

# Tea with Žižek

HASMET M. ULUORTA, Departments of Political Studies and International Development Studies, Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada

LAWRENCE QUILL, Department of Political Science, San José State University, California, USA

**ABSTRACT** *When the Occupy Wall Street movement burst on to the political scene in 2011 an analysis developed by the Lacanian theorist Slavoj Žižek (and others) became a critical lens by which to understand the events. Yet this was not the first instance of widespread dissent in the United States to follow from the crisis of 2008. In 2009, the Tea Party Movement had emerged as a major agent of dissent. In this paper, we seek to apply Žižek's analysis to the Tea Party Movement and, in so doing, point to the relative merits and limitations of such an approach. Copyright © 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

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In April 2009 I was resting in a hotel room in Syracuse, hopping between two channels: a PBS documentary on Pete Seeger, the great American country singer of the left; and a Fox News report on the anti-tax Tea Party, with a country singer performing a populist song about how Washington is taxing hard-working ordinary people to finance the Wall Street financiers. There was a weird similarity between the two singers: both were articulating an anti-establishment, populist complaint against the exploitative rich and their state; both were calling for radical measures, including civil disobedience. Slavoj Žižek (2013)

In late 2011, the Occupy Wall Street movement quickly came to symbolize dissent across the United States and beyond. Almost seamlessly Slavoj Žižek seemed to be at the epicentre of framing the significance of the movement to the occupiers and a global audience. Žižek was able to do so not only due to his personally charged style of presentation but through his use of a Hegelian and Lacanian lens. In short while the Occupy Wall Street movement made the slogan “We are the 99%” famous, Žižek's political analysis became a critical lens by which to understand events as they unfolded. Specifically, his application of the so-called “ethical moment”, “the politics of withdrawal”, and “the act” via an analysis of the heroine Antigone gained popular resonance bringing theory to event and event to theory.

Yet this was not the first instance of widespread dissent in the United States to follow from the crisis of 2008–2009; the initial movement was that of the Tea Party. Formed in 2009, the Tea Party movement (TPM) sought to influence political outcomes in favour of ending illegal immigration, gun control, excessive taxation, overreach of the federal government (e.g., the Affordable Care Act, also known as “Obamacare”), and so on. Yet we are aware of no discussion applying Žižek's

Correspondence to: Lawrence Quill, Department of Political Science, San José State University, One Washington Square, San Jose, CA 95192, USA.  
E-mail: lawrence.quill@sjsu.edu

analysis to the TPM. Specifically, there has been insufficient analysis of the Christian underpinnings of the TPM and in particular its premillennialist, dispensationalist worldview. These are significant omissions. Politics, as withdrawal, flow from this form of apocalyptic Christianity. Furthermore, Žižek (2001, 2003a, 2009, 2011; Žižek & Gunjević, 2012) has held firmly that the emancipatory counterpoint to global capitalism is not to be found in the left's fixations with liberal multiculturalism and relativism. Instead it is to be found in apocalyptic Christianity. It is these omissions that this paper seeks to redress. In doing so, it posits that, while the analysis has significant merit, it fails to address the political rupture afforded by a movement like the TPM.

The first and second sections of the paper discuss the emergence of the TPM and the politics of dissent. In the third and fourth sections we discuss the significance of Christ, his crucifixion, the “ethical moment”, and the “politics of withdrawal” through the TPM's Christian dispensationalist worldview and Žižek's atheist-materialist Christianity. In the fifth section we critically examine what we refer to as rupture/rapture politics.

## THE TEA PARTY MOVEMENT: BACKGROUND

The TPM emerged in 2009 and is associated with the trauma of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, the 2008–2009 financial collapse, the election of President Barack Obama and, more broadly, with the shift from American-led 20th-century globalization to an emerging multi-centred 21st-century globalization. Formed in 2009, the TPM consists of libertarians, social conservatives, the religious-right, nationalists, populists, and wealthy financiers such as FreedomWorks. Participants within the TPM are quick to note that dissent is patriotic and is a necessary part in restoring the nation to its core values of fiscal responsibility, constitutionally limited government, and free markets (Tea Party Patriots, 2013).

The TPM has constructed a narrative of the replaying of the American Revolution, casting themselves as the chosen people whose truths will restore the United States to its past glory. TPM activists are quick to note that they have withdrawn from the larger American culture. It is now, within this historical moment, as rebellious outsiders from “mainstream” America that their explicit purpose is to retake the nation and reassert American exceptionalism domestically and globally (Tea Party Patriots, 2013).

