multinationals. For this reason, multinationals that enter foreign markets can be reasonably confident that government policies in place when the firm entered the country will continue over time. Whereas I agree with many of Klein’s arguments within the book, I felt, however, that she overinflated the case that firms prey on disaster-shocked countries. On the contrary, it can be shown that firms invest for different reasons in different places and at different times.

In conclusion, this book is hugely informative and controversial. Klein’s written style is comprehensive and accessible. The value of the book, though, lies in its breadth and its critical analysis, especially its shocking portrayal of prominent individuals and traumatic events in the world. In spite of some limitations, I highly recommend it.

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Disaster capitalism in historical perspective

Naomi Klein believes there has been a recent and wholly understudied shift in the practices of corporate capitalism. Far from considering disasters a travesty, corporate capitalists now freely embrace catastrophic situations – military coups, pre-emptive wars, climatic hazards, etc. – as opportunities to engage in radical socioeconomic and political restructuring. As an ideology, ‘disaster capitalism’ is strongly tied to broader structural developments, including militarism (as a first rather than last resort), deregulation and privatisation, the promotion of a security state, and the expansion of market fundamentalism. Disaster capitalism is, therefore, structurally linked to the demotion of democracy and the consolidation of power in the hands of a kleptocracy, usually referred to as the ‘Washington Consensus’.

We find this argument extremely persuasive. Arguably Klein’s greatest contribution is to extend our understanding of the violent and predatory forms of capital accumulation under neoliberalism. Klein complements Rosa Luxemburg’s (1913, 371) classic analysis of the primal role of force in accelerating the formation of capitalist markets: ‘Force is the only solution open to capital; the accumulation of capital, seen as an historical process, employs force as a permanent weapon . . .’ Luxemburg’s study has been extended by David Harvey’s (2003) recent analysis of ‘accumulation by dispossession’; however, Klein’s argument goes one step further in observing how catastrophe itself has become an accumulation strategy – not only a way of accelerating the transition to a commodity economy, but a new constituent element in the ‘spasmodic expansion’ of capital. A military presence abroad, and the costs of post-war reconstruction can now be paid for by giving local resources to companies from the country of the occupying power; accumulation by occupation (Keams forthcoming). Neil Smith (2007) shows how climatic events have become accumulation strategies through direct manipulation of ‘weather futures’ and insurance brokering.

This is more than an extension of the Schumpeterian notion of ‘creative destruction’, although the forces Klein identifies may not be as new as her analysis suggests. Capitalising upon disaster has long been integral to imperialism and this is evident for famine, disease, and military occupation. David Keen (1994) suggests that ‘natural’ catastrophes can have political functions, allowing some groups to garner resources not so much through ‘market forces’, as through ‘forced markets’. This mechanism was at the heart of the use of colonial famines for social and economic engineering in Ireland (Nally forthcoming), India (Davis 2001), and Nigeria (Watts 1983). The European colonisation of the Americas was aided very materially by the depredations wrought by infectious disease among indigenous populations. The catastrophe of smallpox and measles made it easier to eject native peoples from the land that was the one resource necessary for their gradual (and now aborted) demographic recovery. Finally, occupation also is not new. To pay for the policing of colonial territories, the British levied taxes from Ireland to India, from Egypt to Nigeria. In each case, these cash payments accelerated the commodification of land and labour (Smyth 2006) and helped force markets into subsistence economies, with, as Reclus (1908) noted, locally disastrous consequences for food security.

The use of catastrophes as an engine for ‘historical transformation’ (Arnold 1988) has an historical geography tied to the global inequalities of imperialism. This is not to minimise the very real and dangerous developments in recent years, but merely to add a further historical focus to the relationship between disasters, markets and violence highlighted so astutely by Klein.

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I must confess to some initial scepticism towards Klein in Africa – I felt that much of Klein’s thesis had been pre-figured by examples and well-worked debates about Africa, where ‘disaster capitalism’ (if not by that name) has had a long and recognised history. I felt the lack of any discussion or recognition of these cases represented an omission.

Many scholars working on Africa, for instance, have argued that chaos is the order of the day, at least for elites in governments and corporations (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Reno 2002; Bayart 1993). Reno has demonstrated that circumstances encourage rulers to ‘intentionally undermine state institutions’ (2002, 839). There is a vigorous debate about the thesis, but most authors stress that the predominance of personalised neo-patrimonial politics in Africa is, in part at least, a result of the *longue durée* (Bayart 1993). Research in Africa has also pointed to the role of colonialism and international companies, aid, and neoliberal policies in perpetuating a situation in which crisis ‘works’ (Clapham 1996; Watts 2005; Lockwood 2005). Ferguson (2005) argues that the combination of international economic interests and patrimonial politics generates a new geography, featuring ‘territorial enclaves’ of capital extraction, managed by international companies with private military forces.

The struggle of scholars working on Africa has been to strike a balance: not to blame everything on indigenous cultural patterns and practices, but also not to blame colonialism or external actors entirely, thereby consigning indigenous actors to minor historical roles. Is it possible that Klein falls into the latter trap? In her South African case, Black African ANC leaders are portrayed as naïve: as they focused on capturing political office they let their ‘old apartheid bosses’ retain control of economic policy. Later they are constrained by the tyranny of the market to follow neoliberal policies. ANC politicians are outmanoeuvred. Perhaps Klein feels constrained – and not unreasonably so – by her own positionality to direct most of the blame for these processes at the US. But the account represents a simplification.

Klein would find much that could strengthen and develop her thesis in the rest of Africa. If, as Klein argues, some countries in Latin America are recovering from shock, are the forces of disaster capitalism directing their energies anew to Africa? Events suggest that this may be so. Structures and regulations may be in place to protect citizens but they frequently fail to be employed; mass-based social movements may develop, but they frequently fail to have an impact (Reno 2002). Amidst this, President Bush is starting a new African tour, widely seen as promoting US interests and challenging new Chinese influence.

Reading the substantive chapters of her book I was struck by how Klein does manage to portray a picture with a complex geography of multiple actors perpetuating disaster capitalism (Thabo Mbeki features prominently in the account of South Africa, even if Klein shies away from developing a critique of his role explicitly). There is also depth to her broad analysis and, most impressively, local colour is retained within her sweeping review. Her selection of cases is successful because they allow her to identify processes that have been taking place – they are taking place elsewhere too! I would have

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