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Obvious: Žižek is Žižek!

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I am delighted to have been invited to write this epilogue. As to Slavoj Žižek, I also feel allowed to evade the convention of dwelling on any unnecessary presentations. Suffice to say that, like many others in many places, I hold his work in high regard --- hardly surprising in itself, considering that he is arguably the most celebrated, productive and inspired contemporary philosopher and political thinker worldwide.

One of Žižek's main features is ambivalence and in this book he also remains rather pessimistic. The pandemic will not change society for the better, Žižek claims. The only thing that seems clear is that the virus will destroy the foundations of our lives bringing about a considerable amount of damage and suffering. As he also points out right from the outset, moreover, the epidemic will not make us any wiser.

Through this blend of ambivalence and pessimism, Žižek develops a view, it seems to me, that can be compared to, and contrasted with the production by Basque Films *The Platform* (2019) --- a Netflix blockbuster dystopia mixing suspense, science fiction and horror, in which director Galder Gaztelu-Urrutia also conveys a dark and skeptical message: as a species, human beings are as selfish as we are greedy.

The Platform itself refers to a sort of jail with cells built vertically on top of each other. Two inmates share each cell. From a rectangular hole in the middle of the cell, a platform descends level by level with heaps of opulent food and drink. Opulent, that is, for those on the top floors while the inmates on the lower ones depend on the leftovers from above. The overall atmosphere is gray, violent and claustrophobic.

No coincidence then that this suffocating sense of claustrophobia pervading the entire film has been hailed as a main reason of its global success. A fitting parable, we are told, of the confinement and lockdown observed to overcome the threat of Coronavirus. However, a more fitting question is this: are we endemically selfish as a species (*The Platform*) or will the global pandemic lead us to rethink our priorities (Žižek)?

The Platform is a human allegory that appears to convey a radical political message, including an uncompromising critique of the capitalist class system. As Gaztelu-Urrutia himself clarifies in some interviews, however, the characters Goreng and Baharat, as soon as they take steps in favour of socialism in an attempt to persuade other prisoners to distribute food voluntarily, they kill half of those who want to help.

At any rate, by the end of the film some light of hope also shines, notably in the "message" embodied by the innocence of the girl lost in the last floor down below. A message conveying the core teaching of the film: the dark force of envy devoid of solidarity shapes the human spirit, society cannot change, only by cultivating virtue can we progress individually --- a weak message, it must be said, after all the fuss.

Weak because it is worth restating how in regards of human *nature*, Žižek remains just as pessimistic. It only suffices to recall how often he warns us against the danger of seeing the light at the end of the tunnel --- as it may well be that of another train coming directly at us. What Žižek does not do, however, is mistaking pessimism with splendid fatalism, and in the face of failure, he refuses to indulge in exquisite sorrow.

For Žižek the answer does not lie on the responsibility of the wise individual. The answer, on the contrary, stems from paying attention to what is common and collective. Certainly, Žižek *knows* only too well the truth behind the past experience of real communism: disaster, catastrophe... *But nevertheless*, when using the term "communism", he is thinking of a new global reorganization for the future instead.

Pandemic, COVID-19 has shaken the world and, according to Žižek, the choice we have left is between barbarism as we know it or reinvented communism. As a result of the coronavirus crisis, his main argument follows, the global capitalist structures and the neoliberal agenda must be replaced. This requires taking the management of production and redistribution away from market imperatives into social welfare.

According to Žižek, overcoming the free market dominated neoliberal economic system is key to prevent the aftermath of the pandemic from becoming a huge nightmare. In addition, the time to place emphasis on collaboration and solidarity has never been more urgent. As we all are now in the same boat, a reinvented communism ought to be developed with new transparent and popular policies.

As Žižek contends, this boat will have to leave behind an old and exhausted way of life. There is no possible return to the normality of the past. Another new “normal” is needed. The word communism does not only refer to the possibility of regulating the economy at a global scale becoming normal. It also refers to collaboration and solidarity not as idealistic aspirations but the only rational choice that can save us.

Solidarity and collaboration, in other words, also belong in the realm of virtue, which is not a privilege exclusive to the free will of the solitary individual making melancholic choices --- recall that the epidemic will not make us any wiser anyway. And so is the case with securing a rational management or administration of the collective political body, including, specifically, our selfish interests inscribed within it.

In *The Platform*, what we are asked through the character Imoguri is this: if everyone were to consume just what they need, that is, if there is more than enough food and drink to satisfy everyone twice over, why is it then that each individual does not make the wise choice of freely sharing for the sake of all? Žižek's answer, no doubt, would dismiss virtuous individual will like this: *it is the Administration, stupid!*

But what is the Administration? “You are one of those who thinks everything the Administration does is wrong, aren't you?” spats conformist Trigamasi at young, self-righteous rebel Goreng. In *The Platform*, the Administration stands for the classic image of hierarchical, absolute authority prone to the manipulation and arbitrariness involved to ensure power and resources are always kept at the top level of society.

