KİLİKYA FELSEFE DERGİSİ Sayı: 2, Ekim 2025, 82 - 101.
KİLİKYA JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY Issue: 2, October 2025, 82 - 101.

Makale Geliş Tarihi | Received: 13.03.2025 E-ISSN: 2148-9327
Makale Kabul Tarihi | Accepted: 21.10.2025 http://dergipark.org.tr/kilikya
Araştırma Makalesi | Research Article

ŽİŽEK'TE İDEOLOJİ, FANTEZİ, TAHAKKÜM VE EVRENSELLİK: KAVRAMSAL BAĞLANTILAR VE ANTİNOMİLER

Can BÜYÜKBAY[1]

Öz: Bu makale, Slavoj Žižek'in dört temel metnini—*"Philosophy, the 'Unknown Knowns,' and the Public Use of Reason" (2006), "The Structure of Domination Today: A Lacanian View" (2004), "The Violence of Fantasy" (2003) ve "A Leftist Plea for Eurocentrism" (1998)*— analiz ederek politik kuramının kavramsal bağlantılarını ve antinomilerini eleştirel biçimde incelemektedir. Žižek; Lacancı psikanaliz, Marksist kuram ve postyapısalcı eleştiri temelinde ideolojinin "bilinmeyen bilinenler" ve fantezi üzerinden sürdüğünü vurgular. Çağdaş tahakkümün ise *Efendi* söyleminden siyasetsizleştirilmiş uzmanlığa dayalı *Üniversite* söylemine geçtiğini öne sürer. Makale, Žižek'in özgürleştirici bir proje olarak değerlendirdiği evrenselcilik çağrısını; faillik, tikellik–evrensellik ilişkisi ve postkolonyal eleştiri çerçevesinde eleştirel biçimde değerlendirir. Metinleri ve başlıca itirazları sentezleyerek, Žižek'in neoliberal iktidar ve ideolojik bağlılık üzerine güçlü bir teşhis sunduğunu; ancak evrenselciliği uygulanabilir bir siyasal stratejiye dönüştüremediğini ileri sürer. Makalenin katkısı iki yönlü olup, Žižek'in ideoloji–fantezi–tahakküm kavramlarının bağlantılı analizi ve evrenselci ufkunu sınırlayan antinomilerin açıklığa kavuşturulmasını içerir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Antagonizma, Fantezi, Psikanaliz, Marksizm, Postyapısalcı Teori

ŽİŽEK ON IDEOLOGY, FANTASY, DOMINATION, AND UNIVERSALISM: CONCEPTUAL LINKS AND ANTINOMIES

Abstract: This article examines four key works by Slavoj Žižek: *"Philosophy, the 'Unknown Knowns,' and the Public Use of Reason" (2006), "The Structure of Domination Today: A Lacanian View" (2004), "The Violence of Fantasy" (2003), and "A Leftist Plea for Eurocentrism" (1998)*. It maps the conceptual links and antinomies that structure his political theory. Through close readings, the article demonstrates how Žižek mobilizes Lacanian psychoanalysis, Marxism, and poststructuralist critique to argue that ideology persists through "unknown knowns" and fantasy, while contemporary domination shifts from the Master's discourse to the University discourse of depoliticized expertise. The article critically evaluates Žižek's call for a renewed universalism as an emancipatory project and identifies unresolved tensions around agency, the

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particular–universal relation, and postcolonial critique. Synthesizing these texts and their major criticisms, the article contends that Žižek offers a powerful diagnostic of neoliberal power and ideological attachment but leaves open the problem of operationalizing universalism into a viable political strategy. The contribution is twofold: a unified architecture of Žižek's account of ideology–fantasy–domination, and a clarification of the antinomies that delimit his universalist horizon in contemporary political thought.

Keywords: Antagonism, Fantasy, Psychoanalysis, Marxism, Poststructuralist Theory

1. Introduction

This article revisits four key essays by Slavoj Žižek—*A Leftist Plea for 'Eurocentrism' (1998), The Violence of Fantasy (2003), The Structure of Domination Today: A Lacanian View (2004), and Philosophy, the 'Unknown Knowns,' and the Public Use of Reason (2006)*, to map the conceptual links and antinomies that structure his political theory across a discrete period (1998–2006). Read together, these texts articulate a coherent arc: ideology persists through "unknown knowns" and fantasy; contemporary domination shifts from the Master's discourse to the University discourse of depoliticized expertise; and a renewed universalism is advanced as an emancipatory horizon (Žižek, 1998, 2003, 2004, 2006). Rather than offering a summary of four essays, the article develops a thesis-driven synthesis that clarifies how these strands fit together and where they pull apart.

The article argues that across these four essays, Žižek argues that ideology is sustained libidinally via "unknown knowns" and fantasy, while power migrates from the Master to the University discourse; yet his universalist wager generates unresolved antinomies around agency, the particular–universal relation, and postcolonial critique.

The periodization matters: Written between the late 1990s and mid-2000s, these texts respond to a conjuncture marked by post–Cold War liberal triumphalism and technocratic governance. Žižek's intervention mobilizes Lacanian psychoanalysis (the Real, fantasy, discourse), Marxism, and poststructural critique to diagnose how ideological attachment persists despite widespread cynicism, and how expert knowledge performs depoliticization as necessity. At the same time, his universalism, which is framed against multicultural relativism, reopens classical questions of agency, representation, and political subjectivation, precisely where much contemporary theory remains cautious.

The article's original contribution is threefold. First, it provides a single operational architecture that links Žižek's accounts of ideology (unknown knowns), fantasy (libidinal support), and domination (Master → University) to his universalist politics and demonstrates how each presupposes the others. Second, it identifies and names three antinomies that delimit this architecture: (i) the agency paradox (big decisive act versus slow, collective change), (ii) the particular–universal tension (one group's cause vs. everyone's cause), and (iii) the carrier problem of universalism (who bears the universal without reproducing Eurocentric authority). Third, it puts Žižek in explicit

dialogue with critical interlocutors: Dean (2009) on institutional/material mediation, Butler (1997, 2000) on performative agency, and Spivak (1999) and Mbembe (2003) on postcolonial/necropolitical limits so that the strengths and limits of his project are argued in situ rather than asserted abstractly.

