

Book Reviews

**“HOW TO GET FROM HERE TO THERE?” –  
ALTERNATIVE KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION, MOBILIZATION, AND  
COUNTER-HEGEMONIC GLOBALIZATION**

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**Abstract**

The organic crisis of hegemonic neoliberal globalization, manifested in aggravated uneven development condensed with ecological unsustainability, requires systemic transformation towards justice globalism. William Carroll's distinguished 4-year research project integrates network analysis with qualitative interviewing to depict a rich picture of the contribution of counter-hegemonic knowledge production and mobilisation by transnational alternative policy groups (TAPGs) to such an emancipatory alternative future. Grounded in thorough data analysis, dialogue between neo-Gramscian methodology and the empirical makes this book an indispensable resource for proponents of global justice as it overcomes the disempowering voluntaristic localism and anti-statism that underlies much of both mainstream and critical approaches to “progressive” social transformation.

**Keywords**

Counter-hegemony; global justice; research institutes; social movements; transnationalism;

William Carroll's distinguished (neo-)Gramscian research into the role of transnational alternative policy groups (TAPGs) in counter-hegemonic knowledge production and mobilization (alt KPM), or “cognitive praxis”, for an emancipatory transformative politics addresses an important knowledge gap as these “think tanks of the global left” (207) have mostly been ignored in the global civil society literature (8). Based on four years of research, and through dialogue between theory and the empirical throughout, this thorough and comprehensive study integrates “architectonic” (83) network analysis of TAPGs' interlinkages and positionings within global socio-cultural and political economic fields with qualitative analysis of 91 interviews conducted with protagonists in the 16 participating TAPGs, of which

ten constitute the core of the study (to which actual field visits were realized). Numerous sociograms (depicting structures and patterns of inter-connectivity) and systematizing tables in combination with the analytical accounts of meanings and contents of TAPGs' actorness (often structured around interview questions), make this eight-chapter book not only a very accessible but indispensable resource for both academic and non-academic readerships striving for global justice.

In accordance with critical theory's concerns with contradictions in capitalism and "progressive" responses for socio-structural transformation, Carroll's entry point is the "dual crisis" of the hegemonic neoliberal globalization project: a political-economic crisis of over-accumulation and aggravated uneven development condensed with a political ecological crisis of environmental unsustainability. These unresolvable structural contradictions cohere in "organic crisis" (18) in which "the different relations of society no longer fit together" (110), and it is climate change in particular that makes systemic change imperative (102). Crisis poses challenges for "elite management" (112), while equally opening up possibilities for a "renewed radical imaginary", and TAPGs are "sites" for "collective imagining" in the construction of transnational counter-hegemony (7). Carroll synonyms such "counter-hegemonic globalization" to "justice globalism" (30), which implies "a commitment to develop democratic, socially just and ecologically sound alternatives to global capitalism that *can in principle be generalized to all of humanity*" (207, italics in original). By drawing from Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Immanuel Wallerstein, and David Harvey, Carroll concludes that such a "global vision" needs to be constructed through a dialectical approach to universals (e.g., human rights, social justice) and particulars (local indigenous knowledges, identities and visions) (209). That is, constructing reflexive, critical "world knowledge" that avoids a simple inversion of "the colonial epistemic hierarchy – as in knee-jerk valorization of non-Western ways of knowing over post-Enlightenment thought" (210). In this framing, "praxis" views social reality as "radically open-ended" in both its objective (systemic-structural) and subjective (reflexive collective self-change) dimensions (94).

For readers less familiar with Antonio Gramsci's theory and methodology, Chapter 1, in particular, lays out this conceptual framework. As Gramscian hegemony is a regime that relies on persuasion rather than coercion, the production of the subalterns' consent to this order relies on the sedimentation of ideas – hegemonic knowledge that appears as "common sense" – in an array of class-biased political, economic, cultural and moral institutions and relations in the state-society complex, which Gramsci termed the "integral state", as the "dialectical unity of civil society and political society": the state apparatus as well as inter-governmental bodies, the mainstream media, educational, religious and corporate capitalist institutions, and the family (26, 143-145). The hegemonic order rests on a mystification of power relations, i.e. the "ruling class does not rule" (10) but articulates its class interests "in alliance with other social groups and institutions" (10) through the formation of a historical bloc: "a historical congruence between material forces, institutions and ideologies, or broadly, an alliance of different class forces politically organized around a set of hegemonic ideas that give strategic direction and coherence

