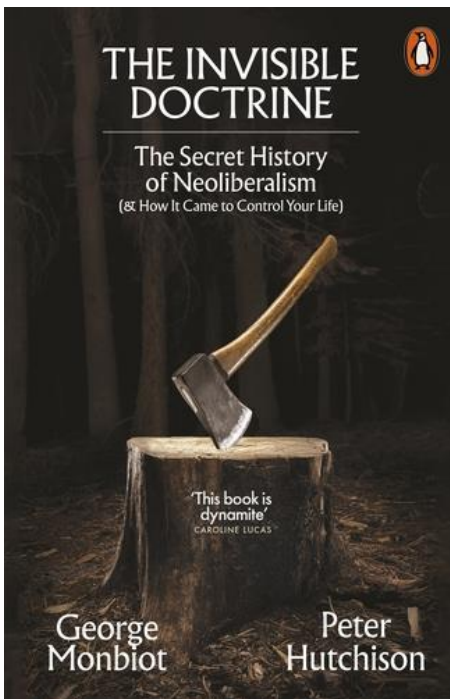


THE INVISIBLE DOCTRINE: THE SECRET HISTORY OF NEOLIBERALISM (& HOW IT CAME TO CONTROL YOUR LIFE)

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Monbiot, George and Hutchison, Peter (2024) *The Invisible Doctrine: The Secret History of Neoliberalism (& How it Came to Control Your Life)*, London: Allen Lane.



Set against a backdrop of rising inequality, the erosion of democracy, and ecological collapse, this book provides a succinct yet insightful introduction to neoliberalism, illustrating its key dimensions, foundational theories, and its deep connections to the fundamental issues at the heart of development education.

Monbiot and Hutchison begin with an introduction to neoliberalism as ideology, rooted in philosophies of individualism, competition, consumerism, and meritocracy. Indeed, they argue that whilst neoliberalism is pervasive, the concept has become opaque, and increasingly, unnamed. In conceptualising

neoliberalism, they consider its connections to capitalism (going beyond dictionary definitions) as colonisation and violence, as the practices at the heart of a project of individualisation and commodification. Drawing on Jason W. Moore's (2009; 2010) work on the exploitation of Madeira (which itself would make a compelling enquiry through a framework of critical development

education and history education, see O'Connell et al., 2021), in tandem within broader African exploitation, they connect these events as the beginning of rapacious cycles of 'boom', 'bust', and 'quit', leading to social, ecological and political crises. Later, this system was reinforced by systems of debt, applied through programmes of 'structural adjustment', in a wider network of financial mechanisms which perpetuated global inequality.

The work of Ludwig Von Mises and Friedrich Hayek, (popularised, for example, through cartoons and children's books), served as the theoretical foundations for neoliberalism, before its mainstreaming in national and international policy. The former reflected in the policies of United States' (US) president Reagan and British prime-minister Margaret Thatcher (underscored by the work of economist Milton Friedman), then the 'third way' of the opposition parties in the US and the UK (United Kingdom). Friedman's ideas were reflected in the globalisation of neoliberalism through 'structural adjustment' programmes, employing privatisation, deregulation, fiscal austerity and the removal of capital controls to further neoliberal ends, alongside widespread resistance of decolonial projects in Africa, Latin America and elsewhere.

Monbiot and Hutchison then illustrate the ongoing 'network of influence' through which neoliberalism operates, in corporate, political and media spheres. Case studies from the UK and US offer compelling illustrations of how the central tenets of the ideology play out in practice. They consider the levers of power shaping decision making processes, and the stark implications for individuals and societies. What is particularly telling in these sections is that despite significant 'flaws in the model' being recognised, the ideology appears bulletproof, even considering the huge human and environmental toll, particularly in the global South. Against this evidence, Monbiot and Hutchison argue, conspiracy theories and individualisation of responsibility (for example, through the concept of the personal carbon footprint), serve as problematic distractions.

For those working within the field of development education, Monbiot and Hutchison's book offers a manageable introduction to neoliberalism as a concept, and through an examination of its philosophical foundations and

political lineage, a clearer picture of (a) how neoliberalism is deeply connected to the most pressing global issues with which we are faced, and (b) a brief, yet important signposting of how education has been shaped by neoliberal ways of thinking. Regarding the former, the book provides brief snapshots of detailed and important work exploring key global challenges (e.g. Piketty, 2014). Regarding the latter - from the outset the position of education within a neoliberal framework is made clear; namely, the 'slow degradation' of education as a public service. Throughout Monbiot and Hutchison's chronology of extractive capitalism, there are several signposts to the connection between neoliberalism and the manipulation and hollowing out of education. The book recognises the privatisation of school management in the UK in the late 1990s as part of a broader privatisation of public schools, and policies of rent extraction through user fees. The drive towards the knowledge economy and how this shapes how subjects are understood and valued is noted. The financialisation of universities through student loans is also recognised. Given the succinct nature of the volume, little space is given (or indeed available) to develop these connections, but for those undertaking an inquiry into the relationship between neoliberalism and education, such connections might include exploration of: the impact of neoliberal structural adjustment programmes on education systems and children's lives (Carnoy, 1995; Vavrus, 2005); how neoliberal processes of market, management and performance have shaped teaching (Ball, 2016); the failure of neoliberal educational responses to societal issues (Brathwaite, 2017; Hursh, 2007); and, importantly, the work of others in this journal, exploring the challenges of development education in a neoliberal age (for example, Khoo, 2017; Madden, 2019).

Monbiot and Hutchison end the publication with a consideration of alternatives to the story of neoliberalism and suggest the potential of a counter story grounded in social values and belonging, underpinning participatory, deliberative democracy. In keeping with the rest of the book, this final section raises a number of questions about the nature and mechanisms of change, and how social, political and economic systems might be transformed for the benefit of all. In doing so, the book offers those working within the field of development education an opportunity to reflect on how development education, and education more broadly, might not only challenge the ideologies and practices of

neoliberalism, but might support the creation of alternative stories of hope grounded in the social values of empathy and community.

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