

An Irreducible Death-Drive or an Emancipative Event: Trauma and PTSD Recovery form Žižek-Badiou's Perspective

DOI: 10.22098/JPC.2023.12458.1158

Mehdi Khoshkalam Pour¹; Seyed Bakhtiar Sajadi^{2*}; Fariba Parvizi³;
Razieh Eslamieh⁴

¹ Department of English Language and Literature, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

² Department of English, Faculty of Language and Literature, University of Kurdistan, Sanandaj, Iran.

Corresponding Author: b.sajadiuok@gmail.com

³ Department of English Language and Literature, Ershad Damavand University, Damavand, Iran

⁴ Department of English Language and Literature, Parand Branch, Islamic Azad University, Parand, Iran

Abstract

Žižek supposes that traumas can turn into death-drives and offer the subject surplus *jouissance*. He warns that ideological systems can profit from traumas to further subjugate their citizens. Notwithstanding, Badiou construes that traumas can appear as tremendous moments of Truth/Events that betrays the voids of the Symbolic Order and actualizes the universal truths that postmodernism has constantly denied or endeavored to suppress. In so thinking, Badiou hypothesizes that the Truth/Event will find/invent its own faithful subject that cooperate to actualize the suppressed or denied Real of their age. Badiou criticizes the Western Ethics for devising a secured mode of life that emasculates the subject of post capitalism age and deprives him of experiencing the sufferings that can confront him with the Real. Badiou states that the Western ethics deliberately ignores the positive effects of PTSD recoveries that can reveal a lot regarding the psychological and social weakness of the subject and the society as well. Defending the idea of traversing the fantasies and encountering the Real, Žižek, however, does not become convinced of the emancipatory force that Badiou attributes to traumatic Events. Instead, he announces that the subject's fidelity to the Badiouian Truth/Event approximates to the devoted insurgents' allegiance to the 'mythic violence' that enables them to disclaim responsibility for their deeds. Badiou himself is apprehensive of ever-present 'simulacra' that the sovereign ideology concocts to counterfeit the Truth/Event. What Žižek prescribes is an 'Act' that can be embodied in 'divine violence' that divulges the Symbolic Order's void.

Keywords: Trauma, Event, Death-Drive, Jouissance, Violence, PTSD Recovery.

Introduction

Can our psychological traumas pave the way for a better life? This is an important question that Žižek and Badiou debate on extensively in their psychoanalytical and ethical works. Žižek assumes trauma as equal to the Real in recognition of the fact that their essences are unknown to the subject's consciousness, and they frequently intrude into and destabilize the subject's usual life. To Žižek, the worst part of trauma is that the subject may internalize it as a usual constituent of his life. He adds that trauma can function as a death-drive, for the subject not only thwarts all psychological therapies but also uses his trauma to ensure his *jouissance*.

Žižek cautions that totalitarian regimes resort to traumas to guarantee their political solidarity; they beguile the people into mystifying their traumas as prerequisites for being accepted within a community with shared values. Ideological regimes welcome traumas at personal and social levels and attempt to sustain them. Žižek points out the idea of 'crisis as shock therapy' through which "the normal run of things is traumatically interrupted, and the field is then opened up for a "discursive" ideological competition" (Žižek, 2009, p. 17). The ideological systems convince their nations of accepting them as legitimate governments that have many values in common with their people. Traumas and crises help such regimes to foist their exploitative plans on the public and simulate bona fide governments.

However, to Badiou, traumas are impressive Events that expose the voids of their age. Badiou recommends that the subject be cognizant of traumatic Events, the citizens' real emancipation is predicated upon their receptiveness to the Truth/Real of the Events. Badiou endorses that the subject and the Event have bilateral relationship; to wit, the subject assumes an impressive moment as the Event, then submits himself to it. Instead, the Event orients the subject towards an authentic freedom. He dispraises the Western Ethics and current psychological trends for immunizing the subject against whatever shaking his normal beliefs, and ignoring the positive points of PTSD recovery.

Anna Sigg (2015) identifies traumas as "the object *a qua* a leftover which is objectively nothing, though it pretends to be something that remains somewhat distant and inaccessible" (20). She echoes Žižek's notion of trauma as a void with no symbolic

value, yet it has maintained its attraction to the subject inasmuch his psyche and body compete to host it. The paradoxical pleasure associated with trauma, as Dale Pattison (2013) describes, has impelled the sovereign ideologies to use trauma as the “very fundamental fantasy that sustains our being, and repress the political real that can reveal the mischievous essence of the ideological states” (16). Pattison indicates that American Literature has the power for both unmasking the machinery of the institutional powers and mobilizing people to oppose capitalism.

