

Dialogue, Monologue, or Something in Between? Neoliberal Think Tanks in the Americas

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This article utilizes a neo-Gramscian framework to interrogate the processes of transnational class and state formation in the western hemisphere as outlined by William Robinson. It examines the role of elite-backed policy institutes in the 40-year transition to a transnationally integrated, hemispheric, political economy underpinned by neoliberal regimes of flexible accumulation. It positions these groups as “organic intellectuals,” both rationalizing the neoliberal bloc’s development and legitimizing its worldview as “common sense” in the press. However, the “transnationalization” of this policy network has been uneven, with northern funding directing intellectual projects in the south. To explore this dynamic, this article uses as a case study the Inter-American Dialogue, a transnational think tank that promotes hemispheric neoliberal consolidation.

Introduction

According to William Robinson (2008) in *Latin America and Global Capitalism*, the past 40 years have witnessed Latin America’s political-economic transformation as countries reject statist national development strategies in favor of reforms designed to facilitate global neoliberal integration. These reforms are associated with a new era of global capitalism in which regional elites become “deterritorialized” as they integrate into transnational regimes of accumulation, increasingly operating through an emergent “transnational state” that is conceptualized as a loosely coordinated network of transnational, regional, and national institutions. In Robinson’s view, this arrangement represents a dramatic departure from north-to-south patterns of neocolonial domination as Latin American elites find themselves partners in a transnational neoliberal bloc.

Though useful, Robinson’s (2008) analysis of transnational social formation downplays the role of neoliberal ideology in underpinning contemporary transnational hegemonies. As an ideological front, neoliberalism has been critical in establishing Robinsons’ bloc, legitimizing its rule as common sense while providing the basis for reforms that rationalize its structure. This front has been partly the creation of a community of organic intellectuals who have worked, through “oligarchic” think tanks, to propagate

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neoliberalism throughout the hemisphere. However, the transnational spread of neoliberalism has been an uneven process, with the ideology's development in the South partly influenced by an overwhelming flow of funding from the North. This gives the consolidation of the neoliberal bloc a much more neocolonial character than Robinson admits.

As a transnational think tank, the Inter-American Dialogue (IAD) seems like the logical extension of this global enterprise. Funded and run by a cross section of hemispheric elites, the Dialogue functions as a transnationalized, organic intellectual in legitimizing and promoting neoliberal policy. It also directly facilitates transnational class and state formation by uniting regional business leaders and policymakers in an attempt to discuss common problems and potential reforms. Yet its sources of funding come almost exclusively from northern corporations, governments, foundations, and northern-dominated international financial institutions (IFIs). Its transnationality is therefore uneven in the same way as is the broader project of bloc formation in which it is imbedded.

Latin America in the Neoliberal Order

In *Latin America and Global Capitalism*, William Robinson (2008) documents capital's "broad offensive" to dismantle national import substitution regimes in favor of global regimes of flexible accumulation underpinned by neoliberal reforms. These reforms include the elimination of capital controls; dismantling of social services; mass privatizations; regressive taxation; deregulation of labor and finance; abolishment of subsidies; and market integration through regional trade agreements and transnational regulatory bodies. Problematizing old models of neocolonial "dependency," Robinson argues that neoliberal restructuring has seen "northern" capital largely abandon direct ownership of Latin American economies, with "Latin" and northern capital increasingly integrated into circuits of global accumulation as partners. The result is the transition toward transnational "global productive integration" in which regional firms become component pieces in complex global commodity chains (p. 25).

This new order has seen the rise of powerful regional industries, including: manufacturers integrated into global production chains through "subcontracting and outsourcing networks" (Robinson, 2008, p. 66), resource extraction firms integrated into transnational commodity chains (Reed, 2002), financial giants integrated into globalized, deregulated financial markets ("Global 500," 2006), and telecommunications conglomerates that provide the communications networks required by transnational regimes of flexible accumulation (Harvey, 2005). Critically, many of these firms resulted from the neoliberal privatizations of the past 30 years (Robinson, 2008).

Neoliberal Restructuring and Elite Power

Foucault (2008) was quite prescient when he saw in neoliberalism the move toward a new, more robust form of governmentality through intensified market discipline. Neoliberal restructuring has consolidated the power of those elites who, integrated into global circuits of accumulation, have largely rejected programs of national wealth redistribution. Often aided by transnational regulatory frameworks like the WTO and NAFTA, many countries have revised labor codes in favor of capital interests over the past 30 years (Robinson, 2008). Meanwhile, capital hyper-mobility, facilitated by economic integration,

has empowered firms to discipline labor with the threat of capital flight. Finally, penetration of local agricultural markets has dislocated millions of rural peasants who now form the basis of an immense reserve army of labor. The result of these processes has been the growth of a massive pool of precarious labor that forms the backbone of transnational production chains.

Elite power is also bolstered by financial deregulation, as currency speculation and the removal of capital controls facilitate the instigation and manipulation of predatory financial crises. Time and again, speculative pressure has devalued floating local currencies and instigated capital flight, leading to soaring public debt, withering foreign reserves, and plummeting local asset values. While personal savings and pensions are decimated, globalized finance capital is free to purchase now-devalued assets for a fraction of their prior worth. Importantly, both the discipline of labor and predatory financial accumulation are enabled by the rise of regional telecommunications industries, which provide the necessary transnational hyper-mobility of capital.

Finally, privatization has also helped consolidate elite power, as investors collaborate to capture public enterprises at a fraction of their true value, often following predatory financial crises. For example, Carlos Slim, owner of Telmex and America Movil, leveraged his small investment firm to gain control over Mexico's newly privatized telecom industry, turning America Movil into Latin America's leading wireless company ("About America," n.d.) and Slim into the world's richest man (Robinson, 2008).

The result of these trends has been a 40-year "pauperization of labor," with severe increases in poverty and inequality, stagnant GDP growth and declining Human Development Index ratings for many countries, including several early adopters of neoliberal reforms (Robinson, 2008, p. 250). Simultaneously, the region has witnessed an explosion in newly minted millionaires and has exported many billions annually in profits and interest.

However, this regional integration into the transnational capitalist order is neither monolithic nor unchallenged. Since the early 2000s, neoliberalization has met resistance from a new crop of democratically elected "New Left" governments (Weyland, Madrid, & Hunter, 2010). Ranging from committed socialists (like Venezuela's Hugo Chavez or Bolivia's Evo Morales) to "pink tide" social democrats (like Brazil's Lula de la Silva and Chile's Michelle Bachelet), these administrations have jointly pursued a limited rejection and partial rollback of neoliberal reforms. Yet some critics, among them Robinson (2008), have argued that such developments have not seriously challenged the structures of global capitalism, particularly the "pink tide" administrations that are continuing with a basic acceptance of the neoliberal framework.

