Globalization as ‘Double Movement’ and the Transformation of Public Education

Abstract

In this paper I propose a conception of ‘globalization as double movement’. Following Polanyi as well as world-system theorists, I suggest that the history of the past three decades has been formed at the nexus of pro-systemic movements that support the expansion of the capitalist mode of accumulation and anti-systemic countermovements that seek to mitigate the consequences of such expansion. The period following the collapse of the Keynesian compromise, I suggest, has seen the transformation of the world-system primarily in the form of ‘globalization as neoliberalization’ opposed by a spontaneously emerging diversity of countermovements that I call ‘globalization as diversification’. There has been a complementary double movement in the field of public education, with the pro-systemic process of commodification producing a dominant condition of depoliticization in the absence of a well-defined anti-systemic countermovement.

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Saturday, December 09, 2006
Introduction: Opening-Up Possibilities

In the early years of the 21st century it would appear that the world has undergone a transformation. For those who lived a significant portion of their lives in the twentieth-century and, furthermore, lived those years at a level of affluence sufficient to allow the time and inclination to develop a sense of the broader world, the present state of affairs is both familiar and strange. The familiar: as before, scenes of poverty, conflict, and disaster, wealth, war/peace-making, and good cheer co-inhabit the mass media, though perhaps in much greater quantity and quality in the one-thousand (or more?) channel, digital, web-linked globe. The strange: alongside these scenes of prosperity and peace in the homeland, violence, insecurity, and lack; in those other, far away lands, more of the same—war, hungry children, natural disasters—but also, increasingly, displays of wealth and affluence. The familiar, in other words, has not changed much; that it has linked up in a more meaningful way with the strange jars the senses and raises suspicion, but does not confirm that the fundamental character of life on planet earth has altered.

Suspicion—re-cast as curiosity—is a creative force. To refocus, to draw back and cast off the usual frames of reference, to abandon for a moment those analytical tools once considered vital to understanding the world—is to seek the principles of a realignment of human relations at the global level. Equally so, it is to doubt that the strange is, in fact, something new and different. It is to question or, as Hans-Georg Gadamer insists, “to open up possibilities and keep them open” (Gadamer, 1988, p. 77). With the principle of contingency firmly in mind, the purpose of this paper is to open up a general line of inquiry—how has the world-system been transformed in the period following 1970?—and a more narrow one regarding an important subsystem—how has public education come to take the form it has in the post-Keynesian era, in the context, that is, of globalization? In brief, the period following 1970 saw the political, economic, and social
conditions of the vast majority of the world transformed by a not-unprecedented, yet qualitatively unique process of globalization. This process took shape as a double movement: its positive (i.e. productive, pro-systemic and, in this case, regressive) expression was contained in the doctrine of neoliberalism; its negative (i.e. self-protective, anti-systemic, progressive) part, as a diversity of spontaneous movements to counter this orthodoxy, a process, in other words, of diversification. Within this double movement, public education—due to its critical role in the social compromise of Keynesianism or embedded liberalism—was an important site of contestation. As in the broader realm, its historical trajectory comprised a double movement, in this case of a pro-systemic process of commodification and an as yet ill-defined, spontaneous response from diverse constituencies.

This paper constructs a historical-sociological account of public education as it has been transformed since 1970 by processes of globalization. In what follows I explore the work of Karl Polanyi as well as others who amend and strengthen his notion of the double-movement. I review existing accounts of globalization and formulate the concept of globalization as double movement. I then use this concept to discuss developments in public education since 1970.

The Double Movement and Anti-Systemic Processes

Polanyi’s Double Movement

The central interpretive concept used in this paper is that of the double movement (Polanyi, 2001). In The Great Transformation, Karl Polanyi employed this concept to explain how the European order had come to the brink of self-destruction and how it could productively move forward. For Polanyi, the historical development of market society was neither a triumph of unfettered capitalism, nor was it pre-determined by an inevitable and abstract principle natural to economics. It was, rather, the product of a double movement, “the laissez-faire movement to
expand the scope of the market, and the protective countermovement that [emerged] to resist the
disembedding of the economy” (Block, 2001, p. xxviii). The picture that emerges is of history produced by competing social forces, of “two organizing principles…setting…specific institutional aims” and working against one another, each according to its own logic and methods (Polanyi, 2001, p. 138). This double movement played out for more than a century, the market continuously expanding, but at every turn checked and pushed in particular directions by oppositional, society-preserving contingencies that, however effective, in the end were incompatible with the notion of a self-regulating market (p. 136). More specifically, the market principle—in its radicalized form, the self-regulating market—required not only the subservience of production to the market, but also the commodification of land and labour, what Polanyi calls “fictitious commodities” (p. 71). But while production could be thus marketized, neither land nor labour could tolerate such conditions without its destruction, a fragility that was the wellspring of opposition to market liberal doctrine, a resistance that in its juridical and institutional forms protected life and nature through the “legislation, restrictive associations, and other instruments” of interventionism (pp. 137-139). A further point is critical to Polanyi’s thesis, one that runs counter to contemporary common sense: the aggressive liberalization of the 19th century, he insists, was not a struggle to remove impediments to the free market; it was, in fact, a movement to co-opt state power to create the conditions of possibility of ‘self-regulation’. The central irony of ‘free’ market liberalism, in other words, is that “while laissez-faire economy was the product of deliberate State action, subsequent restrictions on laissez-faire started in a spontaneous way. “Laissez-faire was planned; planning was not” (p. 147). Yet despite its claims to the opposite, in so far as it succeeded in achieving hegemonic status vis-à-vis control over the primary thrust of state policy, free market liberalization created the exploitive conditions—indeed, the crisis—that
gave rise to its opposing movements (Ryner, 2002), not to mention a bevy of social ills, including economic depression, fascism, and, eventually, two world wars.