Pfeifer (2012) demonstrates that to Badiou, the Event is a moment from a given ‘situation’ that is relatively static and has the effect of making the static temporal mode which always appears as stable, natural, and necessary to those living in it (70). Nevertheless, Pfeifer does not mention that the sovereign ideology uses the Event to deceive the subject into accepting some fraudulent simulacra. Badiou exemplifies the antihumanistic capitalist ideology behind American cinema that has succeeded in offering “certain sexual passions as simulacra of the amorous events” (Badiou, 2001, p. 70). Pfeiffer brings out some several communist revolutions in which the Events eventuated in more repressive ideological systems.

Some critics such as Adrian Johnston (2005), weighs Žižek’s uncertainty about the Event against Badiou’s faith in it, presuming that the Badiouian Event can be a recapitulation of Althusser’ interpellated subject whereby “subject proper only arises when an event calls forth a form of subjectivity specific to that event’s truth” (p. 110). One danger incidental to this hypothesis is that the ideological systems endeavor to distort the Truth/Event in order to attune their citizens to their plans. The other impairment of the Event is that the subject may develop his own perception of the Event, and he, consequently, assumes the Event as a reason for justifying his ultimately subjective incentives. Interpellation with a mystified Event can always be evocative of the diabolical and heinous systematic crimes.

Methods

This research paper uses a descriptive-analytical method to deal with trauma and PTSD recovery from Žižek-Badiou perspective. Traumas freeze the subject and community in

the past and affect their present and future states. Žižek states the post-traumatized subject is “literary a new subject; he lives death as a form of life” (Žižek, 2014a, p. 50). The traumatized subject and society are paradoxically reluctant to recover from past sufferings, so ‘proper subjectivity’ demands the subject’s being “the host of a self-overcoming tendency, a parasitic form of enjoyment, which pursues its gratifications past the thresholds of moderation, health, and, ultimately, the subject’s biological best interests” (Hook, 2016, p. 15). Accordingly, the suffering subject and community develop deviated insights into their traumas.

Žižek supposes that traumas can be bracketed with death-drive in that any attachment to ineradicable psychical issues breeds *jouissance*, as “pleasure in pain, and a perverted pleasure provided by the painful experience of repeatedly missing one’s goal” (Žižek, 1999, p. 297). Žižek elaborates that traumas can have political implications, for ideological regimes purposefully develop pervert subjects whose *jouissance* comes from irreducible traumas. He also implies that both traumas and death drive reason out the subject’s existence in the midst of his sufferings, and the subject’s stress on his psychical pains is “the uncanny excess of life, and an undead urge that persists beyond the biological cycle of life and death, generation and corruption” (Žižek, 2006, pp. 63-4). Traumas make possible the subject’s merging into his nation.

Badiou proposes that the Event can motivate both the subject and nation to aspire to real freedom. The Event is the Real of a situation, and it discloses the voids of a given Symbolic Order. There exists an asymbolic correlation between the Event and the subject; an impressive moment becomes an Event when the subject assumes it as the Event. Likewise, the individual owes the Event for his subjecthood; “it is only by dissipating himself in a project that exceeds him that an individual can hope to direct himself to some subjective real [réel], and thereby contribute to the constitution of a true collective subject” (Hallward, 2003, p. 122). To Badiou the Event has the hallmarks of the trauma, for it splinters the normalized path of life and eventually desecrates the sublime sovereign ideology. Badiou assumes PTSD recovery consequential by reason of its offering the

subject the 'subject' unexplored and bearing in itself an ethical and political force. Badiou is not pessimistic about traumas owing to the emancipatory force embedded in them.

Badiou's description of the Event approximate to the mythic violence, for both categories aim to overthrow their preceding Symbolic Orders, so that they can establish new Law and order. Demanding the subject's fidelity, "the mythic violence seeks to stand in for God, as it were; it seeks to produce a human version of what God wants" (Martel, 2012, p. 51). On the other hand, Žižek presumes that neither Badiouian Truth/Event nor the mythic violence eventuates in authentic redemption. Rather, they entangle the subject in other ideological fantasies that spoil his enthusiasm for freedom. Žižek contrasts Badiou's Event with Divine violence that is basically counter to any new Law. Žižek identifies the Act with Divine violence, for both are anti-fetishistic and counter to the Symbolic Order.

Gregory Bistoien (2016) refers to Immanuel Kant in order to show the infeasibility of the Truth/Event: "Kant concluded that an act of 'radical good' or 'radical evil' could never be achieved in human mortal" (p. 101). Bistoien adds that the Badiouian link between the Event and the subject can occur only when the subject achieves immortality. Echoing Zupančič, Bistoien claims that Lacan believes in the proper Act, although he rejected the idea that the subject's Act is the result of his being an angelic creature. Instead, Lacan relates the ethical Event/Act to subject's *jouissance*. Thus, unlike Badiou, Zupančič (2000) considers impossible a proper Event, it can take place only when the subject has entirely moved beyond the Symbolic Order (p. 101). In line with Zupančič, Žižek reminds that an authentic Act is feasible only when the subject commits 'symbolic suicide' (Žižek, 1992, p. 59) and imposes a radical suspension on the Symbolic Order. Some critics such as Adrian Johnston (2005), weighs Žižek's uncertainty about the Event against Badiou's faith in it, presuming that the Badiouian Event can be a recapitulation of Althusser' interpellated subject whereby "subject proper only arises when an event calls forth a form of subjectivity specific to that event's truth" (Johnston, 2005, p. 110). One danger incidental to this hypothesis is that the ideological systems always endeavor to distort the Truth/Event in order to attune their citizens to their plans.

