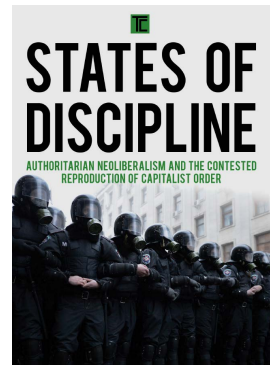


The Right to Starve



Hunger, Discipline and Labour Market Restructuring under Authoritarian Neoliberalism

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Hunger is at the core of capitalist social relations. It constitutes a key disciplinary moment in a system of exploitation based on the separation of direct producers from their means of subsistence. Labour struggles and social democratic parties have historically worked to reduce poverty, health inequalities and food insecurity by building up increasingly comprehensive welfare states designed to mitigate the fundamental contradiction between capital accumulation and progressive (let alone stable) conditions of social reproduction of the working classes. With nearly 800 million people suffering from chronic hunger globally in 2014–2016 (FAO 2015), growing food insecurity in advanced capitalist countries highlights the uneven, yet global, nature of the current subsistence crisis. In the United States, for instance, millions of American working class people are learning the hard way that the foundation of this brave new world is—and has always been—based on their freedom to starve.

The reality of ‘want amid plenty’ is perhaps one of the most painful ironies of the United States (Poppendieck 2000, 2014). While the United States stands as the most developed agricultural superpower, producing enough food to feed its entire population many times over, it has seen food insecurity rising at alarming rates over the last few years. Indeed, the financial crisis of 2007–2008 made visible contradictions that had been simmering for decades, showing the extent to which social and economic stability have been severely undermined during the period of neoliberal capitalism. Falling real wages as well as high rates of unemployment and underemployment have dramatically widened the gap between rich and poor, entrenching poverty and food insecurity even further, and severely weakening people’s economic stability. The result has been a substantial rise in inequality, with total household wealth for the top 0.1 per cent increasing from 7 per cent in the late 1970s to 22 per cent

in 2012. Indeed, ‘the wealthiest 160,000 families [the top 0.1 per cent] own as much wealth as the poorest 145 million families, and that wealth is about 10 times as unequal as income’ (Matthews 2014). By the time the financial meltdown happened in 2008, conditions were ripe for a major crisis in social reproduction to emerge. And as record numbers experienced the strong arms of poverty, the contradiction became increasingly harder to miss: widespread hunger and food insecurity in the country producing the cheapest food basket in the world’s history.

Building on the work of Stuart Hall and Nicos Poulantzas, Ian Bruff has argued that we are witnessing the rise of authoritarian neoliberalism, which is not ‘merely the exercise of brute coercive force’ but also rooted in ‘the increasing frequency with which constitutional and legal changes, in the name of economic “necessity”, are seeking to reshape the purpose of the state and associated institutions’ (Bruff 2014: 115). While Bruff does not deny that neoliberalism has always contained authoritarian tendencies, he argues that the latter have become more prominent since the global economic crisis of 2007–2008, especially in the European Union (Bruff 2016). Yet given that different countries or regional entities have different institutionalized histories of class struggles, authoritarian neoliberalism is by definition a deeply spatial concept whose history ultimately rests on a varied, uneven political geography, which is rooted in the ability of social and political forces to hamper, resist or repress the authoritarian tendencies of the neoliberal project. This chapter explores the uneven spatio-temporal development of authoritarian neoliberalism through a study of the restructuring of public welfare and food assistance programmes in the United States, as concrete manifestations of the state’s ability to implement administrative and legal mechanisms designed to entrench class inequality through the creation, management and maintenance of a flexible labour market. More specifically, I argue that the disciplining effect of hunger and food insecurity has been, and remains, key to the imposition of neoliberal labour market restructuring in the United States.

The social dislocation of the post-war class compromise was accomplished at the price of a deep recession, soaring rates of unemployment, poverty and homelessness, and the decline of the nation’s standard of living. Meanwhile, the crushing of organized resistance and the effective delinking between real wages and productivity—combined with waves of industrial delocalization abroad, new investments in labour-saving technology, deflationary measures and mechanization at home—paved the way to heightened capital accumulation. Neoliberalism is first and foremost a political project to restore class power and capital profitability (Duménil and Lévy 2004; Harvey 2005; Bellamy Foster and Magdoff 2009; Mattick 2011; McNally 2011; Panitch and Gindin 2012). Central to this political project was the restructuring of public

welfare towards harsh and punitive workfare policies, designed to force a low-wage economy down the throat of an increasingly hungry American working class.

This chapter explores the management of domestic hunger in the post-war era and the production of a nationwide crisis in social reproduction. Part one documents the ‘discovery’ of poverty, hunger and malnutrition as national issues, and the ensuing expansion of public welfare institutions, including hunger-relief programmes, in the 1960s and 1970s. Part two considers the rise of neoliberalism as a set of disciplinary practices based on the enforcement of work norms and self-reliance through workfare policies. Part three explores the politics of hunger and malnutrition since the global economic crisis, and the dramatic rise in the depth and scope of food insecurity.

THE ROOTS OF PUBLIC WELFARE

The post-war industrial era has been celebrated for its remarkable social and economic achievements: high rates of economic growth, rising real wages linked to productivity growth, Keynesian macro-economic policies to secure countercyclical economic development, rising standards of living, low unemployment rates and a more interventionist welfare state. Liberal economist John Kenneth Galbraith praised these achievements in *The Affluent Society* (1958). Although Galbraith did not deny that poverty, hunger and malnutrition still existed, he argued that they belong to a past that was fast disappearing. They were remnants, pockets of misery soon to be eradicated by the objective forces of economic growth. Like many others, Galbraith did not seem to realize that this particular period of unprecedented prosperity was exceptional in capitalist history, and that rates of growth of this magnitude were premised upon the reconstruction of an industrial world so efficiently destroyed by the Second World War. In the United States, the triumphalist nature of this position was not only the necessary rhetorical arsenal behind Cold War propaganda, it was also based on the generalization of white suburban life as representative of the nation’s standards of living (Galbraith 1976).

Against Galbraith’s condescending and unfounded optimism, Michael Harrington’s *The Other America* (1962) painted an entirely different canvas, where chronic poverty was the reality for some 40–50 million people. Like Dickens’s vitriolic critique of the Victorian era, Harrington’s depiction of a vast, ‘invisible’ economic underworld in the richest and most powerful nation on Earth made it clear that the rising tide of capitalist development was not lifting all boats. With hundreds of riots erupting in American cities between 1965 and 1968, ‘the other America’ made its presence felt and forced itself into main-

stream politics. There was effectively something rotten in a system where two nations lived side-by-side, one celebrated and advertised, the other ignored and hidden. President Kennedy's more interventionist stance had already secured the expansion of food distribution and established a pilot Food Stamp Program in 1961. Yet it was Lyndon B. Johnson who would launch an 'unconditional war on poverty' during his 1964 State of the Union message. President Johnson's dream of a Great Society was constituted through an ambitious reform programme based on the elimination of poverty and racial injustice as its two main goals. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the Social Security Act of 1965 (which authorized Medicare and allowed for the creation of Medicaid the following year) and the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965 were key legislations supporting an emerging welfare state. In addition, the Food Stamp Act of 1964, the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 and the School Breakfast Program in 1966 proved essential to establishing an increasingly comprehensive food assistance programme.