Structural Reorganization and Gramscian Hegemony

Transnational Elites: Personnel of the Neoliberal Bloc

The neoliberal turn was not spontaneous. In Gramsci's (2005) terms, it involved the organization of a new historical bloc: the tacit alignment of a loose network of classes and institutions into a novel social formation. According to Robinson (2008), the dominant faction of the regional neoliberal bloc is not

a national upper class but rather a transnational capitalist class (TCC) made up of the investors, executives, and managers of firms integrated into transnational circuits of flexible accumulation (p. 31). The TCC has been at the forefront of neoliberal restructuring, forming transnational business lobbies, financing neoliberal political coalitions, leveraging oligarchic media systems, and establishing policy-planning institutes (or "think tanks") that have developed neoliberal reform proposals. To these ends, TCC agents have integrated into the bloc other actors disposed toward neoliberal restructuring, including national political managers and the directors of IFIs like the IMF and World Bank. Also essential are the "organic intellectuals . . . steeped in neoliberal ideology," who provide the bloc with "ideological legitimacy and technical solutions" from their positions in think tanks, universities, and the IFIs (p. 39). Together, this constellation of social actors has formed the core personnel of the neoliberal bloc.

The Transnational State: Institutions of the Neoliberal Bloc

According to Robinson (2008), transnational elites have increasingly consolidated and coordinated neoliberal reforms through the "construction of a supranational legal and regulatory system" (p. 39). This "transnational state apparatus" (TSA) can be conceptualized as a "loose network of transnational institutions" (regional trade agreements, the IFIs) that is increasingly synchronized with "captured" national state structures (ministries of finance and trade, central banks) and the elite institutions of civil society, especially university departments and think tanks (p. 34). The result has been the consolidation of a transnational neoliberal bloc whose personnel operate through various multilateral lending agencies, international regulatory bodies, nation-state institutions, trade organizations, think tanks and university departments. According to Robinson this is not a neocolonial process forced upon the South by the North but rather the result of local elites dismantling nationally oriented political-economies to better participate in global regimes of accumulation.

However, there is evidence that the New Left has distanced itself from the neoliberal TSA, sometimes through attempts to construct an alternative *regional* state apparatus. To this end, there has been a rejection of certain North-South free trade deals, such as Argentina and Brazil's scuttling of the proposed Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (Robinson, 2008). Other reforms involve the formation or strengthening of regional organizations that could supersede the neoliberal TSA, including the proposed South American development bank, Venezuela's launching of the Petrocaribe energy alliance, the new Telesur regional news network, and ongoing negotiations for a new regional political body (parallel to the broadly neoliberal Organization of American States), whose membership would exclude the United States, Canada, and Spain (Hakim, 2006; "Latinamerica Agrees," 2010). Finally, certain domestic reforms undermine neoliberal orthodoxy, such as Venezuela's use of nationalized oil wealth for anti-poverty programs (Buxton, 2008) and Brazil's moves toward minimum wage hikes and strengthened pensions ("The Most," 2009).

However, the extent to which these reforms represent a meaningful departure from transnational neoliberalization is debatable. As Robinson (2008) argues, the major international credit agencies, the IFIs, and neoliberal finance and trade ministries still dominate the regional political economy, while the "pink" governments of Brazil, Chile, and Argentina continue with neoliberal reforms while largely accommodating the demands of global finance and the IFIs. Also, some of the reforms described above

could be seen as a rejection of U.S. hegemony and a move toward the regionalization of transnational neoliberal regulation, rather than a rejection of global neoliberalism per se. Clearly, much more research and analysis needs to be done before we can determine the precise nature of the New Left's position vis-à-vis global neoliberalism and its transnational regulatory structures.

Neoliberalism Rising: Ideological Front of the Neoliberal Bloc

As Gramsci (2005) noted, a bloc's coherence is partially owed to those ideologies related to a given social formation and developed by intellectuals, whose development, interests, and institutional supports are tied to that formation. Together, these intellectuals work through the elite-dominated institutions of civil society to form an "ideological front," which provides a bloc with "an element of . . . moral and intellectual order" (Pozzolini, 1970, p. 113). Hence, notes George Yúdice (2003), hegemony requires a "struggle over . . . the shaping of meaning into an articulated whole that makes sense to diverse sectors" of a society (p. 85).

No one understood this better than Friedrich Hayek, the foundational neoliberal intellectual whose belief that the war against state planning required a decades-long battle of ideas compelled him to found the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS) in 1947 (Desai, 1994; Harvey, 2005). An association of market-fundamentalist intellectuals, the MPS became critical in developing a global network of neoliberal intellectuals that worked to organize and staff think tanks, gain entry into strategic areas of the media, and convert many of their academic colleagues to neoliberal modes of thought. Within a few decades they had successfully created "a climate of opinion in support of neoliberalism" that enabled the capture of the key regulatory institutions of the capitalist world system (Harvey, 2005, p. 4).

Notable accomplishments included the replacement of Bretton Woods with a system of floating exchange rates and the aggressive promotion of financial deregulation around the globe; the Reagan-era purging of Keynesian influence from the World Bank and the IMF and their subsequent pursuit of "structural adjustment" policies, demanding neoliberal reforms in return for debt rescheduling; the Clinton-era promotion of neoliberal reforms and regional "free trade" agreements in the United States and abroad; and the founding of the World Trade Organization in 1995, which put further pressure on states to scrap any regulation, subsidy, or government service that could be seen as a barrier to neoliberal trade (Harvey, 2005; Peck & Tickell, 1997).

And yet the neoliberal movement "remained in the margins of both policy and academic influence" until the 1970s, only emerging as a serious challenge to Keynesianism when economic crises compelled U.S. capital to invest in an alternative intellectual network (Harvey, 2005, 1997, p. 22). Neoliberal think tanks would play a crucial role in this transition, serving as mechanisms to "organize" what until that point had been a distinctly marginal community of neoliberal intellectuals.

Think Tanks as Elite Institutions in the United States

The connection between think tanks and elite political projects in the United States predates the neoliberal era. Power structure researchers Thomas Dye (1978) and William Domhoff (1983) have long analyzed the elite-driven "policy planning networks" that generated government policy favorable to the

corporate community. In these networks, economic and political elites were shown to dominate an assemblage of corporate-backed think tanks and their foundation benefactors through direct funding and control of directorate boards. Interorganizational interlocks could be quite dense, with the boards of these "oligarchic" organizations permeated by a diverse cross section of corporate, academic, and government elites whose interests drove organizational policy. With their material support and governing boards drawn from these elites, oligarchic think tanks can be said to perform the functions of organic intellectuals of particular dominant social formations and/or elite-backed political movements. Furthermore, these oligarchic think tanks can be quite influential, affecting public opinion through the publishing of books and journals while leveraging expertise to influence governments with limited planning resources.

