

Study Guide for Naomi Klein's *The Battle for Paradise* with Biblical Reflections on Colonialism

Written by Martín Anderson

Historical Background and Perspective

In 2016, a UN Special Committee on decolonization called on the United States Government to allow the people of Puerto Rico to take part in a process in which they would be able to exercise self-determination on a path leading to independence. In addition, the US Government would complete the process of giving back occupied land in Vieques and Ceiba. The government would also be responsible for cleaning the land from contamination due to military exercises. This may come as a surprise to some people who are not familiar with the history of the Puerto Rican Independence movement which came about as a result of the US invasion of Puerto Rico in 1898.

For the purposes of this study, we will focus on the current social political and economic situation in Puerto Rico. However, we come from the perspective that the Puerto Rican people have a God given right to live as an independent people and to free themselves from the damaging effects of colonization. For a deeper understanding of the damage to a people's psyche and to their very soul, please refer to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*.

By the end of this study guide for Naomi Klein's *The Battle for Paradise: Puerto Rico Takes on the Disaster Capitalists*, it is our hope that you will ask yourselves some challenging and introspective questions about the effects of US colonialism on the Puerto Rican people. We additionally hope that as people of faith you will be moved to challenge systems of power that are designed for dehumanization.

Study Guide Design

We have provided study questions for each section of the book. Prior to the questions we have also included a brief scripture-based reflection. The study will be most effective if you read each section of the book prior to answering the discussion questions.

Opening Biblical Reflections

Exodus 9:1 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, and say to him, "Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews: Let my people go, so that they may worship me."

In the Book of Exodus, God told Moses to let Pharaoh know that they must be free in order to worship God. In other words, in order for a people to truly live out their faith in God it is important that they are able to overcome obstacles that do not allow them to live to their fullest human potential. It is our contention that Colonialism does not allow a people to reach the height of their human possibilities.

Mark: 23 Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

This scripture from the Gospel of Mark challenges us to look deeply into the systems and structure that create wealth. If wealth is being created as the result of other people

being deprived and oppressed, then Jesus is challenging us to change those systems for the good of all people.

Section 1: “A Solar Oasis”

Questions for Reflection:

- 1) How is the work of Casa Pueblo presenting viable and practical alternatives for the people of Puerto Rico?
- 2) The people of Coqui Solar are looking at the post hurricane crisis as an opportunity to change things. What is the socio-economic impact that there work with solar power can have on Puerto Rico?

Section 2: “Invasion of the Puertopians”

Biblical Reflection:

Before engaging in questions for this section of the book we invite you to reflect upon a brief post-colonial analysis of Mark 3:1-6.

The Man with a Withered Hand

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, “Come forward.” Then he said to them, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

In this text, we see Jesus having compassion for the sick man who is unable to be a full and equal contributing member of his community. This is a recurrent theme in the miraculous healing work of Jesus. People, who due to illness and the judgement cast on them by society, were then made whole by Jesus and were once again able to take part in the social aspects that are an integral part of being human. However, according to the text, another group known as the Pharisees does not agree with his interpretation of the Sabbath and they seek out the Herodians to destroy Jesus. The Herodians were loyal to the Roman appointed King of Judea.

In this short passage that speaks volumes, the writer of the Gospel Mark asks the question of whether we are going to show compassion to common everyday people in need or whether we are going to show our allegiance to the rich and powerful Herodians. The ultimate question is whether we are going to serve empire or are we going to create a just society in which are all included.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Who are the “puertopians” as described by Naomi Klein in this section?
2. Compare and contrast the efforts of the “puertopians” with the work of the people from Casa Pueblo in Adjuntas, Puerto Rico from the previous section.
3. Naomi Klein makes it a point to mention that at one of the seminars on how to take advantage of the “tax breaks” to invest in Puerto Rico the participants are offered a sunrise yoga/meditation class. Why does Klein intentionally put this fact into the book? What are the roles of spirituality and religion as it relates to social issues in general?

Section 3: An Island Weary of Experiments

The following text in the Bible deals with the human perception of the “other” or those who are different from us.