In the context of agency paradox, the article asks the following: Is real change a sudden break (a dramatic protest or revolution), or does it mostly come from many small, repeated actions done together over time (organizing, strikes, care networks)? For example, is a one-day uprising enough, or do unions, tenant groups, and mutual-aid routines matter more for lasting change? In the framework of the particular–universal tension (one group's cause vs. everyone's cause), the article asks how specific struggles (about race, gender, class, migration, etc.) do become a shared fight for equality without being diluted or erased? To illustrate, can a women workers' demand in a factory be framed so it speaks to all workers, without losing what's specific to women's conditions? In the context of the carrier problem, when someone says, "this is for everyone," who has the legitimacy to say that? How do we avoid the "universal" being decided by powerful or Eurocentric voices? For example, instead of a think tank in Europe speaking for the Global South, can movements build procedures (rotation, translation, accountability) so those directly affected carry the universal claim themselves?

Why these four essays? They are frequently cited in isolation to exemplify distinct "Žižekian" moves; unknown knowns (2006), fantasy's structuring role (2003), domination's discursive shift (2004), and the universalist wager (1998). Treating them as a corpus reveals their interdependence and the precise points at which Žižek's diagnostic power exceeds his prescriptive clarity. The selection is theory-driven, temporally bounded, and oriented to a single argumentative question about how (and whether) Žižek's universalism can be operationalized without erasing particular struggles.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 offers a short textual map that fixes terms across four essays 2.1 unknown knowns and ideology, 2.2 the shift from Master's to University discourse, 2.3 fantasy as an ideological mechanism, and 2.4 universalism vs. multiculturalism. Section 3 develops the critical core: 3.1 strengths (ideology as unconscious practice; technocratic depoliticization; fantasy's libidinal bind; the universalist wager) and 3.2 weaknesses (lack of concrete alternatives; overreliance on psychoanalysis over material mediation; the problem of political subjectivity), integrating dialogue with Dean, Butler, Spivak, Mbembe, and Hall where each pressure point arises. Section 4 names and analyzes three antinomies of Žižek's universalism: (i) the agency paradox (Act vs. iteration), (ii) the particular–universal tension, and (iii) the bearer problem, together with operational bridges (procedures, sequences, institutions). Section 5 concludes with strategic implications for left politics and a research agenda that links Žižek's diagnostic architecture to programmatic hypotheses in political economy and collective action.

Taken together, the aim is not to domesticate Žižek's provocation but to reconstruct its argumentative architecture, register its fault lines, and specify what kind of theoretical and institutional work would be required to translate his universalist horizon into actionable political strategy.

2. Literature Review: Žižek's Critique of Ideology, Power, and Universalism

Slavoj Žižek's political theory interlaces Lacanian psychoanalysis, Marxist critique, and post-structuralist problematization to diagnose how contemporary society is organized by unconscious ideological presuppositions, shifting modes of domination, and the political function of fantasy. Across the four focal essays (1998–2006), he argues that ideology endures via "unknown knowns" and fantasy, while domination migrates from the Master's discourse to the University discourse of depoliticized expertise, culminating in a wager on universalism as an emancipatory horizon (Žižek, 1998, 2003, 2004, 2006). This review situates those claims within broader debates and indicates where Žižek's diagnosis is conceptually strongest and where critics press for material-institutional and postcolonial thickening.

2.1. The 'Unknown Knowns' and the Persistence of Ideology

Žižek's "Philosophy, the 'Unknown Knowns,' and the Public Use of Reason" (2006) explores how ideology operates through hidden presuppositions that structure cognition and political discourse (Žižek, 2006, p. 138). Reworking Donald Rumsfeld's epistemological triad—"known knowns," "known unknowns," and "unknown unknowns"—he adds a fourth category: "unknown knowns," i.e., what we unknowingly assume but do not consciously acknowledge (Žižek, 2006, p. 140). This insight aligns with Althusser's interpellation, wherein individuals are unconsciously "hailed" into ideological positions (Althusser, 1971). Thus, rather than supplying ready answers, philosophy should interrogate the premises that make particular answers appear necessary (Žižek, 2006, p. 141).

One of Žižek's enduring contributions is his reconfiguration of ideology as unconscious knowledge. Ideology functions less at the level of explicit belief than of unconscious social practices (Žižek, 2006, p. 142). He departs from classical false-consciousness models and stresses that even those who cynically reject ideology continue to act within its framework: "They know very well what they are doing, but they do it anyway" (Žižek, 2006, p. 145). This helps explain why, in liberal democracies, people can recognize capitalism's harms (e.g., ecological devastation) yet reproduce its routines: what sustains the system is knowing compliance, not ignorance (Žižek, 2006, p. 147).

Critiques note that this Lacanian framing can overemphasize unconscious structures at the expense of material and institutional mediation (Dean, 2009). Dean argues Žižek under-theorizes how economic institutions and state apparatuses stabilize the very premises he problematizes (Dean, 2009, p. 73). While powerful as diagnosis, the account underspecifies practical levers of resistance.

Žižek illustrates his stance with contemporary issues such as the war on terror, ecological threat and argues that ideological frames shape what counts as a problem and a solution. The case of James Jesus Angleton, the CIA counterintelligence chief whose search for "moles" became an ideological trap, exemplifies how an unknown known can organize threat perception and foreclose reality-testing (Žižek, 2006). He also reflects on neuroscience and bioengineering (e.g., brain–machine interfaces): echoing Heidegger's concern with technology, the danger is not a spectacular catastrophe but an imperceptible normalization: "Nothing happens," yet our mode of being shifts (Žižek, 2006).