**Pro- and Anti-Systemic Processes**

For the purposes of this paper, I wish to modify what is already a powerful concept. For those who posit analyses from the world-system perspective, the double movement fords a gulf immanent to structuralist-materialist accounts of history, brings together, in Ikeda’s (2002) words, “structure, agency, and process” (p. 104). This terminology they deploy—*pro/anti-systemic movement/response/process*—is usefully applied, for example, to discussions of the birth of the modern labour movement at the close of the 19th century (Arrighi, 1990); resistance to, responses of, and changes in the capitalist world-system in the twentieth-century (Ikeda, 2002); and both the collapse (in the 1980s) and rejuvenation (in the mid-90s) of protest movements in the post-Keynesian/neoliberal era (Wallerstein, 2005). From an analytical standpoint, this vocabulary enriches Polanyi’s concept of the double movement by allowing us to more subtly describe the relationship between *oppressor/oppressed* and *movement/countermovement*. For Polanyi, the double movement had led to a point at which the forces of the self-regulating free market had been all but played-out. Thus, at the close of *The Great Transformation*, he is able to announce without irony the death of 19th century society “after a century of blind ‘improvement’”, the restoration of man to his “habitation” (2001, p. 257), and that “undoubtedly our age will be credited with having seen the end of the self-regulating market” (p. 148). Yet, as we have seen, the ‘victory’ of interventionism over free market liberalism might just as well be interpreted, in light of the contemporary hegemony of *neoliberalism*, as a temporary setback for laissez-faire capitalism. Silver & Arrighi (2003) state the problem succinctly:
Although Polanyi acknowledged the existence (and sometimes even the importance) of differential power among classes and among states, he nevertheless underemphasized the role that these unequal power relations played in determining the historical trajectory he analyzed. (p. 326)

The suggestion is that Polanyi was in the habit of giving too much credit for resistance to liberal ideology to landed-class guilt/common sense and too little to the working classes (ibid.). A more subtle interpretation might point out that movements are not the exclusive domain of the oppressor; nor are countermovements undertaken only by the oppressed. Neither one nor the other is permanent; were this the case, then we would have long since reached the end of both history (Fukuyama, 1993) and ideology (Bell, 1988). The distinction, therefore, between pro(of the oppressor)- and anti (of the oppressed)-systemic action offers an important adjustment to the notion of the double movement. Whatever the shape of the socio-political-economic present and future, this pro/anti distinction modifies the movement/countermovement dialectic by preserving the historical memory of capitalism’s oppressive order, thereby disallowing the possibility of the oppressor laying claim to oppression in the face of progressive social change. What this leaves us with is a critical refinement of Polanyi’s double movement, a formation in which movement and countermovement are available to oppressor and oppressed alike, but also one in which anti-systemic movements are the exclusive domain of the oppressed.

What is Globalization?

Beginning in roughly 1970, the world-system entered a phase variously described as depression, instability, and crisis. The cause of the crisis was and is much disputed. What has happened since is, if anything, even more contested. Immanuel Wallerstein (2005) has described the change that occurred as, among other things, a shift from developmentalism to globalization, thus casting suspicion on the notion that the transformation somehow signaled a flight from socialism to the proven mechanics of capitalism, and at the same drawing attention to the ways
in which causal ‘accounts’ act as justificatory discourses that produce particular trajectories in policy and practice (p. 323). But if the period preceding 1970 was characterized by a class compromise, an alliance/capitulation of labour with/to capital, or the success of *embedded liberalism* (Carroll & Little, 2001; Carroll & Shaw, 2001; Harvey, 2005a; Ikeda, 2002; Kachur & Harrison, 1999; Ruggie, 1982), what is the nature of this ‘globalization’ that has followed? Indeed, if what Wallerstein and others (see for example Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001) suggest is true, does globalization have any substance other than as a “political project to reestablish the conditions of capital accumulation and to restore power to economic elites” (Harvey, 2005a, p. 19)?

**Competing Typologies**

One of the more controversial propositions in recent years has been Hardt and Negri’s (2000) *Empire*. *Empire* is an attempt to reformulate the debate around globalization away from both “spontaneous” (i.e. as a natural or inevitable process\(^1\)) and conspiratorial\(^2\) (i.e. as a tool of “imperialist domination”) accounts that deny the uniqueness and significance of the present historical conjuncture (pp. 8-9). According to Hardt and Negri, globalization produces an all-encompassing entity they dub “Empire”: neither national nor supranational, it is the culmination of a historical process that passes through and transcends both. *Empire* is a “totalizing social process” (p. 10) consuming all previous expressions of nation and empire and eliminating any prospect of external opposition, including the possibility of externality itself (see also Mookerjea, 2003). Like Hardt and Negri, Amoore (2002) sees the debate congealing around two positions. Critical of “process” theories (similar to the spontaneous theories mentioned above) and

\(^1\) Here Hardt & Negri single out certain world-systems theorists who “argue that…capitalism has always functioned as a world economy, and therefore those who clamor about the novelty of its globalization today have only misunderstood its history” (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 8).

\(^2\) Samir Amin’s *Empire of Chaos* (1992) is identified.
generally supportive of “project” conceptions (which overlap with Hardt & Negri’s ‘spontaneous’ conception), she posits a third, post-structural reading, “practice”, in which globalization, whatever is origin and methods, “is uniquely understood and experienced by people in the context of their known and familiar social practices” (p. 2). A third and more diverse framework focuses less on origins and more on observable nature—globalization “as internationalisation, liberalisation, universalisation, [or] westernisation ” (Scholte, 2000, pp. 15-16). Scholte considers those conceptions residing in the first four categories redundant—they say nothing new—and adds a fifth schema, “determinationalisation” or “supraterritoriality”, that captures “a far-reaching change in social space” (pp. 45-46).

