Thinking Beyond Neoliberalism: Theorising the Future in the Present

Neal Harris, Oxford Brookes University
Onur Acaroglu, Bilkent University

Corresponding author: nharris@brookes.ac.uk

In the autumn of 2019 a surreal discursive symmetry gripped world politics.[1] Statesmen the world over, from Jair Bolsonaro to Bernie Sanders, Donald Trump to Jeremy Corbyn, sought to align themselves with a popular desire for radical social transformation. Borne out of resentment against decades of austerity, change was the order of the day. Support for the status quo was no longer politically tenable with the 'establishment' castigated for being 'corrupt', 'out of touch', 'racist', 'unpatriotic', 'ecocidal', and 'inefficient'. In the United Kingdom, 'Brexiteers' demanded immediate secession from the European Union, 'Corbynistas' advanced a proudly socialist election manifesto, and Extinction Rebellion (XR) and Black Lives Matter (BLM) blockaded London's streets, initiating a newly politicised generation in acts of civil disobedience. In the United States, an articulate wing of the Democratic party typified this uncompromising desire for radical transformation, with their chant 'Bernie or Bust'. They were explicit: more of the same is no longer tenable (Rao, 2020).

Fast-forward six months, to late Spring 2020 and Covid-19 had brought the world economy to a juddering halt, cities were empty, supermarket shelves were stripped, and supply chains crippled. The manifest desire for radical social transformation had come to pass, however in a manner unthinkable just weeks before. In the UK, an apparent 'super-Keynesian' revolution occurred (Chafuen, 2021). By the 16th March 2021, 11.4 million workers had been furloughed (Parliament, House of Commons: 2021: 3), large sections of the rail network were effectively renationalised (a *cause celebre* of the British left), and the state had purchased huge swathes of new healthcare infrastructure. By sheer contingency of a global pandemic, the state had suddenly taken control of large sections of the economy.

Accompanying centralised state efforts in both the UK and the US, 'mutual aid' networks sprung up organically, revitalising communities which had lain quasi-dormant since the neoliberal assault of the 1980s (Cooney, 2020; Cook, 2020). A cadre of kindly citizens delivered ready meals and test-kits to the house-bound, often on bicycles, reminiscent of an Orwell novel. Local and national 'claps for carers' were instituted, with NHS staff, and all 'key-workers' receiving unparalleled recognition. The divergent social value of distinct types of labour became a popular talking point (O'Connor, 2020). Co-operation, community, solidarity, collective-ownership, and a state actively managing the economy for the public good, providing a vaccination for the benefit of humanity… One could easily be mistaken for believing Atlee's 'new Jerusalem' had emerged out of adversity in mid-2020.

Yet, spring forward to mid-March 2021, one year later, and the UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, triumphantly declared to a meeting of his Conservative MPs that 'capitalism' and 'greed' had inspired the nation's Covid recovery, with big-pharma allegedly playing a vital role (Allegretti and Elgot, 2021). A week later, the PM told the country it has had enough 'days off' and must get back to work (Helm, Inman, McKie, 2021). Johnson was able to make such claims, in spite of all reality, as mainstream political opposition to neoliberalism had dramatically receded. Likewise in the US, radical progressive movements centring political-economy had been deflated: Biden had triumphed over Sanders, as Starmer had displaced Corbyn. As Naomi Klein's (2007) *The Shock Doctrine* teaches us, despite initial impressions,

[1] We wish to thank Maïa Pal, Steven Harris, Angus Reoch, and Denis C. Bosseau for their comments on earlier drafts.

devastating social crises are typically good news for neoliberalism. One could argue that neoliberalism has somehow emerged from Covid-19 stronger than ever.

In real terms, consider reports in *The New York Times* that half the $22 billion of public money spent to support the Covid-19 fight in the UK went 'to companies with political connections', 'no prior experience' in the relevant sector, and/or 'histories of controversy'. A remarkable '$5 billion went to politically connected' companies, such as Deloitte, many of whom had made substantial donations to the Conservative Party (Bradley, Gebrekidan and McCann, 2020).[2] Despite the Department of Health and Social Care claiming due diligence had been carried out, dozens 'of companies that won a total of $3.6 billion in contracts had poor credit, and several had declared assets of just $2 or $3 each' (Bradley, Gebrekidan and McCann, 2020). In a similar vein, despite Johnson's claims to the miraculous interventions of the private sector to develop the Oxford-AstraZeneca's vaccine, 97% of the required capital for the underlying research came from various corners of the public purse (Safi, 2021). Tellingly, the Oxford-AstraZeneca Vaccine is increasingly referred to in the British media merely as the 'AstraZeneca jab', quietly displacing all trace of public investment and centring the British-Swedish for-profit multinational.[3] Klein's thesis appears well founded once again: neoliberalism clearly thrives off crises; at moments of collective suffering the rich get exponentially richer, while the poor suffer disproportionately. Covid was no exception (Finch and Finch, 2020).