None of this means that these "power elite" networks are monolithic. Firstly, divisions may arise between segments of elites with differing interests, values, and/or beliefs. These factions may come to form their own unique institutional networks, through which they may clash over influence in the policy apparatus of the state as well as over public opinion. Similarly, an organization's elite directors and funders are unlikely to have a unanimous policy position. Indeed, a key role of elite think tanks is to serve as a venue to negotiate those tensions, ideally helping to identify some basic common denominators around which an emergent "rolling consensus" can be formed (Fischer, 1991). However, even such concerted processes of intra-institutional dialogic negotiation can never result in complete consensus on all issues, even though it may identify the basic thrust of the political and economic strategies of a group of elites.

Think Tanks and Neoliberal Ascension in the United States

Up until the 1970s, neoliberals and their institutes remained subordinate to oligarchic Keynesian organizations. However, explains Desai (1994), intellectual activity varies "between times of normal operation of hegemony and accumulation, and [those] times of crisis" which lead to "an overhaul of intellectual institutions" in favor of an emergent alternative (p. 39). Just such a crisis emerged in the 1970s as economic stagflation caused elite disillusionment with Keynesianism and statist intervention generally (Harvey, 2005). In response there was an explosion of political activities as U.S. corporations formed powerful political associations to coordinate a massive surge in political spending.

Much of this money went toward founding a sprawling network of neoliberal think tanks, such as the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute (Harvey, 2005; Rich, 2004). These new groups leveraged the extensive wealth and social connections of conservative businessmen and elite-dominated foundations to amass large budgets that were translated into a flurry of activity geared toward developing, popularizing, and implementing neoliberal reforms. With these new institutional networks, the neoliberal epistemic community emerged from the political wilderness, becoming incorporated into a powerful new elite-led, policy planning network. The result has been the overwhelming dominance of neoliberal think tanks in the United States over the past 40 years (Rich, 2004). These groups now vastly outnumber their progressive counterparts. They also enjoy a much faster rate of formation, as well as possessing a collective budget several times that of progressive groups. With this money has come a corresponding increase in perceived influence with both journalists and policy makers.

One of the earliest analyses of the new neoliberal think tanks was done by Foucault (2008). He perceptively saw ascendant groups, like the American Enterprise Institute, as functioning like an “economic tribunal that claims to assess governmental action in strictly economic and market terms,” thereby providing a “permanent critique” of the state (p. 247). Indeed, such neoclassical economic attacks on the remnants of the welfare state continue today (Gutstein, 2009). However, in hindsight we can see that the “permanent critique” of the state by neoliberal think tanks was merely the initial, negative aspect of a dual strategy to dismantle Keynesian-Fordist regimes of accumulation and regulation. Concurrently, think tanks have also served a positive function, helping to generate the reforms, legislation, and international agreements that have constituted the neoliberal regulatory apparatus at local, national, and transnational levels, while subsequently seeking to maintain, and if possible, expand said apparatus in the face of economic crisis and/or public opposition. Hence, the neoliberal policy network was at the front lines of campaigns to develop the neoliberal state, having generated and popularized many of the neoliberal reforms of the past 40 years (Harvey, 2005; Stone, 1996). Partially, this has involved directly lobbying and/or working with policy makers to implement specific reforms. More broadly, neoliberal “tanks” have “produced position papers, op-ed articles, and books that shifted the ground of discussion” toward neoliberal solutions (Stefancic & Delgado, 1996, p. iv). To accomplish this, they slowly built up the credibility of their theories in the mainstream press, increasingly taking a “marketing” approach to disseminating policy proposals among politicians, technocrats, and the general public (Rich, 2004).

Think Tanks and the Neoliberal Turn in Latin America

Of course, these Northern accounts emerge from a Northern context and even Robinson, whose sweeping and detailed account of regional integration into global capitalism informs much of this article, is a North American scholar (albeit one with decades of experience in the region). Of course, it is very well known (and to this author’s knowledge, uncontested), that the think tank form originated largely in the United States, only to be consciously exported to other nations around the globe - though with a great deal of local variation depending on local historical, political, economic, and social conditions (McGann & Weaver, 2000). Regardless, the frameworks laid out here cannot necessarily be applied *whole cloth* to a region from which they did not emerge without some corroboration from and reconstitution in the context of local accounts. This is why it is so interesting that much *regional* scholarship—both that of scholars currently based in North America and those based in the region itself—largely agree with the accounts provided above in many key respects. Indeed, as this scholarship argues, activities of U.S. neoliberal think tanks have been largely replicated regionally at the transnational level.

Both Daniel Mato (1997, 2003, 2005, 2008) and George Yudice (2003) have pointed to the increasing importance of transnational networks of capital, government, and civil society organizations in generating and negotiating politically significant ideas, policies, and agendas. To this effect, Mato (2003) identifies the rise of “transnational networks that . . . [integrate] individual intellectuals, working groups, academic institutions, professional associations, professional and academic publications, governmental and intergovernmental foundations, [and] agencies” (p. 784). A core goal of these networks has been to strengthen regional “civil society” actors, often through programs supported by a diverse range of powerful Northern and transnational actors intimately associated with hemispheric neoliberal reform, such

as the IADB, the OAS, USAID, the World Bank, large private foundations like Ford, and many NGOs (1997, 2008). Importantly, notes Yúdice (2003), such global actors have increasingly turned to transnational civil society as the guarantor of social stability and political legitimation in the face of the potentially tumultuous transition to neoliberalism.

In this vein, Mato (2008) relates much of the regional success of neoliberalism to the transnational networks of "think tanks, private foundations, business people, political and social leaders, economists, journalists and other professionals . . . dedicated to the production and dissemination of (neo)liberal ideas" (p. 424). "This is generally achieved through the press," although "many of these institutions are substantially involved in training business, political and social leaders, as well as economists, journalists and other professionals" (p. 428). Many "are also involved in drafting law bills, which they distribute and promote among business, political and social leaders, including parliament members, ministers and presidents in their particular country." These groups therefore promote neoliberal "ideas not only through mass media . . . but also through a variety of social networks." Techniques deployed include

the production and distribution of publications of various complexity and breadth, including research papers, limited circulation bulletins and columns in broadly circulating newspapers, conferences, seminars and general training activities, prizes and award competitions, grants and research funds, the circulation of speakers, directors and members of organizations through related institutions and different types of meetings and social encounters. (p. 429)

"As a result of these practices," neoliberal ideas now "constitute a central element in what is seen as matter-of-fact common sense among many social actors who play key roles in contemporary social processes" (p. 429). These actors include political and social leaders, economists, academics, educators, journalists, and other public opinion-shaping professionals (Mato, 2005, 2008).