Hyperglobalists, Skeptics, & Transformationalists

Whatever their contributions to our present understanding of globalization, each of these frameworks is used to draw out a position that fits neatly into an earlier grouping proposed by Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, and Perraton (1999): the “transformationalist” perspective. Held et al. identify three competing conceptions of globalization held by hyperglobalists, skeptics, and the previously mentioned transformationalists. Such a general framework often—and, I would argue, usefully—makes unlikely bedmates of otherwise incompatible figures: historical materialists with neoliberals; secular humanists with spiritual fundamentalists—ideological positions bleed across typological boundaries. For those labeled hyperglobalists, globalization is represented as a fundamental transformation, a progress toward a telos (i.e. along a predisposed trajectory toward an inevitable end (Stewart-Harawira, 2005, p. 9)), though within this category there are divergent normative positionings (Held et al., 1999, p. 3). There is also agreement that globalization is at its core an economic phenomenon in the sense “that the needs of global capital impose a neoliberal economic discipline on all governments such that politics is no longer the
‘art of the possible’ but rather the practice of sound economic management” (p. 4). The familiar ring of Held et al.’s assertion underlines the extent to which this doctrine occupies a dominating (though increasingly challenged) position in the present-day discourse of governance, not to mention everyday ‘common sense’: “the hyperglobalist thesis represents globalization as embodying nothing less than the fundamental reconfiguration of the ‘framework of human action’ (Albrow in Held et al., p. 5). Neoliberals, for example, focus on the “emergence of a single global market” (p. 3) and draw attention to the eclipse of the nation-state as the fundamental organizing unit (ibid.). The oft-cited Kenichi Ohmae (1993) is blunt in his assessment of the “unnatural, dysfunctional” nation-state as a “unit for organizing human activity…in a borderless world” (p. 78). In proposing the “region-state” as his unit of analysis, Ohmae combines a fundamental belief in the “deft but invisible hand of the global market”, rational choice, comparative advantage theory, and, importantly, an anti-taxation ideal (pp. 78-79). The world would be more properly and productively organized around collections of local entities—of sufficient size to produce economies of scale, but not so large as to contain such diversity that efficiency is undermined—linked not to the nation-states with which they have been historically associated, but to other such entities at the global level (p. 80). Hence, from a narrowly defined methodological perspective, Ohmae and others of his camp (most prominently Fukuyama, 1993) would tend to agree with the likes of Wallerstein, Hopkins, and Amin (Amin, 1991; Hopkins & Wallerstein, 1982; Wallerstein, 2005; Wallerstein & Press, 2004) that the nation-state is too often incorrectly identified as the unit of analysis. But in terms of ontological and normative propositions, the gulf between neoliberals and their historical-materialist

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3 Rieger (2005) suggests that the contradiction between forces of global capitalist integration and the persistence of local social needs accounts for this backlash.

4 Stewart-Harawira (2005) prefers neo-conservative here. For the purposes of this discussion, the distinction is not vital. The question of neoliberalism is taken up later in this paper.
opponents is extreme. Compare, for example, Ohmae’s cheerleading with Teeple’s more pessimistic stance: “globalization can be defined as the unfolding resolution of the contradiction between ever expanding capital and its national political and social formations” (Teeple, 2000a, p. 9; see also 2000b). Teeple efficiently summarizes this outlook:

Globalization is that stage in the development of capitalism in which corporations have superseded their former political embodiment, the nation state, and asserted themselves in strictly corporate form at the global level within a supranational framework. It is the outcome of the productive power of capital and the corresponding national social and political relations, a contradiction evident in the mutual ruin and exhaustion of nationally mobilized capital in the second world war.” (2000a, p. 22)

As will be seen later, there is value in such a view. That expansion of the means of capital accumulation is the driving logic behind the heightened interconnectedness of the world is difficult to dispute. Certainly this position is much stronger than neoliberal hyperglobalists’ case, especially when one considers the way they downplay the role of government in creating or facilitating the emergence of such ‘natural’ entities, even as they trumpet the need for the state to ‘get out of the way’. Even a superficial examination of Ohmae’s empirical case reveals that the region-states he identifies were established by acts of the nation-state rather than by any overriding ‘natural’ trading considerations, a condition that Ohmae eventually and contradictorily concedes in recognizing the persistence of the state’s monopoly over monetary and macroeconomic policy, not to mention violence (p. 82).

Whatever his inconsistencies, Ohmae clearly stands (at the normative, if not empirical level) against conservative skeptics in his criticism of the nation-state as arbiter of the entire nation’s success (or lack thereof) (p. 86). Skeptics do not necessarily dispute the world’s increasing interconnectedness—technology, if nothing else, has ensured time/space compression—but hold that what we have seen has more to do with increasing regionalization than globalization (Held et al., 1999, p. 5). To the skeptic, globalization is a not a new
phenomenon—the depth of global integration is less than what it was, for example, in the “classical gold standard era” (ibid.)—and indeed, perhaps not a phenomenon at all. What we are experiencing is more akin to increasing internationalization or regionalization rather than some newly inaugurated process: “governments are not the passive victims of internationalization but, on the contrary, its primary architects” (p. 6; see also McBride, 2005; Rodrik, 1997; Weiss, 1997). Hirst (1997) and Hirst & Thompson (2002) are convinced that not only has the world been integrated—and, therefore, ‘global’—for more than one hundred years, but also that the notion of the “virtually ungovernable world economy” (1997, p. 410) is false. The world is in fact regionalized and dominated by a “triad” comprising Europe, Japan, and the US (ibid.). Indeed, the doctrine of ‘ungovernability’ itself, as Polanyi would point out were he still with us, is nothing new. On one point, skeptics agree: that growing internationalization has not led to the diminishment of equality; it is leading, in fact, to the fragmenting (rather than growing together) of the world (Held et al., 1999, p. 6). For the skeptic, global cultural homogenization is a particularly galling myth (ibid.) and cannot be reconciled with reality (Barber, 1992; Huntington, 1993; Kaplan, 1994).

Whence, then, the ubiquity and persistence of talk of globalization? Skeptics would argue that globalization is a convenient excuse for implementing neoliberal programs (Held et al., p. 7), a position particularly well represented by Bourdieu & Wacquant (2001):

An empirical analysis of the trajectory of the advanced economies over the longue durée suggests…that ‘globalisation’ is not a new phase of capitalism, but a ‘rhetoric’ invoked by governments in order to justify their voluntary surrender to the financial markets and their conversion to a fiduciary conception of the firm. Far from being—as we are constantly told—the inevitable result of the growth of foreign trade, deindustrialization, growing inequality and the retrenchment of social policies are the result of domestic political decisions that reflect the tipping of the balance of class forces in favour of the owners of capital. (p. 4)

Saul (2005) would tend to agree and insists that globalization—actually globalism, an ideology—has all but died as those who once trumpeted its inevitability have turned their backs,
initially unwilling but now forced to concede to that the illusion they once lived by and propagated is now thoroughly discredited and in retreat. Other skeptics tend toward apocalyptic pessimism: what we are entering is not a new age of global integration, but one of disintegration and realignment along ethno-cultural lines, a ‘clash of civilizations’ (Huntington, 1993). Barber (1992), perhaps pining for the bipolarity of the Cold War, takes up a radicalized notion of the ‘regionalizing’ hypothesis, prophesying a descent into the apocalyptic binary of Jihad vs. McWorld. Kaplan (1994), his words running alongside images of dark-skinned youth, guns, and scattered human bones, offers even less hope.

