

Braedley, Susan and Meg Luxton, eds. 2010. *Neoliberalism and Everyday Life*. Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press. ISBN 978-0-7735-3692-0. Paperback: 29.95 CAD. Pages: 241.

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The following two quotations bookend the latter part of the 20th century. The first is by public policy advisor to the Canadian government, Leonard Marsh. He argued for the formation of a vigorous welfare state. In his 1943 *Report on Social Security for Canada*, Marsh noted that wages—even good wages—were not enough to provide security for most Canadians,

It is impossible to establish a wage that will allow every worker and his family to meet the heavy disabilities of serious illness, prolonged unemployment, accident and premature death. These are budget shattering contingencies that strike most unevenly (Braedley and Luxton 2010, 187).

Forty-four years later, in 1987, then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher advanced her neoliberal ideas with this:

Who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first (Keay 1987, 8-10).

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Canada's welfare state was never as robust as Marsh had envisioned it. And Thatcher's words are now echoed by our own PM, Stephen Harper. In fact now, more than a decade into a new century, progressive social critics often note that Canada's welfare state, which was never as robust as Britain's, shows signs of more weakening.

Canada, along with the rest of the developed world, is deeply mired in neoliberalism, which Raewyn Connell (in her chapter "Understanding Neoliberalism") describes as the new "common sense of our era" (23). Neoliberalism is an economic process that celebrates the free market, frees up capital markets, deregulates banking and currency exchange and seeks to privatize much of what was formerly in the public sphere such as education, health care, social services, eldercare, childcare and even water.

Neoliberalism and Everyday Life locates neoliberalism in relation to what is important to most Canadians. Each chapter examines the neoliberal challenge in fundamental areas, such as the security clamp-down on the Canada-US border (the chapter by Karine Côté-Boucher), the racialization and deterioration of labour standards (Mark Thomas), the lack of support

for childcare (Kate Bezanson), and the scarcity of assistance for the most marginalized.

For example, Paula Pinto's chapter, "Beyond the State: The Making of Disability and Gender under Neoliberalism in Portugal," is both touching and informative. She interviewed 21 women in Lisbon who are mothers and are disabled. While Pinto's study is not large, it is rich in detail and perception. In Portugal, disabled women have very high rates of unemployment, less education and less access to community resources than other citizens, including disabled men (114). In Canada, the situation is similar. In 2006, the unemployment rate for the disabled was 10.4% while it was 6.8% for the able-bodied; there are no recent figures for disabled unemployment during the current recession, but it is estimated to be 14.7% (NJN Network 2009). In 2001, Canadian disabled women had an average income of \$17,230 per year, while disabled men's income was \$26,890. Compare their incomes with the average male salary of \$36,865 per year (CRIA 2006).

Pinto's chapter invites a comparison with a new Canadian book, *Maternity Rolls: Childbirth and Disability* (Fernwood, 2010) by Heather Kuttai, a disabled woman and a mother of two children. As in Pinto's chapter, Kuttai writes about the doctors and hospital staff's negative and unhelpful reaction to her – a paraplegic – having a baby. Kuttai concurs with Pinto's description that disabled women

were not expected to live sexual and reproductive lives ... they were regarded as childlike, asexual beings without desire or the ability to mother. The neoliberal state was complicit with, and reinforced, this view (Braedley and Luxton 2010, 125).

Pinto and Kuttai criticize the bureaucracies in hospitals and social services and how they deal with disabled mothers.

Another important chapter is Susan Braedley's "Accidental Health Care: Masculinity and Neoliberalism at Work." She studied the fire service in Toronto and a smaller centre. She explains that the fire service is not typically subject to neoliberal restructuring because firefighters must respond to accidents and prevent "loss of life and loss of property value" (139). Therefore, cuts to the fire service are not easy to make: for example there is no way to employ firefighters on a casual, a contractual or a part-time basis, or limit the scope of their services.

Braedley notes that one aspect of the neoliberal agenda is to intensify work. Since much of the firefighters' day is spent training, checking equipment, cleaning, sleeping and cooking, there is a perception

there is considerable “down” time. So, since the 1980s, Toronto firefighters’ remit has also included responding to medical emergencies, doing search and rescue work and disposing of hazardous waste. In 2006, just over 50% of Toronto firefighter responses were for “medical” reasons – not always connected to a fire (139). In fact, though not trained in social work, treatment of chronic illnesses or elder care, firefighters are called as first responders to 911 emergency calls in the “absence of other [public] services” (146). For example, septuagenarian “Maisie” called 911 frequently worried about her shortness of breath --which it turned out was caused by chain-smoking. Firefighters dispatched to her apartment, found she needed “company, reassurance and breathing support” (147). Though they were not trained to do this kind of care, increasingly the firefighters found these kinds of calls were becoming a bigger part of their jobs. These jobs previously done primarily by women social workers, aides and caregivers had been cut or cut back due to the neoliberal agenda.

All the chapters in this book find fault with the buzzwords of neoliberalism: choice, autonomy and responsibility. However, Meg Luxton’s chapter “Doing Neoliberalism: Perverse Individualism in Personal Life” was quite special. She points out that the progressive movements of the 1960s and 1970s organized to fight discrimination against (and to fight for the equality of) marginalized groups such as women, visible minorities, immigrants, the disabled, gays and lesbians. She says these groups argued for policies which would “eliminate the privileging of ... [various]... family forms” (165). Progressives argued that in order to level the playing field, there had to be shared or collective responsibility to assist with affordable childcare, homecare, housing, and extended health care such as dental care. They demanded that the costs should be carried by increased taxation on corporations and the rich.

Luxton explains that neoliberalism and the new right did not merely attack the “old” welfare state benefits already in place but argued against their expansion into new areas. She cites Raewyn Connell’s idea (chapter 2) that for neoliberalism to “win” it had to reinforce the “sexual division of labour, nuclear family forms, private responsibility for individual wellbeing” as well as the “racialized division of labour that anchors racism” (166).

This seems both chilling and accurate. In Canada, several provincial governments as well as the federal government have taken this stand. Governments of all stripes have cut welfare assistance rates, made it harder to get unemployment benefits, wiped out government funding for new social housing projects, and have not created the necessary child care

spaces to expedite women's entry into the labour force. *Neoliberalism and Everyday Life* is a good book, which explains the poisonous effects of neoliberalism which touch all Canadians' lives.

References

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To begin, a confession: what I know about Southeast Asia you could write on the head of a pin and still have enough room remaining to house an assortment of angels. My interest in Scott's work is that it is about the state and, most intriguingly, about various peoples who for centuries have been, in effect, running from states, avoiding them at all costs.

The area under study is "Zomia," sometimes referred to as the Southeast Asian *massif*, roughly 2.5 million km² stretching over a number of countries (including contemporary Burma, Cambodia, China, India, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam). Most of its roughly 100 million residents (including the Hmong, Kachin, Karen, Lahu, Lisu, Miao, Shan, Wa and Yao/Mien) live 300 or more metres above sea level in small, egalitarian social units.

Since the middle of the twentieth century, Zomia has been incorporated into a number of nation-states, especially those in search of natural resources, with governments guided by ideologies as diverse as communism and neoliberalism. Prior to World War II, however, the peoples of Zomia were never integrated for any length of time into states, into "civilizations."