

BETWEEN NATIONAL ATTACHMENTS, ROOTED GLOBALISM, AND BORDERLESS
UTOPIAS: SEARCHING FOR IMAGINED COMMUNITIES IN LATIN AMERICA'S
BOOMING ECONOMIC RELATIONS WITH THE ARAB WORLD

By

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To Macarena, our growing family, and the struggle for a better world

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Marx once wrote that, “there is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining the luminous summits” (quoted in: Tucker 1978, p. xix). To the extent that I have begun the ascent, I have not done so alone. Any shortcomings in the below analysis are my own.

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It is often suggested that the spread and consolidation of the global capitalist system is compressing space and time, leading to the creation of an increasingly flat and borderless world economic geography. Of the relatively few thinkers who have analyzed the agents at the commanding heights of this system, many have argued that this global power elite is coalescing into a “global capitalist class”—that is, one whose members are divorcing themselves from the state and other place-based communities, and instead are developing a sense of belonging with class peers the world over. This study aims to interrogate the oft-repeated notion that contemporary global economic elites display such a cosmopolitan class consciousness through careful empirical analysis of their goals, motivations, and life-worlds.

Based on dozens of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Argentine, Brazilian, Chilean, and Colombian economic elites who have business ties with the Arab world, I present—with an ethnographic sensibility—an interpretive analysis of the mental frameworks that guide their profit-seeking behavior. As I argue, they exhibit only nascent signs of global identity formation. While there is indeed a trend toward the

decentering of national imaginaries among many interviewees, they have not been replaced to a significant extent by a positive, cosmopolitan identification with global class peers. In turn, and in contrast to much existing literature on the topic, the largest group of actors retains a mostly place-based (that is, either national or transnational) interpretive framework. Thus, reports of the death of the nationalist or place-based imaginary under globalization have been greatly exaggerated. Further, while economic elites are fond of flaunting their global credentials, I argue that in general they do so not because they have genuinely global identities, but as a political strategy to present themselves as incapable of being contained—and thus regulated—by the state.

Nonetheless, I detect an inchoate globalizing process among capitalist elite identities that will likely become increasingly manifest in the not-too-distant future. I elaborate the concept of “rooted globalism” to capture how new, global axes of identity are slowly rising, but without painting over the place-based attachments that preceded them, instead generating complicated forms of consciousness that fall somewhere in between.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Who belongs to the would-be global capitalist ruling class of our time, and how do its members—the international incarnation of Adam Smith’s (2008, p. 264) “masters of mankind,” Karl Marx’s (1867, p. 362) “Mr. Moneybags,” C. Wright Mills’ (1956) “power elite,” Samuel Huntington’s (2004) “Davos Men,” the “one percent” of contemporary parlance—understand their own roles within the (global capitalist) order that their very actions are conceiving and propagating? To what extent do these actors form a truly *global* capitalist class that has broken free from any “national attachments or needs” (Sassen 2007, p. 187), and instead has developed an “identity in the global system above any local territories and polities” (Robinson 2004, p. 47)? To frame the matter more generally and open-endedly, how does the process of (capitalist) globalization affect how people—and particularly this system’s very protagonists—see the world and their place in it?

At a conceptual level, these are fairly simple questions (if, as we shall see, rather difficult ones to actually study). Further, they have undeniably significant implications both for our attempts to analyze, theorize, and imagine alternatives to the global capitalist system of which we are all a part, as well as for any efforts that we may wish to undertake to regulate the behavior of global capitalist elites and their institutions and prevent the recurring crises that their activities engender (Harvey 2011).

And yet, for reasons that need not detain us long here—among them, one may speculate, a congenital predilection for state-centrism, a longstanding aversion to class analysis and scholarship with “a Marxist odor” (Moore 2007, p. 91) in the mainstream and the collective abandonment by many “critical” scholars of Marxist analysis in favor

of postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and cultural studies in recent decades (Chibber 2013a; Dirlik 2000, p. 9), and finally what John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt identify as the decline of grand theory and rise of quantitative “hypothesis testing” as the field’s dominant modus operandi (quoted in: Oren 2016, 1)—both International Relations (IR) and the larger discipline of political science of which it is typically a part in the U.S. have made disappointingly few theoretical or conceptual innovations in the study of the growth and evolution of the global capitalist system or the life-worlds and tremendous class power wielded by global capitalist elites, let alone efforts to rein in their activities.

There are exceptions, to be sure.¹ Yet they are so few and far between that one reaches the unfortunate conclusion that IR and political science have largely abandoned cutting-edge globalization and particularly global class research to the sociologists.² In this and many other regards, to be properly explicated in the following pages, the present study is intended as a (hopefully) useful corrective of standard operating procedures in my “home” disciplines of IR, political science, and potentially beyond.

