

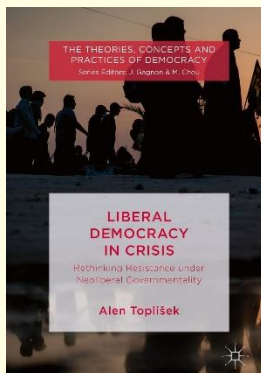
## Book Review

### Liberal Democracy in Crisis Rethinking Resistance under Neoliberal Governmentality (2019), Palgrave Macmillan by Alen Toplišek

Nelman Edy

Department of Administrative Sciences, Universitas Hasanuddin. Makassar. Indonesia

#### Book Overview



This book is one of the interesting books related to the study of democracy that focuses on the phenomena of liberal democracy crisis. This book is based on Project carried out by the School of Political and International Studies, Queen Mary University of London, between 2012 and 2016. The main motivation of this project is to understand and reveal the phenomenon of increasing waves of protest activities occurring in several parts of the world during the period 2012 and 2013. In conveying his ideas and thoughts, the author of this

book, Alen Toplišek divides the structure of this book into three main topics and 7 chapters. Each chapter has its specific analysis that is arranged to show the writer's logical frame.

#### Article History

Receive

December 2021

Accepted

December 2021

In the beginning, Thru the introduction part, this book examines various phenomena related to the spread of various significant collective activities and actions in terms of the way the government handled the 2008 financial crisis as well as the increasing demands for systemic change in various regions of the world. In this part, the author shows various phenomena that ranging from the Indignados Phenomenon in Spain to the global Occupy movement, the Syntagma Square anti-austerity protests in Greece, and the popular uprising in Slovenia which became the event of a strong current of criticism against various governments in the world. These criticisms are related to the involvement of various governments in the framework of continuous neo-liberalization of their people but at the same time considered fail to protect various vulnerable segments of society from the market negative effects. That wave of protests is seen by the author as something that leads to a liberal democracy crisis. It has prompted demands to reconceptualize the relationship

between the resistance activity and institutional politics. Through various manifestations at various levels of society, the crisis has reduced the level of public confidence in the work patterns of institutions such as political parties, people's representative institutions that do not truly represent the people's interests, decreased popular support for certain political parties and so on. All of that has been viewed by the authors as signs of democratic deficit in institutional liberal democracies where also believe has contributed to the intensification of radical politics outside of formal institutions which are believed to be a condition of degradation of liberal democracy.

In this section, the author also shows that the crisis of liberal democracy is not a new topic in terms of scholars' debate. By citing the writings of several previous writers, in this section, the author sees that the challenges posed by the civil rights, ecology, feminist and anti-war movements have prompted, especially conservatives, to question democracy's ability to govern. Increasing democratic pressure on a political system, which they believe to be plural and just, leads them to view the governing elite as being overloaded by unrealistic political expectations and demands. The progressive and neo-Marxist sociologists challenge the burden of theses and view the rise of social movements and protest activity as legitimate responses to the loss of the elite governing legitimacy. The resurgent civil society and the emergence of new social movements challenge the boundaries of institutional politics and encourage a re-evaluation of key principles in democratic theory. It is seen by this book author through his previous work as a phenomenon that forms the background of the arguments he presents in this book.

Furthermore, the author shows that the dominant analytical model of democracy is the aggregative model. By citing the work of Schumpeter (2010) and Sartori (1975), this book demonstrates a pluralist-elite assumption about political life that emphasizes the view of liberal democracy as an electoral competition among a plurality of interests, where the nexus of political power lies with elected politicians, while citizens act as passive spectators. Through the emergence of new social movements in the 1970s, the conception of liberal democracy came under increasing pressure. The deliberative democracy model is presented as an alternative to the aggregative model by challenging the rationalist instrumental economy that underlies its main assumptions and shifting political axioms towards solving normative problems through deliberation as stated by (Habermas 1987, 1996; Dryzek 2000; Rawls 1971, 2005). However, the authors see that these two models fail to capture the antagonistic aspects of resistance to institutional politics and the resulting crisis of liberal democracy.

