

## **Book Review on Slavoj Žižek's *Like a Thief in Broad Daylight: Power in the Era of Post-human Capitalism***

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Slavoj Žižek is an extremely interesting philosopher of our time who translated the philosophy of Hegel, Marx and the psychology of Lacan into a formidable scholarship and activism. Importantly, his philosophy participates in Alain Badiou's conviction that the function of philosophy is to corrupt the youth, to alienate them from the hegemonic ideologico-political order, to spread radical doubts, and enable them to think unconventionally, boldly think dangerously (Žižek 2018: 8-11).

The book *Like a Thief in Broad Daylight* centers on the theses that radical social transformation comes like a thief and it is already happening in a broad daylight where capitalism is openly disintegrating and changing into something else paving for post-human capitalism. It appears as an unexpected by-product and never as the achievement of a posited goal. Žižek claimed that we failed to perceive the ongoing transformation because of our immersion with ideology (Žižek 2018: 10-15). Moreover, he explained eclectically the

book by identifying the current spectacles in technology, politics, and economy under four topics: *The State of Things*, *Vagaries of Power*, *From Identity to Universality*, and Ernest Lubitsch, *Sex and Indirectness*.

In *The State of Things*, Žižek described how the progressive disintegration of global capitalism manifested. One of the clear signals is that capitalists themselves, the likes of Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, and particularly Bill Gates posited that capitalism is not working and that humanity has to act outside market forces (Žižek 2018: 19-29). Moreover, Žižek agrees with Wolfgang Streeck's claim that Marxism was right about the final crisis of capitalism and that it is brought about by lower profit rates, increased corruption and violence, and financialization. In addition, Žižek discusses the threats the new technologies pose to human dignity and freedom. How technology is presented as beneficial to individual and social development, which blinds people from the foreboding complications and consequences, particularly if handled by private corporations and state security agencies (Žižek 2018: 42-60). In a nutshell, the discussion centers on how posthuman capitalism will emerge, and that is because of the current state of things.

In *The Vagaries of Power*, the discussion centers on the idea where Žižek indicates that we are living in interesting times which means living in a time of trouble, confusion, and suffering. One of which is where a candidate in some democratic countries emerges and wins elections as it were from nowhere, in a moment of confusion building a movement around the candidate. However, Žižek pointed out that there is in free elections a minimal aspect of politeness where those in power politely pretend that they do not hold power, and ask us to freely decide if we want to restore them to power in a way that mirrors the logic of a gesture meant to be refused. Thus, in a hopeless situation, facing a false choice, Žižek said that people should summon up the courage simply to abstain from voting and begin to think (Žižek 2018: 80-107).

In *From Identity to Universality*. Here, Žižek talks about the tension between global space and nations states which lies in this defense of a specific (ethnic, religious, cultural) way of life, which is perceived as threatened by globalization in all its versions, including the progressive ones and that today peaceful coexistence of different politico-ideological ways of life, means that coexistence means in the context of the smooth functioning of global capitalism. Thus, suggesting that there is a need for re-analysis of the founding myths of our societies requiring hard theoretical work (Žižek 2018: 108-141).

Finally, Ernest Lubitsch, *Sex and Indirectness*. The discussion broadly centers on the emancipation of women and Žižek pointed out that part of the struggle for emancipation should be to demonstrate to men how the acceptance of emancipated women will release them from anxieties and enable them to lead more satisfying lives. In addition, Žižek presents an analysis of the ideological manipulation by kidnapping Black Panther from a

radical black liberation movement from the 1960s to a superhero-king of a powerful African kingdom soliciting a much deeper reflection (Žižek 2018: 142-182).

Žižek remarkably concluded the book by drawing a Hegelian reflection saying that the current predominant ideology is not a positive vision of some utopian future but a cynical resignation, an acceptance of 'the world is accompanied by a warning that if we want to chat it too much, only totalitarian horror will ensure' (Žižek 2018: 182-208).

As a reader and admirer of Slavoj Žižek's philosophy, I would like to present my analysis of the book by using three anecdotes that are constantly used by Žižek in various books: the red ink, worker stealing wheelbarrows, and Picasso's *Guernica*. A technique along with allegories, fables, and stories of sarcasm whose intention is to draw out repressed ideological predicament. In a way, this is my way of emulating Žižek's eclectic style of writing.

The anecdote of the red ink is about a German worker who gets a job in Siberia. Aware of how all mail will be read by censors, he tells his friends, "Let's establish a code." If a letter you will get from me is written in ordinary blue ink; it is true. If it is written in red ink; it is false.' After a month his friends get the first letter from Siberia, written in blue ink, where they can read, "everything is wonderful here in Siberia. Stores are full. Food is abundant. Apartments are large and properly heated. Movie theatres show Western movies. There are many beautiful girls for an affair. The only thing unavailable in stores is red ink" (Parker 2004:1).

Similarly, in the book, Žižek provides a dimension that urges us "to think dangerously and to question the presuppositions of human freedom and dignity in our liberal welfare state" (Žižek 2018:11) as written in blue ink falsely by the global capitalism on the web that grounds social stability. Forcing an individual to live a life of hedonist reproduction and cynical opportunism coupled with permanent anxiety. However, Žižek pointed out that instead of searching for the red ink, a solution, what should be done is to discern the blue ink that falsely interprets the reality of the red ink. Thus, sometimes what is needed when we are confronted with uncertainties is not to search for solutions but it only requires us to change our standpoint for us to see the false realities painted intentionally with blue ink.