Discussion

Žižek and Badiou's Dissention over the Effects of Trauma

Trauma is followed by sudden rush of psychological sufferings. The aftermath of trauma known as 'post-traumatic stress disorder' (PTSD) is an uninterrupted uneasiness that negatively affect our bodies, self-evaluation, dreams, and emotions, and it triggers in the subject an irreducible sense of despair and worthlessness. Žižek identifies trauma with the Real that "perturbs the smooth engine of symbolization and throws it off balance" (Žižek, 1996, p. 31). A trauma comes within our dreams, paranoiac attacks, and hallucination that "serve as the screen that protects us from being directly overwhelmed by the raw Real [trauma]; thus, the reality itself can function as an escape from encountering the traumatic Real" (Žižek, 2014b, p. 80). Therefore, the Real appears in our dreams and hallucinations, whereas the Symbolic Order itself is a fantasy that protects us against the Real.

Žižek proposes that the subjectivity itself is a traumatic event *per se*, and the introduction into language signifies the subject's division as a 'barred existence', or a Cartesian 'cogito' that constructs "the imaginary 'stuff of the I', that is reduced to a substanceless form of subjectivity, and the zero-point of the overlapping of thinking and being at which the subject in a way neither 'is' (he is deprived of all substantial content) nor thinks' (his thinking is reduced to the empty tautology of thinking that it thinks)" (Žižek, 2010, p. 312). The *cogito* confronts the subject with the Real, and undermines the myths that "anchors him in his symbolic substance: the minimum of an excremental left over, a piece of trash, a mote of dust in the eye, an almost-nothing, and the night of the world" (Žižek, 2000 a, p. 30). *Cogito*, therefore, spoils the idea of *ego* and confronts the subject with the Real of his barred existence.

The subject might get 'inured' to trauma, and adopt it as the 'normal' constituent of his life. Therefore, Žižek looks at trauma as a fantasy that resists the Real, and causes the subject to adapt to a loss through melancholic identification and unending repetitions. Any identification with trauma is "a radical attempt to (re)gain a stronghold in reality or

to ground our *ego* against the unbearable anxiety of perceiving oneself as non-existent, self-induced suffering is an attempt at regaining some kind of normalcy, at avoiding a total psychotic breakdown” (Žižek, 2008a, p. xxvi). Living with trauma becomes an ungovernable compulsion where the subject finds existence in suffering.

Žižek states that Badiou’s theory of the Event has positive insight into trauma (Žižek, 1999, p.p. 142-43). Nevertheless, Badiou refuses to mystify traumatic experiences; rather, he proposes that traumas have something of the Real in themselves, so the traditional approaches to trauma recovery need to be reconsidered. He adds that ideological regimes manipulate the concept of ‘trauma recovery’, and shift concentration from ‘collective’ trauma recovery to individual treatment. ‘Advances in the field occur only when they are supported by a political movement powerful enough to legitimate an alliance between investigators and patients and to counteract the ordinary social processes of silencing and denial’ (Herman, 2015, p. 9). Badiou, unlike what Žižek states, accepts that trauma is a paralyzing experience while the Truth/Event, though a traumatic experience, establishes a new present.

Badiou warns that “the dominant Western framework for thinking trauma recovery, epitomized in the psychiatric construct of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), risks robbing the traumatized of their political agency rather than securing a place for it” (Craps 2013, p. 75). He questions the contemporary ethics that shields us from evils and suffering. “The term ethics today investigates the best way for human beings to live and how to judge what kind of action right or right in particular situations” (Badiou, 2001, p. 2). To Badiou, the contemporary ethics is an ideological state apparatus that “keeps ‘man’ as a fundamentally passive, fragile and mortal entity- as a potential “victim” to be protected (most often, as a ‘marginalized’, ‘excluded’ or ‘Third World’ victim, to be protected by a dutiful, efficient, and invariably ‘Western benefactor/exploiter)” (xiii-xiv). Badiou, thus, pursues an “antihumanistic” approach to the subject and views him as a supernatural creature that can cross the humanistic ethical borderlines. He argues against the post-modernist anti-Cartesian approach to the subject “as a victim, suffering beast, emaciated, dying individual equating with his animal

substance, and reduced to the level of a living organism pure and simple” (Badiou, 2001, p. 11).

