

REVISITING NEOLIBERALISM IN THE AGE OF RISING AUTHORITARIANISMS, Between convictions and contradictions

Routledge International Handbook of Global Studies, in Hamed Hosseini, James Goodman and Barry Gills (eds), London: Routledge, pp: 97-107

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Introduction

Despite the growing disagreement about the applicability of the concept of ‘neoliberalism’ as a useful analytical tool, it ‘is broadly defined as the extension of competitive markets into all areas of life, including the economy, politics, and society’ (Springer, Birch, & MacLeavy, 2016). Furthermore, the four basic policies of neoliberalism are explained as fiscal (tax, war defence, social program spending), monetary (low interest rates), industrial (deregulation, privatization, anti-union, pension, jobs, wage compression), and external (trade, free trade, \$US exchange rate, global money flows, twin deficit solution) (Rasmus, 2019). Harvey (2005, p. 2) has also defined neoliberalism as ‘a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade’. For Povinelli, however, neoliberals did not simply want to ‘free the economy from the Keynesian regulatory state’, but rather ‘they wished to free the truth games of capitalism from the market itself – the market should be the general measure of all social activities and values’ (2011, p. 21). Today, neoliberalism manifests itself in intriguing and complex ways. While it has a variegated character (Akçalı, et al., 2015; Brenner, Peck, & Theodore, 2009; Lim, 2017; Macartney, 2009, 2010), it often has close links with some forms of authoritarianism to sustain its project (Bruff & Tansel, 2019; Tansel, 2017). For example, neoliberalism has proved itself to be not necessarily mutually exclusive with authoritarianism as demonstrated by the cases of Ben Ali’s Tunisia before the Dignity Revolution (Durac & Cavatorta, 2009; Tagma, Kalaycioglu, & Akçalı, 2013; Tsourapas, 2013), Islamic Malaysia (Elder, 2015), paternalistic authoritarian Singapore (Slater, 2018), Erdogan’s Turkey (Di Giovanni, 2017; Özden, Akça, & Bekmen, 2017; Tansel, 2018, 2019a), Putin’s Russia (Dutkiewicz & Trenin, 2011; Müller, 2011), and socialist China (Zhuoyi, 2015). A well governed and transparent security system has even become a key factor to ensure neoliberal socio-economic development (Faleg, 2012). However, and since security often acts as a smokescreen for surveillance, it has enabled authoritarianism to sustain, evolve and become more sophisticated. The boundaries between

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liberal and illiberal, regulated and deregulated, and authoritarian and democratic state have therefore become more ambiguous.

This chapter scrutinizes this conundrum by exploring the current convictions, contradictions, and ambiguities of ‘actually existing neoliberalism[s]’ (Brenner & Theodore, 2002), or, how their variegated character may lead to or sustain authoritarianism. ‘Actually existing neoliberalism’ reveals that despite having common points of reference, contextspecific conditions, experiments, and struggles have meant that neoliberalism has never materialized in any one singular or uniform manner since its instigation in the 1970s (Peck, Theodore, & Brenner, 2009). This compels studying the hybrid character of neoliberalism.

Such an analysis can avoid simplistic definitions of neoliberalism by more carefully exploring and comparing context-specific ‘neoliberal’ regulatory experiments. It can also help us better comprehend as such the eruption and the nature of counter-movements around the world that have been launched against the perceived neoliberal order, in variegated and situated ways.

Adopting this lens can enable us to imagine global alternatives, as well. Instead of viewing it as a consistent project, in light of Foucault’s work on neoliberal ‘governmentality’ which focuses on tracing the technologies of government (Koch, 2013; Weidner, 2010), we should turn our attention to the ways in which such technologies are enacted in ways that subject human agency to authority through forming particular cultural, political, and socio-economic visions. According to Foucauldian conception hence, neoliberalism draws upon the interaction of power relations; it acts as a political technology that is continuously able to transform into different forms and is thus dynamic in character (Foucault, 2008, pp. 101–265, 267–289). The hybridity and the authoritarian character of neoliberalism are consequently just two forms of such dynamism that can reveal the ways in which current socio-economic governmentalities are evolving. In what follows, I first attend to the hybridity of neoliberalism and then consider its connection with authoritarianism and illiberalism. Second, this, in turn, will enable me to consider the motives behind the variegated counter-movements which oppose actually existing neoliberalism/s.

