

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK'S CRITICISM OF NEOLIBERALISM AND RADICAL POLITICAL SUBJECTS

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Abstrak

Neoliberalisme sangat mendukung hak milik pribadi, pasar bebas, dan perdagangan bebas. Dalam sistem ekonomi neoliberal, peran negara adalah menciptakan dan melindungi keberadaan pasar. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mendiskusikan kritik Žižek terhadap neoliberalisme dan penjelasannya tentang subjek radikal. Dalam artikel ini kami mencoba untuk menunjukkan bahwa neoliberalisme memiliki dampak negatif bagi negara-negara berkembang, di antaranya adalah krisis ekologi, krisis ekonomi, dan privatisasi aset-aset nasional. Penulis mengelaborasi lebih lanjut keyakinan Žižek bahwa kehadiran subjek radikal dapat mengatasi masalah ini dengan menerobos neoliberalisme sebagai The Big Other. Ideologi pasca-liberal yang dilihatnya sebagai alternatif untuk menciptakan kesejahteraan masyarakat adalah "komunisme baru," yang berbeda dengan komunisme lama yang digagas Lenin. Komunisme ini menekankan pada solidaritas global dalam menghadapi masalah-masalah global dan menghidupkan kembali peran negara sebagai fasilitator untuk mendukung perekonomian nasional.

Kata kunci: *Neoliberalisme, Subjek Radikal, Slavoj Žižek, Ideologi*

Abstract

Neoliberalism strongly endorses private property rights, free markets, and free trade. In the neoliberal economic system, the role of the state is to create and protect the existence of the market. This article aims to discuss Žižek's critique of neoliberalism and his

account of the radical subject. In this article we try to show that neoliberalism has negative impacts on developing countries, among which are the ecological crisis, economic crisis, and the privatization of national assets. We further elaborate on Žizek's conviction that the presence of radical subjects can solve this problem by breaking through neoliberalism as The Big Other. The post-liberal ideology that he sees as an alternative for creating people's welfare is "new communism," which is different from the old communism proposed by Lenin. This communism emphasizes global solidarity in dealing with global problems and reinvigorates the role of the state as a facilitator to support the national economy.

Keywords: *Neoliberalism, Radical Subject, Slavoj Žižek, Ideology*

Received: October 9, 2023 | **Reviewed:** January 22, 2024 | **Accepted:** February 26, 2024

INTRODUCTION

Issues in the economic field have long been a topic of ideological and political debate. At the beginning of the 20th century, the most phenomenal field of debate was the clash between two competing economic models, namely capitalism and socialism. The clash between these two ideologies ended with the victory of capitalism, which was marked by the collapse of communism (Heywood, 2016a: 154). Capitalism, conceived of as "[t]he modern, market-based, commodity-producing economic system controlled by *capital*" (Wood, 2005: 125), appears in various forms, including business capitalism, social capitalism, and state capitalism. One strand of capitalism that has gained global prominence since 1980 is neoliberalism. Supporters of this neoliberal economic model believe in sustainable economic growth as measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the path to progress.

In order to achieve this goal, markets must be free, the economy must be globalized and public assets previously controlled by the state must be privatized and their management entrusted to private companies (Harvey, 2005: 10). The state government must not limit and control markets to ensure the most efficient and

optimal allocation of economic resources (Harvey, 2005: 8). Neoliberalism rolls back state power and gives market forces full or at least more power. The state's task is to create and protect markets. The state must also create military, defense, police and legal structures and functions to protect private property rights and to ensure the functioning of markets.

One of the principles of neoliberalism is corporate liberalization. The debt trap is the entry point for corporate liberalization in developing countries. Neoliberal ideology attempts to explain the motives behind financial liberalization by arguing that such steps will restore the economy and stability by increasing savings and economic efficiency. However, the main consequence of this economic exposure to short-term capital attacks is increased instability and a series of financial crises in developing countries (Eppler, 2015: vii). Often, the economic crisis will continue with a political crisis. Unlike the economic and political crisis in developing countries, neoliberalism policies have created a global economic crisis. The collapse of *Wall Street* due to the bankruptcy of financial companies marked the global economic crisis in 2008 (Belawane, 2016: 292). This is increasingly exacerbated by the ecological crisis as a consequence of the logic of neoliberal development.

A philosopher who consistently provides a number of incisive criticisms of neoliberalism policies is Slavoj Žižek. Without hesitation, Žižek declared himself a Marxist. He acknowledged the truth in some Marxist critiques of neoliberal capitalism and saw the possibility of alternative, more adequate methods of organizing society (Žižek & Milbank, 2009: 7). In the midst of the discourse on the death of the subject masterminded by postmodernism, Žižek (1999: 30) revives the role of the radical subject by interpreting Lacan's psychoanalysis in a new way to criticize neoliberalism. Žižek proposes the possibility of the subject taking radical action. In this article, the authors propose a radical political subject as an agent of change. Therefore, the basic question to be answered in this article

is, what is Žižek's critique of neoliberalism? How does the radical subject as conceived by Žižek provide a solution to neoliberalism?