In this regard, the author then tries to use the agonist model, proposed by the political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2000, 2005, 2013a). This book will not use the agonistic theory of democracy in its entirety, but in the beginning, it is used to conceptualize an alternative understanding of the aggregative and deliberative models of democracy which then builds on it by involving social movements and new radical left literature. To underscore its theoretical

merit for my analysis, Mouffe's agonistic democracy provides an account of politics, emphasizing its antagonistic character and underscoring the centrality of power in the constitution of identity and political position. It also explains how liberal rationality drives the political axioms of democracy which seem to ignore the antagonistic character of politics. These two important contributions provided the basis for Mouffe's project of theorizing radical democratic politics.

Like the other two models, this thing demonstrates a strong assumption of liberal democracy as a neutral mechanism for interpreting political grievances and demands. All three models of democracy, regardless of their qualification differences, take an indulgent approach to understand liberal democracy while at the same time putting aside the structural and historical analysis of the changing role of state institutions in the context of global market integration. While the agonistic model does identify the depoliticization of liberal democracy as a source of extra-institutional contestation of formal politics, a systemic analysis of what drives this contestation is missing in the literature. In the 1970s, the concept of liberal democracy was increasingly under pressure which then presented the deliberative democracy model as an alternative to the aggregative model by challenging the rationalist instrumental economy that underlies its main assumptions and shifting political axioms towards solving normative problems through deliberation as shown by Habermas (1987), Dryzek (2000), and Rawls (2005) as cited in this book. However, these two models fail to capture the antagonistic aspects of resistance to institutional politics and the resulting crisis of liberal democracy. Based on that, Toplišek raises the various question of why social conflicts arise even in well-ordered societies, such as advanced liberal democracies? Can all conflicts be institutionalized and handled through established democratic procedures? If not, what else? Can analytical models better explain the inherently conflictual nature of social relations and political divisions among different political groups and rationalities? To that end, Toplišek then used the agonist model, proposed by Chantal Mouffe (2000, 2005, 2013a), as a partial response. However Toplišek treats his theory of agonistic democracy as complete, but in the first instance uses it as a starting point for conceptualizing alternative understandings of the aggregative and deliberative models of democracy as He presented in Chapter 2, where it was later constructed by involving social movements and new radical left literature. To underscore its theoretical merit for this book analysis, Mouffe's agonistic democracy provides an account of politics, emphasizing its antagonistic character and underscoring the centrality of power in the constitution of identity and political position. It also explains how liberal rationality moves the political axioms of democracy away from recognizing the antagonistic character of politics. These two important contributions provided the basis for Mouffe's theory of radical democratic politics that is cited in this book. Like the other two models, which treat liberal democratic institutions as neutral mechanisms for translating political grievances and demands, all three democratic models, despite their differing qualifications, take an indulgent approach to understand liberal democracy, while setting aside structural

and historical analyzes of the changing role of state institutions in the context of global market integration.

In light of these various conditions, this book attempts to combine the project of radical democratic political theorizing, the starting point of which will be Mouffe's agonistic view of politics, with an analysis of the political economy, which will offer a structural explanation of the interaction between political and economic processes in liberal democracies. Neoliberalism is understood as a rationality of government that manages and conditions the market economy through a complex network of knowledge and political institutions, operating across the political/economic divisions common in classical political economy.

In building his argument in this book, Toplišek appears to be unconcerned with detailed descriptions of how neoliberalism was rolled out in the West and its negative consequences. for social cohesion, increasing inequality, and exacerbating socio-economic inequalities. The analysis in the book seems to concentrate more on the interrogation of how the development of liberalism and its relationship to neoliberalism affected the political rationality of government in the West and the resistance this transformation created after the 2008 financial crisis.