Neoliberalism: a hybrid phenomenon

In discussing Ellen Meiksins Wood’s pioneering scholarship on capitalism, pre-capitalist societies, globalization, imperialism, and socialism, Patriquin (2012, p. 252) argues that precapitalist exploitation in imperial societies took place by ‘extra-economic’ means through direct coercion using military, political, and juridical powers to extract surpluses from producers who typically remained in possession of the means of production. This meant that relations of economic exploitation between classes were inseparable from ‘non-economic’ relations like the political relations between rulers and subjects (Patriquin, 2012, p. 252). While the imperial expansion continued using military power to extract taxes from the subjugated territories, imperial hegemony in the shape of global capitalism controlled rival economies and states without instigating war with them (Patriquin, 2012, p. 261). Neoliberalism is, nevertheless, expected to be a much different phenomenon however, since according to its proponents, it consists of ‘open, competitive, and unregulated markets, liberated from all forms of state interference, [which] represent the optimal mechanism for economic development’ (Brenner & Theodore, 2002, p. 350).

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Karl Polanyi argues that laissez faire states such as the USA and Great Britain in the 19th century extended the state structure to a dramatic extent to enable laissez faire economic practice (Vials, 2015, p. 251). Harvey similarly suggests that the role of the state has been to create and preserve the appropriate institutional framework for capitalist practices by setting up military, defence, police, and legal structures and functions to secure private property rights and to guarantee – by force if need be – the proper functioning of markets (Harvey, 2005, p. 2; Vials, 2015, p. 251). Besides states, various international institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have also become ardent supporters of capitalism and later neoliberalism. Through structural adjustment programs, these institutions have focused on implementing economic reforms in the belief that they will create the necessary conditions for the development of a strong and autonomous middle

class and civil society with individual entrepreneurial freedoms, skills, norms, and values (Hinnebusch, 2006). This, in turn, has been assumed to increase political participation and push for economic and democratic developments.

Contrary to the anticipated 'shrinking' of the state in a neoliberal setting, actually existing neoliberal policies and practices have hence involved 'coercive, disciplinary forms of state intervention in order to impose market rule upon all aspects of social life' (Brenner & Theodore, 2002, p. 352). This may be because, as Wood (2003, p. 10) suggests, the owners of the means of production under capitalism rely on coercion of individuals by the state to underpin their economic powers and their hold on property, and to maintain social order and conditions favourable to accumulation. The power of capital within the framework of 'neoliberal globalization' could hence not escape the control of the state, nor made the territorial state progressively irrelevant. On the contrary, the state is arguably more essential than ever to capitalism in its globalized form (Wood, 2003, pp. 5–6). In this sense, neoliberalism and the state have continued to exist in a mutually supportive relationship. Such practices have created a fuzzy situation for neoliberalism (Brenner et al., 2009, p. 183), which cannot strictly be linked to a particular political apparatus (Larner, 2000, p. 21). In several post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, for instance, the neoliberal project has been supplemented with socio-economic policies in favour of entrepreneurship, enterprise, and wealth creation, as well as state interventions for the creation of social justice, networks, and public–private partnerships (Bohle & Greskovits, 2012, p. 263). The democratic-liberal transition in 1990s in Hungary followed two main paths: utopian monetarism, seeking to persuade society to accept the idea of a 'selfregulating market' embraced by political liberalism; and nationalism, to foster the early 19th century conservative-gentry myth of 'pure nationhood' as a fundamental value (Bockman & Eyal, 2002; Böröcz, 1991, p. 112). Neoliberalism was thus introduced into Hungarian society with the deep conviction by economists and policymakers that a technocratic program was all that was needed for successful socio-economic reforms (Greskovits, 1998, p. 54). Meanwhile, the experience of Turkey under the Justice and Development Party rule since 2002 reveals the intersections of neoliberalism, local political dynamics, and welfare governance (Zencirci, 2015). Relatedly, in the UK the Blair government adopted 'Third Way' policies to safeguard that market failures would not destabilize the market economy and menace the cohesion of market society (Jessop, 2003, 2013, p. 72). This means that neoliberalism could never really abandon 'the social' provided by the state (Akçali, 2015, p. 10). On the contrary, the expansion of state-led welfare and social programs has often occurred as 'the product of neoliberalism which takes market inequality as given' (Zencirci, 2015, p. 125). These specific neoliberal governmentality techniques, such as social assistance

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programs for the poor, have therefore become very different from those usually associated with this concept (Ferguson, 2010, p. 183).