These claims raise live questions: If ideological attachment is deeply ingrained, how can subjects or collectives break from it? Does the biotech discussion edge toward historical determinism and sideline collective agency in shaping technoscience? And if philosophy must challenge questions rather than answer them, can it avoid normative commitments about which critiques are better? Žižek's analysis is compelling, but it leaves open the problem of operationalizing emancipation.

2.2. Power and the Shift from Master's Discourse to University Discourse

In *"The Structure of Domination Today: A Lacanian View"* (2004), Žižek examines how power shifts from explicit authoritarian rule to technocratic governance. He uses Lacan's distinction between the Master's discourse and the University discourse to frame the change (Žižek, 2004, p. 384). Traditional authority rooted in Master-Signifiers gives way to bureaucratic expertise and depoliticized decision-making, where politics is recoded as a technical rather than ideological problem (Žižek, 2004, p. 388). He draws on Foucault's biopolitics, and argues that modern power less often commands directly and more often administers life through regulatory control of bodies and populations (Foucault, 1978). This raises a critical question: does the critique of depoliticization yield a path of resistance, or only a diagnosis of impasse?

He builds out Lacan's four discourses and specifies that under the Master's discourse power is overt and hierarchical (e.g., monarchic/dictatorial rule), whereas under the University discourse power presents itself as neutral expertise and operates through technical administration (Žižek, 2004, pp. 387–390). Contemporary neoliberal governance exemplifies this: economic policies are justified not as ideological choices but as objective necessities dictated by "science" and "markets." The link to biopolitics is direct: power governs via public health, risk prevention, and behavioral regulation, measures framed as neutral even when their effects are profoundly political (Žižek, 2004, p. 394; Foucault, 1978). For instance, policies on obesity, smoking, or vaccination appear as health mandates rather than political interventions.

A recurrent criticism is that this account under-engages feminist and postcolonial perspectives on power. Scholars such as Judith Butler and Achille Mbembe stress that governance functions not only through knowledge-neutralization but also via gendered and racialized exclusions (Butler, 1997; Mbembe, 2003). Relatedly, Dean

argues that Žižek's emphasis on discourse can understate institutional and material mediation, obscuring how state apparatuses and economic institutions stabilize "technical necessity" (Dean, 2009, p. 77).

Žižek also critiques the contemporary emphasis on tolerance and notes its ideological function:

- Respect for Otherness is conditional: the Other is acceptable only when it is not truly "intrusive" (Žižek, 2004, p. 383).
- The fear of harassment encourages an obsession with "safe spaces," paradoxically intensifying an intolerance of proximity (Žižek, 2004, p. 383).

He contrasts this with the Mosaic Law in the Jewish ethical tradition, experienced as an externally imposed, violent command, against which contemporary models of self-realization appear to domesticate ethics' radical demand (Žižek, 2004, p. 385). He extends the analysis with Foucault and Agamben, and ties University discourse to biopolitics, a regime where life is administratively managed:

- An obsession with health and risk.
- Individuals reduced to objects of expert knowledge.
- The contradiction wherein liberal democracies proclaim rights while practicing surveillance, indefinite detention, and torture (Žižek, 2004, pp. 399–401).

He encapsulates the ideological logic through the "chocolate laxative" paradox, a product that contains the agent of its own negation (Žižek, 2004, p. 400). This paradox maps onto charitable capitalism (exploitation plus philanthropy), pacifist militarism (war for peace/democracy), and neoliberal governance (democracy accepted only when "mature" enough to exclude populist excesses). The net effect is to neutralize resistance by incorporating it into the system's functioning.

The Lacanian framing powerfully clarifies how knowledge and expertise can mask domination, and the critique of liberal tolerance and humanitarianism exposes contradictions at the heart of contemporary democracies. Still, the analysis invites nuancing: equating public-health regulation too quickly with authoritarian control risks leveling important differences; and the Master to University binary may miss emergent forms of power (e.g., platform governance, data-driven modulation) that neither command overtly nor simply masquerade as expertise. Even so, the essay remains a compelling account of ideological operations under technocratic and biopolitical regimes, while leaving open the question of practicable resistance.

2.3. Fantasy as an Ideological Mechanism

In *"The Violence of Fantasy"* (2003), Žižek argues that fantasy does not merely offer escape; it actively structures reality and organizes how we perceive power, ideology,

and violence (Žižek, 2003, pp. 275–278). This aligns with Lacan's "Real": fantasy functions as a buffer against the traumatic kernel of social antagonism (Lacan, 1977).

Žižek's cinematic readings illustrate this structuring role. Animated films like *The Land Before Time* and postmodern fairy tales like *Shrek* stage a multiculturalist fantasy in which differences appear harmonized, thereby neutralizing vertical antagonisms (e.g., class conflict) through a horizontal mosaic of identities (Žižek, 2003, pp. 277–280). Conversely, films such as *Fight Club* and *Taxi Driver* figure violence as liberatory, yet in Žižek's reading they ultimately re-inscribe social order through masculinist fantasies of heroic resistance (Žižek, 2003, p. 286). With *Hannibal*, he notes how the film censors the novel's controversial ending (Clarice's submission to Lecter's fantasy), exposing the public limits of acknowledging a "fundamental fantasy" (Žižek, 2003, p. 282).

Beyond film, Žižek reads Christianity/paganism via G. K. Chesterton: pagan enjoyment bears an intrinsic melancholy, whereas Christianity structures enjoyment so that the "pagan dream" can be sustained without immediate loss (Žižek, 2003, p. 275). This paradox helps explain how ideological enjoyment is managed—promised, deferred, and regulated.

A corollary is his critique of the ubiquitous rhetoric of "resistance." When every position such as LGBTQ+ groups, prisoners, even survivalists frames itself as resistance, the gesture risks becoming empty and system-stabilizing (Žižek, 2003, pp. 278–279). Likewise, appeals to "respect for Otherness" can operate as a repressive tolerance, blocking antagonism rather than enabling politics (Žižek, 2003, p. 279).

