

## A World of Post Politics in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*

ZAHRA TAHERI

Department of Foreign Languages  
Kashan University, Iran  
taherzahra2003@yahoo.com

### ABSTRACT

*Joseph Conrad's The Secret Agent has been hailed as one of the most political works written by the author on terrorism and social upheavals. And it has been a subject of study for many critics. The spectacular feature of his work is described to be in its writer's imagination to portray the upcoming events related to both world wars, especially the second one and the emergence of Nazi regime and Fascism. However, this article discusses how The Secret Agent, with its shady atmosphere, its projection of runaway consumerism, its display of 'the passion for the Real,' its focus on democracy, individual liberty, Capitalism, and the consequences which follow, such as Globalism and imperialism, is much more ahead of its time and delivers the reader a glimpse of what Žižek describes as a 'Post-political' era. Through The Secret Agent, the reader is presented with the 'underbelly,' as Žižek terms it, of political affairs, and how democracy is a faulty notion just bandied about by the Western societies to preserve their privileges over the 'Other'. Taking Democracy at face value is, Žižek believes, the first wrong step to approach the era of Post-politics, because it is nothing more than a deliberate evasion of looking into the underside of the current political affairs and describing them exclusively, as Huntington did, as a "clash between civilizations". It is all but done, Žižek holds, to present the major problems of the world as a clash between Western democracy and Eastern 'fundamentalist' in order to keep the distance of 'us and them' constant and to conceal the very 'fundamentalism' Democracy is stained with in the background of the capitalistic world. It is, however, as Conrad reveals it well, more of a 'clash within a civilization' than a 'clash of the civilizations'—a race for power.*

*Keywords: homo sacer; Žižek; democracy; capitalism; the passion for the Real*

### INTRODUCTION

Žižek uses the term 'Post-politics' to depict the era in which we live nowadays. And he describes its key features in his book *Living in the End Times* (2010) as a celebration of desire and de-politicisation of politics. In his view, what reigns over this epoch is nothing more than the law of virtualisation (the theory of semblance) and politicisation of the cultural phenomena to conceal the omnipresence of the Capital. We live, he believes, at a time when cultural issues— like the women's movement, ethnic violence, racism, and 'Othering' become the focus of political decisions to divert attention from the ruling economic system— that of Capitalism. In fact, the system of Capitalism, in that way, is taken for granted as a background to all other cultural activities and thus unquestionable and fixed (Weber 2011, p. 14). All possible cultural phenomena which occur are a 'mask', in one way or another, to secure its very basis— Capitalism. Transaction, thus, becomes the ruling axis for all kinds of interaction, whether personal or international. In this situation, where economic and geo-political interests are ruling principles, theories like liberal democracy, individual liberty, the respect for the 'Other', and multiculturalism are all but fraudulent and deceitful. This double-dealing of keeping up some appearances while working towards something else has awakened a passion for the Real— a passion for penetrating the very depth of things and ended up in a sort of dissatisfaction with the current status of affairs, which per se provokes the desire for an alternative and a sort of change (Žižek 2010, p. 177). In Žižek's view, this desire for something beyond the culture is the very basis of the drive for revolutionary actions (Neill 2005, p. 1).

This “passion for the Real,” however, is awakened at a time when virtualisation has dominated man’s life even in his most private affairs. And the attempt to “return to the Real” ends up in another “semblance”: “appearances of spectacular effect” (Žižek 2002, p. 10). No “integration into real” is possible, and a return to it is a form of a “strategy to avoid a confrontation with the Real” (Žižek 2002, p. 10). It is the case since life gets “dematerialised” and turns into a “fake stage,” with “abstract” characters and spectacular actions rather than the authentic “acts” (Žižek 2002, p. 14). Its men, then, are the Nietzschean “Last Man” of a “survivalist” philosophy of life, who practice “active nihilism” and pursue the daily pleasures while avoiding whatever threatening to their lives (Daly 2004, p. 104). The result is the very consumerist society which Conrad has portrayed for us in *The Secret Agent*.