However, such transnational ideological labor is structured by unequal power relations, as the negotiation of shared meaning through transnational networks occurs in the context of significant differences in resources that favor transnational and global actors over local and regional ones (Mato, 2005). Despite Robinson's claims to the contrary, the process of regional neoliberal bloc formation has had a distinctly neocolonial feel, with a "north-to-south" directionality in the elite funding of the region's neoliberal intellectuals. In fact, the training of Latin American economists in neoliberal orthodoxy dates back to the 1950s and 1960s when the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Ford Foundation jointly funded the "Chile Project" to combat the nationalist-statist tendencies of the region's dependency theorists (Harvey, 2005; Klein, 2007). The program saw hundreds of students from throughout the region trained in neoliberal economics at the University of Chicago and its "mini schools" throughout the region. Many of these "Chicago Boys" became key players in regional neoliberalization, often obtaining high level posts in national administrations and regional IFIs, where they helped draft sweeping reforms. In fact, graduates from the Chile Project personally drafted the neoliberal reforms implemented in Chile by Pinochet's U.S.-installed military regime, the first regional neoliberal transition.

A similar dynamic is observed in the rise of Latin American neoliberal think tanks that have been primarily reliant on foreign sources of funding. Northern-based, elite-backed organizations, such as the Mont Pelerin Society, the Institute of Economic Affairs, and the Atlas Economic Research Foundations, have greatly aided the development of neoliberal think tanks throughout the region through a variety of long-term financial and institutional supports (Mato, 2005, 2008). Similar supports have come from North American governments (with USAID a major supporter); IFIs like the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB); and U.S. corporate-aligned foundations like the Ford Foundation, the Tinker Foundation, and the Hewlett Foundation (Truitt, 2000). Unsurprisingly then, Truitt demonstrates that most of today's Latin American think tanks are in broad agreement with neoliberal reforms, and have been key players in developing the neoliberal policy proposals implemented by regional governments over the past 20 years. Though some institutes have proposed policies to mitigate the social dislocations of neoliberalism, these concerns have mostly been addressed as part of a wider project of overall neoliberal globalization.

Yet despite these unequal power relations, neoliberalism is not imposed on the South by the North, but is rather constituted by the transnational relations between global and local actors (Mato, 2005). Indeed, neoliberal ideas often have significant support from local actors in transnational networks (Mato, 2008, p. 429). As Mato explains, "each one of the social actors that participate in these networks is following its own interests," and these "interests are closely related to the particular social actor's interpretations of both the[ir] local or national social experience and that of the rest of the world" (p. 429). Therefore, even when working toward rolling consensus, these networks may experience varying degrees of "convergences, divergences, associations, negotiations and conflicts between transnational and local actors." As Yúdice (2003) succinctly puts it, "[t]ransnational culture is also local culture," and vice versa (p. 247).

Though valuable, Truitt's (2000) account was published before the rise of the regional New Left, while Mato's (1997, 2003, 2005, 2008) work does not much probe the relationships (or lack thereof) between neoliberal think tanks and the "pink tide." It is therefore unknown to what extent the regional think tank field is still characterized by north-to-south funding flows and neoliberal ideology. It is possible that these networks have changed or that new, more left-leaning networks have emerged. Regardless, the trends identified by Truitt and Mato both reinforce and problematize Robinson's model of transnational class and state formation. While the ascension of regional neoliberal intellectuals and institutes seems "organically" linked to a transnational project, there appears to be an uneven transnationalization in which northern funding supports a southern ideological project. Of course, actors in a bloc need not be equal partners. The exact opposite is true; hegemonic projects develop coherence and stability precisely *because* they succeed at forming alliances of unequal partners. Indeed, under neoliberal globalization, regional economic integration has often taken the form of an "unequal interconnectedness" in which cultural generation is transnationally oriented, yet weighted in favor of northern capital (Sanchez-Ruiz, 2001). To better understand this dynamic, I will now examine one regional think-tank of a truly transnational character: the Inter-American Dialogue.

The Inter-American Dialogue

A Washington-based policy institute founded in 1982, the Inter-American Dialogue ("About the Dialogue," n.d.) describes itself as "the leading U.S. center for policy analysis . . . in Western Hemisphere affairs."¹ As a not-for-profit charitable organization, the Dialogue develops policy recommendations for a hemisphere-wide "agenda of democratic governance, social equity, and economic growth." It is an organization both "transnational" and "oligarchic," with a membership made up of more than "100 distinguished citizens from throughout the Americas" who are leaders in politics, business, academia, or some combination of the three. The group boasts that "twelve Dialogue members served as presidents of their countries and more than two dozen have served at the cabinet level."

The Dialogue is a truly transnational project. On one hand it functions as an organic intellectual, utilizing its research and writing staff to disseminate publications and policy recommendations that help maintain the neoliberal front. They publish in multiple languages in media outlets throughout the hemisphere, producing differentiated materials for policy makers, academics, corporations, and the general public. Publications include newspaper op-eds, academic journal articles, research reports, symposium findings, and even a daily newsletter for corporate subscribers. By publishing for both policymakers and the general public, the IAD helps develop the policies which organize the aspirations of an emergent transnational class even while legitimizing neoliberalism as "common sense" among the larger population. The Dialogue also facilitates bloc formation through a series of programs run exclusively for corporate subscribers. These programs facilitate transnational class and state formation, albeit in an uneven way that privileges northern capital. However, before we can delve further into the Dialogue's core projects, we must take a closer look at the material factors that constitute the organization: its funders and board of directorates.

The Dialogue: Funding Patterns

As an "oligarchic" think tank, much of the IAD's money comes from corporate-backed foundations (IAD, "Sources," n.d.). Among these are the General Electric Foundation; the Ford Foundation; the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation (n.d), founded by the owners of Knight-Ridder and until recently the second-largest newspaper company in the United States and publisher of the *Miami Herald* (Seelye & Sorkin, 2006); the Annie E. Casey Foundation (IAD, "Sources," n.d.), created by the founders of UPS; the Henry Luce Foundation (n.d.), created by the cofounder of Time Inc; and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (n.d.), created by the cofounder of Hewlett-Packard (n.d.). Notably, these "oligarchic" foundations are associated with an increasingly transnational component of the corporate community, including global manufacturing, transnational media, international transportation, global finance, and ICT. Some have direct connections with regional neoliberal restructuring: both the Hewlett and Tinker foundations have been heavy funders of Latin American think tanks during the neoliberal turn, and the Ford Foundation was a key funder of the University of Chicago's "Chile Project." Critically, these foundations are all associated with U.S.—not Latin American—corporate wealth.

¹ All subsequent data on the IAD, its funders, and its directors are recent as of May 2010.