Commentators warn against overgeneralization: Focus on cinema/popular culture can imply audiences always internalize dominant ideology and underplay interpretive resistance and counter-readings (Hall, 1997). Relatedly, if fantasy always reabsorbs resistance, the account risks strategic paralysis: *If all resistance is already anticipated, how does transformative action emerge?* Finally, Žižek shows how fantasy sustains power by managing enjoyment, but he engages less with how fantasy might be re-appropriated for progressive, collective mobilization. Despite these caveats, Žižek provides a powerful lens for grasping how fantasy libidinally secures ideological attachment: why people "know very well" yet keep doing it and how cultural narratives translate antagonism into palatable forms that leave structural relations intact (Žižek, 2003, p. 286).

Taken together, this supports our thesis that Žižek's diagnostic power (ideology–fantasy–domination) culminates in a universalist wager that remains structurally antinomic around agency, the particular–universal relation, and the bearer of universality. In simple terms, Žižek is great at showing how we get stuck, through hidden habits, fantasies, and "expert" rule, but when he calls for a politics for everyone (universalism), big questions remain about who acts, how specific struggles become a shared cause, and who gets to speak for all. Žižek helps us diagnose why things don't change; but

turning his call for a politics "for all" into practical strategy still needs answers to who acts, how we join struggles together, and who has the right to carry the universal claim.

2.4. Universalism vs. Multiculturalism: The Political Stakes of Žižek's Eurocentrism

In *"A Leftist Plea for Eurocentrism"* (1998), Žižek advances one of his most controversial claims: the European political legacy of universalism should be reclaimed as an emancipatory project, not dismissed as a mere imperial imposition (Žižek, 1998, pp. 988–991). Against postmodern relativism and identity politics, he argues that only universalism supplies a framework adequate to radical political struggle (Žižek, 1998, pp. 991, 995). Drawing on Rancière's notion of the "part of no part," he contends that democracy emerges when the excluded claim universal representation, as in the French Revolution, the civil rights movement, and socialist uprisings (Žižek, 1998, pp. 993, 997).

Žižek begins by conceding that "Eurocentrism" is widely equated with cultural imperialism, yet insists that Europe's distinctiveness lies in its capacity for self-critique and universalization, not in a fixed cultural identity (Žižek, 1998, p. 988). He traces politics proper to ancient Greece, where the demos came to stand for the whole and institute universality against oligarchic rule (Žižek, 1998, pp. 989–990). From there he diagnoses today's postpolitical order, in which politics is reduced to technocratic management and multicultural accommodation, rather than staged as antagonism (Žižek, 1998, p. 997).

A key analytic move is his fourfold schema of political disavowal (Žižek, 1998, p. 992):

1. Arche-politics – organic community suppressing antagonism;
2. Parapolitics – struggle reduced to institutional competition (e.g., electoralism);
3. Metapolitics – politics folded into deeper economic/technocratic causality;
4. Ultrapolitics – Schmittian friend/enemy decision resolved by force.

Žižek claims liberal democracy primarily operates as parapolitics, sanitizing radical demands; crises then trigger metapolitical or ultrapolitical turns (Žižek, 1998, p. 994). He distinguishes globalization from universality: the former markets and manages differences while foreclosing antagonism; the latter arises through struggle, when the excluded universalize their claim (Žižek, 1998, p. 998). Without a credible universalist politics, he warns, the vacuum is filled by reactionary populisms (Žižek, 1998, p. 1001). Hence his critique of identity politics: fragmenting demands into particular grievances both neutralizes conflict and invites administrative control (Žižek, 1998, pp. 1006, 1009). The result is the familiar double bind of neoliberalism, economic deregulation paired with cultural multiculturalism, which, Žižek argues, incubates right-wing backlash (Žižek, 1998, p. 1009).

Postcolonial and feminist critics, especially Spivak (1999), argue that Žižek's universalism risks erasing particular struggles and reinscribing Eurocentric hegemony.

They press two questions we address: *(i)* How can universalism be mobilized without reproducing exclusionary structures? *(ii)* What material analysis explains the rise of the postpolitical? Is a return to class struggle necessary to ground Žižek's wager? While Žižek offers a potent diagnosis of depoliticization, the strategy for repoliticization often remains under-specified.

Even so, *A Leftist Plea for Eurocentrism* remains a forceful left critique of neoliberal globalization and identity politics and calls for a renewed radical universalism capable of confronting both capitalist hegemony and reactionary nationalism (Žižek, 1998, pp. 1008–1009).

Placed after the ideology–fantasy–domination arc, this section reframes the project's endpoint: universality promises repoliticization while opening new contradictions over agency and representation. So, universality restarts politics—but it also forces hard choices about how people act and who gets to speak for the whole.

3. Critical Engagement: Assessing the Strengths and Weaknesses of Žižek's Theoretical Framework

Slavoj Žižek's work has been both highly influential and widely debated, particularly in the fields of political theory, psychoanalysis, and ideology critique. While his analysis of ideology, power, fantasy, and universalism provides a compelling lens for understanding contemporary political dynamics, it also raises significant philosophical, methodological, and practical concerns. This section critically examines the strengths and limitations of Žižek's theoretical framework in light of the four articles analyzed.

3.1. Strengths: Žižek's Contributions to Political and Ideological Critique

One of Žižek's most significant contributions is his reinterpretation of ideology as something that operates at the level of unconscious structures rather than explicit belief systems. In *"Philosophy, the 'Unknown Knowns,' and the Public Use of Reason"* (2006), he demonstrates how hidden ideological presuppositions shape our perception of reality (Žižek, 2006, p. 140). This perspective helps explain why even those who explicitly reject capitalism or neoliberalism continue to function within its framework. His theory of "unknown knowns" extends Marxist and Althusserian conceptions of ideology and argues that ideology persists not because people believe in it, but because they act as if they do (Žižek, 2006, p. 145). This insight is crucial in understanding political apathy and cynicism in contemporary democracies. Even when people recognize the flaws of the system (climate crisis, economic inequality), they remain trapped in ideological inertia, unable to imagine alternatives. This argument builds on Lacanian psychoanalysis, particularly the concept of the Real, which Žižek argues is obscured by ideological fantasy (Lacan, 1977). His work thus provides a powerful critique of neoliberal governance and demonstrates how its ideology functions through both

knowledge production (University discourse) and cultural fantasies (Žižek, 2004, p. 390).

