressed the opinion that might be associated with the kind of views 'those people' are said to put forward:

Maybe this sounds a bit arrogant, but as a highly educated person who can end up poor...I don't know. I've always thought that, like, 'complete university studies and you will never have problems with finances'. I mean I still think that I'll always be able to manage it somehow in order to survive, that I'll never be forced to do dumpster diving. But still.

Sara, similar to what are considered to be 'those people', believes that she, as a properly educated individual, should no longer have problems with her finances and

that she should now finally be permitted to be at peace, passive. However, she is not too comfortable with putting forward her critical opinion and, for that reason, she did first of all point out that what she is about to say might sound 'a bit arrogant'. In order to avoid being flagged as 'passive', she decided to add a brief disclaimer. Sara is aware of the imperative of activity, indicated by her notice that she should maybe experience some shame due to her opinion, 'but still' she is critical of this social imperative and she experiences it primarily as a betrayal of her expectations. Such confrontation makes it apparent that the imperative of activity is not something that simply and easily gets accepted by each and every person in society. 'Those people' and active subjects are not all there is in neoliberal society nor will we all eventually fall in one of these two categories. On the contrary, we will never fall in one of these two categories as, strictly speaking, 'those people' and active subjects do not exist as empirical categories, but merely as analytical concepts that present two ends of a continuum.

#### **7.1.7. The value of activity**

After she had articulated the tacit reminder, saying 'there are jobs, especially here in Zagreb there are jobs, but people won't do just whatever', my conversation with Nada did continue:

Me: Why do you think they don't want to work?

Nada: Well, first, a salary is low, personal income is low. I think it's because of that. I know when my daughter was without a job, she worked in a shop for 1000 kn, let's say. Then some had told me: 'Oh I would not work for 1000 kn'. I said: 'Look. You work for 1000 kn and a month passes and you get 1000 kn. If you are not working, you haven't got anything, right?' I have always looked at that in this way. A thousand, but it is a thousand. I mean better something than nothing, but people don't look at it in this way, you know. They would like a salary straightaway and no one would put a bit of effort into it, right?

Nada is a participant of lower socio-economic status who has experienced periods in life when she was struggling with finances. However, 1000 kn is well below a minimum salary and is even lower than the aforementioned 'compensation for the unemployed'. Taking into account her experiences, it might be argued that Nada actually considers every coin to be relevant and knows how to appreciate money more than those people who have not experienced deprivation. A kuna, but it is a kuna. That is why she might be critical of 'those people' who 'would like a salary straightaway' and why she might consider such demands to be greedy and 'those people' to be lazy. Following such reasoning, one could expect that, on the other hand, a person who is used to a significantly higher income would not hold such values and would consider working for 1000 kn to be simply unacceptable.

Regardless of how expected that might be, it is not necessarily a case. Nina, somewhat surprisingly, would agree with Nada. However, Nina is a prominent member of a rather profitable industry and has been a highly ranked employee as early as her thirties. Reflecting on working habits in Croatia, she said:

Well it seems to me that in Croatia...though nonetheless let's say...I would say that there is a big mismatch. There are those who really are and who are trying something and those who are totally lethargic [...] Kids here won't work over the summer. I always force mine [her daughters] to work something over the summer. And they earn nothing, but it is important that they work. I don't care, but I have a huge number of friends whose children are like 'I will not work for 2000 kn'. I mean a student and 2000 kn...well OK, a mom or a dad can give it to you, but earn it on your own!