Badiou believes that “a traumatic encounter can be an Event that does contain the Real instantly; besides, this Event is a process whereby the Real is modified” (Hallward, 2003, p. 15). Signifying the importance of an event, he remarks that “the subject is the process of liaison between the event and the procedure of fidelity” (Badiou, 2005, p. 239). He “calls the ‘subject’ the bearer [*le support*] of a fidelity, the one who bears a process of truth. The subject, therefore, in no way pre-exists the process. He is absolutely nonexistent in the situation ‘before’ the event. We might say that the process of truth induces a subject” (Badiou, 2001, p. 43). The subject’s responsiveness to and ‘active intervention’ in the Event ensure his access to true subjectivity; “the subject only through remaining faithful to it [the event], and frequent (mis)recognition of what has happened can finally arrive at the truth of the trauma” (Bistoën, 2014, p. 843). Badiou deems it prudent to draw a distinction between the Event and trauma. “Badiou’s event produces a subject, whereas trauma denotes the subject’s dissolution or destruction. Or even, Badiou’s event opens possibilities, while trauma closes them off” (Di Nicola, 2012, p. 103). Therefore, Žižek’s skepticism about Badiou’s Event is once more open to questions.

Žižek and Badiou are at variance with the productivity of PTSD recovery and the Act. PTSD recovery, as Badiou insists, can bolster a radical reformation in political systems. “PTSD-informed interventions have very real political consequences, as they (unintentionally) reinforce the political and economic status *quo* and foreclose alternative modes of responding to these situations. It is precisely because PTSD purportedly describes a reality that transcends particular contexts and cultural determinations” (Bistoën, 2016, p. 5). Trauma recovery enables the subject to retroactively analyze the past incidents that caused him his traumas, persuades him to dry up the factors that can develop social traumas. On the other hand, refusing the positivity attributed to PTSD recovery, Žižek praises the Act and delineates its correct features:

The act differs from an active intervention (action) in that it radically transforms its bearer (agent): the act is not simply something I "accomplish"—after an act, I'm literally "not the same as before." The act involves a kind of temporary eclipse, aphanisis, of the subject. By means of it, I put at stake everything, including myself, my symbolic identity; the act is therefore always a "crime", a "transgression". The act is defined by this irreducible risk in its most fundamental dimension, it is always negative, i.e., an act of annihilation, of wiping out—we not only don't know what will come out of, its final outcome is ultimately even insignificant, strictly secondary in relation to the NO! of the pure act. (Žižek, 1992, p. 44)

Badiou continues to look positively at traumas, stating that "there is something emancipatory in extreme experiences" (Bistoën, 2016, p. 121). He asserts that "what provokes us to think is always a traumatic, violent encounter with some external real that brutally imposes itself on us, shattering our established ways of thinking" (Hallward, 2003, p. 15). Badiou proposes that traumas recovery can offer the subject "some degree of unbinding, some kind of break with the past, some degree of distance from inertia of the status *quo*, and an "emancipatory" innovation that comes from rupture and soustraction" [subtraction] (Badiou, 2001, pp. xxxiv-xxxv). Correspondingly, Badiou endorses that any PTSD pathology can enable both the subject, and the community as to remove the factors that lead to future traumas.

Trauma as a Death Drive

Trauma alludes to a psychological impasse that remains with the subject throughout his life. The same permanency applies to "the death drive as an obsession with an undying urge to continue, not death itself, which is why it is the continuation that is important in conceptualizing the death drive: it is not the cessation of life but its continuation in the form of death" (Hook, 2015, p. 26). Both trauma and death drive have their roots in the past, so they can be presumed as the specters of the deads that haunt the present. The

analogy made between the deads, trauma and death drive befits the term “‘nescient dead’ (ND) the deads that are not zombies, vampires, or walking corpses; they simply don’t realize that they are dead” (Hardack. 2018, p. 1). Like these resurrected deads, the trauma and death drive become the liveliest agents in the subject’s life and cause him to engage with an endless repletion of afflicting recollections. Žižek believes that Judaism’s continuation owes to the traumas never die:

The undead ghosts have haunted the living through the secret history of traumatic fantasies transmitted “between the lines”, every dead is somewhere still alive. Judaism’s “stubborn attachment” to the unacknowledged violent founding gesture that haunts the public legal order as its spectral supplement enabled the Jews to survive for thousands of years without a homeland or a common institutional tradition: they refused to give up their ghost, to sever the link to their secret, disavowed tradition. (Žižek, 2008a, p. liv)

Why does a nation cling to traumas or death drives? Trauma and death drive are the ruptures of inerasable elements into the community’s integrity and can be identified as “the Real by reason of the Real’s irreducible negativity or incommensurability that influences the contemporary life and culture in all its aspects: economic, political, artistic, religious, social, sexual, and intellectual” (Žižek, 2012, p. 41). Such common features among trauma, death drive and the Real signify that the Real is the infelicitous element that the subject most dreads; consequently, he endeavors to thwart it. The Real precedes the reality, and the reality provides a mechanism to suppress the Real. On the contrary, the subject’s reluctance to thwart his traumas and death drives is a part of his resistance to the Real. Žižek supposes that “the death drive’s name is ambiguous, for the death drive is indeed that libidinal uncounsions that never dies. Accordingly, death drive is prerequisite to living, and it is an endless repetitive cycle that is not a desire to die, but to relive death” (Žižek, 2008b, p. 344). Death drive has nothing in common with desire, for desire is associated with death whereas death drive hampers it.

