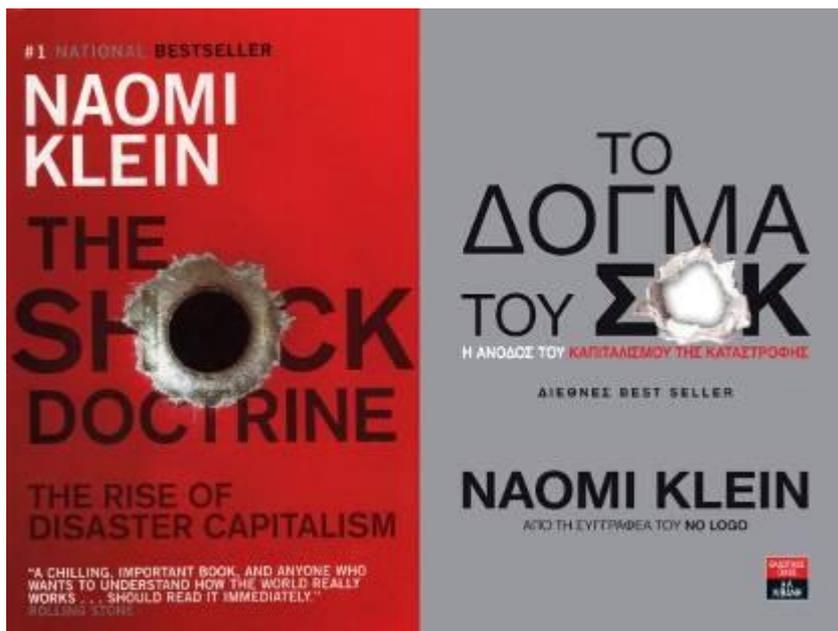


According to bestselling author Naomi Klein, the systemic use of shock and fear by the power elites to undermine vulnerable communities is very much evident in post-bailout Greece. From the rise of racism to the sell-off of the country's oil and natural gas resources – much of what will shape Greece's immediate future are, she argues, predictable consequences of the politics of austerity



Naomi Klein is the author of controversial New York Times bestseller *The Shock Doctrine*, which has been referred to as "the master narrative of our time". The book argues that business interests and powerful nations exploit shocks in the form of natural disasters, economic problems, or political turmoil, as an opportunity to aggressively restructure vulnerable countries' economies. She posits that because ultra-capitalistic policies are harmful to the majority of citizens, they cannot be implemented without a shock, ranging from media-hyped anxiety to police torture, that squashes popular resistance. In this exclusive interview, Klein explains to EnetEnglish how she believes the Shock Doctrine relates to Greece today.



Klein's *The Shock Doctrine* (2007) was an international bestseller and its Greek translation, *To δόγμα*

του σοκ (2010), remained a top-seller for many months **How do events in Greece relate to your arguments in The Shock Doctrine?**

To me it is a classic example of the things I wrote about. It's heartbreaking to see the same tricks and the same tactics being used so brutally. And there's been enormous resistance in Greece. It's particularly distressing to see the violent repression of the social movements that were resisting austerity. And it's just been going on for so long now. People get worn down.

What I've been following recently is the sell-off of natural resources for mining and drilling. That's the next frontier of how this is going to play out – the scramble for oil and gas in the Aegean. And it's going to affect Cyprus as well. This is a whole other level of using austerity and debt to force countries to sell off their mining and drilling rights for fire sale prices.

When you add the climate crisis on top of that it is particularly culpable that you have an economic crisis being used as leverage to extract more fossil fuels, especially because Greece itself very climate vulnerable. And I think its possible that, as the scramble for oil and gas heats up, there will be more resistance because it's a huge threat to Greece's economy

How much does climate change affect your argument?

Because I am working on a book and a film on climate change, that's why I've been following the extractive side of the shock doctrine in Greece, which has gotten a lot less attention. Understandably, people are focused on having their pensions cut, and the layoffs – and those definitely are more immediate. Although in the case of the [Skouries] goldmine, there is an immediate threat to safety, to livelihood, and to economy, and so people are extremely vocal about that.

But the part of this that I find so culpable, and so deeply immoral, is that the rise of fascism in this context is entirely predictable. We know that this is what happens. And this is supposedly the lesson of the Second World War: If you impose punishing and humiliating sanctions on a country, it creates the right breeding grounds for fascism. That's what Keynes warned about when he wrote *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, regarding the Treaty of Versailles. To me it's so incredible that we continue to allow history to repeat in this way.

Greeks have this particular fear that's being exploited, around the fear of becoming a developing country, becoming a third world country. And I think in Greece there's always been this sense of hanging on to Europe by a thread. And the threat is having that thread cut. That fear plays out in two ways: One that you can't leave the eurozone because that will be the end of your status as a developed country. And then on attacks on migrants and in the anti-immigrant backlash.