The TPM became a national political force through viral videos and messages in direct response to the 2007–2008 financial crisis. The video clip of Rick Santelli (2009), referred to as the “Santelli Rant” aired on network television and uploaded to YouTube and other video sites, is considered to be a triggering event. Santelli accused the Obama administration of promoting “bad behaviour” with the announcement of the expansion of bailouts that his predecessor, President George W. Bush, had initially announced. Santelli said during his segment on CNBC's Squawk Box:

This is America! How many of you people want to pay for your neighbor's mortgage that has an extra bathroom and can't pay their bills? Raise their hand ... President Obama, are you listening? We're thinking of having a Chicago Tea Party in July. All you capitalists that want to show up to Lake Michigan, I'm gonna start organizing.

The so-called rant is not without controversy. While TPM activists consider it to be a spontaneous eruption of a heartfelt impulse about the wrongs America faces, others have suggested it was a carefully planned event orchestrated by powerful rightwing groups and individuals such as the Koch brothers. This, along with the willingness of news organizations, primarily Fox News, to

focus on the TPM, have led some to describe the TPM as an “astroturf movement” rather than a grassroots one (Krugman, 2009; Arceneaux & Nicholson, 2012). As Isaac Martin (2013) has documented extensively, however, rich people’s movements masquerading as “people’s movements” have a long history within the United States. The TPM is not an exception to this but is a continuation of the tradition. Nevertheless it would be incorrect to discount the TPM as solely an astroturf manifestation. Radio host Rush Limbaugh broadcast Santelli’s Rant to more than 10 million national radio listeners, adding, “[t]his is the pulse of the revolution, starting today! When the pulse of the revolution starts, it just takes an action like this to inspire confidence in others who want to show up” (as cited in Meckler & Martin, 2012, p. 8). Shortly thereafter, on 27 February 2009, one of the founders of the Tea Party Patriots, Jenny Beth Martin, organized the first Tea Party rally in Atlanta, Georgia. On 4 March 2009 she and fellow activist Mark Meckler formed the Tea Party Patriots and quickly launched a Facebook page, a website, and the Twitter hashtag #TCOT to coordinate with newly formed Tea Party organizations and their activities across the United States. As Meckler and Martin (2012) observed, “the First American Revolution may have begun with a gunshot, but the second American Revolution began with the hashtag” (p. 16).

By March, national conservative radio and TV hosts were promoting the Tea Party as an oppositional force in American politics. On 13 March 2009 Fox News and radio talk-show host Glenn Beck announced to a national audience an initiative he called The 9/12 Project that sought to galvanize the emergent TPM activists with Christian evangelical activists and other right-wing populist groupings around nine principles such as “America is good” and “I believe in God and He is the Centre of my Life” (The 9/12 Project, 2013). The project would culminate in the Restoring Honor Freedom Rally. The largest rallies and national exposure, however, would come on 15 April 2009 when Tea Party activists claim more than 1.2 million people attended nearly 850 Tea Party rallies (Meckler & Martin, 2012).

With high-profile victories of Maro Rubio and Allan West in Florida, Rand Paul in Kentucky, and Scott Brown in Massachusetts, 2010 may have been the apex of the TPM’s electoral success. In July 2010 Michelle Bachmann formed the Tea Party Caucus, with 28 members formally institutionalizing the TPM within the broader Republican Party. The 2012 midterm elections proved to be less successful, with four candidates winning and the re-election of President Obama in 2012. The much-spoofed Republican primary process seemed to have reduced the TPM’s broad appeal. This was confirmed with Senator Ted Cruz’s failed attempt to defund the Affordable Care Act in October 2013 along with attempts to block the raising of the US debt ceiling.

These and other TPM-led initiatives were perceived to be detrimental to the Republican Party and increased tension between the Republican Party establishment, the Tea Party Caucus, and TPM. Yet, as Theda Skocpol (2013) noted, and a position we agree with, the TPM’s success and failure cannot be limited solely to electoral outcomes as its structure, active grassroots organization, and big-money funders mean it can withstand electoral ups and downs. Nevertheless, the recent Republican primary elections defeat of Eric Cantor, the House majority leader, by an unknown Tea Party candidate is another indication that the TPM continues to resonate with the public and divide the Republican Party. This tension within the Republican Party remains unresolvable as the TPM posits that there can be no compromise within the Republican Party nor can there be compromise across the aisle with Democrats.