The Sophocles' *Oedipus the Rex*, suggestive of death drive, indicates how Jocasta and Laius embroil their house in traumas: "If you conceive a child, that child will grow up to commit the monstrous acts of killing its father and sexually embracing its mother" (Slavitt, 2007, p. 82). The warning, however, motivates the couple to consummate their love and embrace what they are prohibited from doing. To Jocasta and Laius, submission to Tiresias's prophecy means remaining desirous, yet desires vanish as they become fulfilled. Indeed, they seem to quest for "*Das Ding*, that unnamable, prohibited object that leads to catastrophic dissolution, and yet is also the true *telos* of desire. The migratory movement of desire through lesser pleasures toward *Das Ding* is the essence of the death drive" (Purcell, 2016, p. 7). Likewise, the post-traumatic subject is different from the pre-traumatic one. "The victim of trauma survives its own death: all different forms of traumatic encounter, independently of their specific nature (social, natural, biological, symbolic), lead to the same result- a new subject emerges which survives its own death, the death (or erasure) of its symbolic identity" (Žižek, 2010, p. 294). The death drive ensures that the symbolic death does not occur with the biological death, for their synchronization means death in absolute sense.

The death drive confronts the subject with *Das Ding*, that X that absorbs the subject's gaze. The Thing is simultaneously desirable and appalling due to the Real embedded in it. "The Thing is too strong for my eyes; then in the shift towards drive, I (the subject) 'make myself seen' as the Thing—in a reflexive turn, I see myself as It, the traumatic object-Thing I didn't want to see" (Žižek 1999, p. 301). The death drive, however, profits from the Thing, for it hinders the most horrible Real that "the Thing the subject searches is the subject himself" (Žižek, 1999, p. 304). "The Thing, which is nothing but what the subject himself puts there, an Otherness which directly is ourselves" (Žižek, 1999, p. 302). The death drive thus hampers the subject's exposure to his ultimate reality and reflects an enigmatic mechanism in human psyche that immunizes him against disintegrating elements. The stimulus to desire always invokes pleasure at the expense of the least tension, while "the death drive generates enjoyment precisely through a perpetual, repetitive seeking out of excessive, essentially painful tension" (Wells, 2014,

p. 48). Thus, death drive is paradoxically associated with *jouissance* and should not be mistaken as an excruciating fixation on an element.

“Satisfaction kills desire, smothers it” (Fink, 1997, p. 241); to wit, desires vanishes as pleasure is taken. Consequently, the subject resorts to death drive at the expense of confronting the Thing owing to the fact that death drive does not intend to gain satisfaction; rather, it keeps the subject permanently desirous. Thus, the death drive surpasses the desire in supplying the *jouissance*. “The drive is the discovery of the impossibility of a desire because it is a “neverending, repeated circulation around the unattainable, always missed object”. This discovery involves the death of attaining the impossible desire and changes into a “circular movement which finds satisfaction in failing again and again to attain the object” (Gildersleeve, 2016, p. 14). The subject of the death drive is detached from the Symbolic Order; indeed, he exists in the sphere of the horrible Real and is in close proximity of Das Ding.

Das Ding or the Real is horrible; nevertheless, the death drive profits from it so that it can hinder the more macabre Reals. Žižek believes that the most horrible Real is that “the Thing the subject searches is the subject himself” (Žižek, 1999, p. 304). “The Thing, which is nothing but what the subject himself puts there, an Otherness which directly is ourselves” (Žižek, 1999, p. 302), “the raw flesh and bones, bodily fluids, half-digested food and excrement” (Žižek, 2012, p. 32). The death drive thus hampers the subject’s exposure to his ultimate reality and reflects an enigmatic mechanism in human psyche that immunizes him against disintegrating elements. The stimulus to desire always invokes pleasure at the expense of the least tension, while “the death drive generates enjoyment precisely through a perpetual, repetitive seeking out of excessive, essentially painful tension” (Wells, 2014, p. 48). Thus, death drive is paradoxically associated with *jouissance* and should not be mistaken as an excruciating fixation on an element. Adrian Johnston identifies “the death drive with a state of absolute rest, a constant struggle to eliminate tension, and a basic orientation around a zero-level of stimulation” (Johnston, 2005, p. 173). Therefore, death drive is synonymous with the psyche’s endeavor to preserve life.