This article consists of three important parts. In the first part, we explain the history and meaning of the ideology of neoliberalism. In the second part, we describe a number of Žižek's criticisms of neoliberalism and end with an elaboration of Žižek's account of the radical subject.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Understanding Neoliberalism

In his book, *The Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey (Harvey, 2005: 2) regards neoliberalism as a political economic theory that proposes one of the best ways to achieve human prosperity through the liberation of personal business efforts and individual skills. The main characteristics of neoliberalism lie in its endorsement of strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. In the neoliberal economic system, the role of the state is to create and protect the existence of the market. The state provides the military, defense, police, legal structures and functions necessary to guarantee private property rights and ensure, by force if necessary, the functioning of the market. State intervention in economic affairs reduces competition and the entry of potential competitors. In short, the role of the state is to regulate contracts, provide a stable currency, and ensure that market participants do not experience distortion.

Privatization of assets is something very important for neoliberals. Sectors previously run by the state were handed over to the private sector and deregulated (i.e., freed from any form of state interference). In contrast to classical liberalism of the 18th century, which reacted against the state's strong control over mercantilist economic life, neoliberalism holds that the state has no reason whatsoever to interfere and supervise the market because the market is actually the underlying principle of the state and society (Priyono, 2003: 57). The market is the benchmark for all successes and failures of state policies.

Therefore, if social policies interfere with market performance, these social policies should be removed or at least changed in accordance with free market principles. In a neoliberal economy, market interests become the orientation for regulating individual freedom. The state is needed to secure the market. As a consequence, humans as autonomous subjects are subordinated as mere economic tools and change the direction of law and government as market servants (Pangaribuan, 2023: 27) This neoliberalism places humans solely as economic creatures (*homo oeconomicus*) over other dimensions of human life, including cultural, spiritual, political, communal creatures and so on (Dennar, 2020: 103).

According to Ross Jackson, neoliberal economy rests on the following principles for regulating economic relations both nationally and internationally. First, the *movement* of cross-border capital flows without control in a floating interest rate currency regime without capital control. *Second*, the elimination of all regulations on the market flow of goods and labor. Third, minimum government regulations on the market. *Fourth*, the elimination of all subsidies, whether direct or indirect, for domestic industry. *Fifth*, privatization of BUMN. Then, the main instruments used to implement this economic regime are three international institutions, namely the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Jackson, 2012: 76–77)

The neoliberal economic system was not born in the 21st century. The ideology of neoliberalism is the reincarnation of the ideology of liberalism classical economics that developed since the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe through *laissez faire ideology*. The two figures who initiated it were David Ricardo and Adam Smith. There are three main characteristics of classical economic liberalism. First, limiting state interference in economic affairs. Second, free trade. Third, classical economic liberalism claims that personal economic interests are the benefits of a free choice which directly benefits oneself and indirectly benefits other people in society or the country. An entrepreneur who has worked hard multiplies profits,

not only increasing capital for himself, but also having an impact on society or the country in general (Jebadu, 2020: 45).

According to Adam Smith, the seepage of economic profits from entrepreneurs to the general public occurs because of the existence of an invisible hand. Invisible hand economic theory became the forerunner of trickle down economic theory effect and privatization of public assets proclaimed by proponents of neoliberalism (Heywood, 2016b: 164) In trickle down economic theory effect, entrepreneurs believe that the pursuit of profits carried out by entrepreneurs will bring results for themselves as well as for the small community. Money from rich people will trickle down and create prosperity for small communities through providing jobs and social welfare. Therefore, every public asset is handed over to entrepreneurs to be managed through the neoliberal economic system.

2. Zizek's Criticism of The Ideology of Neoliberalism

Žižek's Critique of Ideology

Ideology can be defined as a system of values or beliefs that are accepted as facts or truth by certain groups. It is formed from a set of beliefs from various institutions and society. Ideology gives its adherents a picture of the world, both as it is and as it should be. In relation to this ideology, Marx formulated a definition of ideology with a solid understanding of the mechanisms of society, but Žižek explains how that definition works on individuals. According to Žižek, the most elementary definition of ideology is probably the well-known phrase from Marx's *Capital*: "*Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es*"; "they do not know it, but they are doing it". The very concept of ideology implies a kind of basic, constitutive, and naïve misrecognition of its own presuppositions, of its own effective conditions, a distance, a divergence between so-called social reality and our distorted representation, our false consciousness of it (Žižek, 1989: 24). This is somewhat of ignorance about the "reality" in which we live. From this it can be understood that on the one

hand there is reality and on the other hand there is an understanding of that reality in various distorted forms. Ideology is a distorted form of understanding. He destroys the understanding of reality itself. In the context of understanding this ideology, epistemological problems arise. For example, we know that every day we go to work, because we are being conditioned to reproduce the capitalist system. Therefore, we are happy and continue to do it. We do not know that every time we choose to support the status quo, we assume that we have a choice (Adian, 2011: 85).

