Neoliberalization: States, Networks, Peoples

Edited by
Kim England and Kevin Ward

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In memory of:

Graham Ward (16 August 1946 – 23 November 2002)
Judith Ward (15 November 1987 – 4 July 2003)

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Preface

Were you in New Orleans in March 2003, at that year's Association of American Geographers (AAG) conference? Or perhaps you were in Philadelphia in March 2004, Denver in March 2005, or Chicago in March 2006, at those years' Association of American Geographers conferences? If you were at any of these events you might have been struck by the large number of panels and paper sessions that were organized on or around the theme of "neoliberalism." The same could be said about the last few conferences of the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers. Academics working on issues that, on first glance at least, seemed largely unconnected, such as the restructuring of the UK healthcare sector and the policies pursued in the name of "development" in South West Mexico, have suddenly found themselves part of a much larger conversation, one that some at least have found deeply problematic (Castree 2006). No one appears to have been immune. The great and the good, those gatekeepers of the discipline, faculty and postgraduates alike, have set about analyzing, dissecting, and unpacking the term, and what it might mean for their own area of expertise. Reflecting on her attendance at just such a panel at the 2003 AAG, Wendy Larner (2003: 509) asked, "what was this thing called neoliberalism that everyone was talking about?"

Uncomfortable with how the term was being used, she cautioned those working on its further explication to take care. She contended, referencing similar concerns voiced by Gibson-Graham (1996) over the conversations and discussions around the term "globalization," that those who talked and wrote about neoliberalism risked naturalizing "it." To avoid this, which was both intellectually and politically imperative, Larner (2003: 512) pleaded that those of us working on its excavation and refinement should

“overcome the fear and hopelessness generated by monolithic accounts of the ‘neoliberal’ project.”

In areas such as cultural geography, development studies, political ecology, and urban political economy, between which there have not always been too many conversations in the past, suddenly there was common ground. Neoliberalism brought together those of us – and we include ourselves – working in apparently, at least on face value, different areas of the discipline. And, of course, reflective of the times in which we live and work, the dialogue over neoliberalism was transdisciplinary. It involved geographers engaging with work produced in cognate disciplines, such as anthropology, economics, gender studies, planning, political science, and sociology.

It was in this academic context that the two of us were thrown together. We met, for the first time, in May 2002, at a Worldwide Universities Network workshop on neoliberalism, organized by Jamie Peck of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Adam Tickell of the University of Bristol. This event took place against the backdrop of the quintessential English university town of Bristol, a setting that provided a fine context in which to mix academic and social performances. The workshop brought together a range of different types of geographers and geographies. The focus was on exploring the possibility that some of us might begin collaborating on understanding the different aspects of neoliberalism. We are not sure what else came out of this twoday event, but after jointly chairing a session, at the request of the organizers, we continued our dialogue for some months, and decided to organize a panel session at the 2003 AAG – one we guess that might have prompted Wendy Larner’s (2003) editorial! After this our conversations continued. At this time, much of the human geography work on neoliberalism that can now be seen had not yet appeared. We had to look outside the discipline for

guidance, primarily to anthropologists, development economists, political scientists, and sociologists. Four of these guides – political scientist Mark Beeson, sociologist Wendy Larner, anthropologist Catherine Kingfisher, and anthropologist/planner Katharine Rankin – agreed to become involved in our book.

We met again in September 2003 at the annual conference of the RGSIBG, and confirmed a book plan and structure. We finally landed our contract with the Antipode Book Series at Blackwell in the autumn of 2004. Of course, since we began this academic conversation the work published, in human geography and beyond, on neoliberalism and neoliberalization has grown tremendously. It seems at times that it is almost impossible to pick up a copy of a geography journal without at least one article making reference to neoliberalism or neoliberalization. In addition to standalone pieces, there have also been a number of special editions of geography journals on aspects of neoliberalism, such as what it has meant to practicing development professionals (Bondi and Laurie 2005), for our understandings of nature and the environment (McCarthy and Prudham 2004), and for the state of economy and society in South and Latin America (Perreault and Martin 2005). This is in addition to the first systematic foray into analyzing neoliberalism geographically, where the emphasis was on urban and regional state formations in Western Europe and North America (Brenner and Theodore 2002a). At the same time, those working on unpacking neoliberalism from outside of human geography have continued to pursue a set of interrelated interests. A couple of examples will suffice. Political scientists and sociologists have explored neoliberalism in the context of other related debates, such as those over the path dependency of state for nations, economic and political growth trajectories, and the

interrelationship between citizen, gender, governmentality, and power.

