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COVID-19 as a Badiouian Event? A Global Insight Into Theoretical Interrogation of Žižek's Pandemics

The rapidly burgeoning literature surrounding COVID-19 pandemic fetishistically and prematurely tried to catch the academic momentum, taking almost an a priori, non-debatable, starting point of the conceptualization of the pandemic as the “new normal”. In *Pandemic: COVID-19 Shakes the World* and *Pandemic! 2: Chronicles of a Time Lost*, Slavoj Žižek frames the pandemic as multiple global crises, arguing it will aggressively and drastically rupture the global societal norms and dynamics creating a new order. However, did it? This essay debates this question through the theoretical lenses of Badiou's Event. It starts by laying down the fundamental theoretical principles and mapping the necessary criteria needed to be fulfilled in order for a happening to be named an Event. Further, it navigates through ideas and arguments presented in Žižek's publications localizing the pandemic's global characteristics. Finally, it theoretically deconstructs them providing us with the fundamental answer to the question what COVID-19 pandemic is: a Badiouian event that has/is/will construct the global “new normal”, multiple consequential crises, or just a temporary situation that reaffirms the existing societal normatives worldwide.

Key words: COVID-19 pandemic, Event, Badiou, Žižek, communism

Пандемија ковида 19 као бадјуовски Догађај? Глобални увид у теоријско испитивање Жижековог разумевања пандемије

Све обимнија литература о пандемији ковида 19 фетишистички и прерано је покушала ухватити академски моментум, узимајући готово априорно, неспорно, полазиште концептуализације пандемије као „нове нормалности“. У *Pandemic: COVID-19 Shakes the World* и *Pandemic 2: Chronicles of a Time Lost*, Славој Жижек уоквирује пандемију као вишеструку глобалну кризу, тврдећи да ће агресивно и драстично разбити глобалне друштвене норме и динамике стварајући нови поредак. Међутим, да ли се то заиста десило? Овај есеј расправља о овом питању кроз теоријске погледе Бадјуовог Догађаја. Започиње постављањем основних теоријских начела и мапирањем неопходних критеријума које је потребно испунити да би се неко дешавање могло назвати Догађајем. Надаље, креће се кроз идеје и аргументе изнесене у Жижековим публикацијама локализирајући глобалне карактеристике пандемије. Коначно, теоретски их деконструира пружајући нам темељни одговор на питање што је пандемија ковида 19: бадјуовски Догађај који је изградио, гради или ће изградити глобалну „нову нормалност“, вишеструка последична криза или само привремена ситуација која утврђује већ постојеће друштвене нормативе широм свијета.

Кључне речи: пандемија ковида 19, Догађај, Бадју, Жижек, комунизам

Introduction

In the *Spiegel's* 1969 piece “Who’s Afraid of the Ivory Tower? A Conversation with Theodor W. Adorno”, the journalist started the interview with: “Professor Adorno, two weeks ago, the world seemed to be in order”; Adorno briefly answered: “Not to me” (Richter & Adorno 2002, 14). A bit over four decades after the interview, the COVID-19 pandemic started.¹ It introduced 21st century humanity for the first time to extensive globally present local and national lockdowns, social distancing, travel bans, violent borderization, and imposed quarantines. Almost the entire world nostalgically replicated *Spiegel's* journalist’s view remembering the times before the virus as “normal”. Not to compare myself to Adorno, but pre-corona times were anything but normal (if there is such a state at all). After all, normality is just another type of psychosis (Lacan 1980). Yet, a frequency and general acceptance of specific behaviors establish societal normalness of a defined era (Durkheim 1982). Therefore, the sturdy neoliberal neo-consumeristic individualization (Bauman 2000), and increasing globalized capital-driven inequalities (Giddens 2003) will be considered, for the purpose of this paper, as a normality. However, that brings the second argument – the present COVID-19 (coronavirus) centered state of affair has metamorphosed into abnormality, the so-called “new normal”. But, to what extent?

Numerous intellectuals prophetically proclaimed the coronavirus pandemic as a happening that would tectonically shift the global societal dynamics. Slavoj Žižek was one of them. Boarding the carousel of the publishing race of postmodern academia, the international academic superstar and “the most dangerous philosopher in the West” in his *Pandemic: COVID-19 Shakes the World* and *Pandemic! 2: Chronicles of a Time Lost* states that the world we know has come to an end. There is no going back. The pandemic as an unprecedented crisis is/will vigorously change the way we live. Fukuyama (2005) was wrong – it is not the “end of history”. Instead, another order will emerge: either a new communism or barbarism with a human face.