At this stage, the problem of falsifying consciousness lies in the stage of the subject's abstraction of something s/he knows, so that what is illusory is isolated from something the subject knows. Something that the subject knows comes from consciousness of a reality that s/he does not know. Then, it is this awareness that hides the invisible reality. In fact, true reality is an invisible reality, not a visible reality. As a result, the way to detect or criticize ideology is to trace its symptoms.

It is important to emphasize here that on the one hand, Marx refused to categorize commodity fetishism as an ideology because for him, ideology was always related to authority. Althusser added that the materialization of ideology was carried out through the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), whose existence also grew as long as society was regulated by the authorities (State). As a consequence, the subject does not realize that s/he is under an oppressive ideological veil. The subject's consciousness has been deceived by a monopoly on reality. This is what initiated Marx to awaken society through class struggle revolution. According to Žižek, various current socio-cultural problems cannot be separated from the psychological role of society itself, especially ideological problems. In his view, ideology is not necessarily about false consciousness as understood in classical Marxist thought, but also reality itself which is falsified. If false consciousness implies a phenomenon of which the subject does not know but still acts, then false reality implies that the subject does know, but still acts. This means that the subject knows all the falsehoods that occur in reality.

However, the subject obscures the true state of reality, so the subject is resistant to it; and the subject, in fact, does it. What makes the subject still do it is somewhat of an imaginary shadow that supports the subject to keep doing it. In other words, from a psychological point of view, ideology is not necessarily about what we believe or do not believe, but about what we do.

Conception about ideology is what differentiates Žižek's thoughts on ideology. In fact, ideology is not only a matter of naive consciousness, but also of cynical consciousness. In developing the concept of cynicism, Žižek borrowed the ideas of Peter Sloterdijk, who maintains that cynicism indicates a state in which the subject knows all the falsehoods that occur in reality. As Žižek explains: "the cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he nevertheless still insists on the mask." The appropriate formula to understand ideology today as proposed by Sloterdijk would be: "they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it" (Žižek 1989: 25). Žižek (1989: 36) emphasized that

"cynical reason is no longer naïve but is a paradox of an enlightened false consciousness: one knows the falsehood very well, one is well aware of a particular interest hidden behind an ideological universality, but still one does not renounce it."

Free Trade: The Fantasy of Neoliberalism

In attempting to discuss fantasy, Žižek at this point returns to the concept of false consciousness as a critique of Marx's concept of ideology. In the classical tradition, this is a problem of knowing, an epistemological problem. Žižek (1999: 27) argues that it is a problem of the discrepancy between what people effectively do and what they think they are doing. In this regard, Žižek (1989: 28) writes,

"Ideology consists in the very fact that the people 'do not know what they are really doing', that they have a false representation of

the social reality to which they belong (the distortion produced, of course, by the same reality)."

This actually indicates that the subject's problem at this point lies not only in the domain of knowing but in the domain of doing. The reality they know will make curiosity desire will be fulfilled so that the subject experiences a deadlock. If this is connected to the social context, the ideological problem at this time lies in the subject knowing the true reality, but not caring about it. This actually illustrates the way of ideological fantasy that makes the subject act as if they don't know the naked reality while still doing it in order to keep ideologizing as an answer to the question "what do you want?" It is a kind of belief that an ideology will bring prosperity, justice, welfare and so on. If this is connected to the social context, the current ideological problem lies in subjects who know the true reality, but do not care about it. This actually describes the way in which ideological fantasy makes subjects act as if they do not know reality while still doing it in order to remain ideological (Žižek, 2009: 50).

The promise of the free-market fantasy is that everyone will win. A free market would benefit everyone. Michael Lebowitz describes this belief that markets that are not constrained by the state tend to ensure that everyone will benefit from free trade. Therefore, to perpetuate the market, the state provides freedom for the private sector to monopolize the market. Market profits are not only for certain people but for everyone involved in the free market. Free trade supports at the level of fantasy what it avoids at the level of reality, namely that everyone has equal opportunities to access information and distribute it (Lebowitz, 2020: 15–16). On the one hand, neoliberal ideas emphasize the importance of competition. On the other hand, while neoliberalism emphasizes competition, it sticks to the idea that everyone is a winner. This idea is diametrically opposed to competition because in competition there are winners and losers. Countries that are called Third World or Developing Countries are not told that "Sorry, you will lose in global competition. That is the risk of global trade: there are winners and

there are losers. On the other hand, Northern countries or Developed Countries always promise that everyone will be a winner" (Derber, 2002: 37–38).