Nina introduces a distinction between those who are really doing something, those who are active subjects and 'those who are totally lethargic' or, in other words, those who are passive subjects. Active subjects, as she explains, 'are those who really are'. They 'are' as they are active. No one is born active. When we are born we simply are and, if we want to take this on another level and constitute ourselves as active subjects, we need to re-work ourselves. From such a perspective, it is only after we have become active subjects that we really 'are'. Thus, becoming active is like giving birth to ourselves, thereby beginning our second life as 'those who really are'. On the

other hand, those who have not managed to become neoliberal subjects are seen as simply dwelling in their 'totally lethargic' everyday life, restrained in their self-incurred passivity. Following her reasoning, she wants her children to lead a good life and is aware that, if they are to reach a respectable existence, she must guide them in a certain manner. Now, her children are not forced to work due to any deprivation they are experiencing. Nina herself makes this perfectly clear, saying 'And they earn nothing, but it is important that they work, I don't care.' She might as well, without any problems, give them 2000 kn. However, if she were to do so, then she would be one of 'those people' who are contributing to what she identifies as a lethargic atmosphere among some people in Croatia. That is not really an option and, finally, she exclaims: 'Earn it on your own!' What she understands to be valuable in this context is, above all, the fact that her children are working. It is crucial that they are working over summer, that they are active instead of simply passive and waiting for someone, a mom or a dad or the state, to give or offer them something. Strictly speaking, 2000 kn is perfectly irrelevant in this story. Nina does not see activity of her children, at least in this stage of their lives, as something that has an extrinsic value. As it is not conditional upon certain material gains, there is no need for a further compensation of their activity. According to Nina, activity has an intrinsic value and, for that reason, activity needs no further referents to make itself a moral gain. Its value is derived from itself and it makes neoliberal subjects who they are, it literally makes them 'those who really are'.

In those cases where activity has gained intrinsic value, it could be said with confidence that the imperative of activity has been largely internalised. As we have arrived at the conclusion that activity has nowadays become a pedagogic method, we should not forget that this has not happened overnight. There is a history behind the present and, accordingly, neoliberal understanding of activity is part of a certain process of change. Discussing neoliberal work policies, Donzelot (1991: 273) argued:

It is a question of changing people's attitudes to change, in order also to change their attitudes to society and public power. And to do this, one needs to give people both the means and the inclination to adopt an active attitude in this process of change, rather than passively submitting to it while at the same time

demanding compensations from the public power, which are necessary only in consequence of this incapacity for change.

In other words, for a change to take place and domination to turn into hegemony, the distance between the public power and people should be decreased, bridged by an active attitude adopted by contemporary subjects (Baudrillard, 2010; Marcuse, 2007). Radicalising such a perspective, this project has examined both the public power and people as correlatives of neoliberal governmentality, but neither as the source of power (Foucault, 2009; Latour, 2005). Adopting such a point of view has not enabled us to unearth structurally assigned roles that would expose domination and make our analysis well-ordered (Miliband, 1987, 1983). However, it has enabled us to see that the Ministry, the public power in Donzelot's account, is not necessarily and merely on the other side of people. As they are both constituted by neoliberal discourse, the Ministry and the participants are not simply two opposed camps. Nor has this research automatically granted the Ministry with a privileged status in neoliberal society. In fact, some participants have proved to be more up to date with a hegemonic governmentality than the Ministry itself. With Nina, as we have seen, it was not only that compensation has not been demanded from the public power, i.e. the government, but she has herself been chasing the government. It could even be said that the roles, as assigned in Donzelot's reflection on change, have been reversed.<sup>18</sup> The flock is now chasing the shepherd. There was no need for the Ministry (2017a) to proclaim that it is 'particularly interested in fostering activation and education of young and long-term unemployed people', in order for Paula and Nada to recognise activity as a virtue and decide to raise their daughters to appropriate an active lifestyle. On other occasions, however, the imperative of activity was perceived with a certain ironic distance. Sara argued that activity is put forward in order to disguise high unemployment rates in Croatia. Ema, also perceiving activity as a mask, exposed an exploitative logic behind neoliberal market policies.

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<sup>18</sup> Castells' (2010a, 2010b, 2010c) work exemplified a number of contemporary power role reversals, for example groups focused on illegal activities becoming more profit-oriented, adaptable to changes and international than the states themselves. Focusing on particular historical phenomena, while relying on network as an analytic concept, Castells illustrated a flexible character of modern power roles. To be more precise, he made it apparent that power roles are actually power relations (Callon, 1998; Callon and Latour, 1981; Granovetter, 1985, 1973; Latour, 2005, 1999).