The present task, then, is to both start—if only modestly—to fill this disciplinary gap as well as contribute to broader efforts to capture the empirical nuances and theorize the contours of the evolving global capitalist system. Necessarily, and per the question posted at the outset, here I will hone in on only one small piece of the puzzle:

¹ They include: Adrian Budd, Robert Cox, Kees van der Pijl, Mark Rupert, Manfred Steger, and indeed, though his work in this area was more directed toward a popular audience and did not resonate to a significant extent in the discipline, Samuel Huntington.

² See, for example, the works of such globalization luminaries—read widely beyond their home discipline—as Saskia Sassen and Manuel Castells, along with key thinkers—to be cited frequently below—in the study of the “global” or “transnational” capitalist class (a distinction that I will explore below), including William I. Robinson, Leslie Sklair, and William K. Carroll.

the identities and class consciousness of the very capitalist elites who dedicate their daily routines and entire lives to participating in and promoting international trade and finance. Specifically, the question I hope to address is: in our current era of capitalist globalization, to what extent have the protagonists of this global system developed a *global* mindset? Are the many scholars, public thinkers, media commentators, and capitalists themselves who argue that today's global economic elites have mentally divorced themselves from the state and are congealing into a hegemonic class with a global consciousness *correct*?

That is, to restate the question, are the interpretive frameworks of global capitalist elites dominated by an “identity in the global system above any local territories and polities”—have they traded place-*based* attachments for place-*less* ones? Do they “have little need for national loyalty, view national boundaries as obstacles that thankfully are vanishing, and see national governments as residues from the past whose only useful function is to facilitate the elite's global operations” (Huntington 2004)? Do these actors “operate across state borders to further the interests of global capital rather than of any real or imagined nation-state” (Sklair 2001, p. 295)—or, for that matter, *national* classes? Have they shed their “national attachments or needs” in favor of identifying with a set of global class fellow-travelers? To borrow from Benedict Anderson (2006, pp. 6-7), is their “imagined community”—that peer group whose members they may never meet, but with whom they nevertheless share “a deep, horizontal comradeship”—*national*, *transnational*, *global*, or something else entirely? At least for capitalist elites, is nationalism—that great ideational attachment produced by modernity, and whose grip on the throat of human consciousness has “ma[de] it

possible...for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die” for those who have only in the past two centuries become our compatriots—*dead*? What about, in turn, other “limited imaginings,” ranging from cities and regions to religions and ethnic groups?

What we want to know, to start, is how a particular internationalizing population of capitalist actors understands its place in the world, whether its profit-seeking activities pass through national, transnational, or global filters, or perhaps a lens of some other tinting, and with whom it identifies as its “in-group.” And for reasons that will be delineated below, we will attempt to know this by conducting a fine-grained empirical analysis of the life-worlds of the Latin American protagonists who are responsible for the recent boom in the region’s commercial relations with the Arab world. Arab-Latin American economic relations may be an unusual starting place, yet the broader set of linkages between Latin America and the larger Middle East are indeed beginning to pique interest in the academic mainstream—as demonstrated, to give one example, by the recent publication of an edition of the Latin American Studies Association’s *Forum* newsletter focusing on the connections between the regions.³ Further, as we will see, this is an alluring case for the study of capitalist identities, and holds the promise of shedding light on how economic elites *in general* with international business interests conceptualize their participation in the global capitalist system of their own making. Again, such efforts at understanding the life-worlds of capitalist globalization’s protagonists hold a self-evident importance vis-à-vis both the need for academic

³ This refers to volume xlvii, issue 1, published in winter 2016.

knowledge regarding global elites as well as, no less importantly, real-world efforts to regulate and control their behavior.

Before proceeding to provide a brief overview of my overall argument, as well as the case selection and methodology that lead us to it, I will frame the broader cultural and intellectual context of the present work. Here, my principal interest is in exploring corporate and media narratives concerning the growth and consolidation of the global capitalist system, making the case that structural analysis of global capitalism must be combined with awareness of the agents who are pulling the levers behind this very system, and—hopefully—demonstrating to the reader that all of this merits our collective attention for both intellectual and political reasons.

“Tomorrow Thinks Borders Are So Yesterday”⁴: Or, Why We Should Pay Attention to Global Capitalism and Global Capitalist Elites

In a world in which both space and time appear to be rapidly compressing, everything—and particularly capitalism, capital, and capitalists—seems to be global or at least globalizing. We bear witness to corporate mergers leading to the creation of a “global pharmaceutical company” (which, not coincidentally, appears poised to move its headquarters from the U.S. to Ireland to lower its tax burden) and “the first truly global beer company” (*BBC News* 2015a; Chappell 2015). A *BBC* business reporter poses the question: given that its “constituent parts can come from wherever it's cheapest to make [them],” should we now as a result “stop thinking of cars in terms of nationality?” (the answer appears to be yes, since, upon further analysis, cars turn out to be “a hotchpotch of different nationalities”) (Thomas 2016).