The issue for the TPM is not the specificity of a particular policy or a “strategy” per se; rather, it argues that its positioning combines both “truths” and “morality”. The TPM’s positioning,

therefore, cannot be reduced to a single domain such as economics or to a neatly packaged frame of thought such as conservatism. Instead, it advocates a withdrawal from politics.

### **TEA PARTY MOVEMENT DISSENT: WITHDRAWAL AND MORALITY**

Dissent for the TPM forms its own politics, premised on a complex notion of withdrawal, truths, and morality. From one standpoint the TPM seems to be entirely engaged in the political process as they actively challenge the Obama administration on issues ranging from raising the debt ceiling, challenging the legality of the Affordable Care Act, fighting against American intervention in Syria, securing the southern border with Mexico, contesting the basis for ongoing racial violence, contesting same-sex marriage, and so on. Yet their uncompromising stance is also indicative of a politics of withdrawal. Indeed, for the TPM, un-American groups such as liberals, Democrats, socialists, trade unions, the LGBTQ community, the United Nations, and so on bring the United States to the precipice of ultimate destruction. This introduces a contradiction, as alongside this engagement there is also disengagement, as we show below.

Indeed, for the TPM the notion is not of a politics of engagement but of a higher calling to the founding documents of the Republic along with largely evangelical Christian-Right understandings of biblical truths. While notable exceptions include vice-presidential nominee Paul Ryan and presidential candidate Rick Santorum, who are practising conservative Catholics, the overarching influence remains evangelical Protestantism. The overriding issue that frames the politics of withdrawal is a strong belief that we are living in the end times. As TPM favourite Senator Ted Cruz (2013) recently said at the Values Voter Summit, “You know we can’t keep going down this road much longer. We’re nearing the edge of the cliff. ... We have only a couple of years to turn this country around or we go off the cliff to oblivion!” In order to better understand this we delineate the TPM between two constitutive forces: American Libertarianism and the evangelical Christian-Right.

Three-quarters of Tea Party activists describe themselves as Christian conservatives and nearly half (47%) are actively involved in a religious right or Christian conservative organization (Public Religion Research Institute, 2011). The connection between the Tea Party and Christian conservatives, in particular evangelical Christians, has not gone unnoticed. This was partially expressed in the last presidential election when Republican presidential hopeful Mitt Romney selected Paul Ryan, a Tea Party and religious-right candidate, as his running mate. Organizationally, evangelical Christian-Right strategist Ralph Reed formed the Faith and Freedom Coalition in 2009, with the aim of bringing the two groups together. David Brody (2012), author of the book *Teavangelicals*, provided a succinct explanation as to why the two social groupings have considerable overlap. As he indicated, the fiscally conservative message of the TPM resonates with evangelical Christians and other Christian denominations.

The significance of this linkage is that TPM activists assume an immutable connection between religiosity and morality. What binds religion and morality together is the commonsense understanding of objective truths. The one key truth is the belief in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. A recent Gallup (2011) poll indicated that 50% of Americans believe that the Bible is the actual word of God, 22% believe it should be taken literally, 59% believe the prophecies in the New Testament’s *Book of Revelation* will come true (Gibbs, 2002), and 41% believe Jesus Christ would arrive on the Earth by 2050 (PEW Research Center, 2010). While the preachings of people such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Rick Warren, James Dobson, Richard Land, and so on have contributed to

the pervasiveness of this belief, the success of the *Left Behind* (1995) book series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins cannot be discounted. The books have sold 65 million copies to date and have been made into a home video series, along with a motion picture release in 2014 (McNary, 2014). The series animates the end of times by narrating how millions of born-again Christians around the world are lifted suddenly to heaven during the Rapture. Those left behind face the tribulation with the Antichrist taking over the United Nations and establishing a one-world government. These events inevitably pit believers in Jesus Christ against the non-believers in the final struggle.

Withdrawal forms the dominant narrative as the TPM not only forms a synthesis between the evangelical Christian-Right and Libertarians but also between two broad theological streams: premillennialists and postmillennialists. The vast majority of the evangelical Christian-Right within the United States are dispensational premillennialists, who believe that born-again Christians will be raptured before the tribulation and the eventual triumphant return of Jesus Christ. This suggests withdrawal from politics as the inevitability of this narrative leads to a positive outcome, namely a 1000-year rule by Christ. Postmillennials, on the other hand, posit that it is only when Christians take the lead in eliminating evil and living through the tribulation that Christ's rule will come into place. In this vision political engagement is required, as Christians must create the environment necessary for Christ's return. The difference may seem minimal but it produces confusion as to how TPM political engagement is to be understood. Indeed, the issue is not of engagement at all; rather, it is about preparing and facilitating events for the end times.