The IAD ("Sources," n.d.) lists two corporate funders, both U.S. heavyweights, that have benefited greatly under neoliberalism. The first, financial conglomerate American International Group Inc. (AIG), manages a \$260 million Latin American Fund, whose top 10 holdings are world-class firms engaged in the dominant industries of the neoliberal era: resource extraction, banking and finance, and telecommunications (Pinebridge Investments, 2010). Four of these firms emerged from the privatization of state assets: the Brazilian mining firms CVRD (View from RBC, 2012) and Usiminas (n.d.); the Mexican mining conglomerate Grupo Mexico (n.d.); and the Carlos Slim-owned telephone conglomerate America Movil (n.d.). The Dialogue's second corporate funder, Merck & Co., is a pharmaceutical giant with total regional sales throughout Latin America of €569 million in 2007 ("Merck," 2008). As such, it has a natural interest in the ongoing privatization of local health systems, as well as in neoliberal efforts to enforce intellectual property regimes that undermine regional campaigns to produce and distribute generic drugs.

The IAD is also heavily funded by the same IFIs that have been at the center of neoliberal state formation, including the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Andean Development Corporation, and the Inter-American Development Bank. They are also funded by the Organization of American States, a regional governing body that heavily backed neoliberal restructuring during the 1990s (Robinson, 2008).

Finally, the Dialogue receives direct funding from northern government agencies, including the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and USAID. Recall that USAID has long aided regional neoliberal intellectual development, funding the "Chile Project," as well as a host of neoliberal think tanks. The only direct government funding from Latin nations comes from the embassies of Chile and Mexico, both early and aggressive neoliberal adopters.

Looking at the IADs funders, one sees a remarkable assortment of oligarchic actors deeply integrated into a transnational neoliberal project. Yet with only a handful of exceptions, these funders are based in the Global North, an indicator that this transnational project is an uneven one in terms of north-to-south directionality.

The Dialogue: Directorate Interlocks

If the Dialogue's funding stream seems unevenly transnationalized, its board of directors is more geographically dispersed, with the majority of members hailing from elite political, corporate, and academic institutions throughout the region. Many directors have held high-level government positions. From the United States, Vice-Chair Thomas F. McLarty III is a former White House Chief of Staff (Wayne, 2003) and advisor to three presidents (McLarty Associates, n.d.), while Co-Chair Carla Hills served as U.S. Trade Representative from 1989–1993 (The Globalist, "Carla," n.d.). From Latin America, Director Fernando Cardoso was President of Brazil, 1995–2003 (The Globalist, "Fernando," n.d.); Co-chair Ricardo Lagos served as President of Chile, 2000–2006 (International Crisis Group [ICG], n.d.); Director Alejandro Foxley served as Chilean Minister of Finance, 1990–1994 and Foreign Minister, 2006–2009 (Commission on Growth and Development, n.d.); and Vice-Chair Enrique Iglesias served as Uruguay's Minister of Foreign Relations, 1985–1988 (Inter-American Development Bank [ADB], n.d.).

As Mato (1997, 2003, 2005, 2008) notes, transnational networks are rarely entirely unified, as elites emerge from different nations with their own institutions, histories, cultures, and political priorities. It is thereby telling that one Dialogue publication from 2009 states that "our membership is politically diverse," including both "Republicans and Democrats from the United States," as well as supporters of various "parties and political perspectives from elsewhere in the Americas" (IAD, 2009). This diverse ideological and regional representation may account for the fact that many of the IAD's Latin directors do not consider themselves neoliberals, with some serving in nominally social democratic governments. As President of Chile, Lagos oversaw the establishment of national unemployment insurance and expansions in public education (ICG, n.d.), while Foxley has argued that states "must develop some kind of social protection for those who are left out of the process of globalization" (Public Broadcasting Service [PBS], 2001).

Given this divergence from neoliberal orthodoxy, it is plausible that the Dialogue aims to smooth out tensions and establish a rolling consensus around a reform agenda. This may be made easier in that virtually all Dialogue directors emerge from the economic and political institutions of the transnational neoliberal bloc and state apparatus. Tellingly, there neither seems to be labor representatives nor any members of the New Left among the IAD's Latin directorate. Therefore, it should be unsurprising that even the Dialogue's "social democrats" seem to have embraced the overall project of regional neoliberalization. For instance, Foxley has come to "appreciate the strength and the power of the market," even grudgingly commending Pinochet's economic program for "deregulating the markets" and "opening up the economy" (PBS, 2001).

Regardless of occasional social democratic rhetoric, directors have been intimately involved with processes of neoliberal restructuring and transnational state consolidation. Many have worked in top-level posts with neoliberal IFIs: Director David de Ferranti served as a World Bank Vice-President (Results for Development Institute, n.d.); Foxley was a Governor of the World Bank and the IADB (CGD, n.d.); and Iglesias served as President of the IADB (n.d.) for 17 years. Other directors have been involved with neoliberal privatizations. As President of Brazil, Cardoso oversaw the most sweeping privatization program in the country's history (Epstein, 1998; View from RBC, 2012). He was instrumental in the 1997 privatization of CVRD, now the world's second largest mining corporation (and a key holding of Dialogue funder AIG). Cardoso also oversaw the 1998 break-up of Telebras, Latin America's biggest telecommunications firm. Board members have also facilitated transnational state formation through the negotiation and implementation of regional free trade agreements. As president of Chile, Lagos signed "expansive trade agreements with the United States, the European Union and South Korea" (Armington, Lettieri, & Slim, 2005); Iglesias chaired the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations that gave birth to the WTO (IADB, 2010); and Hills served as chief U.S. trade negotiator during the negotiations for NAFTA and the Uruguay Round, at one time declaring that the United States would open up foreign markets "with a crowbar, if necessary" (Uchitelle, 1990).

Perhaps most remarkable are the myriad connections IAD board members share with transnational capital. Thomas "Mack" McLarty, for instance, was CEO of Arkla Gas, a Fortune 500 natural gas concern (Broder, 1998) that serves hundreds of markets throughout the Gulf of Mexico region ("ARKLA Inc.," 2010); a director of Union Pacific Corporation (2006), the "only railroad serving all six

major gateways to Mexico" ("Thomas F. ," n.d.); and president of the ultra-secretive Kissinger-McLarty Associates, an "international strategic advisory and advocacy firm" for multinational corporations (Homeland Security Ventures, n.d.). The last firm is a partnership with ex-U.S. Secretary of State and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, key organizer of Chile's neoliberal coup (Blum, 1998).