With this in mind, we submit that neoliberalism is best defined as a system of social organisation dominated by the formal, active involvement of the executive, to preserve the interests of a select group of market actors, often to the express detriment of the public good. Crucially this is *not* a result of a distortion of best practice, or of cronyism, corruption, or malpractice; while these are, of course, rife, and systemically inevitable. Rather, what must be stressed is, to use Erich Fromm's term, the 'pathological normalcy' of the neoliberal status quo: when operating at its most standardised, most regular, most 'normal', neoliberalism is a system defined by the irrational[4] and morally egregious redistribution of public wealth to a select group of private actors (see Harris, 2019, 2021). The neoliberal system itself, as defined below (section 1), is structurally weighted to advantage capital accumulation for the richest at the cost of efficiency, equity, and social rationality, and as is increasingly apparent, at the cost of the environmental conditions required for human existence. The aphorism that neoliberalism is 'socialism for the rich and capitalism for the poor' holds true; this has become accepted as 'normal' and inviolable. In the words of Walter Benjamin (1982: 592), 'that things are "status quo" is the catastrophe'.

While political parties adhering to neoliberal economics are once again soaring ahead in the opinion polls, most notably in the UK (Swinford and Zeffman, 2021),[5] popular anger is increasingly swelling at oblique injustices. Previously, the systemic logics of neoliberal governance were explicitly attacked in the public sphere (by Corbyn, Sanders etc), today public vitriol is directed towards rogue, 'corrupt' actors, dishonest lobbyists, individual 'fat cats'. In April 2021, David Cameron, former Conservative Prime Minister, stands enmeshed in a

[2] Most troublingly, this is only half the story: only a limited pool of state Covid expenses are in the public domain, and one cannot help but wonder whether those which remain obscured are even more politically revealing.
[3] As a telling example of this trend, see Rigby and Nuki (2021).
[4] Here we draw upon the Frankfurt School tradition of social critique. For Critical Theorists, such as Herbert Marcuse (1969), a society is said to be 'irrational' when it fails to live up to the highest standard of reason made possible by its social-structural development. Neoliberalism is riddled with contradictions: consider the market imperative for infinite growth with finite resources, or a juridical culture, proud of 'human rights', where it is profitable to manufacture and sell weapons of war for use against civilians, while it is a criminal act for a starving person to 'steal' to feed themselves.
[5] There are, of course, significant exceptions to this trend. Obrador remains popular in Mexico (Agren and Nuño, 2021), while Castillo's campaign motto in Peru, 'No more poor people in a rich country', is resonating with the disaffected and impoverished (Collyns, 2021).

‘lobbying and cronyism scandal’ due to his work acting for Greensil, a now failed financial services company (Campbell, 2021). Cameron, it has emerged, entirely legally, sought to persuade various Ministers to utilise Greensil as part of the executive’s Covid recovery. Cameron has said he was ‘contracted to work for the company for 25 days a year’ and, in this capacity, in October 2019 had a ‘“private drink”’ with the Health Secretary, Matt Hancock, ‘at which they are reported to have discussed a payment scheme later rolled out by the NHS” (Heffer, 2021).[6] In light of these allegations, the oft-repeated refrain from senior government figures is that ‘Cameron never broke the law’ (Driver, 2021). This is unintentionally highly revealing of the irrationality and repugnance of deeper neoliberal connections between capital and the executive.

In 1843 Karl Marx wrote a letter to his friend Arnold Ruge, in which he stated that the ‘self-clarification (critical philosophy) of the struggles and wishes of the age’ is the task for progressive actors (1975: 209). In this spirit, what is required is to connect the immanent popular displeasure at the ‘smell’ of Cameron’s perceived disrespectable conduct (Mason, 2021), not to the desire for a new charter on lobbying, but to disclosing the fundamentally irrational nature of neoliberalism. The ‘normal’, standard operating procedures of neoliberalism are the problem. Cameron does not represent a distortion of fair-practice: his conduct is indicative of the ideal-typical workings of a neoliberal state. The fact that Cameron actually played a direct role in drafting the regulations which enabled him to financially benefit as a result of his post-government position is a mere irrelevance. True, it is disgraceful and unbecoming of a public servant. But it is merely indicative of the irrational nexuses in place between state actors and private companies which defines neoliberal governance. The problem is not David Cameron, the problem is neoliberalism.

It is important to stress this point. The mundane reality of neoliberalism is clear: it is a system in which the executive actively supports the economic interests of select private companies, often in direct opposition to its duty to provide efficient, high quality services for the tax-payer. This is in clear contradiction of the stated neoliberal aim of a free-market and a minimal state. Rather, we see targeted state intervention in the market aiding the interests of select factions of capital. Increasingly, certain private interests are advanced by stealth. By way of a contemporary example, consider that, in clear contempt to the public’s support for the NHS, in mid-March 2021 the Conservatives quietly announced that 37 NHS GP practices have ‘been sold to a private US health company’ – Operose Health, UK subsidiary of Centene Corporation (Wilson, 2021). This is a telling mark of further privatisation within the NHS, occurring during the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, where hostility to healthcare privatisation is greater than ever, and where the public overwhelmingly support NHS workers in the campaign to remedy their derisory pay-offers (Weaver, 2021).

The challenge facing progressive thinkers and activists, in keeping with Marx’s words to his friend, is demonstrating the objectively absurd and contemptible nature of the neoliberal social formation. We must connect with the popular resentment against private firms and private individuals looting public assets and colonising public services, contrary to the democratic will, to the deeper, foundational extractivist logics of neoliberalism. As we consider the post-Covid-19 world, the socialist vision embedded with the Corbyn and Sanders project has gone, and neoliberalism, in the form of a nebulous state/private-sector nexus, currently runs triumphant. The media serves both to reinforce the normalcy of the neoliberal model, and the myth of its inevitability and rationality (Berry, 2019).