While many had been shocked to learn about the existence of mass poverty, they could still feel reassured by Harrington's opinion that 'the other America is not impoverished in the same sense as those poor nations where millions cling to hunger as a defense against starvation. This country has escaped such extremes' (1971: 1). Arguably, America was ill-prepared for what was about to follow, as the country discovered the reality of chronic hunger and malnutrition. The scourge became a national issue in 1967 when senators Robert F. Kennedy of New York and Joseph Clark of Pennsylvania came to Mississippi to hold hearings as part of the Senate Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty. During these hearings the senators were eyewitnesses to the horrors of a starving nation. Following these revelations, the Field Foundation, which had already been involved in various projects to help the poor and hungry, decided to sponsor a trip to study the health and well-being of the population in seven counties in the state of Mississippi. 'The stark details of horribly diseased children, suffering from severe dietary deficiencies and hopelessly inadequate diets, were vividly captured in a report they presented in early June, on "Children in Mississippi"' (Kotz 1969: 9). The conditions of the children were so preoccupying that team members found it difficult to believe that they were examining American children.

The President's National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, which had been established in September 1966 by President Johnson, issued its report *The People Left Behind* in September 1967. Some 14 million Americans lived in the abyss of hunger and widespread malnutrition, unemployment and underemployment, low income, dilapidated housing, low educational levels and severely inadequate healthcare. The committee recognized in the opening lines of its report that the consequences of rural poverty 'have swept into our cities, vio-

lently. The urban riots during 1967 had their roots, in considerable part, in rural poverty. A high proportion of the people crowded into city slums today came there from rural slums' (Breathitt 1967: IX). While it might have been an agile political manoeuvre to bring attention to the issue, it failed to acknowledge that, whether rural or urban, the core problem was poverty on a mass scale. And the most dramatic report of the state of hunger in the United States had yet to come.

In 1968 the Citizens' Board of Inquiry into Hunger and Malnutrition in the United States published its report, *Hunger, U.S.A.*, which sought to ascertain whether earlier findings were prevalent at the national level. 'We have found concrete evidence of chronic hunger and malnutrition in every part of the United States where we have held hearings or conducted field trips,' the board reported (Citizen's Board 1968: 16). The report documented the effects of grossly inadequate diets on the prevalence of anaemia, growth retardation such as low heights and weights, protein deficiencies, parasitic infection, worms, viruses and bacterial diseases, low resistance to infection, high infant mortality, shortened life expectancy² and nutritional diseases such as scurvy, rickets, blindness and pellagra. The report also gave chilling evidence about the behavioural and psychological problems associated with hunger and malnutrition, including listlessness, apathy and permanent brain damage, and showed awareness of social issues associated with hunger and malnutrition, including distrust, frustration, alienation, withdrawal, social dislocation and a heightened sense of injustice and revolt. It conservatively estimated that at least 10 million Americans were affected by hunger and malnutrition, most of which were Native Americans, African Americans, Appalachian whites and Mexican Americans. The report also criticized the limitations of various food assistance programmes, including the Food Stamp Program, the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program and the School Milk Program. Yet it was truly with the 1968 CBS documentary *Hunger in America* that millions of Americans realized that hunger and starvation were alive and well in the most advanced capitalist society.

Shocked by these revelations, the Senate appointed a Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs in 1968. From 1968 to 1977, the committee played a key role in crafting legislation that expanded food assistance for families, children and the elderly. It was central in dramatically expanding and improving the Food Stamp Program in 1972, notably by making the programme mandatory on the states and establishing national eligibility standards. The committee was also responsible for the creation of the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), as well as various child food assistance programmes and nutrition programmes for the elderly. Between 1969 and 1983, annual federal expenditures for food assistance increased from \$1 billion to \$19 billion (President's Task Force 1984: X). The

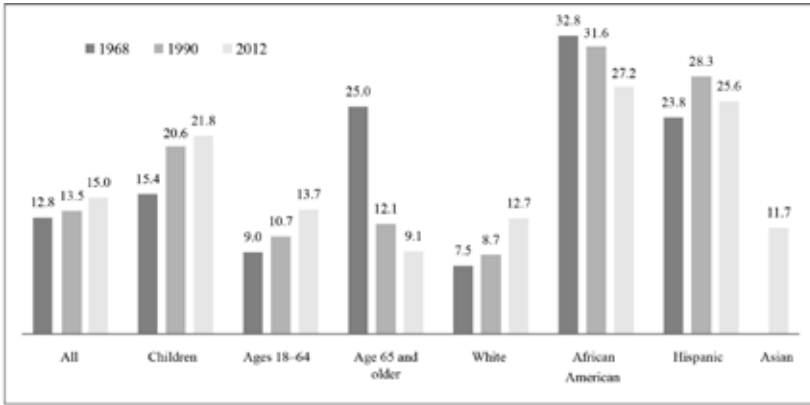


Figure 5.1. Poverty rates in 1968, 1990 and 2012

Source: IRP 2016

Field Foundation’s team revisited the question in 1977 and ‘concluded that although some hunger remained evident, its manifestations had become more subtle and, therefore, more difficult to identify’ (Nestle and Guttmacher 1992: 19S; see also Kotz 1979). Within the space of a decade, immense progress had been accomplished. The US poverty rate fell from 22.2 per cent in 1960 to 13 per cent in 1980 (Crooks 1995: 58). And although the painful reality of poverty and hunger remained all too real, a better future seemed to be on the horizon.

FROM WELFARE TO WORKFARE

If the election of Reagan in 1980 marked the end of Johnson’s ‘war on poverty’ and Nixon’s ‘war on hunger’, the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981 effectively declared war on welfare. In his first budget, Reagan managed to slash government spending and programmes ‘designed to help the poor and the ill, young and old alike’ (Trattner 1999: 365). By the mid-1980s the percentage of poverty-stricken Americans rose above 15 per cent, the highest rate since the mid-1960s. Reagan’s significant reductions in public welfare contributed actively to the formation of a new class of poor that was visiting emergency food and shelter providers for the first time in their lives. Mounting inflation in the 1970s followed by neoliberal policies after 1980 undermined the working-class’s purchasing power and standards of living. Average weekly earnings (in 1982–1984 dollars) fell from \$341.73 in 1972 to \$281.84 in 1982 to \$266.43 in 1992, before reaching \$288 in 2002 and \$298.53 in 2014 (ERP 2015: 402). Figure 5.1 shows a secular trend towards rising poverty rates between 1968 and

2012. Of particular importance is the growing impoverishment of the working population and its direct impact on the number of children living in poverty. The increase of poverty between 1990 and 2012, in the context of rising average weekly earnings, highlights the extent to which economic inequalities are on the rise in the United States. As neoliberalism continues to increase the ranks of the working poor, it also concentrates wealth in the hands of a small economic elite of well-paid professionals.

