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The Pandemic in Neoliberal Asia

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THE PANDEMIC IN NEOLIBERAL ASIA

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How do those hoping for an end to capitalism understand the repercussions of the coronavirus crisis?

This edition of Indonesian Marxist Jurnal IndoProgress is aimed to understand and reflect on the impact of COVID-19 in the Asian region. We do this with an agenda close to our political sympathy. But we too acknowledge the fact that influential international donor organisations—who are smack at the epicentre of our neoliberal global economy—have admitted that the pandemic has exposed new and exacerbated old kinds of inequalities (Ferreira, 2021). Scholars in "Western" capitalist democracies problematise the link between right-wing populists and the lack of expertise in handling the crisis while arguing for the presence of the State (Fukuyama, 2020). The so-called liberals hope for an end to populism as Bolsonaro and Trump fail to lead.

But this kind of hope is one that is detached from the realities of the working classes, many of whom are vital workers as well as increasingly precarious bourgeoisie (Standing, 2011). At least in the past three decades, neoliberal transformations of capitalist economies around the world and the Asian region have perpetuated the exploitation of working classes. While we might be socially positioned within different classes, races, ethnicities, genders, religions—and the list goes on—we are all inextricably linked with the intricate web of 21st century neoliberal capitalism in distinctively exploitative ways. It is with this in mind that we have decided to publish our journal in two languages: Indonesian (to make the authors' work known across different regions in the country) and English (to make their work known and engaged with regionally). We position this journal within broader and local camaraderie.

Developed economies, such as the US, have faced a crisis and its repercussions in 2008, and the current COVID-19 global pandemic has driven the world economy into survival mode. While the pandemic has impacted all countries, communities, and classes simultaneously, the way it affects us is far from homogeneous. The pandemic may take form as a health crisis, but we see it as symptoms of a deeper problem with the way capitalism is able to transform itself in response to and riding on the reforming of social values (Harvey, Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism, 2014) to sustain capital accumulation. This manifests in socially complex, distinctive, heterogenous, and, at times, conflicting ways, as neoliberal markets permit.

The mapping of internal contradictions within the spatial logic of capital accumulation is a primary task for scholars and activists who are concerned with the way profit and rent-seeking occurs in distinctive "moments", as Marx puts it. After all, we live in an historical situation in which the production, consumption, and distribution of people and goods goes as fast as capital is being invested and reinvested in an increasingly digitised labour market.

Here, David Harvey's observation of anti-capitalist politics in pandemic times is useful. He expressed that:

> "It gets complicated as it gets elaborated through, for example, the lenses of geopolitical rivalries, uneven geographical developments, financial institutions, state policies, technological reconfigurations and the ever-changing web of divisions of labour and of social relations. I envision this model as embedded, however, in a broader context of social reproduction (in households and communities), in an on-going and ever-evolving metabolic relation to nature (including the "second nature" of urbanization and the built environment) and all manner of cultural, scientific (knowledge-based), religious and contingent social formations that human populations typically create across space and time" (Harvey, 2020).

Together with the authors in this edition, we reflect on how the virus has spread across an already unequal social terrain, mobilising social inequalities at speeds never before seen in the 21st century. It plays out in hierarchies of power and disputes between political elites in processes of

State policy responses towards COVID-19, with uneven resources in the public health sector already ridden by powers concentrated in the hands of a few. This state, of course, has been percolating, and internalised, in the actions of administrators for generations.

We look at cases in Indonesia, India, and the Philippines. In this edition, authors discuss how the Indonesian capitalist government takes advantage of the pandemic to find novel ways for worker exploitation and labour self-organisation before and during the pandemic. Panimbang (2021), by studying strategies of labour organisation of ride hailing in Indonesia's capital city Jakarta, argues that innovative strategies of resistance have developed new forms of participation among drivers. They are vital workers who are dictated by market mechanisms to remain mobile during the pandemic, yet under extreme exploitation have found ways to self-organise based on communities, associations and unions. This practice of collectivity is pertinent in imagining and conceptualising anti-capitalist politics, in which new strategies for labour solidarity—one that is facilitated by the very digital platforms designed to exploit them—helps us reflect on broader labour movements beyond Indonesia.

Importantly, vital workers are exploited in socially specific ways; one that works along the lines of caste. Vyas and Jha (2021), using Harvey's political economy of space and Foucault's biopolitics and technologies, make the experience of Dalit sanitary workers as frontline warriors during the pandemic in India known to us. All sanitary workers are Dalits, the most marginalised caste in India. Labouring in a system of environmental sanitation inherited from British colonialism, such social segregations are intertwined with the way waste is managed in urban and rural areas; which, historically, are physical spaces of controlling both disease and the native population. COVID-19, as the authors argue, has extended spaces of labour control and capital accumulation, while segregating and segmenting city areas at the expense of Dalit workers.

What are Left intellectuals and activists to do in these historical social settings? Tadem's (2021) reflection on the middle class-led Left movement in the Philippines, we find, is very useful in our internal discussions regarding the supposed failures of Indonesia's liberal bourgeoi-

sie in reforming our democratic political system (Mudhoffir, 2021) and what this means in a broader class analysis (Pontoh, 2021). Tadem (2021) examines the composition of middle-class leadership in the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the New People's Army (NPA), along with its political medium, the National Democratic Front (NDF). Together, they defined the direction of the revolutionary movement, in which the skills of the bourgeoisie were instrumental. These are not unlike the professionalism and expertise lacking in the pandemic policy responses of right-wing populist governments problematised by liberal scholars. Importantly, Tadem argues that middle-class acumen pushed democratisation forward, while also cautioning readers about the limits of these methods in radical structural changes.

As part of the hopes of Left intellectuals and activists to widen the social space for Marxist discussions in the region, we carried out Call for Papers to recruit young scholars and mentor them to carry out empirical analysis grounded on problematising capital accumulation. Here, we would like to thank Hizkia Yosie Polimpung, Diatyka Widya Permata Yasih, and Abdil Mughis Mudhoffir who have allocated the time and energy to participate in our intellectual, political strategy. We deeply appreciate their labouring and redistribution of access to knowledge in this small, but no less meaningful, setting.

Polimpung worked with Wilujeng (2021), as she examines how the Indonesian government is rebounding from the multidimensional crisis by catalysing technological platforms. These platforms, she argues, sustains a marketplace that blurs the boundaries between human labour power and modes of production. Such a space caters to the demand of not only middle class consumers increasingly relying on the private sector to fulfil their basic needs, but also accelerates the exploitation of workers through legitimising entrepreneurialism and the State's withdrawal from the provision of secure employment.

Yasih worked with Wirman's (2021) study on the internalisation of neoliberal subjectivity through internship programmes in the service industry. He argues that such programmes have increased the adaptability of young workers in an increasingly unstable labour market made more precarious by the pandemic. Wirman's concerns are very much inter-

linked with Wilujeng's (2021), as young workers and graduates are left to fend off for themselves not only to seek work, but to survive in a climate of labour precarity made more normal by the pandemic.

Meanwhile, Mudhoffir worked with Rainditya (2021) in his discussion regarding the production and acceleration of the Omnibus Law for Job Creation, which was ratified during the pandemic. He argues that the Law safeguards the oligarchy's surplus by securing access of extractive industries to resources and legitimising the casualisation of labour. Taking advantage of the multidimensional health crisis, this Law was passed under the guise of national economic recovery for the country to recuperate the impact of the pandemic. Importantly, he observes the convergence of neoliberal and oligarchic interests during Indonesia's experience with COVID-19.

This edition is closed with Anugrah's (2021) book review of Žižek's *Pandemic! Covid-19 Shakes the World* (2020). He challenges Žižek's proposed new form of Communism by pitting it against the historical lesson of the Bolsheviks' "War Communism": The necessity of socialist construction. In time when public health cost is high and state power is arbitrary, Anugrah critically questions whether such a communist proposal is no more than a rejuvenation of Keynesian social democracy, as issues such as a clear democratic strategy, neoliberal markets and their destruction of natural ecologies remain unaddressed. This review closes the edition so appropriately, tying together the different angles, cases, and contexts with historical materialism. So we come full circle.

To end this editorial note, we would like to give a special thanks to Marcello Musto, Professor of Sociology at York University, Canada, who has kindly provided suggestions for the direction of this first edition, as well as connected us to Ranabbir Samaddar, Director of the Calcutta Research Group, through which we were able to curate Vya and Jha's work. We too thank Vedi Hadiz, Director of the Asia Institute, University of Melbourne, who has kindly introduced us to Eduardo Tadem, Center for Integrative and Development Studies, University of the Philippines Diliman, through which we too were able to curate Tadem's work. We deeply appreciate the camaraderie and hope that reading these re-

flections provide some relief from our inevitable heterogenous experience with alienation.

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ALGORITHMIC LABOUR PROCESS AND RESISTANCE AGAINST IT IN THE PLATFORM ECONOMY IN INDONESIA: THE CASE OF RIDE-HAILING APPS GO-JEK AND GRAB[1]

Fahmi Panimbang[2]

ABSTRACT

In the burgeoning debate on the digital platform and 'gig economy' that absorb millions of precarious labours in many countries, distinctive responses from labour in this emerging sector is particularly important for the theory and practice of labour movement. App-based drivers in Indonesia show interesting responses despite the challenges they face. This article discusses algorithmic labour process and labour resistance in the platform economy in Indonesia, by taking the case of two major platforms Go-Jek and Grab. It describes the coercive replacement of the conventional transport services by platform companies. The author analyses the labour process and working conditions of app-based transport services, and discusses labour resistance against algorithms. As such, the author highlights that technology is not neutral. Moreover, for the author, technology is a site of class struggle. To examine this, the author sources his analysis based on qualitative research of purposively selected transport drivers in cities with the highest concentration of transport workers, which together account for more than half of the total app-based transportation workers in Indonesia. Furthermore, the

1 Sections and parts of this article have been previously published in Panimbang, F. (2021) Solidarity across boundaries: a new practice of collectivity among workers in the app-based transport sector in Indonesia, *Globalizations,* DOI: 10.1080/14747731.2021.1884789; Panimbang, F. (2021) Organising app-based transport workers in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Asian Labour Update*, No 89 May 2021; and Panimbang, F., Arifin, S., Riyadi, S., & Utami, D. S. (2020). Resisting exploitation by algorithms: Drivers' contestation of app-based transport in Indonesia (Trade Unions in Transformation 4.0), Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

2 Fahmi Panimbang is a research associate at the Sedane Labour Resource Centre (Lembaga Informasi Perburuhan Sedane—LIPS), based in Bogor, Indonesia. His publications include *Resistance on the continent of labour: Strategies and initiatives of labour organizing in Asia* (*2017),* published by the Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC). The author can be contacted at fahmi.panimbang@gmail.com.

author proposes three existing models of drivers' organising, which are based on communities, associations and unions. The article thus argues that drivers' practices of collectivity offer invaluable lessons and insights into the development of a new strategy for labour solidarity, relevant for broader labour movements in Indonesia and beyond.

***Keywords**:* Indonesia; app-based transport workers; digital platform; algorithmic labour process; algorithmic resistance; collectivity

INTRODUCTION

Across Southeast Asia, increasing labour precarity has been absorbed by the rapidly transforming digital economy. In Indonesia alone, millions of precarious workers have been working in the emerging platform economy since early 2015. Likewise, the country's digital economy too is expanding rapidly due to its huge, developing market. In 2018, there were at least 1,807 start-ups active in Indonesia, the largest number in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, and the sixth largest number worldwide (Adiningsih et al., 2019).

Indonesia has been the target of many new platform companies which have adopted a strategic approach to target the country's expanding markets, which includes the growing number of 'millennials' (roughly those born between 1980 to 1998) who represent a large portion of Indonesia's consumer market. With a population of over 267 million and a workforce of 131.01 million in 2018, the Indonesian population is largely dominated by the so-called millennials, who account for 33.75 percent of the total population. There are more than seven million unemployed people in the population and over ten million with semi-employment status. In addition, the National Development Planning Agency (*Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional*—BAPPENAS) has projected Indonesia's population to increase to up to 297 million by 2040, 64 percent of whom will be of working age (Adiningsih et al., 2019). Needless to say, this segment of people has been the main target of players seeking to gain major market share in the growing platform economy, in which mobility and transportation play a significant role.

This article sheds light on workers' organising and new practices of collectivity in major digital platforms in Indonesia (Go-Jek and Grab) amid the growing control of platform companies over the labour pro-

cess. It discusses the algorithmic labour process and its resistance by labourers in the newly emerging platform economy. It discusses the question of how app-based workers respond to and resist the algorithmic labour process and how they organise to deal with the emerging problems in the workplace. It too expands on which factors influence solidarity building practices; and what are the lessons learnt from workers' new practices of collectivity. The author argues that drivers' practices of collectivity offer insights into the development of new organising strategies for the labour movement.

This article is structured as follows. It begins with an introduction, followed by a discussion of the coercive replacement of the conventional transport services by platform companies. Subsequently, the article highlights the labour process and working conditions in the app-based transport sector, and how drivers resist the algorithmic labour control. It furthermore examines the three models of driver organising, and analyses the drivers' new practices of collectivity. The last section concludes with some key points that the article will have proposed.[3]

COERCIVE REPLACEMENT OF CONVENTIONAL TRANSPORT SERVICES BY DIGITAL PLATFORM COMPANIES

Poor public transport in Indonesia is one of the problems that triggered the increasing use of private vehicles such as motorbikes. The

3 The research focuses on worker/driver organising strategies in the app-based transportation sector (both motorbike taxis and car services) in Indonesia, especially in two major platforms: Go-Jek and Grab. I use 'driver' and 'worker' interchangeably throughout the article to refer to those who work as drivers in the transportation industry, including app-based transportation. My analysis draws on data collected through structured and semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) with (1) conventional (indigenous) transport drivers; (2) app-based transportation drivers; (3) app-based driver communities, associations, and unions; (4) union representatives; and (5) researchers and activists from non- governmental organizations (NGO). All interviews were conducted during two rounds of field- work between October and December 2019 and January and February 2020, mainly in Jakarta, Bekasi, Cikarang, Depok, and Bogor, where the largest number of app-based transport workers are concentrated, but also in the provincial capitals of Serang (Banten), and Bandung (West Java). These cities account for more than 50 per cent of total app-based transportation workers in the country. The selection of drivers and driver organisations for interviews and focus group discussions took into account the active organising work of drivers at the time this research was conducted and considered the significant number of factory workers in industrial areas who took up part-time jobs as app-based drivers. This selection is useful to understand how established unions respond to and connect with emerging issues of app-based workers and the needs involved in their organising drives. I interviewed a total of 44 drivers and driver communities (40 men and 4 women), 12 driver community organisers (10 men and 2 women), 6 conventional transport drivers (all male); and 8 labour union activists (7 men and 1 woman). I also had discussions with 5 NGO activists (4 men and 1 woman), and 4 researchers (3 men and 1 woman).

number of vehicles in the country has multiplied over recent decades while its roads have hardly developed, which resulted in the ever-increasing traffic and notorious traffic congestions in urban areas. The sale of motorbikes and other vehicles have increased nearly tenfold in just two decades, from 13.2 million units in 1995 to 121.4 million units in 2015 (Katadata, 2017).

Ojek is an unlicensed motorbike taxi that operates randomly in most areas of Indonesia, from large cities where jammed traffic inhibits other forms of transportation, to rural areas inaccessible to four-wheeled vehicles. As an unofficial means of transportation, self-employed *ojek* drivers do not need to obtain permits or licenses, so anyone can become an *ojek* driver even without a driver's license (Kusno, 2016). As Kusno (2016) points out, *ojek* has been the prime symbol of 'private' lower-class grassroots transport that has filled the gap in the country's poor public transportation system. In urban and transport studies, this type of informal transportation such as *ojek* is academically referred to as 'indigenous transport' (Cervero, 2000).

However, since the beginning of 2015, *ojek* drivers in Indonesia have rapidly proliferated through app-based services, gradually outnumbering the entire conventional or indigenous *ojek*. Since then, the ride-hailing sector has become part and parcel of the digital economy. In the app-based transportation industry in Indonesia, Go-Jek and Grab are the two leading companies that have been in business for nearly a decade. Go-Jek is an Indonesian company founded in 2010. It began by offering an online motorbike taxi booking service,[4] now called Go-Ride, and later expanded its scope to offer a range of different services. After the app was launched in January 2015, it was downloaded by 10 million users that year, increasing to more than 35 million users in early 2017 (Ford and Honan, 2017). In Indonesia alone, there were over 2.5 million drivers actively working for Go-Jek in 2019, providing services in more than 167 cities and districts (Adiningsih et al., 2019). Go-Jek also operates in Viet Nam, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines.

4 This online motorbike taxi booking service is popularly known as '*ojol*', a short form of '*ojek* online', which means online motorbike taxi.

The second major player, Grab, is a Singapore-based company founded in Malaysia in 2012, which entered the Indonesian market when it launched the GrabTaxi service in Jakarta in June 2014, followed by GrabBike and GrabCar in 2015 (Ford and Honan, 2017). Grab operates in 100 cities in Indonesia, and in many cities in other Southeast Asian countries. The number of GrabBike and GrabCar drivers surpassed 2 million when it acquired the Indonesian operations of Uber in early 2018. In 2019, Grab employed more than 9 million drivers throughout Southeast Asia, offering 14 different types of on-demand services (Jayani, 2019). Both Go-Jek and Grab are Southeast Asia's ride-hailing giants and are increasingly expanding to other on-demand services, including food delivery services, convenience goods, and urban logistics.

Go-Jek and Grab have eliminated many competitors. They have been battling it out with each other to see who is capable of monopolising the market. They tried to close a merger deal (Eloksari, 2020), but to no avail as eventually Go-Jek merged with one of Indonesia's e-commerce giants Tokopedia (Tani, 2021). Both Go-Jek and Grab have shown their tendency toward monopolising the on-demand market, and also exhibit anti-competitive structures. One of the reasons for this is that the massive acquisition of proprietary digital metadata can provide a very significant competitive advantage to a single operator. The greater the number of interactions that occur through the application platform, the better the algorithm that governs the transactions and the underlying services (Smorto, 2018), and thus controlling the workers. This tendency towards monopoly, like the practice of capital and investment in general, has had a number of consequences and raised several problems.

Venture capital investments are the main drivers behind the rise of digital platform companies like Go-Jek and Grab, leveraging their vast resources and aggressively offering their services to consumers. One tactic employed by these companies is price wars with their competitors. App-based transport companies, all of them well-endowed with financial investment, can subsidise costs and offer a much lower price to consumers than indigenous transport drivers. When app-based means of transportation have secured a dominant position in the market, it becomes the sole point of access for drivers and passengers. This clearly

increases the danger of an imbalance in bargaining power in favour of app-based transport companies against their workers. In the long run, consumers are at risk of facing much higher rates, and workers are at risk of exploitation due to the society's dependence on app-based services.

Notably, application-based transport services in Jakarta are now superior to and cheaper than others. Also, research indicates that commuter train users in Jakarta are becoming dependent on app-based transport services, and the use of application-based transport exceeds the proportion of those using public transport (Bus Rapid Transit and micro-bus) at many commuter train stations (Saffan and Rizki, 2018). On the other hand, several studies find that the business practices of app-based transport have not reduced the number of motorised vehicle owners and the number of trips taken. Vehicle miles travelled (VMT) have even increased due to the availability of this inexpensive, accessible service. In a nutshell, digital platform companies such as Go-Jek and Grab are achieving dominance and commercial success at the expense of labour and the environment (Davidson and Infranca, 2018; Nastiti, 2017; Retamal and Dominish, 2017; Saffan and Rizki, 2018), and potentially even consumers. This, in turn, has the potential to negatively affect the long-term ability of cities to provide essential public transport services.

Behind the current popularity of Go-Jek and Grab is a history of clashes between indigenous and app-based drivers, which were the result of fierce opposition by indigenous transport companies to application-based transport services, resulting in protests and violence (Ford and Honan, 2019; Panimbang et al., 2020). Indeed, app-based transport services have worked to displace the indigenous sector by actively recruiting indigenous transport drivers. Clashes between drivers in various cities have made headlines and generated controversies in public debate. The government was indecisive and slow to respond to protests and conflicts from drivers. Between late 2015 and early 2016, the government issued a ban against app-based transport, which was later retracted following massive protests by app-based drivers (Makki, 2015).

When these horizontal conflicts subsided, companies began hiring thousands of new drivers again, deepening the many unresolved hori-

zontal conflicts. Go-Jek, for example, moved to recruit indigenous transport drivers in August 2015, enlisting tens of thousands, and converting them into Go-Jek workers. At that time, Go-Jek was recruiting thousands of drivers per day (Aulia, 2015). Companies were hiring drivers up to the age of 55. Drivers had to have their own motorbikes, but would initially receive basic training, skills, orientation, as well as two helmets, a jacket, and a smart- phone that had to be paid in instalments—a certain amount was debited from the drivers' digital wallet in the apps on a daily basis (Drivers organisations, FGD, 29 October 2019; see also Ford and Honan, 2017).

App-based transport companies competed with each other to recruit drivers, providing incentives to migrate from competing companies, and even offering much more incentives to brokers who could convince as many drivers as possible to migrate to their platform. This competition in recruiting drivers was especially evident with regard to motorbike taxi services (App-based drivers, personal interview, 19 November 2019). Recently, more indigenous transport drivers have joined the app-based transport sector, especially as companies continue to target them specifically for recruitment. Having to deal with requirements when trying to join these platforms, companies make these requirements much easier for indigenous transport drivers of any *ojek pangkalan* or *opang*[5]. In areas that saw high levels of horizontal conflicts, popularly known as 'red zones', these companies reimburse drivers for their '*opang* card' or '*opang* permit' and help them obtain a driving license, vehicle documents, etc. In short, 'red-zone' *opang* drivers are warmly welcomed by platform companies to their business (*Opang* driver, personal interview, 28 October 2019).

LABOUR PROCESS AND WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE APP-BASED TRANSPORT SECTOR

Studies on algorithmic labour control in the digital economy analyse how app-based companies such as Go-Jek and Grab leverage their significant control over how workers behave on the job (Gandini, 2019;

5 *Opang* is a short form of '*ojek pangkalan*', meaning the indigenous motorbike taxi service (*ojek*) waiting for a fare at a base/rank (*pangkalan*).

Nastiti, 2017; Rosenblat, 2018). Using labour process theory, Gandini (2019) analyses labour control in the gig economy and argues that transformation of labour power into a commodity is now mediated by a digital platform where feedback, ranking, and a rating system serve the purposes of managerialisation and monitoring of workers. Rosenblat (2018) also analyses how Uber uses its algorithms to control its workers. Instead of monitoring its hundreds of thousands of workers with human supervisors, Uber has built an app-based transport system with a set of algorithms that act as a virtual 'automated manager'. This algorithmic labour control was developed by Uber in the Silicon Valley in the USA, but was very quickly copied by other companies like Go-Jek and Grab in Southeast Asia and elsewhere that use the same system for such algorithmic labour control (Nastiti, 2017). As I will elaborate in more detail, app-based drivers in Indonesia are challenging this algorithmic labour control by, in part, generating algorithm bugs and errors on their smartphones.

Labour process and labour control are based on algorithmic analysis. Once drivers activate their apps, they are constantly monitored and analysed. Nastiti (2017) meticulously identifies the methods of labour control by algorithmic management in the case of Go-Jek. Methods include mechanisms to earn points, bonuses, ratings, and suspension or deactivation. These methods constitute a carrot and stick: Drivers get a bonus if they can accumulate a lot of points, but they are penalised if caught failing. Nonetheless, disincentives are disproportionately higher than incentives. The system serves as another strategy for evaluating drivers. If their average rating falls below four stars, drivers are automatically suspended. They are also suspended if they refuse orders.

Not many drivers understand what algorithms are and how they work, but for the most part they understand that their performance is being controlled and monitored by the apps. They know that the application on their smartphones controls how they behave in responding to orders. Algorithms sometimes privilege indebted drivers, who still have to pay the company for their jacket and helmet in instalments that are deducted from the drivers' accounts every day. These drivers receive a notification about locations with passengers requesting a ride. These noti-

fications are no longer available once payment has been settled (Drivers association, personal interview, 26 January 2020).

Drivers know that they are in a vulnerable position and always feel compelled to get a 'five-star' rating and positive comments from customers. One bad comment from a customer can ruin an overall good performance for the last month or two, forcing drivers to keep moving and searching for passengers proactively. When an order comes in, they cannot easily refuse it. The app system managed by algorithms compels drivers to stay active and search for orders. Otherwise, they risk deactivation from the app or suspension of their account (Drivers association, FGD, 29 October and 21 December 2019). This form of labour process and labour control bring about exploitative consequences. These consequences include the increasing number of road fatalities such as in Cikarang, one of the busiest industrial areas of Bekasi regency in West Java province, with at least five traffic accidents and fatalities involving app-based drivers occurring each month (Drivers association, FGD, 26 January 2020). Despite this fact, the company does not provide any assistance to such occupational accidents and road fatalities. Insurance against accidents has been provided just in the last few years in response to the drivers' demand. The insurance premium, however, is paid for by the drivers. Go-Jek uses the government insurance scheme (*Badan Penyelenggara Jaminan Sosial*—BPJS) and Grab provides private insurance with a reimbursement of a maximum of IDR 25 million (US$ 1,800). Indonesia is among nine Asian countries that account for roughly half a million road fatalities annually, a major contributor to the growth of global traffic accidents (Jiang and Zhang, 2018). Road accidents and fatalities in Indonesian cities have increased being among the highest among the ASEAN countries, and motorbike traffic accidents are the major contributor to this statistic (Antara, 2017; Dananjaya, 2019).

Another exploitative consequence that algorithmic labour control on digital platforms brings is the increasing number of occupational diseases. These include mostly lung and respiratory-related diseases, haemorrhoids, back-pain, and exhaustion-related illnesses that lead to other health issues. Certain polluted areas clearly contribute to the serious lung and respiratory diseases suffered by some drivers, which should be

taken into consideration when considering limiting the drivers' working hours. Labour activists of an industrial union in Bekasi, West Java, worry that at least 30 percent of their union members are taking side-jobs as app-based drivers. One of the union members died in early 2019, one year after the person joined an app-based transport service. Many of his friends observed that he was struggling to drive long hours and consumed supplements to stay awake and strong in order to earn points, bonuses, and eventually additional income (Union leader, personal interview, 27 October 2019). He had the freedom and flexibility to work for a digital platform, but the algorithmic management that propelled him to work longer hours and keep his performance high could possibly be blamed for his death. App-based drivers like him are among those in the gig economy adapting to work for a faceless boss.

Furthermore, drivers' data generated through algorithms are also used to control tariffs and rates as well as monitor drivers' behaviour in the workplace. As companies keep expanding their services, promotional prices and tariff cuts for passengers are advertised on a massive scale. Low-priced 'sales campaigns' are at the expense of drivers whose rates are cut from time to time (Nastiti, 2017). There is no opportunity for drivers to negotiate fares and rates with the companies, which constantly announce different rates and change policies via short messages or through apps sent unilaterally to drivers. In order to have full control over drivers, app-based transport companies have hired many more drivers than the demand, gradually increasing competition between them and weakening their bargaining power. On the other hand, since December 2019, new app algorithms assign only one driver to carry out two food delivery orders in one go, with drivers being paid much lower rates for the second order, instead of receiving two fares (Community members, FGD, 26 January 2020).

These algorithmic practices reflect how technology is constantly changing not only the way we define work, but also how it is organised and used to control and monitor workers. For the moment, app-based transport companies such as Go-Jek and Grab have succeeded in bringing the world of algorithms into the context of employment, which has a host of implications for how workers are treated and protected.

While regulators and legislators are still sluggishly moving to catch up, the app-based transport companies are rapidly using data-driven algorithms to reshape the norms of employment and rewrite the rules of work (Gandini, 2019; Nastiti, 2017; Rosenblat, 2018).

