

Review

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Naomi Klein (2007). *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*,
New York: Metropolitan Books.

Peter McLaren & Nathalia Jaramillo (2007). *Pedagogy and Praxis in the Age of Empire*,
Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Critical Pedagogy in Neoliberal Times



Naomi Klein begins her book reporting on how neoliberals imposed their policies of privatization and markets on New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. She exposes how neoliberals both within and supported by the Bush administration used the disaster as an opportunity to eliminate public housing and privatize public schooling, including how the Bush administration collaborated with anti-government activists to dismantle the public schools and the teachers union, and replace them with privately administered charter schools. Grassroots New Orleans' organizations, such as the non-profit Center for Community Change (2006),

corroborate Klein's analysis and describe the dismantling of the city's schools as a case in which neoliberal and neoconservative reformers disdain

the public sector and those who work within it. It is a vision of competition and economic markets. It is a vision of private hands spending public funds. Most disturbing, it is a vision that casts families and students as "customers," who shop

for schools in isolation from — and even in competition with — their neighbors. It is a vision that, like the game of musical chairs, requires someone to be left without a seat. (p. 1)

Soon after the hurricane struck, the Bush administration began to work to replace the public schools with charter schools, first by waiving federal restrictions on charter schools and then granting \$20.9 million to Louisiana for establishing charter schools. At about the same time, the Orleans Parish School Board placed the district's 7,500 employees on unpaid "Disaster Leave" (Center for Community Change, 2006, p. 10), and later fired all the employees. With the help of an additional \$24 million grant from Secretary of Education Spellings, all but 4 of the 25 public schools became charter schools (p. 28).

In the remainder of the book, Klein shows how the U.S. has imposed authoritarian neoliberal economic policies not only on its own people but also on the rest of the world. She narrates how neoliberalism was first implemented at a national level in Chile in 1973 when the U.S. assisted in the military overthrow of Salvador Allende's democratically elected government, which was replaced by Augusto Pinochet's authoritarian dictatorship. Pinochet not only murdered or forced into exile thousands but also, with the advice of Milton Friedman and other neoliberal economists from the University of Chicago (dubbed "the Chicago boys"), impoverished millions by privatizing education, health care, social security, and other social services. Klein also provides an in-depth examination of how similar policies were implemented in other Latin American countries, including Argentina and Brazil, and in Russia, where crony capitalism has enabled a few to become fabulously wealthy and the rest to become increasingly poor.

She also details the less well-known adoption of neoliberal policies in post-apartheid South Africa, where Blacks obtained political freedom in exchange for consenting to whites implementing neoliberal economic policies that have, incredibly, worsened rather than improved the living conditions for Blacks. Post-apartheid policies have doubled the unemployment rate and the number of people living on less than \$1 a day. (I first became aware of this policy and its effects when I visited South Africa in 1998; see Hursh, 1999.)

Of course, the most blatant example of the U.S. directly imposing neoliberal policies in another country is in Iraq, where the goal has been to use the invasion to advance a neoliberal model for the rest of the world. Immediately after the invasion, the U.S. downsized the government and privatized its assets (Klein, 2007, p. 337), including prohibiting financing of state-owned enterprises (p. 349), dismantling unions and eliminating the minimum wage. Furthermore, the U.S. government provides economic incentives to U.S. corporations, including reduced trade barriers, all of which leads to describing our Iraqi policies as a “reverse Marshall plan,” in which wealth is taken out of Iraq and sent to the U.S.

Klein also reveals how China’s extraordinary economic growth is a result of neoliberal policies that include “low taxes and tariffs, corruptible officials and, most of all, a plentiful low-wage workforce that for many years, would be unwilling to risk demanding decent salaries or the most basic workplace protections for fear of the most violent reprisals” (p. 190). Furthermore, as I have described elsewhere (Hursh, 2008), China’s economic policies have contributed to producing a toxic environment along with economic inequality. Anne-Marie Broudehoux, in *Evil Paradises: Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism* (2007), portrays China’s crony capitalism and billionaire gangsters as it prepares for the 2008 Olympics. She writes that in China “the gap between the rich and the poor, urban and rural is constantly widening” and “has now become one of the world’s most unequal societies” (2007, p. 94). Under neoliberalism, people have lost health care, pensions, jobs, and homes previously provided by the government. In particular, Beijing is a

new metropolis [that] mirrors the society that builds and inhabits it: an increasingly individualist society that willfully sacrifices a more cohesive one, where a predatory elite of private entrepreneurs, technocrats, and party members prey on a disenfranchised and vulnerable populace. A city glittering on the surface but hollow at the core: *a truly evil paradise*. (p. 101, emphasis added)