Trigamasi gives voice thus to the status quo and dominant common sense. He is the proverbial cynical mocker with a bleak message stuck forever and a day in his self-satisfied smirk: humans are fools, the main existing order cannot be substantially changed. Despite the vain efforts by some to rebel and fight, those below will have to always make do with the leftovers that trickle ever so thingly down the line.

No wonder then “obvious” is the keyword Trigamasi repeats non-stop to validate the existing order of things and insist on the impossibility of substantial change. Yet as things stand, it is just as obvious that both the status quo and the dominant common sense can change. That the Covid-19 crisis, in fact, may open a window of opportunity to build a new normal beyond the exiting neoliberal failure to deliver.

Insofar as they only foster apathy and passivity, the wise message of such somber dystopias as *The Platform* is ultimately conservative. Banking on the hopelessly selfish motivations of the human species and anticipating the darkest of all possible future scenarios the answer is a simple one, better the devil we know. Žižek is no fool, though, and he seldom equates change with wishful utopian thinking.

Žižek, in other words, and I do apologise for the lack of adornment in the examples I am to use, hardly falls into half-baked New Age spiritual utopianism: the pandemic is a well deserved *karma* to consumerist capitalism. We are entering a permanent state of *nirvana*, the promised land of organic milk and honey where Mother Earth will smile again and Pilates will be compulsory teaching in all state-run schools.

Quinoa socialism is not Žižek’s answer to the Pandemic. Despite the possibilities for change, there is no inherent reason why capitalism should lose strength, why cuts, outsourcing and precariousness should cease to increase. Normalizing the ongoing states of emergency is also a clear and present danger. And so is losing the little collective feeling left and caring, however virtuously, for one’s individual survival only.

To sum up, therefore, what Žižek’s communism expresses is the importance and need for a global administration or organization that operates outside the logic of the free market, so called. As a result, communism still rests on the ability to regulate and control the economy. To do so, likewise, this global administration should also keep the capacity to limit, when necessary, the sovereignty of nation-states.

The issue of state sovereignty is central to those seeking to establish an independent republic rooted in international solidarity. For no matter how vigorous our emphasis on political freedom, social justice and so on, we will still have to face up to the clever ruse of neoliberalism in regards of the state --- to which, in passing, the patronizing metropolitan Left also succumbs. So here is Žižek’s take on the question.

Without any shadow of doubt, the well-known demand of neoliberalism for less state power and more deregulation is myth at its purest. Neoliberalism needs, in fact, the active support of the state to expand the market to ever wider spheres. To equate neoliberalism and less state is therefore a toxic exercise. And the same applies to deregulation, which is another neoliberal keyword empty of the meaning it intends.

In this context, Žižek's ambivalence towards the existing states under neoliberalism is also obvious. On the one hand, when he expresses his support for of a global organisation able to limit the sovereignty of states, Žižek means to force states to promote and regulate, insofar as there is no such thing as deregulation, in favor of public and collective interest instead of private and corporate interests, as per usual.

On the other hand, again, let no one be fooled that change is guaranteed with the added legitimacy gained by the ideas of the public, the collective and the commons during the Pandemic. The Left will still have to work within the coordinates of existing states. Honest philosophers on the Left will have to be state philosophers, ready to dirty their hands on behalf of new *Administrations* from within the existing structures.

Devoid of convolute theory, the customary depth of Žižek's predicament remains intact in *Pandemic*. Presented to us under the form of newspaper opinion columns and modulated in a tone both intimate and eloquent, Žižek also avoids resorting this time to sensationalist provocation and dirty jokes --- something which still remains the case in the added new chapter included in world translations --- see *The Appointment in Samara: A New Use for Some Old Jokes*.

But Žižek is Žižek, and Žižek without fireworks is not fully Žižek. So, when requested to further contribute perhaps to promote this Basque edition, he immediately obliged with the following last word --- see *Love, Sex and Coronavirus*. The reader will soon notice that we now enter rude territory but also that the topic itself has already been addressed in the book. This is a chunk, therefore, probably censored by some prudish Anglo editor as keen on respectability as eager to keep it all safe and clean.

I extend my gratitude to *Txalaparta* editors Jon Jimenez and Garazi Arrula for daring to add it on. This assists, I think, not only in dismissing the odd legendary cliché of Basque puritanism in regards of sex. It also restores the true balance of the entire book. It brings Žižek's ambivalence to the fore in all its sublime and *pervert* dimensions. PANdemIC and all, it was quite erotic so far. Now, enjoy the porno bit!