LABOUR RESISTANCE AGAINST ALGORITHMS

Discussions regarding labour resistance and strikes within the Marxist tradition is a powerful tool for reflecting on ways to resist capitalism. With the idea of labour strikes, Marx wants to bring about an epistemological change in the working class, "so they would know that they are, together, 'the agent of production', and that if they stopped, then production stopped" (Spivak, 2014). Different models of mass strikes have been practised and reterritorialised worldwide from its origins in Western Europe. There has been debate on how the working class today responds to the current changes of capitalist development (Spivak, 2014). This section discusses workers' collective repertoire that provides an important basis for mobilisation of driver protest, and their algorithmic resistance by breaking the company's algorithms.

Collective Repertoire

In Indonesia, riding vehicles in parade form during labour demonstrations on the road has become part of workers' collective repertoire, a significant form of their political articulation. As an element of 'political trafficking' in worker protests, motorbikes are used for labour organising and mobilisation at every Labour Day rally. In particular, motorbikes were very essential vehicles for workers in the 'factory raid' (*grebek pabrik*) that took place in Indonesia's industrial heartland of Bekasi, West Java, over a period of more than six months from May to October 2012 (Mufakhir, 2014). Workers' motorbike parades staged as political protest in several industrial estates became an everyday scene between 2011 and 2013, and such mobilisation was considered to be an effective strategy. At that time, workers were demanding an end to the widespread use of subcontracting/ outsourcing employment practices in factories, which are unlawful. Worker mobilisation during the factory raids, which included on-site strikes in factories, occupations of factories, ad hoc monitoring of compliance with regulations and on-site checks inside factories,

while building workers' solidarity across factories in industrial zones clearly required high mobility among organisers, who resorted to their motorbikes. Workers' motorbike parades were usually coupled with one or two command cars (*mobil komando*) equipped with loudspeakers playing militant songs in between instructions and speeches by protest leaders.[6]

This repertoire of collective action provides an important basis for recent mobilisation of driver protest. Drivers have protested by reaffirming workers' political demands: They drive motorbikes and cars in massive numbers, rallying at power centres near the presidential palace, house of representatives, government offices, app-based transport companies, and several landmarks, to voice their aspirations. Although drivers' capacity for mobilisation and the way they organise protests are still deficient and patchy compared to those of industrial workers, they somehow mirror the usual "political trafficking" characterising workers' protests, using vehicles, especially motorbikes.

Drivers' Algorithmic Resistance

A lot of workers in app-based transport understand that power is a relational concept, that is, that workers' ability to realize their own interests may depend, in part, on their capacity to counter the power of their employers. In the beginning, when platform firms needed to recruit drivers, drivers' structural power was relatively strong. The drivers as a collective are located in the strategic points in the production or distribution process of the overall transportation business, thus they have a certain structural power within the company. However, this structural power must be exerted collectively (Luce, 2014). Such as the case with many Indonesian workers in various industrial areas during labour strikes since 1998, and the subsequent collective actions that include the historic general strikes in 2012–2013 (Caraway and Ford, 2020; Juliawan, 2011; Mufakhir, 2014; Mufakhir, 2017; Panimbang & Mufakhir, 2018).

Platform drivers increasingly realised that the 'honeymoon phase' is over; no more bonuses they can easily get from the platform compa-

6 For a broader discussion of the importance of street-based labour protests in Indonesia, see Juliawan (2011), Caraway and Ford (2020), and Panimbang and Mufakhir (2018).

nies. Many have experienced suspension without reasons. Drivers may not get any orders for the whole day or week. They observe how orders are given to newly recruited drivers, effectively forcing them to compete to receive orders, and they hope this will not lead to horizontal conflict. As a collective, drivers know that they could do a collective 'off-bid' (turning-off the apps) en masse to disrupt the production or transaction. To some degree, there are collective repertoires that stimulated the drivers during recent mobilisations and protests (Panimbang et al., 2020). However, that is exactly the reason that the companies expand the recruitment of drivers: An excess supply of drivers would weaken their bargaining power, eventually avoiding possible structural disruption by the workers.

Many drivers resist complying with exploitative control and rule by the algorithm by using 'fake GPS' bugs (popularly named as tuyul)[7] to work around the workflow system. This method allows drivers to be seen on the application map at a desirable location closer to potential passengers, so they can receive orders from customers without having to make the effort of getting to the customer, even though in reality they might be taking a rest at a different location (such as at home if this is not that far away, or at a community secretariat to charge their phone). Drivers claim this is not wrong because the bookings and trips are real, and trip orders are completed as normal.

Given the increasingly pervasive yet anonymous control by algorithms, drivers have also employed a variety of resistance tactics to increase their subsistence income. Instead of more open forms of collective protest against app-based companies, drivers have taken advantage of some loopholes in the apps. These tactics have included negotiating with customers about their orders. For example, a driver asks a customer to cancel an order from the app, when in reality the trip is still performed at the same price as shown on the app. This means the driver saves 20 percent–the amount of the deduction from his earnings.

7 In this article tuyul is a term used by drivers to denote a fake global positioning system (fake GPS). Literally, tuyul means a mythical being that obtains wealth for its human master. It is a mythical spirit in Malay mythology in Southeast Asia, especially in Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and Singapore.

Another tactic involves food delivery service, where drivers take advantage of promotions and price discounts that are available. For example, if a customer orders food from GoFood (Go-Jek) and there are special offers or discounts available for the same item at GrabFood (Grab), the driver uses his/her Grab account to purchase the item. This means that the discounts provide the driver with additional income, sometimes up to 50 percent of the price. These kinds of tactics are regularly shared and discussed by driver communities, as well as other tactics and strategies (Driver community, personal interview, 31 October 2019). These means of everyday resistance clearly show that drivers regularly attempt to circumvent their faceless bosses.

One of the most interesting types of algorithmic resistance against algorithms is the use of multiple communities of drivers who have the capacity and skills in digital technologies. This group of drivers is popularly known as '*IT jalanan*', or 'street IT guys', basically self-taught programmers. The name 'street IT guys' is comparable to the 'street-books-and-library' activism popularised by activists in several cities and towns, first initiated in Bandung, West Java. This later spread to the greater Jakarta area and elsewhere in the effort to foster a spirit of youth resistance to social injustice. These 'street IT department' are self-taught persons, some of whom were members of industrial labour unions.

Since they work in a clandestine manner, the community of street programmers in several cities work and coordinate efforts mostly web-based or online. They share new information and tricks related to the new versions of apps from platform companies. Their main goal is to create algorithm bugs in the drivers' application to trick the algorithm. This is mainly intended to reduce the workload imposed on the drivers by the algorithm. The street programmers argue that the labour process and labour control emanating from the ranking and rating system has propelled drivers to work extremely hard and for longer hours. They challenge and resist the algorithmic pressure by helping fellow drivers modify and tweak the apps' algorithm. Interestingly, the street programmer group perceives their resistance as part of the class struggle against corporate greed (Drivers' community leaders, FGD, 2 November 2019). While algorithms seek to maximise the amount of labour extracted from

drivers, an additional app is used to reduce their use of labour power. The drivers have consistently sought to discreetly circumvent these rules underlying faceless managerial assertions of control, asserting their own control over the use of their labour power.

The community of street programmers reminds us of Luddism in the 19th century's British industrial situation, where workers destroyed textile machinery as a form of protest. Luddism is not merely opposition to new machines or technologies, but a set of concrete politics of labour movement against capital. It inspires workers' struggle at the point of production that emphasises autonomy of workers to improve working conditions. Like Luddites, street programmers see the technological advancement in the algorithm as an immediate threat, and they have a critical perspective on technology that pays particular attention to technology's relationship to the labour process and working conditions. In other words, they view technology not as neutral, but as a site of class struggle. It is a weapon of class struggle (the ruling class) against workers (Mueller, 2021).

APP-BASED DRIVERS' ORGANISING AND A NEW PRACTICE OF COLLECTIVITY

Not many established labour unions in the existing sectors have adequately responded to the needs of organising unorganised drivers in the newly emerged app-based transport sector. Labour unions have been preoccupied with their own continuing challenges, including the recent unfavourable Omnibus Law on job creation which promotes more investment and business, on the one hand, while reducing labour rights protections on the other. Organising this new terrain of the gig economy has yet to become a priority for most labour unions in Indonesia (Driver organisers, FGD, 21 December 2019). This section's purpose is to describe three models of drivers' organising and argue that the practice of collectivity among app-based drivers, especially within drivers communities, provides insights into the development of new strategies for labour solidarity building within broader labour movements.

Three Organising Strategies

In general, as Ford and Honan (2019) point out, there are currently three organising strategies: community, association, and union models (see also Panimbang et al., 2020). The first organising model is based on the driver community, which is the most popular model of organisation among app-based drivers. These driver communities are small, informal, and run flexibly. They operate at the grassroots level, with neighbourhood-based membership. Driver community organising strategies are mostly ad hoc, focusing on mutual support in dealing with workplace problems and issues such as suspension of driver accounts and sharing ideas for new tactics to earn higher incomes. Many driver communities provide social services, and more importantly, deal with member's emergency and non-work-related issues like providing support when drivers or their family members are sick.

There is no official data on the number of driver communities that exist, but it is estimated that over 5,000 communities have been established in the greater Jakarta area alone, with each community having between 10 and 100 members or even more (Researchers and driver association leaders, personal interview, 26 January 2020). A survey conducted in 2018 found that no more than 27 percent of app-based drivers in several big cities have joined communities (Instran, 2018), showing that many more drivers are still unorganised. Some driver communities are affiliated to an association of driver communities, a broader scale of organisation at the district or city level.

The second model is drivers association. It is a broader form of drivers' community organisation with members from different communities, but individual drivers can also be included as members. Many of these drivers associations are informal in institutional terms and work flexibly, but some are registered with a social/mass organisational status in order to operate formally, and have a more formal organisational structure. Several larger associations have slightly more complex organisational structures, covering more locations in different provinces, and some are almost nation-wide. Some of these drivers associations, especially those who have access to authorities such as the Ministry of Transportation, have been able to get involved in decision-making on

app-based transport regulations. Both driver communities and drivers ′associations are the most active actors in past mobilisations to protest against governments and platform companies to demand regulations and legal protection (Panimbang et al., 2020).

The third model is the app-based drivers' union. The initiative to form drivers' unions comes mainly from the existing federation of factory unions in the manufacturing sector, or from transport and dock workers' unions. However, this organising initiative to incorporate the app-based drivers into the existing labour union structure faces formidable challenges, as unions are not popular among the drivers. The app-based drivers' unions are relatively small and mostly inactive, and not one single union has been involved in recent policymaking processes presided by the Ministry of Transportation. One possible reason for the unpopularity of drivers' unions–therefore its lack of membership–is their organisational structure and function, which are viewed as rigid, as these have been adopted from the traditional trade unions' structure despite the flexible nature of the platform economy. For example, the drivers′ unions set up a plant-level union structure for Go-Jek and Grab separately (similar with factory or workplace union structure) despite the fact that drivers for both companies are inseparably gathered at the same 'base-camp' or roadside areas. In the following section, I will analyse how the first two models (community and association), in contrast to the union model, can bring about a new practice of collectivity among their members.

A New Practice of Collectivity Among Drivers' Community

By proposing the term 'a new practice of collectivity', I aim to highlight the peculiar act of collectivity among the app-based drivers through spatial interaction that is not extensively practised by any labour union in Indonesia. Both driver communities and association's organisational structures and functions are very flexible and informal, which makes it easier for drivers to establish connections and network with different driver organisations across the country. An essential factor that enables this new practice of collectivity is its type of digital work. Communication and coordination between members take place consis-

tently via digital communication channels as well as through daily personal meetings at drivers' rest areas.

One of the key players in this new practice of collectivity is the voluntary group of drivers known as the Rapid Response Team (*Unit Reaksi Cepat*—URC). URC is a task force of drivers who take turns providing assistance whenever necessary, such as in a traffic accident. It consists of several delegates, between two to four members from each driver community. URCs exist in most of the cities or regions in the country. Although the URC teams operate only at district/city level, they are easy to connect with on a large scale with almost every other URC team across the country. This connection uses a communication platform, especially the most popular and accessible chat platforms like WhatsApp, through which drivers exchange information with each other, and are often in contact with their co-workers almost all day and night without interruption. This constant contact is necessary as many drivers have to stop by at certain areas to charge phones or to have a rest after taking a long trip order. Some others may want their location to be monitored by other community members in case of emergencies or crimes. This practice of mutual support is seen as very helpful for the drivers (Driver community leaders, FGD, 5 October 2019).

Another important practice of these driver organisations is the building of networks and alliances. In networking, they use community labels and badges as symbols of networking and reaching out. That is one of the reasons why they highlight the spirit of collectivity and solidarity on their community's logos and mottos, printed on banners, badges, and stickers. Solidarity (*solidaritas*) and collectivity (*kebersamaan*) are among the most popular words written in the names of their communities. These stickers and badges are used for an exchange with each other's driver communities when visiting. The number of stickers from various communities symbolise and demonstrate the networking capacity of a community; the more stickers they have on their own banner or base-camp wall, the greater the network and friendships they have established. With this networking practice, driver communities/associations–including female driver groups that actively participate in association events such as anniversaries or social services (Panimbang et al.,

2020)–play an important role in the construction of an alternative social relation. Here, they normalise the mobility and movement of drivers, and they consider every place as a common space. More importantly, they treat other co-workers/drivers anywhere like family.

For example, when a driver from a community in one area has a problem or accident somewhere far away, a community that is close to the accident point must provide help. This would be communicated through WhatsApp by community leaders. All drivers seem to support an agreed tacit principle: "You should help other fellow-drivers if you want to be treated the same". Another example of solidarity practice among the workers is mutual aid during the difficulties affected by the Covid-19 pandemic when transport activity virtually halted: Some driver associations collected donations from their members who had other jobs in addition to app-based transport, to be distributed to other members who relied exclusively on ride-hailing work (Community and association leaders, personal interview, 22 May 2020). Such solidarity in practice, along with the collectivity and bonds of friendship, is genuinely implemented among the drivers in many places.

Many communities are able to collect membership dues between IDR 10,000–30,000 (USD 0.80– 2.20) on a regular basis (usually every month), which are used for collective purposes or to support members in need. Others collect money from members occasionally, especially when it is needed for collective purposes like to install awnings in the basecamp to provide shade or to cover electricity costs for charging their phones. Although this capacity is small, it has great potential for driver communities to be able to mobilise resources.

It should be noted that both the driver community and the association become hotspots for the mobilisation of drivers, and they are seen as strategic actors by state authorities and the platform companies who have an interest in detecting and preventing any possible disruptions by drivers. Several key communities and associations, especially the URC team, are tightly monitored by the police and platform companies, as they played an important role in past protest mobilisations that took place between 2015 and 2018. Therefore, although with some limitations as suggested by Ford and Honan (2019), from the author's

point of view, driver communities and associations are potential agents in platform workers organising. They have demonstrated collective action during a number of protest mobilisation, and explored strategies to improve their working conditions as shown by several associations that have been involved in a number of regulatory discussions with the Ministry of Transportation (Driver association, personal interview, 6 February 2020).

I would argue that the practice of collectivity among app-based drivers is an invaluable lesson for established labour unions in Indonesia and elsewhere, which have been constrained by the formality and inflexibility of their organisational structure. It provides insights into the development of new strategies for labour solidarity building within broader labour movements. Furthermore, the labour movement should also reflect on how to start embracing these precarious platform workers who are excluded from the protection of their labour rights, and grappling with their concerns more systematically, because drivers are also part of the working class continuously reproduced by social, political and economic processes of capitalism.

CONCLUSION

Technological change and the rise of the platform economy in Indonesia and globally did not happen in a social vacuum. Rather, it was a result of global economic and socio-political development, that is, the re-organising power of global financial capitalism. In particular, this new economy of digital platforms is profoundly driven by the increasing dominance of venture capital, offering evidence that digitalisation emanates predominantly from business interests rather than societal necessity.

This article showed how the resistance of app-based drivers and street programmers in Indonesia against the algorithms reminds us of Luddism in the 19th century's British industrial situation, where workers destroyed textile machinery as a form of protest. Like Luddites, street programmers see the technological advancement in the algorithm as an immediate threat, and they have a critical perspective on technology that pays particular attention to technology's relationship to the labour pro-

cess and working conditions. App-based drivers and street programmers view technology not as neutral but as a site of class struggle.

This article has demonstrated the labour process and labour control in the app-based transport in Indonesia, which proves that platform companies leverage significant control over how workers behave on the job. Against this algorithmic labour control, some drivers in Indonesia are challenging the platform companies by creating algorithm bugs and errors in the drivers' phone as a form of their resistance. There are three models of organising in place: Community, association and union models. The first two models are the most popular and attractive for the workers, so they have more members and are able to mobilise resources. In contrast to the union model, both drivers' communities and associations have flexible and informal organizational structures that allow them to easily connect with other drivers' organisations across the country. They display a new practice of collectivity among the drivers, which can serve as an invaluable lesson for established labour unions. Driver communities and associations play a significant role in constructing alternative social relations. They normalise the mobility and movement of drivers across territories, and consider every place as a common space.

I argue that despite legal and practical obstacles, driver communities and associations are potential agents in future organising of platform workers who have shown their capability of engaging in collective action and exploring strategies to improve their working conditions. Solidarity-building in actual practice, as well as the common practice of providing mutual help among drivers, have become well-established in most driver communities, clearly demonstrating the great potential of drivers. Without doubt, there are great challenges ahead, and one of the most important is the fact that the majority of app-based drivers misrecognise their employment relation as workers vis-à-vis employers, who are entitled to labour rights as stipulated in the Labour Act. Recognizing these entitlements to labour rights, among other things, is a first step in building more power and legitimacy for drivers' future collective actions.

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Notes

PANDEMICS, PUBLIC HEALTH, AND SANITATION WORKERS IN MUMBAI: CRISIS OF WORK AND LIFE

Mouleshri Vyas and Manish K. Jha[1]

ABSTRACT

A century after the Spanish influenza of 1918, COVID-19 has placed health and disease as well as public health at the centre of attention. This article highlights the impact of COVID-19 on Mumbai's sanitation workers, or 'frontline warriors' — all Dalits, the marginalised caste-based communities in India. It outlines the relationship of these workers with the State from the colonial era till the present. By using David Harvey's political economy of 'space' and Michael Foucault's biopolitics and technologies, the authors explicate the interaction between the State, sanitation workers, and the waste they handle. Control is exercised by the State over migrants as residents and as labour, through four spaces—policy, waste, geographic zones, and the workers, that enable the accumulation and expansion of capital interests through the functioning of its 'spatial practice'. The pandemic, the authors argue, results in the extension of spaces of accumulation; through segregation and segmentation of city areas, and control of the worker and labour process. As the fight against the pandemic transitions into virtual spaces, fundamental questions regarding work and working conditions of this section of 'frontline warriors' emerge more vociferously, and remain to be addressed.

Keywords: India, public health, sanitation workers, informal workers, pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

By March 2020, COVID-19 was a global threat. While the final body count was still growing at the time of writing of this article in

1 Mouleshri Vyas and Manish K. Jha are Professors at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. They can be contacted at molly@tiss.edu and jhamanishk19@gmail.com respectively. This article was originally published by Refugee Watch, Issue Number 57, Year 2021.

November, 2020, with over 8,591,731 infected cases and a death toll of 127,059 had already been reported in India and in the past eight months, the world witnessed the collapse of healthcare systems. The Indian government and the society were taking solace in the fact that in comparison to its population size, the corona-positive cases and the mortality rates have been lower than in many other countries. However, in terms of total numbers, the country continued to be severely affected epidemiologically, economically and socially. A century after the last pandemic, the Spanish influenza of 1918, COVID-19 brought the spotlight back on health and disease in general and aspects of public health in particular. Though it touched lives and circumstances across the class divide, the precarity around migrant workers, their habitats and access to health and hygiene started drawing attention in a renewed manner. It also created a category called 'frontline warriors' comprising medical practitioners, health workers and sanitation workers among others. In this paper the concerns of sanitation workers of Mumbai while tackling the pandemic are detailed through examining the relationship of these workers with the State. This is attempted through drawing upon three moments that provide an insight into their condition - the approach to sanitation in colonial India; the emergence and decline of public health; and administration of sanitation workers through the present pandemic.

The question that we began with was why the working conditions of sanitation workers remained unchanged during the pandemic, in spite of their recognition as 'frontline warriors of Covid'. In 2018, several sanitation workers marched to the headquarters of the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM)[2] with the body of a deceased worker, demanding that the corporation address the issues of contractual sanitation workers or *safai karmacharis.* Malati Devendra was a part of this informal workforce for many years and took her life when she found herself without work and wages for two months. Loopholes in the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970, had worked to the advantage of the labour contractor. A representative of the *safai karmacharis'* union in Mumbai pointed out that there had been 108 deaths of

2 Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai was earlier known as Bombay Municipal Corporation or BMC was established in 1888 under The Bombay Municipal Act.

contractual sanitation workers since 2013. In May 2020, two men in vests and shorts were barefoot and almost knee-deep in sewage, cleaning a drain. Male and female *safai karmacharis* in orange uniform jackets over their clothes were seen sitting next to an open manhole in a street, eating their lunch—some had put on homemade masks, flimsy gloves, and were loading hospital waste onto a truck with an ordinary spade. The workers asserted that they had not received any protective gear or minimum wages with women being paid almost two hundred rupees less than men for the same daily work. The sanitary workers are all Dalits—the most marginalised caste-based communities in the country—and there has been one hundred percent reservation of these jobs for the Dalits.[3] The difference in the images of 2020 is that they are talking amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mumbai, the financial capital of the country, built by migrants since the 20th century, has been hit particularly hard by the pandemic, accounting for almost 61 percent of Covid cases; the death rate was almost 14 percent of the state population. In fact, a few months into the pandemic, Mumbai accounted for as much as 21 percent of the cases nationally and 25 percent of the deaths (Duggal, 2020). Many questions about the origin of the present pandemic, its unusual epidemiological features and the basis of its pathogenicity remain unanswered and resulted in attempting several measures to contain the spread. The decision of the nationwide lockdown with less than four hours' notice and the subsequent spectacle of thousands of migrants walking back in desperation and insecurity of livelihood and habitat contributed to anxiety as well as political posturing. In the midst of this confusion and fear, we heard about the 'Dharavi model' of tackling the contagion. In the 2.2 sq.km. area of Dharavi, the population density is six hundred times the national average. Despite the fact that 80 percent of the residents depend on community toilets and physical distancing is a near impossibility, the 'Dharavi model' brought the spotlight back on community and voluntary efforts. Simultaneously, at the city level, the pandemic exposed the limits of public health infrastructure with the wealthiest municipal cor-

3 Kachra Vahatuk Shramik Sangh, "What #CoronaWarriors are getting for taking extreme risks," streamed on June09, 2020, *YouTube* video, 11:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mrFss4iPA0.

poration struggling to meet the requirement of hospital beds, oxygen cylinders and ventilators.

More than 60 percent of Mumbai's population of nearly 13 million are jammed into concrete and corrugated-metal mazes and makeshift shelters in the city's slums. Access to safe drinking water, sanitation and a ventilated habitat etc. remains a serious concern for the health and well- being of migrant workers from within and outside the state, who inhabit the slums and other unsafe spaces. Over the decades, among the public health issues, shifts in state policy defining the approach to slums, hygiene and sanitation have determined living conditions for migrants. These spaces display multiple vulnerabilities—epidemiological transmissions and social protection failures. The fear of contagion and spread of virus within such cramped neighbourhoods and through them to others, dominated initial concerns of state agencies and residents.

Ensuring adequate hygiene and sanitation has been a key civic responsibility of the MCGM over the decades which increased manifold with the Covid crisis. Almost 35,000 sanitation workers (including about 6,500 contractual and casual workers) are engaged in a range of tasks that include street sweeping, garbage collection and transportation, and cleaning of public toilets to keep the city clean and avert public health crises in normal times. They are also the most vulnerable to disease and contagion due to the precarity of their working conditions and the slum habitats where they live. Through these months, of the city's battle against the pandemic and public health challenge, sanitation workers have worked with clearing large volumes of solid waste and increasing quantities of biomedical waste. In March 2020, when the pandemic broke out, the quantum of biomedical waste generated daily in Mumbai averaged 11,230 kg (Express Healthcare, 2020). The city generated three times the daily average COVID-19 waste in July as compared to April and forty-two times compared to that of the twelve days of the pandemic in March. By July, the city was generating almost the same amount of COVID-19 waste as regular biomedical waste in pre-pandemic times (Deshpande, 2020). Such a crisis was bound to challenge the civic authorities in carrying out its responsibilities. However, the institutions and systems of city administration, the staff at the Solid Waste Management

(SWM) Department and so on, remained the same as they were in the pre-pandemic times. The visible recognition that these are special circumstances emerged only through enforcement of policy measures such as the Bio-Medical Waste Management Rules, 2016, and the provisioning of Personal Protection Equipment to workers.

In attempting to understand the approach of the municipal administration to migrant sanitation workers during the present pandemic, we began with the following questions: What do we learn from the history of pandemics/epidemics in the city that has implications for public health management, sanitation policy and habitat for the labouring migrants? How has this history shaped the current policies and practices of public health? How were the governance and management of informal settlements organised to attend to the issues of hygiene, sanitation and other public health concerns? How do we assess the risks, threats and vulnerabilities of workers during a pandemic? What do overcrowding, insanitary conditions and the dehumanising living conditions tell us about public health and its access by the migrants in the city and its slums? How did the urban poor and sanitation workers, in particular, deal with the prescription of social distancing, isolation, sneezing and coughing etiquettes, containment, etc.? How did they deal with physical injuries, illnesses and death in these months? What do the everyday experiences of the migrants as residents and workers in regard to healthcare and services, their access, alienation, refusal, the sight of fear and anxiety tell us about the city's handling of the pandemic?

Engagement with these questions leads us to three broad aspects—the city's history of pandemic handling; slum habitats and the public health question; and the sanitation worker as a pandemic warrior and as a subject of public health. The analysis of these historical and present-day aspects of the pandemic situation is informed by two sets of concepts viz. David Harvey's political economy of 'space', the argument of the non-neutral nature of space and its employment for furthering 'accumulation' by capital. The second draws from Michael Foucault's *biopolitics* and technologies such as segregation, segmentation, and surveillance, explicating the interface between the sanitation worker and the

waste they handle; and the nature of control exercised by the state over the migrants as residents and as labour.

ENCOUNTERING THE EPIDEMIC AND PANDEMIC: FROM BOMBAY TO MUMBAI

Mumbai has the unfortunate distinction of being the centre of all major epidemics in the country, including the bubonic plague of 1897 and Spanish influenza of 1918. In the backdrop of public discourse around migrants, slum life, and the situation of their work, habitat and health, the earlier epidemics of 1897 and 1918 could be looked upon as moments that affected the nature of life, circumstances and experiences of working-class migrants and shaped the ideas of hygiene, sanitisation, public health and community responsibilisation and policies and practices of governing informal settlements that evolved in the city for over more than a century.

What one witnesses today evokes comparison with earlier epidemics and images of the city, its working class, migrants and the condition of housing and health infrastructure. At the peak of the spread of plague in the city, attention was drawn towards the risk to public health due to the sordid housing and deplorable sanitation conditions of the labouring class. Instant sanitary fortification and several harsh measures were undertaken to deal with the epidemic. A 'popular panic' gripped the city, as much in response to the administration's attempts to survey, control and attack the bodies and congested neighbourhoods of the city's working poor as to the fact of the epidemic itself (Sarkar, 2014). By the beginning of 1897, roughly 400,000 people had fled, which amounted to a little less than one-half of the city's total population (Sarkar, 2014). The epidemic brought the city to near collapse. "…while the city itself wore the aspect of a 'City of the Dead', the railway stations teemed with masses of fleeing humanity.... Business was paralyzed, offices were closed and thoroughfares, ordinarily teeming with life, were characterised by a desolate emptiness" (Condon, 1900).