Based on that, Toplišek then raises two main theoretical problems that are interrelated. First, a structural understanding of the dynamics between liberal democracy and a market economy is needed to explain the systemic depoliticization of political democracy. Second is a reconceptualization of resistance about depoliticized institutional politics, which will overcome the structural obstacles faced by radical left politics in challenging neoliberalism. The two sections of the problem are then used to address certain theoretical gaps in their respective scientific literature. The analysis in this book uses political theory as a source for maneuvering between critical political economy and democratic theory on the one hand where it is then used to describe the relationship between politics and economics, while on the other hand radically new leftist and social movement literature is used. The analysis was undertaken in this book also demonstrates the need for political theory to explain the concepts of crisis and resistance as links to rethinking the relationship between institutional politics and protest movements.

Thematically, the first part of this book connects political depoliticization with the dominant conception of democracy and analyzes the relationship between politics and liberal democracy through a critique of liberalism as the dominant ideology of Western society as seen in Chapters 2 and 3. In the second thematic section, the idea of crisis is explored conceptually. as potential productive sites for the emergence of resistant subjectivities and disturbances that dominate the neoliberal order as described in Chapter 4. The final theme of this book is to use resistance as a starting point for rethinking politics through the concept

of power. The protest movements and new radical left parties that emerged in response to the neoliberal management of the 2008 financial crisis are used by Toplišek as an example to build on the theoretical observations from the previous section to analyze the challenges ahead for political radicals as seen in Chapters 5 and 6).

Specifically, in Chapter 2, through the sub-title *Understanding the Crisis of Liberal Democracy and Rethinking Democratic Politics*, the author tries to analyze the crisis of liberal democracy that exists through the prism of the 1970s debate about the crisis of governance and the differences in democratic theories and models. By analyzing the different responses to the governance crisis from the perspective of academics in the 1970s, this book focuses on aspects of the political crisis by first analyzing the dominant democratic models that have influenced the scientific understanding of contemporary democratic politics. Through a critical analysis of the aggregative and deliberative models of democracy, the author then raises his view that the two dominant models are too normative to be tainted by liberal rationality. The author then uses a critical analysis of Chantal Mouffe's model of agonistic democracy and finds that it can serve as a better framework for understanding contemporary political dynamics but does not provide an adequate explanation as a framework for the post-2011 wave of protest and the rise of populism. Existing theories and models of democracy still do not explain why contemporary liberal democracies have been unable to respond to the growing popular demand in post-crisis Europe. Therefore, Toplišek states the importance of a theoretical approach that can provide structural and historical analysis to recognize the role of liberalism, both economic and political, in reshaping the role of the democratic state in the economy and the depoliticization resulting from democratic politics.

Furthermore, in Chapter 3, this book offers the sub-title *Understanding (Neo)liberalism: The Relationship Between the Liberal State and Free Market Capitalism*. This chapter provides a historical analysis of how liberalism changed the role of state institutions in accommodating the ongoing market expansion. Drawing on Michel Foucault's work on liberal government and Karl Polanyi's study of the dynamics between liberalism and the counter-movement, this book attempts to build on a critical political economy approach that helps in understanding the relationship between the liberal state and free-market capitalism. It is intended to inform the understanding of the relationship between liberal democracy and neoliberalism. In the final section of this chapter, the authors analyze the key transformations in the role of the state under the neoliberal rule, which have created gaps in democracy in the West.

Chapter. 4, provides the sub-heading *Crisis: Critique, Temporality, and Trauma*, this book explores the possibilities and conditions associated with the emergence of resistance to neoliberal government by conceptually dismantling the idea of a crisis. In presenting his argument, the author of this book analyzes various conceptions of crisis that can be found in business and management studies, international relations, and Marxism. However, because

according to the author there is a lack of theoretical concepts in the first two and economic determinism in the third, He then proposes to continue with a conceptual crisis analysis by observing whether the congruence of criticism, the temporality of the crisis, and the trauma of socio-political violence can provide a sufficient basis for the emergence of a crisis. resistance. The author demonstrates a shared ontology of crisis and critique ascertained through readings of Hannah Arendt, Judith Butler, and Michel Foucault to reveal the transgressive and reflective qualities of criticism in times of crisis. In the second part of this chapter, the author establishes the discursive formation of the crisis as an event. In this respect, it achieves an effect similar to the suspension of the old way of thinking as criticism. However, the author by citing Derrida then shows signs of announcing a crisis as an example of determining the likelihood that the 2008 financial crisis will be given the signs a systemic readiness to control and tame it so that the dominant order can return to normal. In the third part of this chapter, the author then explores the possibility of critical subjectivity and rejects things that arise from the trauma of experience in the socio-political violence of the crisis. The author then tries to politicize the idea of showing how internal effects at the subjective level relate to the socio-political trauma of the crisis.