Intended to be short-lived, the growth of emergency food systems proved to be anything but temporary, as the need for soup kitchens and food banks expanded dramatically in the 1980s (Brown and Pizer 1987; Clancy and Bowering 1992). Contemporaries knew all too well that the progress made in the 1970s to eliminate hunger ‘through a combination of economic growth and expanded government program’ was fast receding (Brown 1988: 99). ‘The rapid increases in all program costs show the nation’s growing dependence on these programs,’ wrote Harrell R. Rodgers (1982: 57), ‘a dependence brought about largely by the nation’s economic problems in the 1970s and early 1980s. As inflation and unemployment increased simultaneously, the costs of social welfare expenditures increased greatly.’ Indeed, ‘federal programs for aiding the poor and the elderly absorbed less than 6 per cent of Gross National Product in 1962—roughly \$100 billion in 1982 dollars. Today we spend roughly \$430 billion on such programs, more than 12 per cent of the GNP’ (President’s Task Force 1984: 2). Reagan’s cuts sought to limit the spiralling costs of existing welfare programmes at the very moment when they were most important.

In September 1983, Reagan established the President’s Task Force on Food Assistance, an advisory committee whose function was to analyze existing food assistance programmes and make recommendations on how they could be improved. The task force issued its report in January 1984. It made an important distinction between two interpretations of hunger (President’s Task Force 1984: XIV): ‘The word hunger is used by health professionals to indicate physiological problems of undernutrition; it is used by most lay people to indicate also someone’s inability—even occasionally—to obtain adequate amounts of food.’ Regarding the first definition, the committee found ‘little systematic evidence of widespread or increasing undernutrition in the U.S.’. Regarding the second definition, the report confirmed ‘the continued existence of hunger’, yet concluded that given current indicators and survey methods, the number of hungry individuals could not be documented.³ Moreover, the report maintained that budget cuts had not fundamentally altered food assistance programmes, and that increasing funding levels would not succeed to eliminate the problems of hunger (President’s Task Force 1984: 41). In addition, the report endorsed decentralized decision-making and

argued for the importance of private and local solutions to the problems of hunger. While the President's Task Force might have been a failure for many progressive voices, it was a blessing for the Reagan administration, not only because it legitimized its course of action, but also because it revealed that the government was unable to document the problem it was creating.

Despite difficulties in measuring hunger, the impact of reductions in welfare spending was real enough (Brown and Allen 1988). The best-known study came from the Physician Task Force on Hunger in America, which issued its national report, *Hunger in America: The Growing Epidemic*, in 1985 as a response to the toothless report of the President's Task Force (Physician Task Force 1985). Defining food insufficiency in relation to economic indicators such as income and poverty, the report estimated that 20 million individuals (12 million children and 8 million adults) were suffering from hunger. As Marion Nestle and Sally Guttmacher (1989: 19S) made clear, however, the report of the Physician Task Force was part of a long series of hunger studies realized in the 1980s, with three subnational hunger studies conducted in 1981, 19 studies in 1982, 31 studies in 1983, 40 studies in 1984 and about 30 studies per year in 1985, 1986 and 1987. Based on their review of state hunger studies, Nestle and Guttmacher concluded that 'the numbers of people in need of welfare and food assistance have greatly increased', further noting that 'the time has come for anti-hunger advocates to assume the additional burden of anti-poverty advocacy and to demand that the federal government reclaim responsibility for the food and welfare of its citizens' (1989: 20S).

Welfare reforms remained firmly on the political agenda throughout the 1980s and the early 1990s. Meanwhile, growing rates of hunger and poverty, as well as the restructuring of the labour market towards greater flexibility amidst an anaemic economic recovery, translated into increased welfare dependency. Governor Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign promise to 'end welfare as we know it' made it clear that the welfare reform initiated by Reagan and pursued by George H. W. Bush was far from over. President Clinton's welfare reform law came in 1996 when he signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). As the building block of an unapologetic workfare state (Peck 2001), the result of the law was a thorough 'restructuring of the nutritional and social safety nets' (Himmelgreen and Romero-Daza 2012: 107). PRWORA presided over the weakening of the social safety net by sanctioning more stringent eligibility requirements and requiring work in exchange for time-limited assistance. With few exceptions, the law forces recipients to work after two years on assistance. Moreover, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which was created by the PRWORA to replace the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), imposed a five-year lifetime limit for cash aid. The law also transformed

people’s access to Medicaid, as many in this new army of working poor no longer qualified for medical assistance.

Under the Welfare Indicators Act of 1994, the Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS) must prepare annual reports to Congress on welfare dependence. Anyone living in a family receiving any amount from the AFDC/TANF, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and/or the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is considered a recipient. Anyone living in a family where AFDC/TANF, SNAP and/or SSI constitute more than 50 per cent of annual income is considered dependent. Figure 5.2 shows reciprocity and dependency rates between 1993 and 2012. Three aspects are worth noting. First, it should be emphasized that the rise in reciprocity rates after 2000 is taking place in spite of stricter conditions for food stamp eligibility and the 5-year limit placed on TANF. This suggests that reciprocity rates systematically underestimate what they seek to measure, either because families are no longer eligible or because stricter conditions exclude them. Testifying on the effects of PRWORA on working families before the Committee on Education and the Workforce of the US House of Representatives in 2001, Heather Boushey (2002) concluded that ‘even during the latter years of the boom, many families were unable to maintain stable, full-time employment’, further noting that ‘wages are too low to enable families to escape poverty and avoid material hardships’. Workfare provisions designed to force people to work for poverty wages have resulted in growing dependency rates, despite increasingly restrictive relief policies. The weakening of people’s economic resilience is seen in the rapid growth of reciprocity rates, following the financial crisis.