A third perspective, that of the transformationalists—and here I would include the above mentioned Hardt & Negri, Scholte, and Amoore—globalization is an unprecedented phenomenon: “globalization is a central driving force behind the rapid social, political and economic changes that are reshaping modern societies and the world order” (Held et al., 1999, p. 7; see also Fazal & Lingard, 1997). Still, the trajectory of such an uncertain, historically contingent process is laden with contradictions (ibid.). Yet it cannot be denied that “there are good objective reasons to believe that we are living through a period of historical transition” (Giddens, 2000, p. 19) and that without doubt most contemporary fields—economy, military, and technology, to name but a few—dance to heretofore unheard rhythms (Held et al., 1999, p. 7). But while there is a “deterritorialization of economic activity” and a sense that political power has been rendered problematic, it is nevertheless the case that nation-states retain power (p. 9). It may be the case, in fact, that “the power of national governments is not necessarily diminished by globalization, but is, on the contrary, being reconstituted and restructured in response to the growing complexity of processes of governance in a more interconnected world (Rosenau in Held et al., p. 9). Ryner (2002) holds that globalization is inextricably linked to neoliberalism
and, thus, to the project of capitalist expansion. It represents a transformation co-emergent with the crisis of “Pax Americana”, the eclipse of Fordism, the rise of a “new constitutionalism”, and the deepening and extension of commodification; in short, it represents a move “to universalise a form of social integration that is based on the logic of self-regulating markets” (pp. 101-102).

For all of this, the outcome of this process is far from assured (ibid.).

Globalization as Double Movement

Given the range of claims made in the name of globalization, it behooves me at this point to offer some kind of working model appropriate to the task of analyzing processes of change in public education. I want to suggest that, if globalization is to be a productive analytical concept, then all claims of its inevitability must be set aside. It must be conceived of as more than simply the preordained forward march of capital—though from an empirical standpoint, the strides made by capital must be taken into account—and it must not be simply dismissed as so much ideological bunk that serves only to legitimate the motives of capitalists. That is to say, while the claims of hyperglobalists do not hold, those of the skeptics ignore the obvious. With others, I would suggest three points: first, that globalization as a process does exist; second, that it is not unique to the era in which the use of the term has become ubiquitous; and yet, third, there is something qualitatively unique about its present-day manifestation. To some extent, then, I position myself amongst those to whom Held et al. have attached the label ‘transformationalist’.

As a starting point for fleshing out a more subtle perspective, Held et al. offer a productive framework: first, they maintain that globalization is not a condition but a set of processes; second, globalization is seen to signal the increasing complexity and density of interconnectedness between pre-existing juridical, economic, and social forms rather than their demise; third, they hold that “few areas of social life escape the reach of processes of
globalization”; fourth, globalization cuts across boundaries and is, therefore, an aterritorial process; and fifth, power remains fundamental to globalization even as it is re-organized on an expanded and expanding scale” (p. 28). This account of globalization is at its core transformationalist and has a number of strengths. First, the place of national governments is preserved, but it is also recognized that the relationships between them have thickened and are now in many ways governed by intergovernmental agreements (e.g. NAFTA) and supranational bodies (e.g. the IMF, the World Bank, WTO) that wield tremendous influence. Second, there is recognition of technology as an enabler of both new modes of capital accumulation and individual interconnectedness. Hence, third, it is not only the world of work that is affected by flows of capital but also, in the era of mass worldwide communication and intense (internal and external) migration, matters of culture and identity. Most importantly, though, the distinction between condition and process captures the contingency and mutability of globalization and, thus, underlines the importance of agency in influencing its historical and future trajectories. Each of these strengths points up that globalization need not be thought of as either inevitable and irreversible, or as an indisputable force of good or destruction. Such views can lead only to ahistorical triumphalism or fruitless despair. But thought of as comprising both pro- and anti-systemic processes over the longue durée, globalization as double movement restores agency as a counterbalance to structure. It also reminds us that social structures, often taken to be natural, are in fact the product of the more or less calculated actions of agents. Globalization as double movement, in other words, opens pathways for progressive social change.

**Neoliberalization as a Pro-Systemic Process**

Within the framework of globalization as double movement, neoliberalization plays the role of pro-systemic process. Neoliberalism is, in brief, that body of thought developed
throughout the era of national development (roughly 1945 to 1970)—incubated in the Mount Pelerin Society, proselytized from within the Chicago School of Economics, experimented with in Pinochet’s Chile, taken up by the conservatives Thatcher and Reagan, and eventually adopted by politicians of all stripes (Harvey, 2000a). Its theoretical forbearers were the liberal individualists, neo-classical economists, and, more generally, free market ideologues that Polanyi was so concerned to contradict (ibid.). Given that neoliberalism began its rise at roughly the same time that the post-war era of national development/Keynesian interventionism became dominant, it could be labeled ‘anti-interventionist’. That is to say that, stated minimally, neoliberals combine a commitment to individual freedom, a commitment to free markets, and fundamental disdain for state intervention, a program in direct opposition to the post-war consensus (ibid.). Its policy expressions include “legislated nonintervention, privatization, deregulation, and de-unionization; and of repealed trade, exchange rate, and financial flow barriers” (Morgan, 2003, p. 543). Harvey (2005a) is quick to point out, however, that this politico-economic program is not entirely coherent, as the ideal of freedom in the neoliberal sense does not include the right to associate in non-individualistic ways; nor does it sit comfortably with the fact of its reliance on government intervention for its establishment. Despite these critiques, as a relatively new doctrine born in the wake of an international interventionist consensus, neoliberalism might be understood to be an anti-systemic, i.e. as an anti-Keynesianism countermovement. Taken over the longue durée, however, neoliberalism must be placed within a longer tradition as only the most recent manifestation of an older dogma whose development coincided with that that of capitalism itself.