Two clarifications sharpen the force of this move. First, unknown knowns are not just "things we know unconsciously," but practical orientations sedimented in routines, closer to Bourdieu's *habitus* than to a stock of hidden propositions. This explains why policy critique rarely bites: even when beliefs change, practices and infrastructures (workflows, incentives, interfaces) carry on. Second, Žižek turns the classic ideology question from epistemology ("What is true/false?") to modal ontology ("What does our world render possible or impossible to even *try*?") if the premises that define "realistic" options are themselves ideological, technical fixes will tend to reproduce the field. In short, the point is that changing beliefs is insufficient because routines and infrastructures keep practice on its old rails. This explains why cynicism coexists with compliance: the field of feasible action is pre-structured before belief. Methodologically, the upshot is to prioritize premise-testing over quick "solutions": if the premises that define what counts as realistic are ideological, then technical fixes will usually reproduce the same field unless those premises are changed.

3.1.1. Critique of Neoliberal Technocracy and Depoliticization

Žižek's analysis of power in *"The Structure of Domination Today" (2004)* is highly relevant to discussions about the decline of political engagement and the rise of technocratic governance. He argues that power no longer operates through explicit domination (Master's discourse) but through depoliticized expertise (University discourse) (Žižek, 2004, p. 387).

This critique resonates with Foucault's theory of biopolitics, where power functions through the regulation of life itself rather than direct coercion (Foucault, 1978). This perspective helps explain why contemporary democracy often feels meaningless, as major political decisions on economic policy, global trade, and public health are increasingly framed as technical, non-ideological matters. Žižek's critique is useful in understanding how neoliberalism maintains power not by imposing ideology, but by presenting itself as the absence of ideology (Žižek, 2004, p. 394).

One pay-off of reading Master to University with biopolitics is that it specifies the institutional sites of depoliticization: central banks, independent regulators, public–private standards bodies, expert committees. These bodies translate contestable choices into procedural necessities ("credibility," "market confidence," "evidence-based") and thereby lower the temperature of conflict. A further extension, only implicit in Žižek, but consistent with his frame, is platform governance: data-driven modulation of behavior (ranking, nudging, default settings) that presents itself as optimization rather than rule. Here, expertise is embedded in code, which narrows the range of political dispute by pre-formatting action. This doesn't refute Žižek; it thickens the University discourse with infrastructural detail.

If depoliticization is an effect of expert enclosure, then the practical lever is counter-expertise coupled with re-politicization of criteria (e.g., redefining "efficiency" to include distribution and planetary boundaries). The Žižekian twist is to see this not as a mere "fact debate," but as a struggle over the premises that define what counts as rational.

3.1.2. The Role of Fantasy in Sustaining Ideological Structures

Žižek's work in *"The Violence of Fantasy"* (2003) offers a novel contribution to political theory by showing how ideology operates through cultural narratives and unconscious enjoyment. His analysis of Hollywood films as ideological mechanisms reveals how fantasy shapes political subjectivity by making social contradictions appear natural and inevitable (Žižek, 2003, p. 279). For example, in capitalist societies, the fantasy of individual success obscures structural inequalities. Films like *The Pursuit of Happyness* reinforce the illusion of meritocracy and suggest that economic success is purely the result of personal effort rather than systemic advantage. Žižek's framework helps us critically engage with media and popular culture as sites of ideological reproduction.

The distinctive claim isn't just that "media persuades," but that fantasy organizes enjoyment, and enjoyment anchors compliance. This explains why irony and self-awareness (as in *Shrek*) do not automatically liberate; they can function as ideological inoculation. A Žižek-compatible research move is to track enjoyment-circuits (who gets to enjoy, how, at whose expense) across cultural forms and policy regimes. That connects the cultural reading to material stakes (labor, care, extraction) without abandoning the psychoanalytic insight. It also answers a common objection (Hall, 1997) by allowing for counter-enjoyments and subcultural reappropriations: fantasy can be re-coded, but not by argument alone: Practices of enjoyment have to change.

3.1.3. Universalism as an Alternative to Liberal Multiculturalism

Finally, in *"A Leftist Plea for Eurocentrism"* (1998), Žižek provocatively argues for the reappropriation of universalism as a site of radical politics. He rejects postmodern relativism and argues that multiculturalism and identity politics often depoliticize struggles by reducing them to cultural differences rather than universal emancipatory projects (Žižek, 1998, p. 995). This argument challenges liberal conceptions of tolerance, which Žižek sees as a way of maintaining global inequality by fragmenting political resistance (Žižek, 1998, p. 1001). His critique of the NGO-industrial complex as a mechanism of soft imperialism remains relevant today, particularly in discussions on humanitarian intervention and neoliberal governance.

Two distinctions keep the claim sharp and answer predictable critiques. First, universality is not equal to globalization: globalization manages differences; universality interrupts the order by asserting equality from the position of the excluded. Second, universalism is not equal to the view-from-Europe; the question is who bears the universal. This is where Spivak's challenge bites: unless the bearer is

reconfigured, universalism risks reinscribing Eurocentric authority. A constructive Žižekian response is to link universality to collective procedures (strike, assembly, popular power) rather than to a civilizational subject. In other words, what makes a claim universal is not its origin, but its mode of address and uptake: Its capacity to be taken up by anyone as theirs. That preserves Žižek's insistence on antagonism while avoiding the trap of speaking for others.