During the three months over which we wrote this preface, never mind the introduction and conclusions, as we passed versions between our two e-mail boxes, so we incorporated more into our arguments, and associated bibliographies. Of course, the growth of work on neoliberalism and neoliberalization, as it perhaps expands in a manner not too dissimilar to the processes that it seeks to explain, makes our job as editors both harder and easier: harder because we now have to engage with all the work that has been published in the past few years, from different theoretical standpoints, using different methods in different parts of the world. Not wishing to impose structure and coherence where none exist, nevertheless, summarizing the state of research in this rapidly expanding and diversifying field has proved a challenge. Easier, of course, because there is now more written on the subject, which means we have a richer set of work upon which to draw. There is, of course, also more disagreement over what is meant by the term "neoliberalism" and how best to conceptualize and to study "it," if we can even think of "it" as an "it." Is it a cultural, economic, political, or social formation, or all four? Is it a hegemonic project? Is it a set of governmental technologies? Or is it a set of experiments, without common objective, largely disconnected, and malleable in the extreme? Does it constitute less, more, or a new form of state regulation? Do those working out of the political economy tradition, who stress governance, or those working out of the governmentality tradition and drawing on the work of Foucault, offer the best way of analyzing neoliberalism? Or is some theoretical rapprochement between these two epistemologically, methodologically, and theoretically different approaches possible, and desirable? The contributing authors to this edited collection try, in their

own ways, to address some of these issues, as well as dealing with other intellectual challenges they set themselves during the course of their own chapters. They do so from different theoretical vantage points, writing about different parts of the world, often using different methodologies to write about neoliberalism. For one of the referees of this collection this “difference” was a problem. For others, however, this “difference” was a positive feature of the proposal. Perhaps not surprisingly, we err on the side of the latter.

In the producing of the collection we have accrued some intellectual debts, and it is time to acknowledge these. Thank you to the four referees who commented on the collection proposal. Together with the authors we have done our best to attend to your concerns. Three of you gave the proposal the “thumbs up.” One of you didn’t. We hope that in reading the finished product we convinced three of you that you were right and one of you that you were wrong. Noel Castree, as the editor of the Antipode Book Series, and then of the journal itself, supported its conception and oversaw its delivery. At the same time he too was drawn to intervene, to set out his thinking on neoliberalism and neoliberalization. Throughout the writing of the book he has done what all good editors – and overworked academics – do: stayed out of the way. Thanks Noel! Jacqueline Scott at Blackwell did a great job of encouraging us to submit without applying too much pressure, so thanks to her and her colleagues, Angela Cohen and Arnette Abel, all of whom have been admirably thorough and patient throughout the production process. It was important to both of us to publish as part of the Antipode Book Series. As the home for radical geography, the journal has published a lot of the work by geographers on neoliberalism. It was our hope that this collection would continue this intellectual lineage, and that once published it would sit comfortably alongside other

books recently produced on the subject. The authors are also due our thanks. All have been a joy to work with. They commented on each others' chapters in a positive and engaging manner, making the production of this volume a truly collective endeavor. We hope they like the final product.

Closer to home, our debts largely lie with our respective family members. For Kim the thanks go to Mark and to her son Owen; for Kevin the thanks go to Colette and to his son Jack. All four in their own ways offered advice, encouragement, and support. And Kim's parents, Mariel and Stan, provided excellent editing assistance. As feminist economist Nancy Folbre (2001: xii) comments, "the invisible hand of the market depends on the invisible heart of care."

1

Introduction: Reading Neoliberalization

Kevin Ward and Kim England

> Ideologically, the novelty of the present situation stands out in historical view. It can be put like this. For the first time since the Reformation there are no longer any significant oppositions – that is systematic rival outlooks – within the thought-world of the West; and scarcely any on a world scale either … What limitations persist to its practice, neo-liberalism as a set of principles rules undivided across the globe; the most successful ideology in world history (Anderson 2000a: 17).
>
> The dilemma we all face as citizens is that, with few exceptions here and there … neo-liberalism has swallowed up the world in its clutches, with grave consequences for democracy and the physical environment that can be neither underestimated nor dismissed (Said 2000: 1).
>
> There has everywhere been an emphatic turn towards neo-liberalism in political-economic practices and thinking since the 1970s (Harvey 2005: 2).