That robust, nearly esoteric change in the trace of history can theoretically only be witnessed as a Badiouian Event. The Badiouian Event is a point of no return to the previous state. The subject(s) has entered a new era, a new order. But did it? Is the COVID-19 pandemic a Badiouian Event? This paper will examine these questions through theoretical analysis of Žižek’s above mentioned publications.

Badiou’s Event

Since the 1960s, Alain Badiou had been fighting against a “crisis of Western metaphysics in a heroic effort to rescue philosophy from its time in exile” (Barker 2002, 1). Challenging the postmodernist terminological/meaning obsession,

¹ COVID-19 is a disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). Around four months after mapping the first cases in Wuhan, China, the virus spread worldwide and the World Health Organization announced the global pandemic on March 11, 2020.

Badiou proclaimed that the *truth* exists (Badiou 2005). Although behind him stands an astonishing volume of work, most of his contemporaries consider his theory of the event, alongside theory of subject, to be one of the focal points of his philosophical thought.

In the 1988 magnum opus *Being and Event* (Badiou 2005), through thirty-seven meditations, Badiou (de)constructs the theoretical pilgrimage toward the event – a radical change bringing the truth to the surface. Led by the ‘mathematics as ontology’ axiom, and relying on set theory, Badiou perceives reality as *the void*. It is a starting concept to understand the event. He uses “‘void’ rather than nothing, because the ‘nothing’ is the name of the void correlative to the *global* effect of structure (*everything* is counted)” (Badiou 2005, 56). This void, in set theory a null set (\emptyset), is the basal core of every *situation* (Badiou 2005, 12). Badiou refers to the situation as consistent multiplicity, a multiplicity counted as one (Badiou 2005, 23–24). It is “a whim, a supermarket, a work of art, a dream, a playground fight, a fleet of trucks, a mine, a stock prediction, a game of chess, or a set of waves” (Badiou 2003, 7). Roffe (2006) argues that Badiou’s situation is to be understood in an extremely broad sense – it is “a society, a human being, a natural language or a building would all be situations in this fundamental sense, one-multiples” (Roffe 2006, 333). Badiou (2006) in *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II* notes that broadly taken, the *state of the situation* – the order of the situation’s governance, is the metastructure of the world. For example, global neoliberal capitalism could be perceived as the metastructure of current times. But, what exactly is the “event” to Badiou and how does its truth emerge from the state of the situation?

Truth cannot come out of the situation as it is hidden under the veil of it. It is exactly the event that opens that space by erupting from the *evental site* through the voidal margins of the situation forever changing the state’s governing order (Badiou 2005). It is a radical change, “a hazardous [hasardeux], unpredictable supplement, which vanishes as soon as it appears” (Badiou 2001, 67), exploding and breaking the ontological chains of knowledge repetition giving birth to a new truth. Barclay explains that:

“An event is a completely original happening which interrupts the flow of history and which cannot be either named or understood within the context in which it occurs: it cuts against the grain of the world, not simply as a new departure in the sequence of history, but as the creation of a new possibility, something previously thought impossible, if it was thought of at all” (Barclay 2010, 174).

Or, as Bensaid (2004) says – an event is to a certain extent a historical miracle.

Several elements of the Event can be mapped. Firstly, the event is always a profoundly transcendental, avant-garde-like, unpredictable happening. Its scope outshines the imaginary of the imagination of the subject. Further, it is the evental site (somewhere) where the event is environed and performed. Additionally, the blurry event-situation dynamics mark the event. As it is a creative novelty, we cannot fully know what is being created. Truth is only post-evental (Badiou, 2005).

Next, interpretative intervention is a *conditio sine qua non* to proclaim the event (Badiou 2005, 181). Subject has to name it developing *fidelity*, a genuine one-on-one relationship to and throughout the event. The spectrum of subject goes from hysteric-like, the panicky one, to master-subjects, those fully faithful to the event (Badiou 2006). Additionally, in contrast to Deleuze's small-scale micro-level events, Badiou's is a large, macro-level one (Beck & Gleyson 2016). Most importantly, "the fundamental ontological characteristic of an event is to inscribe, to name, the situated void of that for which it is an event" (Badiou 2001, 69). Finally, there is the outcome of the event – a novel order.