Even more worrying is the belief that countries that participate in free trade will improve the world economy, including underprivileged countries, by clarifying the economic theory of the *trickle-down effect*. In fact, the trickle-down effect economic system has never been realized. As Tim Jackson puts it, the reality that occurred was the opposite of trickle-down economic theory. Trickle down economic theory believes that the essence of free trade results in the rise of rich people throughout the world. The wealth of the rich will trickle into the pockets of the majority of poor people (Jackson, 2009: 5). In reality, the wealth of the majority of poor people is sucked up by rich people in developed countries. Developing countries that embrace neoliberalism see the impact of neoliberal policies that enrich global elites, but still maintain and follow the political and economic policies of neoliberalism. This is what gives rise to fatalism. Fatalism in this context is more about people's cynicism in continuing to believe in neoliberal policies even though their impact is impoverishing developing countries.

Neoliberalism Reproduces Pleasure

"It is easier to imagine the fall of the state than the collapse of capitalism," so Žižek said in an interview hosted by Anja Steinbauer (Zaenal, 2012: 35). This capitalism has transformed itself into the economic system of neoliberalism after Margaret Thatcher and Reagan in the 1980s believed in the economic doctrine of neoliberalism. According to neoliberal theory, the state must prioritize private property rights, the rule of law, free market institutions and free trade (Harvey, 2005: 107). The state must use its monopoly of violent means to protect freedom whatever the cost. However, freedom here is not doing the work we want, but the freedom to choose based on the alternatives offered by the products of neoliberalism. According to Žižek (1999: 338), this freedom has

the potential to be nihilistic and lead to disaster. Every subject is forced to choose the product of neoliberalism without knowing the ongoing consequences. Faced with this choice, the subject is forced to accept the choice without rational consideration.

Pleasure, as a political category, extends from the ideas of Jacques Lacan, a psychoanalyst who expanded Freud's concepts into culture, politics, and contemporary life. It is viewed as excessive pleasure that astonishes humans, leading them to seek its repetition. Pleasure can also manifest as excessive pain, serving as a framework for experiencing routine pain to delineate pleasure's coordinates (Dean, 2009: 4). In an interview with Glyn Daly, Žižek asserted that all politics rely on a certain pleasure. Throughout his career, Žižek described pleasure as the image of "because they don't know what they're doing," terming it a political factor. He also explored pleasure's workings in ideological fantasies, ethnicity, bureaucratic socialism, and critiques of capitalism (Dean, 2006: 46). Žižek expands the Lacanian perspective by correlating human psychic phenomena with political situations, resistance, revolution, and positioning oneself from the transgression of late capitalism. He attempts to shift political theory from absolute authority to rediscovering the nature of democracy, totalitarian practices, or the challenge of ideology today. According to Žižek (1989: 6), any shift is never total; the previous order of enjoyment is always included in analyzing contemporary political conditions.

Accepting today's politics characterized by political fullness, traumatic fear, hatred of interfering others, and moments of enjoyment in popular culture, Žižek invites us to see how society constructs pleasure. Political and economic ideologies compete for pleasure, interrelated with each other (capitalism, socialism, nationalism, racism, sexism, etc.). Thus, the pleasure factor can unmask the naivety of different contemporary ideological arrangements. Žižek views ideology as an extension of the pleasure factor in politics. Ideological formations function as economic pleasures by prohibiting, permitting, perpetuating, and ordering actions needed to enjoy those pleasures. Rejecting Laclau and

Mouffe's argument, Žižek sees ideological formations as fantasies sustaining surplus points and irrational pleasures, explaining society's imperfections by promising and producing pleasure.

One of the mechanisms of enjoyment of neoliberalism is humanitarian aid which has become a method of exploiting the wealth of developing countries. According to Anto Sangadji, one of the main examples of the expansion of neoliberalism was seen in the politics of humanitarian aid from Japan when it occurred in Petang, Central Sulawesi, where a 7.5 magnitude earthquake occurred which triggered massive land liquefaction and a tsunami. Starting from sending emergency aid, then sending a mission to survey damage and needs, Japan then helped with post-disaster reconstruction. JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) has formulated an outline of a resilient rehabilitation, recovery, and regional development project. With a loan value of more than IDR 3 trillion, apart from grants, JICA financed the rehabilitation of roads, bridges, irrigation, hospitals, and construction of tsunami embankments. WB (The World Bank) is funding the rehabilitation of roads, water networks, sanitation, buildings, and irrigation with a total of IDR 2.88 trillion. After the disaster, Central Sulawesi, WB and ADB (Asian Development Bank) officially provided reconstruction loans of USD 1 billion and USD 500 respectively (Hermawandi, 2019: 237).

Aid donations and debt traps open up opportunities for asset privatization in Central Sulawesi by the neoliberal state. In Banggai Regency, the Japanese capital is controlling a giant LNG (liquefied natural gas) project. PT DSLNG (Dongi-Sinoro LNG) produces LNG and exports it to Chubu Electric and Kyushu Electric in Japan and Kogas in South Korea based on long-term contracts. PT DSLNG shares are controlled by Sulawesi LNG Development Ltd, (55.9%), Pertamina Hulu Energy (29%) and PT Medco LNG Indonesia (11.1%). Mitsubishi Corporation controls 75% of Sulawesi LNG Development shares and Kogas (Korea Gas Corporation) owns 25%. A consortium of giant Japanese and South Korean financial institutions financed the construction of the LNG plant. JBIC (Japan

Bank for International Cooperation) lent US\$763 million (JBIC, 2014).

