and through capitalism will remain with us, it seems, forever, even if they may be somehow coordinated with the more benign inputs of renewables.

Nevertheless, Malm lacks, in my opinion, a sophisticated model of consumption to go with his very sophisticated model of fossil-fuelled production. Presumably if a Malm-inspired technocracy were to regulate energy production and consumption many individual consumers would be obliged to, well, consume less. One can imagine how this 'planned economic recession' would be received. But why do people in the First World consume so much in the first place? Are they simply bewitched by capitalism? How can they be weaned from their brand of consumption ('consumerism')? One would like to think that the low-energy-consuming citizens of the developing world could serve as models of virtuous restraint, but one sees, throughout the world, that when resources become available just about everyone avails him- or herself of the resources on offer. Capitalist theorists call this 'development'. Malm needs to ask, then, why consumption mania is not so much just a symptom of First World decadence, and instead an indicator of 'progress' worldwide.

I would argue for this reason that Malm needs a more developed theory of (personal, societal) consumption to go along with his convincing and thoroughly researched study of energetic expenditure and power (political, economic and energetic). Does fossil-fuel culture have an appeal beyond its purely economic seductiveness for the capitalist? Could the pleasures of consumption be tied to a low-carbon lifestyle? Could there be another pleasure in consuming, aside from just buying, 'using' and dumping more stuff, another kind of consumption, another expenditure of energy? Could we reorient renewables and see them as part of a larger practice of desire? Could areas as diverse as sexuality and religion, modes of expenditure of energies not directly tied to fossil fuels and their attendant abstraction and quantification, provide areas of pleasure more powerful than those provided by the capitalist-fostered fossil fuel high?

Future investigations will no doubt address these problems, and Malm's *Fossil Capital* will remain a singularly important work, pointing the way for future work in economics, politics, theories of time, space and energy. For the first time, thanks to Malm, we see how fossil-fuel productivity and (over)consumption are not incidental to capitalism, but rather integral to it; from now on one cannot think the one without the other.

Allan Stoekl

First we take Europe

Slavoj Žižek, *Against the Double Blackmail: Refugees, Terror and Other Troubles with the Neighbours*, Allen Lane, London, 2016. 128 pp., £9.99 pb., 978 0 24127 884 0.

Ian McEwan once said of his friend Christopher Hitchens that 'if Hitchens didn't exist, we wouldn't be able to invent him.' The same sentiment holds for Slavoj Žižek: we wouldn't be able to invent a Marxist philosopher such as Žižek for the simple fact that his political *modus operandi* is to consistently break with our assumptions about what we perceive to be self-evident leftist (or the ideological constellation of the dominant liberal-left) dogmas or truths.

Ever since the publication of *The Sublime Object of Ideology* in 1989, Žižek's theoretical-political interventions have sought to slaughter the sacred ideological cows of the 'Western' Left (from leftist academics to activists and political parties). From his continuous criticism of liberal political correctness and multicultural tolerance, the all too pervasive rise of identity politics among leftist activists, to his theoretical disagreements with theorists of discourse analysis, and the need to reorient the shattered Left to the Communist Idea (something which Žižek and Badiou have been championing for years), Žižek's political commentary has always intervened critically in the ideological discourse of the Left in order to pinpoint its limitations and failures. It is within this interventionist framework that we should read Žižek's most recent and most controversial political book to date, *Against the Double Blackmail: Refugees, Terror, and Other Troubles with the Neighbours*.

Against the Double Blackmail is short, perhaps too short for what it attempts to accomplish. The book is an expansion of a series of articles, written in the immediate wake of the refugee crisis in the autumn of 2015, which sparked a strong backlash on social media, where leftists were quick to dismiss Žižek as a racist, a fascist, a Eurocentric right-winger, and so on. Most of the vitriolic reactions against Žižek are effectively nothing but knee-jerk reactions: from hyperbolic, emotional resentment to quotes taken out of context, misattributions and, in some extreme cases, flat-out lies. The publication of this book therefore serves as an opportunity for Žižek to develop and rearticulate his position.