Carla Hills is connected to numerous firms with ties to the hemispheric neoliberal project. She is the CEO of her own "international consultancy agency," which "advises companies on global trade and investment issues" in "emerging markets" (The Globalist, "Carla," n.d.). Until 2006 she served as director to Time Warner (2006), whose cofounder Henry Luce founded one of the Dialogue's major foundation benefactors. She is a director of Gilead Sciences, Inc. ("Carla," n.d.), a bio-medical company that blocks "the distribution of cheaper generic versions of its lifesaving drugs in the developing world" (Klein, 2007, p. 290). Hills also serves on the international advisory board of U.S. financial giant JPMorgan Chase ("Carla," n.d.), the firm that clandestinely coauthored Argentina's sweeping neoliberal "shock program" that privatized utilities and pensions while slashing worker protections (Klein, 2007, p. 167). Finally, she has served as a director of AIG ("Carla," n.d.), itself an IAD funder whose many ties to regional neoliberal restructuring have already been discussed.

Dialogue director William Friend is also connected to the neoliberal project, having retired in 1998 as executive vice president of the engineering giant Bechtel Group ("William Friend," 2004). In the 1970s, Bechtel was one of the corporate funders of "Free to Choose," the television series based on Milton Friedman's neoliberal manifesto of the same name (Klein, 2007). The firm also landed the notorious contract for the privatization of Bolivia's water system in 2001.

The Dialogue: Corporate Programs of the Neoliberal Bloc

The Dialogue has specifically developed programs to aid transnational class and state formation. One of the IAD's major projects is the "Corporate Program." In exchange for paid membership, the program gives "business and financial leaders who are committed to the region's future" the "opportunities to engage Latin America's policy makers in frank discussions and dialogue" through IAD-hosted "events and conferences" (IAD, "Corporate Program," n.d.). The program gives "these individuals (and the institutions they represent) opportunities to meet on a regular basis . . . to hear from and exchange ideas with U.S. and Latin American policy makers, top political and economic analysts, [and] corporate and financial leaders" (IAD, "Miami Group," n.d.).

Though the Corporate Program is undoubtedly a transnational enterprise, it is a profoundly uneven one, given that the vast majority of participating firms are North American. Some are uniquely bound up with the neoliberal project, like the credit ratings agencies Moody's Investors Service and Standard & Poor's that help global finance discipline national governments. Some have other connections to the Dialogue, whether through interlocking directorates with board members (JPMorgan Chase, AIG), connections to foundation benefactors (General Electric, Hewlett Packard, Holland & Knight), or as direct funders (Merck, AIG).

The Corporate Program serves neoliberal bloc formation in various ways. For one, it provides a semicovert avenue for funding, thereby mitigating perceptions of corporate influence. After all, the Dialogue's list of official funders includes just two corporations; yet the Corporate Program counts over 100 corporate sponsors. The program also aids transnational class and state formation by providing a regular forum for political and corporate leaders from throughout the hemisphere to discuss potential reforms.

The Dialogue: Ideological Front Propagation

In their organic intellectual function of ideological propagation, Dialogue staffers alternate between discourses and media outlets, depending on the target audience. Some propagate a neoliberal "common sense" among the general public by publishing in traditional media outlets throughout the hemisphere. Others produce journal articles, research papers, and conference findings targeted toward regional policy makers, thereby attempting to rationalize the bloc's development. Regardless of medium, certain core messages remain constant: the desirability of free trade, the necessity and benevolence of IFI hegemony, the folly of proposed alternatives to neoliberalism, and the capacity of neoliberal consolidation to eliminate poverty and inequality.

Of course, this rolling consensus must take into account the group's diversity, as Latin directors' unique interests may create policy priorities distinct from those of northern members. This may involve reforms that run counter to prior orthodoxy and/or address local concerns. Regardless, such reforms will likely leave the basic architecture of the system intact. Otherwise, they would not be reformers but revolutionaries. Hence, occasional departures from neoliberal orthodoxy continue to be wedded to the basic model of flexible accumulation in which Dialogue funders and board members are integrated. Solutions to problems are presented as piecemeal reforms that can be accommodated into the bloc without disrupting its regimes of accumulation.

That said, there is no simple one-to-one relationship between the perceived interests of funders and directors and the activity of the group's organic intellectuals. As Stone (1996) notes, think tank intellectuals do possess a certain relative autonomy from their elite backers. Indeed, this autonomy of intellectual production serves those backers in a variety of ways. A rolling consensus is not generated by intellectuals telling group membership what they already know or agree with. Elites incorporate intellectuals into their institutional networks *precisely* so that they can challenge them with potentially novel or counterintuitive solutions to recognized problems. Similarly, the position taken by any think tank is rarely monolithic. Were all of a group's intellectuals to say the same thing in lockstep, they would be useless to their elite backers in producing solutions to novel policy problems. This need for diversity is especially strong, given the Dialogue's goal of developing a transnational elite consensus that must take into account the specific contexts of particular nations.

However, Fred Fischer (1994) notes that, while a think tank's elite backers may tolerate, and even encourage, a certain diversity of opinion and intellectual freedom, research must still generally fall within the bounded consensus of the group. Research and policy recommendations must ultimately be accepted by elite backers as *within their own interests* or at least *accepted as legitimate attempts to meet*

or *redefine those interests*. Individuals and institutions who find that the group's researchers consistently produce recommendations not in their interests may simply stop funding the group or sitting on their board. Hence in the Dialogue's case it is likely that a group dominated by directors and funders with such deep ties to flexible accumulation will not propose that regime's dismantling.

Preaching to the Public

As organic intellectuals, Dialogue staff leverage connections to the press to articulate neoliberal ideology as societal "common sense." An excellent example is Non-Resident Senior Fellow Marifeli Perez-Stable, who publishes frequently in the *Miami Herald*. The *Herald* is a holding of Holland and Knight, an IAD Corporate Program member, whose John S. and James L. Knight Foundation is a Dialogue funder. In a *Herald* article, Perez-Stable (2008) complains that "free trade is getting a bum rap everywhere" even though "the benefits of free trade are amply evident." In another article (2006), she argues that further market integration can actually help ameliorate entrenched inequities," claiming that "nothing helps the poor like [the] robust economic growth" that "only a market economy" can provide. Looking to Latin American policy makers, she is pleased to find that Chilean President Michelle Bachelet and Brazilian President Lula de la Silva, both of whom have partly continued with neoliberal restructuring, "get it." Venezuelan President (and anti-neoliberal) Hugo Chavez, on the other hand, "definitely doesn't get it." Indeed, Chavez is routinely demonized by Perez-Stable. In a 2010 article, she goes so far as to call Chavez a "dictator," who is "gutting democracy from within." One of Chavez's most unforgivable crimes? "Clamp[ing] down [on] the private sector."

Dialoguing the Elite

While some work is directed toward the general public, the majority of the Dialogue's output seems geared toward policy makers and other elites, which is consistent with the role of organic intellectuals in rationalizing the bloc's future development. Such output cannot be monolithic, as the local contexts of Latin American nations may necessitate a softening of neoliberal orthodoxy, as well as the incorporation of regional and local priorities.