Bearing all this in mind, it is clear that the participants decode neoliberal norms in various ways (Hall, 1999; Hall and O'Shea, 2015) and, accordingly, they should not be perceived as a monolithic collective but as a fragmented collective. There is no homogeneity here and forcing a clear pattern on the participants would merely leave us with a misleading simplicity. This does not mean that the process of change has not properly occurred in Croatia. If the multiplicity of power is taken seriously, one should not be tempted to homogenise contradictions. Rather, 'we should keep in mind that heterogeneity is never a principle of exclusion; it never prevents coexistence, conjunction, or connection' (Foucault, 2008: 42). We should not expect to see an ultimate stage of neoliberal development in which all of its contradictions would be finally resolved into homogenous unity. The process of change will never be completed and this always unfinished character of change is exactly what makes it as far-reaching. In other words, contradictions enable the process of change. As this chapter shows, neoliberal subjects are quite often simultaneously agents, critics and the products of activity. However, there is no need for a dialectical happy end in order for neoliberal society to constitute (Zupančič, 2008). We are already living in neoliberal society and it is a task of our analyses to finally take into account the productive character of contradiction in contemporary society.



## 8. CONCLUSION

Examining the performativity of neoliberal discourse illuminates numerous features of neoliberal society. Conceptualising neoliberalism as a discourse reminds us that neoliberalism is a set of meanings that comes with its own history. Neoliberal discourse has not always characterised society nor is there anything inherently rational in this discourse that would ensure its hegemonic position in future. Neoliberalism is always in the process of becoming or, in other words, in the process of being performatively constituted through numerous acts of repetition and various forms of exclusion. This, however, does not make it any less 'material'. Neither is it to imply that neoliberal discourse will collapse due to its inherent contradictions that will, as the story goes, implode due to a natural evolution of capitalism. There are no guarantees. What understanding neoliberalism as a discourse implies is that it is structurally open for change. Poststructuralism, let us be clear, is not about portraying a world in which there can be no social structures. Nor it is to say that if a certain social structure somehow manages to establish, its fate could not be any other than to follow the structure of a fluid (Bauman, 2006; Bauman and Donskis, 2013). These two claims, while apparently different, are in fact the same. If a structure were to follow the dynamics of a fluid, it would cease to be a structure. Such reasoning, in its final consequences, denies the possibility of power relations in contemporary society and is strange to the perspective deployed in this thesis. Reflecting on analytic novelties introduced by poststructuralism, Butler (in Fischer, 2016) claims that 'the move from a structuralist account in which capital is understood to structure social relations in relatively homologous ways to a view of hegemony in which power relations are subject to repetition, convergence, and rearticulation brought the question of temporality into the thinking of structure'. What is important to note here is that repetition, convergence and rearticulation have nothing to do with rejecting the existence of social structures. Instead, as analytic concepts, they have all been introduced in order to help us understand how these structures have been constituted or, to put it more clearly, how a certain structure has become a structure. At the same time, these analytic concepts are here to bring the question of temporality in our understanding of society. To acknowledge this is to recognise that a performative character of structure makes neoliberalism structurally open for change. While hegemonic character of neoliberal discourse is contingent, and is something with

which society could eventually dispense, its structural indeterminacy is indispensable.

In this context, the interviews I have conducted as a part of my thesis are telling. These conversations constitute a textual material which the research has used in order to provide prospective readers with a glimpse into part of the process that contributes to establishing our contemporary subjectivity. What such formulation implies, and as has been mentioned a number of times throughout the thesis, is that this project does not conceptualise the participants as neoliberal subjects *par excellence*. Prospective readers, myself and *all* the people who live in neoliberal societies are seen as neoliberal subjects. *We* are neoliberal subjects. Foucault (1982: 780, emphases added) properly acknowledges such a collective character of power, saying 'I think *we* have to refer to much more remote processes if *we* want to understand how *we* have been trapped in *our* own history'. Reading this thesis we get a glimpse into *our* own subjectivity, into *our* own history. Conceptualising *all* the people living in neoliberal societies as neoliberal subject is not to say that neoliberal discourse is all there is. As subjects we are constituted by various discourses that could never be reduced to only one set of meanings. Neoliberal discourse is always only one of many discourses present in a broader field of discourses that circulate in a particular society. However, while neoliberalism is not all there is, there is no discourse that, in this or that way, has not been influenced by neoliberal discourse. More precisely, neoliberal discourse, due to its hegemonic position, currently influences all other discourses more significantly than any other discourse that circulates in society.