Furthermore, Chapter 5 as the section that has a relevant theme as chapter 4, offers the sub-heading Politics and Resistance As Power. Through this chapter, in response to the existing reluctance within social movements and parts of the radical left to engage with existing structures of power and to answer questions about government and move away from romantic views of resistance in radical politics, the author of this book argues. that practice resistance cannot operate outside the network of power relations because they form a structural part of it. Through his analysis of the work of Michel Foucault and Hannah Arendt's conceptions of politics and power, Alen Toplišek challenges the conventional understanding of power as always repressive, reserved for the subject of the strong, and applied to the less powerful. According to him, based on the analysis of Arendt's political understanding, it was revealed that the empowerment and constitutive aspects of power through its emphasis on active participation and deliberation of all citizens in public places. According to him, Arendt sees power as a positive thing and the non-coercive political element ignores its structural relationship with the notion of rule and government, which Foucault manages to tackle through the concept of counter-behavior. Given the occupation and protest movements that erupted in response to the neoliberal management of the financial crisis, Toplišek argues that radical politics should not shy away from their conducting (counter) power which is a structural part of the resistance. This observation has important political and strategic implications for radical politics as it demonstrates the need to address the ephemerality of power in the protest movement through institutionalization. The author then examines this thesis through an analysis of the political passion of Antonio Gramsci and Jacques Rancière's argument that the circularity of rules can be radically shifted in politics. Through Walter Benjamin and Jacques Derrida's Exposition of legal violence, the last part of this book

demonstrates the understanding that the aporetic structure of rule is radically unavoidable in politics.

In Chapter 6, this book offers the sub-title *Challenging Neoliberal Governmentality: Social Movements and the New Radical Left*. Based on the arguments presented in the previous chapter, in this section, the author shows the challenges faced by the post-2011 protest movement and the new radical left party against the neoliberal rule. In this section, the author emphasizes the need for political left radicals to engage with power structures as a result of the author's analysis of the joint ontology of institutional and non-institutional politics through the notion of power in the previous chapter. The post-2011 wave of protest movements and the emergence of new radical leftist parties acted as a re-politicization of the depoliticized structure of democracy while representing the possibility of establishing an alternative to neoliberal governance. Therefore, the authors offer an analysis starting by identifying the continuity and discontinuity of the anti-austerity movement with the Global Justice Movement. Breaking with past practices and thinking, the radical left has just realized the limitations of working outside of institutional politics and decided to multiply the effectiveness of their struggle by entering electoral politics. Then I use the 2012–2013 case study of the Slovenian protests and the emergence of the United Left party to illustrate in greater depth how these theoretical observations are matured through the practice of activists on the Slovenian radical Left. In the final section of this chapter, the author identifies and analyzes two challenges facing the new radical left parties in their resistance to neoliberal rule.

The final chapter of this book is the conclusion section that concludes every aspect of the discussion that has been conveyed by the author in the previous chapters. In this chapter, the author summarizes the main theoretical findings from the book as well as raises analytical questions that can be considered for future research efforts.

Based on the things presented in this book, I think this book is a very interesting work, especially for those who have an interest in the studies of democracy and socio-political change. The arguments presented are very interesting and provide a good explanation regarding the phenomenon of the protest movement that is happening in the world concerning the existence of liberal democracy today. Indeed, the idea of a liberal democracy crisis in this book is not the very end thing. This book has successfully provided an important understanding in forming an understanding of the existence of a crisis against liberal democracy as well as preparing a foothold to be developed through further research and discussion.