With this in mind, one can better understand the 2006 *Foreign Affairs* article "Is Washington Losing Latin America?" by IAD President Peter Hakim. The elite U.S. journal is read by businessmen, academics, and government leaders around the globe, and its publisher, the Council on Foreign Relations, "includes nearly all past and present [U.S.] Presidents," as well as Secretaries of State, Defense and Treasury ("About Foreign," 2006). In other words, publishing in *Foreign Affairs* may be the perfect expression of the organic intellectual function.

The central concern of the article is the increasing hostility of Latin American publics to U.S. regional leadership, as exemplified by the rise of the New Left. In addressing this, Hakim (2006) outlines some failings of U.S. policy that have damaged its regional standing, including its aggressive unilateralism and disregard for international law in fighting the War on Terror' its support for recent coups in Venezuela and Haiti; its continued protectionist support for U.S. agriculture; and its draconian immigration policy. In

all of these areas, argues Hakim, the United States should pursue reforms so as to improve its regional relationships.

Despite these fig leaves, Hakim's (2006) article remains an ideal expression of the neoliberal position. He argues that in the neoliberal heyday of the 1980s and 1990s "the Americas seemed to be heading in the right direction" of democratic consolidation and integrated free trade. Recently though, the refusal of Latin American governments to implement proposed market reforms and free trade agreements have stymied regional economic growth, while democratic progress is halting and even reversing in Venezuela, Nicaragua, Ecuador, and Bolivia. When criticizing Latin America's "economic failings," Hakim concentrates solely on low GDP growth, ignoring inequality, which is itself revealing, given that Latin America is one of the world's most unequal regions and that inequality has increased substantially during the neoliberal era.

Hakim (2006) explains that the way to improve Latin America's fortunes is to move forward with plans for hemispheric economic integration and free market reforms. To this end, Chile "continues its exceptional economic and social progress" as a result of signing a free trade pact with Washington in 2003. Similarly, the ascent of Mexican President Vicente Fox, who has pushed hard for a hemisphere-wide free trade pact, is "a special opportunity" to "deepen the relationship" between the United States and Mexico.

Interestingly, Hakim (2006) bolsters his argument by drawing on the discourses of modernization theory, whose proponents either assumed that liberalized economic growth and democracy were correlated, or that market-driven growth actually initiated democratization (Landmann, 1999). As such Hakim (2006) almost pathologically links market economics and democracy, blurring the lines between the two. He speaks of Latin America's turn in the 1980s and 1990s "toward democracy and market economics"; cites unnamed observers who "hailed the region's progress toward democracy and market economics"; and laments that today "most Latin American governments have only partially completed the political and economic reforms needed to sustain robust growth and healthy democratic institutions" (p. 39). As such, "democratic progress is faltering in the region, in large part because of the dismal economic . . . performance in country after country" (p. 40).

The result is that Hakim's (2006) account conflates neoliberal economics and democratic governance; countries that reject the former necessarily forfeit the latter. Any regional alternative to neoliberal economics can therefore be portrayed as antidemocratic. Hakim claims that Chavez's Venezuela, which "rejects representative democracy and market economics. . . . today . . . barely qualifies as a democracy" (p. 42). It is true that Chavez has pursued reforms that concentrate power in the executive branch. However, such hyperbole is extreme, given that at the time Chavez had survived multiple elections and recall votes—all validated by international observers ("Venezuela Ratifies, 2004)—and faced an extremely hostile press (Bartley & O'Briain, 2003).

Another example of democratic backsliding is the probable election of Washington's old "nemesis" Daniel Ortega in the upcoming Nicaraguan presidential election (Hakim, 2006). Ortega last won office in 1984 when his socialist Sandinista government won an election considered legitimate by more than 450

foreign observers (Chomsky & Herman, 2002). He was voted out in 1989 in what was widely understood as a bid by the Nicaraguan electorate to end U.S. funding of the brutal Contra insurgency that had ravaged the country (Blum, 1998). Shouldn't the return of a democratic leader, who was driven from office by a foreign-funded campaign of mass terror, be a remarkable sign of democratic resilience? However, as a socialist, Ortega may reject neoliberal restructuring, and therefore his election cannot possibly be democratic.

Hakim (2006) also cites the probable victory of the socialist Evo Morales in the upcoming Bolivian election as further evidence of weakening democratic institutions. Morales, who, like Ortega, won his election, became the first indigenous President of Bolivia, a country with a majority indigenous population (Engler & Martinez, 2005). Isn't this a democratic triumph? Yet as a staunch opponent of neoliberalism, Morales, like Chavez and Ortega, finds his democratic credentials inherently suspect.

Mitigating the Crisis

A key function of organic intellectuals is to respond to crises. To remain hegemonic, organic intellectuals must develop policy responses that are seen to mitigate problems, while leaving the core system intact. Otherwise, the bloc is left open to competition from counterhegemonic forces. This is precisely how neoliberalism overthrew Keynesianism in the 1970s, and how Keynesianism itself overthrew the laissez-faire order of the early 20th century.

It is therefore instructive to analyze the Dialogue's output in times of crisis. One example is the Dialogue-sponsored report *Washington Contentious* released in 2000 during the midst of the Argentinean financial crisis. The group's Latin directors (to say nothing of the report writers themselves) would have been keenly aware of the crisis of legitimacy this event entailed—a crisis which could disrupt the accumulation circuits in which they were integrated. It is therefore unsurprising that the social dislocations caused by the crisis—soaring unemployment, public debt, severe poverty, and the annihilation of local savings—compelled the authors to propose limited Keynesian interventions, including an enhanced social safety net, food stamps, unemployment insurance, expanded public schooling, and progressive taxation (Birdsall & de la Torre, 2001).

Yet interestingly, and in keeping with Truitt's (2000) account, these limited reforms continue to be couched in a broader, over-arching continued support for neoliberal economics. According to the report (Birdsall & de la Torre, 2000), the limited Keynesian reforms proposed cannot be deficit financed, even in times of crisis, as "fiscal indiscipline . . . has high costs for the poor" (p. 22) The Dialogue thereby recommends that capital flight be mitigated through "market-supplied insurance" (p. 35) and the maintenance of government "stabilization funds" (p. 36). Banks and governments would have to build countercyclical provisions in times of high credit growth, thereby providing countercyclical liquidity. Countries should also be given automatic "access to international lines of credit" in times of crisis (ibid.). Stability can be improved through a further "internationalizing [of] the banking system," as the "entry of first-rate foreign banks can rapidly enhance the domestic banking system's stability and resiliency" (p. 37). Finally, stability can be further enhanced through "continuing efforts to diversify trade and increase foreign direct investment, including negotiating multilateral, regional, and bilateral agreements" (ibid.).