3.2. Weaknesses: Limitations and Critiques of Žižek's Framework

3.2.1. Lack of Concrete Political Alternatives

One of the most persistent critiques of Žižek is that while he is brilliant at diagnosing ideological impasses, he offers little in terms of practical political solutions (Dean, 2009, p. 72). While his work exposes how ideology sustains power, he rarely provides a clear strategy for resistance or transformation. For instance, in *A Leftist Plea for Eurocentrism* (1998), Žižek argues for a return to universalist politics, but he does not specify how such a project would be organized or mobilized. Critics have pointed out that his critique of identity politics, while often incisive, can risk dismissing the concrete struggles of marginalized groups (Butler, 2000, p. 35). If universalism is the answer, how do we prevent it from becoming another form of exclusionary hegemony?

Across the four essays, Žižek's comparative advantage is diagnostic: he explains *why* subjects remain attached to ideology (2006), *how* domination shifts into expertise (2004), and *how* fantasy converts antagonism into enjoyment (2003). Yet when *A Leftist Plea for Eurocentrism* (1998) gestures toward universalism as an emancipatory horizon, the account stops short of institutional design. What organizational forms would enact universalism without reproducing parapolitical containment (1998, p. 994) or ultrapolitical escalation (1998, p. 992)? The texts leave open what bodies, what procedures, and what accountability mechanisms could sustain universal claims while preserving antagonism rather than suppressing it.

Žižek's theory tends to privilege ruptural agency, the Act/Decision that breaks symbolic coordinates, over iterative, collective agency. This sits uneasily with the very mechanisms he documents. If ideology persists as unknown knowns and as fantasy-structured enjoyment, then change likely requires long-duration practices that re-code enjoyment and re-train premises, not only singular acts. Butler's account of performativity stresses precisely such iterative processes through which agency accrues in and against norms (Butler, 1997). The under-specification of organizational temporality, how coalitions persist, learn, revise criteria, renders Žižek's universalism programmatically thin.

The Structure of Domination Today (2004) shows how University discourse rebrands choices as technical necessities (pp. 387–390, 394). But if depoliticization is mediated by institutions (central banks, regulators, expert panels), then resistance requires institutional counter-formation (counter-expertise, public standards, democratic

oversight) rather than only exposing ideology. Dean's critique is important here: Žižek under-theorizes the material and organizational scaffolding needed to repoliticize criteria (Dean, 2009, p. 73). Without such scaffolding, the call to universalism risks remaining normative rhetoric rather than governance strategy.

Eurocentrism (1998) reclaims universality against multicultural fragmentation, invoking Rancière's "part of no part" (pp. 993, 997). But who articulates and who authorizes the universal? Spivak warns that universal claims can reinscribe Eurocentric authority if the bearer of universality is presumed rather than politically constituted (Spivak, 1999). Mbembe adds that ignoring racialized exposure to death (necropolitics) flattens the stakes of "universal" politics (Mbembe, 2003). Absent an account of representational procedures (mandate, rotation, accountability, translation across differences), Žižek's universalism risks being spoken for rather than spoken from the excluded position it valorizes.

If, as *The Violence of Fantasy* (2003) argues, fantasy organizes enjoyment and sutures subjects to the status quo (pp. 275–280, 286), then strategy must address enjoyment directly. What counter-enjoyments, rituals, or collective practices might detach subjects from the pleasures that anchor compliance? Žižek's cultural readings show how irony and transgression are recoded by the system, but the essays do not elaborate how movements build durable counter-libidinal economies. Without this, the path from critique to sustained mobilization is opaque.

Žižek's critique sometimes levels distinct phenomena, e.g., treating public health mandates and authoritarian control within a common biopolitical logic (2004, pp. 394, 399–401). The theoretical gain (revealing how "neutral" expertise masks power) can become a practical cost if it collapses distinctions crucial for strategy (e.g., when to defend versus contest administrative measures). Scope conditions, *when* a measure functions as depoliticization and *when* it materially enables democratic capacity, remain underspecified, weakening the move from analysis to actionable criteria.

Žižek distinguishes globalization (management of differences) from universality (insurgent equality) (1998, p. 998). Yet making universality operative requires mediations he does not provide: resource coordination, institutional experimentation, and legal-political forms that hold antagonism open without devolving into ultrapolitics. The NGO-industrial complex is rightly criticized (1998, p. 1001), but what replaces it? Without positive proposals, universalism risks registering as a moral horizon rather than a programmable sequence.

The absence of a blueprint is not fatal, but a few constructive directions follow from Žižek's own premises:

- Premise contestation as method (*2006*): institutionalize premise audits (who sets "realistic" options?) in budgeting, regulation, and risk assessment. Example: If

"balanced budget" rules block social housing, review that premise, not just the housing proposal.

- Counter-expertise within/against the University (*2004*): build public, adversarial expertise that makes criteria contestable (e.g., citizens' assemblies with binding review triggers). Example: An assembly can force a re-evaluation of an "evidence-based" closure of a public clinic.
- Re-coding enjoyment (*2003*): pair discourse with practice-design (mutual aid, cooperative culture, festive forms of assembly) to cultivate counter-enjoyments that compete with status-quo pleasures. Hence not arguments alone; design practices that make collective life enjoyable, so they can compete with status-quo pleasures.
- Procedural universality (*1998*): define universality by how claims travel (openness, uptake, revision) rather than by who speaks; embed rotation/recall to avoid surrogate elites. Example: Rotating spokespeople and translation committees ensure migrants, caregivers, and workers can all carry the "universal" demand.

The charge that Žižek lacks concrete alternatives is well-motivated: the essays excel at showing *why* domination persists and *how* ideology sticks, but remain thin on *how* to build durable counter-power. Still, this limitation is not a reason to discard the framework; it is a prompt to extend it. Taking Žižek's insights seriously implies designing institutions of premise contestation, counter-expertise, and collective enjoyment, and articulating procedural universality that makes the "part of no part" legible without defaulting to Eurocentric stand-ins.