According to Žižek, this phenomenon is defined as *jouissance* or enjoyment. In simple terms, pleasure is more pleasure (an excessive pleasure) that amazes people and always wants to repeat it. A kind of surplus of pleasure that has no means of measuring because it goes beyond its logic. Pleasure can also be excess pain (an excessive pain) or a surplus of pain that is routinely experienced so as to provide the coordinates of pleasure. More briefly, it can be said that *jouissance* is pleasure but pleasure resulting from loss. In it at the same time there is pain which can simply be termed "pleasure in pain".

This logic of enjoyment precisely explains the correlation between capital and the penetration of the neoliberal economic system. Post-disaster aid as a form of solidarity is the entry point for neoliberalism to exploit poor countries. Debt becomes a pleasure that facilitates the privatization of public assets to be controlled by transnational corporations belonging to neoliberal countries. Aid donations do not use violent methods but in ways that persuade, encourage, and seduce. The aid package offers enjoyment. As a consequence, privatization of public assets reduces the wealth of poor countries to a greater extent than post-disaster aid. The end result, if capitalism in Marx's era was run with a "surplus value" mechanism, in the complex contemporary era, the mechanism of neoliberalism is "surplus *jouissance*".

3. The Subject of Žižek and The Analysis of Neoliberalism as The Big Other

In this section, the author will attempt to read the ideology of neoliberalism within the framework of the Žižekian radical political subject. In the author's view, disseminating the study of neoliberalism through a Žižekian perspective could be an adequate alternative intellectual effort to show that the ideology of neoliberalism can be examined philosophically-epistemically. The

identification of neoliberalism as The Big Other becomes the entry point for the revitalization of radical political subjects to fight and destroy the Symbolic order for the sake of political emancipation.

The author first explains the formation of the subject according to Žižek. Žižek's thinking on the subject was influenced by Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and Lacan. Of these philosophers, Žižek's reconstruction of the subject reaches its peak in Lacan's psychoanalysis. Lacan's thinking becomes a kind of furnace that cooks Žižek's concept of thinking about the subject. However, Žižek's conception of thought is very different from those of previous thinkers. Žižek's subject construction not only leads to epistemological fascination, but also evolutionarily leads to an axiological level. Žižek defines the subject as a state of "out of joint". The subject is part of the substance which is also independent of itself (Robert, 2010: 73).

According to Žižek, reconstruction of the subject is explained in more detail in the Lacanian triangular conception of the Triad, namely the Real order, the Symbolic order and the Imaginary order. Through the reflection in the mirror, humans learn about their bodies. However, in this learning process humans experience alienation. This alienation arises because there is a feeling of wanting to unite with the image reflected in the "mirror". There is a feeling of longing that has never been realized for the self-image reflected in the "mirror" (Lacan, 1986: 4). This longing that never comes true causes the ego to split into two between itself and the image of itself (Robert, 2010: 74). This unrealized longing causes cracks within humans. This rift lasts forever and humans will continue to fill this rift forever. When humans want to overcome this rift, humans will use language. That's where the Symbolic order begins to take place. This stage can be called reality which has been made explicit. It is as if humans are imprisoned in the pool of the Symbolic order. When faced in front of a "mirror", humans experience an existential rift and will never achieve unity.

According to Žižek, in the Symbolic order two personas are present in "the other" and "The Big Other". The other is the

Imaginary Other, namely all the signs that we use to replace the loss within ourselves. The Big Other always refers to the Symbolic order, either to individuals who are considered to represent the Symbolic order itself (teachers, police, etc.) or institutions (law, state, school) (Robert, 2010: 77). The other and the Big Other are what make mediation possible within humans.

According to the Žižekian formation lens, within each subject, symbolic reproduction and identification takes place within a network of resources known as The Big Other (Adian, 2011: 82). This means that the subject (including expectations, political orientation, ideals) is always influenced by the symbolic determination of The Big Other. In Žižekian subject philosophy, the subject entity is the result of the construction of ideology or desire of The Big Other which acts through the cultivation of desire and is structured through language. The process of becoming a subject is in the Symbolic order, namely when the Self negotiates with language (chain of signifiers), so that its imaginary identification is subordinated to symbolic identification (Setiawan, 2018: 10). This capacity of the Big Other can take various forms such as ideologies, ideologies, systems of thought and beliefs. Following Žižek's analysis, neoliberalism is a representation of the Symbolic order which acts as The Big Other. Neoliberalism dictates the economic order, ideology, thoughts, and expectations in society as a subject.