The Truth/Event and the Charge of Violence

Žižek's insights into violence can make us infer Badiou's Truth/Event as violence in absolute sense. Slavoj Žižek classifies violence into five types. The first type is the 'subjective violence' that includes any form of assault against other individuals. The second type alludes to the 'systemic violence' as "an invisible mechanism that exploits the subject for the capitalism benefits" (Valentic, 2008, p. 2). The systemic violence is the 'imperceptible' cause of the subjective violence and "results from the smooth functioning of capitalism that involves the automatic creation of excluded and dispensable individuals from the homeless to the unemployed" (van der Linden, 2012, p. 6). The third type of violence is the 'symbolic violence' that acts through language, symbols, and signs and reduces the subject into a signifier that is absent in the story representing it. The symbolic violence leaves the subject a split sign, a disintegrated entity that is narrativized within the big Other's discourse" (Žižek, 1992, p. 151). Žižek clarifies that the symbolic violence serves capitalism and incarcerates the subject within its ideological myth.

Of all types of violence, it is the 'mythic violence' that bears resemblances to Badiou's Truth/Event. The 'Mythic violence' alludes to transcendental creators of dictums as unending wellsprings of guidelines that justify the subject's deeds. "In the mythic violence the subjects, undergoing sacrifice and self-erasure, resign their autonomy and responsibility since it is some larger divine power which acts through them" (Žižek, 2000c, p. 200). We recognize mythical violence 'with certainty' because ultimately, it is of human origin, that is human is in charge of provoking it (Martel, 2012, p. 78). Thus, the subject feels addressed by an impressive, yet invisible mythic power. Walter Benjamin predicts that the sense of guilt and retribution are tied with the mythic violence (Benjamin, 1978, p. 43), for the subject feels that he might have not fully comprehend the message of the mythic violence.

Badiou's Truth/Event is the assurance "that it is in 'interpretative intervention' that it finds its support. The Truth is found in the Event; and the will to draw out its dialectic and to propose to humans that they concentrate the best of themselves to the

essential” (Norris, 2012, p. 172). Both the mythic violence and the Truth/Event hint at an undecidable force whose actualization leans on an ardent subject. The Truth/Event comes about “through fidelity to some previous event which in turn enables those who come after, who inherit the privilege and responsibility of thinking its consequences through-to fulfill what had so far remained within the realm of prefigured yet unactualized possibility” (Badiou, 2005, p. 231). While devoid of any verifiable content, the Truth/Event is the outcome of a choice, a conscious decision that centralizes the subject’s existence in a cause for establishing a new law.

Both the mythic violence and Badiou’s Truth/Event create Law to terminate the pre-Evental lawlessness. “The mythic violence is very much connected with the Law, and it seeks to stand in for God, and it seeks to produce a human version of what God wants” (Martel, 2012, p. 21). In addition, both the mythic violence and the Truth/Event ask the subject to participate in the process of its subjectivization. “The subject also seeks to establish ‘new presents’ or new Orders that allow belated access to the meaning of the event and a disruption to the ordinary run of things” (Bistoën, 2016, pp. 152-53). Like the mythic violence, the subject and the Event merge in one single procedure.

Badiou’s Truth-subject invites the subject to be responsive to the Event and to “ward off Evil, through its effective and tenacious inclusion in the process of a truth, which aims neither to submit the world to the abstract rule of a Law [symbolic Order], nor to struggle against an external and radical Evil” (Badiou, 2001, p. 91). Therefore, the Truth-subject embodies a coalition between the Event and the subject’s intuition. Notwithstanding, Žižek asserts “that the opposition between the external social regulations and the internal moral Law is that between reality and the Real: social regulations can still be justified by objective requirements of social coexistence; while the demand of moral Law is unconditional, brooking no excuse. Social regulations make peaceful coexistence possible, while moral Law is a traumatic injunction that disrupts it” (Žižek, 1999, p. 280). Any submission to the emerging Event reflects the subject’s masochistic *jouissance* in circumventing all the common laws and legal codes:

What if the subject invents external social norms precisely in order to escape the unbearable pressure of the moral Law? Isn't it much easier to have an external Master who can be duped, towards whom one can maintain a minimal distance and private space, than to have an intimate Master, a stranger, a foreign body in the very heart of one's being? (Žižek, 1999, p. 280)

Žižek clarifies that such *jouissance* reflects the fact that the subject can attenuate the centers of power by bribing them, whereas the subject's humbleness cannot outwit the uncompromising superego. "Whom does this scene of suffering and submission serve to deceive?" (Žižek, 1999, p. 281). Thus, any submission to an external Law including Badiou's Truth/Event can masochistically supply the subject with the minimum of being: "I suffer; therefore, I am, I exist, I participate in the positive order of being. It is thus not guilt and/or pleasure, but existence itself which is at stake in the subject's stance to the demanding external Law" (Žižek, 1999, p. 281). The same mechanism applies to the mythic violence whereby the subject subordinates himself to an internalized source of influence.