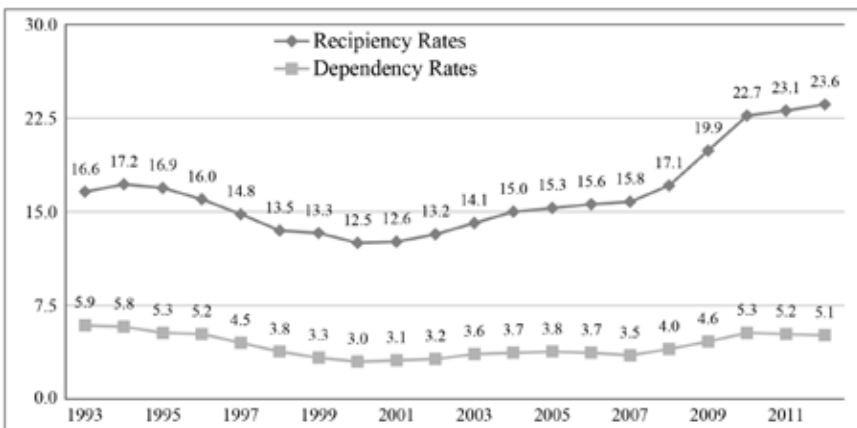


Figure 5.2. Reciprocity and dependency rates 1993–2012

Source: USDHHS 2015

Second, TANF is a fixed block grant of money given to the states that have not changed over the years. ‘In all but two states’, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) reported in 2015, ‘the real (inflation-adjusted) value of TANF cash benefits has fallen since welfare reform’s enactment and in the vast majority of states, TANF cash benefits today are worth at least 20 per cent less today [sic] than in 1996.’ In addition, the five-year limit placed on TANF means that the programme is providing assistance to fewer and fewer needy families. According to the CBPP, average monthly caseload fell from 4.7 million families in 1996 to 1.7 million families in 2014 (CBPP 2015). If the five-year limit helps to explain relatively stable dependency rates, as people are effectively kicked out of the programme, it also suggests that part of the increase in reciprocity rates after 2000—and a fortiori after the global economic crisis—comes from working families in need of TANF for the first time. This further suggests unmet needs on a growing scale amidst rising precarity.

Third and finally, reciprocity and dependency rates are measured based on the presence of a limited number of programmes: TANF, SNAP and SSI. This means that key programmes such as the School Breakfast Program, the WIC Program and the National School Lunch Program are not included in determining reciprocity and dependency rates. Together, these three observations suggest that reciprocity and dependency rates, as measured by the US-DSSH, are both limited and limiting. What Figure 5.2 adequately measures, however, is PRWORA’s effectiveness at forcing people off the welfare rolls (dependency rates) while producing a growing class of working poor that is increasingly dependent on restrictive and time-limited assistance programmes (reciprocity rates). In this respect, the main achievement of President Clinton’s welfare reform was to secure capital’s expanded reproduction through workers’ widespread economic vulnerability. If anything, the crisis of 2007–2008 brought forward contradictions that had been simmering for decades.

THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS AND ITS AFTERMATH

Growing disparities and market insecurity have been heightened by the global economic crisis, during which average annualized household wealth declined by 25 per cent for the bottom four-fifths, with disproportionately higher impact on the bottom two-fifths, overwhelmingly represented by single mothers and Black and Hispanic households (Allegretto 2011; DeNavas-Walt, Proctor and Smith 2011). Disparities are also shown in the overall share of wealth

among every quintile. According to the 2009 American Community Survey from the US Census Bureau, working families in the lowest quintile received 4.8 per cent of total income, with the next four quintiles accounting for 9.9 per cent, 15.4 per cent, 22.6 per cent and 47.3 per cent. This represents an impressive redistribution of wealth at the top of US society, with 60 per cent of the population sharing less than one-third of the total income. Programmes designed during the expansion of the welfare rolls in the 1960s and 1970s have absorbed most of the dramatic rise in human insecurity, even though they have been severely limited by workfare policies.

While food security can be defined as the ‘access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life’, food insecurity is conceptualized as an economic and social condition marked by ‘the lack of consistent access to adequate food’ (Nord 2009: 1, 3). Food insecurity thus refers to a situation whereby members of a household are unable to secure a normal diet. In its most extreme form, severe or prolonged food insecurity may result in hunger. Despite the fact that SNAP—the new federal Food Stamp Program—continues to be the main vector through which food assistance is provided, other programmes have also become increasingly solicited under neoliberalism. While the number of participants in the School Breakfast Program increased from 3.6 to 11.6 million children between 1980 and 2011 (USDA 2012b), the number of participants in the WIC Program grew from 1.9 to 9.0 million during the same period (USDA 2013a). The number of participating children in the National School Lunch Program has also grown rapidly: 7.1 million in 1946–1947, 22 million in 1970, 27 million in 1980, 24 million in 1990 and 31.6 million in 2012 (USDA 2013b). Despite these staggering figures, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimated that 79 per cent of those eligible to participate in SNAP in 2011 were enrolled—compared with 72 per cent in 2009 and 54 per cent in 2002 (Leftin, Eslami and Strayer 2011: 15)—and that only 39 per cent of elderly and 42 per cent of individuals with incomes above the poverty line participated, thus suggesting a much deeper crisis in social reproduction (USDA 2014). Similarly, coverage rates for all participants in the WIC Program have remained relatively stable between 2000 and 2013, oscillating between 57 and 65 per cent (Johnson et al. 2015: D-3).

Meanwhile, Feeding America, a nationwide network of member food banks and emergency kitchens, estimated serving 37 million different people in 2009, an increase of 46 per cent since 2005 (Mabli et al. 2010). Based on a study of more than 62,000 in-person interviews, with clients from its national network as well as from over 37,000 completed questionnaires from its agencies, Feeding America reported that 36 per cent of its clients were from households with one or more adults employed. Among all adult clients, 60.8 per cent were women, 40.3 per cent were non-Hispanic white, 33.6 per cent

were non-Hispanic black, 20.5 per cent were Latino or Hispanic, 3.9 per cent were American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 10.9 per cent were non-US citizens. The report also found that 45 per cent of those interviewed described their health as either ‘poor’ or ‘fair’, with 29 per cent of households reporting to have at least one household member in poor health. Many food-insecure households reported having to choose between food and other necessities, such as paying for utilities, heating fuel or rent. Of the 37 million people served in 2009, a staggering 14 million were children. One-fifth or more of the child population in 40 states and District of California lived in food-insecure households in 2009. This must be weighed against the fact that research on child health and development consistently indicates that children struggling with improper nutrition and living in food-insecure and food-insufficient households are more likely to experience difficulties such as lower academic achievement, stomachaches, headaches and colds, poorer health, higher hospitalization rates, anaemia, lower physical function, higher chronic health conditions, higher rates of anxiety and depression in school-age children, behavioural problems, depressive disorder and suicidal symptoms in adolescents (Simeon and Grantham-McGregor 1989; Chandler et al. 1995; Nord 2009: 7; Kesari, Handa and Prasad 2010).