Implementing such reasoning in my research design, the thesis was careful not to slip into a sort of discursive relativism in which the fact that we are constituted by a multiplicity of discourses would imply a radical fragmentation of our subjectivity. When those more prominent names of contemporary critical theory are considered, it could be said that such an understanding of subjectivity is not strange to certain Baudrillard (2009, 27):

In fact the subject – the subject as agency of will, of freedom, of representation; the subject of knowledge, of history – is disappearing, but it leaves its ghost behind, its narcissistic double, more or less as the Cat left its grin hovering. The subject

disappears, gives way to a diffuse, floating, insubstantial subjectivity, an ectoplasm that envelopes everything and transforms everything into an immense sounding board for a disembodied, empty consciousness – all things radiating out from a subjectivity without object; each monad, each molecule caught in the toils of a definitive narcissism, a perpetual image-playback.

This account should nonetheless be read with a sufficient attention. Baudrillard is not really saying that the subject has simply disappeared and is now nowhere to be found, gone. The subject has indeed disappeared, given way to 'a diffuse, floating, insubstantial subjectivity', *but* it has left its ghost behind. The subject, therefore, haunts the field of discourse, it never really disappears, 'nothing ever disappears' (Baudrillard, 2009: 26). Arguing that the subject, according to Baudrillard (2009), has disappeared would be a manoeuvre similar to the one of the critics who, reacting to his text *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (1995), argued that Baudrillard claimed the Gulf War has never occurred, thereby mystifying the material reality of war (see, for example, Norris, 1992, 1989). Understanding Baudrillard's take on the Gulf War in a different light would, according to Norris (1992: 384), be nothing but ignoring 'the main lesson to be learnt from Baudrillard's texts: that any politics which goes along with the current postmodernist drift will end up by effectively endorsing and promoting the work of ideological mystification.' However, what Baudrillard (1995: 73, 85) argued in this text was mainly that, in the context of the Gulf War, 'nothing occurred which would have metamorphosed events into a duel' or, more precisely, that 'war is no longer what it used to be...' That is it. Maybe it is not an overly impressive point but it is nothing scandalous really. Returning to Baudrillard's idea on the disappearance of the subject, one could also note that his account should be read as a critique of the humanist subject. Baudrillard (2009: 27) is, after all, explicitly concerned with exposing 'the subject as agency of will, of freedom, of representation; the subject of knowledge, of history' and, once his claim is contextualised in this way, it is easier to agree that the subject has disappeared. However, it is one thing to argue in favour of dispensing with the humanist subject in our analyses, but it is quite a different point to say that the subject has disappeared altogether, as an 'empirical' entity. What we get with Baudrillard's take on the subject, apart from flirting with the perspective in which the subject liquefies and is

now floating in the form of subjectivity, is not really clear. Is it then the problem that he 'staked his claim to be "post-" just about everything, poststructuralism and Foucault included' (Norris, 1992: 360)? The way I see it, Baudrillard was not radical enough and we should not ask for less but for more poststructuralism in Baudrillard's understanding of the subject.