Žižek identifies two modes of what he calls 'ideological blackmail, which make us irreparably guilty'

in reference to the thousands of refugees risking their lives to come to Europe. The first belongs to 'left liberals, expressing their outrage at how Europe is allowing thousands to drown in the Mediterranean', who 'state that Europe should show solidarity, should open its doors widely'; the second belongs to 'anti-immigrant populists, [who] claim that we should protect our way of life, pull up the drawbridge and let Africans or Arabs solve their own problems'. For Žižek 'both solutions are bad, but which is worse? To paraphrase Stalin, they are both worse.'

Žižek's rejection of the ideology which frames the refugee crisis in moral language follows Hegel's criticism of the Beautiful Soul, 'which feels superior to the corrupted world while secretly participating in it: they need this corrupted world as the only terrain where they can exert their moral superiority'. These beautiful souls are those on the Left (both mainstream and not) who advocate that Europe ought to open its borders and allow all the refugees to enter. According to Žižek this will never happen (and he claims that even those who advocate for open borders *know* it will never truly happen) since it would trigger a massive popular anti-refugee uprising. Those who advocate this, therefore, merely do so out of moral self-importance.

Žižek's criticism of the dominant 'left-liberal' tendency can be effectively summed up by Oscar Wilde's remark that 'their remedies are part of the disease'. For Žižek, then:

> With regard to the refugees, our proper aim should be to try and reconstruct global society on such a basis that desperate refugees will no longer be forced to wander around. Utopian as it may appear, this large-scale solution is the only realist one, and the display of altruistic virtues ultimately prevents the carrying out of this aim. The more we treat refugees as objects of humanitarian help, and allow the situation which compelled them to leave their countries to prevail, the more they come to Europe, until tensions reach boiling point, not only for the refugees' countries of origin but here as well. So, confronted with this double blackmail, we are back at the great Leninist question: what is to be done?

What is to be done for Žižek is to first take a step back and assess the current geopolitical global situation. Rather than engage in the spectacle of public moral outrage at the ongoing refugee crisis, Žižek wants us to pause and think. The crisis, he claims, 'offers to Europe a unique chance to redefine itself'. This is because 'every crisis is in itself the instigation of a new beginning, every failure of short-term pragmatic measures (for example, of the financial reorganisation of the European Union) a blessing in disguise, an opportunity to rethink our very foundations.' He proposes that we need a 'critical engagement with the entire European tradition', where 'one should repeat the question, "What is Europe?," or rather, "What does it mean for us to be Europeans?", and in doing so reformulate a new vision. The task is a difficult one.' Žižek's own proposal is to resuscitate 'the emancipatory core of the idea of Europe'. It is this attempt at reformulation of the European tradition that sparks such controversy and anger from those on the Left who think Žižek advocates a Eurocentric position.

Consistent with his interventionism, Žižek argues that the contemporary Left must be ready to break with its ideological taboos in order to revitalize its own critical political project. The taboos he identifies include: (i) breaking with equating the 'European emancipatory legacy' with imperialism, colonialism and racism; (ii) the reliance upon the inner self-narrative of our lived experiences as constitutive of our external politics; (iii) the notion that the insistence on 'a way of life' is inherently proto-fascist; (iv) the tendency that sees any criticism of Islam as 'Islamophobia'; and finally (v) the equation of any politicized form of religion as mere fanaticism. Žižek's wager is that not only are these points of contention ideological, in the sense that they obfuscate and distort how we on the Left react to and think about our current predicament, but that these taboos are easily accommodated by global capitalism. Žižek's endeavour is to undermine the very ideological presuppositions of a toothless, ineffectual Left which has cosied up to the dominant liberal ideological framework of contemporary liberal-democratic capitalism (identity politics, multicultural tolerance, political correctness, etc.).