to its constituent elements" (Gill 2008, 60). In these processes, "organic intellectuals" are "organic" in two ways: as "'organizers' of an advanced capitalist way of life, and their intellectual work is functionally – organically – predicated on the dominance of capital in human affairs" (10). What Susan George – who participated in Carroll's study in her capacity of Chair of the Transnational Institute (TNI) – calls the "Gramscian right" (90) relates to the fact that "conventional think tanks" form part of the transnational hegemonic structure (11-13). As George (1997) observed previously, the transnational capitalist class (TCC), in contrast to the "progressive movement", had long understood the "war of ideas" and systematically established "intellectual institutions" (think tanks) to achieve "ideological authority", i.e. Gramscian "cultural hegemony". Neoliberalism, thus understood, has evolved through passive revolution: an "elite-engineered 'revolution from above'" in times of weakened hegemony, where potential strands of subaltern leadership (e.g., liberal leftism) are absorbed into the hegemonic bloc and into such political-economic practices as "structural adjustment programs", "green capitalism", and "American-style consumerism" (22-23).

Accordingly, "challenging hegemonic knowledge", or "myth-busting", to "disrupt the common sense of hegemony", is a key mode of cognitive praxis common to all TAPGs (143-144). While TAPGs share with alternative media the element of critical investigative journalism for consciousness-raising, they transcend alternative media groups' "grassroots reportage" (181) through the production and mobilization of *critical reflexive knowledge*: detailed, in-depth research-based analyses that provide intellectual (cognitive) resources for prefiguring alternative futures. Thus not merely restricting alternative knowledge production to critique of, and resistance to, existing practices, TAPGs *expose* the "injustices or irrationalities" of dominant political-economic and political-ecological practices and arrangements, *oppose* these "with reasoned argument", and *propose* alternative, counter-hegemonic visions, policies, practices and strategies (31, 62, 143, 178-179). Depending on available resources, these proposals are mobilized – i.e. applied in political practice – via seminars, lectures and convenings, online as well as print (publications, policy papers, mainstream press releases) and audio-visual media. This addresses three major publics: transnational *counterpublics* within critical movement cultures; the mainstream *general public*, to counter the dominance of corporate media in forming public opinion; and *expert communities*, i.e. practitioners "typically located in and around state and intergovernmental policy networks" (143). Strategically, TAPGs thus are identified as "relatively central *articulation points*" (181, italics in original) between alternative media, transnational NGOs, social movements organizations, political parties and progressive governments, from which they build "alliances through dialogue" (62). Thus, on the one hand, TAPGs, as collective "organic intellectuals to globalization from below" (141), assume an integrative or mediating role within a networked global civil society in generating "a convergence of perspectives and affiliations" (178) – a "shared" rather than "common" vision (193) – in the formation of a counter-hegemonic historical bloc for justice globalism. On the other hand, while TAPGs generally do not get involved in direct-action politics, they provide "the enabling conditions for

collective action” (188) through their intellectual leadership in a transnational counter-hegemonic war of position (strategic collective action when the power of the dominant group(s) is diffused in the state-society complex). Thus, TAPGS engage in the dialectic between the ideational and material elements in (counter-)hegemony: regarding the first, they produce not merely “counter-discourses” (9) but coherent social visions for “intellectual and moral reformation” (208-209). Regarding the second, they contribute to “constructing the socio-political relations and the subjective human capacities through which justice globalism can thrive as a material reality” (209). Within the general structure/agency dialectic, Carroll then speaks of a “double dialectic” (163) regarding the production of “*transformative knowledge concomitantly with knowledge-based transformation*” (142, italics in original): the dialectic of theory and practice, through which critical spaces, systematizations of knowledge, and transformations are generated; and a Socratic sense of dialectic that involves not only the production of “sound knowledge” but the dialogical building of trust and “solidaristic relationships” among TAPGs and other global left actors, upon which the construction of a counter-hegemonic historical bloc depends in normative, ethico-political as well as strategic terms (163, 210).

While ideologically converging around justice globalism, TAPGs are differentiated by their distinct alt KPM projects, organizational forms, social visions, strategies, practices, and locations within national and transnational spaces. Chapter Two outlines the specific complementary and overlapping projects around which the TAPGs’ cognitive practice is focused, generating a three-category typology of the 10 principal TAPGs:

- Critical-liberal, re/trans/formist TAPGs that promote human rights, empowerment and grassroots democracy: *Third World Institute/Social Watch*, Montevideo (ITEM/SW), and *Participatory Research in Asia*, New Delhi (PRIA).
- More nationally and locally embedded TAPGs that directly contest globalizing neoliberal capitalism: *International Forum on Globalization*, San Francisco (IFG); *People’s Plan Study Group*, Tokyo (PPSG); *Centre de Recherche et d’Information pour le Developpement*, Paris (CRID); and *Centre for Civil Society*, Durban (CCS).
- TAPGs that embody inter- and transnationalized resistance to neoliberalism and/or capitalism *per se*: *Rosa Luxemburg Foundation*, Berlin (RosaLux); *Transnational Institute*, Amsterdam (TNI); *Focus on the Global South*, Bangkok (Focus); and *Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era*, Global South (Dawn). Of these, Focus, RosaLux and TNI emerge as “particularly important centres of transnational counter-hegemony” (162).