What Baudrillard (2009) fails to acknowledge, in his piece *Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared?*, is that the contemporary subject has been constituted in a particular way. Reading the interview accounts in this research, we come across the participants who have not given way to 'a diffuse, floating, insubstantial subjectivity'. Of course, as anyone else, they have their own insecurities and inconsistencies, but this by no means marks the disappearance of their subjectivity. Spivak (1990: 104, emphasis in original) reminds us that 'deconstruction, also insistently claims that there cannot be a fully practicing deconstructor. For, the subject is always centered as a subject. You cannot *decide* to be decentered and inaugurate a politically correct deconstructive politics. What deconstruction looks at is the limits of this centering'. The decentered subject, therefore, does not exist as an empirical entity; it is not a person that we could come across as a part of our everyday life. The subject cannot be but centred. Being situated in the field of discourses is what centres us or, in other words, is what temporarily fixes our identity.

The question is, therefore, how have we become centred and what are the limits of this centering? When the latter is considered, 'in its suggestion that masterwords like "the worker", or "the woman" have no literal referents deconstruction is again a political safeguard' (Spivak, 1990: 104). Poststructuralism, and this is important to note, has not proclaimed the disappearance of literal referents. What poststructuralism has proclaimed is that these 'empirical' referents have never existed at the first place, but have always been a product of totalising reasoning. This, as I have emphasised throughout my thesis, is not to argue in favour of abandoning our categorical apparatus, including the category 'women'. Neither is this Spivak's point. The point is simply to insist on situating these categories that, while misleading at their final instance, allow us to communicate our efforts. Or, in Spivak's (in Rafaty, 2014, emphasis in original) words, 'yes, of course there are some general principles. And on the other hand, in order to *use* them you have to bind them to the conditions of the place where you are trying to get something done'.

Conceptualised in this way, 'women' is always necessarily an analytically empty category, deployed only to orientate our understanding and enable the production of contextualised knowledge.

The first part of the question, namely how have we become subjects, remains. In this respect, the interview accounts on which my thesis is based are illustrative. The participants are situated in a network of discourses and it is within this network that their identity has been constituted. Their identity has not fallen apart, to each discourse its own, but has been centred in a particular way. Discourses that frame feminism in Croatia, discourses on mastery and discourses that emphasise leading an active lifestyle are just a part of a broader field of discourses in which the participants are situated. What we get with this thesis, as I have already said, is a glimpse in the performative constitution of subjectivity. Gender, as a discursive product, is constituted in relation to these discourses. Some discourses have less and some more relevance in the context of gendered identities. Neoliberal discourse could be compatible with emphasising a gendered identity, but quite often the performativity of neoliberalism suppresses our gendered identification. It is in relation to a broader field of discourses, where it is important to note that misidentifying with a particular discourse is also a form of relation, that we form our identities.

As subjects, we are therefore not 'an ectoplasm that envelopes everything and transforms everything into an immense sounding board for a disembodied, empty consciousness' (Baudrillard, 2009: 27). This research shows that the subject might best be seen as a knot of discourses. The metaphor of knot is indeed rather useful. First, it does not portray a picture in which the subject has been liquefied or has disappeared in any other way. Second, it neither reinstates a humanist understanding of the subject as the subject of knowledge and history. However, in this metaphor, what exactly is the role of neoliberalism? Due to the hegemonic position it currently occupies in the field of discourse, neoliberal discourse could best be understood as what tightens this knot nowadays. Neoliberal discourse, therefore, acts as the contemporary social link.

Conceptualising neoliberal discourse as a *social* link is a widely contested move (Bauman, 2006; Bauman and Donskis, 2013; Touraine, 1998). Neoliberalism is usually seen as a force of fragmentation, alienation, detachment etc. or, in other words, as an anti-social discourse. The terms 'neoliberal' and 'social' are generally considered to be mutually exclusive. However, despite a number of crises in which it