The unhygienic sanitary conditions in the habitats of the working class were construed as conducive to the spread of the epidemic. Being alerted by the plague and insanitary conditions, the Bombay City Improvement Trust (BIT) was formed in 1898 with the "intention of clear-

ing the city of its insanitary areas and mitigating the problems caused by the abysmal living conditions of the urban poor" (Kidambi, 2001). The trust was mandated with "making new streets, opening out crowded localities, reclaiming lands from the sea to provide room for the expansion of the city, and the construction of sanitary dwellings for the poor".[4] Autonomous of the municipal corporation, BIT was also assigned the responsibility to construct sanitary dwellings for the poor (Srivastava, 2012). The spaces were appropriated and regulated through acquisition of land and slum demolitions and clearances. However, much of these spaces were subsequently diverted for construction of private buildings and other purposes for financial incentives.

The plague prompted decisive actions by the municipal authorities in Bombay where they assumed special powers that authorised the segregation and hospitalisation of suspected plague cases (Sarkar, 2014). Several hundred slum- dwellings were destroyed in the hope of extirpating the disease before it could fully establish itself.[5] To deal with the plague, "health officers, sanitation workers, the police, and port authorities attempted to identify, quarantine, and racialise unhygienic natives" (Chhabria, 2019, p. 115). However, quarantine and control became hugely controversial and led to widespread resistance. Gradually, it was realised that demarcation and isolation as epidemic administration are ineffective and unsustainable.

The attention of epidemiology shifted to the slums, which due to the concentration of migrant workers— living in conditions that lacked ventilation, adequate lighting, faced problems with disposal of waste— were considered unhygienic. Slums were viewed as a public health concern and sites for spreading of contagion. Kidambi claims that epidemic diseases are products of locality specific conditions of filth and squalor that exercised significant influence over the colonial state's war against plague (Kidambi, 2001). Public health officers were confronted with the chronic overcrowded tenements of a notoriously ill-fed working class

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4 *Annual Administration Report of the City of Bombay Improvement Trust, for the year 1899* (Bombay: The Times Press, 1900), 3 cited in Kidambi, "Housing the Poor in a Colonial City", pp 57-79.

5 P.C.H. Snow, Report on the outbreak of bubonic plague in Bombay, 1896-97, together with reports from H.W. Haffkine, T.S. Weir and N.H. Choksy (Bombay: Times of India Steam Press, 1897) cited in Sarkar, "The Tie That Snapped," 184-191.

and the devastating effects of the early industries on the living conditions in the cities with their pollution, noise and smells. A sanitary discourse opened up the holistic bodily metaphor featured in medieval thinking and emphasised the interface between bodies and their surroundings (Füller, 2016).

As Foucault explained, under colonial rule, medicine and health policies too became a tool to colonise the society and land and not just the body. To assuage the fear of plague, a major public health response came in the form of the Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897—a product of the colonising efforts of the Indian Medical Service officials— it gave the civic authorities a free hand in exercising their whims. It allowed for inspection of ships, isolation and quarantining to prevent the spread of disease. Through several health and sanitation processes, the city was turned into a space of spatial reconfiguration and mobility control. Police cordons conducted house-to- house searches to identify plague cases, deaths were reported, the sick were isolated, dilapidated houses were vacated and disinfected and the occupants removed to camps (Sarkar, 2014). These officious and harsh public health interventions were considered insensitive and numerous direct or clandestine ways to resist or escape such intervention were reported. There was widespread anger and fierce resistance against the municipal authorities. Reacting to the rumours that the hospitals were deliberately killing the sick, the mill workers rioted (Arnold, 1993).

The plague epidemic in Bombay impacted the relationship between the colonial state and its subjects. This was the first instance when the state acquired juridico-legal powers for an apparently humanitarian cause: To prevent the spread of the epidemic. It specifically targeted the poor and the migrant workers, seen as the carriers of the disease, restricting their movements, demolishing their homes, and subjecting their bodies to medical experiments. This became the model for the subsequent governments to use disease or epidemics to justify authoritarian measures over the decades till the current pandemic.

In fact, first the plague and 20 years later, the Spanish flu of 1918 fundamentally shaped the policies and practices of city governance in

Bombay. In 1919, Radhakamal Mukerjee, while visiting these slums immediately after the Spanish influenza pandemic of 1918-19—that had already caused fifty million deaths worldwide and posed a full-blown threat and warning to public health—observed an extremely unhygienic and unhealthy living conditions in the slums and highlighted:

> "…under such overcrowded conditions the spread of diseases is easy and an outbreak of plague, cholera or small-pox will drive away all those *who can* escape. The recent influenza epidemic has affected the poorer classes in the Chawls and Bustees much more than the upper classes. How can it be otherwise? In Bombay, some of the Chawls are absolutely filthy. In one in which no less than 2,000 souls live, the Bhangi, Scavenger, has not been for a little less than a fortnight, and all the filth has accumulate[d]…. Whether in Calcutta or Bombay, Cawnpore, Bangalore or Poona, Ahmedabad or Madras, one is face to face in the bustees and chawls with living human misery, the dirt and disease of hell incarnate" (Mukerjee, 1919, pp. 291-292).

This epidemic was, after HIV, the second deadliest pandemic of the modern era (Donaldson and Kensington, 2016). Between 1918-20 an estimated eighteen million Indians lost their lives to influenza or its complications, making India and the city of Bombay the focal point of the disaster in terms of mortality. The provincial death rate in the Bombay Presidency was a relatively high 54.9 people per thousand inhabitants.[6] The severity of the disease in Mumbai led researchers to call it 'The Bombay Influenza' or 'The Bombay Fever'. Unlike the plague, the response of the colonial regime was less stringent during the influenza epidemic. While the 1918 flu did not lead to sanitary reforms as the plague had, it did do something else—mobilise communities into donating their time and money and creating a new culture of social work and civic engagement. Additionally, the colonial accounts of dirt and disease in India represented the aggressive modernist perceptions of hygiene, order and 'appropriate' use of public and private spheres (Srivastava, 2012). Such understanding and response of authorities had substantive consequences for urban development and policies in Bombay.

6 India Sanitary Commissioner, *Annual Report of the Sanitary Commissioner with the Government of India for 1918* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1920).

The experience of epidemics influenced the administrative approach towards health, disease, housing conditions and its overall interface with the city. To control the relations between human beings and their environment, the milieu in which they live was approached through biopolitical intervention. Examining the nineteenth century urban reform, Gandy, traced the formation of the 'bacteriological city' as a distinct constellation of a changing hygiene discourse, the problematisation of urban metabolisms and several technical developments (Gandy, 2006). Numerous other studies on colonial India elucidated the deplorable situation of housing and hygiene. Florence Barnes's report, based on research conducted in 1922, revealed: "in one room measuring some 15 ft [sic] x 12 ft… six families living. On enquiry, I ascertained that the actual number of adults and children living in this room was 30...This was one of many such rooms I saw" (Barnes, 1922, p. 31). Lecturing on the "Evils which afflict millworkers of Bombay" Dr. Harold Mann remarked, "I never felt the meaning of the term "warehousing labour" as I did when I saw the chawls in Bombay. I found 14 workers living in a single room".[7]

In dealing with these pandemics, state control was established and legitimised, laying the ground for authoritarian interventions in times of such crises. Physical sanitisation became the main problem of public health intervention. Health and the space of the city became related in significant new ways in the emerging sanitary discourse. Instead of focusing on occupants of the poorly ventilated dwellings, the spatial relations formed by them caused concern. Most of the public health discourse and health policies emerged in this backdrop within a span of two decades in Bombay. These fundamentally changed the relationship between the colonial state and its subjects and foregrounded the idea of public housing, sanitation, hygiene and related aspects of housing and health services.

7 Times Correspondent, "EVILS WHICH AFFLICT THE MILLWORKERS OF BOMBAY: "Jobbers" Should be Abolished NEED FOR MORE DIRECT CONTACT BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND WORKERS," *The Times of India*, March 22, 1932, 8, ProQuest. The newspaper report is also cited in Srivastava, "Creating a Healthy and 'Decent' Industrial Labor Force," 93.

DIFFERENTIATED CITIZENSHIP, SPLINTERED ACCESSIBILITY AND PUBLIC HEALTH CONUNDRUM

Public health services are an essential part of a country's developmental infrastructure. They help control diseases through measures such as food safety, provisioning of clean drinking water, hygiene and sanitation, managing solid waste, and others. Structural inequalities result in social and economically marginalised populations being more impacted by the absence of these services and public goods. Public health services are both pro-growth and pro-poor as they target the poor, who face maximum exposure to disease (Dasgupta, 2005). However, accessibility of public health services for residents in cities like Mumbai is splintered for a number of reasons that have historical antecedents. In colonial India, policy making and planning for public health was systematic and aimed at addressing major threats to public health. As discussed in the previous section, colonialism provided the first model of using scientific means of pandemic control for the large-scale and often coercive regulation of people's lives and livelihoods, and it continued to influence the policies and practices in postcolonial times. The British lived in residentially segregated areas with good environmental sanitation. Public health measures were focused on British civilians and cantonment areas. The motives behind this focus could have been a hesitation to invest in the well-being of the native population or impose 'alien' practices upon the Indians.

> "The cantonments and the British residential areas were segregated from Indian areas, with spacious roads and grounds which averted diseases spread through crowding. Municipal areas were privileged with machinery to assure good sanitary conditions, including the management of water, solid waste, and liquid waste. For towns and rural areas, the services were focused largely on early detection and control of outbreaks of contagious diseases with high fatality rates— such as cholera and the plague— before they could spread, and even menace the more privileged populations" (Dasgupta, 2005, p. 5160).

The colonial period witnessed the drawing up of public health legislations, and the establishment of institutions and infrastructure to monitor and provide public health services at the federal and provin-

cial levels. Municipal governments hired their own public health staff—medical doctors, and sanitary inspectors to enforce sanitary regulations (Harrison, 1994). However, there was a gradual and systematic atrophy of public health institutions and public health as a priority in post-Independence India; this was a result of several factors: the refinement and mass production of antibiotics since the 1940s that made it possible for the elite to procure these as cures for diseases rather than having to follow preventive measures such as environmental hygiene like the rest of the population; a shift towards financing curative technologies rather than public health systems; private goods (such as medical care) holding greater electoral value than public goods (such as sanitary measures to protect the health of the public as a whole), resulting in curative systems overtaking the preventive; and public health becoming more medicalised, with medical doctors coming into health systems and public health professionals getting side-lined. Public health systems faced severe shortage of funds due to dissonance between the Centre and states and little elbow room for fiscal autonomy for the states. Public health services were dismantled through 'neglect of public health regulations and their implementation'; 'diversion of funds from public health services'; and 'organisational changes inimical to maintaining public health' (Dasgupta, 2005). Through the 1950s, the importance of sanitation for controlling communicable diseases was recognised, though little was done about it and by 1960s water and sanitation that had been a part of health planning had been moved out of the health sector, and the sanitary inspectors' role receded into the background.

These developments led to carving out of domains in the health sector, enabling segmentation and separation of power, control and responsibility between the state and private entities. In subsequent decades, the role of the state in ensuring public health and providing services was reduced, and these were increasingly privatised through various arrangements such as public-private partnerships, and a simultaneous push for insurance to replace public services/infrastructure. Bereft of insurance, social security and any form of medical assistance, the poor are the ones who bear the burdens of privatisation and decline of the public health system. The country has failed to deliver comprehen-

sive public health services, leading to public health problems like under-nutrition (caused by factors such as inadequate food, poor access to water and sanitation causing recurrent infections) and poor availability of curative care. This is evident in the condition of health workers including sanitation workers, who live in informal settlements, and the treatment meted out to them.

The living and working spaces of the informal labour in Mumbai, most impacted by poor access to curative care, add to their peripheralisation. Over half of the Mumbai city's population lives in informal settlements of varying infrastructure, income, economy, ethnicity, and religion, squeezed into whatever space that could be found, from bridges and railways to pavements and shantytowns. The growth in informal settlements reflects both the spectacular rise in real estate prices during the 1990s driven by the city's economic growth (Appadurai, 2000), and the inadequacy of the state's social housing commitment (Verma, 2002). Most people in informal settlements lack security of tenure, live in poor-quality housing vulnerable to monsoon rains, suffer from frequent bouts of state or private demolition, lack access to sufficient and clean water and sanitation facilities, and live in highly polluted environments where they are vulnerable to illnesses (McFarlane, 2008). These settlements, frequently depicted and perceived as zones between legality and illegality, occupy a contentious space, where inhabitants often experience differentiated citizenship as mere 'populations' rather than as 'citizens'. Here, a range of services and facilities are "extended on a case-to-case, ad hoc, or exceptional basis, without jeopardising the overall structure of legality and property" (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 137). These services are focused on populations rather than citizens, in the terrain of what Chatterjee calls the 'heterogeneous social' rather than the homogeneous social of citizenship. Additionally, these urban spaces are sanitised through a logic of demolition rather than improvement with the aim to "rid the city of encroachers and polluters and, as it were, to give the city back to its proper citizens" (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 140). As an illustration of differentiated citizenship, Risbud's analysis of data indicates that a very limited number of only 5 percent of slum inhabitants have access to individual water connections while 49 percent have to share

standpipes and often rely on handpumps and tube wells (Risbud, 2003). Individual toilets are almost non-existent and around 28 percent of the people defecate in the open and 73 percent of the people use community toilets. Slums built on municipal land are provided with services while slums on private land are not entitled to any, those on state lands are in between these two conditions. Whether the slum is notified or not is another criterion of discrimination (Zérah, 2008). The distinction is particularly complex in Mumbai as it is tied to 'cut-off' dates, exposing the politics and political economy that affects the migrant's access to health services. This policy arose in response to democratic pressure from slum-dwellers, who form a large proportion of Mumbai's electorate (Subbaraman and Murthy, 2015).

A discursive transformation in Mumbai was influenced by the experiences and lessons from the earlier two epidemics whereby the aspects of sanitation, ventilation, housing, settlement pattern etc. informed the shape of health. To give the city a semblance of ordered space, the idea and conception of shelter and housing for the poor became vital in city planning and aesthetics. Despite being the wealthiest municipal corporation, sanitation and hygiene in poorer neighbourhoods' have remained disorderly. Drawing from experiences of earlier epidemics when deployment of 'scavengers' was not easy, attempts were made to settle them in identifiable localities so as to secure their services as and when required. Informal settlements have grown into hubs of service providers in the city. In Mumbai, they are spread across the city, creating neighbourhoods that are mixed in terms of class, and ensuring that for the middle and upper classes, service providers such as sanitation workers are near at hand.

SANITATION WORKERS: SEGMENTATIONS, SURVEILLANCE, AND BIOPOLITICS DURING THE PRESENT PANDEMIC

Though the Covid pandemic has impacted lives and circumstances across the class divide, the precarity and uncertainty around migrant workers, their habitat, and access to health and hygiene has emerged with a renewed focus. There is an eerie similarity with the concerns that were highlighted and planned to be attended to *vis-à-vis* public health after the late nineteenth and early twentieth century epidemic. Informal

workers in Mumbai have struggled through earlier epidemics. At the time of the plague, mill workers constituted 80,000 of the total 850,000 population of the city. Forced to face harassment under plague-control measures, which involved sanitisation, quarantine, and separation of sick family members in poor conditions and even destruction of their dwellings, they resorted to striking a number of times in early 1897. "Within three to four months of the start of the plague, 4 lakh people, including many mill workers, fled from Bombay to their villages, pushing the city into severe economic crises" (Sarkar, 2014 cited in Duggal, 2020, p. 17). Both in their spaces of residence and of work, labour has continued to be treated as a non-citizen of the city.

Sanitation workers, ensuring social reproduction of labour, are involved in a direct confrontation with disease. Features of the regime for governance of sanitation workers highlight their place— at the intersection of informality, selective control by the state apparatus, and the biopolitics of handling waste. As detailed earlier, solid waste management, articulated as maintenance of hygiene and sanitation, was treated as an imperative of the public health system in the colonial era, with sanitary inspectors monitoring conditions at provincial and municipal levels. After Independence, and with the setting up of municipal governance systems and institutions across towns in the country, solid waste had to be managed, and as an urban issue, this became a key responsibility of the municipalities. Increasing urbanisation and specialisation of functions over the past several decades led to the management of solid waste being assigned to SWM or health departments of the municipalities. These departments undertook recruitment, organisation, and management of the work and labour. The MCGM currently is the largest municipal corporation in the country in terms of its annual budget and area (Pethe et al., 2011). The SWM department has employed increasing numbers of workers for city cleaning through several tasks that include cleaning of public toilets, sweeping the streets, collection and transportation of solid waste (household, industrial, biomedical waste) to landfill sites.

In Mumbai, waste is poorly managed by residents; it is often scattered and thrown into gutters for removal by street sweeping crews. Lack of discipline and inadequate placement of bins are among the rea-

sons for the challenge in keeping the city clean (Kumar et al., 2003). Segregation of waste, enforced by municipal authorities, is not followed adequately and effectively; and waste collection and transportation remains as the essential responsibility of the sanitation workers. Additionally, waste pickers in the informal economy play a crucial role in segregation and recycling, a contribution that is not formally recognised by the municipal corporation. Labour is, therefore, at the centre of different processes in the management of different types of waste in the city. These processes turned out to be excessively crucial during the pandemic due to the risk of contagion from various sources.

In the past two decades, policy changes have allowed for the entry of private firms and organisations in managing solid waste and city cleaning. Consequently, there has been segmentation of tasks with some such as street-sweeping largely handed over to the private firms and contractors, segmentation of areas with certain neighbourhoods entirely managed through fixed-term contracts, and, most importantly, the segmentation of labour with municipal bodies like the MCGM getting the work done by standard (permanent) as well as non-standard (contractual) workers. Hence, SWM, while distancing itself from public health as a goal, is aimed at managing waste. It has grown in a hybrid format—with permanent or standard workers and contractual or non-standard workers both engaged in similar work, but under different conditions (Vyas, 2009). This expansion of the existing biopolitical imperative of the state is evident in the normalisation of the contract system with insecure conditions for labour. "Sanitation workers…collect refuse from residential and commercial establishments in a truck designed for this purpose, which they may also drive. Among risks involved in this occupation are those resulting from lifting heavy refuse receptacles, trauma and others…." (Mamtani & Cimino, 1992, p. 27). Informal sanitation workers confront lack of basic amenities and services, including healthcare, unless they are organised into unions. As a caste-based occupation, the social stigma faced by these workers, irrespective of gender, has affected generations of households. The inherent irony of sanitation work is the difficulty of accessing healthcare services for those who are actually engaged in ensuring it for the public (Jha et al., 2013). The situation reso-

nates with what the Bombay Chronicle observed a century ago: "The sweeper, while he is the most neglected human being in ordinary times, is nevertheless among the most important" (Bombay Chronicle, 1922 cited in Masselos, 1982).

There is a high congruence between poverty, vulnerability and informal work in India.[8] The informal economy is marked by diversity in terms of occupations, working conditions, and nature of insecurity; and slum- dwellers and those living in informal settlements, such as on the pavements, work in precarious conditions with the labour market and broader social insecurity as defining elements (Arnold and Bongiovi, 2012). For contractual sanitation workers, the pandemic has exacerbated their insecurities due to poor working conditions and public health services. Over the past twenty years, their struggles for entitlements have been long drawn-out, resource intensive and yielded mixed results (Vyas, 2009). Occasional strikes in protest for minimum wages, protective gear, basic amenities at the workplace, and social security have led to city-wide physical conditions that portend a public health crisis for the city. The 2005 Mumbai floods provided a small window when their contribution came to be recognised, even valued, but the larger prejudices against low-status of sanitation workers returned once the disaster was over, and the workers went back to their precarious livelihoods having some of the highest mortality rates of any occupation in the city (Asher, 2015).

Governance of the city, of labour working for the municipal authority, and other sectors of the economy, is central to examining sanitation work and the workers in Mumbai. Not unlike what Foucault explicated several decades ago, governance of the pandemic at the state and city levels led to "strict spatial partitioning…a prohibition to leave the town…the town immobilised by the functioning of an extensive power… a whole set of techniques and institutions for measuring, supervising and correcting the abnormal…" (Foucault, 2008). Patton asserts, "pandemic management has become a post- modern, spatio-temporal

8 *Report on Conditions of Work and Promotion of Livelihoods in the Unorganised Sector,* National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, Government of India (2007), 5. http://dcmsme.gov.in/Condition_of_workers_sep_2007.pdf.

paradox— populations require constant surveillance because disease is potentially anywhere, virtually everywhere but only ever actualised at some particular place at some specific time" (2011, p. 105). Yet, managing the pandemic requires more than surveillance and control. The experience of the plague in Surat had some important lessons in terms of the role of stigma in inhibiting efforts to contain the spread, and the importance of initiatives aimed at reducing stigma and anxiety; very importantly, it led to immense improvement in sanitation and primary health care, and the realisation that safety of 'first-line healthcare providers' and their families need to be ensured "or they may be forced to choose between the good of their families and the good of their larger society" (Barret and Brown, 2008). Since fear, uncertainty, anxiety and stigma influence the impact of the techniques of controlling and managing the pandemic, they need to be taken into account in the governance of populations. Nowhere do all of these converge as clearly as they do in the spaces of the sanitation worker or *safai karmacharis* handling the waste, and of their interaction with other subjects.

Experiences of sanitation workers through nine months of the pandemic from March to November 2020 highlight the city's handling of the pandemic. While safai karmacharis have been recognised as frontline workers along with medical workers, through gestures such as beating of plates, and lighting of candles, a temporal view of sanitation workers confirms the continuance of their peripheralisation through segmentation and surveillance that marked the city administration's handling of the situation. When the infection was on the rise across the city, a nationwide lockdown was announced, and local train services were suspended from midnight of March 22, as officials feared that it would lead to the spread of the virus. This immediately impacted the mobility of sanitation workers. In an overt control over labour and labour process by the corporation, they were warned against taking any leave from work as the BMC was summoning all its resources to fight the spread of the virus. Not turning up for work meant losing the day's wage. The Kachra Vahatuk Shramik Sangh in their notice to the Mumbai Municipal Commissioner complained that they were not provided with proper masks, hand gloves, uniform, shoes and soap or sanitisers (Dhupkar,

2020). Ashok Yamgar, the Chief Engineer, however, asserted that contractors had been instructed to provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and if they were not doing so, the workers needed to complain at the municipal-ward level. Narrating their work condition during the pandemic, Shankar Kunchikorwe, whose service area is in Dharavi, said that, "there are six workers in each vehicle that carries waste. "Equipment like metal basket is shared by two people on the field. The workers are at serious risk and the BMC should think of taking care of us…" (Dhupkar, 2020). During this period, the BMC adopted mechanisms that were historically at its disposal to manage the pandemic in the city—control and command to demand attendance of workers and continued non-provision of protective gear.

By April, some discussion started around the risks to sanitation workers and rag pickers from 'unmarked medical waste'— discarded masks, gloves, and tissues etc.— from homes where COVID-19 patients were quarantined. Although guidelines were issued by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) about how the waste was to be segregated at the source, and how it was to be disposed of, the lack of civic awareness and fear of contamination created obstacles in successful implementation of the system (Mallapur, 2020). Residents said that they were not even aware of the need for segregation inside their homes.

> "It is scary to touch medical waste that is being used regularly for fear that I may contract the disease as well. So we try to put everything in one bag and give it to the BMC because they know how best to separate it," said a 44-year-old woman from Jijamata Nagar, a containment zone in Mumbai's Worli, whose husband tested positive for Covid-19… Mumbai has been generating 9 tonnes of Covid-19 waste and 6 tonnes of non-Covid biomedical waste every day, BMC estimates" (Nandi et al., 2020).

With Mumbai and Delhi having one incinerator each and a total of 200 such facilities in the country, there was a possibility that the waste would have to be transported to neighbouring states for processing. The scale of biomedical waste generation in big metropolitan cities like Mumbai and its management were the emergent challenges.

As the 'bacteriological city' became visible, control over labour had to be exercised to deal with it. The BMC had by then instructed its sanitation workers to work on a rotational basis with only 50 percent staff at work during the lockdown. An additional payment of Rs300 per day for transportation and food expenses was also announced. However, it was not specified whether this would apply to contract workers and it was also unclear whether workers would be paid for the non-work alternate days that they were asked to maintain. In May, the case of a sanitation worker who tested Covid positive and inadvertently passed the infection to his wife, came to light. In April she succumbed to the deadly virus (Kumbhare, 2020). The lack of space in the house added to the difficulty in maintaining social distancing and other precautions. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare issued a circular saying that sanitation workers and others should be provided with PPE. Baburao, a contractual worker, said that they were provided with PPE only when they refused to work, and they were asked to wash the suits at home and reuse them at work. Their union protested on the grounds that the workers did not have the space and resources for washing and maintaining the suits; they asserted that this was the responsibility of the BMC, to which the latter agreed. In a television report it was mentioned even in non-pandemic times, each worker is provided only one bar of soap by the Corporation (Meshram & Bisht, 2020). Its inadequacy in providing protection for the workers who are occupationally consistently vulnerable to infection by the deadly virus during the pandemic is glaring.[9]

The hierarchy among municipal employees is stark with sanitation workers as Class IV employees in the lowest rung; contractual sanitation workers are even further down in status and lack recognition as employees of the corporation. Though central in its contribution in the pandemic, the worker's body was treated as the marginal figure in the machinery that runs the city. In the initial months of the pandemic itself we see the emergence of discursive sites in SWM viz. first, the policy space with government agencies (MCGM, CPCB) at the centre; second, waste generation, which attained significance in terms of quantum and nature of waste and biomedical waste in particular; third, segmentation

9 See Mehram and Bisht, "The Coronapocalyse."

of city areas into containment zones, hospitals, and non-containment zones each signifying levels of fear, caution, stigma, and mechanisms for waste handling; fourth, the body of the worker handling the waste with its proximity to the waste and the virus. The first space is used by the state to extend its control over the others; the second is conceptual and concerns itself with tracking and planning for managing waste at city level; surveillance by the state directly extends to the third and fourth spaces where waste is generated. The virus can spread and the bodies of the resident, the medical practitioner, and the sanitation worker are in the closest proximity to it.

When the SWM department officials in G-North ward handed over June's schedule for daily waste collection, one of its waste collectors turned apprehensive. Earlier in the month, the 32-year-old was tasked, along with two other municipal workers to collect waste from the containment zones in block 119—a set of nine areas in Dharavi, one of Asia's largest slums which saw a severe outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic— and load it into a vehicle that would take the biomedical waste to the city's only treatment facility located adjacent to the Deonar dumping ground. "The fear of contracting the virus never leaves the mind," said the sanitation worker, who asked not to be named as he is not authorised to speak to the media. "But work is work, and it has to be done." His job is risky, as very often residents of the containment zone do not segregate the waste they generate into hazardous biomedical waste (yellow bag) and household waste (black bag). "Though residents were provided separate yellow and black coloured bags, we continue to receive one bag every day with all types of mixed waste including masks, gloves, banana peels, gowns and plastic bags that are spilling over," said the worker. "It is scary when residents toss black bags in large garbage collection bins over the sealed boundary of the containment zone towards us." … BMC agrees that workers in the 46 waste segregation centres are at risk…some of this waste is also making its way to the city's landfill where workers tested positive for Covid-19 and recovered (Chatterjee and Pillai, 2020).

Segmentation of the city, and demarcation of containment zones created a narrative of special treatment by authorities, and of fear and necessary distancing by others. The biopolitical imperative pushes the

worker into closest contact with the waste and the unseen virus, while the aim of the actors making policy decisions, and at containment and other zones is to distance themselves from these as rapidly as possible.

In August, the contract *safai karmacharis* found that they did not have access to water and toilet facilities in one of the areas they work in. These were provided only after the union took up the issue. Workers of one of the wards complained to the Labour Commissioner about not being paid the minimum wage and were denied work by BMC officers and contractors. Control and punishment were used to discipline the workers and keep them in check. In September, the case of Ashok Taare, came to light. He was denied leave when he was unwell and passed away due to suspected COVID-19 infection. He had been a contractual worker for many years and obtained permanency of employment under the BMC due to the legal battle waged by the union. When the *mukadam* of his *chowki* tested positive for COVID-19, they shut the *chowki* and asked all the workers to move to another in the same area. After a week Ashok started feeling unwell and requested for sick leave (having not taken any of the 21 days he was entitled to this year), and for a medical test. The leave was denied because every worker was required to work. He continued working and passed away at the end of May. Ashok's co-workers wash and re- use the masks. Their union raised their concerns by forming a human chain across some parts of the city (Shinoli, 2020).