There have also been forms of neoliberalism practised by non-state and nongovernmental actors. In *Neoliberalism from Below* (2017), Verónica Gago examines for instance the ways in which neoliberalism in Argentina and elsewhere in urban centres in Latin America is practised 'from below', such as in the illegal market 'La Salada' in Buenos Aires. Gago argues that economic practices by migrant workers, vendors, sweatshop workers, and other disadvantaged groups in La Salada, such as the sale of counterfeit commodities produced in illegal factories, offer an alternative to neoliberalism, whilst they concurrently repeat its models of exploitative labour and production. Through such

examples of neoliberalism from below, she provides an unconventional understanding of neoliberalism; another hybrid characteristic of ‘actually existing neoliberalism/s’ where popular entrepreneurship flourishes challenging the traditional forms of obedience to neoliberalism from above. This is also a good example of what Foucault describes as neoliberal governmentality, insofar as techniques of governmentality subject human agency to the prevailing power structure/s and form ‘new’ cultural, political, and socio-economic subjectivities. Such subjectivities in a neoliberal framework imply ‘entrepreneurial individuals’, guided by the principles of a competitive marketplace, who assume the extension of these principles into all spheres of social life (Kurki, 2011, p. 353). In order to scrutinize further hybrid dimensions of neoliberalism, it is also useful to inspect the case of the developmentalist state structure and its governmentality techniques, particularly rampant in Asia. Countries as different as communist Vietnam, Islamic Malaysia, paternalistic-authoritarian Singapore, or market socialist China have willingly shaped their political economy to create a ‘neoliberalism as exception’ space combining both liberal and illiberal politics, so that they could be easily integrated into the competitive global economic system (Akçalı et al., 2015, p. 7). Such hybridity and the developmentalist state structure hence may be the reasons why Asian societies have experienced much lower levels of inequality than Latin American societies during their ‘neoliberal’ decades (Akçalı et al., 2015, p. 7). China and Vietnam, for instance, managed to navigate both the Asian economic crises of 1997–1998 and the global economic crises of 2008–2009, while recording high economic growth over the past three decades (Malesky & London, 2014). Neoliberalism has hence once again proved itself to have a variegated character (Brenner et al., 2010, p. 183), with one of its most striking dimensions being perhaps its transformative capacity (Peck & Tickell, 2002, p. 400). Finally, a way to further explore the hybrid nature of neoliberalism is to consider its relationship with nationalism. Nationalism and neoliberalism should not be assumed to be fundamentally conflicting ideologies. Rather, as Antonsich (2016) shows for the case of Italy, a neoliberal workfarist and individualized logic is a functional component of the reproduction of a dominant ethnic group in the face of international immigration. Antonsich argues that the normalization/nationalization of the immigrant occurs through their domestication into an active neoliberal subject (2016, p. 21). As long as an immigrant works, produces, and pays taxes, they are more likely to be considered Italian (2016, p. 21). A nationalist project can also easily be reframed in entrepreneurial terms (Akçalı & Korkut, 2015, p. 79) and its association with neoliberalism can create an ‘entrepreneurial nationalism bound up with market competition and calculative self-development as key attributes of the neoliberal subject’, while concurrently displaying loyalty to the state; as evidenced in Russia (Müller, 2011) and in China (Hoffman, 2006). These dimensions bring neoliberalism closer to authoritarianism, a link which I shall explore in detail in the following section.

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Is neoliberalism authoritarian? A view from the ‘global South’

One remarkable phenomenon is that rather than pushing for further liberties, neoliberal economic reforms have actually enhanced authoritarian practices (Hinnebusch, 2006). This has been particularly evident in the Middle East and North Africa, where the eruption of Arab revolts against the corrosion of economic and democratic rights has indeed revealed the co-constitutive relationship between neoliberal reforms and authoritarian state practices (Tansel, 2018). Social justice mechanisms which are delivered by the state or non-state actors (Baruah, 2015; Bui, 2015; Elder, 2015; Takaaki, 2015; Zencirci, 2015; Zhuoyi, 2015) within the current neoliberal order might appear to be aimed at increasing the ‘welfare’ of

certain classes (mostly, the poor). Yet, these practices are different from those of the traditional welfare state. They can act as tools of pacification and co-option of the masses in order to prevent contestation and help maintain the political and economic status quo (Akçalı et al., 2015, p. 12). They can also be read as neoliberal ‘buying off’ techniques rooted in populism (Akçalı et al., 2015, p. 12), which then open the path towards authoritarian settings. As in Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy, tyranny is inherent in the utopian ideal of freedom (Vials, 2015, p. 251), just as here, authoritarianism is in neoliberalism.

