

Mia Arp Falov & Cory Blad (eds.), *Social Welfare Responses in a Neoliberal Era: Policies, Practices, and Social Problems* (Leiden and Boston: Brill. *Studies in Critical Social Sciences: Critical Global Studies*, 2019)

I would like to recommend this book to those who have a specialized interest in social work and governmental policies. There is much to learn from this excellent volume. The editors have taken great care to pull together some very good papers. Having edited several books myself, I know how much work went into this volume. (For example, even just constructing the bibliography must have taken up a great deal of time and effort.) The critical comments here are not meant to detract from the volume, but to indicate precisely what can be found in this book, and what cannot be found. I am sure some of the chapters will be read by those academics and graduate students specifically interested in public administration and/or social work practice in the nation-states studied (e.g. Denmark, Finland, Mexico, etc.). Librarians should order this book and other books in the series since there is a great need for better, more detailed information about global issues at the national level. Those with a particular interest in Pierre Bourdieu will find the ways in which his ideas are used stimulating for further theoretical work. Fans of Michel Foucault will also find some subtle uses of his theories. I was pleased to see references to the ideas of Charles Ragin and of Luc Wacquant. (I do not personally know any of the authors who contributed to this volume, or the editors.)

This volume consists of twelve essays by a diverse group of scholars. The Notes on Contributors indicates an array of institutional affiliations in Canada, Denmark, Italy, Ireland, Mexico and the U.S.: Aalborg University, Denmark; Manhattan College; Queens University, Belfast; Scuola Normale Superiore, Florence; University of Strasbourg; McGill; and Le Moyne College. The fields and disciplines in the social sciences are also diverse: sociology, social work, public administration, political studies, development studies, social policy, and social integration. All of that diversity means the volume risks lacking a central focus, but the papers all deal with various somewhat implicit interpretations of Neoliberalism. (There is even mention of the idea of "Postneoliberalism" and generally what comes after Neoliberalism.)

Somewhat surprisingly the importance of the U.S. in the international capitalist world system is not discussed except in passing. Except for mention (especially in the final chapter) one would hardly know that the different U.S. executives have approached Neoliberalism in somewhat different ways or that there is currently a great deal of animated political discussion in the United States of America about "making America great again" but allegedly de-emphasizing globalization and retrenching to earlier international arrangements somewhat along the lines of the immediate Post-WWII era. The general dynamics of all modern capitalist systems are not explored in depth, but one could argue that there has always been a tension between profits going to the owners of the means of production, processing, distribution and exchange, on the one hand, and those who have to

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sell their labor in order to make what passes for a reasonable standard of living. Those who are only semi-employed for less than a minimum wage or who are clearly unemployed and largely unemployable will always suffer in a system that emphasizes the selling of “free labor” on a capitalist labor market. (Slavery within a modern capitalist system, of course, also needs to be very carefully examined, since the Capitalist Mode of Production often still carried components of outright slavery and not just indentures and “wage slavery.”) Of course, no one volume can cover all relevant topics, case studies and the general theory of monopoly capitalism, especially when so much in the world seems to be changing at such a rapid pace. To some extent Polanyi’s views could be said to unify some of the essays. But technological change has been increasingly important for the core nations of the world capitalist system and the People’s Republic of China and Taiwan. (The PRC, Taiwan, and the East Asian nation-states are not discussed.) That is to say, so much *seemsto* change in so many different ways, yet plus la change, plus la meme chose. There is much change, part of which is considered to be the rise of Neoliberalism after Thatcher and Reagan, yet arguments can be made that much of the change is actually superficial when considered from a rigorous Neo-Marxian meta-paradigm (e.g. Harvey, Mészáros), much less political Marxist ideas.

One advantage of scholarship is that we move away from the hype found in the mass media and social media to a somewhat more detached perspective. But, of course, Neo-Marxian writers do not fully endorse any kind of “Olympian” objectivity either. So, ideas tend to be “contested” even in the academy and policy experts cannot claim to have a clear-cut solution to specific social problems that would be realistically endorsed by various different national, federal governments or even provinces (states) and large metropolitan areas. Different policies work in different ways in different settings, in part due to the degree of cultural emphasis on sub-cultural norms of honesty and goal-rational bureaucracy.