Each incident points to the conflictual relationship between the state and the workers marked by resistance on both sides and the state's unwillingness to take full responsibility for contract workers and asserting that it is the contractors who must do so. In analysing this relationship, it emerges that it remains unchanged through the pandemic times.

CONCLUSION

The four spaces viz. policy, waste, geographic zones, and the worker; through the functioning of its 'spatial practice' enable the accumulation and expansion of the interests of capital (Harvey, 1990). Non-provision of entitlements to sanitation workers— wages and protective gear, water and sanitation at the workplace, paid sick leave, access to healthcare among others— are ways by which the contract re-

gime thrives and profit margins for contractors increase when they do not meet minimum wage and protective gear requirements. The pandemic results in an extension of spaces of accumulation; presently, this extended space can be expected to last as long as the pandemic does—through segregation (quarantine facilities) and segmentation (demarcation of containment zones) of city areas, and controlled deployment of workers. In the management of the pandemic in these months, the four discursive spaces have become closely intertwined—vertically and hierarchically as well as horizontally and merging with each other. Policy and guidelines are enforced and determine the daily work schedule of the sanitation worker, the geographies that they interact with through the tasks of waste segregation, collection, and disposal. The nature of the city zones determines the quantity and type of waste that the worker has to handle. The waste itself has no agency, but is the outcome of economic, social, and epidemiological determinants of the people in the zones; it can be a carrier of the virus and spread disease and is, therefore, imbued with properties that elicit fear, disgust, stigma, apprehension and keenness to distance oneself from it. The worker as a subject acted upon by the other three spaces is central in the prevention and control of the virus, engaged in a biopolitical equation with these spaces and in the proximity to the waste and virus, embodying that which is most fearful about it. Yet, a certain distancing and detachment from the work, symbolised by the protective gear is necessary in order to be able to do it. The pandemic has emerged as an extension of the space for control of the worker and labour process, and for accumulation.

Though the conviction that filth and poor sanitation were the primary causal factors in the outbreak and spread of epidemics; diseases dominated the discourse in colonial India, the present pandemic has little correlation with the earlier conception. The authoritarianism in dealing with public health that emerged through the beginning of the 20th century, was diluted in later decades through its medicalisation. However, ill-ventilated, overcrowded tenements in the city's unsanitary localities housing migrant workers are surely perceived as more likely bearers of contagion due to their inability to maintain sanitation, hygiene, distancing and isolation protocols.

Sanitation workers who bear a large burden of the pandemic and its control protocol today, ultimately pay heavily in terms of safety, security and are highly susceptible to disease and death. They bear the burden of fighting the pandemic at risk to their health and well-being and remain in the trap of neoliberalism that keeps their employment contractual, and a society that keeps them at the margins. In the process of governing contagion and infectious disease, the most susceptible and vulnerable are at the threshold of epidemiological management. The public health management that gave primacy to law-and-order approach to ensure lockdown, distancing, isolation, containment, etc. has contributed to what *The Economist* refers as 'coronopticon',[10] with data gathering, tracking, and surveillance as central to pandemic management. As the fight against the pandemic moves into virtual spaces, in the future, newer answers to questions about who the epidemiological 'frontline warriors' are, and on what terms they may be called so, may emerge. For the 2020 experience, the battle and the war was on the ground with the sanitation workers bodily in the midst of it.

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THE POLITICS OF A MIDDLE-CLASS-LED LEFT MOVEMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES[1*2]

Teresa S. Encarnacion Tadem[3]

ABSTRACT

This essay examines how the middle-class composition of the leadership of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), its military arm, the New People's Army (NPA), and its political vehicle, the National Democratic Front (NDF) defined the direction which the revolutionary movement took during the martial law period whereby the armed struggle was complemented with strategies which needed middle class skills and acumen. These included the establishment of united fronts against the dictatorship on non-class issues such as the environment, women's concerns, indigenous peoples' rights, and the Moro people's struggles. Internal Party debates, however, emerged which led to the 1992 split within the Party. In the post-martial law period, those who left the Party continued their advocacies through the establishment of left movements and civil society organisations (CSOs). Middle class-oriented strategies by the Left have helped push the democratisation process forward, but there are also major limitations to the extent to which a middle-class-led Left movement is able to

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2 The post-martial law (1986–present) section of this paper draws from the author's book chapter, "The Middle-Class-Led Left Movement in Civil Society's Role in the Philippines' Democratization Process," in Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao. ed., Middle Class, Civil Society and Democracy in Asia (2019). London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 81–101.

3 Teresa S. Encarcion Tadem is Professor of Political Science, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy (CSSP), University of the Philippines Diliman (UPD), Manila. She can be contacted at tetadem@up.edu.ph.

undertake the needed radical structural changes in society.

Keywords: The Philippines, middle class, left movement, civil society struggles, liberal development agenda.

INTRODUCTION

The Philippine middle class has generally been viewed as a crucial component in the country's democratisation process, foremost of which was the part it played in the 1986 People Power Revolution which overthrew the Marcos dictatorship. It has continued to pursue this role in the post-martial law period in challenging oligarchical rule that has perpetuated poverty and the widening of socio-economic inequalities in the country. An important venue by which the middle class has expressed its opposition to the status quo is through the Philippine Left movement, i.e., the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), its military arm the New People's Army (NPA), and its political vehicle the National Democratic Front (NDF), or the CPP-NPA-NDF. There has been a lack of studies, however, in examining the role of the middle class in the CPP-NPA-NDF.

The first part of this paper will, therefore, examine the role which the middle class played in the emergence and evolution of the CPP-NPA-NDF. It will focus on how a middle-class led CPP-NPA-NDF defined the direction which the revolutionary movement would take during the martial law period (1972-1986) whereby it complemented the armed struggle with strategies which needed middle class skills and acumen. These included the establishment of united fronts with both the marginalised as well as the elite sectors of society against the dictatorship through various formations, such as through sectoral coalitions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The second part, on the other hand, will focus on the left movement led by the middle-class left faction, which split from the CPP-NPA-NDF, i.e., the "RJs" or "rejectionists" during the post-martial law period, 1986 onwards. Examination will be placed on this left movement's middle-class strategies in the civil society arena mainly through NGO development work, the creation of civil society networks to push for their advocacies at the local and global levels, government engagement, col-

laboration and participation in electoral politics to further the democratisation process in the country.

It is thus crucial to clearly outline the middle class. The middle class has generally been defined as the old middle class (OMC) and the new middle class (NMC). "C. Wright Mills describes the old middle-class of small businessmen, shopkeepers, farmers and professionals, as independent from economic and political control. These small entrepreneurs answered to no one—they were their own bosses and dealt with their own customers" (Glassman, 1995, p. 161). As for the new middle class, for C. Wright Mills, the new middle-class emerged after World War II with the new technocratic-bureaucrat industrial capitalist economy (Glassman, 1995, p. 161). This was the time for Mills whereby "the ranks of the professionals began to swell with the enormous increase in the number of school teachers and academics, scientists, doctors, nurses, psychologists etc." (Glassman, 1995, p. 163).

As for the middle class in the Third World like in the Philippines, this was viewed largely as "new middle class". That is, "it is composed of salaried employees of large corporations and government bureaucrats–managers, technicians and service workers" (Glassman, 1995, p. 350). "Along with the new middle class many developing nations also have an expanding commercial middle class of small businessmen and shopkeepers. The commercial middle class is often linked into the foreign corporations economy as middlemen or merchandisers" (Glassman, 1995, p. 351).

Giddens, on the other hand, differentiates the middle class from the bourgeoisie on the basis of market capacity: Ownership of property vs. possession of qualifications (Robison and Goodman, 1996, pp. 8-9). The middle-class composition of the CPP-NPA-NDF leadership were, thus, mainly students and professionals whose family backgrounds could be identified with the old middle class or the new middle class; and they were educated. They were not peasants or workers.

THE MIDDLE CLASS IN LEFT POLITICS DURING THE PRE-MARTIAL LAW PERIOD (1972-1986)

The middle-class background of the CPP-NPA-NDF leadership can thus be juxtaposed with the Philippine politics ruling elite during the pre-martial law period whose basis of wealth is the control of vast lands generally described as *haciendas*. This provided the foundation for its oligarchy-building as best exemplified by the dominance of political dynasties. A result of this was the emergence of a state apparatus which is prey to a powerful oligarchic class that "enjoys an independent economic base outside the state with its political machinery as the major avenue for private accumulation" (Tadem, 2019a, p. 82).

> "Such a situation brought about agrarian unrest in the countryside which led to the rise of the Marxist-Leninist Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP) or the Communist Party of the Philippines on November 7, 1930. An important constituency of the PKP was its predominantly middle-class youth sector which it consolidated when it organised the Kabataang Makabayan (KM – Youth for Nationalism) in 1964. Because of ideological differences with the PKP leadership, the KM split from the PKP and formed the new Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) which was founded in 1968. The "re-established" or new CPP was Marxist-Leninist-Maoist inspired. As for the middle-class origins of the founding members of the new CPP, its founding chair Jose Ma. Sison came from a small landed clan. Of the 13 founding members of the new communist party, 10 came from middle-class families" (Tadem, 2019a, p. 82).

Given the economic crisis of the 1970s, the anti-nationalist and anti-imperialist rhetoric of the new CPP attracted an initial core of cadres during its incipient years, the overwhelming majority of whom were university students and intellectuals from middle-class families who were mainly from the University of the Philippines (UP) (Rivera, 2001, pp. 234-235 as cited in Tadem, 2019a, p. 82).

For Ricardo Reyes (2016), a former CPP leader, although the founders of the new CPP mainly came from the upper- and middle-class, the members of the First Founding Congress of the CPP which took place on December 26, 1968, were predominantly workers and peasants. A reason for this was Sison was able to attract the workers and peasants who

were disenchanted and had left the PKP (Reyes, 2016, cited in Tadem, 2019a, p. 82)

With the declaration of martial law by President Ferdinand E. Marcos on September 21, 1972, the KM's middle- and upper-class members went underground and assumed the leadership of the CPP's regional organisations. By the time a CPP-CC Plenum was convened in 1978, it was already predominantly composed of members from the middle-class (Reyes, 2016). The leadership of the CPP-NPA-NDF are one and the same (Reyes, 2016).

This development for Reyes brought about the shift in the membership in the 1968–1971 CPP Central Committee (CPP-CC) when it became predominantly middle class. He noted that of the CPP-CC members during this period, only three were from the peasantry, i.e., Bernabe "Dante" Buscayno, the founder of the New People's Army (NPA), and two were from peasant families. For Reyes, a number of these middle class CPP members, who ultimately became members of the CPP-CC, were small landowners. He observed, however, that land was not really their source of wealth as they were more of professionals.[4] For Reyes, there were also students from the peasant and working class who came from UP who joined the CPP during this period. Their entry into UP, he observed, was facilitated by the university's policy of allowing the top five graduates from each public high school to enter UP which enabled those from the peasant or working class the social mobility to become middle class.

> "The new CPP highlighted the three issues of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism as a comprehensive

4 This could be similar to the current phenomenon of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) coming from the lower and middle classes and going abroad as domestics, entertainers, garment factor workers, engineers, hotel workers, nurses etc. who are able to send their children to the elite private schools. The American colonial policy of mass public education also enabled the children of the lower- and middle-class to go to very public high schools as the elites went to elite private schools. Jose Ma. Sison studied at the Ateneo de Manila College. The other elite school was La Salle and University of Sto. Tomas (UST). The Americans' establishment of UP in 1908 as a secular university to produce professionals for the business sector and the government also provided an entry point for children coming from the lower and middle classes to avail of good quality education. UP encouraged intellectual growth and thinking being a secular school which was not run by religious orders as with the Jesuit-run Ateneo, the LaSalle Brothers of LaSalle and the Dominican order of UST.

> framework for the analysis of the Philippine situation. There was also a strong nationalist ferment which was able to influence the formulation of economic policies, 'Filipinization'" (Tadem, 2019a, p. 82).

MIDDLE CLASS STRATEGIES AND THE CPP-NPA-NDF DURING THE MARTIAL LAW PERIOD (1972-1986)

With the declaration of martial law by President Ferdinand E. Marcos on September 21, 1972, the CPP-NPA-NDF employed middle class strategies in forging alliances with various sectors of the Philippine society which shared its concerns and issues to complement the armed struggle. This was officially launched in April 1973 when the CPP formally organised the *Preparatory Commission of the National Democratic Front*, "which would take the lead in developing a broad alliance of all forces opposing the dictatorship" (Tiglao, 1988, p. 62). This effort coupled with continuing efforts to organise the marginalised sectors of society.

These included organising united front alliances with the following: One was with the marginalised sectors of society, e.g., peasants and workers which culminated in the establishment of national federations. An example was seen in June 1985 with the establishment of the national-based peasant movement, the *Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas* (KMP) or the National Peasant Union. These national federations were used as a bargaining leverage in the formation of united front alliances with the "middle forces" which constituted the anti-dictatorship struggle. These consisted of students, professionals, and members of the business community. A third united front alliance was with the oppositionist traditional politicians and landed elites. This alliance was greatly facilitated by the issue of crony capitalism, i.e., the monopoly of corruption in the hands of Marcos, his cronies and relatives. Corruption coupled with the failure of the Marcos technocrats to come up with economic policies to address the problem of poverty and underdevelopment and the ballooning debt of the country made for an easy united front with disgruntled members of the country's business community and other sectors of the middle classes (Tadem, 2006b, p. 28).

The Various Dimensions of The Middle-Class-Led United Front Alliances

The CPP-NPA-NDF also established middle-class-led united front alliances along the following issues. Firstly, human rights. An issue which emerged during the martial law regime which the CPP raised was that of human rights violations. This was a result of the increasing militarisation in the countryside and the number of death-squad assassinations of peasants and labour activists (Tadem, 2006b, p. 29). The fight against human rights violations also appealed to the elite and middle-class players in society who also suffered from the repression of the martial law regime, particularly members of the elite political opposition who were imprisoned by the dictatorship. CPP cadres were also active in the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) National Secretariat for Social Action (NASSA) and its regional counterparts such as the Luzon Secretariat for Social Action (LUSSA), one of whose major advocacies was the fight against human rights violations. The NDF also worked with the Task Force on Detainees of the Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP) to report on incidents of violation of human rights in general and incidents of torture in particular (Wurfel, 1988, p. 126).

Secondly, the anti-imperialist struggle. The NDF also formed alliances with members of the traditional opposition and sectors of the business community who were opposed to U.S. domination of the Philippine economy in collusion with the government and local elites, i.e., the Marcos cronies, who formed joint ventures with multinational corporations (MNCs). The NDF alliance with the local elites was also formed due to a common opposition against IMF/World Bank support to the Marcos dictatorship. This was facilitated by members in the business community who viewed the financial assistance extended by the IMF/World Bank to the government as propping up a repressive regime.

Furthermore, these businessmen also saw the IMF/World Bank as favouring MNCs over local businesses, particularly the medium and small enterprises. The NDF was thus able to tap this f nationalist spirit of opposition civil society members which it equated with the anti-dictatorship struggle. Such a struggle also found expression in the call for the

removal of the U.S. military bases in the country, particularly Clark Air Base in San Fernando, Pampanga and the Subic Naval Base in Olongapo, Zambales. The view was that the dictatorship was using these military bases as a negotiating leverage to gain military and economic assistance from the U.S. Moreover, stalwarts of the nationalist opposition, e.g., Jovito Salonga and Jose Diokno, also viewed the American bases as an assault on Philippine sovereignty, an accusation which fitted well into the views of the CPP.

Thirdly, the Moro struggle. The CPP-NPA-NDF also attempted to forge a united front with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) which was established in 1974. Both the CPP and the MNLF "anticipated that Marcos was out to extend his regime and that military force was necessary to oppose it" (Tiglao, 1988, p. 67). Because of this, in the mid-1970s, the MNLF and its army, the Bangsa Moro Army were organised under the leadership of former radical student leader Nur Misuari. Misuari was a UP political science graduate and a member of the *Kabataang Makabayan*, the CPP's youth arm. It was during his time in UP that he forged a friendship with Sison. Up to the declaration of martial law in 1972, the MNLF had quietly built up its armed strength (Tiglao, 1988, p. 67). The MNLF portrayed its resistance as a political, socio-economic, and religious one and the martial law period provided a venue whereby the MNLF and the CPP could forge a unity.

Fourthly, the rights of indigenous peoples. A united front was also forged with indigenous peoples who were driven away from their ancestral land to pave way for MNCs, e.g., those engaged in agribusiness. A celebrated case of resistance was the Chico River Dam project in Kalinga Apayao, Northern Luzon which was financed by a World Bank loan. The project aimed to provide electrification and irrigation in the area to attract foreign investments. The venture, however, was implemented without consultation with the Kalinga tribal community. A result was stiff resistance from the indigenous peoples leading to the death of their chieftain Macli-ing Dulag (de Dios, 1988, p. 125). It is incidents like this which enabled the NPA to recruit the aggrieved members of the tribal communities into their fold.

Fifthly, the religious sector. The CPP also sought to strengthen the role of the religious sector in its fight against the dictatorship. One of their primary endeavours was the formation of the Christians for National Liberation, then headed by Edicio de la Torre, SVD. The CNL argued for the need for Marxist-Christian cooperation (Bolasco, 1994, p. 125).

Sixthly, the rights of women. The NDF during the martial law period also pursued the organising of the women's movement which began during the pre-martial law period. As noted, "… feminist discourses began to be more sharply articulated with the emergence of women's formations …", these included organisations such as the *Malayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan* (Free Movement of New Women) or MAKIBAKA (1970), *Katipunan ng Kababaihan para sa Kalayaan* (Women's League for Liberation) and GABRIELA (originally stood for General Assembly for the Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership and Action) (Santos, 2010, p. 117).

Lastly, forging alliances through the establishment of development NGOs. The NDF's establishment of development NGOs in rural areas also enabled the Party to not only form alliances with the peasantry and fisher folks but also to recruit them into the movement. The marginalised sectors of society gravitated towards these development NGOs as it aimed to alleviate poverty in the areas where the NDs were organising. This endeavour was greatly aided by development assistance from donor countries and foreign agencies and NGOs. Such an assistance was also made possible through the progressive networks of middle-class players in the Left movement in Europe, the U.S., and Japan, among others.

Tensions and Debates in The Pursuit of United Front Alliances

Tensions and debates, however, emerged in the process of pursuing united front alliances among which were the following. First was the tension between the NDF and non-ND members in the united front alliances due to differences in viewpoints. This was seen in the formation of a broad anti-dictatorship movement alliance where differences emerged

in viewpoints concerning the nature of the transition government that such an alliance was calling for. For example, in the Justice for All, Justice for Aquino (JAJA) movement, formed in 1984 in the aftermath of the assassination of ex-Senator Benigno Aquino, members of the business community did not agree to the ND position to resist all forms of foreign intervention in the country (Diokno, 1988, p. 135).

Another major and last attempt to organise a broad opposition spectrum which the NDF was very much part of was the formation of the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan or BAYAN. Its major function was "to unify and consolidate the leadership of popular organisations … and to adopt a broad and comprehensive strategy for struggle that will integrate all forms of non-violent actions (Diokno, 1988, p. 158). Such an effort also failed "because of differing concepts of a truly united effort in which the spirit of democracy, and not the exercise of mere mechanical majority, would prevail" (Diokno, 1988, p. 161). One view which emerged was that the NDs, also referred to as the NatDems (representing the CPPNPA-NDF), was just too strong a force in numbers as opposed to the other ideological blocs such as the social democrats (SocDems), and the liberal democrats (LibDems), and even independent spirits (Diokno, 1988, p. 160).

Second was the tension within the NDF with regards to non-class issues. The engagement of the NDF in united front efforts which focused on non-class issues also brought about tensions similar to that of the CPP stance on NGO development work. This is best summarised in the manner in which Marxism has been viewed by the party as narrated by a CPP cadre engaged in the organising of women's movement.

> "My understanding of Marxism consisted of several things, some of which were: One that, class struggle and particularly the struggle of the working class is primary for any radical social transformation to happen; two, that the working class would have to lead the revolution toward socialism; three, that the ruling class, i.e., the bourgeoisie needs to be overthrown along with its lackeys and minions; four, that capitalism would reach a point of decay, and that its overthrow is the only way for the masses to be liberated from the different yokes of oppression; five, that the way to explain the word is to use "dialectical materialism" based on concrete social

> conditions; and six, that women's emancipation would follow the emancipation of the working class. I also learned that we have to pass through the national democratic struggle to attain socialism and eventually communism" (Santos, 2010, p. 113).

Given this interpretation of Marxism by the CPP, non-class issues such as ethnicity as epitomised in the Moro insurgency and the plight of the indigenous peoples, religion, and the women's issues are secondary to the class struggle. This was the reason why the CPP could not fully support the Moro struggle. Thus, although the CPP and the MNLF found unity in their fight against the Marcos dictatorship, they parted ways in the manner by which they would pursue this through the armed struggle. Further, divisions emerged when the MNLF agreed to the Tripoli Agreement of 1976 which facilitated peace between the MNLF and the Philippine government. The agreement was brokered by Moammar Khaddafy of Libya (Tadem, 2006a). As for the indigenous peoples who were repressed by the Marcos dictatorship, they found themselves drawn to the armed struggle for national liberation rather than for their own particular emancipation.

For the CNL, this CPP Marxist interpretation which undermines religion as a primary issue in the struggle against the dictatorship is blamed on the "underdevelopment" of Marxist categories for analysing the Church. As further pointed out:

> "Marxist thinking on the Church has swung from viewing the Church as a feudal institution directly reflective of the landlord interests to explaining the emergence of the Church into oppositionist politics by the fact that church people come from classes also oppressed by "imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism" (Bolasco, 1994, p. 127).

The CPP leadership in general believed that the non-class issues such as ethnicity, as epitomised in the Moro insurgency, and the plight of the indigenous peoples and the women's and environmental issues should be treated as secondary to the class struggle, while other Party members disagreed. NGO development work was also treated as secondary to the political struggle against the dictatorship. In this climate,

socio-economic work, particularly concrete livelihood-generating projects, were often mistrusted because they diverted time and energy away from the anti-fascist, i.e., the struggle against U.S.-Marcos dictatorship.

The Nature of The Middle Class and Party Debates

For Reyes (2016), the nature of these debates were also spawned by the changing composition of the CPP Central Committee (CPP-CC) which became dominantly middle class, i.e., educated as well as intellectuals. These middle class players also came to assume CPP leadership responsibilities as they headed CPP regional organisations which in the 1980s have already stabilised and consolidated. Reyes saw such middle class consolidation of leadership in the Party as the turning point of which was the 1980 Central Committee Meeting. During this period, CPP leadership was with Rodolfo Salas as Sison was arrested in 1974. As part of the Party policy, once a party member is arrested, he/she is no longer considered as part of the CPP for security reasons. Once the detained party member is released from detention, the party member undergoes a Party debriefing before he/she can join the Party again. Thus, even if it was Sison issuing orders from prison to the heads of the CPP regional organisations and even to the public, this would not be considered an "official" Party line. Such a situation, therefore, provided the middle class leadership of the CPP space to discuss and debate policies and concerns which they felt strongly for. What also stood out in the Party leadership was they were predominantly from UP and although they were conscious not to highlight this "UP elitism" which might sow some tensions, this fact still stood out (Reyes, 2016).

One thing to consider is the role of non-CPP left intellectuals. According to Reyes (2016), non-CPP left intellectuals also contributed to the debates which ensued in the Party. Among these non-CPP left intellectuals were those who were with, and participated in the activities of the third World Studies Program (TWSP). TWSP is a research centre which was established in 1976 and is based at the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), University of the Philippines. The TWSP, which later became a Centre in 1999, was founded by then CAS Dean Francisco Nemenzo who earlier on left the PKP when it split in 1972 into two factions, i.e., those who surrendered to the Marcos dictatorship and those

who were not for this. Nemenzo belonged to the second faction which also led to his imprisonment for a year under the Marcos dictatorship. The other TWSP non-CPP left intellectual was the Program's first director, Randolf "Randy" David. David was not ideologically aligned with any of the left-wing political blocs. Nemenzo and David were acceptable to CPP and non-CPP left-wing intellectuals as well as activists which included CPP renegades. TWSP provided a space where debates could ensue through forums, lecture-discussions as well as publications. Such debates, for example, were captured in two TWSP publications, *Marxism in the Philippines: Marx Centennial Lectures* (1984) and *Marxism in the Philippines* (1988), as well as in its quarterly journal, *Kasarinlan: Journal of third World Studies*, which would also publish articles written by CPP members under their pseudonyms, concerning debates which were ensuing in the Party. An example of this is Nathan Quimpo's article arguing for urban guerrilla warfare vs. the protracted people's war (PPW) such as the strategy of the left in El Salvador during the 1970-80s. The TWSP also provided an "academic space" for CPP members who were released from detention like the former left leader Ralf Baylosis who became its research assistant in the late 1970s.

Reyes (2016) also pointed to the role of left-wing intellectuals in church establishments in the country as contributing to deepening the debates which went on in the CPP. Among these were the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines' (CBCP) NASSA and its regional institution LUSSA. There were also a number of priests and nuns from Europe and the United States who provided an intellectual as well as logistical network of support for members of the CPP in the countryside.[5]

Another matter to consider is the sense of wasted professional qualifications, skills, and training. Adding to the debate concerning the Party line was also the dilemmas which emerged among middle class revolutionaries who also had professional qualifications. There were middle class revolutionaries who were trained, for example, as medical doctors but their revolutionary work did not make use of their medical skills and training. It came to a point when these professional mid-

5 See Tadem 2014 on how the church networks in the Philippines facilitated the grassroots organising of health activists during the martial law period.

dle class revolutionaries would question what would be the best way to serve the revolution, i.e., through the "armed" or "legal" struggle, giving equal priority to the latter concerning the former (Tadem, 2014).

This is also a dilemma confronted by middle class Party cadres involved in NGO development work or advocacies. They believed that the "legal" struggle they are carrying out which benefits greatly from their middle-class qualifications, skills, and training is as important as engaging in the armed struggle. Thus, a tension which emerged in the CPP concerning NGO development work was that it was treated as secondary to the political struggle against the dictatorship.

Such a tension was also exemplified in members of the CPP who viewed non-class issues associated with the "middle class" such as the struggle of women, the Moros, indigenous peoples as well as environmental advocacies as subordinate to the armed struggle.

THE MIDDLE CLASS AND THE LEFT MOVEMENT IN CIVIL SOCIETY STRUGGLES DURING POST-MARTIAL LAW PERIOD (1986-PRESENT)

The transitioning from authoritarianism to democracy in the advent of the 1986 People Power Revolution which ousted the Marcos dictatorship offered a widening space for united front activities in the civil society arena for the CPP to further pursue its goals. The country's political transition, however, also intensified the tensions which were brewing in the Party and ultimately led to its split in 1992 between the Reaffirmists or "RAs," those who continued to adhere to the Maoist orthodoxy, e.g., the armed struggle, and the Rejectionists or the "RJs." For the latter, they looked at the middle-class strategies which they employed during the martial law period, e.g., development work, as the priority.

> The split in the CPP and the consequent shift from the armed to the legal struggle saw the emergence of civil society as not only an arena of contention but also as a primary social force in society to bring about change. This was within the context of the need to strengthen people empowerment which is viewed as the "process of building up 'parallel power' in 'civil society'" (Tadem, 2019a, p. 85).

Thus, civil society became the primary arena of struggle for the middle class-led left movement during the 1990s and the emergence of civil society organisations (CSOs). "Civil society" as a term was therefore used to include all non-state actors who challenged the state. Thus, it was in the 1990s whereby the term "civil society organisations" (CSOs) was popularly used by the Left. The post-martial law period thus witnessed the rise of left-wing CSOs (Tadem, 2019a, p. 85).