It is precisely this point that leads many (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001; Harvey, 2005a, 2005b; Wallerstein, 2005) to suggest that globalization is merely a buzz-word trotted-out to hide
the truth of a social retrenchment that favours upper class interests. Here the importance of neoliberalism proper is minimized as merely the most recent expression of free market ideology, as a discourse that serves to establish or maintain asymmetrical relations of power (Thompson, 1984). As such, the suggestion is that the doctrine will soon die a deserving death. To be sure, those accused of pursuing the latter would rarely describe themselves as neoliberal (never mind liberal) and are often heard to utter ‘globalization’ at precisely those times when they might otherwise be called upon to account for the effects of their policies. Wallerstein (2005), for one, does not distinguish between globalization and neoliberalism. Both, he holds, involve an effort of “capitalists [to] collectively fight back”: “this is what neoliberal globalization is all about—a massive political attempt to roll back remuneration costs, to counter demands for internalization of costs, and of course to reduce levels of taxation” (p. 331). Harvey (2005b, 2005b) sees neoliberalism as equal parts utopian project and instrument of restoration of class power, as a response of the bourgeoisie to the early 1970’s crisis of over-accumulation and a discourse whose realization in government policy has resulted in “ever greater levels of social inequality” (2005b, p. 144). Ikeda (2002) would tend to agree, drawing as he does a direct link between the co-optation and integration of workers as “absorbers of commodities” during the national development (Keynesian) interlude and the consolidation phase of “free enterprise imperialism” that followed (p. 116)—both periods, in other words, belong to the longer process of establishment, expansion, and consolidation of U.S. capitalist imperialism.

Morgan (2003) offers a detailed look at the North American variant of neoliberalism, pointing out that, as a political project, it brings together political conservatism and neoclassical economics (2003, p. 542). The former is obvious in the context of ‘so-con’ government in

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5 Here I would point out that it is hard to argue that the likes of Alberta’s Ralph Klein are anything but true believers. The Conrad Black’s of the world, on the other hand, is in a better position to fantasize about utopias and restore class power.
Canada and the US (McDonald, 2006); the latter, perhaps less so. Neoclassical economics—the foundation of neoliberalism—is informed by an ontological vision of individuals as ‘hardwired’ to pursue self-interest and insists that “unimpeded self-interest produces a spontaneous and economically ideal order” (Morgan, 2003, p. 542). But where classical liberalism sought individual freedom as both a natural right and as the engine of the market economy, neoliberalism offers only a limited ‘freedom’, i.e. of the individual to become a consumer; indeed, the one thing that one is not meant choose is to not consume. Of course, classical liberalism was compromised from the beginning by a similar contradiction: the free individual was always meant to ‘choose’ to work. Where the two neo’s (conservatism and liberalism), come together is precisely at the point of individualism (ibid.). Looking at public schooling in the contemporary context, Burbules & Torres (2000) capture the essence of the union between neoclassical and neoliberal doctrine: “schools are not only concerned with preparing students as producers; increasingly, schools help shape consumer attitudes and practices as well” (Burbules & Torres, 2000, p. 20).

In light of the historical record, each of these accounts rings true, but if we accept Harvey’s and Wallerstein’s notion that neoliberalism is merely a tool in a programme that seeks the restoration of class power, then the pressing agenda becomes analysis of how it functions to achieve this goal in the long term. The need for such analysis is even more compelling in light of the now obvious limitations of Polanyi’s analysis. What I am suggesting is, should the falling by the wayside of neoliberalism coincide with renewed interventionism and a continuation of capital accumulation (though perhaps somewhat impeded), what then? Given this problematic, it is important to recognize neoliberalism’s ultimate objectives rather than only its readily apparent policy goals. Rather than seeing neoliberalism as a doctrine or an ideology, that is, we must see
how it is operationalized as a process *qua neoliberalization*. Its policy victories, that is, tend to ensure its legacy far beyond the point at which its active political program ceases to function. Neoliberalism, as such, is an “antidemocratic ideological force of…capitalism” that must and does support “a [privatized] conception of democracy [that] minimizes the role of ordinary citizens as political actors who can shape their collective destiny through participation with others in political life” (Sehr in Weiner, 2005, p. 4). *Neoliberalization*, in other words, is the production of a permanent condition of neoliberalism (Carroll & Shaw, 2001) in which viable alternatives are devalued or dismissed out of hand. In the Canadian context, for example, neoliberalism produces not only a new economic reality, but also a revised political culture in which active individualism replaces a sense of collective struggle engendered by the expanding social programs of the post-war era (p. 46). Given the extent to which their claims have been couched in economic arguments and coming as they have at the expense of visions of a national common good, even the collection of recent advances made by minority groups (e.g. women, Aboriginal groups, sexual minorities) cannot be seen as an unqualified triumph over neoliberal logic (*ibid.*). Indeed, Carroll suggests that victories of such “active citizenship”, whose manifestations at times appear to counter the prevailing logic, actually arise from and play into the neoliberal project. Consider, for example, how the granting of same-sex marriage in Canada has tied previously ‘free’ sexual minorities into “new circuits of control” and limited the range of possible forms of resistance to discrimination (p. 52). Or the ways in which school authorities wrap in the rhetoric of ‘choice’ a broad range of special ‘services’—many of them formerly

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6 There are several cogent analyses of the how government policy can produce such a condition. McBride (2005; McBride & Shields, 1997;), for example, details the ways in which Canadian politics have undergone a process of neoliberalization. This has included the classic symptoms of neoliberalism—retrenchment, free trade agreements, liberalization of monetary controls—but can also be seen in the way that neoliberalism has become the dominant mode of operation of governments of all parties. McBride also details efforts to construct a condition of permanent neoliberalism first through constitutional amendments and then through quasi-constitutional means. For the purposes of this paper, I am more concerned with the production of consent among the public rather than the formulation of policy regimes.
routine offerings—to an ever narrower range of interested ‘consumers’ (i.e. those who have enough money or are otherwise well-positioned to choose) (Kachur, 1999; Taylor & Woollard, 2003). The insidiousness of neoliberalization lies in the way it is able to co-opt such apparently anti-systemic urges and channel them toward the fulfillment of its long-term project—the incremental commodification of goods that previously existed outside of the market and the permanent construction of the individual as consumer in an ever deepening and broadening capitalist world-system.