has found itself, neoliberalism has not been seriously shattered in its hegemonic role. One must try really hard not to notice that 'the so-called "crisis" has been going on for decades and that it is actually nothing but the normal functioning of capitalism in our time' (Agamben in Savà, 2014). At the same time, nonetheless, there is a lack of theories that would clearly say what the social link of neoliberal society is. Touraine (1998), in his seminal text *Sociology Without Society*, argues that the relation of the actor and the system is no longer what it used to be. Compared to earlier times, when the actor and the system had been interdependent, now we are facing nothing short of a chasm between the two. What happened, basically, is that 'the triumph of capitalism imposed the idea of weakening of social and political constraints, and of the rise of economic rationality, interests and the entrepreneurial spirit, as well as of a growing differentiation between social subsystems which sapped all content from the idea of society' (Touraine, 1998: 123). In other words, the novelty of contemporary society is that it is no longer a society. From such a perspective, as there seem to be no binding values, it is hard to understand how any identity can be formed in such context. Touraine, in this respect very close to Bauman, nonetheless provides us with an explanation of how identities constitute in the context where the idea of society has been sapped. Once 'we have acknowledged the actual decomposition of the multidimensional and self-regulating system we have been calling society' (Touraine, 1998: 129), we are left only with particular, fragmented and selfish interests that are, in fact, a fertile ground for various extremist identities. Touraine frames this process of separation between the system and the actor as the process of demodernisation and, from this point on, one can get a quite clear idea where this is all heading to. It is then said that, with the separation of the private sphere from economic life, we are left with an increasing number of identities that are a result of certain nationalistic, ethnic, religious etc. aberrations. We are nowadays dealing with the rise of tribes or, in Bauman's (1993) terminology, 'neo-tribes'. In short, due to the rise of capitalism, and the alienation of the economy that is said to come with it, there is either the identity of a tribe or there is no identity at all. In any case, one can rest assured, or maybe it is better to say rest anxious, knowing that there definitely is no such thing as society. From this point on, we are left merely with a moral condemnation of our contemporary alienation, with a yearning for those lost times in which, as the tale goes, we still had society.

What we lose, as a consequence of such analysis, is precisely the understanding of *contemporary* character of contemporary phenomena. It is almost fascinating to see that Bauman's book, which comes with the title *Postmodern Ethics* (1993), presents existing phenomena primarily as a return to those allegedly primitive patterns of behaviour. Throughout my thesis, in order to avoid this analytic trap, I have been cautious not to proclaim the end of society due to the rise of neoliberal individuality. Criticising Sloterdijk's (2016) take on stress and freedom, I insisted on the collective, albeit fragmented, spirit of neoliberal society. Discussing the imperative of activity in the final chapter of my thesis, I argued that contradictions in contemporary society are not to be conceptualised as an obstacle from perceiving neoliberal society as a society. This was to fully acknowledge that 'the socio-economic mobilization of individuals may not take the same form as 100 or 200 years ago, yet this is not to say that it doesn't take place and that we are not - as individuals with our own way of enjoyment - very much engaged in "feeding" the present *social* link, which bind us to itself, and to each another' (Zupančič, 2008: 39, emphasis in original). Society, therefore, has not disappeared; it has simply taken a different, neoliberal form. The thesis has argued that we, as neoliberal subjects, effectively represent micro-embodiments of neoliberal government, thus internalising the neoliberal imperative and, at this point, a sharp distinction between the subject and the state, so characteristic both for Marxist and liberal reasoning, collapses. This, however, is not the same as to say that neoliberalism is dependent on the role that 'small' people have in the system. Rather, it is to say, much more radically, that neoliberal subjects are neoliberalism or, to be more precise, that neoliberalism is above all a form of subjectivity. This is a completely different argument than the one put forward by Touraine, in which there is a radical break between the actor and the system that has led to the disappearance of society.

In Baudrillard's parlance, it could be said that the disappearance of society did not take place. The meaning of 'social' is no longer what it used to be. Exploring the contemporary social link, Zupančič (2008: 39-40) argues:

The Other no longer has any hold on us in the guise of a concrete, 'small' other. In other words, what is abandoned is the possibility of the link or short-circuit between an other and the Other, the possibility to believe that a 'small' other can be the very mode of

existence of the big Other. No concrete person (parent, teacher, president, etc.) is truly an instance of the Other, because she or he is always only human, inconsistent, if not altogether weak and pathetic. Should we not see and recognize here a rather spectacular operation of saving the big Other?