Forging alliances with civil society players and civil society as an arena of primary and secondary contention for the RJs and RAs respectively would characterise the manner in which the Left would pursue its push for the democratisation process during the post-martial law period. In relation to this, NGO/CSO advocacies and strategies thus generally remained middle class based. As noted by Reyes (2016), this is because the strength of these NGOs/CSOs are generally knowledge-based, i.e., they need to educate people on their advocacies, formulate and apply for funding proposals, pursue alliance building which are generally identified with the middle class (Reyes, 2016).

The Middle-Class-Led Popdems

Among the national democrats (NDs or natdems), which later on became a faction of the rejectionists or the "RJs," who split from the CPP were the popular democrats (popdems) whose main concern was to work for a broad left front. Spearheading the popdems was former NDF head Horacio "Boy" Morales together with former CPP stalwarts Isagani Serrano and Edicio de la Torre. The popdem expressions had three important dimensions which required middle class strategies and qualifications of which were the following (Tadem, 2019a).

NGO development work, which was exemplified with the establishment of the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM) and its sister organisation, the Cooperative Foundation of the Philippines Inc. (CFPI). With regards to the former, the revitalised PRRM was one of the biggest NGOs which prospered during the first decades of the post-martial law period. This was a popdem initiative which provides for education and resources in its aim to strengthen "civil society" (Tornquist, 1993, 42). Second, a popdem "thinktank" was seen in the forma-

tion of the Institute for Popular Democracy (IPD). The IPD focused on the issues of governance and electoral reforms as well as popular democracy and participation. And third, a social movement, the Movement for Popular Democracy (MPD). This movement would link the lower- middle- and upper classes in society at the local and national levels of governance.

The PRRM focused on empowering rural communities and this was through rural development and reconstruction. It established around 12 regional chapters all over the country. One of its showcases was Nueva Vizcaya where it helped to bring down the poverty levels in cooperation with other civil society organisations (CSOs) and the local government unit from 45% to 4%. Another example was the CFPI which joined forces with other CSOs, and focused mainly on the following: (1) organising farmers into cooperatives to empower them and provide them with assistance, e.g., technical as well as legal; and, (2) campaigning to enact national laws to promote the development of cooperatives in the country as seen in the promulgation of the following laws on March 10, 1990: (1) Republic Act (R.A.) 6938 known as the Cooperative Code of the Philippines, creating an organic law for cooperatives; and, (2) R.A. 6939 establishing the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) as the government agency to implement the Cooperative Code.

"A reality of left-wing CSOs during the post-martial law period was the splintering of its organisations given the debates which would ensue as brought about the growing complexity of issues and new developments. This has generally been brought about by vicissitudes in the political dispensation" (Tadem, 2019a, p. 89). This was seen in the FDC. As this CSO network began to take on other issues, such as structural adjustment programs and privatisation, issues which were no longer as black and white as the debt issue, debates emerged within the FDC in the 1990s about the direction in which the CSO network was heading towards (Tadem, 2019a, p. 89).

Moreover, there was also the issue of strategy. One faction wanted to give priority to research on pertinent economic issues needing more middle-class skills. The other faction, led by the FDC's mass base, however, wanted to focus the FDC resources on political action, e.g., mass

mobilisations and demonstrations. The former, which was led by FDC President Leonor Briones, then a UP Professor of Public Administration and its Secretary General Filomeno Sta. Ana, ultimately left the FDC (Tadem, 2019a, p. 89).

Briones would later become the National Treasurer of the Estrada Administration (1998-2001) and is currently the Secretary of Education of the Duterte Administration (2016 to the present). Sta. Ana, on the other hand, established the Action for Economic Reforms (AER) in 1996. The AER took a more nuanced position on the government's Comprehensive Tax Reform Package than its other counterparts in FDC. It became a major force behind the reform coalition which successfully lobbied for the enactment of the Sin Tax Law, officially known as Republic Act No. 10351, which imposed higher excise tax on alcohol and tobacco products (Tadem, 2019a, p. 89).

GLOBAL LEVEL OF GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRATISATION

Another prominent feature of left-led CSOs during the post-martial law period was the emergence of global CSOs which was made possible by their middle-class character. By the 1990s, the internationalisation of CSO activities has become the norm given the advent of globalisation. In the case of the FDC, which started out as a local NGO, it has morphed into a transnational CSO. Together with other global civil society groups, FDC is credited for playing a vital role in advocating for multilateral financial institutions (MFIs) to enact the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) (Tadem, 2019a, p. 90).

The Shift to Electoral Politics as The Arena of Struggle

Despite the headway which these left-led CSOs have attained with their advocacies, which was made possible by their middle-class acumen and strategies, the reality which remains is that the country's elites continue to dominate the political and economic spheres of society. The realisation, therefore, is that under an "oligarchical" democracy, there are limits to the reforms which left-wing CSOs can push for, thus the impetus for capturing state power through electoral politics. Given its middle-class character, they were able to embark on establishing political parties.

An example of this is the Akbayan Citizens' Action Party or Akbayan which, aside from the popdems, consists of two other left-wing political blocs—the democratic socialists or demsocs and the socialist group BISIG (Bukluran sa Ikauunlad ng Sosyalistang Isip at Gawa or the Advancement of Socialist Thought and Action) (Tadem, 2019a, p. 93). The window for left-wing movements to enter electoral politics was through the system of party-list representation as mandated by the 1987 Constitution. The purpose of the party-list system was to remedy the problem of under-representation of the lower echelons of society by allowing them as much as three seats if they win 6 percent of the votes cast in the party-list system. A major limitation to this system, though, is that traditional politicians have begun to form their own party-list parties which made it difficult for left-wing parties to win seats in Congress (Tadem, 2019a, p. 93).

Because of this, left-wing CSOs which have established their own political parties were forced to ally with these traditional politicians to win seats in the party-list representation system. This has led to the watering down of CSO advocacies and, worse, the dissolution of the CSOs themselves due to debates which ensued on whether to pursue such a strategy of elite alliance or not given its adverse effects (Tadem, 2019a, p. 93). Another strategy was to support the presidential candidacy of a traditional politician. This was the case of Akbayan whereby during the 2010 election, it campaigned for the presidential candidacy of Benigno S. Aquino Jr. When Aquino won, a number of Akbayan leaders were awarded government positions (Tadem, 2019a, p. 94).

Such a strategy also created tensions and divisions in Akbayan as some of its leaders and members did not agree with several policies of the Aquino Administration, particularly its neo-liberal development agenda. This ultimately led to a number of them leaving this left-wing movement and political party. What was clearly evident was the failure of Akbayan to bring in its left-wing agenda or alternative while in government (Tadem, 2019a, p. 95).

The fate of Akbayan is reminiscent of the experiences of previous Left personalities who were recruited into government but who could not make any substantive difference. An example was PRRM's Morales

who was appointed by President Estrada as Secretary of Agrarian Reform. Morales, however, could not make much of a difference due to the strong influence of the landed elites. The current Duterte Administration also appointed three leading left-wing personalities identified with the CPP to Cabinet positions. These were: Judy Taguiwalo, then a University of the Philippines Professor, as Secretary of the Department of Social Work and Development; Liza Maza as the head of the National Anti-Poverty Commission and a peasant leader, Rafael Mariano as Secretary of Agrarian Reform. Mariano was the first ever peasant to be appointed to a government cabinet position. He was also formerly a member of the Philippine Congress House of Representatives. But together with Taguiwalo, he failed to get the confirmation of the Philippine Congress which remains to be dominated by politico-economic elites and big business interests (Tadem, 2019b).

CONCLUDING REMARKS: WAYS FORWARD FOR THE LEFT?

The Philippine Left experience thus shows that the middle class has played a crucial role in the pursuit of middle class strategies through the Left movement. Increments have been gained such as the organisation and popular empowerment of the marginalised sectors of society, the translation of their advocacies into legislation and international policies as well as participation in and appointment to government cabinet positions. There are, however, also limits to the extent to which the Left is able to push for democratic change particularly through electoral politics and government appointments. This is mainly attributed to the continuing dominance of oligarchical interests in the country and the absence of a feasible left alternative to this status quo.

The author explained that the middle class can either swing to the left or to the right and vice versa. In this sense, the middle class is not static. Further, the author shared that the category of the "middle-class" is problematised. The work of Giddens (1995), who classifies the middle class not in terms of market capacity but in terms of qualifications, e.g., education, is useful in this discussion. In the Philippines, this is exemplified in the case of the students who joined the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). They may be children of shopkeepers and landed elites, but they were joining not because of their market capacity but

because of their qualifications and their skills, among other things. The need to identify the values that set the middle class apart from the other classes (Rivera, 2001; Bautista, 2001) is a salient question throughout the article. This complexity also figures prominently in the author's study on technocracy (Tadem, 2020), where it was observed that technocrats can come from the lower class, like Manuel Alba, and the upper class, like Placido Mapa. The technocrats are also shown to be related to the new middle class.

The whole left ideological spectrum has already been covered, but it is time to build an independent movement and national party. Under Corazon Aquino and Fidel Ramos, the Left had the socdems (social democrats). Under Joseph Ejercito Estrada, Boy Morales, formerly with the CPP-NPA-NDF; and under Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, the Philippines had people who were from the Left, but they were not coming as left. Under Benigno Aquino III, there was the Akbayan. And finally, under Rodrigo Duterte, the CPP was co-opted when its members joined the government. But they were ultimately also left.

Revolutionaries from the middle class have more options compared to those from the lower class; this has an advantage as well as a limitation. First, the middle class is more likely to relate to the lower class and to the upper class, thereby opening themselves more to united front alliances, which the lower class would not be able to do. This openness of the middle class is seen in the University of the Philippines (UP) as a socialising process of mixing the left and the right.

The flexibility available to the middle class is also reflected in a situation where revolutionaries had to figure out where to go after the revolution. In the case of the New People's Army (NPA) in Negros after the 1986 People Power Revolution, it has been revealed that it was more difficult for somebody from the peasantry and the working class to leave the movement (Rutten, 2000). The tendency was to look for a patron to help them. The classic case was Dante Buscayno, who had to look for a patron, and that was Corazon Aquino. He was able to establish one of the biggest cooperatives for a time. On his own, Buscayno would not really have been able to do what Boy Morales did, which was getting funding from other countries.

In contrast, the middle class could easily go back to their homes, such as in Dasmariñas, Cavite, etc. The middle class always has an option to join the government, academe, or a civil society organisation. In other words, there are more options available to them. Even before the 1986 People Power Revolution, there were already simmering tensions between the middle and the working-class revolutionaries within the movement. Some members of the CPP once said that they dress like peasants, they look like peasants. There was also a running joke that the middle-class revolutionaries know how to revolt but do not know how to clean and cook (*marunong makibaka pero hindi marunong maglinis at magluto*). But these tensions were not as obvious as after the People Power Revolution. Importantly, those who came from the middle class had an easier time leaving the revolution and going back to mainstream society. Other PKP members on the Left still had the revolutionary aspects. Those who left PKP established *Bukluran sa Ikauunlad ng Sosyalistang Isip at Gawa* (BISIG). Some became religious charismatic leaders and pursued other different occupations.

The problem is that people cannot see the distinct economic policies. Whoever the Philippines' president is, economic policies remain very hegemonic. In the case of the Workers' Party in Latin America and of Bernie Sanders in the United States, it is very clear that they are socialist because of their economic policies. In the Philippines, once the Left allies with traditional politicians, they can raise issues of poverty and corruption but not inequality. Raising the issue of inequality requires redistribution, which means addressing economic policies, and traditional politicians do not accept that. The first one to bring up class inequality was Estrada, with his *Erap para sa Mahirap* (Erap for the Poor) rhetoric. But his economic policies remained the same. Related here is the use of "good governance" as a discourse, which is elitist. Good governance covers corruption, but it does not address inequality (Bello, 2005). Addressing genuine representation of the marginalised sectors would have been the work of the party-list system, but that system was also bastardised.

Funding from other countries too is problematic. Funding agencies can significantly determine the activities of civil society organisa-

tions. When the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM) was revitalised, the main source of funding was Oxfam Novib, a liberal NGO from Europe which was in tune with what Boy Morales wanted. On the other hand, the UP Third World Studies Program refused to take money from Ford Foundation and USAID, as these were considered counterrevolutionary funds.

Development work is a process, especially after the 1986 People Power Revolution. Based on the author's study of Dante Buscayno's cooperative (Tadem, 1998), Buscayno was saying that it was difficult to tell people to engage in revolution, given the nature of cooperatives as a different kind of political dispensation. He said that he would push and push people to be involved in a cooperative until they could see its limitations, and that was when it would be easier to tell people to take up arms.

Finally, concerning the nature of participation of left personalities in government. They are pulled into government as individuals; they are not bringing the movement and the ideas with them. It was Akbayan that was the first to bring in its agenda, yet still it was not able to push the agenda due to the marginalised government posts given to it. Left personalities are usually placed in the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) or in the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). Boy Morales was assigned to the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), which was crucial, but an undersecretary position was allegedly reserved for someone who was affiliated with Peping Cojuangco's Hacienda Luisita. Overall, left personalities were not put in the main economic agencies—namely, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the Department of Finance (DOF), and the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA)—which significantly hampered their capacity to advance crucial economic reforms.

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COMMODIFICATION OF SUBSISTENCE: PROFIT, PLATFORMISATION, AND THE PANDEMIC IN NEOLIBERAL INDONESIA

Estu Putri Wilujeng[1]

ABSTRACT

This article examines the ways that capitalism adapts in order to self-sustain within the condition of Indonesia's pandemic. During the spread of COVID-19 in the archipelago, the paradigm of capitalist configurations shifted, to persevere and grow stronger, as well as become more pragmatic and sustainable. The author argues that capitalism will survive through rebounding, which does not rely solely on the state, but on their capacity to appropriate people's survival practices during the multidimensional health crisis. This process of appropriation utilises digital platform technology which combines machine learning, artificial intelligence (AI), and the human-computer interaction (HCI) to attract people's efforts to survive, which can be defined as platformisation. Using narrative and thematic qualitative approaches towards news articles in mass media, the author examines the catalysation of platformisation acquired through a hybrid between physical world and the platform's architectural components such as human-computer interaction design, artificial intelligence, and machine learning. This prompted users to grow dependent on the platform, and this dependence disguised the boundary between the individual as an autonomous being and the exploited worker by acceleration. Human resource utilisation becomes a way to develop the means of production to marketise commodities, and that the relation between platform and user is legitimised by a neoliberal government increasingly withdrawn from providing secure employment.

***Keywords**:* Indonesia, platform capitalisation, human-computer interaction, machine learning, artificial intelligence*.*

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1 The author is a lecturer at the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Indonesia. She can be contacted at estuputri@ui.ac.id.

INTRODUCTION

The crisis caused by the widespread of COVID-19 has affected societies all over the world. Importantly, the global pandemic has launched debates regarding the fate of capitalism. Optimists affirm that capitalism is helpless in the face of such a multifaceted crisis, which would expose the frailty of the global chain of neoliberal capitalism (Free and Hecimovic, 2021), its precarity, as well as hopes for a material rise of socialist ideologies (see Martinez, 2020); which together reveal hopes for a post-capitalist world (see Nelson, 2020). Meanwhile, pessimists predicted that the global pandemic will give birth to necropolitics,[2] or the practice of normalising the dehumanisation and exploitation of human precarity for neoliberal purposes (Hunsinger, 2020). This debate indeed presses us to reexamine the current capitalist configuration, especially its transformations during the global pandemic. Significantly for the author, both camps agree that the pandemic has intensified individual precarity, further entrenching workers as exploitable targets for the capitalistic market.

Building on this premise, the author begins with the assumption that the pandemic does not eradicate or even challenge capitalism, as it has the ability to rebound through labour management by means of digital platforms. The platform attracts, accommodates, and connects producers and consumers or users, in the process called platformisation. To achieve this, platformisation combines machine-learning, artificial intelligence, and human-computer interaction. The pandemic was a major catalyst to accelerate platformisation, instrumentalising individual precarity—people who are trying to avoid unemployment. Platformisation demands capitalists to master the mechanics of the platform, and those who master it have increased capital accumulation during the crisis.

Capitalism's ability to rebound is not new. It is a key characteristic of capitalistic relations. Harvey (2010) stated that in times of decreasing purchase power in the market, capitalism will design a way to sustain itself and control this relation. One of its tactics is to expand the market,

2 Necropolitics is a practice of dehumanising and exploiting human precarity within neoliberal times. Necropolitics can potentially be traumatising. This condition continues until it meets resistance or any acknowledgement that such forms of violence should not be normalised (Hunsinger, 2020).

to create new products and lifestyles, to invent an instrument of credit, and arrange the state budget. Varying rebound strategy devised to protect capital forces us to question any hope for the pandemic to annihilate capitalism (see Free & Hecimovic, 2021; Martinez, 2020).

Moreover, Harvey (2010) explains that the rise of capitalism depends on the state's ability to regulate competition and plans for merger and acquisition to increase profit. But the state is not the only party instrumental in this rebound. Capital owners create new models to administer businesses with smaller capitals, and this is done by providing a platform or market which can be controlled through novel terms and conditions. Likewise, Srnicek (2017) has argued that platformisation is a sustainable business model which can monopolise the digital economy. He defines a platform as a digital infrastructure connecting various users to build products, services, and marketplaces.

In Indonesia, the largest digital companies encompasses marketplace Shopee and Tokopedia as well as ride-hailing app Go-Jek and Grab as common forms of digital platforms. Putri & Zakaria (2020) have analysed how Shopee and Tokopedia are e-commerce platforms with the highest website metrics and social media performance. Meanwhile, Go-Jek and Grab are transportation platforms which expanded into one-stop-services, which also include financial and investing services.

These platforms have operated before the pandemic, but they have accumulated high surplus value by monetising local business on various levels. For example, Setyowati (2020) described the competition between Go-Jek and Grab to attract micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) and grocery stalls to join their business, by creating services to attract stall-owners such as GoToko by Go-Jek and GrabKios by Grab. The ability to customise their appeal for smaller enterprises contribute to the platform's economic control in the digital marketplace. Therefore, these platforms have grown stronger in monopolising Indonesia's digital economy and even benefit from the health crisis which has pushed ordinary people to work in digital spaces.

Such monetisation can be seen in the twofold increase in the number of transactions during the pandemic, from 80 million transactions

in August 2019 to about 140 million transactions in August 2020 (CNN Indonesia, 2020). Koesno (2020), cited by a study from Exabytes, stating that there was a 38,3 percent increase in the amount of e-commerce users; likewise he referred to iSea Insight's research that showed a rise in e-commerce activities done by business actors. Likewise, Burhan, (2020b) showed an increase of 10 million monthly active users in relation to e-commerce, while the number of sellers rose by 2,7 million; mainly consisting of small and medium enterprises.

The platform's ability to attract businesses and accumulate capital relies on the mechanics of the platform. Tokopedia, one of the largest digital marketplaces in Indonesia, utilises machine learning and artificial intelligence to extract consumer data trends and predict consumer demands and orders. Tokopedia furthermore presents them to the sellers in a simple and friendly interface (Librianty, 2020; Rizal, 2019). This technology is a part of the platform's architecture design and system to increase users' interaction and experience, shaping loyalty through convenience; able to attract users, provide facilities, and connect the producer with their targeted consumer (Parker et al., 2016).[3]

Capitalists' ability to accumulate profit through platforminsation during these spread of COVID-19 shows that capitalism too adapts to the pandemic. That is why the transformation of capitalism through platformisation needs to be elaborated. Therefore, the author attempts to unpack how capitalis restructurisation occurs through the machinations of platforms amidst the COVID-19 crisis.[4]

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3 Platforms thus have become exploitative, as users have little an alternative to survive unemployment during the pandemic. Cosgrove et al. (2020) have studied the exploitation of pandemic precarity through platforms aiming to help users' mental health problems. The platform extracts the users' activity data and sells it to third-parties for commercial purposes. The involvement of platforms and pseudo-health applications enforces towards users to enter the capitalist supply chain. The users of these platforms and applications are encouraged to be involved as a user and become part of the means of production to generate profit for the platform's owners.

4 The author unpacks this by following some methodological steps. Firstly, by combining narrative and thematic qualitative methods to understand the capital evolution during and after the pandemic. In this method, the author collects various narratives according to the needs of the study and classified them into thematic categories. The two main categories in this study are the labours of surviving and how platforms accumulate profit during the pandemic. In each category, the collected data is classified according to the themes. In the first category, the writer traced the phases of development of COVID-19 and the citizens' response into various types of labors of

CAPITALISM IN CRISIS?

In order to achieve the purpose of the article, this section maps previous studies in three ways. Firstly, by providing a general discussion regarding capitalism and crises. Secondly, it examines platform capitalism as a result of structurisation in times of crisis. Thirdly, it explains the usage of machine learning, artificial intelligence, and human-computer interaction in these processes. Together, these subsections show how the architecture of platforms exploit users for the purpose of accumulating capital. This analysis is expected to contribute to the study of capitalism amidst crises, especially the transformation, endurance, and potential disruption caused by its own survival mechanism.

While exploitative relations is a pre-capitalist phenomen, long before the invention of commodities and modes of production (Marx, 1894, pp. 424-427), it has been greatly perpetuated and legitimised through loans to the landowner and small business owners to acquire interest. After taking control of economic circulation and accumulating wealth through interest, hoarders started to control the ownership of labor, land, houses, and other properties through acquisitions. Marx (1894) explained that the relations between capital resources and interests, land ownership, and the privatisation of assets correspond to the capitalist mode of production (p. 569). Capital hoarding through the control of assets and economic circulation is a basic principle for capitalist hegemony, which can potentially break down in a structural crisis.

Saussen and Campbell (in Mirowski, 2013) define crisis as the breakdown of financial regulations caused by the logic of capitalism itself. Moore (2016) believes that crises or disasters occur when capitalism begins organising nature, or what he defined as 'capitalocene'. All of them defined crisis as a situation harmful to capitalist relations, caused

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sustenance. In the second category, the writer divides the findings into a few themes to present the platforms' strategy to sustain itself in the pandemic. The writer then draws a relation between both categories, which is how platforms provide space for the citizens' labors of sustenance as their strategy to sustain themselves in the pandemic as well. From this analysis, a causal relation will be drawn between our current condition and further possibilities of platformization in the future. Data sources are sampled from various online media; from online news media to online platforms media, a descriptor of how they create their own discourse. The sources are chosen to represent the range of citizen's various labors of sustenance, and how platforms mediate them.

by capitalism's mode of organisation and regulation.[5] Thus, we can define a crisis as a disaster caused by the inability of capitalism to regulate itself in order to accumulate capital.

The relationship between capitalism and crisis has been explained by Duménil and Lévy (2004), who stated that the law of capitalist evolution involves a structural crisis. They recounted past crises which had contributed to the transformation of capitalism, such as those which happened in 1875-1893 throughout Europe, but especially in France; and the Civil War of the United States in 1865. After those crises, capitalism has experienced drastic changes such as the division between capital ownership and management, transformation of the global financial system, and the growing interest in corporatism. They explained further that the Great Depression and World War II has created a new dimension for capitalists, giving rise to the third way or a mixed economy (Duménil & Lévy, 2004). These changes have indicated that the previous mechanism of capitalism cannot accommodate the crisis it had generated. Srnicek (2017) also found that changing capitalist relations will always generate a crisis which leads to change. The author agrees that a crisis is a consequence of capital accumulation. The mechanisms designed by capitalism lead to missteps, and this demands the perpetual reproduction of new mechanisms able to pull itself out of the crisis.

This is where discussions about the ability of capitalism to divert the crisis it caused become important, as theorists dispute whether reforms signify capitalism's strength or its weakness. Nelson (2020) argued that reform is a part of the weak and frail cycle of social reproduction, while others point out capitalism's potential to enact competition through self-regulation, encouraging capital owners to compete with each other for control of capital relations (Bernanke et al., 2019). Fundamentally, capitalism exists in a constant state of fragility, and their regulations always risk a crisis. But it has, as history dictates, been able to rebound over and over again in order to reaccumulate capital.

5 We can see this clearly in the credit boom phenomenon. Bernanke et al. (2019) stated that financial institutions which continued to develop credit to acquire interest would face an integral credit boom. In other words, the organisation of capitalism gives birth to a dire crisis.

This ability to rebound is associated with the role of the state, or at times the lack of the role of the state, as the main actor that reinforces capitalism. Bernanke et al. (2019), for instance, mentioned the significant role of the state in resolving crises, as 'financial fires' are regularly extinguished by the state in the 20th and 21st centuries.[6] But these types of solutions are given to predominantly the big companies and capital owners. Thus, the key to sustaining dominance in capitalist relations relies on the ability of capital owners to take advantage of the state in their role to solve crises, by granting them asset stimulus in order to sustain control in capital relations.

Sustaining capitalism during a crisis is also achieved through exploiting the crisis. Capitalism is able to absorb social relationships during times of crisis into processes of capital accumulation. Klein (2007) explained that in disaster capitalism, crisis and disaster are utilised to take advantage of the people's fear and struggle to survive, which forces them to accept any kind of help and recovery (p. 8-20). In disaster capitalism, such as military industrialisation during times of war and reconstruction after natural disasters tend to lead to privatisation (Klein, 2007, p. 299). Crisis is administered as a profit source for capitalists. As in the case of the pandemic, gaping inequalities due to neoliberal transformations are exploited to accumulate wealth, both by corporations and governments) (Lee, 2020).

During disasters, wealth is accumulated through commodifying the struggles of the people to survive, or the commodification of subsistence.[7] This is evident as labour turns into the means of production itself

6 Such attempts have been done when the United States experienced a financial shock in 2008, through bailing out big companies and supporting the vital credit market.

7 Workers and labours here have distinctive meanings. Workers are defined as autonomous individuals carrying out various working activities, while labours are individuals within the capitalist relation acting as tools of production and are forced to remain subsistent (see Bernstein, 2010). Bernstein (2010) explains that the commodification of subsistence relies on proletarisation through seizing the assets owned by the laborers to turn the laborers themselves into assets. He gave examples of farmers who, being deprived of their land, experience difficulties to produce autonomously. They are proletarised. The seizures of assets often employ agents of state, such as military officers employed to assist land acquisitions. Harvey (2010) stated that the royal family, military, civilian aristocrats, civilian bureaucrats, and enterprises often execute land acquisitions in both urban and rural settings. This acquisition is a part of capital accumulation. In capitalist relations, the assets of the state can also be seized to support capital accumulation such as public spaces,

to sustain their lives, relinquishing the control of their work to the capitalist class, who exploit their labour and to make labours use their own mode of production. The state is less and less present in capital or property acquisitions, and at times is annexed in wider capitalist relations. Thus, the key to capital accumulation through acquisitions does not lie in the state's power, but in the capitalist's power to retain themselves in an attractive position for every party who can turn in profit for them as well.

Acquisitions of assets supported by capital is increasingly evident during the pandemic. Crisis happens when capitalism is unable to overcome the disruption in capital accumulation, triggered by undistributed wealth and capitalism's dependence on profitable smaller parties (Duménil & Lévy, 2004; Moore, 2016; Mirowski, 2013; Saussen, Campbell in Mirowski, 2013; Srnicek, 2017). In the context of the pandemic, this crisis can rise from the halt in macroeconomics activities, disrupting the progress of capital accumulation. A sustainable capital relation must have the power to preserve this process of accumulation by seizing models of assets in techniques suitable to the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

These conditions determine the way modes of capital accumulation are restructured. Srnicek (2017) stated that capitalism reorganises itself in times of crisis and adapts to the characteristics of the crisis. In this context, the pandemic prohibits physical activities to prevent viral transmissions, and new policies are reinforced to reduce physical activities. This leads to the designing of mechanisms of capital accumulation which does not rely on direct contact, but instead relies on mediation of interaction to develop capitalist relations.