Perry Anderson, Edward Said, and David Harvey. Three of the most well-regarded social scientists of their generation. Each has written about the origins, rise, and consequences of neoliberalism for different parts of the world. Tying it into wider discussions of globalization, American Imperialism, imperial hegemony, and Empire, these three public standard

bearers of the Left have each provided insightful accounts of the current phase of capitalism. Was this convergence by three eminent thinkers not enough to get most scholars (those for whom this book is the primary, but hopefully not the exclusive audience) interested in neoliberalism, then surely the changes under way around us should be. Rising inequalities of different types of capital – cultural, economic, environmental, social, and political – between as well within nations are frequently cited as tangible indicators of the imprint of neoliberalization. Wounds run deep and provide points of connection and alliances across space, across particular issues, even across perhaps otherwise disparate social groups, in ways that undermine the claims of those who remain committed to Margaret Thatcher's famous assertion "there is no alternative" (TINA) (MacEwan 1999; Harvey 2005). Neoliberalism as a "radical-theoretical slogan" (Peck 2004: 403) might have its limits, but it does serve to unite. It offers a reference point, against which those who oppose it can define themselves, as Harvey (2006) has argued, for example as in the "another world is possible" maxim of the anti-capitalist-globalization movement, initially coined by the World Social Forum to capture its commitment to build alternatives to the free-market economics espoused by the World Economic Forum. As Susan George (2001: 4) put it (referring to Davos, Switzerland where the WEF meets annually): "*Homo davosiensis* wants all the resources, all the wealth, all the power and all the freedom to extend his ascendancy across time and space" (see Beneria 1999, for a feminist analysis of the Davos man). Neoliberalism – in spirit if not in words – also binds together those with a stake in its continued reproduction. Government ministers, venture capitalists, the chief executives of multinationals, the largest owners of the media, the officials in international institutions: all are involved in practicing neoliberalization (Bourdieu 1998; Harvey 2006). The consequences of the actions of the

“transnational capital class,” as Leslie Skair (2000) terms them, can be seen around the world: on the streets of the poorest cities of the global South, in the former coalmines of Eastern Europe, and in the Latin American rural villages decimated economically by the slump in the global price of coffee. And yet, it remains politically important to constantly draw attention to the links between those in positions of power and the inequalities witnessed in geographically dispersed yet socially interconnected areas of the world.

Neoliberalism does appear to have become the ubiquitous political commonsense condition of recent years – used in all but name on the Right and used quite deliberately by those on the Left. Its widespread usage has led the sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Loïs Wacquant (2001) to describe neoliberalism as a new “planetary vulgate.” Certainly now more is known about the personalities, the places, and the institutions involved in the transformation of neoliberalism from the “abstract intellectualism of Hayek and Friedman to the state-authored restructuring projects of Thatcher and Reagan” (Peck and Tickell 2002: 41) and beyond, to what many consider, despite the protestations of Anthony Giddens (2000), to be neoliberalism with a friendly face – the Third Way of Britain’s Tony Blair, Gerhard Schroder in Germany, Australia’s Mark Latham, and Ricardo Lagos in Chile (see Larner, Le Heron, and Lewis, this volume, for a discussion of the Third Way in New Zealand). These developments suggested to us that the current moment provides an opportunity to take stock of what is known about neoliberalism in its many geographical configurations, to examine differences and similarities between how neoliberalism has been introduced, resisted, and challenged in particular contexts. And in turn, it offers the possibilities of reflecting on the meaning and usefulness of grand abstractions, such as “neoliberalism.” The two of us thought this would be a worthwhile exercise, in both political and

intellectual terms. As the book's title indicates, we make a distinction between neoliberalism as an end-state and neoliberalization as a *process*, consisting of a multiplicity of openings and closures. Adam Tickell and Jamie Peck (2003: 165) describe neoliberalization as being "contradictory, having the capacity to bring forth countertendencies, and as existing in historically and contingent forms … analyses of this process should properly focus on change – on systems and logics, dominant patterns of restructuring and so forth rather than on binary and/or static comparisons between a past state and its erstwhile successor." This collection, then, is intended to expose neoliberalization in all its variants, all its guises, all its hybrid formations, in all its subject-forming strands.

Increasingly, standard textbook definitions of neoliberalism are not hard to find, nor are accounts of how "it" went from the ideological wilderness to the political mainstream (see our summary in Table 1.1). Most writers refer to it as an economic and political orthodoxy marked by commitments to policies of free trade, privatization, deregulation, and welfare state retrenchment (MacEwan 1999; Peet and Hartwick 1999; Campbell and Pedersen 2001; Brenner and Theodore 2002a; Peck and Tickell 2002; Harvey 2005). The majority of accounts of the emergence of neoliberalism tend to focus on the reforms delivered by University of Chicago-educated economists in Latin America; or detail the structural adjustment programs of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. There are of course exceptions, such as the account offered by Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2004). He documents the reforms pursued in the American South as a means of offering an alternative account of the rise of neoliberalism. As he puts it, "the material matrix of real neo-liberalism is the American South … The Chicago School provided an economic rationale and intellectual gloss to what was, and remains for the majority,