So, in this operation of saving neoliberalism, we have two processes that should best be understood as two sides of the same coin. First, identifying our neoliberal order as the only instance that really deserves our full commitment and, second, the reluctance to see any concrete person as a proper embodiment of this same symbolic order. On the one hand, therefore, there is the emphasis on self-entrepreneurship that keeps us apart. This is indeed close to Bauman's and Touraine's perspective; no permanent bonds, we are all chasing our individual and selfish interests, thus acting as islands, monads, units etc. On the other hand, once our optics are changed, we realise that we are indeed facing a strong pattern of collective self-entrepreneurship that binds us together in a rather excessive way. This introduces a plot twist in the following Bauman's (2006: 22) story of liquid modernity:

What has been cut apart cannot be glued back together. Abandon all hope of totality, future as well as past, you who enter the world of fluid modernity. The time has arrived to announce, as Alain Touraine has recently done, 'the end of definition of the human being as a social being, defined by his or her place in society which determines his or her behaviour and actions'.

What Bauman fails to recognise is that, somewhat paradoxically, cutting apart also involves gluing back together. Or, in Zupančič's (2008: 39, emphasis in original) words, 'the existence of the multiplicity of individuals as solipsistic islands of enjoyment is precisely the form of existence of the contemporary *social link*'. This, however, has nothing to do with the so-called process of demodernisation that both Touraine and Bauman portray as a regressive tendency. It is a fundamentally modern occurrence. Even more so, a postmodern occurrence. Bearing this in mind, the human being has not ceased being a social being but the meaning of 'social' has changed or, more precisely, it has been framed by neoliberal discourse. All previous



discourses on 'social', for example the socialist one, have not disappeared, 'nothing ever disappears' (Baudrillard, 2009: 26). Giving way to a neoliberal one, 'former' conceptualisations of 'social' have left their ghosts behind, haunting the contemporary meaning of 'social'. Nowadays, however, we are bounded by maintaining neoliberal values, thereby structuring a particular form of society, namely neoliberal society. The social link has not weakened; it has simply taken a neoliberal shape.

Exploring the relation of gender and neoliberal governmentality, the thesis has asked how should we understand this phenomenon that we call 'neoliberalism'? What type of subjectivity it structures or, in other words, how is contemporary subjectivity performatively constituted? Nevertheless, the dissertation opens up a number of further questions, for example: Could we talk about the microphysics of forms of governing other than the neoliberal one? Where would this leave us in relation to the novelty of neoliberalism? What ideas have remained relatively resilient through various social changes, while they nowadays might appear to us as characteristic of our times? This list continues in various directions, nonetheless the one who decides to engage with such theoretically complex questions would eventually be prompted to ask herself how to manage such theoretical inquiry in the context of (or, and here is yet another question, should we rather say in the aftermath of?) what Marcuse (2007: 15) framed as 'the radical empiricist onslaught'? However, *the* question that might be seen as haunting the thesis is the one that Butler (1997: 100) precisely formulates: 'How can we work the power relations by which we are worked, and in what direction?' When this question is properly decoded, and power seen as productive, reworking the contemporary power relations appears in its full complexity. In this context, the best answer my thesis could offer is that, if we want to exploit the structural openness of neoliberalism for change, it is at the level of the social link that we have to intervene, thereby identifying ways to engage the political potential of subjectivity. However, while acknowledging the urgency and relevance of Butler's question, this thesis was not written with the aim of offering the strategy of changing contemporary power relations. The aim of this research has remained different; its intervention was in the direction of *understanding* what neoliberalism is. Any meaningful attempt at changing neoliberalism should be preceded by recognising that neoliberalism is not liberalism and taking into account the productive character of power. At the same time, I recognise that examining

subjectivity is not simply on the other side of transforming social relations. Acknowledging that subjectivity has a crucial role in the way neoliberalism operates is already to start with reworking the power relations by which we are worked, making them explicit and understanding the role that we, as neoliberal subjects, occupy in neoliberal discourse. However, reworking the contemporary power relations, including the choice of direction in which this will be done, necessarily remains a collective political effort.

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