According to Žižek, neoliberalism is a Big Other. Neoliberalism (The Big Other) as an ideology has been proven to reproduce poverty, squalor, and misery. However, the subject remains "submitted" to the ideology of neoliberalism. The determination of The Big Other (neoliberalism) is very strong and pervasive and causes the subject to deny the harsh facts of the Real, supporting the Symbolic world and being reluctant to leave The Big Other. The fantasy of free trade and *jouissance* becomes a trap for the Symbolic order to restrain the subject (Real order). Various neoliberal regulations strangle the poor, but they are unable to fight the domination of neoliberalism. Capitalism and Neoliberalism are difficult to destroy. However, Neoliberalism is not an ontological

phenomenon or a symbolic order that is impossible to destroy. The effort to destroy neoliberalism is positive optimism through Žižek's radical political subject. Žižekian subjects are always struck by lack and try to make up for it again. This deficiency can take the form of dissatisfaction with neoliberalism policies that "strangle" the majority of the poor people. The shortcomings within the subject become a precondition for the subject to always engage in dialectics and generate political emancipation through Žižek's radical political subject.

4. Slavoj Žižek's Radical Political Subject and the Destruction of the Big Other

The penetration of neoliberalism ideology (The Big Other) ensnares the subject's freedom. However, according to Žižek, the subject has the ability to radically reconfigure the symbolic and move on to another symbolic. In his book, *The Ticklish Subject*, Žižek (1999: 24) maintains that a subject is a subject that has lost (lack) what is within itself. The subject never perfectly fills the hole in himself. Therefore, he was always imprisoned in his efforts. The search to fill the gap keeps the subject in existence. The Symbolic Order also has divisions within itself through contradictions, feelings of trauma, and the impossibility of eliminating subjects who always have a feeling of lack of ontology within themselves (Wattimena, 2012: 185–186). Žižek suggests that in its capacity to influence the subject, The Big Other is insubstantial and fragmentary. The existence of the Big Other is only possible and real as long as the subject experiences and lives it as a moment of Real order. Facing the ideology of neoliberalism, so Žižek claims, radical political subjects are needed. In an effort to formulate radical action, Žižek contemplates the idea of the subject from Alain Badiou. According to Žižek (1999: 129–130), Badiou defines his subject as a subject who believes in Truth-Event.

According to Badiou, some-one, i.e., all human animals can become a subject, but not everyone is. Badiou sees that humans are

not intrinsically yet true subjects. S/he only becomes a subject when s/he enters and is involved with events, is tested by events, and his/her existence is forged and matured by events (Baghi, 2012: 222). In other words, humans will become subjects if they believe in the truth of events as a basis for intervention and creation of action. For this reason, humans must remain faithful to events and make decisions in every incident, including political events.

The truth is in political events. Truth can only be understood in relation to faithfulness to events. People who remain faithful to events will produce new situations that shape the subject. The understanding of the subject here is not a consciousness, or a subject as substance, but a political subject. According to Badiou, the subject is the person involved in the faithfulness of the event. The subject is an agent in the Truth-Event who moves to intervene in the situation and dares to welcome and support the Event (Žižek & Milbank, 2009: 130).

Departing from Badiou's concept of a faithful subject, Žižek creates a political subject. For him, it is not enough just to arrive at faithfulness, because no action can present possibilities in the coordinates of the situation. By looking at Badiou's thinking through Lacan, Žižek finds that Event is the Real order and faithfulness is the Symbolic order. In Žižek's view, this condition must not be regarded as a fate, but instead as an opportunity for the subject to redefine his or her concept of Event. The subject should be able to redefine the boundaries of a possible event until finally finding its own conditions of possibility (Žižek 1993: 121). In this case, the difference between Žižek's and Badiou's thinking is apparent, in that Žižek focuses more on action, whereas Badiou only reaches the stage of faith.

Apart from these differences, Žižek's thinking about act has similarities with Event from Badiou's thinking, namely that they both originate from emptiness. Things such as Events are said to be *ex nihilo*, unquantifiable, and unpredictable. This "empty" state is important for action because action in Žižek's thinking is made without encouragement from certain parties, without direction,

without reference. In fact, the subject dares to leave his old Symbolic order. The subject through his actions dares to break the old Symbolic order and adopt a new Symbolic order. The action taken by the subject is an attempt to emancipate himself from the confines of the Symbolic order, even though it is only an attempt to adopt a new Symbolic order. However, emancipation here is not a "result", but rather a coordinated movement between possibility and impossibility. The emancipation movement can be a political act.

The subject's actions do not come from encouragement or pressure from outside parties. The subject performs the act of emancipation for himself. According to Žižek, the subject must change his own conditions retroactively and then create his own conditions of possibility. The subject must kill his old Symbolic order by committing an unforeseen act. The subject abandons the most valuable thing about himself thereby changing the coordinates of the existing situation. The subject in Žižek's view is a subject who finds his freedom in failure and views every crack in himself as an opportunity that results in radical action.