During the pandemic, attempts of restructuration are put into motion to preserve the accumulation of capital. Many economic models and new businesses are developed to take advantage of the crisis itself. The forms of restructurisation in these digital times are designed through platforms (Srnicek, 2017; Parker et al., 2016). Srnicek (2017) defines a platform as a digital infrastructure which functions as a vessel

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which can be commodified in a capital relation in which the state has no full control of.

and medium of interaction between individuals or groups of users to build products, services, and its marketplace. This involves buyers, advertisers, service providers, producers, suppliers, and physical objects to commit economic transactions, or digital commercialisation. To do this, platforms rely on the network effect, and they go far and wide to attract networks and spread the gospel, such as extracting data regarding usage patterns to understand their target market. This extracted data is used as a foundation to market commodities. Once the platforms have calculated the characteristics of their users from the data and are able to offer them to third parties, the users' behaviours become commodities that can generate surplus value.[8]

In capitalism, the changing model of business platforms to connect many actors with the ever-expanding type of services are seen as an innovation.[9] Parker et al. (2016) dubbed platforms as a revolutionary in-

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8 Henry (2021) explains that studies on platforms have started since the 1980s. He pointed out that the platform as a concept began from a vessel of networking for many regional companies, also known as a firm or a multinational company. This concept was developed into Network Intelligence, and in 2003, it was developed as a business model to connect consumer and producer, or what is considered as the market (Rochet and Tirole, 2003 in Henry, 2021). In its development, Harry mentioned the current state of the platform as a digital infrastructure to connect two or more interacting users. He had predicted further possibilities of the platform: A predatory collective intelligence or a collective vessel. Anyone can use the platform for any purpose, depending on the type and orientation of the platform. Srnicek (2017) classifies five types of a platform: Advertising (i.e. commodifying user data for advertisers), cloud (i.e. the lending of digital space for storage or means of production), industrial (i.e. providing soft and hardware for businesses to shift online and lower production costs), product (i.e. lending digital marketplaces for producers and consumers), and lean platform (i.e. outsourcing workers to keep organisations lean, thus lowering production costs and increasing profit).

9 For example, health and wellness platforms would consist of applications to assist exercises, meditation, and medical consultation and purchases; transportation platforms connect users to providers of means of transportations, such as Go-Jek and Grab; digital marketplace platforms mediate economic transactions, such as Tokopedia and Shopee; while donation and charity platforms mediate the process of collecting funds for the purposes of charity, such as kitabisa.com. Sometimes, these platforms would expand the types of their services and grow into a multiplatform. According to Tiwana (2014), one of the characteristics of platforms is an improvement of their distinctive specialty. The writer argues that the distinctive specialty is merely the start of a platform because it will eventually diversify its services. In Indonesia, we can look at e-commerce platforms such as Tokopedia and Shopee. They started as providers of a marketplace for economic transactions between the producers and the consumers, and they have developed into advertising platforms providing space to advertise products to the consumers. Eventually, they even developed into lean platforms, employing partners to deliver shipments. They have also become financial platforms administering lending and installments by themselves or through a third party. This development has also occurred in ride platforms such as Go-Jek and Grab. Both started as transportation providers before offering a variety

novation because it transformed the linear chain value model into a business model which connects the producer and consumer in each end of the pipeline. They cited four reasons why the platform is able to compete against the chain economy model. First, it reduces gatekeepers or the traditional chain of distribution between the producer and the consumer. Second, it creates a new space for value creation and supply. Third, it uses data-based tools to receive feedback from the user community, which will later be reapplied to enhance their experience. At last, it inverts its financial strategy, shifting their focus from the companies' internal management towards external stakeholders and interactions. Therefore, platforms seem to be the most cost-effective capital accumulation model, which can be seen in its architecture.

Platforms' architecture describes every component in a platform and its mechanisms, all the way until the end-user. The relations between each component execute tasks to support profit accumulation, from target market data extraction, data transformation, into market attraction through user interface and experience. Moreover, Fitzpatrick (2018) explained how contemporary modes of technology such as artificial intelligence (AI), big data, and algorithms as computational intelligence are instrumental in this process. The interaction between human and technology are developed by experts in a whole subject known as human-computer interaction (HCI). Kim (2015) defines HCI as an interdisciplinary study of interface and interaction between humans and computers in an abstract and technical model. Love (2005) defines HCI as beyond the limits of desktop computers, but also in a mobile system or application design. In platforms, artificial intelligence helps extract data and display services automatically. The display is created through HCI mechanism to attract users and prolong their screen time, enhance their experience, within the mobile system and beyond it.

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of services: Self-care service through spa and massage, delivery services, personal shopper for food and other daily needs. In their development, they also offer financial services of lending and credit payment. These platforms' tendency to expand their services is based on a classic business strategy, diversification to control a wider and more segmented market. Diversification reflects the main principle of a platform, known as the "red queen effect" or the demand to quickly adapt in order to survive in the market and to compete with other technological solutions.

The combination between HCI and AI accelerates capital accumulation. Cosgrove et al. (2020) explains the problem between artificial intelligence and problematic surveillance in disaster capitalism, especially through mobile applications promoted during the pandemic. Citing newest studies on mental health apps Huckvale, et al., 2019 in Cosgrove et al., 2020). They pointed out that 81% of these apps send their users' data to Facebook and Google for data analytics. 92% of them also send data to a third party outside Facebook and Google. This study corresponds to the findings of Azhar (2020) who discovered that free services provided by these apps are intended to lure users to consume products, enabling app providers to sell users' data to other parties. The gap between free and forced consumption becomes a space to identify profit.

Srnicek (2017) sees the state as the highest authority able to control and solve the problems of platforms in its management, at least to create policies to prevent monopoly, to protect users and partners from being exploited, to protect their privacy, and regulate the platforms' tax. But the neoliberal state is only able to regulate the platforms, a technical solution that neglects the structural and everyday problems in the creation and development of platforms within larger capitalist restructuring.

Platforms are not only associated with big capitalists and the many stakeholders it attracts, but also with public space. Scholz and Schneider (2016) developed a cooperative platform model to be managed by the public as a strategy to take reign in the digital economy. Schneider (2016) elaborated two strategies to survive in such a competitive economy. First, build a cooperative strategy based on solidarity. Second, acquire governmental support in realising these cooperative practices. These two strategies are crucial foundations of a cooperative platform.

Unfortunately, the cooperative platform model remains flawed when facing other platforms better equipped to monopolise and acquire larger resources and networks (Srnicek, 2017), and the state's involvement in developing a democratic, publicly controlled platforms to solve problems of self-exploitation in these platforms are necessary. But this idea has its downfalls, as state power can be put in use to protect the profit and privileges of a few. In other words, cooperative platforms will

not be protected by state power within capitalistic systems. And even more so, in the Indonesian case, the state legitimises the platformisation of the marketplace used by ordinary people to survive the multidimensional health crisis.

MARKETPLACE OF SUBSISTENCE

In this section, the author reflects on platformisation as capitalism's survival strategy to adapt to the global pandemic. Using socially significant platforms in the Indonesian case, the author argues that there is a "market of subsistence"—where the survival skills of ordinary people are being monetised by platforms. To ground this argument, the author presents examples of the role of platforms in the market of subsistence during Indonesia's experience with the pandemic.

Various global reports show that the Indonesian government was slow to respond to COVID-19, and that the pandemic has revealed deep-seated inequalities in the country.[10] While national media report mass-scale rapid test since March 2019 (Sutarsa et al., 2020), a closer look reveals that social groups such as lower classes (Sutarsa et al., 2020), migrant workers (Aminuddin & Pallikadavath, 2020), orphans staying in shelters (Setiawan, 2021), and informal workers (Sutarsa et al., 2020) had poor access to the test due to its cost.

Likewise, there was an underlying panic surrounding essential commodities. Survey of the development of MSMEs throughout the pandemic shows 94.69 percent of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) have experienced sales drop (LIPI Bureau of Legal Cooperation and Public Relations, 2020). There too is a sales decrease by more than 75% are experienced by 47.44% offline/physical sales business, 40.17% online sales businesses, and 39.41% businesses with both online and offline sales method (LIPI Bureau of Legal Cooperation and Public Relations, 2020)

The number of people living under the poverty line have also increased. In September 2019 it decreased to 24.79 percent. In 2020, the

10 Sutarsa et al. (2020) compared the cost of the COVID-19 test in a private hospital to the wage of 74 million informal workers. Tests cost IDR 770,000 (approximately USD 60) to IDR 1,000,000 (approximately USD 85), while informal workers only earn a range of IDR 1,300,000 (approximately USD 100) to IDR 1,500,000 (approximately USD 120) per month.

number increased to 26.42 percent in March 2020 and 27.55 percent in September 2020 (Central Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Indonesia, 2021). In this precarious condition, platforms gain stability as a place for people to seek sustenance and temporary work. In that, they circulate capital to develop its architecture to collect data and attract new users and transactions.

Appropriating Everyday Survival

During the pandemic, platforms utilise digital networks that increasingly became a survival aid for the people who are practicing social distancing and reducing their mobility. They accommodate cross-classes, ranging from the precarious labours, small business owners, to lower-, middle-, and upper-class consumers. At the same time, many platforms attempt to lure the digitalisation of business. Catriana (2021) reported a 2.5 million increase in sellers in Tokopedia. In December 2020, the number of sellers reached 9.9 million, dominated by MSMEs. Tokopedia has also acquired 2,000 new sellers from multiple regions. Likewise, at the beginning of January 2020, the numbers of customers reached 90 million.

Grab (2020) too released a statement that they have accommodated 350,000 MSMEs in their platform. They organised an online bazaar with special promotions, participated by 52,000 merchants of GrabFood, GrabMart, GrabExpress, and GrabKios. They created an ad manager feature for the merchants to directly manage their advertisements. Shopee has done the same with MSMEs, by organising the 4.4 Mega Shopping Day (Darmawan, 2021); a shopping program held on unique dates with the same number for its day and month as a sale day to attract consumers. It is also held to celebrate National Consumer's Rights Day on April 20, and World Consumer's Rights Day on March 15 (Berita Satu, 2021).

These platforms have proliferated into multiplatforms. They include many types of platforms in one app. Tokopedia, Shopee, Go-Jek, and Grab are lean platforms relative to their partners as a third party to accumulate their profit. At the same time, they are product platforms, accommodating sellers to market their product. They have also become advertising platforms by using the users' activity data as targets to advertise the sellers and partners in the platform. The platforms have trans-

formed into a one-stop-market and financial service, where customers can buy virtually anything legal, sellers can sell any kinds of commodity, or what we call a multi-service platform. They also facilitate product delivery through expedition, and payment through digital wallet, credit, and lending.

Asset acquisition is a part of commodification of subsistence. The key to commodification of subsistence does not come from state's enforcement to seize the tool of production, as developed by Bernstein (2010) and Harvey (2010), but from the many services created by the platform according to users' needs. This can be seen from the constant upgrading of the platforms' architecture, specifically by extracting and processing users' data to increase interaction and attract new users through machine learning, User Interface/User Experience (UI/UX) to increase human-computer interaction, and artificial intelligence (AI). These components are built in the platforms to acquire digital network space, which would be rented to the users. Users who utilise the digital space as a marketplace to sell their products must pay rent, either directly or through a profit-sharing system. This will include additional costs to afford special features to increase accessibility and trust from the users, such as the Power Merchant status or Starred Seller. The platform also developed features such as Go Ekspor to accommodate MSMEs to export their products, and a digital training for MSMEs and other local entrepreneurs by Tokopedia Bersama Kominfo (Tokopedia with Ministry of Information) (Burhan, 2020a)

The state, which Bernstein and Harvey considered as the key to land acquisitions, is actually present and instrumental during the acquisition. This can be seen in the training held by Tokopedia and the Ministry of Communication, Information, and Technology (Burhan, 2020a), and the distribution of People's Business Loans (*Kredit Usaha Rakyat*–KUR) through Go-Jek, Grab, Tokopedia, and Shopee platforms (Nurfitriyani, 2021). The relation between the state and people are mediated by digital platforms, legitimising the dependence towards capitalistic digital platforms, even though states are present only on platforms that have succeeded in showing better capital accumulation than other platforms.

Platformisation is catalysed when the pandemic has led to a condition that Nelson (2020) calls a critical pressure to classic capitalists in the production and distribution of individuals and commodities, disrupting the monetary process of debit and credit. Platforms, relying on online network technologies and easily adapting with the demands of the market, take advantage of this moment of crisis; including the state which grows more dependent on the role of these platforms in providing employment and markets. They dominate the market by accommodating many levels of enterprise and workers as partners.

Commodification of subsistence, from the perspective of consumers and business owners especially MSMEs, is evidence of commodification of the people's subsistence during the pandemic. But the commodification was not achieved through acquisition by the state, but through the platforms' ability of appropriating survival practices by different classes in the neoliberal Indonesian society—to a point where platforms have even succeeded to appropriate the state's public programs.

Increasing Surplus Value Through Platform Architecture

Parker et al. (2016) defines platform architecture as programming codes to connect users and increase exchange rate between them, be it exchange of information, goods and services, or currency.[11] Platform architecture reduces complex technological solutions into components which build the platform as a whole (Tiwana, 2014). The main functions of these platforms are run by a programming language and algorithm, especially machine-learning. The algorithm acts as a line of automated instructions which turns input data into output data (Gillespie, 2014; Pasquale 2015 in van Dijck et al., 2018). Machine learning as part of ar-

11 Parker et al. (2016) have explained the main principle of the platform architecture, which is to accommodate transactions of information, goods and services, or currency between users. The transactions are based on three aspects: Participant, value unit, and filter. These aspects are the foundation of platforms. The more complex the platform is built, the more complex the component details of these aspects should be. After mapping the three aspects within the interaction, a platform must have three main functions to increase interactions: (1) to attract users (producers or consumers) to join the platform, (2) to facilitate their interaction through tools and guidelines to ease the process of exchange, and (3) to match them according to information of their digital activity and profile of each group or individuals.

tificial intelligence will extract user data and patterns of use. Sampson (2018) explains that data collection and machine learning are main aspects to recognise consumer behavior, in order to keep them doing more digital activities. Besides that, automated machine learning algorithms assist in making efficient decisions and avoid human error (van Dijck et al., 2018).

To acquire user behavior data, platforms do not solely rely on machine learning and HCI in digital space, but also through direct interaction with potential users in physical spaces. This has been done by Grab's cooperation with the government, Tokopedia's acquisition of physical stores in many regions, and the roadshows organised by Shopee, Tokopedia, Grab, and Go-Jek. The strategies can be applied either to attract participants in physical spaces and nudge them to interact on platforms; or to attract participants who are already digital savvy to interact more deeply in the platform. After all the participants have joined the platforms, they encounter its UI and explore its UX. Both UI and UX is a part of the human-computer interaction, constantly in improvement to increase efficiency and effectiveness, and elongate and increase interactions within the platform.

The combination between HCI and machine learning is supported by the AI's capability to make decisions and match users to incite interactions. Therefore, HCI functions as the net, machine learning functions as the data extractor and mapper, and AI as the decision maker. Its conclusion is then sent back to HCI to serve as a tool to shape the user's experience. This process must be repeated and repaired if the platform aims to dominate the market. Rizal (2019) explained how Tokopedia uses machine learning and AI. Through this technology, they extract consumer trend data and serve it to the sellers as lists of recommendations in a simple, comprehensible dashboard display. Librianty (2020) also explained how AI solves Tokopedia's problems by extracting data to predict consumer demands and orders.

During the pandemic, the invasion of capitalist aspects of human-computer interaction has more intensively conditioned users to depend on its services. The capitalistic bond in every component of the platform is evident in several aspects. First, the constant improvement

of the UI and UX to ease users to browse their e-commerce apps. Platforms would organise their display by creating specific categories for their commodities using discount features like TokopediaNyam, which has been improved multiple times since the beginning of the pandemic. Tokopedia displays a special box, a feature easily recognisable by users. In this box, many kinds of food commodities are organised. The display was featured to highlight a few merchants, which quadrupled over time. There is also a menu specifically displaying pandemic essentials, such as equipment to sanitise the body, objects, and surroundings; face masks; vitamins and supplements; to work from home essentials.

Besides the ease of access in its display and usage, another bait would be the many promotions that reduce the exchange value, both directly and indirectly. This includes short-term discounts, cashback coupons, discounts, to delivery cost discounts. They also put emphasis on special moments such as dates with unique and recognisable numbers. This urges the consumers to make their purchase, and more easily too, since the price displayed is lower. This capitalist relation has been administered in many platforms since before the pandemic and has been accelerated and intensified during the pandemic.

Third, the platforms recreate an actual marketplace. It is evident from the Live menu where the merchants can produce or sell commodities while haggling with the customers. There is also the Story menu, a common feature in most social medias which enables the user to quickly upload their contents; in this case, the commodity to be sold and bought. Fourth, the classification of users based on their ratings and profit. Platform users are classified in many levels based on the numbers of their transactions. The higher the customers' classes, the higher the prestige and material profit acquired by the sellers, such as delivery cost discount, cashbacks, to symbols of promotions and trust endowed by the platform. Customers will have a symbol to signify their class, whether they belong to the class of silver, gold, platinum, or diamond. Merchants are also classified by star codes, Power Merchant labels, to Official Store which affects their range to the customers and the customers' trust. Class differences between the merchants also depend on the sum of capital

shared with the platform; the higher their level, the higher their digital space rent or part of the profit they share.

Besides the fast-access menu, many platforms are gaining users' interaction through additional features such as games, entertainment, and celebrity endorsements. Azhar (2020) explained that free services act as baits to increase commodity sales, which develop a simulation game with shopping coupons or coins as its prize; employing local celebrities or even international ones (for example, South Korean idols) to promote their service. As the promotions vary and hit more target markets, platform usage increases, which in turn will increase the capital accumulation.

The features are widely accepted and work accordingly, because it runs according to the data extracted by the AI, especially machine learning, and displayed through HCI components. This attracts and bonds more users into the capital relation, according to the increase of sellers and monthly active users. Evandio (2021) reported an increase in the number of sellers, resulting in a total of 10 million accounts by January 2021, while the number was still 7.2 million in January 2020. In other words, it has increased by 2.8 million in the span of one year. The monthly active users have also increased from 90 million users in January 2020 to 100 million in January 2021. Therefore, the platform architecture aids capital accumulation.

Accumulation signifies capitalism's ability to rebound and gather profit during a crisis. Capitalistic platforms strengthen the components of their architecture to dominate the digital economy and commodify the people's subsistence. As users grow dependent on the platform, the more difficult it would be for them to resist exploitations, higher fee deductions, and the many risks they bear that come together with capital accumulation. Therefore, the author encourages readers to reflect on the future of the platforms and resist exploitative capital relation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE FUTURE OF PLATFORMS IN THE HANDS OF THE PEOPLE?

This article reexamined how capitalism has adapted to the crisis that followed the global pandemic in the context of Indonesia, by means

of commodifying the subsistence of ordinary people through platformisation. Capitalism restructures its mechanisms of accumulating capital through platforms, with various modes of production and digital commercialisation colour by its technological architecture.

Platforms are able to accomodate differection classes in Indonesian society during the pandemic. It is clear that platforms are slipping away from people's control. The neoliberal state is, at best, permissive, and at worst, reliant on corporations to provide assistance for the people during the pandemic; despite having the authority to regulate an equal relationship between platforms and their users.

Some have offered counter-narratives to escape the trap of capitalistic platformisation (e.g., Bernstein, 2010; Henry, 2021; Scholz, 2016; Srnicek, 2017). Generally, they advocate for the principles of cooperation and collectivity. Bernstein (2010) explains the importance of cooperation and collectivity among peasants to build a shared facility to support their conditions of labour, in terms of forces exerted and time spent. Henry (2021) highlights the importance of collective intelligence to organise a platform aiming for a common objective, and to rise against predatory platforms. Scholz and Schneider (2016) explains the importance of platform cooperatives as a part of a shared economy amidst the capitalist economic regime. Srnicek (2017) points out the importance of public platforms in the future, and suggests the use of automation to relieve the labor conditions in the future (Srnicek & Williams, 2015).

These alternatives are not easy to realise, as it paradoxically necessitates capital to cooperate collectively amidst the control of a few centralised platform economies. As the Indonesian neoliberal state encourages bigger platforms to occupy small businesses, Srnicek's suggestion to create a public-controlled platform becomes harder to imagine.

The first step to overcome this situation is to erase the myth of the capitalocene, or how society must depend on a capitalistic relation to survive, including those in the monopolistic platforms. Next, the initiative to build a public platform must be limited to small scales, preventing risks of self-exploitation. Henry (2021) mentioned that community organising can be the grassroots of collective intelligence, and that it can

accommodate the exchange and production of knowledge. The community also has a role to create and nurture social bonds through communal practices, a spirit which can fuel the creation and development of platforms.

Grassroot communities and platform users can contribute to the distribution of access and the demand to regulate platforms and protect the users' rights, for every consumer, seller, and partner. This, of course, requires a Marxian structural analysis of the regulatory mechanisms that benefit capitalist transformations more than it does the people's self-organisation. To achieve all this, further studies on the future of community and collective platforms in the increasingly monopolistic digital economy must be continued.

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THE NORMALISATION OF PRECARITY IN NEOLIBERAL INDONESIA: LOOKING AT INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Eko Razaki Wirman[1]

ABSTRACT

In Indonesia and around the world, neoliberal restructuring has affected the way work is managed. Likewise, education institutions have become more and more geared toward a student market that wants to ensure employability in the increasingly precarious labour market. This article studies Indonesia, the largest, most populous country in Southeast Asia, where half of the population is under 20 years old; specifically focusing on the link between higher education and the labour market. The paper describes the way university students in Indonesia draw meaning out of internships programs which were designed in response to a volatile labour market. Importantly, students who participate in internship programs are also prone to exploitation, many are overworked and face more uncertainties regarding future employability. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis has amplified and further normalized these practices, with the state's dwindling economic power to provide employment. This article argues that the normalization of precarious work through internships programs—particularly within advertising agency circles in capital city Jakarta—are conditioned through neoliberal subjectivities, justifying self-exploitation with individual autonomy. Foucault's concept of Neoliberal Governmentality is utilized as a major framework in explaining the creation of individual subjectivity under neoliberal influence. Over the course of their internship programs, students have accepted the exploitations they face and further justify them as social investments to boost their skills. Neoliberal subjectivities allow them to generate a feeling of safety in spite of the social reality that

1 The author is a teaching assistant at the Undergraduate Programme, Department of Communication, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Indonesia. He can be contacted at eko.razaki@ui.ac.id.

employment security cannot be guaranteed by neither the markets nor the government.

***Keywords**:* Indonesia, neoliberalism, precarity, neoliberal subjectivity, internship program, the pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

The global COVID-19 pandemic has brought significant changes to Indonesia's labour market conditions. These changes are exemplified by the drastic increase of Indonesia's unemployment rate as a result of massive layoffs coupled with a simultaneous decline of available jobs. Data from the Ministry of National Development Planning (*Badan Pembangunan Nasional*—BAPPENAS) suggests that by the end of 2020, the proportion of unemployed workforce was at its highest within the past decade, reaching up to 9.2 percent (BAPPENAS, 2020). The ratification of Indonesia's Jobs Creation Law in the same year further exacerbates worker precarity (Nastiti, 2020). Aside from undoing existing policies on the types of jobs that are prohibited from employing outsourced workers, the Law also annuls the maximum time labourers are allowed to work on a contractual basis before companies are mandated to offer them permanent employment, thus providing employers greater leeway to fire their workers at will.

One group most affected by these turbulent labour market changes are the younger populace—those between the age of 15 to 34 years old (LPEM FEB UI, 2021). As such, the main focus of this article are university students, who face an even tighter competition for employment after graduating. These students do not only compete with their cohorts, but also the unemployed and recently-fired, whose numbers have kept growing throughout the pandemic. These conditions have urged students to develop strategies to boost their qualifications in order to meet the perceived requirement of the labour market, even when they are still undergoing their studies. One common strategy to increase their odds of getting a decent job is through internship programs (Corrigan, 2015; Siebert & Wilson, 2013). And often, the desire to secure their wellbeing amidst the uncertainties of work availability has conditioned students to accept the exploitative practices they face during internships.

Several studies have attempted to unearth the different motivations that drive university students to participate in internship programs, whilst illustrating the exploitative conditions imposed upon them throughout their experience (Corrigan 2015, IP, 2015). Corrigan (2015), for example, suggests that the motivation of students who apply for internships are driven by the need to boost self-qualifications by honing relevant skills, forging professional connections, and building a public image. Interns feel content with their experience if they find their work "meaningful"—that is, when they are granted the opportunity to be mentored, and gain the trust of their supervisors to directly carry out main tasks of the company they're interning for (Corrigan, 2015). More often, however, interns are burdened with tasks that do not fit the job description of their respective work divisions, or are unrelated to the specific skills they aim to master throughout their programs. These incongruities rob interning students of the desired meaning they expect to find in their work, but they nonetheless tend to accept these extra workload as it is. In other words, they have accepted their own exploitation (Corrigan, 2015).

Ip (2015) discovers that interns justify being overworked as part of the larger learning experience, and perceive themselves as facing a steeper learning curve compared to their employee counterparts who have "already worked". In essence, they value their internship as a chance to learn from actual experience—something that amounts to a logical continuity of their studies, rather than an entirely new strategy to boost competence to achieve their desired careers.

However, these studies from Corrigan (2015) and Ip (2015) have yet to explain the processes that determine and enable the exploitation faced by interns—the same exploitation they have accepted themselves. This "normalizing process" was mentioned by Cockayne (2020) in a case study of interns in digital corporations (such as Google, Facebook, and Microsoft) who studied under a Cooperative Learning method (referred to as "co-op") in University of Waterloo, Canada. The co-op method is a manifestation of neoliberal education that propels students to be mature, readied workers by amassing as many qualifications as possible, including through internships. The study concludes that corporate norms and

culture within institutions have led to the normalization of "overworking culture" among interns.

This article expands the point of how exploitation has become normalized through internship programs. It agrees with Cockayne (2020), who similarly views corporations and educational institutions as a combination of institutional forces that directly contribute to such normalization. However, this article further analyses how the State also plays a role in justifying exploitation of interns. Foucault's concept on Governmentality and Neoliberal Subjectivity—explained in detail below—will be utilised as a framework to unpack the State's involvement. This research argues that the normalization of exploitative practices faced by interns—illustrated by the case of Indonesia's advertising agencies—is conditioned by the formation of individual subjectivity under a neoliberal capitalist climate, and that the State has fostered this climate through numerous interventions in the labour market and educational institutions. Within this order, individuals are conditioned to assume responsibility to build their own self-competence to secure decent jobs, and, as a consequence, are prone to justify the exploitation they experience along the way.

PRECARITY IN NEOLIBERAL INDONESIA

Foucault's concept on Neoliberal Governmentality refers to the mechanisms employed by different parties, such as the State and corporations, to influence subjects to think and act in an autonomous, individualized, and enterprising manner (Türkena, Nafstada, Blakara, & Roena, 2015). This *episteme* dictates subjects to assume full responsibility in navigating their social terrains by employing rational decision-making, epitomized in gauging the cost-effectiveness of their behaviours and actions (Hamann, 2009).

Neoliberal Governmentality regards individuals as assets of capital—in other words, *human capital*—and conditions them to independently expand their private potential to accrue even more profits for the capitalist system. In turn, subjects are inclined to keep on working in spite of the uncertainty, precarity, and instability of their jobs as this is the only way to demonstrate their worth (Türkena, Nafstada, Blakara, &

Roena, 2015). As an effect, Neoliberal Governmentality has manipulated subjectivity as a non-coercive mechanism of social control that reproduces the status quo, as every individual burdens their own fate and failures if they cannot continuously develop their potential.

