

**Book Review**

Naomi Klein (2007). *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. Penguin; Reprint edition (18 Sept. 2007) ISBN-13: 978-0713998993

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The Shock Doctrine, authored by Canadian Author and social activist Naomi Klein, discusses the rise of the neoliberal free market policies in developed countries as being a product of large scale privatization and trade liberalization prompted by a deliberate attempt at “Disaster Capitalism”. The book tells the tale of how America’s “free market” policies have found global domination by taking advantage of disaster-shocked people and countries.

Naomi Klein, the author, is an accomplished writer and is known for her political analysis. She is the author of multiple international bestsellers and also one of the most influential books about alter-globalization, *No Logo*. She features in various lists of top influential thinkers, such as the prospect magazine’s world thinkers 2014.

In *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein attempts at explaining the connection between man-made or natural disasters in various parts of the world and the rise in neo liberal free market ideologies following those disasters. She implies that powerful international companies can not only survive in disaster stricken areas but have actually learned to thrive, feeding off the poverty and desperation that follows catastrophe. Without pointing to any global conspiracy, she explains how a series of failed policies and injustices have created a world where the rich are facilitated and the poor are subjected to discrimination and further hardships. Throughout the book a similarity between electro-shock therapy as a way of mind alteration used by psychiatrists and shock therapy as a radical capitalist economic policy is established. Ranging from the objectives of the process to the process itself, stating the three steps by which both the processes are theoretically accomplished. Firstly the ‘destruction’ of the existing foundation, followed by targeted ‘reconstruction’ and finally imposing of the changes that take place. Many examples of such systematic overhaul of society are given and the author through this book has

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expressed her personal experiences and interactions with the affected societies.

The author traces the roots of “Disaster Capitalism” five decades prior to the attacks of September 11, 2001 which seemingly changed the world as we know it. According to Klein the intellectual origins of the present free market economic policies are rooted in the University of Chicago’s economic department under Milton Friedman, the Nobel Laureate is charged with producing a policy which worked to reengineer societies that are reeling from shock-“disaster capitalism”. During the course of the book the author draws innovative and astounding correlations amid economic policy, 'shock and awe' warfare and covert CIA-funded experiments in electroshock and sensory deprivation in the 1950s; research that helped write the torture manuals used today in Guantanamo Bay.

Part one begins with a chapter on psychiatric experiments conducted by the infamous psychiatrist Ewen Cameron in collaboration with the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency). These experiments were based on the premise of wiping clean to rebuild the human mind, according to the references suggested throughout the book these experiments are still in practice by the CIA as means of torture. Dr. Ewen Cameron worked on the concept of complete “de-patterning” of his patients through electric shock treatments and total sensory deprivations; he believed that once the mind was wiped clean it could be rewritten. His patients were subjected to extreme torture and constant idea inductions by repetitive play of sounds and videos. Needless to say the experiments failed miserably, the patients were left with incurable psychological trauma, only a few were able to resist the treatments and live to tell the tale.

Klein calls this the “shock therapy”; use of destruction to numb the senses and build something new, she in the same part juxtaposes this idea against the economic structures of Milton Friedman. Naomi Klein connects this process to the destruction of modern economic structures by way of shock therapy. She refers to him as the “other shock doctor” – and his battle for the hearts and minds of Latin American economists and economies.

The book goes on to discuss “The Chicago Boys” (from the university of Chicago) with their free market ideas and Milton Friedman handbooks ready to conquer the Latin Economies in the 1970’s what resulted was a bloody coup in Chile led by General Augusto Pinochet and years of suppression, mass imprisonments

under the garb of anti-Marxist regime. She quotes the Chilean economist Orlando Letelier on the “inner harmony” between the terror of the Pinochet regime and its free-market policies saying that Milton Friedman shares responsibility for the regimes crimes, rejecting the argument that he was only offering “technical” advice.

In part five of the book we are introduced to the “Disaster Capitalism Complex”, as the name suggests it’s a capitalist idea of fruition from disaster. Where companies find “exciting market opportunities” in areas of disaster, Klein draws analogies between areas of natural disaster such as New Orleans after Katrina and Sri Lanka after the disastrous tsunami. In each case, she claims, the predatory impulses of the disaster capitalism complex won out over sympathy for the victims, as developers took advantage of the evacuation of the poor from areas made temporarily uninhabitable and seized prime real estate. This resulted in the marginalization of the deprived while the wealthier profited further from the losses of those already at the bottom of the food chain.

Part six discusses the rise of private contractors, be it war or rebuilding post war. She discusses the use of "Shock and awe" in the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the subsequent occupation of Iraq, which Klein describes as the most comprehensive and full-scale implementation of the shock doctrine ever attempted. Iraq war saw the largest privatization of US military operations, the US government paid a staggering \$138 billion to private companies, one of these companies was Halliburton, and the CEO of Halliburton at the time is reported to have made nearly \$39 million during the Iraq war rehabilitation. Not surprisingly post Iraq war was one of the most lucrative year in the history of Halliburton. It is only one of the ten companies which received more than fifty percent of the billions pumped into Iraq war, what is also not a surprise is the lack of results in the region. At the same time laws were passed which handed over Iraq’s vast oil reserves to the British Petroleum and Shell.

The final part of the book sheds light on the aftermath of the economic shock therapy; how the security apartheid of the present day has resulted in the success of small groups who move into communities which are cordoned off from the rest of the world while outside the public infrastructure falls apart. What’s tragic is how it has become “normal” for the masses to be subjected to massive routine security checks at every airport, while the security industry flourishes

thriving on the insecurities of the people. Klein discusses the gated communities of Atlanta and how they have incorporated themselves legally to prevent the taxes of their residents to be spent on schools and hospitals in impoverished areas.

The book ends with a criticism of the international institutions such as IMF and the World Bank, which in the authors opinion encourage the "shock doctrine" and the global backlash against it. In Klein's opinion this backlash is evident in the South America and post 2006 war in Lebanon, where the governments are rolling back the policies of free market and the mentioning of community-minded advocates campaigning in China and South Africa.

The book comprehensively in a chronological order discusses the gradual indoctrination of the free market policies at the global level, from western free-market to the starkly different yet similar global south implementation of the same policies, one under democratic rule the other forced and backed by military regimes. The book is unique in its detail and fact oriented approach, although books in the genre seem to be complicated Klein's intellectual nonpolitical approach makes it a favorable read. Some might find evidence of a massive conspiracy behind the work, but the author in conclusion disavows any such notion, defending herself by rightly pointing out that failed policies and blatant capitalism add up and take its toll. She believes that for an economy to flourish the growth needs to be organic specific to its unique eco system and the same economic policies cannot be applied universally by force, there is a broader social fabric which is inherent to growth of civilizations.

While some may perceive this book as an oversimplified explanation for the current state of world economics, the fact that Naomi Klein's role is more of a journalist's, describing personal experiences and interactions, than an expert on the subject, must be considered.