McLaren and Jaramillo (2007) also begin their book by exposing U.S. policies in New Orleans and Iraq with a focus on neoliberalism’s consequences for education. They rightly argue that as a nation we have avoided any serious discussion about what such

policies mean for democracy, the racial divide, and the obligation of government to its citizens (p. 6). The residents of New Orleans, they point out, have historically experienced a poverty rate twice the national average and now, after the hurricane, many of the poor have been discarded as if they do not exist. Like Klein, McLaren and Jaramillo show how, in Iraq, the U.S. has made all the crucial decisions about the country's future, and consequently Iraqis have experienced "mass theft disguised as charity" and "privatization without representation" (p. 32).



Peter McLaren and Nathalia Jaramillo

But McLaren and Jaramillo push their analysis to raise questions about what we can and should do as educators and, in response, describe a "revolutionary critical pedagogy" that includes the following. First, they argue that educators are crucial to "reclaiming public life that is under the relentless assault of the

corporatization and privatization of the life world, including the corporate-academic complex" (p. 94). But we need to do more than reclaim the public sphere; we need to work for its socialist transformation. They continue:

The terms revolutionary critical pedagogy seeks to identify the realm of unfreedom as that in which labor is determined by external utility and to make the division of labor coincide with the free vocation of each individual and the association of free producers, where the force of authority does not flow from the imposition of an external structure but from the character of the social activities in which individuals are freely and consciously engaged. Freedom as we are conceiving it is freedom from necessity. Here, the emphasis is not only on denouncing the manifest injustices of neo-liberal capitalism, critiquing the current global crisis of overproduction, stagnation, and environmental ruin and on creating a counter force to neoliberal ideological hegemony but also

establishing the conditions for new social arrangements that transcend the false position between the market and the state. (p. 94)

McLaren and Jaramillo move beyond critique to describe what is possible. Rather than a society that focuses on creating more goods, regardless of whether they add value to our lives, and working for the purpose of creating profits, they aim to create a socialist society in which the goals are democratic equality and economic well-being.

However, as long as we live in a capitalist society in which profits are valued over people, such goals cannot be achieved. McLaren and Jaramillo lament that most educators ignore the role that capitalism has in creating class inequality and that “exploitation is a fundamental character of capitalism, that it is constituent of the labor-capital relation” (102). Under neoliberalism in particular, with the so-called “end of ideology” in which capitalism supposedly reigns triumphant, alternatives to capitalism are impossible. However, the evidence provided by Klein, Harvey (2005), Faux (2006), and many others demonstrate that unregulated capitalism or neoliberalism necessarily results in economic inequality and environmental degradation. But in a society in which capitalism has gained hegemony, the destructive consequence of capitalism is the problem that has no name.

Therefore, McLaren and Jaramillo desire to create a socialist society in which decisions are made not based on profit but on the developing of an inclusive democracy. It is not enough to bemoan the increasing inequality in the U.S. and the world: one must lay blame where it belongs — on capitalist rationalities, especially as they play out in the increasingly hegemonic neoliberal policies — and create alternatives.