[6] To add further colour, it has since become public that Hancock’s sister owns shares in an NHS approved firm, also granted funding as part of the Covid recovery (Whannel, 2021).

In the Covid-19 age, the rich have quickly got richer, while the poor die proportionally ever-younger (Neate, 2020). It is clearly time to reignite the activist imagination, to remind us of the possibilities of a post-neoliberal world, and to place the COVID-19 pandemic as a catalyst for long-lasting qualitative transformation. This volume carries the hopes of such an endeavour, seeking to unite academic and activist voices from around the world, shining a light on the possibilities which exist within the present, the opportunities for resistance manifest within neoliberal institutions, and to chart possible routes for progressive transformation. Our challenge is truly to provide a 'self-clarification' to the struggles of the age.

Naming the beast: defining 'Neoliberalism'

The term 'neoliberalism' is used in competing and often contradictory ways, rendering it an exemplary 'essentially contested concept' (Boas and Gans-Morse, 2009). As a result, various scholars have argued that the term has limited usefulness (Clarke, 2008; Venogopal, 2015; Welsh, 2020). Other academics have attempted to further delineate varieties of neoliberalism, with 'authoritarian neoliberalism' being a noteworthy example (see Tansel and Bruff, 2019). Clearly, any attempt at an extensive definition of neoliberalism would need to include multiple constituents, sensitive to neoliberalism as an economic model, a form of subjecthood, a form of governmentality, an ideology, a geopolitical project, and the existing socio-economic reality.

Neoliberal Economics

The standard, textbook definition of neoliberalism would refer to an economic order guided by the principle of minimal state intervention in the marketplace (Heywood, 2007: 90-91). Such 'laissez-faire' models are associated with the work of Ludwig Von Mises, Friedrich Von Hayek, and Milton Friedman.[7] In Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), economic liberty *qua* free markets is held to be fundamental to social liberty and to the well-being of the society. Such a perspective holds that the state is an inefficient mechanism for economic distribution. Rather, a truly free market is held to offer the optimal possibilities for economic and societal development, meritocratic attainment, and social cohesion.

Such a framework is fundamentally "academic" and normative, offering an ideal vision for economic management. Economic approaches based on these foundations were originally the theoretical outliers, an iconoclastic counterpoint to the existing Keynesian orthodoxy (see Palley, 2004). While rooted in economic theory, Thomas Hoeber (2019) rightly stresses that economic theory quickly moves into sociological and ethical territory, promoting normative values as to the merits of competition, meritocracy, and the role of the market within society. One can frame this first understanding of neoliberalism as a theoretical, 'pure' economic vision, untouched by the messiness of socio-political reality.

Neoliberal Subjecthood

Today, one often hears of the 'neoliberal subject' and the 'neoliberal self' (Chandler and Reid, 2016; Verdouw, 2016). Such a framing can be explicitly normative and/or theoretical, as per the above, or it can be used as a descriptor for the forms of behaviour dominant within the existing social world. As such, the term is used in competing ways. In both definitions what is captured is a set of behaviours, norms, and aspirations associated with subjects living within a society nominally promoting free-market values. Verdouw (2016) has identified key indicators of neoliberal subjecthood, based on empirical research, including, but not limited to: a belief in individual autonomy and individual moral responsibility, materialism, a market-centric account of freedom, and a consistent focus on profit and productivity. Developing

[7] For an excellent intellectual history of neoliberalism, see Quinn Slobodian's (2018) *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism.*

Read's work (2009), Verdouw speaks of the neoliberal subject as forming 'a company of one', reinforcing the importance of the normative individualism associated with the market (see Friedman, 1990).

McGuigan (2014) has also written extensively on the neoliberal subject. A distinctive feature of McGuigan's account is the divergence between the generation of neoliberal subjects and their social-democratic predecessors. In contrast to the social-democratic self, which prioritises social cohesion, affective and practical co-operation, commonalities and group dynamics, the neoliberal self is remorselessly subjected to a cool individualism, attuned to consumption and utility-maximising practices.

Expanding McGuigan's work one can connect the neoliberal subject with a valorisation of 'resilience' (Chandler and Reid, 2016). While the ideal-typical social-democratic subject believes in the societal responsibility to provide for all members of the community at times of crisis, the neoliberal subject believes in the primary importance of the resilient individual. As times get tough, the neoliberal subject must step up and practice meditation, mindfulness, yoga, a strict fitness regime (Joseph, 2013). The onus is on the individual to strive to survive (Brunila, 2014), rather than there existing an overbearing moral responsibility on the community to support the vulnerable and needy.