Badiou's (2005) examples of an event penetrate all four arenas of his philosophy – love, art, science, and politics. For instance, Mallarmé's *A Throw of the Dice will Never Abolish Chance* is an event in art, while 19th century Cantor's mathematical set-theory constitutes an event in science. Regarding the amorous domain, it seems that his view of falling in love as an event heavily reminds of the ideas of philosopher Alan Watts (2012), who perceives that process as uncontrollable, mystical, forever changing the subjects of love. Still, political events as drivers of colossal social change remain central to Badiou's theory unraveling the shadow of maoist-oriented philosophy. In *Being and Event*, Badiou (2005) hitchhikerly guides us from the Russian Revolution and the Paris Commune, through the Chinese Cultural Revolution and 1968 protests in France. As seen, most of Badiou's illustrations of the event are revolutionary-tattooed, making the previously systematically socially and politically suffocated proletariat/masses (subjects) struggles visible. However, a theoretical warning must be kept in mind – events are historically highly rare and unique. They change our 'world(s)', our metastructures as we know it by ripping apart the web of established normativeness building a novel, unique order. That is what Slavoj Žižek argues regarding the COVID-19 pandemics.

Žižek's Pandemics

"In the last couple of years, after the SARS and Ebola epidemics, we were told again and again that a new, much stronger epidemic was just a matter of time, that the question was not IF but WHEN. Although we were convinced of the truth of these dire predictions, we...were reluctant to act and engage – the only place we dealt with them was in apocalyptic movies like *Contagion*" (Žižek 2020, 64).

That is how Žižek reflects on COVID-19 in his *Pandemic! COVID-19 Shakes the World* – by providing a pop-culture reference as his standard ace in the sleeve writing trick, illustrating society's omni-neglection, in spite of its awareness, of the global history-changing hazard to come. And, with the coronavirus pandemic, according to Žižek, it came.

Through ten essays in Volume I, Žižek (2020) offers a provocative socio-cultural reading of the COVID-19 pandemic. Courageously presented to the public only around 100 days after the breakout, Žižek frames the pandemic as a global biological, cultural, and economic-political melange, ideologically oiled by the machinery of panic and fear. The first chapters introduce the "new world" we emerged

into – the world defined by pandemic-related measures. “We are all in the same boat” (Žižek 2020, 42), says Žižek, echoing Martin L. K. Jr, holding that the entirety of humanity is in jeopardy. Moreover, he empathetically reflects on the “new normal” of social and physical distancing enforced worldwide, burdening everyone for the first (historical) time. However, the ongoing pandemic is also a chance for profound personal transformation. Evoking the biblical Jesus’ words to Mary Magdalene, “Touch me not”, and also recalling Hegel, Žižek insists that genuine love and solidarity could be accomplished precisely via the imposed separateness we are exposed to during the pandemic (Žižek 2020, 2). Moving from a Christian-painted analysis of individual micro-cosmoses, Žižek jumps to the nation-state level. Remembering his childhood, he reflects on the former communist Yugoslavia’s bureaucrats, noting that whenever they said we should not panic, it meant they are already panicking (Žižek 2020, 63). Here, disagreeing with Giorgio Agamben, Žižek points out the weakening of the (nation) state power during the pandemic. However, on the other side, he insightfully maps altruistic-like acts of some states (like China) wherewith the reinforcements and the prolongements of lockdowns, the value of human life was put before the economic market (Žižek 2020, 89). Nevertheless, these acts are not enough to fight the pandemic. Much more is needed.

Žižek claims that:

“We will have to change our entire stance to life, to our existence as living beings among other forms of life. In other words, if we understand “philosophy” as the name for our basic orientation in life, we will have to experience a true philosophical revolution” (Žižek 2020, 78).

Moreover, “even if life does eventually return to some semblance of normality, it will not be the same normal as the one we experienced before the outbreak” (Žižek 2020, 77). Exactly here by the binary before *versus* after corona times, Žižek proclaims COVID-19 pandemics as catalytic, hence, a Badiouian-tending Event that will make us reimagine humanity. The worldwide yet individual fragility exposed by the pandemic, dethroning us as from the Anthropocene pedestal, can only result in Žižek’s vision of a post-pandemic “society beyond nation-state, a society that actualizes itself in the forms of global solidarity and cooperation” (Žižek 2020, 37). However, first, we must answer a crucial question.