Figure 5.3 shows the evolution of food insecurity in the United States between 1998 and 2014. The first part of the graph (left axis) is represented by two areas (very low food security and low food security) whose aggregate represents the total number of food-insecure individuals in the country, from 36.1 million in 1998 to 48.1 million in 2014. During this period, the number of individuals considered to be in a situation of very low food security almost

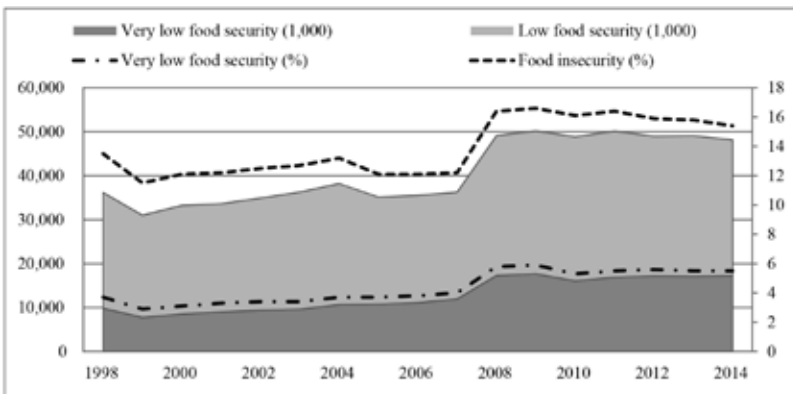


Figure 5.3. Food insecurity in the US 1998–2014

Source: Coleman-Jensen et al. 2015: 6–7.

doubled, rising from 9.9 to 17.2 million, while those in a low food security state increased from 26.2 to 30.9 million. The second part of the graph (right axis) tackles the issue of food insecurity relative to the population. Food insecurity remained relatively stable, near 12 per cent between 1998 and 2007, and reached 16.6 per cent in 2009 before settling at 15.4 per cent in 2014. The growing prevalence of very low food security—from 3.7 per cent in 1998 to 5.5 per cent in 2014—suggests that food insecurity is becoming more entrenched and difficult to escape for a growing proportion of the population. As shown in Figure 5.3, food insecurity has increased both in absolute and relative terms since the late 1990s.

Another important trend to note is linked to the depth of poverty. Expressed as an income-to-poverty ratio, the depth of poverty measures how close individuals and households are from their poverty threshold. It is no secret that the rise of hunger in America is closely related to the growing number of working poor, which now forms the backbone of the US economy. In 2009, nearly one in three (30.1 per cent) working families earned less than 200 per cent of the official poverty line (Roberts, Povich and Mather 2010–2011). The Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) estimates that in 2012, 6.6 per cent of all people lived with an income less than 50 per cent of the poverty threshold, 15 per cent under 100 per cent, 19.7 per cent less than 125 per cent, 24.6 per cent less than 150 per cent and 34.2 per cent less than 200 per cent (IRP 2016). Considering that 84 per cent of all client households served by Feeding America had incomes less than or equal to 130 per cent of the federal poverty line and that 16 per cent had an income equal or higher to 131 per cent (Mabli et al. 2010: 136), it seems more than reasonable to suggest that rates of poverty and food insecurity in the United States are underestimated. What this trend towards the ongoing impoverishment of the US society suggests therefore is that more and more people are only one economic downturn away from officially joining the ranks of the poor and food insecure. For about one-third of American families, unexpected expenses, sickness or temporary unemployment would be sufficient to dramatically undermine an already fragile financial situation.

In 2015, the US Census Bureau poverty threshold was \$12,331 for one person under the age of 65, and \$24,036 for a family unit of four people with two children under 18 years (US Census Bureau 2015). To put this into perspective, the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) has created a Family Budget Calculator to measure ‘the income a family needs in order to attain a modest yet adequate standard of living’. Based on the institute’s estimate of community-specific costs, one adult with no children would need \$32,122 per year to live in Seattle/Bellevue, Washington, while an annual income of \$72,274 would be required for a family of four. In Chicago, these amounts

would, respectively, be \$31,334 and \$71,995 (EPI 2015). With ‘a modest yet adequate standard of living’ placed at almost three times what the federal government considers the poverty threshold, EPI’s cost-of-living calculations demonstrate that those living with less than the poverty threshold are already substantially poor. It also suggests that the growing mass of working poor living with less than twice the poverty threshold already live in a chronic state of financial insecurity.

Furthermore, a recent overview of the SNAP by the Congressional Budget Office reveals that most participants in the programme in 2010 lived in households with very low incomes, on average \$8,800 per year. The average monthly SNAP benefit per household was \$287 or \$4.30 per person per day (Congressional Budget Office 2012). In 2012, the maximum SNAP monthly benefit for a family of four amounted to \$668 or less than \$1.90 per person per meal. SNAP benefits are based on the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), a minimal cost meal plan articulated around the idea that nutritious and healthy diets are compatible with cheap food. Although the TFP is remarkable for its effort at devising a comprehensive diet out of an unhealthy economic system, the reality is much less rosy as it stubbornly refuses to align itself with the ideals that animate the TFP. Indeed, Feeding America reported that 41 per cent of its client households are also participants in the SNAP. Among households with school-aged children, 62 per cent participate in the federal School Lunch Program and 54 per cent in the School Breakfast Program. Meanwhile, 54 per cent of households with children aged 0–3 year(s) participate in the WIC (Mabli et al. 2010).

In one of the many ironies emanating from the US food system, the USDA itself reported that 58 per cent of emergency kitchen users in 2010 were also participants in the SNAP, therefore undermining its own claim that it is possible to survive on a diet based on the TFP. Moreover, it reported that 80 per cent of SNAP participants had an insufficient intake of zinc and that 61 per cent showed a deficiency in vitamin C (USDA 2012a: 19). Moreover, the TFP is premised upon the rather difficult assumption that poor people have proper cookware and housing facilities to cook large quantities of cheap food. The reality is rather different. Poor people often live in less than appropriate houses or apartments because they cannot afford better housing. Under these circumstances, people often ‘choose’ to go hungry in order to avoid homelessness, preferring to skip a meal in order to pay for utilities and rent. They therefore submit themselves to the harsh and painful condition that is food deprivation in order to reconcile the contradictions of a system within which the only thing the disciplinary effect of the minimum wage can guarantee is precariousness and food insecurity.

Despite harsh welfare reforms to contain the spiralling costs of public welfare, welfare budgets have dramatically increased under neoliberalism. For

instance, the costs associated with SNAP have skyrocketed over the years, rising from \$17.1 billion in 2000 to \$75.7 billion in 2011. Between 1980 and 2011, the costs of the School Breakfast Program have increased from \$287.8 million to \$2.9 billion (USDA 2012b), while those associated with the WIC Program rose from \$727.7 million to \$7.2 billion (USDA 2013a). Meanwhile, total costs for the National School Lunch Program increased from \$3.2 billion in 1980 to \$11.6 billion in 2012 (USDA 2013b). Given the growing fiscal crisis of the state, the pressure to enact policies contributing to reduce overall federal spending in social security programmes has resulted in the decision to not prolong the temporary Emergency Unemployment Compensation programme beyond 2013. This programme temporarily boosted SNAP benefits by implementing a state-wide waiver on the SNAP time limit.