It is therefore not surprising that neoliberalism has acquired the capacity to emerge in semi-capitalist and non-democratic settings such as Vietnam and China, which have artificially repressed labour costs (Bui, 2015; Zhuoyi, 2015). Indeed, socialist China encompasses both neoliberal techniques of governing (for example, marketization of labour, calculative choice, and fostering a self-enterprising ethos in place of state planning), and Maoist era norms and values ‘such as serving the nation’ (Hoffman, 2006, p. 552). In another study considering slum eradication in Moroccan cities, Bogaert (2013b) demonstrates that Moroccan political commitments to fight poverty and uneven development, while continuing with the neoliberal economic agenda, have become part of the repressive state project. Latin America and the Middle East also have a long history of neoliberalization through authoritarianism (Bedirhanoglu & Yalman, 2010). This likely stems from what Brenner and Theodore (2002, p. 349) have described as ‘the contextual embeddedness of neoliberal restructuring projects’, or the ways in which socio-economic projects are always ‘produced within national, regional and local contexts defined by the legacies of inherited institutional frameworks, policy regimes, regulatory practices and political struggles’.

The Tunisian experience with its structural adjustment programs under the leadership of Ben Ali also presents a good case of a ‘contextual embeddedness of neoliberal restructuring projects’. It demonstrates that economic liberalization did not lead to any substantial reconfiguration in power relations since the authoritarian nature of the system remained intact (Durac & Cavatorta, 2009). In the Tunisian case the neoliberal market-based mechanisms and a police and authoritarian state have hence been mutually supportive (Hindess, 2001), confirming Bruff’s (2014) argument that authoritarianism can be considered a key characteristic of neoliberal governmentality.

The case of Ben Ali’s Tunisia reiterates therefore the need to scrutinize neoliberalism as a regime of capital accumulation with the state as a key actor in protecting and reproducing neoliberalism, which Tansel (2017) also acknowledges in his study on Turkey. Tansel (2017) argues that contemporary neoliberalism relies upon and reinforces coercive state practices that discipline, marginalize, and criminalize oppositional forces and judicial and administrative state apparatuses, which in turn limit the avenues in which neoliberal policies

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can be challenged. In another study of authoritarian neoliberalism in Turkey, Tansel (2018) problematizes the scholarly analyses of the AKP (Adalet and Kalkınma Partisi, or the Justice and Development Party) period by shunning the suggestion that the party’s methods of governance have shifted from an earlier ‘democratic’ model – defined by ‘hegemony’ – to an emergent ‘authoritarian’ one. Instead, by reviewing the mechanisms of the state-led reproduction of neoliberalism since 2003, he puts forward that the AKP’s earlier ‘hegemonic’ activities were always moulded by authoritarian inclinations which manifested themselves at various levels of governance (Tansel, 2018). Akçalı and Korkut (2015) also contend that by responding with enthusiasm to the increasing mobility of capital and the internationalization of investments through gentrification plans in Istanbul and Budapest,

both the AKP government in Turkey and the Fidesz government in Hungary have reinvented authoritarianism so that these cities serve the purposes of their national leaders. Such development strategies in these urban centres signals a hybrid form of neoliberalism that is at the same time combined with illiberal logics.

In fact, authoritarianism has a polyvalent character as well, since authoritarian regimes are as diverse as democracies. Moreover, authoritarianism is not simply the absence of democracy (Slater, 2018). In Southeast Asia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia offer a variety of examples of both illiberal democracy and electoral authoritarianism (Slater, 2018). Coercion in such situations is not always exercised directly by means of absolute force either, but rather indirectly and impersonally by the compulsions of the market (Wood, 2003, p. 11). This is because the market can become an economic ‘disciplinarian’ or ‘regulator’, even in illiberal settings (Wood, 2003, p. 279). Once economic actors become market-dependent, even workers who own the means of production are forced to respond to the market’s demands of competition to the degree of exploiting themselves and letting go any so-called ‘uncompetitive’ enterprises and their workers (Wood, 2003, p. 279). Such hybrid forms of neoliberal governmentality that, both in theory and practice, combine neoliberalism with illiberal ideologies such as authoritarianism and nationalism and even non-democracy can therefore enable us to explain the existence of a myriad of diverse reactions to neoliberal globalization, especially at the peripheries and semi-peripheries of advanced capitalism (Akçalı & Korkut, 2015, p. 80). The next section discusses the nature and development of such counter-movements against existing forms of neoliberalism.