Neoliberal Governmentality

While 'governance' can be seen to be invested in an outmoded fragmentation between 'state', 'market', and 'civil society', 'governmentality' seeks to elide such compartmentalisation (Cotoi, 2011: 111). For those studying neoliberalism as a form of governmentality, power flows seamlessly across such dated divides, colonising life-worlds and shaping the most basic and foundational activities of social subjects. Governmentality is most commonly associated with Foucault (2008), who defined it as the 'conduct of conducts', forms of rationalisation through which subjects are shaped and rebuilt according to invisible imperatives. Neoliberalism for Foucault is thus understood as a practice, 'a reflexive mode of action' (Cotoi, 2011). As such, neoliberalism is not understood merely as a political commitment to the shrinking of the state, or the exiling of state actors from the marketplace. Rather, neoliberalism is also productive of a certain kind of social behaviour (Brown, 2015). As such, social critique today must incorporate a critical analysis of the everyday behaviour of subjects within neoliberalism.[8]

Neoliberalism is thus seen as a coalescence of regulatory pressures, creating subjects who embody a particular worldview. As a result, the subject behaves in a manner commensurate with free-market imperatives and their attendant values (Foucault, 2008). The neoliberal subject will thus check their step-count, measure their sleep cycles, calculate their calorie intake, make 'rational' cost-benefit analyses. Conversely, they will have contempt for the 'lazy', the 'unproductive' (see Christiaens, 2018), and for those invested in projects and goals on the basis of affect or passion, rather than for their potential return on investment. Neoliberal governmentality is thus the series of conduct shaping processes, emanating from pulsating, subterranean, market logics, once-removed from the subject's first-order consciousness. From such a framework, neoliberalism is the processes through which the ideal-typical modern subject is created.

Neoliberal Ideology

Neoliberalism can also be understood as a dominant contemporary ideology (Navarro, 2007). From this perspective, neoliberalism is presented as a veil which permeates society, distorting

[8] That said, Foucault's approach to neoliberalism is increasingly contested amongst progressive academics. Zamora and Behrent (2015) have convincingly argued that in many ways Foucault actually endorses and supports central features of neoliberalism.

the subject's 'second-order' reflexive capacities (Zurn, 2011: 345). Or, expressed more crudely, neoliberalism is a form of social conditioning which stops social subjects from thinking clearly about their social world. Emanating from all social domains, from advertisements[9] to primary school lessons, such an ideology serves to set the dominant norms and values which act as determining referents for social analysis (Althusser, 1971). As such, certain assumptions, such as the mythical[10] 'efficiency of the free market' (Fox, 2009), become accepted as second-nature, and remain lodged in the subject's consciousness despite the overwhelming empirical evidence to the contrary (Letza, Small, and Sun, 2004).

Neoliberal ideology does not merely lodge myths deep within the subject's consciousness, but it is productive of *desires* as well as of values (see Brown's chapter in this volume). Paraphrasing Žižek (2006), ideology does not give us what we desire, it teaches us how to desire. We thus fetishize certain values related to market functioning: efficiency, order, hard-work, self-regulation, material abundance; and denigrate other, more productive values: care, contemplation, restraint, reflexivity (Amable, 2010). Consumption is valorised as freedom, and the calculative, rugged individual is heralded as the measure of all things.

Finally, neoliberal ideology serves to obscure the simple reality that the market does not deliver optimal outcomes compared to existing alternatives. This is spectacularly apparent when one compares marketised and non-marketised provision of key services (healthcare, education, transport). The reality that Cubans (victim to an illegal blockade for over sixty years), 'live as long as Americans at a tenth of the cost', should be highly instructive (Hamblin, 2016). There is a clear irony here: neoliberalism ostensibly places a premium on efficiency and utility-maximisation.[11] Yet, during Covid-19 Cuba was exporting medical supplies and doctors to aid nations suffering from their desperately inefficient capitalist health-care systems (Augustin, 2020). The obvious lessons a cursory turn around global geopolitics should teach are systematically concealed.

That it is easier to imagine the end of the world, than the end of capitalism (Jameson, 1994), is, in itself, a crucial result of neoliberalism. Analysing our impeded capacity to examine the social world is thus an essential precondition of understanding our current social formation. Understanding neoliberalism as an ideology, as a force which distorts our vision of the world, is thus truly important and must be a central concern for analysis. As Adorno (2005: 50) framed it in *Minima Moralia*, 'the splinter in your eye is the best magnifying glass'.

Neoliberal (Geo-)Politics

Neoliberalism also refers to a political, and, indeed, a geo-political project, the objective of which is the replacement of solidaristic and co-operative economic systems with the free market. While sounding eerily conspiratorial, it is entirely justified to state that there are highly influential organised political groups which advance free-market economics globally. The Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS) is perhaps the most famous organisation dedicated solely to this cause (see Mirowski and Plehwe, 2015). Founded in 1947 by Hayek, von Mises, Friedman, and other distinguished academics and statesmen, the MPS advocates for a global neoliberal revolution. The MPS is perhaps best characterised as a think-tank with remarkable reach and influence. Compared to many of its allies, it remains comparatively academic, transparent, and peaceful in its operations.[12] The same transparency cannot be said of The Bilderberg Group. Founded

[9] See Debord's (1994 [1967]) *The Society of the Spectacle*.
[10] For more on the role of widely accepted socio-economic myths and their power, see Ohana (2012).
[11] Further empirical studies show that the US sits unfavourably relative to the Indian state of Kerala on multiple development indicators (Sen, 1993).
[12] While comparatively peaceful in their approach to neoliberal transition, MPS members were unashamedly honest about their suspicions of democracy for the prospects of free-market economies. Cornelissen (2017) has shown how central to fifty years

in 1954, the organisation brings together select political leaders, academics, financiers, and journalists, for discrete, confidential talks, often postulated to be centred around the goal of advancing neoliberalism (see Skelton, 2016). Andrew Kakabadse captures the objectives of the Bilderberg group as seeking to 'bolster a consensus around free-market Western capitalism and its interests around the globe' (cited in Lewis, 2020: 195).