This translates into a central role to be played by the United States as God's "shining city upon a hill". TPM activists pointed to the origins of the US constitution in the Federalist Papers and the Declaration of Independence as the basis for their perceived future (Meckler & Martin, 2012, p. 23). This is not to say that the evangelical Christian-Right TPM discounts or contradicts a more secular interpretation of the US constitution. Both Libertarians and evangelical Christians call for a return to a strict interpretation of the Constitution (Brody, 2012, p.16). For evangelical Christians, the demand is based on a religious worldview that they argue coincides with the original intent of the founding of the Republic premised on Judeo-Christian principles (Brody, 2012, p. 28).

While there are synergies between more secular elements and religious perspectives regarding the centrality of the US constitution, evangelical elements within the TPM focus on what they believe is the basis for the documents – a belief in God and God's hand in the drafting of the documents. Libertarians would not object to this notion but would instead include a claim to natural laws. The evangelical Christians would suggest that the natural laws are the workings of God. Pointing to the Declaration of Independence, for example, evangelical Christians within the TPM argue that the rights provided to Americans in that document do not come from the rule of law but from the creator. As former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee (2014) proclaimed in his recent Conservative Political Action Conference speech:

These are the things that I know. I know there is a God, and I know this nation would not exist had he not been the midwife of its birth. And I know that this nation exists by the providence of his hand, and if this nation forgets our God, then God will have every right to forget us. I hope that we repent before we ever have to receive his fiery judgment.

Taken together, both Libertarian and evangelical Christian constellations posit that there are rules pertaining to right and wrong that human beings only need to discover. Evangelicals add that their knowledge of these truths means they have access to God's thinking and overarching plan

for humanity. Within this paradigm there exists one correct answer for every moral question and hence the fitting notion of an absolutist morality. And for a Judeo-Christian civilization, as the two groupings consider the United States to be, these moral absolutes ought to regulate both private and public conduct by forming the laws that govern society. Where they differ is the purposes of this vision. For the evangelical predispositionalists it is in preparation for the Second Coming.

Not to adhere to these moral absolutes invites tragedy, as evidenced by, as TPM activists Meckler and Martin (2012) noted, the passage of the 16th Amendment, which introduced US income tax in 1913. The second moral lapse, according to Meckler and Martin, was the passage of the 17th Amendment, which allowed for the direct election of US senators by the people of each state. Prior to that, state legislatures were responsible for their selection. This culminated in the third mistake of a concentration of power in Washington, DC. These objections point to a critical understanding of the United States not as a democracy but as a republic; TPM activists argue that the Founding Fathers understood human nature as largely negative and therefore designed a form of governance that would protect citizens from both unchecked power exercised by a sovereign and from the tyranny of majority rule. On the other hand, for the evangelical predispositionalists, these events, and others like them, serve to confirm that we are living in the end times, with the return of Christ in the near term. The TPM call for a second American revolution therefore is met with both a sense of activism and resignation.

## **ŽIŽEK'S DISSENT: THE POLITICS OF WITHDRAWAL AND ETHICS**

Slavoj Žižek argued, paradoxically, that the true revolutionary moment will only be achieved by, first, withdrawing from the political realm. Here, we want to critically examine Žižek's claims regarding his controversial notion of the "act". The act, for Žižek, introduces a radical openness that prepares the ground for the unexpected. In terms of the politics of withdrawal, Žižek maintained that within a deep crisis stark choices are necessary. His 2011 book *Living in the End Times* provided Žižek's view of the way forward for progressive dissent to effect radical social transformation. Contrary to what the dominant American political discourses seek as a means to go beyond the impasse, namely some sort of bipartisan compromise, Žižek argued the opposite as he called for withdrawal. However, Žižek's notion of withdrawal is different because it is radically political. Yet, to understand what is meant here one must first distinguish between political activity – of which he thinks there is too much – and what he called, following Lacan, the political act, a human action that is genuinely or authentically free. Žižek (2011, p. 392) suggested that in a democracy antagonism is often agonism and the only way forward is to reintroduce the radical antagonisms through the dictatorship of the proletariat, by which he means the pressure brought to bear on governments through mobilization and self-organization.