Protest and counter-movements against neoliberalism

It has been argued that there is now strong evidence which demonstrates that inequality can significantly lower the level of the durability of growth (Ostry, Berg, & Tsangarides, 2014).

Neoliberalism has been unable to create a socio-economic environment conducive to socioeconomic equality and security of the majority of the people in the developed and the developing world (Crotty, 2000; Ostry, Loungani, & Furceri, 2016), in order to maintain the durability of economic growth. Thus, policymakers should be more open to redistribution through increased spending on education and training (Ostry et al., 2016). Such motives consist of expanding equality of opportunity (so-called pre-distribution policies), and fiscal consolidation strategies, bringing the budget to balance by gradually reducing the spending ratio while continuing to fund priorities such as education, justice, public health, and investments for the future (Ostry et al., 2016). There is indeed a need – even for the IMF, which is considered as one of the major actors of global neoliberalism – to develop alternative views to the conventional practices of neoliberalism (Ostry et al., 2016).

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In the absence of progressive socio-economic policies to supersede neoliberalism, it is very likely that populations around the world are going to continue to revolt, as has occurred in the last decade in a variety of mass demonstrations. These protests have not emerged out of the blue. Rather, they are the outcomes of socio-economic unrest, years of political struggle against authoritarian regimes by variegated societal actors, or cooperation among transnational movements. Often referred to as anti-globalization or counter-globalization movements, these revolts generally oppose structures associated with neoliberalism – such as financial markets and multinational corporations – that have deregulated or unregulated power and maximized profit as their ultimate goals at the expense of labour rights, workers’ safety, and environmental degradation. If one is to look at the root causes of the 2011 Arab uprisings, for example, alongside the lack of democracy, basic freedoms and rights, generalized poverty, unemployment, precarity, rise in food prices, uneven socio-economic development (Hanieh,

2013, p. 173), and inequality caused by the perceived neoliberal capitalist globalization (Bogaert, 2013a), have constituted the main driving forces.

The claims of the participants in the Arab revolts were also similar to those of countermovements such as the Indignados movement in Spain and the Occupy movements in cities around the world (Akçali, 2015). The participants of these counter-movements have claimed for new progressive structures and practices for both national and global economies to be able to better provide democratic representation, human rights, fair trade, and sustainable development (Crotty, 2000; Hosseini, 2011; Stiglitz & Charlton, 2007). However 'actually existing neoliberalisms' have also incited radical revolutionary feelings within societies. Farright and/or radical Islamist movements have an ambivalent relationship with neoliberalism (Davidson & Saull, 2017; Khalil, 2014). These radical formations often win the hearts and minds of their followers, largely by promising alternative views to neoliberalism such as socio-economic justice, solidarity, and freedom from neoliberal hegemonic structures such as the IMF, World Bank and even European Union, for instance.

A critical examination of the authoritarian and hybrid cases of actually existing neoliberal practices is therefore essential as it helps uncover how inequalities of power are produced and reproduced in capitalist societies, and furthermore stimulates the search for ways in which progressive worlds can be possible (Bruff & Tansel, 2019). Scholars and activists must hence clarify what progressive emancipatory societies might look like and what types of struggles in various socio-spatial contexts can lead to in such societies (Tansel, 2019b). Ellen Meiksins Wood argues that even though some of the basics of a humane and just community such as gender and racial equality are attainable within capitalist societies, efforts to establish peace and initiate sustainable development are said to be likely to fail unless the basic modus operandi of capitalism and its sub-set neoliberalism are challenged (Patriquin, 2012, p. 17). It is hence for this reason that revolutionary socialism has traditionally placed the working class and its struggles at the heart of social transformation (Patriquin, 2012, p. 282).