As policy responses, these recommendations are extraordinary. The immediate cause of the crisis was capital flight facilitated by financial deregulation and the elimination of capital controls. In the similar East Asian crisis of 1998, Malaysia ignored IMF advice and imposed capital controls to great success, while those nations that followed IMF dictates suffered greatly (Harvey, 2005). Yet capital controls would undermine regimes of flexible accumulation dependent on unrestricted capital flows. The Dialogue thereby rejects controls, simply advising that governments and banks hold enough money to ensure that the impact of capital flight is lessened in times of crisis. This is to be achieved through new insurance mechanisms and access to lines of credit—both of which will presumably be supplied by the same global financial firms that helped instigate the crisis in the first place, or possibly from the IFIs that originally imposed neoliberal reforms. Finally, the Dialogue's cure for instability is not less, but more neoliberal financial and trade deregulation and integration.

Another example is the 2009 report *A Second Chance: U.S. Policy in the Americas*, prepared for U.S. policy makers in the wake of the 2008 global financial-economic crisis (IAD). Aware that the crisis represents a further blow to regional neoliberal legitimacy, the report openly concedes that "popular frustration may lead to diminished support for democracy and markets" throughout both North and Latin America. Also, the report endorses a familiar suite of policy measures designed to placate Latin American publics, once again demonstrating which concessions are necessary to generate a transnational elite rolling consensus. The report (2009) advises the United States to restore its credibility on democracy and human rights; normalize relations with Cuba; help its regional partners in "confronting crime, violence, and drugs"; and reform immigration policy.

However, the underlying thrust of proposed economic policies continues to be broadly neoliberal. Admitting that support for "new trade initiatives will not be a priority for either the United States or most Latin American nations in the coming period," the report (IAD, 2009) recommends that the United States quickly "gain congressional ratification of the already negotiated and signed free trade agreements with Colombia and Panama," while preserving "hemisphere-wide free trade" as a "critical long-term goal" (p. 10). On a similar note, the United States is urged to "avoid protectionist measures that would reduce Latin American access to U.S. markets and investments" (p. 9). Furthermore, the United States must "help ensure Latin America's continuing access to necessary credit and capital" by "mobiliz[ing] support for an expansion of the resources and programs of . . . the Inter-American Development Bank, World Bank, IMF, and Andean Development Corporation" (p. 7). Three of the 4 IFIs mentioned are direct funders of the Dialogue, and all have worked to implement neoliberal reforms that laid the groundwork for the financial bubbles that caused the current crisis. No mention is made of the enhancement and/or support for the proposed "Bank of the South." Only the traditional financial institutions of neoliberalism hold the key to global financial stability. "There is no alternative" (p. 7).

Conclusion: Dialogue, Monologue, or Something in Between?

As Robinson (2008) has argued, the capitalist world system has entered a new era in which the global historical bloc is anchored by an emergent transnational elite and a corresponding transnational state. Unlike the dependency era, regional elites increasingly find themselves integrated into transnational regimes of accumulation and regulation. Housing as they do the bloc's organic intellectuals, oligarchic

think tanks have been integral to neoliberal restructuring. In both North and Latin America they have helped develop policies of neoliberal consolidation, even while legitimizing their ideological front as “common sense” among the general population. Given the global nature of the neoliberal project, it makes sense that these policy planning networks have themselves become increasingly transnationalized.

As a think tank both oligarchic and transnational, the Dialogue seems like the logical extension of this global enterprise. It is funded by corporations, corporate-aligned foundations, governments, and IFIs deeply involved with the transnational neoliberal project. Its board of directors represents a transnational oligarchy whose interlocks with other elite organizations show a profound integration into the neoliberal bloc. It also directly aids transnational class and state formation. It does this through its corporate circle program, in which business executives and regional policy makers unite to discuss problems and potential reforms to the bloc. It also accomplishes this through the very existence of its board of directors and wider membership who are able to further develop as a transnational class through the identification of common interests, problems, and reforms. The Dialogue also fulfills the role of an organic intellectual, constructing and propagating an ideological front that both legitimizes neoliberalism as common sense while developing policy recommendations that rationalize the bloc’s further development. However, this rolling consensus must take into account the local contingencies of the various countries, actors, and institutions involved, even while the core precepts of flexible accumulation that bind them together remain intact.

Of course, there is no one-to-one relationship between a think tank’s activities and actual policy outcomes, and the account here does not provide any evidence that the Dialogue’s transnationally-generated policy recommendations necessarily make their way into local policy networks. Indeed, the rise of the new regional left, who do not seem to be well-represented in the Dialogue’s network of funders and directors, may provide an added barrier for transforming transnational policy recommendations into local reforms (though this is, of course, speculative).

Regardless, determining how these transnational activities manifest themselves in local reform does not fall in the scope of this paper and may even be a task best left to, or pursued in conjunction with, local scholarship. However, and this cannot be stressed enough, the object of study here is not Latin America as some kind of reified entity. It is, rather, the transnational links generated in an increasingly transnational space by transnational actors under global capitalism—or as Mato puts it, the “era de globalismo.” In this sense, it is just as much a study about the North as it is about the South, and in some ways neither. And this is precisely why it is so significant that scholars from the North and South, particularly Mato and Robinson, find themselves largely in agreement about the contemporary globalization of social formations.

With this very important caveat in mind, the case study here does seem compatible with Robinson and Mato’s accounts of a transnationalization of civil society parallel to regional political economic restructuring. The Dialogue is a clear example of a civil society institution composed of funders and directors with long histories in the construction of a neoliberal transnational state apparatus. Whether or not they succeed, they at least hope to impact regional policy processes in favor of further neoliberal transnationalization, even while developing a “rolling consensus” of North and Latin American elites that

takes into account various local priorities (contrary to Robinson, the national does not seem to be so much superseded by the transnational so much as mutually constituted and run parallel with it). To what extent this project faces meaningful regional resistance from the New Left remains to be seen and should be the focus of further study.

Yet despite the transnational nature of the neoliberal bloc, processes of transnationalization are rather uneven, with the United States in particular integral to the development of the ideological front in the South. North American government bodies and corporate foundations paid for the original training of neoliberal intellectuals in Latin America, while northern funding sources have been critical to the spread of neoliberal think tanks throughout the region. Even in the Dialogue, sources of funding come almost exclusively from northern corporations, governments, foundations, and the northern-dominated IFIs.

Of course, northern and southern components of the neoliberal bloc seem to possess shared goals of continued transnational restructuring, including piecemeal reforms to ensure systemic stability. Furthermore, hegemonic projects develop coherence and stability precisely because they succeed at forming alliances of unequal partners. Regardless, though the era of globalized neoliberalism finds all transnational elites equal, some continue to be more equal than others.

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