Critics have suggested that Žižek's unwillingness to provide a coherent programme or agenda renders such a concept under-theorized or, worse, incoherent. Marcus Pound (2008, p. 75) exemplified this stance, stating, "Žižek's work, which I identify as transgression without progression, i.e., a revolutionary act that is unable to sustain itself as anything other than a moment of profound rupture". Here, we suggest that such a move is deliberate. The very nature of the act means that to "fill in the gaps" would be to misunderstand the radical contingency of the position of the actor and the unpredictable nature of politics. Indeed, we want to suggest that in his description of the act we find an embryonic theory of political leadership.

For Žižek, politics proper involves a tension between the social order and that which is external to it where appeal to a universal principle such as justice, equality, or liberty for all is made. Politics, then, is precisely this conflict between an appeal to a universal and to the particular, current, contingent circumstances. Politics is never simply about a question of distribution, but recognition: “the struggle for one’s voice to be heard and recognized as that of a legitimate partner” (Žižek, 1998a, p. 989).

That politics is a kind of trauma or rupture explains why “the entire history of European thought is ultimately nothing but a series of disavowals of the political moment, of the proper logic of political antagonism” (Žižek, 1998b, p. 991). It explains, too, why we have such a difficult time even imagining a scenario that is different from the “objective” political and economic conditions in which we find ourselves. This is the reason, then, why Žižek (2003b, p. 3.) considered the movie *The Matrix* (Silver, Wachowski, & Wachowski, 1999) the perfect model for our contemporary predicament as it articulated the dilemma of those who desire change but cannot decide whether that requires “outright rebellion” or whether playing “the local games of resistance while remaining within the Matrix” is enough. And yet, Žižek does think that genuine politics *is* possible. The genuinely revolutionary act, he notes, creates the conditions of its own possibility (Žižek, 2002).

In *Violence*, Žižek (2008) pointed to the peculiar dilemma of political action:

The threat today is not passivity but pseudo-activity, the urge to “be active”, to “participate”, to mask the nothingness of what goes on. People intervene all the time, “do something”; academics participate in meaningless debates, and so on. The truly difficult thing is to step back, to withdraw. Those in power often prefer even a “critical” participation, a dialogue, to silence – just to engage us in “dialogue”, to make sure our ominous passivity is broken ... [abstaining from “participation”] confronts us with the vacuity of today’s democracies. (p. 183)

Thus, in the absence of convincing alternatives, it is best to withdraw from politics altogether. To participate in any way within the system – to employ protest as part of a strategy to further a group’s interests, for example – is to legitimize it (Žižek, 2006). A refusal to participate, to withdraw completely, is the only possible alternative; yet one with huge costs for the individual. It involves nothing less than the rejection of all symbolic supports hitherto relied upon to construct reality. It is also the necessarily preliminary to effect a “miracle”; the unexpected, the unpredictable, and what Žižek termed after Lacan, the act – a precise moment which changes the structure of political possibility within a polity and for which there is no guarantee of success. As Žižek (2002) noted, “an Act retroactively changes the very co-ordinates into which it intervenes” (pp. 152–153).

Žižek’s discussion of withdrawal in the political realm mirrors the relationship between the psychoanalyst and analysand in the therapeutic encounter. In that encounter, when the analysand acknowledges the lack of external guarantees for their own actions, they withdraw from the social-symbolic order in preparation for a radical gesture of freedom (see Homer, 2005). Similarly, a genuinely “political” moment arises when we recognize that what we took to be reality, plain and simple, is, rather, a complex fantasy in which we always already find ourselves located and subjected. As Sean Homer (2005) noted in a discussion of Žižek’s (1989) *The Sublime Object of Ideology*: “[w]e like to think of our society as naturally and harmoniously evolving over time and through the democratic consensus of the people. For Žižek, this is not

the case: all societies are founded upon a traumatic moment of social conflict and the social ideological fantasy masks this constitutive antagonism” (p. 113).

By withdrawing from this fantasy we confront groundlessness and profound disorientation. The way we had hitherto experienced our fantasy as a form of enjoyment prevented us from disrupting the existing patterns of hierarchical domination. Yet, by traversing this fantasy, one brings the entire socio-symbolic order into question.

Žižek has drawn on a number of examples to illustrate the significance and ethics of this withdrawal. In *Living in the End Times* he discussed Herman Melville’s short story *Bartleby the Scrivener* and Bartleby’s almost conditioned response, “I’d rather not”, as a paradigmatic example of ethical withdrawal – in this case of refusing to participate within the accepted boundaries of ordinary discourse. In his article *A Leftist Plea for “Eurocentrism”* Žižek (1998a) returned to the example of Antigone and her rejection of the symbolic order provided by Creon as constitutive of a Lacanian act. While each of these is important, they draw on what he thinks should be the focal point: Christianity. He says of Antigone, “[t]hose interpreters who see Antigone as a proto-Christian figure are right: in her unconditional commitment, she follows a different ethics that points forward towards Christianity (and can only be adequately read ‘anachronistically’ from the later Christian standpoint)” (ibid., 2010, p. 105).