McLaren and Jaramillo raise the essential questions of how we, as educators, might create alternatives in a time in which individualism, entrepreneurship, and corporate profits are held in higher regard than the community and non-economic values such as the environment. I would suggest that current events provide opportunities. Almost every day we learn how capitalist rationalities contribute to global warming and the potential catastrophe that may result. For example, an article in today’s (December 7, 2007) *New York Times* examines how the Indonesian government both provides generous economic incentives for companies to log the forest and turns a blind eye to those who

engage in illegal logging (Gelling, 2007). *The Guardian* reports on the potential deforestation of 60% of the Amazon forest by 2030. Such deforestation will result in a significant increase in the amount of carbon in the atmosphere and an increase in global temperatures of more than 3.6 degrees that would result in catastrophic floods and drought, rising sea levels, and heat-wave deaths and diseases (Benjamin, 2007). Reducing deforestation will require rejecting neoliberal policies that privilege the market and implementing sustainable logging practices along with appropriate land-use and development policies.

Moreover, the daily environmental news out of China, the archetypal neoliberal government, demonstrates how neoliberal policies result in environment destruction. China now has sixteen of the twenty worst cities in the world with respect to air pollution (Bradsher, 2003) and, according to a recent study, has surpassed the United States as the top emitter of carbon dioxide (Reuters, 2007). Recent reports (Barboza, 2007) indicate that China's air and water pollution causes 750,000 premature deaths annually and costs \$160 billion a year in damages. Furthermore, the drive for capitalist expansion at all costs has contributed to numerous ecological disasters (Yardley, 2004), including benzene and nitrozone spills in the Singhua River (Lague, 2005), which contaminated drinking water for millions of people, and exporting dangerous products, including toys with lead paint, defective auto tires, and poisoned toothpaste.

These environmental problems cannot be solved if, as President Bush's policies do, economic growth always takes precedence over the environment. Bush, in opting out of the Kyoto protocols, exclaimed: "I will explain as clear as I can, today and every other chance I get, that we will not do anything that harms our economy. . . . That's my priority. I'm worried about the economy" (Bush, cited in McKibben, 2006, p. 18).

Bush and other neoliberals aim to create the economic, environmental, and social conditions that will benefit the investor class to the detriment of the middle class and the poor. Consequently, McLaren and Jaramillo argue that we need to begin an anti-capitalist struggle building on Gramsci's notion of a strategic war of position. That is, citing Robinson (2003),

Social conflicts linked to the reorganization of the world economy will lie at the heart of world politics in the twenty-first century. The challenge is how to reconstruct the social power of the popular classes worldwide in an era in which such power is not mediated or organized through the nation state. The universal penetration of capitalism through globalization draws all people not only into webs of market relations but also into webs of resistance. (p. 320).

Building on Robinson, they argue for several “fundamental requirements for an effective counter-hegemony.” First, we need to “build a political force on a broader vision of social transformation that can link social movements and diverse oppositional forces” (McLaren and Jaramillo, p. 113). We need to connect a variety of grassroots social movements that work towards both their specific goals and to develop an anti-capitalist or socialist alternative.

Second, because global capitalism is able to move and concentrate its power and workers from one place to another, resisting neoliberalism requires challenging the global elite “by accumulating counter-hegemonic forces beyond national and regional borders; to challenge that power from within an expanding transnational civil society” (Robinson, 2003, p. 324). Consequently, and last, educators and others engaged in countering neoliberalism need to “subordinate their work to and in the service of popular majorities and their struggles” (McLaren and Jaramillo, p. 115).

McLaren and Jaramillo recognize that it is difficult to engage in critical pedagogy in these times of seemingly hegemonic neoliberalism. But they, as I have suggested elsewhere (2008), recognize that the increasing national and global inequality and the destruction of the environment leads to increasing questioning of the dominant policies. They write, quoting Roy (2004):

As the rift between the rich and poor grows, as the need to appropriate and control the world’s resources to feed the great capitalist machine becomes more urgent, the unrest will only escalate. . . . The urge for hegemony and preponderance by some will be matched with greater intensity by the longing for dignity and justice by others. (p. 196)

Klein, McLaren, and Jaramillo demonstrate in detail the negative consequences neoliberalism has had for people and the planet and suggest what we might do to combat neoliberalism. Furthermore, educators cannot ignore neoliberalism as it increases economic inequality and schools are privatized and unions broken. Educators and others must not be afraid to name the problem for what it is — the reassertion of ruling-class power through policies that promote their own interests — and to work for socialist policies that promote equality and social justice.

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