Clua-Losada and Ribera-Almandoz (2017), for example, demonstrate through the Spanish telecom giant Telefonica that even within the most authoritarian circumstances, workers find ways to resist and subvert the disciplining effects of authoritarian neoliberalism. The proposal that the working class is potentially the revolutionary class (hence the primary agent of revolution) has not yet efficiently been challenged by an alternative analysis of social power and interest in a capitalist society (Patriquin, 2012, p. 283). This may be because the working class still contains 'the real possibility of a classless society: a class without property of exploitative powers of its own to project' (Patriquin, 2012, p. 284). In this way, no other version of the socialist project has the same potential force to transform neoliberalism as the

working class, with its comparably 'consistent and organic conception of claims, objectives, social processes, and historical possibilities' (Patriquin, 2012, p. 284).

For Karl Polanyi however, counter-movements, including those of the working class, may not always come with a morally and politically acceptable justification (Unsar, 2015, p. 280). Next to the existence of the working class, as highlighted by Brown (2015, p. 38), neoliberalism produces new agents within civil society against authoritarian, despotic, paramilitaristic, and corrupt state forms. The hybridity of actually existing neoliberalisms create new forms of subjectivities, hybrid identities, transformed structures, and resistances (Akçali, 2015; Hosseini, 2015) that arise against or as a result of such hybrid and authoritarian forms whilst also challenging or enhancing them. It is essential to scrutinize these new formations further in order to comprehend their resistance and seize their transformative

capacities for a more emancipatory politics. To this end, one can consider post-neoliberal forms of governance that emerged in the mid to late 1990s, linked to the unfulfilled promises of neoliberalism and its incompatibility to non-Western settings (Akçalı et al., 2015). In the Latin American setting, post-neoliberalism has meant a process of readjusting and rebalancing liberal democratic principles by strengthening the plebiscitary and participatory aspects of democracy, such as creating constituent assemblies or constitutional reforms and social citizenship, as well as focusing on the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of human rights (Wolff, 2013, p. 52). Such forms of resistance are perhaps not as spectacular and loud as mass popular protests, Occupy movements, and uprisings, but they usually take a multiplicity of localized forms (Malmvig, 2014), and at times yield revolutionary results. They therefore call for scholarly attention.

Furthermore, in order to avoid the impasse that engagement of the traditional agents with the capitalist state creates for counter or anti-neoliberal protest movements, popular discontent perhaps needs to embrace antagonism rather than agonism against unequal social and political structures (Musil, 2014). Such antagonism does not need to resort to violence. It may likely inform the creation of class alliances against oppressive and unequal social structures that have the potential to harm all sides with the same cruelty in the last instance (Akçalı, 2018, p. 13). After all, a genuine transformative movement – in other words, a revolutionary socio-political transformation – depends heavily ‘on the political agency of class forces having attained a certain degree of leadership and cohesion in countering the advances of neoliberal development’ (Berberoglu, 2010, pp. 127–128).

Conclusions

In MaddAddam’s trilogy, Margaret Atwood is able to expose an idea of freedom not as a possibility inherent in our social world, but as a shackle that must be broken so that true liberation can arise (Vials, 2015, p. 252). This suggests that in order to go beyond the concept of ‘neoliberal’ freedom, which may indeed be a mere illusion, one may need to investigate the contradictions of ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ as the contradictions of capitalism (DuRand, 2014). As DuRand (2014) notes, the state mediates class relations and its function is to maintain the social order, or in other words, to maintain capitalist relations. As such, instead of viewing and accepting neoliberalism as a coherent project, in light of Foucault’s work on neoliberal governmentality which focuses on tracing the technologies of government (Koch, 2013; Weidner, 2010, p. 18), we should turn our attention to the ways in which such technologies subject human agency, and form and re-form cultural, political, and socio-economic visions and subjectivities.

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This chapter has discussed the dimensions and techniques of ‘actually existing neoliberalism[s]’ (Brenner & Theodore, 2002) to better illuminate where we – as scholars, activists, and ordinary people who are all affected by neoliberal processes – stand, and where we are leading to, with the hope of eventually imagining possible global alternatives. We need to conceptualize what an alternative and progressive social reality should look like, what the capacities of hegemonic structures for constraining or enabling such transformation are, and what are the strengths, desires, and limits of the existing and new agents in wanting and realizing this change. In this sense, we may need to imagine a concept of freedom and liberation, as Atwood suggests, beyond our existing social world, and be prepared for possible surprises as well.

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