3.2.2. Overemphasis on Psychoanalysis at the Expense of Material Conditions

Žižek's reliance on Lacanian psychoanalysis has also been criticized for neglecting economic structures and materialist analysis. While his concept of the "unknown knowns" explains ideological inertia, it does not account for the role of institutions, class struggle, or economic power in shaping ideology. For instance, Jodi Dean (2009) argues that Žižek's psychoanalytic framework tends to reduce political action to symbolic gestures rather than material struggles. While Žižek critiques neoliberalism, he rarely engages with concrete analyses of capitalism, labor, or economic policy (Dean, 2009, p. 76).

The charge is not merely that psychoanalysis is "non-material," but that libidinal mechanisms (fantasy, enjoyment, unknown knowns) require a carrier system—institutions, infrastructures, property relations, and legal forms—to become historically durable. Althusser's insight about ideological state apparatuses helps here: schools, media, and workplaces are not just sites of interpellation, they are material organizations that reproduce relations of production (Althusser, 1971). Žižek foregrounds the subjective binding to ideology; critics want the objective binding specified: *Which* institutions, *which* funding streams, *which* regulatory designs fix the premises that psychoanalysis then describes at the level of subjectivity?

When Žižek (2004) reframes domination via the University discourse, the emphasis falls on expert knowledge and depoliticized necessity. Dean's point is that we must show how this necessity is fabricated and enforced: central banks' mandates, rating agencies' criteria, technocratic veto points, and—today—platform infrastructures that codify norms in algorithms, defaults, and data schemas. Foucault's biopolitics (1978) already urges us to track how power "administers life" through techniques; the materialist add-on is to specify the budget lines, standards bodies, and enforcement mechanisms that translate expertise into binding decisions. Without this, psychoanalytic diagnosis risks becoming an elegant superstructure story.

Žižek's account of enjoyment (jouissance) is powerful, but critics argue that it should be mediated by class position and labor regimes. Enjoyment is not evenly distributed: who enjoys flexibility, and who absorbs precarity? Hall's cultural materialism (1997) suggests reading media/fantasy through industrial location (ownership, labor conditions) and audience segmentation (classed/racialized markets). This reinscribes the means of production into the psychoanalytic story: fantasy does not float; it is funded, produced, targeted, and monetized.

A related concern is Žižek's tendency to privilege ruptural Acts over organizational reproduction. Butler's performativity (1997,) and feminist political economy remind us that iterative practices such as care work, unionization, budget campaigns such as repattern the material conditions under which subjects attach to or detach from ideology. If unknown knowns sediment in routines, then counter-politics must recode routines (workplace rules, tenancy protections, benefits design) rather than await a singular Act. Otherwise psychoanalysis risks heroizing breaks where institutional rewiring is required.

Mbembe's necropolitics (2003) presses the sharpest material constraint: who is exposed to premature death and carceral management is patterned by race and coloniality. A psychoanalytic focus on fantasy can name the *form* of attachment but miss the material distribution of risk. If universalism is to be more than a formal claim, its bearer must be constituted through organizations capable of redistributing exposure (housing, healthcare, policing oversight, border regimes). Otherwise, the universal repeats Eurocentric allocations of life and death while narrating itself as emancipation.

Finally, a materialist thickening clarifies when Žižek's categories explain most and when they need supplementation. His framework is strongest where expert rule and ideological enjoyment are evident (monetary policy, humanitarian securitization, culture industries). It requires extension where platformized power and supply-chain capitalism relocate coercion into logistics, data extraction, and subcontracted labor. Naming these scope conditions does not negate psychoanalysis; it targets it where it best diagnoses attachment, while pairing it with institutional analysis where rules are made and enforced.

The over-psychoanalysis critique lands to the extent that Žižek leaves institutions, class, and racialized materiality in the background. But it also indicates a productive synthesis: keep Žižek's insight that ideology binds at the libidinal level, and embed it in a mapping of the apparatuses that make such binding pay in budgets, bylaws, algorithms, and borders. Only then can critique travel from subjective attachment to transformative construction.

3.2.3. The Problem of Political Subjectivity

Žižek's theory of ideology implies that people are deeply embedded in ideological fantasy and make genuine political action extremely difficult. However, if ideology is as totalizing as he suggests, how do people ever break free from it? Some critics argue that Žižek's theory leaves little room for agency. By focusing on how ideology reproduces itself unconsciously, he does not adequately explain how radical change occurs in practice. His references to historical moments of rupture (e.g., the French Revolution, May 1968) are compelling (Žižek, 1998, p. 997) but do not translate into concrete political strategies.

Žižek's account of subjectivation privileges the Act, a rupture that suspends the coordinates of the Symbolic, over the iterative, world-building practices through which collective power accumulates. Conceptually this generates a paradox: if ideological attachment is reproduced as unknown knowns and as fantasy-managed enjoyment, then emancipatory subjectivity seems to require an exceptional break, yet the very conditions that would make a break intelligible are pre-structured by ideology. The result is a double bind: the Act is necessary and yet structurally unlikely.

Butler (1997) reframes agency as performativity: ıterative reworkings of norms rather than singular ruptures. In this register, political subjectivity emerges through repetition with a difference (strike waves, encampments, mutual aid, everyday refusal) that re-patterns the field of the possible. Seen from here, traversing fantasy does not only happen in a decisive "event"; it is distributed over time, sedimented in habits, institutions, and infrastructures that make new acts thinkable and sayable. If premises are embodied in routines, then agency must include re-coding routines.

Žižek's affinity with evental models (a decisive cut) raises the problem of sequences: how does fidelity to an event become institutionalized without neutralization? Here Dean's worry reappears: absent organizational mediation, the political subject remains occasional, present at ruptures, absent in reproduction (Dean, 2009, p. 73). An account of sequencing, how movements survive lulls, translate demands into binding criteria, and redesign rules, would complement Žižek's emphasis on the Act.

Because Žižek anchors subjectivity in libidinal investments, agency must be specified as affective re-attachment as much as belief-change. The question becomes: what counter-enjoyments (festive forms, solidaristic care, shared risk) can unbind subjects

from the pleasures that secure compliance? Without a positive economy of enjoyment, calls for rupture risk asceticism, a politics of renunciation with limited durability.