One of the harshest provisions of the welfare law of 1996 was to limit unemployed childless adults aged 18–49 years without disabilities to three months of SNAP benefits in a 36-month period, unless they worked for at least 20 hours per week or were registered in a qualifying work or training programme. Given that the law did not require states to offer work or training programmes for 20 hours a week, most states simply do not offer such programmes because they are too expensive. In short, basic food assistance is denied to people who are actively searching for a job and will accept a spot in a training programme. The 1996 welfare law allowed states to request a temporary waiver of the three-month limit in areas with persistent high unemployment. Because of the effects of the global economic crisis, nearly every state qualified for a temporary suspension of the SNAP time limit. As a result, the number of able-bodied adults without dependents receiving SNAP benefits increased from 1.1 million in 2008, before the waivers became effective, to 3.9 million adults in 2010 (Zedlewski, Waxman and Gundersen 2012: 3). With unemployment rates now falling, fewer states qualify for the temporary waiver. As a result, the CBPP estimates that between half a million and one million recipients will be cut off in 2016 (Bolen et al. 2016).

The state is balancing its budget on the back of the poor and reinforcing further the neoliberal logic of wealth inequalities and economic hardships. Meanwhile, food banks and other private charities are increasingly solicited to provide hunger relief as the state is increasingly failing to fulfil its role as mediator between labour and capital. It is therefore not surprising that Feeding America, who as we saw, estimated serving 37 million different people in 2009, has come to rely extensively upon the help and contributions of its corporate partners. These partners include, among others, mammoth transnational corporations such as 7-Eleven, Bank of America, Campbell's, Cargill, The Cheesecake Factory, Coca-Cola, ConAgra Foods, Costco, Dannon, Del Monte, General Mills, JPMorgan Chase & Co., Kellogg's, Kraft, Kroger,

Ford Motor Company, Ikea, Monsanto, Morgan Stanley, Nestlé, Pepsico, The Safeway Foundation, Sam's Club, Starbucks Corporation, Sysco, Target, Unilever, Walmart and The Yum-O! Organization. These corporations are among the most powerful businesses worldwide. The corporatization of hunger-relief effort is a particularly troubling aspect of the twenty-first century 'hunger amid plenty'. Not only does it signal what feminist political economists call the privatization of social reproduction (Bakker and Gill 2003; Bakker and Silvey 2008; Bezanson and Luxton 2006; LeBaron and Roberts 2010), but also exposes the limits of the neoliberal state and its unwillingness to mediate the growing contradiction between the power of capital and progressive conditions for social reproduction.

CONCLUSION

For more than 50 years, the United States has tried to reconcile the contradiction between capital and labour through public welfare institutions and programmes. The expansion of the welfare rolls in the 1960s and 1970s, including the implementation of comprehensive food assistance programmes, was fundamental to the rapid fall in hunger and malnutrition rates. While food insecurity remained a considerable problem in the late 1970s, the nation seemed to be heading in a good direction as major progress was realized in mitigating the worst effects of food insecurity. The neoliberal restructuring of the economy was instrumental in reversing the trend towards the betterment of society. Today, food insecurity is a widespread phenomenon that is more costly than ever in spite of grossly underfunded and increasingly overstrained programmes and institutions. The neoliberal assault on the social safety net has restored the conditions of capital profitability, which produces an army of working poor for whom food and economic insecurity have become the norm.

This chapter has argued that the restructuring of the labour market under neoliberalism in the United States was premised upon welfare reforms designed to enforce work norms, restrictive relief policies and time-limited assistance. These measures were effective in large part because they reasserted the right to starve which had been muted by an expansive welfare roll in the 1960s and 1970s. The management of domestic hunger in the United States is a prime example 'that a state's own crisis intensifies at the same time as its strategies of displacement ... seek to stabilize the contradictions and dislocations emanating from socio-economic restructuring without granting material concessions to subordinate social groups' (Bruff 2014: 125). Indeed, the more the state is trying to resolve its own crisis through harsh, authoritarian welfare reforms, the more it creates the conditions for larger and more encompassing

crises in social reproduction. The history of hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity in the United States is an embodied history of class power, of the extent to which capital's crises are first and foremost corporeal crises. That history is a litany of broken promises. If anything, it demonstrates that the right of the few to accumulate is ultimately rooted in the right of the many to starve.

NOTES

1. Many thanks to Cemal Burak Tansel for his thoughtful and helpful feedback. This research was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

2. A recent study found that female mortality rates increased between 1992 and 2006 in nearly half of US counties (Wyler 2013).

3. USDA's annual surveys on food insecurity, which started in the 1990s, find their origins in the debate created by the President's Task Force on Food Assistance about how to construct reliable indicators to measure levels of food security. The federal government adopted the conceptual framework developed by Sue Ann Anderson (1990).

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Chapter 6

Urban Transformation under Authoritarian Neoliberalism

Annalena Di Giovanni

Every crisis produces its own city. From ‘austerity urbanism’ in North America (Peck 2012) to ‘asset-priced urbanism’ in Ireland (Byrne 2016) passing by the ‘New London Vernacular’ (Hatherley 2016), the aftermath of the 2008 crash has affected how we afford a roof upon our head; where it is going to be located; who will be our neighbour; what will our outside routines be; and which services will still be there for us to move around, school our children, meet our social expectations and obtain care. Each instance of economic restructuring has confronted state institutions with the contradiction of having to step in to salvage markets; and almost invariably, new property and zoning regulations have been devised to displace overaccumulation through immovable assets. Each time the city has been turned into an agent of decompression versus the slowing down of financial investment, shrinking decision-making mechanisms in the name of economic necessity. Thus, each ‘recovery’ has disrupted our built environment and re-sold it to us as a financial product, a living space, an experience, a place in society and an identity.

The main case of urban transformation under authoritarian neoliberalism that I want to focus on, namely, ‘Crazed’ Istanbul, begins with an earlier crisis—that of 2000, followed by its IMF-induced 2001 rebound.¹ Sprawled between two seas and three coastal areas across a radius of 80 km and home to 80 per cent of Turkey’s industrial activity as well as an estimated 15 million inhabitants, Istanbul seemingly presents all the grievances of a global city at the crossroads of neoliberalism: patterns of consumer-initiated gentrification, urban-focused economic governance, privatization of public services and the divestment of capital from industrial production to property development. And yet there is more to the case of Istanbul than just the pattern of a Fordist city meeting its end (Lever 2001). Ever since the 2000–2001 crash, and its subsequent thrusting onto power the Justice and Development Party (AKP), Istanbul

has become both the engine and the signifier of an economic growth fuelled by real estate development, signature megaprojects and a reconfiguration of the urban commons. As the June 2013 protests against urban transformation in Gezi Park have proven, this political–economic process has been transformative of social relations, self-representations and forms of governance. Not only the ‘crazing’ of Istanbul has brought new social formations against the ruling establishment; the AKP itself has renegotiated the modalities and aesthetics of urban transformation.