Beginning his novel with a description of Verloc’s shop and his vague commodities and shady ambience, Conrad pictures for us a modern society entangled in the business of sex and the pursuit of bodily pleasures. His emphasis on extreme consumerism is furthered through the physic he allots to his characters: most are obese, ‘wallowing’ pig-like in bed or on sofas (The only exception is Professor who is a ‘dingy little man in spectacles’, and whose body seems empty). But what makes the story even more curious is the fact that the very agent of the consumerist society is self same very agent of the revolutionary. While the former is to act as a safety valve to the capitalist society, as R. Zimring says, the latter is to destabilise and destroy the very basis of its capitalistic system (1997, p. 334). This paradox could not be held unless Conrad, as Brian Shaffer argues, was to forge these “bonds between revolutionary politics and pornography” in order “to tarnish the glamour of subversive politics with the smuttiness of tawdry sex” (1995, p.446). For Zimring, the very paradox suggests that Conrad sees “desire, whether sexual or revolutionary,” as having “as its object simulations and as its banal relief, an economic transaction: the purchase” (1997, pp. 334-335). This ironic stand towards revolutionary politics and the business of pleasure and the commodification of human being puts Conrad in line with Žižek as a critic of modern Democracy and virtualization which have reduced people to ‘bare life’, deprived of subjectivity (because one’s symbolic identity takes shape when s/he has been deprived of ‘enjoyment’, in Lacanian term. It is while the consumerist society turns on pleasure as the only goal of life). And laying bare the ‘under belly’, as Žižek calls it, of these social rules and principles is, in fact, what Conrad follows in *The Secret Agent*.

Hence, this article attempts to reveal how the modern society, of which the Conradian world is a prototype or a miniature, has got itself involved in the ‘cultural games’ which are there to secure the very basis of Capitalism. It also debates how the very notions of multiculturalism, humanitarian aids, the respect for the ‘Other’, individual liberty, and the universal Democracy are all faulty and an attempt, in one way or another, to secure globalised Capitalism and to keep the distance between ‘us and them’ intact. It then, focuses on the issue of the ‘Other’ and how the very existence of an ‘Other’ promises the happiness of a society and relieves it from the tension of social upheavals. At the same time, it elaborates on the virtualisation of the modern world and the resultant ‘passion for the Real’ which can even lead to social unrests, although the revolutionaries are just satisfied with the spectacular changes and do not get to the end. In this world of appearance, therefore, everything gets “de-substantiated” and what matters is catering to the illusory aspect of the events (Žižek 2002, p. 24). Change happens when one steps out of this “symbolic order” of Lacan and enters the realm beyond, in which the Real rules: the realm of void, of nothingness, of death where one, as the de-subjectivised being, can practice the autonomy which has been withheld by the democratic society and is free to choose whatever s/he desires, not what is imposed on them as the right option for choice (Belsey 2005, p. 54).

## ANALYSIS

### THE TORN WORLD: THE DOOMED WAR OF THE REAL AND THE PASSION FOR THE REAL

The world one witnesses in *The Secret Agent* is in a “state of emergency” in which some nations are fighting against terrorism, and they know no constraints to stop a group from acts of terrorism, even if these acts seem necessary in order to return them to the “normal course of the thing” (Žižek 2002, p.107). Besides, one comes across a consumerist society and the Nietzschean *Last Man* with his survivalist philosophy of the pursuit of pleasure and evasion of any sort of disturbances to his everyday life. He, in fact, “reject all ‘higher’ goals as terrorist and dedicates his life to survival, to a life filled with more and more refined and artificially excited/aroused minor pleasures” (Žižek 2002, p.88). And both of these exist side by side in a background of a capitalistic, democratic society in which just money and transaction talk. The paradox that crops up here is how the violence of terrorism goes with the survivalist stand of consumerist *Last Man* while securing the Capital, since it would be impossible for something to survive in Capitalism unless it paved the way for its stronger hold over people. The answer lies in ‘the passion of the Real’ which Žižek discusses using Lacanian Theory of ‘unconscious’.

In his description of the Real, Lacan defines the Real as the sense of loss which has been formed in the clash between the language, the culture, and the human organism. It is a loss which “makes its disruptive presence felt,” while it is impossible to be represented, and if it is to be experienced, “we do so as a gap, or a limit or a point where culture fails us” (Belsey 2005, p. 13). It is this very awareness of something missing in the culture which “makes thought,” as Lyotard notes, “go endlessly” (Belsey 2005, p. 13). And it is this “absence of the Real,” as Belsey declares, which provides for an alternative to the current cultural regulations and for a view that “our relationship with the world is capable of a change: things can be other than they are” (Belsey 2005, p. 19). This “gap between culture and the Real” ends up in a sort of dissatisfaction “which impels us to want more, and the revolutionary ideas come from this” (Belsey 2005, p. 19).