Comparatively, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organisation (WTO), and World Bank (WB) are more famous actors relative to the shadowy Bilderberg and MPS. However, they function as far more effective political champions of neoliberalism as a geo-political-juridical project (see Gill and Cutler, 2015). While purporting to further development and sustainable governance, the IMF and WB have demanded aggressive neoliberal reforms on developing countries. Central to this political project are 'structural adjustment programmes' (SAPs). Capital is provided to developing nations, overwhelmingly to post-colonies, on the condition that 'austerity' measures are imposed: that food subsidies are abolished, wages are reduced, privatisation is enforced, and government expenditure curtailed. Financial institutions promoting neoliberalism are created, currencies are devalued, and economic output is focused on extractive heavy industry (mining, deforestation) for the purpose of exports. The empirics are unambiguous: the imposition of SAP has led to untold death and suffering (see Palast, 2001; Forster, Kentikelenis, Stubbs, and King, 2020, *inter alia*). As such, Richard Peet (2009) has referred to the IMF, WTO, and the WB as the 'unholy trinity' of neoliberalism.

For Costas Lapavitsas (2019), the European Union epitomises an institution which advances an aggressive neoliberal geopolitics. While conscious of the lack of central coordination in its higher echelons, Lapavitsas memorably refers to the bloc as a 'transnational juggernaut haphazardly thrown together and rolling in a neoliberal direction' (2019: 19). Yet the ultimate neoliberal course on which it is heading is irresistible. Parallel to Preet's 'unholy trinity', Lapavitsas attacks the role of the 'troika'[13] in the Eurozone crisis, seeing the European Union as crippling any attempt at socialist transition in its periphery through the enforcement of politicised austerity measures. One could view the actions of the 'troika' to represent a form of coerced structural adjustment (Bell, 2015). Remarkably, considering Lapavitsas' depiction, for many on the right of the UK's Conservative Party, the EU fails to be neoliberal enough. Members of the tax-payer funded,[14] European Research Group (ERG), pushed for a so-called 'hard-Brexit', seeking to transform the UK into a so-called 'Singapore-on-Thames', undercutting the EU with lower taxation and less regulation (Davies, 2019). The ERG has been referred to as a 'party within a party' and is explicit about its political objectives: accelerated neoliberal reform typified by substantial deregulation (Cusick, Corderoy, Geoghegan, 2020; Burton-Cartledge, 2019).

The MPS, Bilderberg, SAPs, and the EU, are far from the most distasteful features of neoliberalism as a targeted political project. A satisfactory discussion would have to incorporate a host of US backed invasions, including support for fascist governments,[15] and illegal coups. It is no stretch of the imagination to consider neoliberalism as a political strategy which incorporates extra-legal American expansionism targeted to displace national industries

of MPS discussion was the possibility of radically curtailing the scope of popular power, placing constitutional limits on the ability of elected representatives to restrict market freedoms.

[13] The 'troika' consists of the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.

[14] See Ramsey (2018).

[15] The US had close ties to the Portuguese and Spanish states in the post-war decades, thereby displaying its willing accommodation of fascism in the classical sense. Moreover, right-wing authoritarian regimes from South America to the Middle East have enjoyed US support in all dimensions. While the designation of such contemporary states as 'fascist' is intensely debated, they exhibit many similar properties and dovetail with US hegemony.

across South and Central America, MENA and South East Asia (see Sardar and Davis, 2004: 92-101). In this regard when one mentions 'neoliberalism' as a political project, perhaps what is truly being described is Atlantic foreign policy (see van der Pijl, 1984; Gill, 1989). In such a vein, 'neoliberalism' may be reasonably captured by Sardar and Davis' (2004: 194) definition of American foreign policy more broadly, as a political project 'based on authoritarian violence, double standards, and self-obsessed self-interest'.

Actually Existing Neoliberalism

Carrying aspects of all of the above, my preferred option is to speak of 'actually existing neoliberalism'. Most simply, one can hold 'neoliberalism' to be a signifier corresponding to today's social world. As such, theorisations of 'neoliberalism' must capture the messiness of social reality, rather than the sheen of sets of normative goals or theoretical abstractions. In this volume, neoliberalism functions as a shorthand for today's society and political economy.

Indeed, in direct contrast to the abstract, Hayekian dream of a 'free market', today's world is riddled by state-market interpenetration. It is no stretch to define actually existing neoliberalism, as alluded to above, as a system in which state actors intervene arbitrarily to artificially promote the interests of capital, often in a manner directly opposed to the democratic will of the people. Fascinatingly, this also operates to directly oppose the results of 'free market' competition. Neoliberalism is thus typified by state-funded artificial respiration of failing private industries, propping up failed monopolies in sectors where the profit motive has no possible bearing: rail, motorway maintenance etc.[16]

The relationship between theoretical neoliberalism and actually-existing neoliberalism is thus important. The hypocrisy of support for the free-market is used to justify the displacement of socially owned industries, while self-same free-market institutions, appointed to replace nationalised providers, are then financed to the hilt by the state. When the authors gathered in this volume are *Thinking Beyond Neoliberalism* it is this hypocritical nexus of state-power, public wealth, and private capital which is at the forefront of their minds.