Next is the anecdote of a worker who steals a wheelbarrow. There is an old story about a worker suspected of stealing: every night, as he leaves the factory, the wheelbarrow which rolls in front of him is carefully inspected. The guards find nothing. It is always empty. And then, the penny drops...(Žižek 2008:1)

The anecdote preliminarily points out the capitalist violence, the topsy-turvy world of global capitalism. The distribution of wealth is one of the most widely discussed and controversial issues. One of the most contentious approaches in the appropriation of scarce goods is capitalism. Commonly, capitalism is defined as a system in which the means of

production, in private hands, are employed to create a profit, some of which are reinvested to increase profit-generating capacity provided that they are determined by private decisions.

Moreover, the worker who steals the wheelbarrow represents the disorder of global capitalism which constructs an illusion that pushes an individual to own and satisfy that capitalist chimer. While the guard represents the victim of capitalism—and the individual who under the capitalist beguilement fails to recognize the violence. But are we painting too many dark pictures? Advocates of capitalism deemed that despite all the critical prophecies, capitalism is not in crisis, from a global perspective, but progressive more than ever. Truly, capitalism is not in crisis, it is just the people caught in this explosive development are in crisis. Similarly, when corporate fast-food chains and supermarkets wantonly produce plastic products that polluted our environment, people thought plastics and home appliances were signs of development but just like the guard we were unable to see the *modus operandi* of the factory worker (Žižek 2017:33-35)

In addition, this tension between overall rapid growth and local crises is part of capitalism's normal functioning: capitalism renews itself through such crises. Thus, one task of this book is to send the message that everyone must drop the obsession with progress instead focus on those who are left behind by the gods and the market (Žižek 2018:25). Since capitalism legitimizes as an economic system that implies and furthers personal freedoms; its dynamics have brought new forms of slavery such as thousands of immigrant workers being deprived of elementary civil rights and freedoms; massive use of labor force in the exploitation of natural resources; and rise of Asian sweatshops (Žižek 2018:37).

In connection, capitalism started in the Philippines in 1834 when the country officially open for trade and residence to merchants coming from any foreign port. The demands of capitalism modernity forced the country to develop an agricultural economy, foster a national market, and attract commerce (Abinales & Amoroso 2016:77). With time, capitalism gave rise to a new class of commercially-oriented landowners. The class became the Philippine economic elites, which eventually found a favorable advantage in politics, the association of wealth and power become popularly known as crony capitalism. It is based on monopoly, exclusive access to the government's financial programs, and brute forces. The prevalence of cronyism brings about the so-called booty capitalism, which explains the disposition of why the country's long-standing difficulties in converting its assets into sustained developmental progress (Kang 2002:1-21).

Moreover, the detrimental impact of capitalism on the country can be traced at various times, particularly in the industrialization era. From Pre-Martial Law (1946-1972), Martial Law (1972-1986) to post-Martial Law (1986-present) manifested that the only way to achieve economic competitiveness in global capitalism is through foreign dependency and debt from multilateral institutions such as World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The so-called "generosity" is remunerated through liberalization of the Philippine economy, privatization, dismantling of cartels and monopolies, and other policies put in place. As a result, commerce helps nurture capitalism in the country (Hutchcroft 1998:10-11).

Finally, the anecdote of Picasso's Guernica where a German officer visited Picasso in his Paris studio during the Second World War. There he saw Guernica and was shocked at the modernist "chaos" of the painting, asked Picasso: "Did you do this?" Picasso calmly replied: "No, you did this!" (Žižek 2008:11)

In this anecdote, I would like to draw to the growing distrust and disgust of Filipinos in Philippine politics. Just like the German soldier, there is quite a good number of politicians in the Philippines who blatantly exclude their responsibility for the deficiencies by denying their involvement in issues. Some of the compelling issues are rampant buying and selling of votes, why people delinquently spend their money received from the government under its poverty alleviation program, and why farmers despite the enormous programs failed to translate into a concrete inclusive socio-economic growth. Instead, they claim that is part of the reality that people naturally cause their failure and chaos. Like the German soldier who instead of reflecting on the horrors that they had made ask Picasso who did it.

Furthermore, one of the spectacles in Philippine politics with an unrecognized impact on people and the promotion of inclusive growth is populism. Ideally, the critical feature of populism is that the general will of the people is the source of political authority and a unified entity able to act and retrieve power from government officials. Scholars considered populism as either a political movement or a political ideology. However, both perspectives consider society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the pure people versus the corrupt elite. It argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people. Populist rhetoric takes on an oppositional character, in which the people are pitted against the elite, whether that elite is understood in socio-economic or cultural terms (Kenny 2017:30-35).

However, in the Philippines populist approach has always been an effective strategy for those who seek power in the government, they do it callously by constructing an outsider or maverick image by expertly crafting narrative scripts and visual cues, arguing that this allows populist politicians to set themselves apart from the political establishment. Thus, as a result, there emerge different kinds of populism such as elitist populism, media star populism, applied populism, and penal populism (Thompson 2010:1-28). Therefore, similarly to Picasso, the book urges us that we must tell them that it is the result of their politics. Thus, due to their utter irresponsibility, it draws only dissent and indifference among Filipinos.

In conclusion, the book is an exploration of possibilities and tendencies, particularly of the science and technological advancement (from Elon Musk to Mark Zuckerberg), as humanity enters a new posthuman era in which the basics of self-understanding as free and

responsible human agents will be affected. It means that readers of this book are presumed aware of the dramatic changes in the world of philosophy and social issues around the globe since the way Žižek confers arguments represents a complex genealogy of divergent trails through a different framework and cultural terrains. I do not intend to discourage future readers but rather suggest to better understand Žižek and concretely translate the purpose of this book into our worldview.

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