Diversification as Anti-Systemic Process

In the preceding sections, I have suggested that globalization can be understood as a double movement whose productive, pro-systemic, and ultimately regressive expression is neoliberalization. I want to suggest here that globalization also has a self-protective, anti-systemic, and progressive side that may be understood as a process of diversification. It should be understood, first of all, that the two processes did not emerge at the same moment. Where neoliberalization (as a pro-systemic countermovement) strengthened in the vacuum created by the fading of what is commonly known as the Keynesian era—or what Ikeda (2002) calls “the process of establishing free enterprise imperialism” (p. 116)—so too has diversification arisen in the twilight of neoliberalization. Along with Wallerstein (2005), who identifies a revitalization of anti-systemic movements in the mid-nineties, Ikeda (2002) points to a promising trend in The Nation’s list of the one-hundred most significant events of the twentieth-century. At the latter end of that list, anti-systemic movements became more significant (e.g. the Seattle anti-WTO protests) and appeared to gain impetus in the form of public reports revealing the exacerbation of inequality worldwide: “income and wealth polarization, environmental degradation, and human rights abuses on a global scale are creating a united opposition to neoliberal globalism, and the
battle of Seattle continues on the streets of Washington, the heartland of American imperialism and the home of neoliberal institutions” (p. 121). There is no question in Wallerstein’s mind that the world-system has entered a phase of potentially constructive instability focused on “three principle cleavages”: an inter-regional struggle over capitalist dominance between the U.S., Japan/East Asia, and western Europe; the old struggle between north and south over distribution of resources; and a “new struggle that revolves around the structural crisis of the capitalist world-economy (2005, p. 332). The struggles of most concern are the second—which is characterized by the potential emergence of a new balance of power between north and south as the global south and key defenders emerging rejection of the neoliberal, structural adjustment model (p. 333)—and the third, representing as it does an opportunity for the emergence of a more desirable future: “the story from Chiapas to Seattle to Porto Alegre has been that of the emergence of a new kind of world antisystemic movement, sometimes called these days altermondialisme” (p. 327). Carroll & Little (2001) identify a number of these movements as they have emerged in response to two decades of neoliberal policy formation: in Canada, initiatives originating within the New Democratic Party, more active opposition from trade unions, wide-ranging opposition to NAFTA and CAFTA, protests against APEC; in the wider world, “mass political revolts against globalization (e.g. the three weeks of strikes and protests in France in 1995), popular protests in December 2001 that brought down the Argentine government, people’s summits organized to coincide with major international meetings, such as the Nongovernmental Organization (NGO) Forum on Women 1995 at Beijing, the annual World Social Forum, and the Group of Six Billion (G-6B) at Calgary in 2002”, and many more (p. 57; see also Johnston & Laxer, 2003). All of these, say Carroll & Little, suggest that the “second act” of Polanyi’s movement is under way (p. 58; see also Gill, 1995). From the secular humanist camp, Saul (2005) is also certain that the end
of globalism has come: “what we have seen over the last decade is a renewed and growing desire to build our society at all levels with our own hands—that is, to find ways to be involved” (p. 271). But he remains concerned about the fallout—can the forces of “positive nationalism” win out over those of “negative nationalism”? What concerns Saul here is the emergence of an unreflective anti-globalization that may in the most general sense be anti-systemic—in that it may work against globalization generally—but in the end constitutes a contradiction that might provide fertile soil for the growth of a regressive, pro-systemic countermovement. Saul understands this trend as one of “negative nationalism” premised on “insecurity, poverty, and ambition” (p. 246). Take, for example, xenophobic responses to cultural pluralization in locations ranging from the U.S. and Canada, to Europe, Japan, and Indonesia (ibid.; see also Morrow & Torres, 2000). In the final analysis, such movements are most likely pro-systemic in effect in that they represent the channeling of anti-globalization reactions into forms of nationalist sentiment that further the interests of a national elite. Such a result is far from desirable in terms of the health of the broader anti-systemic movement. All of this points to the precariousness of anti-systemic movements, underlined by Wallerstein when he speaks of the uncertainty that is sure to accompany the shaping of the post-globalist world.

Yet the inability to foresee more than an uncertain future is not necessarily a weakness of anti-systemic movements. I would suggest that such uncertainty is the result of a process of diversification that results quite naturally from the spontaneity of anti-systemic movements. If neoliberalization is a pro-systemic process that attempts to make its programme permanent through methods that encourage an acceptance of inevitability, then any anti-systemic countermovement must counteract not only its opus operatum—its specific policy manifestations—but also its modus operandi—the very professions of unity, simplicity, and
inevitability central to the neoliberal doctrine. What is important to note in each of the anti-
globalism movements is that, as Polanyi has taught us, these anti-systemic movements are,
unlike neoliberal globalism, organic and spontaneous, mobilized by large segments of widely
dispersed ‘losers’ at the sharp end of neoliberal globalism’s free market lance (Morrow & Torres,
p. 42), as well as by those morally, politically, or otherwise opposed to its precepts. To the extent
that the emerging anti-systemic movements\(^7\) have been successful, it is not only because they
believe in a doctrine contrary to neoliberalism, but also because they organize and behave in a
manner in direct contradiction to the logic of neoliberalization—in place of the global, the local;
against standardization, variegation; against individualism, collectivity. Indeed, if they are to
remain viable in the foreseeable future, anti-systemic movements must take diversity, complexity,
and doubt as central to their mode of association and action.

The Double Movement in Public Education

Are there global trends in public education analogous to those in the larger world-
system? Is it possible to identify both pro- and anti-systemic processes by which public
education has been transformed? The short answer is yes, but organizing these into categories is
an inherently precarious and tentative process, particularly as anti-systemic processes are
concerned. The task is further complicated by the conditions alluded to in the previous section:
diversity and complexity. There are always, in other words, movements that on the surface
appear to be anti-systemic, but whose end results are hard to reconcile with a broader social
justice agenda. There is no shortage of accounts of the trends that have brought significant

\(^7\) It should be noted that I am referring primarily to non-governmental anti-systemic movements. It can be
legitimately claimed that anti-systemic trends also exist at the level of the state and from within the ranks of elected
politicians and larger bureaucratic systems, these mainly coming in the form of what might be called ‘neo-
Keynesianism’. I would argue, however, that these movements tend to come in response to resistance at a much
‘lower’ level, hence my preference for giving priority to ‘ground-level’ movements.
change to the provision of public education in the past thirty or so years. Here I review three of these before offering a synthesis.