Theorising Alternative Societies, Transition, and Resistance

The chapters gathered here help the reader 'think beyond neoliberalism' in three ways: (i) by demonstrating actually existing alternative forms of economy and society, (ii) by charting considerations for transition and social transformation, and (iii) by discussing possible modes of resistance to neoliberalism within its institutions and governing structures. All three are vital areas for study, both in enabling the conceptualisation of a post-neoliberal world, and for emboldening progressive activism, reminding us all that another social order is possible.

Part One of the volume, 'The Future in the Present', contains essays on existing social constellations beyond neoliberalism. In this spirit, Luke Martell's chapter outlines a plethora of alternative economies, seeking to demonstrate their remarkable possibilities, while remaining mindful of their contradictions and limitations. In this effort, Martell's contribution discusses actually existing communism, co-operative ownership, participatory economics, alternative work, freeganism, alternative economies, community wealth building, democratic economies, and national and public ownership. Martell's analysis shows that real alternatives exist, and that utopian aspirations can be married to achievable, practicable goals. As Martell concludes, these existing formations are 'not fantasies, but tangible [and] practical' showing the 'alternatives that can be attained'.

[16] This Sisyphean nature of public wealth bailing out failed private has been captured by economists for generations. Keynes' famously uses the imagery of the myth of the Danaid jar, deploying it powerfully in his *Treatise on Money* (1930: 125, *inter alia*, see Ferguson and Johnson, 2013).

In a similar vein, Robin Jervis' chapter, 'Co-operatives and Socialism: The Promises and Contradictions of a System of Worker Ownership', focuses on the potential possibilities embedded within co-operative movements. For Jervis, co-operatives serve both to offer forms of employment which 'ameliorate the worst effects of neoliberal capitalism', but crucially also serve as 'revolutionary consciousness-raising institutions'. Jervis presents co-operatives as harbouring a real emancipatory potential, framing them as 'interstitial bodies able to bring about economic and social change'. However, like Martell, Jervis is no blind idealist. A strength of Jervis' chapter is his political acuity, he argues that co-operatives in neoliberalism are susceptible to 'degeneration', yet feasible antidotes exist. Central to the success of existing co-operatives is their funding mechanisms. Thus, future co-operatives, Jervis argues, need to be financed through 'participatory economic structures' (as discussed by Martell), or by market-socialist redistribution. Co-operatives are thus presented as existing institutions which point beyond neoliberalism, which, with further socialist transition, can form a stable basis for more equitable, more rational, and less alienating forms of society.

Drawing on his experience as both an activist and as an academic, Johnbosco Nwogbo's chapter, 'Why the post-Covid world needs a Universal Basic Income (UBI)' demonstrates the necessity and feasibility of providing all members of society with a regular cash payment. The Covid-19 pandemic has entrenched existing inequalities, as the richer middle classes were able to save their unused disposable income. In contrast, the precariat were left in a debilitating cycle of under-employment, in-work poverty, and increased debt. Demonstrating the malleability of neoliberal governance, Nwogbo argues that the same logics which enabled the 'Coronavirus job support scheme' can be extrapolated to normalise a form of UBI. Neoliberalism is presented as an amorphous order, capable of tremendous adaptation. As such, Nwogbo presses the case for an internal, gradual, development out of neoliberalism, following its own internal contradictions and requirements. The establishment of a Universal Basic Income is thus presented as a feasible extension of existing policy, critically attuned to the dominant normative order, while capable of enabling gradual qualitative transformation.

These alternative social and economic formations are not presented as blueprints for a future utopia. Rather, they are actually existing social formations, which have been trialled or fully enacted, and which are open to co-optation by neoliberal logics, or to internal capture by conservative factions. However, what can be stressed is the reality of these projects: they exist in the here and now, and as such, in Martell's prose, offer a 'basis for hope for social change and a better world'. In this regard, Jervis, Martell, and Nwogbo, serve to demonstrate that the true 'realism' lies not in believing that 'there is no alternative' ('TINA') to neoliberalism. Rather, alternate social formations already exist. The authors are explicit in their defiance of the Thatcherite dogma: there are multiple, superior alternatives to neoliberalism. This is not to suggest that a perfect solution is simply waiting 'out there' for us to implement. Rather, considering the brazen failures of neoliberalism, we contend that there are a plurality of plainly superior alternative social structures. This does not mean they will be free from their own contradictions. Indeed, considering the brutalities of neoliberalism we contend that identifying superior alternative social orders is embarrassingly easy. The first section of the volume seeks to provide responses to the obvious question: "surely there must be a better system than this!?" The answer, we contend, is a loud "yes – several!" The challenge, as the authors in section two start to address, is how to transition out of the 'pathological normalcy' of the present, and arrive at a superior social system.