That question is what do we truly want – barbarism or communism. It is “simple as that” (Žižek 2020, 95). Žižek’s answer is clear – communism. However, “this is not a utopian Communist vision, it is a Communism imposed by the necessities of bare survival” (Žižek 2020, 92). Referring to the conversation between Varoufakis and Assange, Žižek notes that exactly what seemed “impossible within the coordinates of the existing world order” (Žižek 2020, 86) happened. For instance, according to him, the evidence of communist-leaning acts are Trump’s healthcare checks and Johnson’s nationalization of the railways in the UK. Moreover, the rise of potency and influence of international organizations during the pandemic, like the WHO, is precisely an example of that. Therefore, Žižek’s new, global, solidari-

ty-fueled communism, bringing novel universal global healthcare, asks for a supra-national, cosmopolitan organization to handle this and future crises.

To Žižek, it is clear why those robust, contingent shifts occurred. The COVID-19 pandemic, like litmus paper, brought long-hidden truths to the societal and ideological surface.

“My modest opinion is much more radical: the coronavirus epidemic is a kind of “Five Point Palm Exploding Heart Technique” on the global capitalist system—a signal that we cannot go on the way we have till now, that a radical change is needed”² (Žižek 2020, 41–42).

Global capitalism is in a unique, unprecedented crisis. And, to disastrous capitalism, solely disaster communism is the adequate response (Žižek 2020, 104–105).

In *Pandemic 2! Chronicles of Time Lost*, Žižek (2021) continues, now more coherently, his examination of the ongoing pandemic. Developing his argument of collapsing capitalism in the first book, Žižek (2021, 19) claims that during the pandemic, “class divisions have exploded”. In contrast to the first book's reflection on renovated visibility of exploited workers in factories, in a capitalistic language known as the “essential workers”, these are not some old-fashioned Marxists class struggles one might bear in mind. These are the issues of geo-social class - the household keepers, construction workers, migrants – being exploited “with regard to the way they relate to the material conditions of their life” (Žižek 2021, 20–21). Additionally, there is a *new working class*, a “highly racialized, ethnicized and gendered” exploitation needed for the capitalistic machinery to function (Harvey in Žižek 2021, 19–20). Those are the nurses, healthcare workers, and deliverers alongside the new subclass of self-exploiters, like managers and the privileged intellectual elite, working from home. Consequently, Žižek points out the highly noticeable emergence of the brand-new class of techno-feudalists, like Elon Musk. Their projects, like Musk's *Neuralink* – an ultra high bandwidth brain-machine interface, are transforming pre-corona “actual/bodily social interaction” and replacing them with the “new norms of social dependency and control” that come with practices in cyberspace (Žižek 2021, 62). In the end, reflecting on Mike Davis' insights, he recurrently summons the new communism, not just as a solution to the ongoing pandemic, but to the global ecological crisis undoubtedly to come (Žižek 2021, 189–191).

Theoretical Interrogation of Žižek's (Ideological) Virus

At the very beginning of the examination of Žižek's reading of the ongoing pandemic, we encounter a problem – the eventual site, the *sine qua non* of an Event. In both books, Žižek sees the entire anthroposphere as endangered. However, can an event have such scope? If we go back and look at Badiou's examples, one might

² “Five Point Palm Exploding Heart Technique” is a famous martial arts move from Tarantino's *Kill Bill* movie. The move embodies hitting the victim on five unique body pressure spots. When the person makes five steps after being hit, its heart explodes.

say no – every event has to be localized. Indeed, during the pandemic, nation-states reacted differently (Ashraf 2020), creating localized/nationalized variations of the “new normal”. Yet, in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, the entire globe could be seen as the place where a Badiouian event occurred for the first time in the Anthropocene. Chernilo explains that decades of intensive globalization produced a cosmopolitan dimension to the COVID-19 pandemic, making it “the first global phenomenon in human history in which the majority of the world’s population is experiencing a similar event at the same time” (Chernilo 2021, 157). Although the liberal fetishization of the individualization of the pandemic experience is present, in the case of COVID-19 disease, “a similar spectrum of individual and collective social behaviors has emerged” (Tsiamis 2020, 21) globally. It is clear – all of humanity is in danger (Nancy 2020). Therefore, if we stretch the theoretical boundaries of the event to its breaking point, the COVID-19 pandemic inaugurates both empirical and theoretical novelty by covering the biggest possible evental site – the (human) planet. That brings us to the questions of magnitude and contingency.