To undermine the Symbolic order within The Big Other (neoliberalism), there needs to be a radical political subject. According to Žižek, the radical political subject leads to action. The actions of radical political subjects (should) have the character of momentum, not process because the process involves plans, intentions, deliberateness and so on. Momentum presupposes the presence of an *ex-nihilo* explosion that is unexpected and aimless, but does not mean aiming without direction. Therefore, Žižek sees this action as a direction or shot itself (not a target), so that it is without a specific or determined goal (Setiawan, 2018: 19).

According to Žižek, there is a need for a radical political subject to break the structure of The Big Other (neoliberalism). Any action that does not break The Big Other will only amount to completing the structure. However, Žižek also suggests that the moment and peak point for the subject to break the structure is precisely the moment of emptiness of all forms of symbolic identification. This could be interpreted as meaning that the subject himself experiences

a "void", perhaps even an ideological void. The most radical subject is actually a subject in a moment without reference to ideology (Robert, 2010: 189).

In the political realm, Žižek takes the example of Lenin as a manifestation of a radical political subject. Lenin was able to reject all opportunistic compromises and adopt a radical attitude and make radical interventions to change the coordinates of the situation. To control the country from the snares of capitalism, Lenin by force took over all small or large private businesses and placed them under state control (Magnis-Suseno, 2005: 4–7). According to Žižek, returning to Lenin was an attempt to seize the moment to act on the situation. Lenin's actions were not in the pragmatic sense of "adjusting theory to realistic opinions through compromises that must be made," but on the contrary with the aim of eliminating opportunistic compromises, establishing a clear radical position and from that position intervention can be carried out in such a way that the intervention can change points intervention node (Žižek, 2006: 10).

The main purpose of the actions of Žižekian subjects is to destroy neoliberalism (The Big Other). The subject becomes the main perpetrator in the destruction of The Big Other. In other words, the subject should act without any ideological reference, or based on an ideological vacuum, and without any intention (Robert, 2010: 189). Therefore, authentic action against neoliberalism can only be based on an empty situation of necessity that is not burdened with any morality. In other words, action is not a rational necessity, an attempt to break the situations that limit the subject. To explain Žižek's radical political subject theory and the destruction of The Big Other (neoliberalism), we try to interpret the events of the Industrial Revolution in France. One of the causes of the outbreak of the Revolution was financial problems caused by excessive spending by the French kings in the 1600-1700s. To overcome this problem, the French king used a tax system for his people. However, the tax system used was unable to provide justice for its people. Apart from that, injustice in politics could be seen

from the selection of government employees based on descent and not based on profession or expertise.

Seeing this condition, the residents (subjects) staged a massive demonstration. King Louis XVI imprisoned several figures driving the revolution in the Bastille prison. Seeing this situation, thousands of people began to take to the streets. There were rumors circulating that mobs would storm the Bastille prison, which was considered a symbol of royal arrogance and tyranny. Wave of revolution (the subject's attempt to leave the Symbolic order of The Big Other) started. On July 14, 1789, a mob of the Sans Cullotes, the third class in the hierarchy of French society, stormed the Bastille prison to free political prisoners and take power. The rebellion ultimately destroyed the absolute monarchy regime in France that ruled (the destruction of The Big Other). The French Revolution in the economic field led to the elimination of the feudal tax system, the development of modern industry, the emergence of a free trade system and fairness in the taxation system. The French Revolution in the socio-cultural field had resulted in the elimination of feudalism, the emergence of a new class of classless people, efforts to distribute education and teaching, the existence of religious freedom, and steps taken by many other countries. The societal revolution then accompanied a radical change from the pattern of authoritarianism (the same Big Other) towards democracy and individual freedom (Lukman, 2008: 45).

Through this analysis of the French Revolution, Žižek finds a new horizon in Lacanian psychoanalysis (as well as going beyond it) namely the possibility of emancipation within the subject. Subjects who are characterized by a sense of lack are always open to dialectics. Dialectics in this context means efforts to read, understand, and destroy the Symbolic order wherein one is living (Robert, 2010: 78–82). The penetration of neoliberalism ideology (The Big Other) ensnares the subject's freedom. However, so Žižek states, the subject has the ability to leave or destroy the Symbolic order and move on to another Symbolic. This is due to a sense of ontological lack within the subject. Consequently, the subject can

always engage in various Symbolic orders and seek the fullness of identity. However, the realm of the innocent is a very fragile momentum. After experiencing subjectification by placing The Big Other in the symbolic realm, the subject will find and design a new The Big Other. This moment of backflow explains the process of re-subjectification of the subject.