Mbembe's necropolitics (2003) and feminist political economy add that exposure to harm—policing, borders, care burdens—conditions what forms of action are survivable for different groups. A general theory of the Act can flatten these disparities. If universalism is to be operative, the bearer of the universal must be politically constituted through protective infrastructures (legal aid, bail funds, strike funds, sanctuary networks) that lower the cost of action unevenly borne by racialized and feminized subjects.

Žižek compellingly specifies why the political subject is hard to become. Ideology is sticky because enjoyment is sticky. But the theory remains under-complete on how subjects are made durable. Integrating iterative performativity, organizational sequences, and a designed economy of counter-enjoyment does not dilute the Žižekian insight; it operationalizes it. In this key, political subjectivity is not the rare lightning bolt of the Act alone but the weather system that makes lightning possible—and survivable.

4. Antinomies of the Universalist Wager

Despite well-noted limitations, Žižek's work remains a live instrument for reading the present. His account of ideology as unconscious premise and managed enjoyment clarifies why neoliberal formations endure amid crisis: people do not simply believe in the order; they attach to it through routines, fantasies, and "unknown knowns." His analysis of depoliticization, the migration of authority from the Master's discourse to the University discourse, speaks directly to an era in which technocratic expertise frames political choices as necessities. Taken together, these insights illuminate how inequality persists without requiring explicit consent.

At the same time, Žižek's universalist wager pushes debates on the left beyond identity recognition and toward antagonism as a condition of equality. His critique of liberal multiculturalism as a mode of pacification helps explain why some intersectional discourses stall at symbolic inclusion while leaving structural power intact. The contribution here is not a dismissal of particular struggles but a provocation: which forms of universality can organize them into a shared project without erasing their specificity?

Žižek's emphasis on fantasy remains indispensable for diagnosing the appeal of authoritarian populism and the spread of conspiracy imaginaries. Fantasy is not a decorative overlay; it structures plausibility and allocates enjoyment and determines which explanations feel satisfying and which coalitions feel thinkable. This lens clarifies how media narratives and cultural forms translate antagonism into acceptable plots that stabilize the status quo.

Still, three hinge problems persist and set the agenda for work that builds on Žižek rather than merely citing him:

1. If domination is reproduced through expert premises and libidinal attachments, then political construction must target both: (i) premise contestation inside budgeting, regulation, and standards (opening "technical necessity" to public dispute); and (ii) counter-enjoyment practices that reattach subjects to collective efficacy rather than individualized success.
2. Rupture matters, but durability comes from organizational sequences—institutions, funds, and procedures that carry antagonism forward without collapsing into parapolitics or ultrapolitics. Research should specify how citizens' assemblies, unions, tenant councils, platform cooperatives, and movement schools convert events into binding criteria and rules.
3. To address postcolonial and feminist critiques, universalism must be procedural rather than civilizational: its bearer is politically constituted through rotation, recall, translation, and accountability, not presumed in advance. This reframes universality as what claims can be taken up by anyone, not as the voice of a particular region or identity.

Future work, then, is not to choose between psychoanalysis and political economy, but to integrate them: pairing Žižek's insights with class analysis, institutional design, and collective action theory can specify where to intervene (premises, platforms, budgets), how subjects are made durable (sequences, safeguards, infrastructures), and who speaks for universality (procedures rather than surrogates). In this key, Žižek's oeuvre serves less as a finished program than as a diagnostic architecture that marks the coordinates for construction.

Slavoj Žižek thus remains a critical reference for contemporary political thought: he names the libidinal glue of ideology, uncovers the expert veneers of domination, and reopens the universal as a contested horizon. Yet his relative silence on organizational form, strategic sequencing, and representational procedure leaves tasks for theorists and activists to complete. The value of Žižek's project today lies precisely here, as a map of impasses that doubles as a blueprint for their undoing, provided we supplement critique with institutions, practices, and publics capable of sustaining a different order.

5. Conclusion: Žižek's Relevance in Contemporary Political Thought

Read as a single arc, the four essays yield a diagnostic that is theoretically coherent and politically provocative: ideology reproduces itself beneath avowed belief; governance is naturalized through the rhetoric of expertise; fantasy supplies the affective adhesion that keeps both in place; and universality returns as a wager rather than a settled inheritance. In other words, our core claim restated, *Žižek shows that attachment to the social order is sustained by what we don't know we know and by fantasy, while power relocates from command to credentialed know-how; yet the universalist horizon he defends exposes*

unresolved tensions over who can act, how the particular speaks to the whole, and who has standing to utter the universal.

What this synthesis most usefully delivers is a set of targets rather than a turnkey program: *premises* to contest, *institutions* to reconfigure, and *enjoyments* to re-route. On that basis, Žižek's value today is less to prescribe tactics than to sharpen the coordinates of intervention**.** Three lines suggest themselves. First, relocate political struggle to the level where "necessity" is minted, budgets, mandates, standards, and platforms, so that expertise becomes publicly arguable rather than sacralized. Second, pair critique with counter-enjoyment practices (care infrastructures, collective festivals, cooperative cultures) that shift attachment from individualized success to shared capacity. Third, treat universality as a procedure, open uptake, rotation, translation, accountability, so claims can travel without being spoken for by surrogate elites.

The novelty of thİS article is synthetic and architectural, not archival: I (i) treat four widely cited essays as a single argumentative machine; (ii) name and systematize three antinomies that delimit Žižek's universalism; and (iii) propose bridges from diagnosis to practice (premise-level contestation, adversarial public expertise, designed economies of counter-enjoyment, procedural universality).

If there is a limit, it is programmatic rather than diagnostic: the essays stop short of detailing the organizational sequences that could carry rupture into durable change. Yet this is precisely where their provocation is most productive. By naming the knots, premises, institutions, enjoyment, representation, they outline a research and action agenda that others can advance. In that sense, Žižek's project remains timely not because it answers our political questions, but because it poses them at the right level**,** inviting the construction of strategies capable of making another order thinkable and livable.

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