The COVID-19 pandemic is undoubtedly perilous, not just spatially. In slightly over a year, as of May 14th 2021, the WHO official COVID-19 website shows that the pandemic had affected over 190 countries, leading to close to 140,000,000 infections and 3 million deaths. Blake’s and Wadhwa’s December 14 World Bank Blog review of 2020 notes that the coronavirus pandemic has pushed millions into poverty, caused massive job losses and debts, affected education, deepened gender inequalities, increased global health care costs, mental health crises, among many other consequences. Regarding the exigency of the pandemic, it is not in question – it is “a result of natural contingency at its purest” (Žižek 2020, 14). Žižek’s prophecy of a colossal multidimensional crisis has been proven. But, as Badiou (2003, 61) warns, just because there is “an abrupt and complete change in a situation does not at all mean that the grace of an event has happened to it”.

Besides its global scope, which is a significant yet purely quantitative novelty, multiple consequences of the “new” normal are not genuinely new. The pandemic itself is not an authentic event. On the contrary, it is ancient. One of the first historically noted pandemics was the Justinian Plague which emerged in the sixth century AD killing millions across Europe, Asia, and Africa (Huremović 2019). Social distancing and masks were a standard during Spanish influenza pandemic in 1918 (Forbes 2021). The first quarantine was reported in 1377 in Ragusa, today’s Dubrovnik (Huremović 2019). The same measures implemented today can be mapped in Foucault’s (2008) *Discipline and Punish* when he describes middle age towns during plagues as “a segmented, immobile, frozen space” in which “each individual is fixed in his place” risking, upon the slightest movement, “life, contagion or punishment” (1). COVID-19 national lockdowns are just a variation of middle-age town lockdowns, as nation-states are the dominant administrative-political units of today’s era.

Furthermore, Žižek’s Hegelian-Christian fueled “love thy neighbour” prophecy of the separation-induced love is already debunked. In Camus’ *Plague*, based on the cholera epidemic in mid-19th century Algeria, the lovers trapped in the

sealed-off town of Oran find themselves in dual suffering - for themselves and their loved ones. Similar effects are detected during the present pandemic. It profoundly negatively affects social relationships with possible long-term issues (Naser et al. 2020). Globalized interpersonal trust during the COVID-19 pandemic did not deviate from the pre-corona times (Thoresen et al. 2021), opposing Žižek's ideas of enhanced empathy. Moreover, not only did interpersonal empathy not occur, but the pandemic developed a novel, more extreme breed of incautious liberal individuals, all of them led by, as Marjanović (2020) argues, eruption of post-truth populist ideas during the pandemic. Therefore, social distancing, quarantine, lockdown, and emotional suffering are just colloquialisms historically not branded as unique. Many are not aware of it. It is not surprising. The collective memory, including the history of pandemics, is individualized, ethnicized, nationalized, regionalized, yet rarely globalized. In this case, a quote commonly attributed to Hegel comes to mind – the only thing we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history.

However, the principal question is – are there mementos of originality and societal freshness bursting out from the pandemic, screaming for the potential birth of the new truth, exposing the fallacies of the state of the situation, naming the void? According to Žižek – Yes – the exposure of the liberal-capitalist New World Order virus, predominantly detected in the new class struggles that erupted. Yet, Theodoropoulos in his *ROAR Magazine* piece from May 23 2020 partially opposes such thoughts holding that “the distances, ruptures and conflicts in the social landscape were already profound before the coronavirus changed our lives forever” (para. 26). However, it is not the question of whether the class struggles were there. They were. The question is, did pandemics bring them to the societal exterior? Žižek, claiming that it did, rightly points out in *Pandemic! 2*, to the global exploitation of migrant workers, already affecting global food supply chains. Likewise, in vol. 1, he stresses that the visibility of overworked healthcare workers and doctors, although hidden under the discourse of heroification of exploitation which even Žižek socialistically praises, exploded. Additionally, the pandemic world order exposed a recently formed and emerging class – technocrats and the techno elite that became richer and richer under the rise of virtual consumerism during the pandemic. That is not the end. Upgrading Byung-Chul Han's argument that “today, everyone is an auto-exploiting laborer in his or her own enterprise” and that “class struggle has transformed into an inner struggle against oneself” (Han in Žižek 2020, 21), Žižek rightfully maps the new *modus operandi* of the capitalist virus. The workers are being forced to obtain resources of production and to perform the labor simultaneously, merging into a capitalist-worker hybrid class, yet still being exploited. Think of when a professor in academia or a manager in a marketing agency sits down at home with his laptop during the pandemic. That is where new class struggles are transferred – to the home as the locality of capitalistic production through enforced distance and digitalized work, disguised under the freedom to choose self-exploitation.