Just because something bad is happening doesn't mean you're going to go into shock. Shock is what happens when you lose your narrative, when you no longer understand where you are in time and space. You don't know what your story is anymore.

In The Shock Doctrine you talk about how countries the IMF lent money to were said to have sick economies, and specifically, to have ‘cancer.’ But with Greece we talk about ‘contagion.’ What are the implications of this change in metaphor?

‘Cancer’ is already a violent discourse. When you diagnose a country with cancer whatever treatment you go with is justified, it’s necessarily lifesaving. That’s the whole point of the cancer metaphor. Once you have that diagnosis, you, as the doctor, are not culpable for the negative affects of the treatment.

But calling it a contagion of course means that this is about keeping it contained, and preventing whatever rebelliousness is being incubated from spreading, particularly to Cyprus, Portugal and Spain.

When you have these fears of a contagion, when investors are afraid of a whole region, it means that that region has power to come together as a block with a much stronger hand. This is what I wrote about in the book about Latin America in the 1980s, with the so-called debt-shock. Where it would have been next to impossible for individual countries to stand up to the power of the IMF. But if Latin America as a block had organised themselves and stood up to the IMF together, then they actually would have had the power to break them. And then you would have had a much more even negotiation. I’ve always thought that this is one of the answers to the idea of contagion. If that’s what your opponents are afraid of, organise into a negotiating block.

So the countries of southern Europe should come together negotiations with the troika?

I would think so, yes. It’s called a debtors’ cartel. But it never happens. As far as I know it hasn’t been tried.

There is a concerted attempt to create the false equivalency between an individual who went into a little bit of consumer debt, and a bank who leveraged themselves 33-1. It’s an outrageous comparison



— Naomi Klein

Former deputy prime minister Theodoros Pangalos said, “We all gorged together” – as in every Greek was complicit to causing the crisis. In contrast, Alexis Tsipras, the head of main opposition party Syriza, has pointed the finger at Angela Merkel and her followers. How should the way that the crisis came about affect the way we try to solve it?

If you accept the premise that everybody created this crisis equally, then you have created the context where collective punishment is acceptable. That is the whole point of this false equivalency.

There is a concerted attempt to create the false equivalency between an individual who went into a little bit of consumer debt, and a bank who leveraged themselves 33-1. It’s an outrageous comparison. But unfortunately this is the way economics is discussed in our culture where you always have these equivalencies. Between family debt and the debt of a nation. ‘Would you run your house this way?’ It’s a ridiculous comparison because the way you run your house is not the way you run your country. We all gorged together ... that means everyone has to starve. But of course we know everybody won’t starve.

The journalist who published the identity of the names on the Lagarde list, Kostas Vaxevanis, said in an interview with the Guardian that [Greeks have to go to the foreign press to get news on their own country](#). What is the role of the press in either assisting or resisting the shock doctrine?

Information is shock resistance. The state of shock that is so easy to exploit is a state of confusion. It's a loss of story, it's that panic that sets in, this window that opens up, when things are changing very, very quickly. And those are the moments when we need our media more than ever. This is the collective way that we 'renarrativise' ourselves. We tell ourselves a story, we keep ourselves oriented – if we have a good media.

Just because something bad is happening doesn't mean you're going to go into shock. Shock is what happens when you lose your narrative, when you no longer understand where you are in time and space. You don't know what your story is anymore. That's when you are very vulnerable to somebody coming along and telling you, 'This is the story.'

Greeks have this particular fear that's being exploited, around the fear of becoming a developing country, becoming a third world country. And I think in Greece there's always been this sense of hanging on to Europe by a thread. And the threat is having that thread cut.

None of this can happen without a complicit media, a media willing to work with the elites, and spread the fear. It's the fear that's fuelling this, the fear of falling, falling out of Europe, falling into the developing world. Politicians don't have the ability to spread that fear on their own. They need the commentaries. They need the hysteria on the talk shows.

Journalists have to understand that none of this can happen without us. We are not just observers. In these moments when it's all about fear and orientation and loss of story, we are actors in this and we have choice. Are we going to help people stay oriented, or are we going to be tools of the elites?

Whether it's fear of immigrants, or this supposed calamity in the future that prevents people from looking at the calamity in the present. The calamity has come. This is a depression. But by constantly focusing people on the worst thing that could happen down the road that is always being put in front of you, then you are not focusing on the outrageous, masochistic attack that has been inflicted on this country.

The roots of this are the financial crisis in 2008. And it was the journalists who didn't ask the questions in the first place, and fed all of this hype about a market boom that was going to last forever and didn't ask those questions.

We are deep in this. Both in creating the context for the economic crash in the first place, and now being tools of the elites and how we respond to it.