From the other side, the Real is always with us. It is the condition of our “existence,” to use Žižek’s term, that human beings are uneasy “composites” of an unreachable real organism and of the subject they become. Unconscious is not the Real but the consequence of its loss. The subject is/remains just empty, though constructed by culturally constructed images of reality (Belsey 2005, p. 31).

The Real is where the excess enjoyment is experienced; and this *jouissance* has to be sacrificed on the part of human to let him enter the realm of the symbolic order or “the big other” (Žižek 2006, p. 83). It is the cost which should be paid for the achievement of the symbolic identity. However, the felt presence of the lost Real makes human to experience different alternatives in order to do away with the dissatisfaction derived from its loss. It, thus, ends up in “bombarding the self with forms and gadgets of enjoyment” (Žižek 2004 b, p. 397). Here comes the rise of consumption and the loss of symbolic identity— the erasure of personal peculiarities and a de-subjectivisation of the subjects— where people turn into the multitude masses whom the Professor rebukes in *The Secret Agent*: “He felt the mass of mankind mighty in its numbers. They swarmed, numerous like locusts, industrious like ants, thoughtless like a natural force, pushing on blind and orderly and absorbed” (Conrad 2001, p. 59).

This leads to a crisis which Eric Santner called the “crisis of investiture” which culminates in ‘post-metaphysical’ survivalist stance of the Last Men,” which reduces human life, in Žižek’s view, to the satisfaction of its bare necessities (2004 b, p. 397-8). Conrad has represented this excessive consumption through the obesity of the characters and their strong

relish for sexual pleasure, embodied best by Verloc's shop and his shady, pornographic materials. It is while the only 'subject' in the story, who has disentangled himself from the social conventions, is the 'dingy weakling' self-isolated Professor. This 'unconstrained consumption', in Žižek's view, is dangerous to society. The danger, however, lies not in the pursuit of human desires since "it seems good to have excess pleasure" and "to maximise our pleasure"—which is the goal of utilitarianism and the ethics of modern society which Conrad also reveals through the emphasis he puts on the usefulness to the others or one's society (Daly 2004, p. 115). It, in fact, rests in turning pleasure into a

Mechanism determining our behaviour. [...] There is always this totalitarian engineering aspect. From Bentham's view, the central concern is with how a wise ruler should take into account what moves people in order to organise a society where people [...] to bring about as much good not only to themselves but to society. The idea being that if I know what moves you [...] then I can manipulate you [...] I can master you. (Daly 2004, p. 132)

Being manipulated contradicts the very sense of being autonomous. In fact, in Žižek's view, autonomy "is the domain outside the law" and social conventions, where one practices freedom and is capable of breaking with the norms and regulations (Daly 2004, p. 135). It is while the Utilitarian ethics imposes strict laws and thus culminates in totalitarianism. For Žižek, this kind of ethics is in line with Bentham's ethics of "non-autonomy" (Daly 2004, p. 132). Here lies the paradox of liberal democracy where each individual is seemingly granted with some autonomy, yet s/he is slave to the rules and conventions; no matter which you are, a member of masses or one of the anarchists, all are subject to the rule of Capitalism and its money fetishism. Professor regrets this fact when he reminds Ossipon that

You revolutionaries [...] are the slaves of the social convention, which is afraid of you; slaves of it as much as the very police that stand up in the defence of that convention. Clearly you are, since you want to revolutionise it. It governs your thought, of course, and your action too, and thus neither your thought nor your action can ever be conclusive. (Conrad 2001, pp.50-51)

However, he is not exempt from the conventions of his society and gets entangled in its money fetishism— he makes bomb to earn money. In fact, each member in Conrad's story sells him/herself out. Winne exchanges her marriage to Verloc with the social and financial security. Verloc sells himself out as the double agent for achieving more money. The other revolutionaries prostitute themselves for money.