Commodification as a Pro-Systemic Process

Ball (1998) points to five elements that run through contemporary educational policy: one, “neoliberalism or ideologies of the market”; two, “new institutional economics” that seek to “explain the workings of social life and its various institutions…in terms of the choices and actions of the rational actor” (Seddon in Ball, p. 122); three, “performativity”, the notion that schools should ‘perform’ according to an arbitrary set of criteria aligned with principles of business or, failing this, simply disappear; four, “public choice theory”; five, “there is new managerialism, that is the insertion of the theories and techniques of business management and the ‘cult of excellence’ into public sector institutions” (p. 122-123). Harrison & Kachur (1999) concur with this general outline and draw attention to the ways in which the restructuring of education in Canada is consistent with neoliberal doctrine along a number of identifiable lines: centralized control over curriculum, standardized testing, and ‘stakeholder’ advisory boards (accountability); an apparently contradictory trend to disempower locally elected school boards (technocratic managerialism); school-business partnerships (privatization); and perhaps most importantly “the end of twenty-five years of sustained growth in spending on public education and the initiation of deep cuts in some provinces” (retrenchment) (pp. xx-xxi). In Alberta, a province generally considered a public policy ‘innovator’ in the Canadian context, the trend toward privatization has come in three ways: the expansion of private provision, although still supported by public money; the increasing presence of for-profit entities in schools; and the transfer to parents of costs that were formerly considered part of basic educational provision

Morrow & Torres (2000) offer a broader perspective that makes a distinction between “neoliberalism” as an ideological discourse and “the challenges of globalization” as an independent process. If Keynesianism and prior forms of the state wielded all but absolute authority over public education, then the slow creep of private institutions and/or funding schemes has opened a crack whereby market logic is able to play an increasing role in educational provision. It can be said that the “emergence of the globalization problematic” has led to a political realignment vis-à-vis educational policy: a push from the neoliberal right to link education to the economy through the introduction of market forces is supplemented by an abandonment amongst the traditional left of efforts to advance education as a potential tool of social equalization (pp. 39-41). In the face of such pressures and marginal counter-pressures, a number of trends can be identified with respect to globalization and education: trends toward reconfiguring the knowledge base of education cross-cultural, international, and global distance education; the impact of imposed structural adjustment programs in the ‘developing’ or peripheral countries; the “rise of entrepreneurial universities”; and reform of school curricula and teacher training to meet the perceived needs of globalization (p. 41). Morrow & Torres contribute to this discussion in two important ways: first, they draw attention to the ways in which neoliberalism acts to justify retrenchment and consolidation of class power; and second, they observe how these trends point toward a general process of commodification in public education.

Within the general process of globalization, then, with its pro-systemic process of neoliberalization and anti-systemic processes of diversification, commodification can be
identified as a *pro-systemic process* by which public education has been transformed. It is not easy to summarize in general terms the effects of this process on public education, but I would like to suggest that a number of commonalities run through the above analyses: the insertion of business models of *accountability*; *instrumentalization* of educational outcomes; *privatization* through the introduction of choice and the end of the public monopoly of provision; and *depoliticization*.

The first element of commodification is the insertion of notions of accountability at and between all levels of the educational system: teachers are said to be accountable to students and parents, schools to school boards, school boards to governments, and each of these to an unspecified ‘society’ as a whole. This upward trajectory is sometimes obscured by apparently contradictory policies—*centralization* of curriculum vs. *decentralization* of funding, for example (Kress, 1996, p. 186)—but even such contradictions can be explained with reference to the broader neoliberal agenda. Centralization of curriculum, for example, ensures technocratic control over desired ‘outcomes’, while decentralization of funding fulfills another primary neoliberal goal—the privatization of fiscal responsibility and the entry of corporate interests into schools. Such trends are as apparent in ‘communist’ China (Bray & Borevskaya, 2001; Chow & Shen, 2006; Lin, 1999; Wang & Karl, 2004; Wang & Huters, 2003; Yochim, 2006) as they are in ‘capitalist America’ (Apple, 1996, 2000b; Giroux, 2002).

The second trend is instrumentalization. Ball (1998) draws attention to how “concepts such as the ‘learning society’” and “the ‘knowledge-based economy’….symbolise the increasing colonisation of education policy by economic policy imperatives” (p. 122). Here again, the record is clear, most obviously, once again, in China, where Deng Xiaoping inaugurated a new role for education as a tool of ‘modernization’, thus implicitly indicating that which it would no
longer be—a vehicle for alleviating class inequity (Deng, 1987a, 1987b). But this is no less the case in Alberta, where there exists a decades-old and now hegemonic discourse that explicitly links economic success to efforts to create ‘better’ and ‘responsive’ schooling (Alberta Education, 2006), despite much evidence that such claims are dubious at best (Ball, 1993). Instrumentalization relies on a discourse that has the “power to position teaching, education, schooling, and literacy as overly functional endeavors that not only work in the service of neoliberal interests directly, but help to reproduce the institutional structures that leave unmet the needs that neoliberalism helps to create” (Weiner, 2005), p. 5).