Section Two, 'Theorising the Possible', thus focuses on the challenge of 'transition' itself, centring the question: "How do we move beyond neoliberalism?" In this vein, chapters from Acaroglu, Roth, Brown, and Davis offer insights from political theory, psychoanalysis, and Frankfurt School Critical Theory. The contributors do not advance a unified theory of socialist

transition: such a task obviously falls beyond the scope of this volume. Rather, the contributions in section two provide a series of provocations, identifying considerations and social-theoretical resources to engage with, when asking "how do we get out of this mess?"

Extending themes first explored in his recent *Rethinking Marxist Approaches to Transition* (2020), Onur Acaroglu's chapter, 'Regaining the Future: Temporality and Left Politics', stimulates discussion on the importance of breaking with the hegemonic account of temporality inscribed by neoliberalism. As Acaroglu outlines, the *chronos* of an 'eradicated historical temporality has overridden the *Kairos* of qualitative, transformative temporality'. More simply put, our understanding of time, and our imagination of ourselves as actors within a 'present', is socially variable. How we consider the 'progress' of time itself is historically dependant. At present, a neoliberal approach to temporality has achieved hegemony. Acaroglu thus stresses the importance of returning to a *Kairotic* understanding of temporality, of qualitative time, to enable new possibilities to emerge beyond the petrified rigidity of the neoliberal imagination.

Lynn Roth's contribution, 'There is No Place Like Hope: Ernst Bloch's Utopian Consciousness', brings a further social-psychological dimension to transition. For Bloch, the collective *yearning* for a better world needs to be given due consideration. Roth shows how Bloch's notion of 'Heimat' centres psychology and social relationality in social transformation, presenting actors as constantly working together in creating a new, shared future. The merits of Bloch's understanding of a utopian form of 'consciousness' are outlined; utopia is presented as a way of thinking about the world, rather than as a mere hypostatised social formation. As Roth argues, Bloch provides a crucial theoretical infrastructure through which to conceptualise collective longing, and demonstrates how harnessing such popular sentiment can productively compliment theories of transformation and transition.

Owen Brown's chapter, 'Connection Lost: Fully Automated Luxury Communism, Critical Theory, and Psychoanalytic Perspectives', offers a productive dialogue between Lacanian psychoanalysis and the growing literature on 'Fully Automated Luxury Communism' (FALC). For Brown, FALC, as associated with the work of Aaron Bastani (2019), has much to offer, however it has failed, as yet, to sufficiently embrace psychoanalytic insights. This is a crucial omission, for, as Brown stresses, how does one define 'luxury'? What are the generative mechanisms which determine our desires? There is a crucial social-specificity to what the subject yearns for, and theories of transition must be sensitive to this reality. The subject's longing for a different world, for a better world, is located within a power-strewn social domain, a world of ideology, conflict, and contradiction. Brown is sensitive to this complexity and urges theorists of transition to be aware that our desires are socially mediated, even our desires for social transformation. That said, Brown is supportive of the emerging FALC tradition, in that it encourages a new generation of activists to consider possible alternative futures. While Marx (1976: 99) had no interest in writing recipes 'for the cook-shops of the future', Brown sees merit in FALCs' contemplation of the particularities of alternative societies. His chapter thus supports a gentle course correction and an expansion of FALC theory, providing complimentary psychoanalytic insights, enabling us to better conceptualisation transition.

Dan Davis' chapter, 'The Pathology of Normalcy and Consensual Validation: Thinking Beyond Neoliberalism with Erich Fromm', draws on Fromm's Critical Theory as a resource to help *disclose*[17] the 'pathological' nature of the neoliberal order. Central to promoting social transition is the challenge of piercing through the stabilising forces of neoliberal ideology. In this regard, Davis skilfully shows the merits of Fromm's theoretical apparatus, engaging with *The Sane Society* and *Beyond The Chains of Illusion* to demonstrate Fromm's contemporary

[17] See Honneth (2000) on 'disclosing' forms of social critique.

relevance. Through an examination of Fromm's concepts of 'pathological normalcy' and 'consensual validation', Davis demonstrates how the neoliberal status quo is stabilised as 'normal', 'naturalised', and 'routine'. As Davis argues, Fromm provides activists and academics with resources to account for the widespread acceptance of neoliberal norms and values, despite their manifest divergence from the interests of social subjects more broadly. Through his powerful reading of Marx and Freud, Fromm is presented as a thinker rich in conceptual resources for furthering socialist transition.

While section two of *Thinking Beyond Neoliberalism* united theoretical insights on the problematic of transition, section three, 'Institutional Transition and Resistance', switches the focus to forms of resistance, or 'counter-conduct', within dominant institutions. A particular focus is offered on higher education and the university's "employability agenda". A crucial objective of this volume, as discussed in section one, was to show that alternatives to neoliberalism are not merely utopian, but rather are plentiful within social reality. As Pal and Lewis demonstrate, there is scope within institutional settings for important forms of resistance.