### HOMO SACERS OR ACTUAL OTHERS

Žižek, then, continues that the only idea crossing the mind here is that the "autonomous, free, and responsible" subject, which has been the ultimate aim of the universal narratives of Democracy and Enlightenment, has just been a fiction whose function is only to create agents or externalised other/agencies to whom socially unacceptable actions can be attributed" and on whom blames can be put (Daly 2004, p.133). It is exactly the maxim which the western governments has abused to justify their war against terrorism and anarchy; they introduce the 'Other' as responsible for their mishaps, to conceal their own fault— what Nazi regime did by introducing the fantasy figure of the Jew (Žižek 1991, p. 57). Boyer's view seems interesting here

Democracy was tested and found wanting during the first half of the twentieth century. The well-established democracies of France and England were unable to avoid, and indeed entered enthusiastically into, the futile savagery of trench warfare in World War I.

In the aftermath of the war, the collapse of fledgling democratic regimes in post-World War I Italy, Germany and elsewhere led directly to Nazism and at least indirectly to the Holocaust and to World War II. (Habibi 2014, p.133)

This search for destructive ‘Other’ is, nevertheless, based on the old rules of class, gender and race. It means that the ‘Other’ is still one who belongs to the poor, the second sex, or the other races including immigrants. The result is, as Giorgio Agamben declares, a divided society of full citizens and Homo sacers where there is a system of distinction between those who are included in the legal order and Homo sacers (Žižek 2002, p. 91). However, this system acts not just horizontally to differentiate two groups from each other but vertically— i.e. it is hierarchical (Žižek 2002, p. 32). “On the level of Law, we are treated as citizens, legal subjects, while on the level of its obscene superego supplement, of this empty unconditional law, we are treated as Homo sacer” (Žižek 2002, p. 97). And as Conrad adds, it turns it into “a bad world for poor people” (2001, p. 124).

Homo sacers may be the immigrants, the women and so on, but what matters about them is that they all undergo an abstraction through which personal features which differentiate them or brand them as other are erased, and one turns into an abstract entity as if on which death were put (2001, p. 137). This ‘Other’ can be an idealised one whose ‘Otherness’ has been erased— i.e. assimilated— or an actual one who is treated as a threat to the social security. Belonging to the former or the latter entails different treatment from the western society: that of tolerance, respect for the “Other,” and multiculturalism or that of war against this invisible, abstract enemy (Žižek 2004 a, p. 507). It, in fact, depends on how it fits in the system of Capitalism since as Michaelis points out

History is made by men, but they do not make it in their heads. The ideas that are born in their consciousness play an insignificant part in the march of events. History is dominated and determined by the tool and the production— by the force of economic conditions. Capitalism has made socialism, and the laws made by the capitalism for the protection of property are responsible for anarchism. No one can tell what form the social organisation may take in the future. (Conrad 2001, p. 30)

And what is curious is the fact that the Capitalist western society abuses both of these conditions again to strengthen its own stand. It is, in fact, under the guise of its humanitarian help to the former where Capitalism tries to conceal its own role in the unfortunate status brought about by its economic policy and colonialism; West, in fact, practices an ethics here which Žižek calls the “Capitalist ethics [...] where the ruthless pursuit of profit is counteracted by charity. Charity is part of the game as a humanitarian mask hiding the underlying economic exploitation” (Conrad 2001, p. 505). These sorts of aids are granted not only by the Capitalistic states to the unprivileged countries but also by their rich members. Conrad alludes to this capitalistic ethics in the scene where the rich Lady helps Michaelis out, while ignoring what has put him in that state:

The great lady was simple in her own way. His views and beliefs had nothing in them to shock or startle her, since she judged them from the standpoint of her lofty position. Indeed, her sympathies were easily accessible to a man of that sort. She was not an exploiting capitalist herself; she was, as it were, above the play of economic conditions. And she had a great capacity of pity for the more obvious forms of common human miseries, precisely because she was such a complete stranger to them that she had to translate her conception into terms of mental suffering before she could grasp the notion of their cruelty. [...] But this grotesque incarnation of humanitarian passion appealed somehow, to one’s imagination (Conrad 2001, p.78).