A third and more obvious manifestation of commodification in education is creeping privatization through the introduction of ‘choice’ as a central objective of public education systems. The school choice movement is grounded in a conviction that market-based solutions are the key to turning around ‘failed’ public education (Hepburn,, 2001) and tends to promote options in three categories: private schools, ranging from religiously based to alternative delivery to schools for economic elites; charter schools based on specific educational ‘missions’; and home-schooling, a one-time fringe movement that has grown to take-in a significant portion of U.S. students (Apple, 2000a, 2000b; Aurini & Davies, 2005; Chan & Mok, 2001; Taylor et al., 2005). Apple (2000b) discusses the U.S. ‘choice’ movement as pursuing a blind ‘politics of recognition’ and critiques it for its affinity with neoliberal ideologies that seek retrenchment of the state (p. 74). When taken to its logical extreme (i.e. refusal to contribute to the betterment of the other), he insists, the politics of recognition as school choice has negative effects on the ‘politics of redistribution’ that pursued more general goals of equality and dominated public policy in the Keynesian era (ibid.).
Finally, and most importantly, a fourth trend is the ideological thrust that justifies and even masks the overall process of commodification. The ideological process of *depoliticization* is a part of the larger process that attempts to produce a permanent regime that favours unfettered individualism and the creation of conditions for capital accumulation. It constructs both the ‘passive’ consumer and the aggressive competitor, but not passive in the sense that one buys—widgets or university degrees alike—blindly and without critique. Indeed, constructing the critical consumer, one who carefully considers quality and the ‘push’ of the advertiser is central to new curricula. Rather, it constructs the passive consumer in two ways: one, it limits the range of criteria by which certain subjects are considered legitimate targets of critique (e.g. free markets are considered ‘natural’ and government intervention not so); and second, it precludes the possibility of *not* consuming or competing. Weiner (2005) describes this as “a ‘pedagogical’ process” through which “neoliberal ideology manufactures common sense at an incredibly efficient rate” (p. 7). Such a process causes “imaginative inertia…[,] an inability to think beyond the parameters of dominant” frames of reference (*ibid.*).

**Anti-Systemic Processes: Evidence of De-commodification?**

Locating clear anti-systemic movements in education is not so simple as is extracting them from the larger context. To begin with, one must recognize that the entire enterprise of public education is and always has been implicated in the project of capitalist expansion through its links to the state (Kachur & Harrison, 1999). In the face of retrenchment, there is a tendency for advocates of public education to romanticize it and ignore how it is deeply implicated in the reproduction of the inequality that its proponents claim to despise (*ibid.*). Thus, we sometimes see that present-day opposition to commodification in schools lacks imagination, thus channeling energy that might be use to produce anti-systemic alternatives into a nostalgic desire to return to
a bygone mode that was no less pro-systemic. This same attachment to public education encourages a blindness to the possibility that “under the right conditions markets may be selectively used to open up and pluralize ossified public educational systems” (Morrow & Torres, 2000, p. 40) and eliminates the historical fact that anti-systemic educational alternatives might necessarily take the form of education provided outside of state schools.

This being said, the purpose of this paper is to identify pro- and anti-systemic process that fall under the purview of publicly provided education. Is there evidence of systematic opposition to commodification *qua* accountability, instrumentalization, privatization, and depoliticization? On the first count, teacher, school, and even school board resistance to various accountability measures might be evidence of an emerging anti-systemic movement. In the province of Alberta, for example, large teacher protests in 1997 and 2001 as well as a series of strikes appear to have had some effect in limiting the extent of budget cutbacks (Kachur, 1999). It would appear also that school divisions in Alberta have openly rejected the provincial government’s efforts to discipline them into fiscal balances at the expense of conditions in schools. Furthermore, there is anecdotal evidence of teachers scuttling efforts to assess students and schools according to standardized examination results, as well as schools’ ‘cheating’ of funding schemes through grade inflation and other means (Taylor *et al*., 2005). In another context, my own research (Yochim, 2006) with middle school teachers in China revealed them to be highly creative in adopting strategies to avoid curricular and managerial mandates of government and school leaders. But, once again, while such resistances might be seen as anti-systemic, it is important to realize that they oppose only those trends broadly associated with neoliberalism—e.g. managerialism, accountability—rather than the imperatives of the larger system that existed, complete with flaws, before the ideology of the day. A more promising anti-systemic contender
might be seen in the ongoing and highly persistent rejection of Albertans—in the supposed bastion of Canadian neoliberalism—there is an obvious and longstanding countermovement that has prevented the wholesale adoption of the neoliberal prescription. Indeed, the general public’s vocal support of government funded education has not shifted despite years of efforts otherwise (Kachur, 1999).

Conclusion

Since the beginning of the demise of the social compromise known as embedded liberalism, a social compact that held sway in much of the advanced industrial world for the better part of three decades, the world has been inexorably restructured and redefined by a qualitatively new process that I have described as globalization. The term ‘globalization’ accounts for not only transformation within these nations, but also for the expansion of the dominant economic system throughout much of the remainder of the world. This expansion has been both motivated and accompanied by a generalized failure of the world-economy to grow at a rate that would allow a standard of living for the world’s entire population similar to that which existed for a minority of mostly western-dwelling people during the previous era. Given this reality, which has been exaggerated by a greater rate of accumulation amongst the wealthy (at the level of the individual) and advanced capitalist nations (at the level of the state), there has been, amongst those with the power to forward such a programme, the need to create conditions to restore a greater level of capital accumulation. Ideological justification for such a regressive renewal was found in the doctrine of neoliberalism, which I have discussed as merely the latest version of liberal individualism combined with neoclassical economic theory. In the years following 1970, neoliberal ideology slowly became dominant, beginning with the ascendance to superstardom of economists from the Chicago School and culminating with the elections of
Margaret Thatcher in the U.K. and Ronald Reagan in the U.S. and continuing in most if not all political regimes for the better part of two decades. Yet if these pro-systemic movements comprised a process of globalization as neoliberalization, then there has emerged a spontaneous, anti-systemic countermovement that I have labeled the process of globalization as diversification.

Its importance in both the Keynesian and globalization eras ensured that public education would be struggled over by the forces that battled on behalf of these competing processes. Thus, globalization as neoliberalization has sought to control education by a series of strategies that combine as a process of commodification. This process can be seen as a technology that attempts to produce a permanent condition of neoliberalism. And while there have been important resistances to this process at the school level, I would argue that the structure and history of public education systems has made it difficult for any coherent and legitimately anti-systemic movement to arise from within them. This analysis suggests that, while the dismantling of public education and the removal of its monopoly holds the potential for unintended consequences that are far from desirable, there may be a need for anti-systemic movements to move outside of this system in order to formulate creative alternatives before they are able to move back inside to champion a new vision for public education based on diversity, complexity, and doubt.

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References