Yet, class hierarchies were not changed. The coronavirus pandemic is not a “great equalizer” as some claim, but rather an amplifier of existing inequalities” (Crawley 2021, 1). It just “reshuffled the privileges, power, borders and hierarchies

of im/mobility” (Lazreg & Garnaoui 2020, 1). For instance, black and indigenous populations in the US had higher death rates than others due to lack of proper living conditions and healthcare access (Whitcomb 2020). The division of who will get in Žižek’s boat of humanity, was more of a Titanic-like selection – class privileges were the deciding signifiers of one’s pandemic reality.

But, what about Žižek’s (2020) alleged radical anti-economic morality of China’s lockdowns, Johnson’s nationalizations of the railways, or Trump’s healthcare checks? Are these political moves a neoliberal capitalism novelty guided by solidarity toward the others? Hardly. Indeed, some of the above-mentioned reactions were unexpected. Nevertheless, they remain in the status-quo domains. In the USA, a social issue (health care) was fixed with a capitalistic solution (checks). As Larry Elliott points out in his January 30 2020 Guardian article, the Johnson’s measures were historically already seen interventionism and crisis-pragmatism in the UK. Eventual newness would have occurred if the USA had implemented widespread free universal healthcare for all citizens, both during and after the coronavirus pandemic. Finally, China’s lockdowns, and many others, are heavily blurred with cyber-authoritarianism, all too reminiscent of that ‘beneficial, non-consequential system’ of dystopian omni-surveillance as in Philip K. Dick’s *Minority Report*. As Agamben (2020) warns, referring to the case of Italy, state repression and control are precisely hidden under the veil of care and safety. This evocation of Deleuze’s *Society of Control* is not mimicry. Think about the almost live-tracking apps such as Bahrain’s BeAware Bahrain, Norway’s mass surveillance app Smittestopp, or Shlonik in Kuwait. In the end, many of the state actions Žižek refers to remain a debatable precedent, not a distinct societal norm.

The Missing Heroes of Missed New Communism: Back to the Old Normal

Finally, the result of the event is the new order – did it happen? Did any other order replace the neoliberal capitalist World Order? Žižek’s Communism did not. Firstly, although transnational solidarity, including global cooperation, partially emerged during pandemic (like the COVAX vaccine system), the dominant nation-states were those deciding on measures and resource allocation. The resurrection of the power of nation-states in an economically polarized world could be seen in the development of vaccine nationalism which will leave the poor countries of Africa and Asia on the margins of immunization, reestablishing their status in what Ramon Grosfoguel calls the Zone of Non-Being, becoming the main threat to global cooperation (Ravi 2021). Byanyima, UNAIDS Executive Director, in the Guardian article from February 29 openly announced the unfolding of the global vaccine apartheid, which puts profit before human lives. From CNN to Reuters, many global media outlets are reporting that in India, people are dying in the streets full of bodies due to the shortage of oxygen supplies in the healthcare system.

The fall of Žižek’s prophecy of solidarity and a new communism just proved two things. Firstly, interethnic solidarity in times of disasters is not new. Let

us remember the massive floods in the Western Balkans in 2014. Back then, the ex-Yugoslavia countries that were in a bloody war a few decades before, helped each other by establishing transnational solidarity, just to, few years after interethnic solidarity during the floods, boomerang back to potential war rumours spreading over Bosnia's media landscape at the moment. In the end, every event finishes within the nation-state's borders (Malešević 2013). Secondly, a capital-driven economy merged with nationalism as the dominant ideology of today's era seized the first opportunity to reestablish the neoliberal market. If there was ever a chance for global neo-communism to erupt, it is now virtually non-existent. Žižek's "Communism or Barbarism With Human Face" pendulum is clearly leaning toward the latter one blended with the robust amplification of the globally pre-existing social norms of neoliberal capitalism. However, whether Žižek erred in preaching the new communism, or whether he was right, remains less important.

