



## To Deceive and Conquer: How neoliberal UK and USA coercively mobilized the concept of freedom

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Drawing on ideas about neoliberalism, information society and globalisation, this critical review will focus on how countries such as the UK and USA employed neo-liberalism to mobilize the concept and idea of freedom to pursue policies of war, free markets and austerity. Thalos (2016) argues that the theory of freedom is a social construction, and that freedom is not just given to us, but rather a political concept and to understand freedom we must understand the constraints that are restricting people from being 'free'.

We could argue that neoliberalism could be one of these restraints as freedom is for some but not for all as 'neoliberalism is an extreme form of capitalism' (Klein, 2017: 79). The idea of neoliberalism is that it will benefit everybody: 'under the neo-liberal worldview, governments exists in order to create the optimal conditions for private interests to maximise their profits and wealth, based on the theory that the profit and economic growth that follows will benefit everyone in the trickle-down from the top-eventually' (Klein, 2017: 79). However, the trickle-down theory promoted by neo-liberals

is, simply put, a false promise. The notion that money trickles down from the pockets of the rich into the hands of the poor is rather illusive. Even the International Monetary Fund (IMF) argued so: 'if the income share of the top 20 percent increases by 1 percentage point, GDP growth is actually 0.08 percentage point lower in the following five years, suggesting that the benefits do not trickle down' (Dabla-Norris et al, 2015: 6).

Therefore, under a neoliberal establishment only the few will benefit rather than the many. Consequently, this reflection will explore how globalisation has triggered a resistance and



sparked an increase in nationalism within the UK and USA. In addition, it is of interest how information society is the way 'theoretical information is at the core of how we conduct ourselves

these days' (Webster, 2006: 9), as information is used and manipulated as a political and economic scheme.

'The founding figures of neoliberal thought valued political ideals of human dignity and individual freedom as fundamental, as 'the central values of civilization'. In so doing they chose wisely, for these are indeed compelling and seductive ideals. These values, they held, were threatened not only by fascism, dictatorships, and communism, but by all forms of state intervention that substituted collective judgements for those of individuals free to choose' (Harvey, 2007: p.5).

This was shown in March 2003, when an American led coalition involving the UK, and small contributions from Australia and Poland, invaded Iraq. The war was given the label of *Operation Iraqi Freedom*. The US and the UK's aim were to rid Iraq of dictator Saddam Hussein and his alleged weapon of mass destruction (WMD). However, the UN sent in weapon investigators as well as the Iraq Survey Group who filed their report that 'the ISG has not found evidence that Saddam possessed WMD stocks in 2003' (Cia.Gov, 2004: n.p.). The US justified their actions under their 'war on terrorism' slogan as the country was still reeling from the events of 9/11, claiming that Saddam Hussein had the intention to make weapons of mass destruction in the future when UN sanctions had been lifted.

The lack of evidence for weapons of mass destruction was speculative, thus prompting a challenge from the UN. Despite a lack of support The US continued their crusade and rewrote Iraq's constitutions, bombed their cities, killed civilians and disrupted their whole society. The irony of this war on 'freedom' is the invasion was led by America which is the most imprisoned country in the world, 'there

are more than 2.1 million prisoners in the United States of America, the countries with the highest prison population rate – that is, the number of prisoners per 100,000 of the national population – are the United States (655 per 100,000), followed by El Salvador (604)' (Walmsley, 2018: 2) as well as being a country with a infamous past for slavery.

The US' defence for invading Iraq, the possibility of weapons of mass destruction,



was saturated with hypocrisy, as the only country to have ever used a nuclear weapon on another country, is the US in WW2. The US dropped two bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan;

these immoral actions were consented by the UK and 'the final death toll was calculated at 135,000' (BBC, 2005; n.p.). The bombing of Japan was a retaliation to an initial attack from Japan on American people due to America obstructing Japan's trade and its intention to expand; this suggests that America feared globalisation as well as another country becoming more resourceful which could pose a threat to America economy and security.

Reports have been made over the years questioning and doubting the true intentions of the USA and UK for invading Iraq. Naomi Klein (2014), for instance, argued that in the after math of the invasion, the USA exploited Iraq for its money and profits from their oil sector as well as issued a law that restricted future Iraq politicians to have any involvement in future oil contracts, as well the increasing privatisation within Iraq all while Iraq and its

civilians were in chaos. Neoliberalism 'at its core, is a rationale for greed' (Klein, 2017: 78).

With the rise of terrorism after 9/11, globalisation was one of the key culprits. Terrorists' used globalisation to their advantage with more advanced technology, the internet and easier travel. Despite the aftermath of western neoliberalism, which is still rampant, in the current political climate we can highlight two political occurrences that embody the



principles of neoliberalism, Brexit and the election of Donald Trump. The concept of freedom has been remobilised in recent years and has been at the forefront of both political campaigns: For Brexit, freedom from the EU and the free movement of people, to crack down on immigration and stricter border controls.

Brexit was an act of fear rather than a pragmatic action, as immigration was portrayed as a major threat to our security, our housing crisis, the welfare state and the NHS this was the only way people felt like they could help their deteriorating country. The Leave Campaign based their campaign on the idea of freedom, that made Brexit a project for nationalism as globalisation was increasing in a world of instability. Harvey (2004) argues that neoliberalism is a class project, which can be linked to Brexit as a project to restore the power of the elite and give them more power. Neoliberalism 'is an economic, political and ideological project pursued by certain groups (such as governments and corporations) to construct a reality' (Birch and Mykhnenko,

2010: 2) and the new project of 2016? *Brexit*. Inside the EU, the UK can trade freely which sounds perfect for a neoliberal. However, inside the EU you are not free from their rules and regulations as they have a court that will assess if your adhering to those rules and

regulations. Whereas neoliberal wants freedom from all rules and regulations, the less state interference the better.

All these events that have aspects of neoliberalism, were

manipulated and falsely portrayed to the rest of the world, for example the misrepresentation of the real reason the USA and UK invaded Iraq, the mass of fake news surrounding Brexit as the Leave campaign told multiple mistruths to sway the vote to end the way they wanted it to, as well as the fake news stories surrounding Donald Trump and his election campaign. The rise of information society alongside neoliberalism 'has replaced any sense of what we ought to do to achieve democratic goals and ambitions with a logic built on perception of the inherently good and essential qualities of markets' (Birch and Mykhnenko, 2010: 2). This has negatively impacted upon the democratic process, people are no longer free to choose and vote for who and what they want as they are manipulated into it even if they do not think they are. Without information society globalisation would not have been possible. With information society 'in its support of globalization, technology may also undermine democracy. Imperilling the national sovereignty that has been democracy sanctuary' (Barber, 2001: 44).

Freedom is a key issue in today's society, with the increase of homelessness, poverty, imprisonment and surveillance. Freedom is not a choice, it is a commodity that can be bought, 'morality and ethics have been turned right way up in response to 'natural law' of economic exchange in which the rich can buy more freedom than the poor' (Birch and Mykhnenko, 2010: 2). Elites have more access to resources and information. Therefore, freedom can be used as a tool to deceive and control the public through the welfare system, surveillance and with the increase of information society. It is clear to us as shown in the several examples given, that the UK and USA use the concept of freedom to influence and control society to conform and behave in a way that suits the needs and lines the pockets of the government and the elites and is motivated by profit and power. This shows how globalisation, information society and neoliberalism coincide within society.

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