The impact of Neoliberalism on agriculture is not a major theme of this book and there is little concern with rural areas, but food is a basic need and one of the biggest social problems facing some of the countries not discussed here is food security. We have come a bit further since the kinds of things that happened in the nineteenth century in Ireland and many other places or that happened during WWII in Bengal (and many other places!) but food security should not be dismissed as an issue in a context where Neoliberalism is global and not just national, much less just regional or local.

The key idea here is that we can examine the responses to Neoliberalism in various settings and zero in on policies, practices and social problems. There is no one clearly articulated “social science paradigm” that is discussed consistently in all chapters at the philosophical level of ontology and epistemology. However, Bourdieu and Foucault are frequently cited.

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Most sociological theorists would tend to argue that Foucault's social theories are often quite different from those of Bourdieu, especially in terms of the subtle nuances. Foucault was a classics scholar, an aspect of his background that becomes very clear when one tries to work through his lectures. He pays a great deal of attention to the etymology of words. It has been argued that Foucault has a meta-semiotic approach to the study of "ideologies", "discourse" and semantic-pragmatic rules of interaction. There seems to be less interest in the "episteme" in Bourdieu's work. It would take a book-length discussion to get at similarities and differences between the two authors and then another volume to rigorously explore their ideas compared to those of the other thinkers mentioned by the editors. The devil is in the details. Bourdieu's conceptualization of his key concept of *doxa* has itself shifted (Myles 2004, as cited by Blad on p. 53 footnote 8).

There is no attempt to provide a clear historical overview of where and how "globalization" has become Neoliberal rather than Fordist, or some other designation of the Capitalist World System, although there is casual mention of GATT and policies adopted in the 1945-1980 period, before Neoliberalism per se.

Interestingly, there is an attempt to use the theories of Polanyi yet his work does not appear in the references. Polanyi was not discussing Neoliberalism but a general tendency of "liberal capitalism" to exacerbate material hardships, hence making it necessary to have some reasonable system of social welfare. To the best of my knowledge neither Foucault's "archaeological" approach to knowledge nor Bourdieu's stress on "habitus" would be easy to reconcile with Polanyi's more "liberal" views. Karl Polanyi (1886-1964) belonged to a different generation. His 1944 classic *The Great Transformation* has had a resurgence of interest among some sociologists, but his critique of the "market mentality" is not so much Marxist-Marxian as Post-Marxian. His existentialist views are ethical and not clearly related to democratic socialism and he expresses a strong respect for tradition, which could be considered a conservative view of European culture and even Eurocentric. He was a comparative historical sociologist (CHS) with a distinctly moral tone that separates his work from the ideas of some contemporary academics who attempt to do CHS in a more "value neutral" (*Wertfrei*) manner. The idea of a "double" change, or two "movements" that go together historically, is well worth examining in more depth for more societies. Like the authors of this volume he does not accept Marx's idea that modern capitalism contains the seeds of its own demise, but instead allows for constructive modifications. In that way he is acceptable to some Keynesian Neoclassical economists. But to develop Polanyi's ideas in depth was not the goal of the editors. He is merely mentioned. The editors also chose to ignore World Systems Theory as it applies to post-WWI (Great War) historical social, political economic change.

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Moreover, the history of the world system from the earliest days of modern capitalism in the sixteenth century is ignored and the literature on East, Southeast, South and Southwest Asia is not represented. Andre Gunder Frank ended his career by emphasizing the importance of trade in East, Southeast and South Asia. But Frank's "reorienting" thesis implies that *aspects* of modern capitalism are politically and ethically progressive (an idea also found in the Communist Manifesto). There is also no deep study of conditions in Africa or all of Latin America and the Caribbean. This is not an encyclopedic work about social welfare responses in many locales. It is not a highly theoretical work about Neoliberal Era policies and practices. To a large extent "social problems" are discussed at a fairly common-sense level.