This line of thinking was successfully entrenched during the transition from Fordism to Post-Fordism. Under the former, labourers are posited to be devoid of autonomy over themselves when it comes to their relation to their work, leaving the managerial class with full control over organizational matters (Ezzy, 1997, p. 429). However, the "meaning" of work has since undergone changes due to the rise of the concept of "worker subjectivity", paving the way for more normative methods of control. Some studies define subjectivity as the central link between the worker, their work, and what is learned through their work (Billett, 2010). Somerville and Fenwick (2006) suggests that this subjectivity constructs an autonomous worker identity, defined by its orientation as an individual that not only works, but also learns by working, *to become a better worker*. In a Fordist-era, the manager simply aims to control work, sidelining other "superfluous" aspects such as creativity and labor identity, whereas Post-Fordist managers attempt instead to manage the subjectivity of their workers—in other words, how they see themselves through their work.

Several shifts surrounding working conditions within the Post-Fordist era—marked by an increase in employment flexibility and the subsequent ease of information exchange that is conducted swiftly on a global scale—has reoriented workers' subjectivity by postulating them to be their own managers, independent from supervision of hitherto Fordist superiors. Such dictum of self-management implies that workers have to independently pursue their own learning in order to survive and compete within an organization (Somerville & Fenwick, 2006).[2]

2 This research aims to analyse how the normalisation of exploitative practices within internships occurs through the formation of a neoliberal subjectivity within interns. This process of subjectification is uncovered by exploring the experiences and perceptions of individuals who have worked as interns in Indonesia's advertising agencies. In-depth interviews are utilised to acquire primary data, which takes the form of semi-structured interviews with nine university students who interned between 2017 to 2020. All informants are similar in their educational backgrounds of studying social sciences, have experienced exploitation during the course of their internship, and

In Indonesia, the expansion of neoliberal ideology and policies is applied in specific ways in the country's different sectors. As such, this article will firstly elaborate the specific historical developments of neoliberalism in Indonesia that have led to present-day ills—how its growing influence within the state affects the precarisation of working conditions, which is exemplified by the structural status or position of interns within the larger labour market. Secondly, this article examines neoliberal influence within the higher education sector as they reduce universities to institutions merely designated to "prepare" its students to weather future work conditions—such as through mandatory internship programs.

Harvey (2007) defines neoliberalism as the political economy doctrine that postulates individual liberty and entrepreneurial skills as monolithic avenues to achieve human welfare. This framework thus espouses strong private ownership, along with free market and free trade, as essential prerequisites for achieving success through the neoliberal system. The role of the state within this scheme is to merely provide institutions that safeguard the smooth functioning of the free market by ensuring the sustainability of the private sector—in other words, to diminish their own influence by withdrawing social security mechanisms such as education or health services (Harvey, 2007). One outcome of this neoliberal expansion is the normalization of uncertain and precarious forms of work, intended to reduce wage expenses and maximize flexibility of employers (Yasih, 2017, p. 35).

Indonesia was initially reluctant to employ laws that cater to more flexible forms of work, especially during the New Order regime that was highly inclined to espouse centralistic and patrimonial labour regulations instead (Yasih, 2017, p. 35). However, the 1997 Asian economic crisis and the fall of the authoritarian regime (1966-1998) compelled Indonesia to implement policies that lead to a more flexible labour market. This crisis had forced then President Soeharto to ratify deals with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other international organizations to receive financial aid in return for adopting policies to promote economic globalization in the country (Hadiz, 2014). One such regulation

conducted their programs in multinationals instead of local advertising agencies.

was to increase the flexibility of work contracts seen as an incentive that would boost investment as it provides leeway for companies to hire and fire workers as needed (Tjandraningsih, 2012). Two decades after this policy shift, the ratification of the Job Creation Bill that coincided with the pandemic-generated economic recession had further exacerbated the regime of work flexibility in Indonesia—promoting the informalization of work within formal sectors by massively retracting worker security, as more workers are employed on a contractual or outsourced basis.

These "flexible" working conditions have in turn generated what is called the precarisation of work. Standing (2011) introduced the term "precariats" to identify what he designates as a newly-emerged category of laborers who are employed under uncertain terms as they face the ever-present threat of work termination. However, some had argued that these conditions are not a particularly new phenomenon to Indonesia (Yosie, 2018), as illustrated by the outsize proportion of workers in the informal sector since the 1970s (Tjandraningsih, 2012). In 1971, informal workers constituted 25 percent of the workforce and have since grown exponentially to 60.47 percent by August 2020 (BPS, 2020). The largest driver of this change has been urbanization: more and more people in the working age have moved to cities to find better-paying jobs than agricultural work in rural areas. Yet without the corresponding education and required skills, these people have been relegated to jobs outside the formal sector (Swadesi and Purwanto, 2017). The lack of employment security within their informal work shares highly similar characteristics with precariat workers (Tjandraningsih, 2012).

Yet this precarisation of work has not only befallen workers in the informal sector—whose proportion within the entire workforce have always been significant—but their counterparts in the formal sector as well, under a process referred to as "informalisation". Even formal workers can count themselves as members of the precariat class as their employment and working conditions are not far different from outsourced or contract workers (Tjandraningsih, 2012; Swadesi dan Purwanto, 2017). Based on the precarious conditions imposed upon them, interning students fit into this category of the precariat class as well.

Aside from their influence in increasing the flexibility of the labour market, neoliberalism has also been internalized in educational institutions (Silalahi dan Aminda, 2018). While the 1997 IMF deal did not contain specific clauses that tinker with the national education system, the growing influence of government technocrats and international donors have made their mark on government policies—in this case—on education ever since (Rosser, 2015). These forces have enabled neoliberal influence to grow periodically over the years in the education sector, as illustrated through several policies such as the autonomy given to educational institutions (universities, polytechnics, and the like) to manage and accrue more resources; increasing competition between universities by corporatizing their management; and promoting accountability of education institutions to ease the process of amassing public funds. In practice, these neoliberal turns have forced educational institutions to increasingly focus on catering to market needs—specifically to produce workers with relevant qualifications (Silalahi dan Aminda, 2018), where mandated internships to fulfil academic credit is one facet of their economic function.

GOVERNING FLEXIBILITY THROUGH INTERNSHIPS

The sector discussed in this paper is the cultural industry that produces intangible, non-manufactured goods, with a focus on the advertising industry. The workers in this industry are categorized as immaterial labourers, along with workers in the service, cultural, knowledge, and communication sectors (Hardt and Negri in Lee, 2013, p. 6). Advertising agencies, as a simplified definition, assume the specific function of producing symbolic products intended to persuade the public, but their workers, including the interns, have been similarly subject to the precarisation of work as other immaterial labourers. Their industries tend to require flexible working hours (Alvesson, 1998; Ladner, 2008; Kerr and Proud, 2005), and advertising agencies often have a fast-paced, flexibility-demanding working climate in line with the neoliberal framework of their field, as highly specific and organized operational methods pose the risk of being incompatible with different types of market they can tap into globally (Grein and Ducoffee, 2015, p. 308).

Advertising workers are often required to tend to company matters outside of formal working hours, where they would work overtime through online communication channels after returning home. Effectively, this implies they work far longer than labour regulations allow (Ladner, 2008; Ladner, 2009). Agency workers who work beyond their official hours often do not receive overtime fees, and at times can only obtain them through negotiations. Within this mechanism, workers are designated as "human capital" that were simply "allocated" to "specific projects" (Ladner, 2009).

These sets of precarious conditions also apply to Indonesian advertising agency workers, who constantly face the risk imposed on their physical and mental health. In some cases, this exploitation has resulted in fatal outcomes. In 2013, 30-year-old copywriter[3] Mita Diran employed by the multinational agency Y&R passed away after working for 30 hours non-stop without sleep and with irregular eating patterns (Dhani, 2017). These long daily working hours and immense workload are generated by the business strategies employed by advertising agencies, whose main source of income is directly tied to the number of clients that hire them. Earning a client's trust entails fierce competition with other agencies by pitching business ideas with unpredictable outcomes as they solely lie on the client's personal predilections, while the "creativity" of agency workers are nearly impossible to quantify (Alvesson, 1998). Moreover, the largest control over the ensuing workload is also held by the clients who tend to not include clauses designed to ensure agency workers' wellbeing in their contracts. This allows clients to freely contact them and request additional work at any time—even outside official working hours within the agency itself.

Informants in this paper interpret their internship experience in specific ways. Yet, the lens of neoliberal subjectivity understands these particular, shared experiences and understanding of work as shaped by common structural factors. Interns, who throughout the course of their programs are still enlisted as students, mainly identify themselves as future employees. Two main considerations that prompt them to undergo internships is what they perceive as a high barrier to entry within a

3 Responsible for writing scripts/texts (copies) to promote a product or service.

competitive labour market, and to rehearse their future predicament so that they will acquire "staying power" once finally working under precarious conditions. One of our informants, DP, shares their anxiety on this subject:

> "Insecure because everyone is aware of that condition, the market is becoming more—employment is getting more competitive, more creative. (...) In a nutshell, more advanced. And so I realize other people are aware of this, try to enrich [their qualities], to fulfil the requirement, so that they can fit within those employment conditions. I also see that people have entered competitions, or done internships at a young age, like that" (DP, personal interview, 11 April 2019).

Within this understanding, the value of internship programs are thought to increase as working conditions become even more difficult as well, as they train students to adapt with future precarisation. In other words, so that they are able to feel secure within conditions that actually generate insecurity. Such sense of security corresponds with how Foucault sees the neoliberal subjectivity to glorify the autonomous, free individual, even if they are actually still subject to a multitude of structural oppressions[4] (Foucault in Ezzy, 1997; Türkena, Nafstada, Blakara & Roena, 2015).

As the structural forces of neoliberalism generate social and economic uncertainty, including the availability of jobs within the labour market (Standing, 2011), the COVID-19 crisis exacerbated this condition by not only driving unemployment and cutting off job openings, but also by limiting the availability of internship programs. Even if internships remain popular and encouraged by universities, the chances of acquiring them have also been diminished throughout the pandemic. One of our informants, MP, expressed their restlessness as a final year student who had yet to be accepted in an internship program even if their university never mandated it. Through their friends' stories, MP fully understands the possibility of having a bad internship experience, such as lack of remuneration, long working hours, and heavy workload—but

4 The different external factors influenced by neoliberalism as an ideology, economic system, and methods of governance.

nonetheless still sees it to be beneficial as it provides them a further sense of certainty, especially during a pandemic crisis.

> “According to my friends, the risk of internships involves being mentally exhausted. They keep saying “I can’t do this.” One of my friends even had to go through therapy. The pressure is enormous. They even WFO-ed [work from office], staying there until early morning, told to write copies. (...) I see these as the obvious risks of interning, but they will certainly be paid in return by the knowledge you acquire, the skills” (MP, personal interview, 22 May 2021).

Thus, MP claims to feel more secure in being an exploited intern rather than a student with no prior internships, as they lack the crucial learning experience that is only attainable through such programs. Similarly, other informants also refer to first-hand work experience and learning opportunities as their main motivations for interning, which they perceive will ease their way to achieve ideal future careers by increasing personal qualifications. Many allocate their free time between academic semesters to achieve their personal goal of increasing self-competence. RH, for example, perceives their interning experience as an asset for future career stability:

> “I see interning as... What should I call it? Well, the experience from an internship can be my [secret] weapon once I’ve graduated. So during every holiday, during the semester gap, I always set the target of either interning or at least taking freelance jobs (RH, personal interview, 15 April 2019)”.

The choice to intern in advertising agencies, however, might unconsciously reflect our informants’ career trajectory. Agencies have always had a sinister reputation for their unforgiving workload, but they see this burden as the ideal method to forge themselves to fit in a competitive working climate—even if they never planned to have a long-term career in advertising. Knowing very well the precarious aspects of working in the advertising sector, some deem the in-house agencies of e-commerce companies to startups as better avenues to a well-paid job. Some informants would argue that entrepreneurship is the penultimate solution to all sorts of exploitation workers face, while acknowledging

that demands towards agencies are slowly declining. Nonetheless, they also tend to see that interning in advertising agencies, especially in multinational ones, provide them with an edge in the labour market simply due to the company's established reputation.

Many respondents correlate their desire for a learning opportunity via internship with the disenchantment of the formal education they receive in university, which is deemed as inadequate to provide them with the necessary tools to compete for ideal jobs. In this sense, some have even assumed that private universities can actually accommodate them with more relevant qualifications in line with industry needs.

> "I compare myself to my friends who study in Binus [Bina Nusantara University, privately-owned], because they actually create campaigns for college assignments and are also mandated to find internships. Even if they don't get paid, they still in some sense enjoy the benefits because they get to pass their class and get grades. I don't get that here [in public university]" (NH, personal interview, 8 April 2019).

Informants also complain that universities have failed to facilitate them with the right experiences to boost their qualifications. KL, for example, had hopes to directly observe the activities of a production house studio that produces visual content for advertisements:

> "In agencies, you can directly see the production process, such as in a production house studio. (...) This is something I never had throughout college as this is more professional, more is at stake. If you fail to do something during actual production, the consequences are far greater than campus [assignments]" (KL, personal interview, 23 October 2020).

In other words, they see the field practice during internships as more essential compared to often theoretical and conceptual studies in university. This view is similarly espoused by SR, an intern in a multinational agency:

> "My bachelor's education is more theoretical. Hmm... We do have practical courses, but in my view they can still be far more optimized. I don't know. We're not a vocational degree,

> but it does feel like that, if you want practical stuff, just go find an internship, we're just here to provide you with the theoretical aspects" (SR, personal interview, 27 April 2019).

These subjectivities are manifestations of self-neoliberalization to respond to a competitive labour market along with the withdrawal of social welfare policies by the government, leaving individuals to assume responsibility for their "survivability" by applying a self-enterprising mentality (Türkena, Nafstada, Blakara, and Roena, 2015). As the function of educational institutions have also been reduced to that of "producing workers", the absence of more practical courses are easily dismissed as an obvious shortcoming of the education system itself. Such attitudes are a reflection of Indonesia's neoliberal education, which has been engendered by the forces who formulate pro-neoliberal education policies—technocrats, international donors, and private foundations (Rosser, 2015).

In some cases, interns might even self-exploit by taking initiative, thus self-aware when putting themselves in a more uncomfortable situation. This is prompted by our informants' assumption that the most concrete form of learning is through experience, while also preferring to take on important work during their internship that provides them with a sense of achievement. But some simply dislike having too much idle time on their hands. The self-exploiting character of this behavior is evident when interns take on extra work without the guarantee of an incentive, either financial or otherwise, while knowing their overtime might turn out as higher profits for the company; some have justified their actions as an attempt to maintain or foster a reputation for themselves.

These behaviours of self-exploitation are the byproducts of the ambiguity that comes with their work, as informants have complained of doing a lot of menial jobs with no relevance to the division they were stationed in. Such ambiguity is also fostered by the inability of our informants to properly gauge how effectively their internship experiences directly contribute to their "learning" process. On one hand, they have rationalized that the sum of what they learn is to substitute the financial compensation of their work—an equivalent to their contribution to

the advertising agency for whom they are interning. There are no clear guidelines, however, that would ensure that interns receive the adequate skill boost, or increase their competence to a desired degree. Either unconsciously or otherwise, these ambiguities have compelled our informants to believe that taking initiative to do extra work is the main way to ensure they acquire enough "experience" in return. Furthermore, these uncertainty-filled scenarios could also amplify their restlessness regarding the sum of benefits they acquire throughout the internship program as their workload keeps piling up.

Likewise, self-exploitation, in essence, are attempts to maximize learning potential throughout an internship. Yet the precarisation of work means that interns are not guaranteed to receive an experience that lives up to their expectations—either in the sense of having a fruitful learning experience, or securing their positions in the future labor market. KL, for example, had the prior expectation of being directly involved in the production process of visual content in a production house studio. Unfortunately, only workers with significant credentials are allowed to enter the studio during the pandemic, and there is nothing they can do to turn the situation around. Moreover, throughout the COVID-19 crisis, most employees are forced to work from home, depriving interns of hope to get their hands on more practical matters.

Interns that do not exert control over their working conditions can only spring into action per their superior orders—and these often come by surprise, with vague instructions, and need to be tended to immediately. It is not uncommon for these orders to be received at night, way past working hours. Even if their internship contracts provide clauses for official working hours, interns feel the pressure to stay alert for the possibility that surprise assignments may come throughout the entire day. Paradoxically, these exploitative conditions actually compel the interns to ask for more challenging work on their own volition. Based on interviews, companies do not provide background training for interns to gain prior understanding of what they are going to face so they are able to manage their expectations. KL, again, had volunteered themselves to be involved in pitching a project despite knowing very well the risk of

overtime and stress, as it is only through these stressful situations that they feel able to fully grasp the meaning of their internship experience.

Despite all this, there is no assurance that internships will result in job security after graduation. The only thing that seems to have changed after the program has concluded is the interns' personal subjectivity—that their experiences of exploitation have elevated them to become more qualified and competent individuals. The normalization of work precarity through internships has also affected how workers view their autonomous subjectivity in regard to their own fate. Informants disclosed that the one thing they have tried to maintain throughout the internship program is their public image—constantly attempting to project a "good impression" with coworkers and superiors in their own agencies, whom they perceive to exert a degree of control regarding their future career stability. This perception of control also defines the expectation of their internship: a more senior colleague can "open up" access through their connections or provide better working opportunities, yet poor performance can tarnish their reputation throughout their superior's networks. In short, interns have assumed the role of governing their own boundaries—even without the existence of specific rules that regulate their behaviour for the sake of their own image. Although the neoliberal climate might seem to provide freedom for interns to navigate and make their own decisions, in reality they are still mired in and oppressed by structural forces (Foucault in Türkena, Nafstada, Blakara, and Roena, 2015).

CONCLUDING REMARKS: EXPLOITATION AS SELF-GOVERNANCE

This article aimed to explore how the formation of neoliberal subjectivity within intern workers have led them to normalize the exploitation they faced throughout their internship programs, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The author established this argument by firstly elaborating Indonesia's larger socio-historical context—namely how neoliberalism, during the last several decades, has continuously undermined the country's social welfare policies such as worker protection and affirmative rights, leading to a widespread ailment of precarity. Neoliberal influences have also permeated the labor market and edu-

cational institutions, reducing both to mechanisms that simply cater to market needs.

The concept of neoliberal governmentality coined by Michel Foucault holds that the government's partiality to market interests has rendered its subjects to become individualized and deemed responsible for their own well-being—in other words, to govern themselves. Subjectivity formation under a neoliberal climate is eventually realized by the glorification of self-entrepreneurism, where individuals would compete for self-development to survive within the neoliberal system. This line of thinking is manifested, among others, in internship programs for students to secure their positions in the labour market after graduating. In turn, the precarious nature of internships are normalized via the creation of neoliberal subjectivities as a habitual sequence within labor market neoliberalism. This article elaborates how such subjectivities are engendered—and the roles they play—through our informants' reflections of their internship experience.

Firstly, our informants reflected on what they define as a "sense of security within insecure conditions". Entering the precarious labour market is an intimidating experience that nonetheless awaits them in the future—and internship programs are seen as an opportunity to forge themselves so as to "fit the requirements". In turn, this logic prompts interns to only appreciate their internship experience by undergoing harsh working conditions. Some informants even claim that the notoriety of advertising agencies as having an unforgiving working climate actually motivates them to apply there. This is even after knowing very well the precarious situations they are going to end up in—such as low remuneration, long overtimes, and heavy workload—actually amounts to exploitation. These insecure conditions, in turn, are justified as an accurate representation of how the world actually works, and therefore seen as an opportunity for self-development—although most informants see agencies only as a stepping stone rather than a fixed career trajectory.

These reflections overlap with our informants' need for an ideal educational institution— in this case universities—that would accommodate them with relevant skills to compete in the industry. Informants perceive their academic studies and future work as two disjointed

realms with little sense of continuity between each other, while internships enable them to rehearse before facing the "real world" of work. Interns expect to receive experience, learning, and connection throughout their program—which fits with the trajectory of an education system infused with neoliberal values, namely to provide institutions to produce workers.

Secondly, the experience of self-exploitation, which stems from companies disregarding the expectation of interns to boost their skills, leaving them to ensure the quality of their own "learning experience", amounts to an investment for their future career stability. To resolve this ambiguous notion, interns would often take the initiative of asking their superiors to be included in more difficult and taxing work, as putting themselves in stressful situations is seen as part of overcoming the learning curve.

Interns thoroughly accept the precarious conditions imposed upon them, which is affected by the limited autonomy they actually possess regarding their own professional outlook. Both superiors and colleagues are perceived to assume control over their opportunities in securing their position within the labour market, such as by giving recommendations or peer reviews

In turn, these beliefs rob interns of any potential for expressing dissent towards their seniors in the workplace, such as demanding a working experience that would satisfy their expectations of growth, or even insisting on their basic labour rights such as remuneration or reasonable working hours. These docile behaviors arise from their anxieties of being unable to secure themselves in a highly competitive labour market—thus forcing them to exert control over themselves by forging an entrepreneurial subjectivity through continuous self-development, even at the cost of being exploited.

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CAPITALIST TRANSFORMATION IN INDONESIA: THE CONVERGENCE OF NEOLIBERAL AND OLIGARCHIC INTEREST DURING THE PANDEMIC

Deda R. Rainditya[1]

ABSTRACT

In various crises of the 21st century, capitalism has succeeded to self-sustain through inventing ways to control the accumulation of wealth. No crisis has had such a devastating impact as does COVID-19 on countries all over the world in contemporary history. This crisis has also triggered transformations of prevailing neoliberal operations in different parts of the world. By taking Indonesia as a case to discuss specific capitalist transformations, the author discusses studies focusing on the oligarchy thesis, or the system of power relations that facilitates the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few and its defense. The author explores and questions the pessimistic views towards the neoliberal regulatory state. The oligarchy thesis posits that domestic capitalist interest marginalises the neoliberal capitalist agenda. However, the state responses towards the global pandemic in Indonesia show that the interests of domestic and neoliberal capitalists actually converge yet in a contradictory way. The author demonstrates the latter through various contradictory directions taken by the central and local governments' political decisions and responses to the pandemic. Significantly, the Indonesian government—using neoliberal instruments from global capitalism—produced financial policies that open loan facilities sourced from multinational banks to alleviate economic pressures during the pandemic. At the same time, the government's policies have also facilitated oligarchic interests to defend their hold over the nation's capital. These cases show that neoliberal and oligarchic interests have converged under intense pressure caused by the pandemic.

1 The author is research assistant at the Department of Political Science, Airlangga University, Indonesia. He can be contacted at deda.rainditya@gmail.com.

***Keywords**:* Indonesia, capitalism, oligarchy thesis, neoliberalism, pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

Since the first confirmed death of a COVID-19 patient in China on January 11, 2020, and the ensuing pandemic status declared by WHO on March 12, 2020 (WHO, 2020), governments around the world took steps to control the spread of COVID-19. Countries put in place restrictions to public and physical activities with varying degrees of success in containing the danger, but all resulting in economic contractions. In April 2020, the global economy contracted by -4.9 percent. In advanced economies (i.e. USA, European Area, Japan, UK, and Canada), economic growth dropped by -3.5 percent with Japan being the lowest at -11.4 percent in Q2 2020 (IMF, 2020). Meanwhile, countries in Emerging and Developing Asia (i.e. China, India, & ASEAN-5)[2] showed an average of 2.4% growth thanks to China's growth of 2.4%,[3] India's 4.4%, and ASEAN-5's growth of 0.2% (World Bank, 2020, p.7).

In Southeast Asia's largest economy, Indonesia, the pandemic too has impacted political economic conditions. Indonesia's economy in Q3 2020 contracted by 3.49 percent compared to Q3 2019 (BPS, 2021), a long fall from Q3 2019 growth of 5.01 percent. The growth in household consumption towards GDP also saw a 4.05 percent contraction in Q3 2020, compared to 5.01 percent growth in Q3 2019 (BPS, 2021). This, inevitably, has led to an increase in poverty. There were 27.55 million poor people in September 2020, an increase of 1.13 million compared to March 2020, and an increase of 2.76 million people compared to September 2019 (BPS, 2021).

At the same time, the pandemic exposed new configurations within the capitalist system from which the oligarchic political and economic interests are benefiting. The author discusses this further in two cases.

2 According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations-5 (ASEAN-5) comprises five ASEAN countries with the biggest economies in Southeast Asia, consisting of Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

3 Significantly, infrastructural programs such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China, through their construction banks, had funded ASEAN countries since 2018. Indonesia is the top recipient with US$ 171,11 million, followed by Vietnam with US$ 151.68 million, and Cambodia with US$ 103.93 million (ICBC, 2018).

Firstly, the author argues that such domestic capitalist interests can be seen in the political decisions made by the elite in response to the pandemic. Reports have shown that the Indonesian government was slow to respond to contain the virus spread, producing incoherent, even contradictory policies. Infamously, in February 2020, while neighboring countries were registering a spike in cases, the government insisted that Indonesia was still Covid-19 free, even offering discounts for domestic tourist destinations. In March 2020, while public health experts and epidemiologists called for a strict lockdown, putting into effect the Regional Quarantine Law that also mandated social assistance to those most impacted, the government opted for a looser "Large-scale Social Restrictions" (*Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar*—PSBB) policy that did little to contain the damage. The fragmented response also exposed tensions between political elites at different levels of government and a state that had no capacity and was utterly unprepared to manage a crisis of this magnitude.

Secondly, the article examines the ratification of the Job Creation Law (*Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*) which was rushed through a chaotic legislation process under the guise of economic recovery. This law aimed to create the enabling conditions to mobilise capital and expand markets, among others, through increased labour flexibility. The World Bank, while initially expressing concerns about the lack of social and environmental safeguards in the law, ultimately issued a statement in praise of the law as an important reform, asserting that it would make Indonesia more competitive and support its long-term economic growth (World Bank, 2020).

As such, this paper aims to explain how neoliberal capitalism has adapted to the social disruptions brought about by the pandemic in Indonesia. The author does this by drawing a link between central and local elites' responses towards COVID-19 using the oligarchy thesis, and connecting this with neoliberal instruments used by political elites to secure their position amid their power struggles.[4] This paper concludes by

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4 This article is based on literature study with emphasis on document assessment, statistical records, and economic data released by official institutions using critical approaches. Critical investigation is the meta-process of investigation that questions the values of mainstream assumption and challenges conventional understandings of social

offering alternative views that could contribute to discussions regarding processes of democratisation and decentralisation in times when oligarchic interests have converged with neoliberal reorganisations of socio-economic structures in Indonesia.

OLIGARCHIC RELATIONS AS A SOCIAL ANALYSIS

The oligarchy thesis speaks of an elite minority class with access to the means of production dominating the structure of political life (Robison and Hadiz, 2004), and the ensuing relationships to defend this dominance is called oligarchic relations. This thesis is an important tool for analysis as their role in the ever-growing configuration of social relations in Indonesia is increasingly central in discussions regarding Indonesia's capitalist transformations.

Several important premises from the oligarchy thesis are discussed in this article. Firstly, Robison and Hadiz emphasised that international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and other proponents of development heavily influenced the neoliberal transformation of Indonesia's governance. This Era of Neoliberalism marks the installment of the country's democratic structure characterised by market systems where political economic life and state institutions are integrated into global markets. Robison and Hadiz's oligarchy thesis assert that neoliberalism was hijacked by established oligarchic relations. This was done by taking advantage of post-authoritarian democratic institutions as new means to accumulate capital, such as through electoral processes. Secondly, Robison and Hadiz (2004; 2013) defined oligarchy as a system of power relations which allowed for the concentration of wealth and authority as a collective defense. Oligarchic relations are products of wealth accumulation that were able to influence—

structures. With this method, researchers are able to manage false consciousness in a studied phenomenon. This paper discusses the neoliberal market agenda within mainstream debates pertaining to the issuing of state policies and its social relations. The paper begins with three premises. Firstly, ideas are mediated by the power relations between the state/ruling classes and the public. Secondly, the ruling classes employ coercive power over lower classes. Thirdly, social facts produced within such a social structure are always attached to the interest of the ruling classes (Gray, 2004, p.23-27). By taking advantage of critical investigation, this research aims to reach a complex and multidimensional understanding about the connection between national politico-economic structure and the responses of local authorities, specifically by looking at the strategic policies passed during the pandemic. This is done to understand unique capitalist patterns in Indonesia during the health crisis.

even control—public institutions and state authorities (Robison and Hadiz, 2013, p. 37-38).