Chapter Three moves to a concrete level of analysis by mapping the embeddedness of TAPGs within global civil society, concluding (despite partially contradictory results) that TAPGs as collective intellectuals are “indeed positioned” to mediate for “a convergence across difference” (81), i.e. the construction of a global counter-hegemonic historical bloc becomes a “project of projects” by building a “movement of movements” (63, 94, 211). Chapter Four extends the preceding network analysis to the practitioners by discussing accomplishments and responses to challenges, particularly the structural marginalisation of producers of critical

(transformative) knowledge within the hegemonic regime that attempts "at every turn to integrate them into dominant structures and practices" (116). Chapter Five expands this argument by scrutinising the TAPGs' positions in the global political economic field, to challenge the "NGOization thesis" according to which TAPGs' financial dependence upon institutions of the hegemonic system they critique inevitably co-opts them into the hegemonic bloc. Interestingly, while network analysis affirms the NGOization thesis (138), interviews paint a less homogenized picture: first, even though most TAPGs are organizationally "structured as NGOs", their counter-hegemonic politics differentiates them from the technocratic service-oriented, liberal-charity NGOs (130); second, TAPGs assume an "agentic role" (138) in countering NGOization through a range of strategies, including "solidaristic action" (134-138); and, third, the findings dissolve the "simple NGO-vs.-movements binary" (132), i.e. the idealization of social movements as *per se* being more "radical" and more democratically organized than NGOs. Rather, the picture of a "mosaic left" emerges as NGOs are "differentiated in terms of cultures, networks and organizational forms" (133). Chapters Six and Seven, respectively, elicit repertoires of strategically informed, interrelated *modes* of cognitive praxis and specific *practices* of alt KPM, upon which TAPGs differentially and simultaneously draw: in addition to critical research and scholarship, as previously discussed, this further includes: outreach for mobilising alternative knowledges through oppositional engagement with dominant institutions of the integral state and the general public (e.g., counterevents, alternative media); grassroots empowerment by use of critical pedagogies and participatory methodologies; building solidarities across places, sectors and cultures through networking; dialectically integrating theory with practitioners' experiential knowledge; creating critical-reflective spaces, also for democratic knowledge production within TAPGs; systematizing and disseminating alternative knowledge for use in practice; and, importantly, prefiguring *feasible* alternative futures, *inter alia* in the form of "deglobalization" and "subsidiarity" (political and economic decision-making and organisation at local and national scales) and *buen vivir* as "a keystone of Andean socialism" (160). The concluding Chapter Eight identifies convergences among TAPGs that, as a prefigurative vision for justice globalism, may be subsumed into a counter-hegemonic, participatory democratic eco-socialist paradigm referred to as "green transformation" governed by non-growth and "commoning" as a process of socialisation (deprivatisation).

The book does not fall short of eliciting limitations, constraints and challenges faced by TAPGs' in contributing to building a counter-hegemonic historical bloc: on the one hand, the "structural disadvantages" (90) of TAPGs within the hegemonic regime, manifested in limited material capabilities (funding, and consequently in regard to logistics and time), which profoundly undermines their reach into, and gaining credibility in, the general public (especially in the North) colonized by capitalist media's "infotainment" (186), fake news, and the like. Socio-psychologically, on the other hand, the TAPGs efforts of articulating the general public into a counter-hegemonic project through a communications strategy that, while introducing "some critical ideas" (185), nonetheless is confined to a language that is "acceptable and

understandable” (93), “without going beyond the breach of mainstream thought” (185). Certainly, operating “both in the mainstream and on the margins of the mainstream” (103) appears as the only viable communications strategy in a counter-hegemonic war of position. However, to what extent can such a strategy truly destabilize the dominant discourses and overcome “the crisis of imagination that feeds the passive revolution” (107), and generate broad “political awakening” (113) among “the children of neoliberal capitalism” (114) socialised into “hyperconsumption” (108), “who have never known anything different” (114)? After decades of TAPGs commitment to “progressive” transformation, the global social reality seems to provide a rather discouraging response to this question. Moreover, as the TCC controlled global governance regime “relies increasingly on a preponderance of coercion over persuasion” (6), how can a counter-hegemonic project come up against the accumulated legislative, juridical and military power of authoritarian neoliberalism upon which the growing repression, criminalization and illegalization of dissent and resistance, including of civil society organisations, rests? (see 6, 24, 109, 122)