The Truth/Event and mythic violence seem to contradict 'divine violence'. The mythic violence is a fantastic relationship with extraordinary sources of law, whereas "divine violence serves to undermine that fantasy" (Martel, 2012, p. 19) and "constitutes antithesis in all respects" (Martel, 2012, p. 19), and destroys all the potential grounds that establish law and order. Walter Benjamin characterizes divine violence as "a pure violence without justification that is in sharp contrast to the 'legal' and 'justified' mythic violence" (Martel, 2012, p. 144). Divine violence neither follows any transcendental Big Other nor "it gives the agent the license just to kill with some kind of angelic innocence" (Žižek, 2008b, p. 162). It goes beyond the confines of the personal pathology, criminal law, and sacred books. "Divine violence purifies the guilty not of guilt but of law" (ibid), and those obliterated by it deserve punishment because they are guilty of living a mere life schematized by laws.

Divine violence is similar to the 'Act'; both undermine the dominant ideologies. "The Act necessarily has a messianic dimension, then, since it explicitly rejects or 'traverses' all the founding assumptions of the existing ideological regime, with its undergirding political fantasies" (Sharpe, 2004, p. 84). The Act never aims at identifying the subject with any 'new present. Žižek impliedly brackets the Act with the Kantian anti-prudential 'diabolical evil' as "any act motivated solely by a sense of duty alone, despite all the individual's pre-existing 'pathological' feelings and attachments" (Sharpe, 2004, p. 126). It prefigure a succeeding transition that is inhumane, and ineffably intransigent.

Badiou in *Ethics, An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (2001), admits that the Truth/Event is at risk of seizure by what he considers as the Evil [*Le Mal*] that distracts the Event from its holy mission. Furthermore; "it is always a possibility that the fidelity to which the subject is faithful looks very much- too much like- this or that certified Evil the formal characteristic of which are exactly those of a truth" (Badiou, 2001, p. 79). The Evil is embodied into three forms, each one a 'perversion' of the Truth: (a) "betrayal" or what can be construed as a simple disavowal through which the individual, prior to subjectivization, intentionally or influenced by the hegemonic regime, adheres to pre-Evental transcendental Law as if nothing had happened; (b) "delusion" or pervasive mimicry of the Truth/Event whereby a cunning chicanery is mistaken as a thorough and authentic Event; and (c) "terror" or a straight ontologization of the Event that reduces the Event to a new symbolic Order (Badiou, 2001, p. x). Badiou points out the reaction of the liberal democratic systems to the Truth as a betrayal to the Event, and associates delusion with the fascist conservative revolution as a pseudo-Event, and at last relates terror to "Stalinism". The Evil leave the subject on the verge of self-erasure whereby the subject-to-become betrays the becoming-subject in himself, and becomes the enemy of that truth whose subject the 'someone' that he is composed.

"Simulacrum", as Badiou asserts, is also a potential hazard to the Event. Simulacrum is a mechanism whose sole aim is to conceal the void of the previous symbolic Order in the hope that the impaired and deficient Law will return and imitates all the features of an authentic Event. Simulacrum has not only found a naming, but it

also constructed its particular subject; it calls for the subject's support even when the subject no longer feels caught up in the process, and when the event's name is lost, or the event gets obscured (Badiou, 2001, p. 71). Simulacrum always resorts to terror because it strives to thwart the emerging Event. Badiou clarifies that both the Event and the simulacrum that imitates it, include some changes. So thinking, he proposes that there can be four types of change: (a) modification that just modifies or rearranges the codes of the present transcendental hegemony; (b) weak singularities with weak existential consequences; (c) strong singularities with important existential change but whose consequences remain measurable, and finally (d) the events, as strong singularities that generate strong and infinite consequences (Johnson, 2009, p. 8). Apparently, what distinguishes the simulacrum from the Event is the fact that the first three changes can be traced in a simulacrum whereas 'the strong and infinite consequences' are exclusively present in the Truth/Event.

Conclusion

This paper used the ethical and political assumptions of Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek to shed light on a controversial question having occupied human's mind since the ancient times; do our pains and sufferings turn us into pathetic creatures or usher us into the safe shore of freedom and tranquility? Žižek sees good grounds for pessimism about our traumatic experiences, stressing that traumas can incarcerate us in an irreducible miserable life. He magnifies how political systems use our traumas to make us orthodox and obedient citizens. On the other hand, Badiou sounds optimistic about our past traumatic experiences, believing that they can bring to light the dark sides of our life, and supply us with extra inducement to remove every element that incapacitates us. Both Badiou and Žižek, however, consent that there are myriads of conditions affecting the feasibility of constructive traumatic events. Both theoreticians as this paper detected, seem to have in mind the same attributes that match the ground-breaking Act as an ultimate factor that can guarantee our emancipation.