Since the mid-1960s, then President Soeharto and his authoritarian regime (1966-1998) managed to put the state as the main actor in a series of corporate-oriented new politico-economic formats. This was achieved by building internal relations—state institutions—and forming outward politico-business relations with out-of-state economic powers and conglomerate coalitions. Soeharto and his supporters agreed that any opposition to such relations would be deemed "enemies of development". The growing power of Soeharto came with the principle of organic authority-meets-state corporations that was established or nationalised during the Soekarno regime (1945-1965), and became the hallmark of the authoritarian New Order regime (Hadiz, 2005, p. 121). State officials not only forced their authority through coercive means and a series of state bureaucratic powers, but also through primary mass organisations and the ruling party, Golkar, as well as its associated organisations (Robison, 2009).

Responding to Robison and Hadiz's oligarchy thesis, Suwandi proposed an explanation of global-scale monopoly in contemporary history (Suwandi, 2020). This method evolved into monopolies where economic power is concentrated in the hands of multinational corporations (Suwandi 2020, p. 141-142), questioning the position of the domestic oligarchy within the relationship between global and local capital. Another response questions the ability of conglomerates to reorganise power through political instruments (Widoyoko, 2020). This response views state-owned companies as no longer an instrument for the oligarchy and/or conglomerates, as interests within state enterprise too have become intensively fragmented after decentralisation..[5] Widoyoko under-

5 The oligarchy's acceptance of the neoliberal market agenda can be traced historically in the evolution of Indonesia's capitalism, specifically the strong role of the state in these processes since the 1960s. The state's growing control over economic life can be seen to have begun during the Economic Declaration (*Deklarasi Ekonomi*--DEKON) in1962. Since then, state coordination in economic development involved seizing control of the means of mass production (Assistanceit, 1963); in the name of the people's interest. This set the stage for increased state control over economic life. The state had a legitimate role in ensuring national interest and to achieve larger social goals (Hadiz, 2005, p. 116). Then president Soekarno's pragmatic coalition comprising of factions within the military, the Indonesian Communist Party (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*—PKI), and small Muslim bourgeois circle were unfavourable towards the state's economic-politic. Indeed, the

lines thus state through state-owned companies accommodate the capital and state capitalism convergence, market agenda through capital inflow furthermore the same oligarchic relations.

Since the late 1970s, though, the authoritarian regime's economic model has been reconstructed through several investment streams and foreign loans. These became the main elements in Soeharto's governmental consolidation and state capitalism during that time. Moreover, the state's claim of "economic development" was further legitimised by technocrats and expert coalitions, affirming the state's capitalist agenda. Additionally, growing ethnic Chinese-Indonesian conglomerates also solidified this politico-business coalition, at least during the early stage of Soeharto's regime in late 1970s.

Massive neoliberal restructuring occurred throughout the 1980s, and as Indonesia's capitalist system became more integrated in global markets, the more vulnerable it became to external shocks. In 1997, the Asian financial crisis ultimately contributed to the fall of the Soeharto regime, which was followed by a series of mass protests. Robison and Hadiz expanded the oligarchy thesis by discussing the ways they reorganised in times of markets (2004). They stated that oligarchic coalitions and political elites had to reconsolidate and adjust to the process of democratisation. This involved power distribution through the decentralisation agenda from the central state to local elites. Practically, local power, including through state-owned corporations, was consolidated through capital accumulation at a local level (Robison & Hadiz, 2004).[6]

Faris Al-Fadhat (2020) asserted that the new capitalist class' transformation in Indonesia, and Southeast Asia, involved a substantial shift

1960s crisis, indicated by 600% hyperinflation and the collapse of the agriculture-based export sector inherited from the colonial government, led to socio-political instability. Civic struggles and occupations between landowner bourgeoisie and PKI as well as its affiliates enhanced the national crisis. Then General Soeharto was in the strategic position to gain control and in defense of security and stability, tore down PKI through a series of organised killings, internment, and cleansing policies. His regime stopped the struggles, which marked the next round of new economic consolidation.

6 Popular arguments about Indonesian politico-economic growth in the 1980s was stated by Kunio Yoshihara (1988), who also explained capitalist developments in South-East Asian countries. Yoshihara illustrated that oil-based capitalism was a fusion between regime-related local entrepreneurs and foreign capital. Moreover, Yoshihara explained the Japanese Capital fund through manufacturing industry which became Indonesia's top industry in the 1980s.

from national-oriented bourgeois consolidation (i.e. prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s) to international-oriented bourgeois factions. This is notable in the advancement of multinational companies in neoliberal Indonesia (Al-Fadhat, 2020, p.192). Al-Fadhat emphasised that Asia's crisis allowed the state to perform transnational expansion. These reveal the capabilities and flexibility of the neoliberal order to adapt with politico-economic structural conditions in which capitalism operates (Springer, 2017, p.29-30).

CAPITAL AND CONSUMPTION

Capital expansion, through international monetary organisations and development banks, is one of the main characteristics of neoliberal operation. The author refers to the work of neo-Marxist geographer David Harvey (2005) to explain forms of capital expansion through penetration. Harvey saw the accumulation by dispossession as a principle of contemporary capitalism. There are two models related to how capitalism works according to Harvey (2003; 2020).

Firstly, the circulation and accumulation of capital show internal contradictions in differing moments of production, realisation (consumption) and distribution, as well as reinvestment. Harvey saw this as the spiral of expansion and endless growth. Harvey opens up a room for discussion for the Spatial Temporary Fix—the beginning of accumulation by dispossession (i.e. state and capitalistic anticipation in creating monopolies) that utilises space as an exit route in facing the crisis of consumption—particularly so during the pandemic. Harvey too emphasises that market ideology, consumerism, was at an all-time low due to the health crisis (Harvey 2020, p. 54).

The second model works through merging human necessities and realising it by combining institutions, organisations, or ideology (Harvey, 2020, p.74-75). For Harvey, the pandemic disrupted the flow of capital leading to devaluation and economic crisis. Economic crisis happens when there is not enough effective demand during the pandemic to realise values. But such devaluation did not occur in Indonesia, as the state holds a central role in responding to crises with a history of bailouts during decades of state developmentalism under the New Order.

The Indonesian government has been receiving loans since roughly the 1970s Oil Boom, together with loans from a multinational consortium called the Inter-Governmental Group on Indonesia (IGGI).[7] The Indonesian government's relationship with IGGI goes back to their bailout for the internal crisis of state oil and gas enterprise Pertamina in 1976, when it was at risk of defaulting on a USD 40 million payment for short-term loan to The Republic National Bank of Dallas. The total debt ballooned to US$ 3.1 billion in 1985. Importantly, the government took over Pertamina's payment to salvage the state-owned company by applying for a USD 1.4 billion low-interest soft loan (Wie, Thee Kian 2004, p. 62). Post-Oil Boom, the Indonesian Government developed the non-oil and gas manufacture industry and deregulated economic policy following the World Bank's suggestion that Indonesia's domestic industrialisation process was protectionist with an anti-export bias that resulted in inefficiencies, making the sector uncompetitive.

During the pandemic, such a dynamic is observed in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank's (AIIB) capital injection of USD 1 billion as a rescue agenda through consumption stimulus. This partnership between international organisations supports the neoliberal market agenda, as people are encouraged to consume even more during a crisis. This too can be seen in other state policies that focus on economic recovery. The Ministry of Finance received a loan facility through development partners such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF), and AIIB (Ministry of Finance, 2020).

These loans are intended to mitigate the impact of social restrictions and public health policies imposed during the pandemic, which significantly halted economic activities. President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, through the regulation concerning State Financial Policy and Financial System Stability for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Handling and/or to Addressing Threats to National Economy and/or Financial Sys-

7 IGGI is a consortium of international assistance institutions (World Bank and ADB) and donor countries such as Netherlands, Japan, and USA to provide adequate coordinated assistance for Indonesia to solve stability and economic rehabilitation problems post-1965 – 1970.

tem Stability, allowed the government to take extraordinary measures to mitigate the pandemic's economic impact. These include a relaxation of the fiscal deficit to exceed 3% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) until 2022.

Likewise, AIIB approved a loan to the Indonesian government in May and June 2020 worth USD 1 billion, which consisted of two schemes. In the first scheme, USD 750 million was disbursed together with ADB to be used as a stimulus for the national economy. The second scheme, funded together with the World Bank, was worth USD 250 million. This scheme focuses on prevention, COVID-19 treatment, and health facilities (AIIB, 2020; World Bank, 2020). The Indonesian Government too proposed extra funding, on top of the funding given to the government's Hopeful Family Program (*Program Keluarga Harapan*—PKH), as well as other social assistance programs (World Bank, 2020). This USD 400 million program received through loan schemes increased the number of beneficiaries from 6 millions to 10 millions households. This suggests a contradiction, that in its attempt to extend basic services and social assistance to people impacted by the pandemic, the government's monetary policy has actually expanded the neoliberal market agenda.

Globally, 70-80% of today's market economy today is linked with consumerism (Harvey, 2020). Likewise, during the pandemic, the Indonesian government's fiscal efforts to maintain consumption (spending) have implications on the national economic growth rates in late 2020. A release from Statistics Indonesia showed a slowdown in GDP decline from -5.32% to -3.49% in late 2020. Likewise, the government was able to induce positive growth because of social assistance. Among the middle classes, there was an increase in purchasing as the middle classes saved more. Notably, the middle-class consumption component in the same quarter was dominated by recreational purchases as many of them were able to work from home (LPS, 2020), such as consumption specifically tied to decorative plants and cycling hobbies that emerged among the urban middle-class during the pandemic (Basri, 2020). Among the lower classes, the PKH program provided assistance to 15.2 million households (Ministry of Finance, 2020), which later also included additional grocery spending and electrical bill subsidy. The author sees these as-

sistance as part and parcel of the neoliberal market agenda, as the lower classes are supported to continue consuming during the pandemic.

A critical review of consumption behaviour must be seen in light of the state providing stimulus to the lower classes. Brown (2015) proposed that citizens, which she calls Human Capital, bring and pull investors, providing additional values to neoliberalism and the state (Brown, 2015, p. 24). The author uses this view and links it with middle-class consumption as part of the state's economic crisis recovery. Government stimulus since March 2020 indicates how citizens are instruments that drive consumption, and would—through programmatic assistance programmes—become an independent economic group that supports market capitalism. Mudhoffir and Hadiz (2021) perceives that pandemic has shown class inequality, as seen from the lower-class social security. Beside the consumption-based social assistance, "gotong royong" narration dominates the mechanism of lower-middle class continuity by relying on the voluntary social communities such as #wargabantuwarga. This mechanism has depoliticised the government role in handling the pandemic crisis, therefore it has shaped a new normalisation based upon government inability and communities assistance mechanism (Mudhoffir & Hadiz 2021: 46).

Increasing consumption of the middle class and providing assistance to the lower class to shore up their purchasing power and help solve the pandemic crisis comes with internal contradictions. Social inequalities and class antagonism arise. The Poverty Depth Index[8] increased from 0.38 to 0.47 between March and September 2020. This condition is further worsened by issues pertaining to assistance distribution. Social assistance for COVID-19 relief was plagued by problems ranging from illegal fees (19.25 percent), inclusion error (17.99 percent), and assistance undelivered to recipients (9.62 percent). These are the gaps that the oligarchy exploits to consolidate its powers (ICW 2020).

8 The Poverty Depth Index indicates an average gap between poor citizens' expenses. Poverty Severity Index indicates expense inequalities among poor citizens (BPS 2021).

STATE RESPONSES TOWARDS COVID-19

The Indonesia government, despite massive decentralisation, applies a centralistic model when responding to COVID-19, by intervening policies made at local levels. The gradual implementation of PSBB began in capital city DKI Jakarta, followed by the greater Jakarta Area (Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, Bekasi) region and West Java Province, then further by four provinces and 27 districts/cities throughout Indonesia. On June 1st, 2020, public activity restrictions were loosened with health safety protocols by instructions from the central government. This was done in spite of continued increase of infections until late 2020.

Around the same time, the Job Creation Law, also known as the Omnibus Law, was ratified. Experts and scholars asserted that the ratification of this law and the rushed legislation process show how the state prioritised the nation's extractive sector over public health during the times of the pandemic (Kontan, 2020). For example, the law stipulated a zero percent royalty payment to the state for investors who are able to bring more value to coal production and provide positive impact for coal producers, a policy linked with the interest of the National Electricity Company (PLN). The Omnibus Law solidified the pattern of government-sanctioned oligarchic interests accumulating capital through extractive industries. Illustratively, 262 or 45.5 percent of 575 members of the parliament are affiliated with corporations or have corporate backgrounds (Koran Tempo, 2019).

The Omnibus Law too legalises the casualisation of labour, largely benefiting corporates. Even before the pandemic, neoliberal governance of the labour market has exacerbated unemployment among the working class. Since August 2020, at least 29.12 million people in productive age were affected by the pandemic; 2.56 million became unemployed, 0.76 million exited the workforce, 1.77 million were furloughed, and 24.03 million worked shorter hours. The Job Creation Law has consequences similar to Law 13 of 2003 regarding Employment, which undermined workers' rights. These include the removal of minimum wage provisions, replacing it with an hourly wage system, as well as cutting down severance pay from nine to six months.

The quota for non-skilled foreign workers increased with a maximum of five-year term of employment under the pretext of transfer of knowledge. Conversely, the previous Employment Law regulates that foreign workers can only be hired to fill positions that local workers cannot fulfil. The Job Creation Law also promoted labour market flexibility through outsourcing. Sanctions for employers who fail to pay their employees' wages were removed. Wages are based on the agreement between employer and employees.

Despite Jokowi's claims that the Job Creation Law would open more work opportunities, especially for those affected by the pandemic, the law clearly benefits the interest of corporations to accumulate profit. The Job Creation Law was also expected to cut bureaucratic hurdles in granting business permits, resulting in increasing efficiency and increased investment (Jakarta Post, 2020).

In early 2020, students and sections of the working class rose to protest the law. The Indonesian Police issued Telegram Notice No. ST/1100/IV/HUK.7.1/2020, which instructed the police to monitor cyberspace and take necessary actions to suppress "fake news" and those who offend the President and/or other public officials (Amnesty International, 2021, p. 22). Other reports show that violence and restrictions to freedom of expression throughout the pandemic (December 2019 to November 2020) was dominated by Omnibus Law issues (KontraS, 2021). Moreover, 455 people had been arrested in 87 cases linked to the Omnibus Law, 232 of which were injured due to violence during the protests. Related to the pandemic, especially during the period of social restrictions, 938 people were arrested related to violations and criticism against social restrictions and pandemic handling issues in general (KontraS, 2021). The suppression of citizen's political rights, in this case their freedom of expression, showed how the supposedly democratic state reoriented their agenda towards upholding social order to benefit the market economy.

At a local level, neoliberal restructuring, intertwined with various local elements, also benefits the markets more than the people. Robison (2009) examines capitalist developments in Indonesia in ways that revealed how smaller capitalist classes had developed in parallel to the

development of capital power that assists Indonesian politico-economic developments in a broader sense (Robison, 2009, p. vii). Hadiz's (2010) analysis is also similar, elaborating the connection between state authority and wider local power constellations. He too explains how state authority could be controlled structurally and instrumentally through dominant regional social powers (Hadiz, 2005, p. 172-173).

Two cases in Surabaya and Bali, purposively selected by the author, are illustrative of local political dynamics during the pandemic. In Surabaya, East Java, local business persons pressured the local government to loosen social restrictions to reduce the economic impact on their businesses. The Mayor of Surabaya, first, lifted Social Restriction rules on June 8, 2020 even though Covid-19 cases were still high (Jakarta Post, 2020). Furthermore, Surabaya issued Mayoral Regulation Number 28 of 2020 concerning New Normal Arrangements during the COVID-19 Pandemic Condition in Surabaya City with the formation of resilient malls, restaurants, and cafes in association with coalitions of business persons (notably the Indonesian Association Shopping Centre Organisers [*Asosiasi Pengelola Pusat Belanja Indonesia*—APPBI and the Indonesian Cafe and Restaurant Business Owners [*Pengusaha Kafe dan Restoran Indonesia*—APKRINDO] in East Java). This was taken to sustain the city's economy and help circulate and save the city's entrepreneurs (Surabaya Government, 2020). The alliance between local governments and local entrepreneurs is not new, nor is their alliance with political parties. Surabaya Mayor Tri Rismaharini is known to have negotiated with the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan*—PDIP), who then backed mayoral candidate Eri Cahyadi (Tempo, 2020), as well as Surabaya entrepreneurs to consolidate their interests during the 2020 Local Elections.

In Bali, local elites consolidated with gangsters, building the narrative of guarding Bali from destructive external forces. I Wayan Koster, the Governor of Bali, built on his ties with local elites and vigilante groups, and instrumentalised local traditions such as heritage villages and aristocrats (Saraswati, 2019) to get elected and further consolidate his power. To illustrate this relation, despite Bali Chief of Police Warrant No. R/846/IV/2017/Bidkum to disband several of Bali's vigilante groups

such as Laskar Bali (*Bali Soldiers)*, Baladika, and Pemuda Bali Bersatu (*United Bali Youth*) for multiple violations of the law and criminal activities between 2015-2017 (Balipost, 2019), I Wayan Koster undermined this effort by only issuing a warning without processing the disbandment.

In Bali, pandemic-related decisions are heavily dominated by governors, such as his refusal to impose lockdown under the pretext of protecting the local economy (Kompas, 2020). Koster personally had a lot at stake. The deteriorating global economic conditions halted the influx of international tourists due to the pandemic. His politico-business social relations with local businesses and militias whose economic activities relied heavily on tourism (such as security and protection rackets, parking) were impacted by the pandemic in Bali.

Koster made the decision to give full authority to heritage villages in handling the pandemic. Through the Governor Decree 15 of 2020, Heritage Villages could invoke a change in the allocation of Heritage Village Funds (*Dana Desa Adat)* sourced from the Provincial Budget which consisted of two budget items. The first is for the procurement of tools and materials needed for pandemic prevention, such as disinfectant, masks, gloves, etc., including the Communal Task Force (*Satgas Gotong Royong*) operations created to protect heritage villages. The second item is providing a social safety net in the form of non-cash food assistance for heritage villages. This won the support of local aristocrats who had supported Koster's decision in determining local pandemic policies and the politics-business consolidation as well.

In addition to Rakhmani & Permana (2020) who argues that the local politics phenomenon in the pandemic crisis has indicated more opportunity for local and national elites to take advantage of this situation for upward political mobility. Such as the 2020 local election which shows the increasing trend of single-candidate ballots and the decreasing number of candidates. Local elites in the time of pandemic shows their territorial-based power, such as in Surabaya and Bali.

The author posits that the pandemic has provided new ways to accelerate neoliberal restructuring that benefits elite classes, at the expense of the poor and lower classes. The state's priority during the pan-

demic is heavily focused more on economic recovery, disadvantaging the public whose exercise of political rights are violated. Oligarchic factions benefit from the increasingly dominant role of the state through established politico-business relations. This new despotism in Indonesia reveals a regime that operates more effectively and sustainably as it is able to systematically manage social consensus (Kusman and Istiqomah, 2021) through local and central elite consolidation, which is smoothened by foreign assistance that brings with it the neoliberal market agenda.

CONCLUSION

This paper analysed the relationship between the oligarchy and neoliberal markets, specifically to describe a picture of Indonesia's power configuration in the development of capitalism. Robison and Hadiz (2004) argued that oligarchic interests hijacked the neoliberal agenda and their consolidation was able to adjust the market agenda. Convergence between the interests of domestic capitalists and market capitalists was formed, arguably, more intensively during the pandemic.

Harvey (2003) saw that contradictions since the advent of capitalism created temporary fixes in every crisis it faced. The author found that, while Indonesia's economy was significantly impacted by the pandemic, the way the logic of capital is internalised is specific to the types of regimes that dominated the country's state developmentalism. It was noted that the state in the history of capitalism in Indonesia was able to refurbish massive consumption through state spending and multinational bank loans to support national economic stimulus.

The author revisits Brown (2015) who claims that citizens as human capital in the neoliberal system had significantly saved capitalism during crises, especially so during the pandemic. The reason is that human capital, through their shifting to working from home, is transformed into digital, financial capital and hence able to contribute to national economic recovery. This is achieved through a change in consumption patterns of the middle classes and the injection of social assistance to the lower classes to maintain their purchasing power. The state actively hands out economic stimulus for the lower-middle class to induce consumption activities and trigger the absorption of national production.

Similar patterns can be seen at local levels, where politico-economic elites have also honed links with market interest and predatorial politics in their effort to defend their grip over power and capital. Capital mutation during the pandemic in Indonesia places the state as the main actor, which is materialised through the ratification of Job Creation Law and the state's monetary policies for economic recovery. Power relations, from the national to local levels, exhibit a convergence of oligarchic and neoliberal interests, within which capital mutates through market and democratic institutions.

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BOOK REVIEW

Slavoj Žižek, *Pandemic! Covid-19 Shakes the World.* New York and London: OR Books, 2020.

Iqra Anugrah[1]

Covid-19 pandemic has shaken the world's existing politico-economic order. Unlike previous disruptions to global capitalism in the last two decades (September 11 attacks and the War on Terror, Global Financial Crisis, Occupy Wall Street, Arab Spring, and various populist moments), the current interruption is spurred by a non-human entity: virus. The ravages that this pandemic brought – physically, socially, economically, and politically – have made many wonder about the future of the world. Will things stay the same? Does this crisis spell the end to the current form of capitalism? Is there a future for renewed emancipatory politics?

The philosopher-provocateur Slavoj Žižek tackles this ongoing conundrum in his latest political commentary, *Pandemic! Covid-19 Shakes the World.* Trapped in our current predicaments, the only solution to this crisis, he claims, is the revitalization of the Communist project.

Žižek's proclamation might sound dangerous – or trite, depending on one's viewpoint and political allegiance. But I implore the readers to finish the book. His prognosis of the Covid crisis hits the right spot.

1 The author is a contributing editor at IndoProgress, and Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, Japan. He can be contacted at officialiqraanugrah@gmail.com.

His rumination is divided into ten short chapters. He starts by arguing how the pandemic, a natural contingency, unites the human species in our experience of helplessness. Its catastrophic effects show the limits of market mechanisms and the necessity of seemingly "communist" measures: coordination of quarantines as well as production and distribution activities (pp. 10-12).

He then discusses the fate of the laboring class during pandemic in the second chapter, aptly titled "Why are we tired all the time?" Firmly anchored in Marxist political economy, he delineates the uneven working conditions and degrees of alienation experienced by different strata of the working people. Medical staffs and essential workers are overworked at the frontlines, whereas others are "forcibly or voluntary confined to their homes" (p. 19). For many in the Third World countries, the situation is even more dire. The old Fordist production arrangements do not disappear, but is simply outsourced to toiling workers in the Global South. For every self-exploiting cognitive worker in Los Angeles (or Jakarta, for that matter), there are many more workers with classic proletarian characteristics in the so-called "emerging economies." The pandemic exacerbates such class divisions.

Moving on, Žižek switches his attention to the global elites. He lands his jab on the existing powerholders, especially the new authoritarian-capitalist formation called the Putogan virus – "the devilish dance between Erdogan and Putin" that led to the intensification of the Syrian civil war and the European refugee crisis (p. 33). This in turn gives pretext for racist populists to associate the coronavirus threat with the immigrant and refugee crisis in Europe. But the virus knows no boundaries and it infects everyone, citizens and non-citizens. The way out of this impasse is not abstract liberal humanitarianism. Tolerance and solidarity for those most affected by geopolitical and Covid crises are needed, but not enough. The better leftist, materialist response to the double crises is this: it is in the interest of poor *and* rich nations to tackle these prolonged crises.

This brings us to the philosopher's proposal that he elaborates in the rest of the book. Contra the insistence that the pandemic will be over soon followed by the return to normalcy under market capitalism, Žižek

calls for a restructuring of our current way of life and what he earlier describes as "communist" measures: global coordination and organization to control the economy with strong executive powers. Contra denialism and hysteria, he urges us to accept the fundamental transformation of our way of living and embrace the uncertain future. He also celebrates the courageousness of everyday dissidents such as anti-apartheid Israelis and the citizens of Wuhan, who confront the silence and abuse of the authorities. At the same time, he also advocates the necessity of a strong state combined with decentralized collective initiatives to tackle new forms of crises. This, for him, is "the only rational egotist thing to do" (p. 68).

Towards the end of his book, Žižek challenges the conservative doggedness in continuing business as usual ("let's not sacrifice the economy because of the pandemic, let's get back to work!") and Giorgio Agamben's (2020a; 2020b) simplistic alarmism ("the state of exception is right in front of us!"). Instead, he says: let's not sacrifice the material constituents of the economy – the working people – by militantly fighting this pandemic. Further, Agamben's reading on the increasing intrusion of the state, in Žižek's view, should be grounded in actual political economy. Haphazard policies taken by state elites should be seen not only as a sign of alarming intrusion, but also as an indication of incompetence in handling the pandemic-induced crisis of capital. At the same time, the ongoing limitations of our freedom by the virus and the state have also jump-started the outpouring of local and global solidarity in addressing the impacts of the pandemic. The elemental realities of bare life and its death, Žižek contends, unite rather than divide us.

Lastly, Žižek ends with a political – and also personal – note: our efforts, the communism in practice, is the only way forward to save humanity and, by doing so, create a new humanity (p. 105). It is hoped that this "non-alienated, decent life" will somehow "survive when the pandemic passes" (p. 114).

Like Žižek's many other political commentaries, *Pandemic!* provides a fresh, contrarian take on current affairs and a nice intermezzo from his more heavy, theoretical explorations. His sharp attack on convention-

al understandings and mainstream narratives on the pandemic is complimented by his empathetic message of solidarity in times of Covid-19. Readers will also enjoy the way he weaves his ruminations with references to contemporary culture – his signature style and forte. In particular, Indonesian readers will appreciate his sensibility of the conditions of the working class in the Global South during the pandemic.

Nevertheless, I want to challenge Žižek's elaboration in several aspects. First, he does not go far enough in his proposal for a new form of Communism. Our collective effort to save humanity from itself, according to Žižek, is already communistic. He likens this "Communism imposed by the necessities of bare survival" to "War Communism" of the Bolsheviks (p. 92).[2] However, one major logical consequence – and historical lesson – is surely missing here: the end of War Communism necessitates socialist construction. The question for Žižek and all committed leftists then is this: what will be the aftermath of the pandemic War Communism? To adopt a Žižekian – and Gramscian – gesture here, I remain a pessimist. The post-pandemic future looks bleak: the high cost of this public health, humanitarian tragedy, the reconstitution of capital and its controllers, and arbitrary state power will continue to haunt us. What would be the proper Communist response to the post-pandemic complexities?

Which leads us to my second complaint. Let me ask provocatively: to what extent Žižek's "War Communism" is nothing but a revivified Keynesian social democracy on steroids? I agree with Žižek on the necessity of a strong state coupled with solidarity initiatives from below to handle our current crises *and* guarantee our basic freedoms. But why not talk openly – or rather provocatively – about the necessity for democratic *planning* against market capitalism and ecological catastrophe? If the Left, as Žižek (2020) urges, should "dare to speak its name," shouldn't it also be proud of its past achievements and experiments while recognizing their limitations and failures?

2 Soviet "War Communism" was implemented to defend the workers' state from imperialist encirclement during the 1918-1921 Russian Civil War.

These criticisms aside, *Pandemic!* is a sober, analytical, hopeful, and thought-provoking take on the Covid-19 crisis. Žižek shows his politico-ethical commitment as an old-fashioned radical leftist, as shown in his elaboration of working conditions of the masses under the pandemic and elevation of the new "communist" measures of coordination and solidarity as a world-historical event. This serious political manifesto is also an enjoyable read. Once again, Žižek the pamphleteer successfully delivers.

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Iqra Anugrah

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