5. The Crisis of Neoliberalism and the Rise of Communism as a New Symbolic Order

The subject in Žižek's view is a subject who finds his freedom in failure and views every crack in himself as an opportunity to produce radical action (Wattimena, 2012: 185). Žižek suggests that in its capacity to influence the subject, The Big Other is insubstantial and fragmentary. The existence of The Big Other is only possible to the extent of experiencing and living a Real order. Neoliberalism as a Symbolic order (The Big Other) in Žižek's thought formation experiences inconsistencies in each of its policies. The policies of neoliberalism in themselves reproduce the crisis (Harvey, 2005: 56). The division within neoliberalism (The Big Other) is the source of the collapse of the ideology of neoliberalism. Moreover, it is becoming clear to many of its critics that neoliberalism fails to deliver its promises (Fred, 2011: 89). The wealth of neoliberalism is apparently supported by robbery, lies and fraud. Various crises in history, culminating in COVID-19, have signaled the slow death of neoliberalism (Žižek, 2020: 25).

These various crises of neoliberalism emphasize the weaknesses of neoliberalism's ideology. Faced with these various crises, ideological repentance is necessary. In this regard, 174 academics in the Netherlands have signed a petition containing five main policy proposals for post-COVID-19 development models. These five proposals will be immediately implemented to develop sustainable development (Feola, 2020). First, changing the focus of development from aggregate GDP growth to sectors that need investment (which are called critical public sectors such as clean

energy, education, health and so on) and sectors that need to be developed radically for sectors that does not experience decreasing sustainability due to excessive consumption (especially oil, gas, mining, etc.). Second, the economic framework focuses on establishing a “universal minimum wage” redistribution that applies equally throughout the world, strong progressive taxation of income, profits, and wealth, reducing working hours and division of labor as well as developing important public service sectors, such as health, public services, health, and education.

Third, the transformation of agriculture towards regenerative agriculture based on biodiversity conservation, sustainable local and vegetarian food production as well as employment and fair agricultural wages. Fourth, reducing luxurious and wasteful consumption and travel to frugal and sustainable consumption patterns. Fifth, debt cancellation, especially for workers and small business owners in Southern countries (sourced from rich countries and International Financial Institutions).

These five proposals from academics are a path to ideological conversion towards a global economic order that is dignified and supports humanity. These five proposals support Žižek's idea of the failure of neoliberalism's promises. According to Žižek, this ideological conversion is very urgent in dealing with the COVID-19 crisis and various social injustices. Though the crisis is basically over, we believe that his proposals are still relevant, serving as a reminder of the frequent failures of neoliberalism to deliver its promises. In his book, *Pandemic!: COVID-19 Shakes the World*, Žižek (2020, 70) states that when the COVID-19 pandemic hit global society, free market mechanisms were unable to provide credible alternative solutions. COVID-19 has revealed to us the “weaknesses” of the neoliberal economic system and the human need for a kind of “reinvented communism” as the “hidden message” behind this pandemic. According to him, the fragility of global neoliberalism can only be countered with global communism with a new face.

Žižek predicted that the COVID-19 pandemic will give rise to economic reorganization. He advocates communism as a new

alternative in organizing the world economy. The communism in question is not the old-style communism, not 20th century communism, but rather a kind of global organization that can control and regulate the economy. The changing face of global economic movements is outside the capitalist-neoliberal system. With this, communism will end national populism and become a way out of tensions between West and East fueled by brutal conspiracy theories.

In other words, the crisis illustrates that global cooperation and solidarity is an urgent call for the survival of humans on the Earth. Solidarity paves the way to treating all people equally based on humanitarian principles both in health, economic, and psychological matters. This global solidarity transcends neoliberal capitalism's central tenet of "survival of the fittest" (Žižek, 2020: 80). The liberal spirit of the free-market system seeking self-security amid panic, which reveals the Hobbesian "selfish man", is unable to answer the challenges of this crisis. For Žižek, humanitarian solidarity is a free principle, not dependent on political decisions full of competing interests (Žižek, 1989: 35). Solidarity is based on a spirit of compassion and willingness to help each other by helping countries that need assistance. Furthermore, so Žižek maintains, the role of the state is very important as an alternative to neoliberal capitalism. The state directly intervenes in policies that improve the welfare of the people. The advantages of communism amid the COVID-19 pandemic are evident in the nationalization program for state-owned companies that are facing the threat of bankruptcy when managed by private parties. Trump, for example, began nationalizing *Boeing* and started talks about nationalizing entire pharmaceutical production lines.

CONCLUSION

In this article we try to discuss Žižek's critique of neoliberalism and his account of the solution to the damaging effects of neoliberalism. In his view, neoliberal policies have been bringing disasters to global society, such as the destruction of biodiversity, the exploitation of natural wealth through the fantasy of free trade, the emergence of economic disparities between developed and developing countries, and the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. To solve such damaging impacts of neoliberalism, he proposes a radical political subject, a conception of subject which he develops out of the Lacanian Triad. To be an agent of change, this political subject must break the dictate of the old symbolic order and move to a new Symbolic order. The subject is to exploit every crack s/he finds in his/her self to produce a radical, emancipatory act. One important act of such kind is to replace neoliberalism with new communism. This type of communism differs from the old one endorsed by Lenin.

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