The act, Žižek argued, is the core of Christianity as it not only forms the basis for religious belief but should also orient the community of believers as political subjects. The initial act was that of the crucifixion of Christ (Žižek, 2009). Žižek, however, argued that the crucifixion does not simply denote the death of Christ on the cross but also the death of God. This singular act transforms the existing order as it demarcates the shift away from the transcendental God to the community of revolutionary believers that Žižek (2009) understands to be the Holy Spirit. Žižek and Gunjević (2012) wrote:

... [t]herein resides the terrible risk of revelation: what “Revelation” means is that God took upon himself the risk of putting everything at stake, of fully “engaging himself existentially” by way, as it were, of stepping into his own picture, becoming part of creation, exposing himself to the utter contingency of existence. (p. 40)

God’s death then is not that of an all-knowing God; it is of a fallible God who has taken a risk. The outcome is unknown. Žižek and Gunjević (2012, p. 156) argued that with God stepping into the frame we are witness to “a suffering God – not a triumphalist God who always wins in the end, ...; not a God who exerts cold justice, since he is by definition always right; but a God who – like the suffering Christ on the cross – is agonized, who assumes the burden of suffering, in solidarity with human misery”. To reiterate the point, Žižek (2003a) informed us that this suffering God cannot be outside of human events but instead is himself immersed in an open and incomplete reality. This effectively removes the bifurcated view that a God exists who is at a distance from the earthly realm and therefore an all-knowing deity.

The immediate change in coordinates that are a consequence of this act, according to Žižek (2011), is the advent of a Christian community of believers who are made to be fully responsible for their beliefs. This, for Žižek, is the “Holy Spirit”. There is no longer a guarantor of the future as the transcendental authority is no more. It is this death – the death of God that brings into existence the primary ethical responsibility of Christianity – which is to understand a suffering God’s leap of faith in us as the community of believers, as the “Holy Spirit”. The crucifixion, as withdrawal, in this sense cannot be understood as the absence of God with the hope of his



eventual return. Žižek also insisted that the act of withdrawal should not be understood as a negation. Instead, God's act of withdrawal infuses the Holy Spirit, the community of believers, with an ethical duty to act in his place. God's death on the cross is God's gift to humanity (Žižek & Gunjević 2012, p. 55). As Žižek (2009) drawing on Lacan noted:

God doesn't give what he has, he gives what he is, his very being. That is to say: it is wrong to imagine the divine dispensation as the activity of a wealthy subject, so abundantly rich that he can afford to cede to others a part of his possessions. From a proper theological perspective, God is the poorest of them all: he "has" only his being to give away. His whole wealth is already out there, in creation. (p. 59)

The death of God is also understood to be the death of the big Other (Žižek & Gunjević, 2012, p. 55). The absence of the big Other introduces a radical openness and possibility to shape the world by us and for us and not for an outside force (Žižek, 2003a). The act then leaves us, "with the terrible burden of freedom and responsibility for the fate of divine creation, and thus of God himself" (Žižek, 2009, p. 25). Belief, for Žižek, is therefore not tied to the eventual return of Christ with the apocalypse, though that may happen. Instead, true belief is tied in with Žižek's understanding of ethics as we participate and act in a world without a big Other and in a reality that is incomplete.

## YOU SAY RUPTURE, WE SAY RAPTURE

In terms of Žižek's understanding of the TPM, what becomes clear is not a dismissal of the movement; rather, he assumes that they are not the "enemy" per se but instead share much with left-populist dissent. This is not a new message, as Žižek delivered it when he addressed the Occupy Wall Street activists in Zuccotti Park in 2011. He (as cited in Gell, 2011) said, "[t]he tragedy is that many of the Tea Party people should be on our side ... That's where we should work. They may be stupid, but don't look at them as the enemy." Seemingly exasperated by the TPM's stance, Žižek has more recently (2014, p. 491) asked, "How long will the base of the Tea Party stick to the fundamental irrationality of its agenda to protect the interest of the hard-working ordinary people by privileging the 'exploitative rich' and thereby literally countering their own interests?"