Besides, its proclaimed readiness to deal with terrorism and the invisible threats is just to make sure that no real change in power is to happen and the status quo is preserved. It is a strategy to curb the mass revolution. In fact, the terrorists which the West fights against are

the ‘abstract agency’ or in Freudian terms, the “obscene superego double,” which is the double of the state corporation “yet with no clear territorial base” (Žižek 2002, pp. 32, 38). What happens at this moment, Žižek believes, is that “neither terrorists confess to their sin, nor the anti-terrorist measures are obvious; thus here comes up an ideal breeding-ground for conspiracy theories and generalised social paranoia” (2006, p. 375). In Conrad’s story, Verloc is an embodiment of this strategy. He is a member of the Revolutionary Red Party and an informer to English police, an agent. Conrad, through professor, gives voice to this notion of conspiracy declaring that both the revolutionary and the police are slaves to the state and strengthen its status:

You are not a bit better than the forces arrayed against you— than the police, for instance. [...] Like to like. The terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket. Revolution, legality— are counter moves in the same game; forms of idleness at bottom identical (Conrad 2001, p. 51).

In fact, in Professor’s view, both groups— the police and the revolutionaries— are involved in silent conspiracy rather than opposing each other; in other words, “they are both ‘them’ against ‘us’” (Žižek 2002, p. 51). That is why, in Lindner’s view, he points out the “futility of playing at anarchism”: playing the game equals “enslavement to social condition”, and “a selling out to forces of domination, doing nothing” (Linder 2002, p. 109). The futility, which Professor regrets, derives from the distinction Žižek has drawn between the ‘authentic act’ and the ‘false act’. For Žižek, the authentic act is performed by the social symptom: the outcast who sacrifices himself to liberate the society and to break out a change. This authentic act is excessive i.e. it breaks through the symbolic order and is followed by violent transgression of social conventions and rules (Neill 2005, p. 4). The authentic act

Must be conceived as the subjective response in the face of the system... and is beyond or out with the law or system. To avoid the position of automaton, to avoid slavish adherence to the law, it would be necessary for the subject to judge in each situation (Neill 2005, p. 17).

It is this manifestation of the radical autonomy, which for Žižek is outside the realm of law and the symbolic order. In fact, it goes to the limit, beyond what is determined as possible. It occupies “the location of zero-level-symbolization,” the very zone Lacan allots to death (Žižek 2002, p. 99). And the person who acts it out has to live a life between life and death: “S/he is a ‘living dead’ in the sense of publicly assuming an uninhabitable position, a position for which there is no place in the public space” (Žižek 2002, p. 99). The best prototype for the authentic act, Žižek believes, is Antigone’s move against the symbolic order in her defying Creon. Her act is heroic, and she is a social hero. The ‘social symptom’, as Žižek calls this kind of hero, cannot be one among the *Last Men* with their silly pursuit of daily pleasures since s/he should risk his/her ‘social existence’ and then enter the realm of “symbolic death” –that is to locate herself/himself out of the symbolic space which is his/her society (1999, p. 263). The act, thus, should be “radically divorced from the symbolic order,” i.e. “irrecoverable to the symbolic,” and in that way is distinguished from what Žižek “terms the performative ‘staging’ of revolt, or ‘performative reconfiguration’ of the Symbolic order” (1999, p. 264).

Žižek’s notion goes with the distinction the revolutionary writer Stepniak draws between propagandists and the terrorists. “In contrast to propagandist who had been committed to a “sublime test of the power of words,” the Terrorist, declares Stepniak, is committed to “Acts” (Houen 2002, p. 57). The terrorist is a “spiritual militant,” a “pure force,” and “immortal” with a “messianic nature” whose “limbs may fail him, but, as if by

magic, they regain their rigor, and he stands erect, ready for battle after battle until he has laid low his enemy and liberated the country” (Houen 2002, p. 57).

This distinction is exactly what Conrad in his *SA* is working towards, and from which his criticism of current revolutionary movements derives— his equation of pornographic and revolutionary material. In his story, a group of revolutionaries and anarchists are working seemingly towards a big change. However, their efforts bring about no change. The secret is that they are more propagandist than the men committed to the “act”. That is why Verloc’s voice is emphasised— since he just talks well and is a lecturer to the Party— or why Ossipon plays as a lecturer to the working class to stir them up. Michaelis has also turned into a writer, writing about his prison’s days and the vision he has experienced. No one seems to risk his life for the big change. Even for the explosion, Verloc abuses Stevie, his degenerate brother-in-law. Ossipon escapes from Winnie at the end not to risk his life too, or Michaelis takes refuge in the very system he claimed to work against: i.e. he takes lodge with a very rich lady. There is no act possible, therefore. No transgression of the symbolic order of the Capitalistic society can occur. And they just secure the very basis of Capitalistic society through their providing a group of minority which performs the role of an invisible enemy against whom the state police is at work. In fact, they assure the order. Theirs is not the act, and the revolutionaries are not but the idle, hypocrites who corrupt the society by keeping it stagnant underneath, while apparently destabilizing it.