What I therefore suggest is to look at urban transformation as a dialectical process comprising material forces, social pressure and negotiated representations. Without such a contextualization, 15 years of the AKP’s ‘crazing’ of Istanbul would appear mercurial or risk being depoliticized as the product of a leadership of increasingly frenzied individuals. This is important given that, in its beginnings, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s neoconservative government debuted as a passive revolution of the marginalized political forces (Tuğal 2009) and rose to shine in the region as the champion of a consistently high economic growth. Once it secured a second mandate, the AKP successfully dismantled the legacy of military rule and civil conflict, crossing the decade as a torchbearer of both diversity and divestment. And yet such a seemingly steady tenure marked its first decade with a vertical fall into recession, war, repeated clampdowns on human rights and possibly the highest number of terrorism incidents since the 1980s. To this fall, a total breakdown of strategic alliances should be added.

Istanbul’s skyline fully reflects this meandering trajectory. The city’s body has wavered from TOKİ’s (Turkish Mass Housing Development Administration) early ventures into public housing on the outskirts of the metropolis to the years of EU-modelled ‘smart’ planning and polycentric drive, up until the reinvention of heritage and tourism and the consequent crackdown on public spaces that has marked the post-2010 era. In fact, when looking at the transformation plans dotting Istanbul in 2016 and the sheer amount of court cases opened in order to push the projects through, one might even wonder if there is a viable political economic framework capable of explaining the AKP’s transformation of Istanbul throughout 15 years. The AKP is certainly not the first political force to exploit Istanbul by means of renovation; and neither was it the first one to inaugurate the use of extreme means to enforce spatial changes. In this sense, the violent cleansing of Ülker Sokak behind Taksim Square in the 1990s (Selek 2001) and the string of megaprojects across Turkey pushed by the ANAP (Motherland Party) administration came only over a decade before the ‘crazing’ of Istanbul.

Notwithstanding the visibility and influence of the pre-AKP urban reforms, a conscious political and economic critique of Istanbul’s transformation un-

der the aegis of *neoliberal kent rejimi* (neoliberal urban regime) has entered parlance in the last 15 years. Even more so after the discursive production of the Gezi protests (and of earlier urban movements it was built on) the term ‘neoliberal’ permeates films, radio programmes, songs and social media. ‘Neoliberal’ is the term through which the AKP’s transformation of Istanbul, in its unprecedented pace and scale, is made sense of and framed as a coherent political economy. And yet the contours of what makes urban transformation ‘neoliberal’ remain only partially satisfactory and somehow fail to explain how the neoliberal urban transformation process sustains itself and evolves across time. Scholarship has over time identified it either as a class-based project (Harvey 1989); a ‘market without limits’ utopia (Bourdieu 1998); a post-Keynesian rollback of state commitment vis-à-vis social security and provision of services (Jessop 2002); and a broadly defined ‘market rationality’ (Brown 2003). But when it comes to grounding the entrepreneurial logics of neoliberalism onto speculation and real estate development (Hackworth 2007; Harvey 1989; Ward 2003), accounts on what is *neoliberal* in this specific model of development—and if there is a model—are equally contradictory. Hackworth (2007: 13), for example, defines it as the ‘aggressive promotion of real estate development, particularly spaces of consumption’. However, it is worth questioning when, in the past century, housing and commercial properties have not been a laboratory of exploitative practices. A more circumstantial summary comes from Harvey, who charts what he considers entrepreneurial logics of neoliberal urbanisms across three traits he finds distinctive: the first one is an overarching use of public–private partnerships, whereby speculation is financed through external, that is, non-state, sources of funding. The second is the speculative nature of transformation, as opposed to a tradition of rational planning. In other words, a *laissez-faire* planning culture, which bestows the realm of lived space to the fluctuations of free market demand, leaving inhabitants to bear the risks and costs of urban ventures. A third aspect is the focus on ‘places and localities’ rather than cognizance of the larger metropolitan fabric: as local development projects are cascaded discontinuously across the urban fabric under the spur of investment, so do polarization and inequality.

If we are to maintain the three facets Harvey marks as key characteristics of neoliberal urbanisms (how it is financed, who bears its price and risks, how it promotes an increasingly fragmented urban fabric due to *laissez-faire* planning), what Istanbul presents us with is a postlude of where it is eventually headed. In the long run, the contradictions of sustained urban growth are bound to jostle the tenets of liberal democracy; and holding the reins of both—as they continuously hinder each other—requires more relentless enforcement mechanisms. As I will demonstrate throughout the text, Istanbul’s transformation has

indeed operated as a power broker across small and medium developers, much in line with Harvey's three-pronged framework, while simultaneously financed through external funding that was artificially maintained by the government's monetary policies. Likewise, Istanbul's development projects are indeed fragmented, discontinuous and polarizing; yet still, planning functions have never been more centralized than now. And as neoliberal urbanisms unfold, who bears the risks of Istanbul's transformation? On this point in particular, the case of Istanbul suggests a rather uneven picture as its transformation has gradually escalated from punishing the poor to punishing more affluent classes. In fact, while the earlier stages of TOKİ and the crackdown on *gecekondu*² and unregistered housing follows a classic pattern of dispossession of the already dispossessed, the AKP's interventions on the urban space have progressively moved up from the economically dispossessed of the city's outskirts to those very classes it previously garnered consent from, such as the culturally hegemonic liberal middle class.³

This chapter will examine the transformation of Istanbul in the 2003–2013 decade as a case of urban development under authoritarian neoliberalism. Rather than extracting a continuous strategy out of the AKP's 'crazing' of Istanbul, we will examine politics and architectural discourses, together with social and political alliances, to chronicle how city-making—both as a political economy as well as a branding approach—has materialized as a chronically unstable, contradictory and increasingly despotic governance in order to sustain itself and its investment environment. Three arcs of urban planning will be singled out. The first one looks at the nexus between post-crisis restructuring and massive state intervention into the residential construction market. The second focuses on the transition from housing to place-branding during the preparation of Istanbul's European Capital of Culture Initiative bid and the 'crazy' megaprojects. The final arc traces a clamping down on public spaces and cultural heritage.

AUTHORITARIAN NEOLIBERALISM AND THE CITY

As a neoliberal project, the urban transformation of Istanbul under the AKP presents two distinct problems: its sustainability, and its changing types of intervention into the built environment. In other words, one problem is how the government has operationalized development in the long run; and the second, the forms that this model of development took. A response to the first issue is to locate the political economy of the AKP into the rubric of authoritarian neoliberalism; a second proposal is to examine the relations between this political economy and its spatial reproduction in terms of branding.