His analysis pointed to both the irony and paradox of the TPM. The irony is that their radical individualism results in undemocratic control by large anonymous corporations over their everyday lives and life chances. The contradiction is that the TPM is engaged in a "moral war" (e.g., total ban on abortion, regulating Hollywood, and so forth) that cannot be won but is instead tolerated by the elites as the moral outrage distracts from the possibility of challenging elite economic domination (Žižek, 2006, p. 360). In short, for Žižek (2014, pp. 92–93), the so-called culture wars are displaced class wars. The 2008–2009 bailouts serve to exemplify this conclusion as the TPM foolishly argue against any form of redistribution to aid others in American society while the wealthy receive billions in relief.

While we do not disagree with the general thrust of Žižek's understanding of the TPM, we raise two points of concern. First, Žižek was incorrect to assume that the TPM were not appalled that the "too big to fail" doctrine translated into monies flowing from the state to wealthy elites and corporations. While Žižek may have viewed this as an outcome of specific policy choices, the TPM viewed it as a natural and inevitable outcome of an expanded and "socialist" state (Meckler

& Martin, 2012, p. 8). This suggests that Žižek's and other commentators' focus on policy and politics is not in fact what the TPM is about. Instead, it fits into the much grander narrative of the United States as the chosen nation and the epic struggle between good and evil. Žižek, and other commentators, assume that the purpose of the policies is to eradicate some sort of immediate deficiency (e.g., the Healthcare debate), yet this is an assumption, not a certainty. As the TPM leadership has indicated, the task was neither to "win" the debate nor to defund the Affordable Care Act but instead to draw a line in the sand.

More importantly, Žižek's analysis of the TPM failed to identify the movement's evangelical religious-right underpinnings and their premillennial dispensational view of the Second Coming of Christ with the need to draw a line in the sand. Instead, Žižek's analysis appeared to posit the TPM as just another right-wing populist group such as the National Front in France, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) or the Freedom Party (PVV) in the Netherlands. This omission helps explain Žižek's misreading of the TPM. The TPM is ultimately about closure as the grand narrative of end times precludes any possibility of a progressive and emancipatory politics as sought by Žižek. The counterbalance to being political and to politics is the evangelical belief that the challenges faced by the United States are spiritual in nature and a consequence of moral decay. The remedy is not social transformation but personal religious conversion as the end times approaches (Smith, 2000, p. 126). It is this predispensational worldview that requires further elaboration.

While both Žižek and the TPM believe we are living in the end times, they have radically different understandings of what this entails. For both, though, the apocalypse points to a new beginning and therefore should not be feared. The TPM's understanding of the apocalypse arises from authors such as Hal Lindsey and Carlson (1970) and Tim F. Lahaye and co-author Jerry B. Jenkins (1995). Lindsey (1970), for example, related the significance with an analogy, asking readers if they had stumbled upon an old childhood toy later in life and how it no longer had any of the meaning it once held, he suggested that this is what it would be like when believers meet Christ. The rapture, within this context, is an individual experience. Understanding what happens is relayed on the basis of a personal interaction with Christ prior to the end times. Lindsey's point is to note how fortunate individual believers will be when they are removed from the Earth just prior to the deepening crises and irreversible events of the apocalypse. A guaranteed personal deliverance to heaven helps to reduce any anxiety TPM activists may face. Knowing that the end times are coming means believers do not have to worry. Instead each contradiction, each political setback, or natural disaster becomes evidential truth that the end times will be met not with consternation but with rejoicing.

Žižek would argue that these interpretations of the apocalypse fail to understand its true Christian message and are a perversion of Christianity (2003a). Drawing on Lacan, Žižek (2007) defined perversion as a subject position where the individual assumes the position of object-instrument of the big Other's desire. In doing so perversion absolves the individual from taking responsibility as their actions are not their own. Instead they act only as tools for the big Other. There is within this an absolute conviction that one knows what the big Other wills and fulfilling it is obligatory in order to remain desired by the big Other.

The "logic of reimbursement", where one has a personal relationship with a God who will intervene in the end and save those moral few, is a fantasy. Žižek (2006, p. 356) stated, "One plays with such fantasies, not 'taking them seriously,' and this is the way they fulfill their function – and the fundamentalist lacks this minimal distance toward his fantasy." The remedy is, as discussed previously,

to rupture this fantasy of living life after death. Instead, a Christian life should be led before one's death and without the calculations of what happens after. Žižek has been adamant that it is necessary to recognize that the fantasy of future salvation during the rapture is not Christian but perversion; it fails to understand fully the radical act of God's death on the cross and the emergence of the

Holy Spirit, in the form of the community of believers. This act is unique to Christianity as it demarcates both the end and the beginning. In understanding this, in coming to terms with the lack of a guarantee, Žižek suggested that acts are possible now and ultimately necessary if we are to confront ecological crisis, the unintended consequences of biogenetics, systemic conflicts (e.g. resource wars), along with deep social and economic inequalities – what he refers to as the “four riders of the apocalypse” (Žižek, 2011, p. x).