It is exactly the point Professor makes. As the ‘Other’, the outsider to whom is attributed the whole wrongs and crises, the diverse kinds of revolutionaries, in fact, strengthens rather than weakens the nationalistic belief which specifies them as the ‘national enemy’, who should be punished to keep the nation intact. Thus like the police force they are supporting the State. They just destabilise but not destroy. Professor declares,

To break up the superstition and worship of legality should be our aim. Nothing would please me more than to see Inspector Heat and his likes take to shooting us down in broad daylight with the approval of the public. Half our battle would be won then; the disintegration of the old morality would have set in in its very temple. That is what you ought to aim at. But you revolutionists will never understand that. You plan the future, you lose yourselves in reveries of economical systems derived from what is; whereas what’s wanted is a clean sweep and a clear start for a new conception of life. That sort of future will take care of itself if you will only make room for it (Conrad 2001, p. 53).

Theirs is the ‘staging’ of revolt, only a ‘spectacular’ effect, as Wurm asks for it, or a “revolution without revolution” (Žižek 1999, p. 264 & Žižek 2002, p. 28). That is why they are at loose or even working for the State. Theirs thus is a ‘false’ act. Along their acts comes that of Winnie’s hers is also far from authenticity. Even her suicide, which in Lacanian view can be “the only act which can succeed without misfiring,” is a far cry from an authentic act. The reason lies in the fact that through her suicide she is not to deal with the Real, instead she finds the Real so frightening that she kills herself to resolve it (Neill 2005, p. 15).

Through the whole narrative, the only possible authentic act seems to be promised by Professor. And he acts differently from the other revolutionaries. He is an in-between figure, living in a gap between the death and life; his state, however, cannot be traced to his antagonism towards the conventions of the symbolic order but to his readiness to risk his life at every moment. He is not one of the *Last Men* with a hedonistic philosophy of life but a very stoic one who even goes hungry to make his bombs. As he himself declares,

They depend on life, which in this connection is a historical fact surrounded by all sorts of restraints and considerations, a complex, organised fact open to attack at every point; whereas I depend on death which knows no restraint and cannot be attacked (emphases added) (Conrad 2001, p. 93).

He is the only individual in the story who rebukes both the multitude of masses assimilated in the virtuality of consumerist society and the real which has been constructed to fill up the loss of the Real. He is after ‘the Real’ and is not satisfied with its alternatives. That is why his is a ‘death drive’, using the Freudian term, in contrast with the others who prefer ‘life drive’— best embodied by their pursuit of bodily pleasures. It is because, as Žižek declares, death is the very realm of ‘the Real’, the Void, and the empty nothingness (Belsey 2005, p. 54). While the others draw satisfaction from ‘pleasure principle’, using the Freudian term, he seeks the beyond which contains the excessive enjoyment and whose feature is not that of daily pleasure or a satisfaction with the signifier or the appearance; he seeks something beyond that: a pleasure in pain and a life in death. His tendencies are exactly embodied through his life style and his domicile, a void-like space scantily furnished but for a cupboard safeguarding his explosives. As a messianic figure that is to save the world, he grants the others, no matter whom, the means to reach that space; he sells bombs to everybody as he admits to Ossipon. It is because, as Belsey says, it is through death that the reverting to the Real becomes possible— “eliminating body and the speaking subject with all its knowledge, death puts an end to the cultural game for each of us” (Belsey 2005, p. 41).

He is, thus, a threat to the society, an “actual other,” to quote Žižek, who stands in total contrast to the other revolutionaries for whom nothing is worth dying for. His is a true revolution while theirs is “a revolution without revolution” since they are followers of a school of thought which holds that one can enjoy everything as long as it has been “deprived of its malignant substance” (Žižek 2002, p. 10). Assimilated in the symbolic order, which Professor yet defies, these revolutionaries (much similar to current liberal thinkers from a Žižekian stand) avoid any kind of excess which belongs to the realm of the Real and label it as ‘mindless fanaticism’. In fact, their aim is a pursuit of happiness which is bound by “the pleasure principle,” but not real enjoyment since “enjoyment is destabilizing, traumatic, excessive, the Freudian pain-in- pleasure” (Belsey 2005, p. 45).