ORCID

<https://www.orcid.org/0000-0002-6483-5803>

References

- Badiou, A. (2001). *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (Peter Hallward, Trans.). Verso. (Original work published 1988)
- Badiou, A. (2005). *Being and Event*. (Oliver Felltham. Trans.). Continuum. (Original work published 1988)
- Benjamin, W. (1978) "Critique of Violence." *Reflections: Essays, Aphorism, Autobiographical Writings*. Shochon Books.
- Bistoën, G. (2016) *Trauma, Ethics and the Political beyond PTSD The Dislocations of the Real*. Palgrave.
- Bistoën, G, S. Vanheule, and S. Craps. (2014). Badiou's Theory of the Event and the Politics of Trauma Recovery. *Theory and Psychology*, 24(6), pp. 830-851. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354314548616>.
- Craps, S. (2013). *Postcolonial witnessing: Trauma out of bounds*. Palgrave.
- Di Nicola, V. (2012). *Trauma and event: A philosophical Archeology*. Wallis Fink
- Fink, B. (1997). *Clinical introduction to lacanian psychoanalysis*. Harvard University Press.
- Gildersleeve, M. (2016). Complexes Tickling the Subject. [Review. of Ticklish Subject, by Slavoj Žižek]. *Humanities*, 5(85). University of Queensland. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.3390/h5040085>
- Hallward, P. (2003). *Badiou, A Subject to Truth*. U of Minnesota.
- Hardack, R. (2018) Amnésia of Death: The Unsettled Endings of the Dead Who Don't Know They're Dead. *Sillages Critiques*, 24(3). Retrieved from DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/sillagescritiques.6053>
<http://journals.openedition.org/sillagescritiques/6053>

- Herman, J. (2015) *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence- From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. Basic Books, 2015.
- Hook, D. (2016). *Of Symbolic Mortification and 'Undead Life: Slavoj Žižek on the Death Drive*. Duquesne U.
- Johnston, A. (2005). *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive*. Northwestern UP.
- Johnston, A. (2009). *Badiou, Žižek and Political Transformations*. Northwestern University Press.
- Martel, J. R. (2012). *Divine Violence: Walter Benjamin and the Eschatology of Sovereignty*. Routledge.
- Norris, C. (2012). *Continuum Studies in Continental Philosophy: Derrida, Badiou and the Formal Imperative*. Continuum.
- Pfeifer, G. (2012). *The New Materialism: Althusser, Badiou, and Žižek*. U of South Florida.
- Purcell, W. (2016). The Death Drive: Zombies and Zombie Capitalism. *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, 10(3). Retrieved from <http://Žižekstudies.org/index.php/IJZS/article/view/951/986>.
- Sharpe, M. (2004). *Slavoj Žižek: A Little Piece of the Real*. Ashgate.
- Sigg, A. (2015). *Therapeutic Theatre: Trauma and Bodily Articulation in Post-War European Drama*. McGill U, 2015.
- Slavitt, D. R. translator. (2007). *The Theban Plays of Sophocles*. Yale UP.
- Valentic, T. (2008). Symbolic Violence and Global Capitalism. *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, 2(2). Retrieved from <http://Žižekstudies.org/index.php/IJZS/article/view/108/108>. PDF download.
- Van der Linden, H. (2012). On the Violence of Systemic Violence: A Critique of Slavoj Žižek. *Radical Philosophy Review*, 15(1), pp. 33-51. Retrieved from

doi: 10.5840/radphilrev20121516.

http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers/248/.

- Wells, C. (2014). *The Subject of Liberation, Žižek, Politics, Psychoanalysis*. Bloomsbury.
- Žižek, S. (1992). *Enjoy Your Symptom: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*. Routledge.
- Žižek, S. (1996). *Interrogating the Real: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters*. London: Verso.
- Žižek, S. (1999). *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. Verso.
- Žižek, S. (2000). *The Fragile Absolute or Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth-fighting for*. Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj. (2006). *How to Read Lacan*. London: Granta.
- Žižek, S. (2008a). *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*. Verso.
- Žižek, S. (2008b). *In Defence of Lost Causes*. London: Verso.
- Žižek, S. (2008c). *Violence, six sideways reflections*. Picador.
- Žižek, S. (2009). *First as tragedy then as Farce*. London: Verso.
- Žižek, S. (2010). *Living in the End Time*. Verso.
- Žižek, S. (2012). *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. Verso.
- Žižek, S. (2014a). *Event, Philosophy in Transit*. Penguin.
- Žižek, S. (2014b). [*Trouble in Paradise: From the End of History to the End of Capitalism*](#). Allen Lane.
- Zupančič, A. (2000). *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*. Verso