Rupture politics, of never giving up on one's desires, forms the epitome of an ethical act for Žižek. The elevation of ethics as the basis of politics is also found within the TPM. Defined as “Cowboy ethics” (Meckler & Martin, 2012, p. 5), these commitments harken back to a mythologized ordered life based on good versus evil with its culmination in the rapture. It comes as no surprise that the outsider who steps outside the law in order to enforce the law helps formulate the TPM's ethical positioning. In both instances, the ethical turn is also an evacuation from the political, whether it is with the ushering in of the era of the post-political universal claims beyond identity politics or a return to God and America's path in ushering in the end times. Rapture and rupture politics transcend politics as it replaces divisions with the end of life.

Seemingly diametrically opposed to Žižek's Christian interpretations of a world of possibility, the TPM's end-of-times narrative is one of predestination focusing on life after the earthly one. A Christian simply has to accept the unfolding of the existing narrative and fall into God's plan in order to participate. Little else needs to be done as the end of times forms a welcomed inevitability. There remain, however, political possibilities that should not be discounted. As Žižek (2000a, p. 2) stated, “the authentic Christian legacy is much too precious to be left to the fundamentalist freaks”. One implication of this statement is that there is a diversity of Christian views, and evangelical Christianity in the United States is no exception. Historically, Christian evangelicals within a postmillennial dispensational tradition have taken up progressive causes such as civil rights, opposition to the Vietnam War, and support for women's rights (Balmer, 2006). A second implication is that TPM activists should be told they are correct to hold their Christian beliefs as the basis of their political outlook, to agree that we are indeed living in the end times but that their faith requires of them to act, and that to do otherwise is a failure to understand God's act of faith in us. We acknowledge that this is a risky strategy. But might this confrontation open up the TPM to a more diverse Christian outlook? Some may disagree but surely they could be left behind.

## AFTERWORD

We analyse the TPM because, like Žižek, we are not willing to dismiss its significance politically and theoretically as a reactionary populist movement or as a loosely formed group of hysterics. Quite the opposite; we side with Žižek in viewing the TPM's religiously oriented worldview as one, “[in which] the subject avoids its constitutive splitting by posting itself directly as an instrument of the Other's Will” (Žižek, 2003a, p. 29). Hysterics are preferable as they maintain critical distance, always questioning the big Other, leaving the possibility for change (Kotsko, 2008). However, by engaging Žižek with the TPM, our analysis reveals that Žižek's understanding of the movement is also incomplete as he has failed to theorize the TPM's

theological orientation. This is a critical omission as Žižek's analysis of Christianity is one filled with hope for the possibility of radical change in the end days of the apocalypse. We find Žižek's approach promising, not least because advocating alternative responses to state oppression has been a mainstay of theorists of disobedience for the last five hundred years at least (Quill, 2009).

Speaking in a language or adopting a stance that states can understand is precisely not the way to achieve reform. Only by removing oneself from the dominant narratives of our time, from the symbolic realm that necessarily qualifies and reduces human freedom, can one hope to challenge the prevailing order of things. What Žižek attempted in his rendering of the miracle of Christ's death and by extension politics, of the act, is nothing less than a re-description of the possibilities for political life.

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**Hasmet M. Uluorta** is Assistant Professor at the Departments of Political Studies and International Development Studies, Trent University, Ontario Canada. He is interested in global political economy, theories of international relations, as well as employment and work strategies. His most recent research focuses on the US model of development, seeking to clarify why consent may be forthcoming despite the existence of hyper-contradictions.



**Lawrence Quill** is Professor of Political Theory at the Department of Political Science, San José State University, USA. His most recent publications include *Civil Disobedience: (Un)Common Sense in Mass Democracies* (MacMillan, 2009) and *Secrets and Democracy: From Arcana Imperii to Wikileaks* (MacMillan, 2014). In 2015, he was a visiting fellow at Wolfson College, Cambridge University UK, at the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities. His current research focuses on the politics and ethics of leaking, and political theories of conspiracy.