The editors set the stage with the first chapter: "Social Welfare Responses in a Neoliberal Era: Adaptive Responses, Sustained Need, and Exacerbated Hardships." They also contribute to other chapters individually (e.g. Blad in Chapter 3 and Fallov in Chapter 8.) Then there is a concluding chapter by Fallov and Blad (Chapter 12). A reader might want to read chapters 1, 3, 8 and 12 first in order to get a clear sense of where the editors stand on the key issues. It is possible that those four chapters taken as a whole provide a bit more unity to this volume than the other eight chapters taken separately. Blad's "theoretical lens" emphasizes Bourdieu's concept of *doxa*. But Harvey is also cited and Mises is mentioned. (Elsewhere Mézáros and Poulantzas are cited as well.)

Many academics who are progressive in some sense or on the political left emphasize the notion of "exacerbated hardships" and the Marxist and Neo-Marxian literature on that topic could have been emphasized. The notion of material hardship is, however, also something that needs to be examined within a framework that shows some awareness of cultural relativity concerning wants. The actual material "needs" of North American and European populations have not grown, but the "desires" (wants) have been ratcheted up through advertising and general awareness of technological change. It is no longer enough to have a telephone (a landline); one must have a mobile cell phone, and not just an earlier model but the latest model. (That has led of course to competition from the People's Republic of China and Taiwan.) There is no mention of Marx or Wallerstein per se in the Index. The use of thinkers like Polanyi and Mises indicates the editors are willing to borrow from a diverse set of paradigms. The existence of something that can be called "Neoliberalism" is taken for granted to some extent, although there is discussion of whether it has been intensified or may be subject to significant modifications due to chauvinist nationalist ideas of unique "patriotism" symbolized by the building of immigration barriers and various kinds of "walls" (physical and administrative). But the idea that there really is some degree of unity in the ideological aspect of the global system does not necessarily mean that there is also a high

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degree of similarity in how that global order works in different countries. Many would assume that the question is entirely unproblematic; but, of course, many others might challenge the idea on the basis of the peculiarities of local cultural standards and institutional structures. If the Neoliberal order was all of one piece then, it could be argued, the rates of pay of labor (labour) would be the same or nearly the same in Denmark and Mexico. The essays reveal a great deal of diversity despite the hypothesized existence of Neoliberalism as a fairly coherent modern capitalist world system.

It is interesting to read about the fact that despite on-going need there can be and are “adaptive responses.” It would have been nice to have had some internal classification of the papers along the lines of the three topics introduced in the first chapters. Which papers deal with the exacerbation of hardships by Neoliberal policies and the global crony capitalist world system? Which papers are mainly about the ways in which needs have not disappeared but have often been on-going and “sustained” (in the negative sense) by the global world order. What would have been valuable would have been a summary chapter in which the “adaptive responses” from the various case studies were listed and compared. How does Canada compare to Denmark? How does Ireland compare to the U.S.? In general, the authors follow a kind of “case study” approach but they do not justify that in terms of research techniques, Methodology or general Theory. Some will regard the lack of representation of conservative views as a strength, but others may regard that as a weakness. The notion of the *social construction* of “social problems” and needs is also not underlined, yet we know that a social problem does not become a social problem until it is recognized as such in some way, either by academics or by practitioners employed by non-governmental or governmental organizations. There are such things as clear “basic needs” such as water, food, shelter, public health care, basic education for literacy, and so forth. But beyond basic needs it is not always clear that a certain lack is really a “need” that absolutely must be corrected. In the best of all possible world systems there would be a way to provide every human being with basic needs, but unfortunately that has not yet been the case. Yet we know there are many who argue that a higher percentage of a larger population (which is still growing) have benefited from globalization in certain ways. Analysis of phenomena at the level of the local “community with propinquity” (as opposed to “community” in the more metaphorical network sense) does not always provide a clear indication of major trends.