Less explicitly, though, the book points to a further limitation: that the “crisis of imagination” actually also rests within many of the TAPGs themselves (and, in fact, among many sectors of the global left). As one research participant exemplifies, “we see the alternative systems over there” (116) – i.e. critical analyses and visions abound – however, the critical question of *How to get from here to there?* within the hegemonic structures remains only vaguely answered (116). This methodological problem is rooted in TAPGs practitioners’ frequent adherence to the mainstream, strategically disempowering “top/bottom” and “from above/from below” dichotomies, alongside an entrenched state/society antagonism that plays different scales, sites and actors of counter-hegemonic praxis off – or out – against each other. To be sure, by contrast to many global justice movements that simply “ignore the state” (145), which Carroll clearly identifies as a non-viable option (145), except for one of the TAPGs studied in this book all do – depending on their ideological position – engage with the state via either oppositional “outsider strategies” (alt KPM for protest mobilization outside of state power) or “insider strategies” (direct dialogue and collaboration with states and intergovernmental bodies) (145-147, 161-162). However, even the “outsider strategies” may be accused of inherently drawing from an anti-statist ontology and epistemology, and it is principally the more critical TAPGs (DAWN, Focus, RosaLux, TNI) that most expressly extend their “prefigurative praxis” (161) strategic-selectively to actually-existing counter-hegemonic political projects – state bodies, governments and political parties – to connect counter-hegemonic knowledge “into more concrete conjunctural developments” in a move from “episodic” defensive campaigns and “micropolitical resistance” to “responsible radical proactivity” (7, 189). Most noteworthy in this regard is TNI’s engagement with the “progressive” governments in Latin America-Caribbean (above all, Venezuela), which undercuts the commonsensical movements-vs-governments antagonism. As Carroll states:

a “*triangle*” of investigative reporting, activist campaigning, and state-centred policy...can effect real change when connected together...In this respect, (re-)emergence of democratic left parties linked dialogically to grassroots movements – in parts of Europe and Latin America, and prospectively in South Africa – marks a promising step forward for the global left. (143, italics original, 212)

It is these findings and reasonings that build up to the book’s crucial contribution for global justice proponents: recognising the structure/agency dialectic, the (neo)Gramscian approach overcomes the voluntarism inherent in methodological anti-statism and methodological localism. Carroll develops this line of reasoning iteratively and transversally throughout the book: by establishing that justice globalism has to be a *global* project that goes “well beyond defensive politics of resistance and localism into a politics of anti-passive revolution and counter-hegemony” (206), the book joins existing critiques of post-structuralist/postmodern, especially post-developmental, and anarchist localist and anti-statist approaches that misrecognise the state as “simply an instrument of oppression”, rather than as a complex and contradictory “terrain of struggle” (24-30, 134, 144-145). That is, by drawing on such state theorists as Nicos Poulantzas and Bob Jessop, a war of position depends on a conception of the state not as a monolithic bloc, but “as an ensemble of political and social institutions that reproduce a way of life, through varying measures of coercive and consensual practices” (145). As globalised neoliberal capitalism is organised and planned within hierarchical and centralised corporate, state and intergovernmental bodies (160, 207), a *feasible* counter-hegemonic strategy (or the “adjacent possible”, in Roberto Unger’s terms, 83), while governed by the “principle of subsidiarity” (207), decisively depends on “global planning” (206-207). This itself requires *organization* and, as Carroll insists, “whether you like it or not, some degree of hierarchy” (131). Some TAPGs recognise this by integrating the development of grassroots “leadership capabilities” in their pedagogical practices (168). Thus, the book challenges another “bottom up” catchphrase – the idealisation and romanticization of so-called “horizontal relationships”. What this builds up to, and perhaps could have been made more explicit in the final conclusions, is that a war of position is a struggle over the form of the state, i.e. to transform the state by engaging with statist bodies and, ultimately, by taking state power grounded in a strong participatory social and political support base, in order to transform the state into a material, political, legal and cultural resource for progressive politics (144-145, 199). It is noteworthy that these issues – the indispensability of leadership in dialectical relation with popular movements for revolutionary state transformation while creating new institutions, as well as grassroots participatory empowerment through the state – have been central to the politics of the “progressive” governments in Latin-America Caribbean, which during the leadership of Hugo Chávez adopted precisely such a “global pluri-scalar war of position” as “a multidimensional struggle over minds and strategic places at and across different interlocking [geographical] scales simultaneously in

the construction of a historic bloc.” (Muhr 2013: 7). Only this way can the “challenge of TAPGs and the global left more broadly...to devise ways of addressing the ‘elite capture’ of global governance institutions and their undemocratic functioning” (108) be addressed:

the future of the global left and the prospects for meaningful responses to capitalism’s dual crisis depend in part on the effectiveness of TAPGs in learning from, working with, informing and inspiring critical movements, publics, parties and progressive governments in a great variety of locations and across a wide range of issues, in a multiform politics of resistance and reconstruction. (212)

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