Exodus 22: 20—You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

These words challenge us to not look at people with preconceived notions. Instead it calls for us to have empathy and understanding for their situation. In this section, Naomi Klein, after giving a thorough economic analysis based on her ideas of the shock doctrine, makes the assertion that one of the most important reasons behind the continuing US colonization of Puerto Rico is just plain and simple racism. While engaging with the questions from this section, please think about how racism and other ideas that dehumanize people create a paradigm in which inhumane acts are seen as a normal part of life.

Questions for Reflection:

1. According to Naomi Klein, what was the result of the 1960 US government population control experiments?
2. What is the importance of including the state of the ecosystem in Vieques in this section?
3. According to community organizer and environmentalist Juan E. Rosario, what is the psychological impact of these experiments on the Puerto Rican people?

Section 4: Welcome to Magic Land

In this section, we will focus on the resiliency of the Puerto Rican people.

Biblical Reflection:

2 Corinthians 6: 1 – 7:

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, "At an acceptable time, I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation, I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God, we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left.

In this text, Paul continues to exhort the early followers of Christ to stay strong in their belief in the face of persecution from the Roman Empire. Paul also proclaims that the day of salvation is now! In this section, please think about how the people of Puerto Rico have exemplified this spirit of resistance and resilience.

Questions for Reflection:

- 1.** How does agronomist Dalma Cartegená help Puerto Rican children heal from the trauma of the hurricane?
- 2.** What is the purpose of practicing agro-ecology?
- 3.** What are the connections between the planting practices of agro-ecology and the goal of an autonomous and self-sufficient economy for Puerto Rico.

Section 5: Shock After Shock After Shock Doctrine

Biblical Reflection:

Luke 4: 16 - 19

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me

to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,

to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

In this text, Luke has Jesus using scripture from the Book of Isaiah 61: 1 - 2 to announce and define the true purpose of his ministry from a social stand point. We fully recognize that the ministry of Jesus can also touch many people on a deeply personal and intimate level. The year of the Lord that is proclaimed comes from Leviticus 25. In Leviticus, there are very specific guidelines on the practices of selling and buying as well as land and debt forgiveness. These texts are powerful for us today in helping us to establish socio-economic structures in which people can have loving and trusting relationships centered on respect for God and each other. The texts also ultimately teach us the importance of being responsible stewards of land and its resources for they are seen as blessings and gifts that God has bestowed on us.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What does Naomi Klein define as the “shock doctrine?”
2. Why does Naomi Klein compare Puerto Rico’s situation to the events in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina?
3. What is the financial coup d’ état that Naomi Klein refers to in this section?

Section 6: Desperation, Distraction, Despair, and Disappearance

Biblical Reflection:

Isaiah 60: 4-6

Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses’ arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

This text from the Book of Isaiah speaks of hope to a people who have undergone a forced exile and have returned to their land. Today, the people of Puerto Rico are facing a situation in which leaving their homeland of Puerto Rico may be the only viable option for their wellbeing. While reading this section, please think about how a mass exodus of the Puerto Rican people from their country is of benefit to the “Disaster Capitalists.”

Questions for Reflection:

1. According to Klein, privatization is being presented by the Puerto Rican government as the only option available for solving the energy crisis. Who are the

groups presenting other solutions? And, in which countries are these options being implemented successfully?

2. What was the first major political demonstration to be organized and held after Hurricane Maria?
3. Explain the title of this section and how Klein uses it to explain the strategy of the “Disaster Capitalists.”

Concluding Thoughts:

The last two sections of the book, *The Islands of Sovereignty Converge and a Race Against Time*, deal with themes that we have covered in previous sections. In them the struggles of a wide array of people are detailed by Klein. These people come from various professions and are all united in the pursuit of dignity and self-determination. They are University of Puerto Rico professors, union organizers, environmentalists and farmers. They were all doing this work of self-determination for Puerto Rico prior to Hurricane Maria. The storm and the ensuing events have just exacerbated the situation. It is our hope that after reading this book and after answering, reflecting, and discussing these questions that you will be moved to pray and take action that will support their cause.

The author Martín Anderson is a member of First Congregational Church of Chicago UCC. The church is located in the West Humboldt Park community and is dedicated to the social justice mission of Jesus.