In calling for the Western Left to break all of these taboos, Žižek strives to awaken it from its liberal

ideological slumber. For example, while acknowledging the colonialism and imperialism that European countries have propagated, and continue to propagate, around the world, he points out that global contemporary capitalism easily incorporates all the different cultures, religions and traditions within its very logic. What's more, today global capitalism seems to function better if it adopts the authoritative politics of non-European countries like China, Singapore, and so on:

> The cruel irony of anti-Eurocentrism is that, on behalf of anti-colonialism, one criticizes the West at the very historical moment when global capitalism no longer needs Western values in order to function smoothly… In short, critics of Eurocentricism are rejecting Western cultural values at the very moment when, critically reinterpreted, many of them – egalitarianism, fundamental human rights, the welfare state, to name a few – can serve as a weapon against capitalist globalization.

As contemporary leftists we should be able to be critical towards Europe's colonialism *as well as* take care that our political positions do not go hand in hand with the dominant ideology of Western liberal-democratic capitalism. It is curious how many critics of Žižek seem to miss this point. It is easy to dismiss Žižek's interventions as nothing but controversial claims intended merely to provoke, and too easy and too lazy to suggest that Žižek has shifted to the right or that he is nothing but a Eurocentric, Islamophobic, racist; such caricatures of Žižek fail to engage with his arguments in any substantial way.

Žižek also makes the point that we must strive to understand the underlying political economy of the crisis, rather than simply engage in humanitarian moralization. He maintains that

> it is not enough to do (what we consider to be) the best for the refugees, receive them with open hands, show sympathy and generosity to the utmost of our ability. The very fact that such displays of our generosity make us feel good should make us suspicious: are we not doing this to forget what is required?

So what *is* required of us? Rather than perpetuate the liberal multicultural ideology of divergent and different cultures coexisting within the liberal democratic capitalist framework, Žižek wants us to demand and reclaim the struggle for universal emancipation.

Not just any conception of universality will do here. As Žižek is well aware from Hegel, there is a difference between a conception of universalism which simply abstracts a general commonality from its particular instantiations (what Hegel calls the 'abstract universal') and a conception of universalism that incorporates and internalizes its particulars (Hegel's 'concrete universal'). The first axiom of any emancipatory project today ought to function as a concrete universal: it ought to connect all different – particular – struggles for emancipation as *one and the same struggle*. Žižek is adamant about this political-theoretical point, concluding that 'maybe such a global solidarity is a utopia. But if we don't engage in it, then we are really lost. And we will deserve to be lost.' As Žižek asserts time and again in this book, the only global, hegemonic form of oppression and exploitation is the economic exploitation of capitalism; therefore our task is to recognize the structural manner in which class struggle overdetermines all other social and political antagonisms. This is not to suggest that class struggle is the *essential* struggle. For Žižek 'class struggle is here the "concrete universality" in the strict Hegelian sense. In relating to its otherness (other antagonisms), it relates to itself, which is to say that it (over-)determines the way it relates to other struggles.'

Never one to patronizingly fetishize the refugees by treating them as a single, homogenous, morally good entity, Žižek's intervention, rather than participating in public moral outrage at all the refugees risking their lives to enter Western countries, is fundamentally a provocation: a provocation meant to shock us out of our preconceived and assumed ideological premisses, one that will continue to be misread (if read at all), misunderstood and probably dismissed outright by those on the Left so content with attacking him as a Eurocentric fascist and an 'Islamophobic' racist. If the idea of communism has any relevance for the twenty-first century then its minimal relevance is that it addresses our common or shared interests, interests which call out for a global will to fight. Everything from the struggle against police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement in the USA, to the fight against ISIS, the rise of the populist, anti-immigrant Far Right in European countries, the end (and failure) of the populist Left in Latin America, the ongoing conflict in Syria and the thousands of refugees fleeing their countries in need of a better life, to the obscenity that is Donald Trump, demands that the Left resuscitate such a global political vision.

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