In the end, let's go back to the theory of Event. The compulsory element of it is the proclamation of an event as such by the subject. When Badiou (2005) talks about the French Revolution, the naming of the French Revolution per se is its crucial part. If we all say that COVID is an event, exactly that is an element of the event. This matters because the subject must proclaim the Event and act on it both discursively and pragmatically. Yet, the subject has to be a set. The individual by itself does not constitute a subject. The subject has to be an intertwined yet cohesive multiplicity (Badiou, 2005). Hence, who is Žižek's subject?

Žižek's COVID-19 pandemic subject is a "we/us-subject". It remains unclarified, yet hints at a we-the people-subject. Therefore, it is truly Badiouian, a-individual, communal, maoist. However, which people can be part of this we-the people-subject? For instance, in the case of Christ's Resurrection, it would be the Christians. In Žižek's pandemics, the subject is extremely plurified, going from those hysteric ones, who are still panicking about the crisis brought by the COVID-19, to obscurantist ones. Yet, the true Evental subject is a master-militant one, holistically driven by the Evental interior, embracing the truth brought by the Event. Hence, the we-the people master-militant subject would be we/those who not just scream in an "the emperor has no clothes" manner that "the neoliberal capitalism is in crisis", but follow through the truth into the New Order, the new Communism.³

Still, besides the above mentioned precedents in nation-states, and acts by international organizations such as WHO which Žižek praised, although they remain mostly discursive global solidarity, where are those subjects of the COVID-19 pandemic? Where are the heroic figures born out of this crisis? Žižek (2020, 7) maps one of them – Li Wenliang, "the doctor who discovered the coronavirus epidemic". Yet, she was censored by Wuhan authorities for sharing information about the new SARS-CoV-2 virus and later died from COVID-19. Other clear examples are missing. For now, these master-militant subjects are globally fragment-

³ The emperor has no clothes expression comes from a 19th century short story for children by Hans Kristian Andersen. It is used in cases where people omit to publicly say the obvious truth due to the fear of the group judgment.

ed, scattered, absent, only leaving the philosophical prophets of change, like Žižek and Badiou, to wait for them.

Conclusion

A Badiouian Event is a happening that shifts the paths of history into a novel direction giving birth to unknown truths and creating a new order. With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, many claimed exactly that. Slavoj Žižek, with his *Pandemic! COVID Shakes the World* and *Pandemic! 2: Chronicles of Time Lost* was a pioneer of such thought. According to him, the ongoing pandemic exposed class struggles emanating from the collapse of the liberal-capitalist world order becoming a historical point of no return. Žižek's ideological crossroads of post-corona humanity should lead us to never before seen global communism.

However, it did not happen. Indeed, Žižek insightfully maps not only the problems of the old Marxist class struggles during the pandemic, but also the strengthening of techno-feudalists, and the apparent exploitation of the new geo-social class. Moreover, he exposes the corona-brought visibility of digitized Han's master-slave auto-exploiters. Yet, his prophecy lacks crucial elements of Badiou's Event – unalloyed newness and *bona fide* militant-subjects, the heroes of new communism.

Ultimately, Žižek's reading of the pandemic showcases three things. First, the COVID-19 pandemic, besides its planetary evental site scope, did not produce anything genuinely and historically novel. Moreover, Žižek's communism or barbarism pendulum is leaning towards the latter one, proving what Jung centuries ago claimed: "Indeed, it is becoming ever more obvious that it is not famine, not earthquakes, not microbes, not cancer but man himself who is man's greatest danger to man" (Adler, Fordman & Read 1973, 8439). Second, the postmodernist fetishism of uniqueness is clear in the need to describe "its" times, hence the corona "new normal" epoch as well, as special, different, and uncertain. Yet, it is not. Alan Watts in his 1951 *The Wisdom of Insecurity* writes that every epoch thinks it is more insecure than the other one. However, "poverty, disease, war, change, and death are nothing new. In the best of times, 'security' has never been more than temporary and apparent" (Watts 1951, 15). And third, the COVID-19 pandemics is not a holistic Badiouian event, but an amplification of globally already concretized societal norms of neoliberal capitalism, with sporadic bursts of potential change. It seems that Žižek forgot a phrase commonly attributed to him – "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism" (Fisher 2009, 2). But, if it is not an Event, what is it? For now, it is leaning toward becoming a Žižekian simulacra of the Badiouian event – not a copy of the original or mere parody, but a deeply rooted, self-created substitution of the "signs of the real for the real" (Baudriallard 1994, 2). However, we have yet to see that. The pandemic is not over. The truth is only post-evental (Badiou 2005).

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