Framing the governance of the AKP over Istanbul's city-making in the years that followed the 2001 financial crisis as authoritarian neoliberalism means, first of all, putting an emphasis on the role of the state in the protection and reproduction of capital accumulation.⁴ The 'crazing' of Istanbul is aligned with what Ian Bruff (2014: 115) identifies as a primary trait of 'authoritarian' neoliberalism: the increasing imbrication of market and non-market forces 'to the point that the separation of the two is a non-viable analytical tool'. A second distinctive aspect is the pace and frequency of constitutional changes to limit democratic fixtures. Policies not only change faster but must be also implemented at will by controlling any participatory process that might oppose them. In the case of urban planning, reducing uncertainty and delays through unilateral and expedited administrative authorizations accommodates a fundamental contradiction proper to estate development, that of being a traditionally slow-motion form of investment that resists frequent modification (Aalbers 2009, 2016). By virtue of its being located in highly mediated spaces such as cities, real estate is 'illiquid, entailing high transaction and operational costs upon sale, requires security, and is not easily divisible. Longer turnover periods create barriers to further accumulation, as capitals get tied up in situ until capable of generating high returns' (Weber 2002: 521). Overstepping stakeholders' appraisal not only enhances the marketability of a property asset (projects are guaranteed outside administrative approval and thus can be monetized at earlier stages) but also reduces its unyielding period. But pace and frequency are once again tightly related to a third distinctive feature of authoritarian forms of neoliberalism—coercion.

'Coercion' should not be understood only as sheer display of force and repressive mechanisms. Those too can be deployed, as they notably were in Istanbul during the June 2013 protests against the destruction of Gezi Park; but in the case of urban transformation, since it always entails the disruption of a quintessentially social domain, an element of encumbrance is almost inevitable as not all interests can be accommodated. From Haussman's Paris to London's Docklands, it is hard to locate a renovation process which has not tried to overstep certain stakeholders in order to favour more powerful others. In the case of urban transformation, I propose understanding coercion as a preemptive governance capable of legally restricting decision-making and auditing mechanisms. As politics must sustain the market of development investments and economic growth, policies are bound to restrict participation and accountability. Moreover, the ills of renovation are imposed onto dwellers as inevitable because they are sealed as part of larger restructuring fixtures. This narrative of 'inevitability' glossed over urban transformation corroborates Bruff's reflection on how 'frequent constitutional changes in the name of "economic necessity" are seeking to reshape the purpose of the state and associated institutions' (2014: 115).

By focusing on coercion, we move away from the understanding of neoliberal planning as a polity which has the withdrawal of central authorities from planning functions, and a subsequent fragmentation of decision-making across independent private interests, as its distinctive feature (cf. Hackworth 2007; Harvey 1989). On the contrary, even if construction awards are fragmented across private enterprises close to political power, and even if administrative reforms push towards 'going local', what we have is a retrenchment of government actors over decision-making powers in order to secure imbricated market and non-market interests. It is worth highlighting that such a planning model of fragmentation, private contracting and the centralization of local decision-making can be traced to planning under Thatcherism when the housing and property markets of London literally became a government business (Thornley 1991; Tewdwr Jones 2002). Therefore, by coercive mechanisms we imply the administrative restructuring of decision-making: if there is a pattern common to neoliberal cities showcasing a sudden spectacular growth, even more so after a period of recession (Istanbul but also Dubai, Qatar and London), it is that nothing is left to the chance of the markets' *laissez-faire*.

Even within a move from consensus to coercion, and even when its imbrication with the markets curtails any long-lasting strategy, the state is never separate from the social (Poulantzas 1978: 141; Bruff 2014: 118). Therefore, the state never ceases to negotiate its own imaginaries and representations through city-making. In the case of urban transformation, precisely because the political economy requires a continuous intervention into the built environment, spaces are marked by selected forms and self-narratives. As Gramsci (1971: 377) noted, 'Material forces would be inconceivable historically without form; and the ideologies would be individual fancies without the material forces.' No matter how fragmentary and fast-paced, or whether focused on property housing or large-scaled planning, transforming the urban directs the future through intervening on the past and reproduces social dispositions by managing everyday spaces. I label this reorientation of self-understandings and practices to sustain and direct market and non-market relations as 'branding the city' and emphasize it as an integral aspect of the political economy of urban transformation. In the marketing and place-branding literature, a brand is generalized as 'a product or a service made distinctive by its positioning relative to the competition and by ... a unique combination of functional attributes and symbolic values' (Hankinson and Cowking 1993: 10). Hence the intuition behind place-branding is that 'it's in the people's minds that the city takes form through the processing of perceptions and images about the city', and that these perceptions are part of the same process that 'follows the formation of images or of entities like products or corporations' (Ashworth and Kavaratzis 2010: 6). What positions and, therefore, 'brands' a place is

the selection—or conversion—of a series of attributes which allow it to be marketed as unique: choosing the traits of a city brand implies laying claims to the control of which heritage, gestures, consumption routines, social dispositions and leisure patterns and even representations of the future are to be legitimized and to serve which economic aim. In tracing the branding of New York after the 1973 crisis, Greenberg (2010: 119) problematizes the use of marketing urban imaginaries by warning that ‘the branding of cities and their politicians are now integrally intertwined’. In studying the combination of marketing and image-making with economic restructuring and austerity measures in the case of New York, Greenberg (2010: 116) comes to an understanding of branding as the realignment of a ‘broader social formation, one in which an emphasis on image and media integration is tied to the extension of market priorities into new social and political realms’. We can, thus, argue that branding is not simply about selling the city.

What the case of ‘crazed’ Istanbul clearly brings to the fore is that urban transformation does not stop at ‘branding’ as a strategic positional choice within a competitive market. Urban transformation ‘brands’ the city in the sense that it imposes a specific mark on its spaces—an intention to make it more ‘sellable’ in view of certain market trends. A city brand is not just a discursive production inasmuch as it is an attempt (and an always risky one, in terms of sociopolitical costs) to ‘associate the city with a desired category of urban development’ (Anttiroiko 2014: 15). ‘Branding’ does not simply inform us about the recipient, that is, the potential buyer or the loyal citizen, it also refers to the maker, hence to the governance that seeks to alter its own item. As it will be seen in the case of Istanbul, under authoritarian neoliberalism these alterations can be made through increasingly undemocratic decision-making mechanisms; the projects are removed from the purview of accountability and relieved of lengthy auditing processes, and interventions scale up in size and pace. In short, under authoritarian neoliberalism cities are branded at a faster rhythm and on a wider scale.

Spaces are not simply selected from promotion and sale, they are also renovated or demolished. Branding is thus a very physical phenomenon: it transforms cities in its attempts to align markets and society under the same economics of loyalty and consumption. It is more than mobilizing the urban spectacle for the representation of power. As erratic as urban transformation might seem under the fast-paced, reactive and un-mediated conditions proper to authoritarian neoliberalism, it nonetheless always harbours a branding intention in producing its own materialities through distinct architectural languages, while trying to control the self-image of the city and the dispositions of its citizens. This language(s) is neither fixed nor necessarily consistent and, under authoritarian neoliberalism, it continuously falls short of achieving an