This happiness-oriented-style-of-life’s first principle is to avoid the Real and suffice with the appearance— the virtual world resulted from the loss of the Real. Whatever or whoever threatens this illusory happy life should, then, be prohibited or filtered. Thus how can violence and war against terrorism be indispensable elements in such a society? Žižek answers it this way,

Today, all the main terms we use to designate the present conflict— ‘war on terrorism’, ‘democracy and freedom’, ‘human rights’, and so on—are false terms, mystifying our perception of the situation instead of allowing us to think it. In this precise sense, our ‘freedoms’ themselves serve to mask and sustain our deeper unfreedom. You are free to choose as long as you make the right choice. (2002, p. 2)

In fact, they are there to be deployed to cover up the stagnation we are subject to in a Capitalistic society and to feed us with the illusion of progress and freedom. That is why some major country like England is open to terrorists or immigrants since their presence masks the economic policy of this Empire and turns this cultural issue to a major political one distracting world’s attention from her exploitations (Dean 2005, p. 166). And here, Žižek believes, the de-politicization of politics happens, at the very point where culture instead of economy becomes the focus of major political actions. And if, at this time, some other countries protest to her policies, as Vladimir voices them here, it is not because of humanitarian concerns but due to the fear of losing their own economic and geopolitical interests— as the schemes for explosion in SA proves it right.

The multiculturalism— of course in its prototypical version— which England practices here or the tolerance she shows towards her immigrants, displayed in the form of “leniency of the judicial procedure” as Wurm refers to it, is viable as long as the immigrants do not threaten the existing conventions (Conrad 2001, p. 55) since, as Žižek notes, “the ther



is tolerable till s/he displays no element of otherness” and this Multicultural strategy means nothing but “racism” (Daly 2004, p. 118). Dreadful as “the children of the evil,” these immigrants have to go “through stern discipline and punishment” to return “to the honest life,” which means “the status of Homo sacers [...], but never a full citizen” (Žižek 2002, p. 114). In that way, all the revolutionaries seem to be under close surveillance and to be deprived of any sort of privacy. In other words, they are, as Žižek notes, “legally dead (deprived of a determinate legal status) while biologically still alive” (2009, p. 4).

It, thus, becomes evident that the liberal democracy which the West is so proud of cannot be that much liberal since its promises of individual freedom and autonomy, which have turned into the West's major fetishes, go against the major principles of its Capitalistic policies. In fact, the idea of an “honest Democracy” is all but an illusion (Žižek 2002, p.79).

## CONCLUSION

At the end, one can piece out that Conrad's story is, in fact, a blue print of the world politics today in which the war against terrorism, fundamentalist ethnic or religious groups is the major headlines of news. However, this widespread violence puts Democracy in an uneasy position. As a missionary for individual freedom and liberty, Western Democracy should have seen better ends; however, its multiculturalism is but biased and the respect it shows for the ‘Other’ is just fictitious. In fact, the West assimilates its ‘Other’ as long as this ‘Other’ can censor its otherness— its ethnicity, culture, and religion— and can be reduced to an abstraction which induces no danger since it is not alive. However, if this very ‘Other’ is to keep the features which feed his differences, i.e. to remain as an actual ‘Other’, the West tries to censor it in another way— through a war against terror. Thus the democracy, which the West propagates as is its major monopoly, basically falls short of its promises: liberty for all individual. In fact, at such moments, as Žižek points out, Kant's view in his “What is Enlightenment?” is noteworthy: in the modern world of today, of which Conrad's world is a miniature, to assure social servitude, the state tries to induce a freedom of thought but with this underlying logic that one is free to choose as long as it chooses the right choice. However, “who” determines what is right and wrong, “what” the standards are, and how many choices one has have nothing to do with the ‘Other’. The ‘Other’ is there, in fact, to play the role of “master signifier,” which is “the selected fact that will enable all the ‘facts’ cohere in a new arrangement” (Žižek 2006, p. 40). And it is there where one can explain away the shortcomings of the West in one way or another; the curious point, however, is the fact that the profit-oriented, capitalist system falls never short of exploiting even the terror. It does its all best even there.

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