Cory Blad is Chair of Sociology at Manhattan College. He has published in *Third World Quarterly* and in an edited volume (Mele and Vujnovic 2006). Mia Arp Falov is an Associate Professor at Aalborg. The two editors are not widely known in the field of sociology and its various disciplinary sub-sets (e.g. Marxist sociology, World Systems sociology, Sociological

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Theory). They have attracted authors who are also not extremely well known (e.g. one other author from Manhattan College and two other authors from Aalborg). They do not seem to be part of any well-established Interpretive Network (IN) and they do not seem to have any clear-cut Operationalized Representations (ORs) of phenomena. That is, the various authors use theoretical ideas in ways that seem to be somewhat individualistic. Blad's well-articulated use of ideas from Polanyi and Bourdieu is not systematically utilized by the majority of the authors.

The bibliographical references are not attached to individual chapters but are found at the end of the book (Pp. 261-287). The twenty-seven pages of references amount to around five hundred citations. Some references are to government publications. The authors most frequently represented are Bourdieu and Foucault. (As mentioned, Polanyi somehow did not make it to the references.) The idea of "zombie neoliberalism" is mentioned.

Bourdieu is perhaps the key thinker here. Bourdieu (1977) uses the term *doxa* in his analysis to point to what is often called "culture" or "worldviews". It is that which is often taken for granted by a large fraction of people who live in a specific nation-state. Another way of discussing that is in terms of the perception of what is "common sense reality" for most people of a particular economic class or political power group. Those with higher status take different things for granted than those who have a very low status. In the Boston area (where I am writing this) one sees houses advertised for two, three and even more millions of dollars and one receives advertisements for travel that costs US\$10,000 or more for one week. The *doxa* for the super-rich elite is quite different than the *doxa* for the unemployed person who worked for twenty years in a factory producing cars but has now been replaced by robots. The authors do not seem to have made a thorough analysis of regional, national or class differences in belief systems. What passes as common sense in central Alabama is not necessarily the same as what is considered a standard belief in eastern Massachusetts.

Overall, read this book. If libraries purchase it then perhaps it will someday appear in paperback and become more affordable for individual scholars and graduate students. It would not be a good textbook for undergraduate classes since it would be too difficult for most students to sort out the various arguments and be able to see the forest rather than the trees or leaves. This is a significant and provocative analysis of a very important issue. Comments made here are not meant to be dismissive but simply to engage the editors and other authors and to challenge them to continue this work in an even more rigorous and consistent manner. For example, a chapter that looks at the ways in which the various key thinkers could either be seen as making a very general contribution or perhaps sometimes contradicting one another might be useful to facilitate further progress. Further research on

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the topics discussed would be very worthwhile, especially if the rest of the world were also included. An analysis of Neoliberalism requires some consideration of the European Union and, when it happens, the effects on British workers of Brexit. Countries around the world which are not mentioned could be studied carefully and included in a follow-up volume that definitely includes Iran, India and Indonesia as well as the PRC and Taiwan. The importance of Israel for globalization along the lines of U.S. and U.K. interests could also be studied since public administration and social work are urgently needed to help resolve the impasse in the Israel-Palestine conflict recently exacerbated by the Trump administration's decisions concerning Jerusalem and the West Bank. Those on the fringes of the global capitalist system might very well be discussed in terms of being very peripheral nation-states and regions hardly influenced by Neoliberalism in any direct manner, but only indirectly. International trade and geopolitics is also relevant to any comprehension analysis of the effects of Neoliberalism on the welfare of workers and marginal populations. Clearly, this excellent collection of essays has stimulated my thinking about many topics and it is a very good addition to a literature that needs to be explored by young scholars. Ironically, the rapid decrease in tenured academic positions means that many recently minted Ph.D.'s will have to rely on temporary employment, an example of the trends related to Neoliberalism in general. The prestigious research-intensive universities world-wide have become increasingly difficult to access by workers who commit themselves to analysis of the global trends.

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