Maïa Pal's chapter, 'Employability as Exploitability: A Marxist Critical Pedagogy', shows how institutional neoliberal imperatives can be resisted by practitioners through everyday forms of 'counter-conduct'. While many on the left may be tempted to avoid any engagement with ostentatiously neoliberal initiatives, such as the 'employability agenda', Pal argues that such a retreat is ill-conceived. Instead, she argues that progressive scholars must be part of these conversations, for example, they can resist the neoliberal perversion of the academy, retaining a role for social critique and advancing qualitative transformation. As Pal charts, 'employability' induces a debasement of education, a transition from providing students with the critical skills needed to best comprehend and engage in the world around them, as critical and reflexive subjects, to prioritising equipping students with vocational skills to optimally perform within the neoliberal order. Pal's chapter charts the development of the employability agenda, and identifies opportunities for counter-conduct, demonstrating the possibilities of a Marxist Critical Pedagogy, which teaches 'employability' as an aversion to the dehumanising rat-race, and as a skillset attuned to the critique of neoliberal exploitation.

Christine Lewis' contribution, 'Neoliberal Creep and Reach: Education Services within the UK', offers an analysis of policy developments across the UK's education system, demonstrating how an array of neoliberal logics and initiatives were instituted across 10 consecutive government terms. Her sharp analysis of education policy illustrates the relentless pursuit of privatisation, and points to efficacious forms of resistance. Lewis' chapter is rich in historical detail and truly showcases how neoliberal rationalities were embedded across the education sector. Lewis teaches us that through such careful analysis of past developments opportune forms of resistance can be identified to optimally advance collective struggles today.

The volume ends with a brief conclusion by the co-editors, reflecting once again on the perilous state of the current conjuncture, as ecological devastation and insurgent neofascism vie for dominance as the greater horror. Yet, we stress that change floats in the air. Neoliberal apologists are sensitive to the instability of the status quo, possibilities abound for a recalibration of values, systems, and norms. Even an editorial in the Financial Times (2020), mouthpiece of the financialised class, admits to the 'frailty of the social contract', and acknowledges that a range of left-field policies such as UBI and wealth taxes will have to seriously considered. However, as with the social-democratic settlement, such concessions cannot be celebrated uncritically, or else they may, yet again, serve to allow capitalism to bide its time, regroup, and return more vicious than ever. We contend that for transition to be truly progressive it must be sensitive to the true complexity and embeddedness of neoliberal logics,

which must be identified and transcended. What is required is a fundamental qualitive transformation. As Rosa Luxemburg (2010) framed it, our choice is clearer than ever: socialism or barbarism.

Conclusion

This volume embodies hope for a post-capitalist world, pointing beyond today's neoliberal horrors. We argue that the range of possible alternatives is so promising, that the needless suffering in the present so extreme, and the opportunities for resistance so tangible, that 'think beyond neoliberalism' is a valid injunction to demand of scholars and activists. While mindful of the progressive inflection Bloch (2015 [1954]) holds in the term 'utopia', we are aware that the pejorative connotations of 'unrealistic', 'impracticable', and 'outlandish' remain dominant in attempts to see past the present. However, we contend that today's outlandish 'utopians' are the neoliberal sympathisers, those who believe in the perpetuation of free-market economics to further enrich the opulent, at the cost of inconceivable human misery and environmental degradation, when humane and equitable alternatives exist. In this regard thinking beyond neoliberalism, and disclosing its needless horrors, serves to comfort the afflicted (showing that a better world is possible), and to afflict the comfortable (disclosing the needless suffering produced by neoliberal institutions).

This volume carries a proudly international inflection, with the contributors' varied activist and academic experiences in Argentina, Canada, Cyprus, France, India, Nigeria, South Africa, Switzerland, Turkey, and the UK, nurturing an implicitly critical cosmopolitan outlook (Delanty, 2010). The volume also unites contributions from across the generations of progressive thought; senior Professors (such as Luke Martell) are joined by emerging scholars and activists (such as Johnbosco Nwogbo and Lynn Roth). We believe that striving for a world beyond neoliberalism is an endeavour which must unite actors across generations and across continents. That stated, we are aware that much of the literature on socialist transition is deeply Eurocentric,[18][19] and there remains a need to reflexively examine our location within political-economies of knowledge production, expanding our horizons and questioning established hierarchies (see Bhambra and Holmwood, 2021). In this regard, we present this volume as an invitation to further scholarship, rather than as an encyclopaedic compendium of possibilities.

We are not blind to the magnitude of the task ahead of us. The forces invested in maintaining neoliberal hegemony are colossal. As has been shown repeatedly, violence, even war and torture, are used to advance the neo-imperialist, extractivist and carbon-capitalist form of life (Harvey, 2007: 25). While we retain belief in the possibility of a more rational social world, one where we may 'fish in the afternoon' and 'criticise [philosophise] after dinner' (Marx and Engels, 1976: 47), we are aware that we sit on the event-horizon of neoliberal-induced catastrophe. Without immediate course-correction ecological devastation awaits (Malm, 2020). Progressives may not win. However, even accepting such odds, and the very real possibility of failure, what better meaning is there to give our lives, what richer harvest can we attempt to reap, that to struggle for a more rational, more human future. Even if such a struggle serves only to induce cathexis, functioning as an opiate for the weary mind facing terrifying odds, we must continue to push friends, colleagues, comrades, activists to 'think beyond neoliberalism'; so we can continue the struggle for one more hour, for the good of us all.

[18] On the difference between 'methodological' and 'empirical' Eurocentrism, see Pal (2020: 52-56).
[19] For an excellent approach to neoliberalism was consciously centres the global South, see Connell and Dados (2014).

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