⁴ As I will discuss below, this quote comes from an advertisement by Emirates Airline. It can be viewed at: <https://www.pinterest.com/flywithemirates/hello-tomorrow/> (accessed January 17, 2016).

The “ultra stealthy startup” Globality (Magee 2015), which features Al Gore on its team of investors, predicts not just the arrival, but its own inauguration of a new and benign world order in which “the process of globalization is complete and a new ‘global reality’ is emerging.”⁵ All companies will seemingly become “players in the global economy” (Magee 2015), and, as proclaimed in a bank advertisement that is analyzed in Chapter 7, “even the smallest business”—down to the level of children’s lemonade stands—“will be multinational.”⁶

As it is with the corporation, so it is with the capitalist. According to recent figures, “the global super-rich”—that is, the “one percent”—now own more wealth than the other 99 percent of the world’s population. *Combined*. Meanwhile, another milestone: the world’s “62 richest billionaires” have amassed a larger collective fortune than the bottom 50 percent, equating to several billion people (Elliott 2016). As the inequality specialist Branko Milanovic observes, “we could end up with a kind of a global plutocracy, this global one per cent or even half a per cent that are very similar among themselves,” even though they “belong to different nations” (*BBC News* 2016a). In this scenario of extreme and increasing concentrations and inequalities of money and influence, even establishment figures such as David Rothkopf (2008)—CEO and editor of the Foreign Policy Group, publisher of the namesake publication—has observed the rise to hegemony of a new “superclass,” a “global power elite” that is remaking the world in its image. To quote from the book’s description:

Today's superclass has achieved unprecedented levels of wealth and power. They have globalized more rapidly than any other group. But do

⁵ The company’s website is located at: <http://www.globality.com/> (accessed February 1, 2016).

⁶ This and other relevant ads are available at: <http://mustardpost.com/hsbc-airport-ads> (accessed February 1, 2016).

they have more in common with one another than with their own countrymen, as nationalist critics have argued? They control globalization more than anyone else...Who sets the rules for a group that operates beyond national laws?⁷

As I will analyze in Chapter 7, perhaps the fact that, as of now, there is of course no such Leviathan that could “set the rules” in a truly enforceable way at the global level goes some distance in explaining why corporate actors appear to be salivating over the idea of a future world order in which “borders” really are “so yesterday,” per a recent poster advertisement by Emirates Airline.⁸ Predictions of such a utopian—or dystopian—borderless, capitalist future are not entirely new. In 1972, less than a year before he died in a U.S.-backed coup, then-Chilean president (and socialist) Salvador Allende warned, in a speech before the United Nations, that “the corporations are global organizations that do not depend on any state and whose activities are not controlled by, nor are they accountable to any parliament or any other institution representative of the collective interest.” He went on: “in short, all the world political structure is being undermined.” Providing the ideological undergirding for this advance of global capitalism and its corporate shock troops is the familiar if amorphous concept of *neoliberalism*, which, as noted by the historian Greg Grandin (2015), undermines “collective ideals of citizenship” in favor of the cold, atomizing logic of individual utility-maximization in the “free” market.

Or, in the starker phrasing of the Zapatistas, a largely indigenous autonomist movement based in southern Mexico that burst onto the international scene following its

⁷ This summary is from the publisher’s website, available at: <http://us.macmillan.com/superclass/davidrothkopf> (accessed February 1, 2016).

⁸ This advertisement can be viewed at: <https://www.pinterest.com/flywithemirates/hello-tomorrow/> (accessed January 17, 2016).

January 1, 1994 uprising against the Mexican state and that very same day's implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), "neoliberal globalization"—coterminous with "capitalism"—"destroys what exists in these countries" where it is implemented. "[I]t destroys their culture, their language, their economic system, their political system, and it also destroys the ways in which those who live in that country relate to each other. So everything that makes a country a country is left destroyed" (Zapatista 2005, p. 291).

The media have also started to notice that we live in hyper-capitalist and increasingly unequal times. For those interested in conducting some armchair sociological analysis, the *BBC Two* offers viewers a program entitled "The Super-Rich and Us," which promises viewers the rare opportunity to "spend some time with the super-rich." Based on the accompanying website, private jets, yacht parties, and something called "the ultimate facial" seem to be the order of the day.⁹ Or one's curiosity may be piqued by an exploration of the strength of network ties between the "Davos Men [and Women]" who attend the exclusive, annual meetings of the World Economic Forum (*BBC Capital* 2016).¹⁰

⁹ This and other information about the show is available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04xw4rw> (accessed February 1, 2016).

¹⁰ Other transnational or global projects take us in a different direction, such as the would-be country of Atlantium, carved out of "a remote rural province of Australia." As it frames its "non-territorial" guiding ideology: "in an age where people increasingly are unified by common interests and purposes across—rather than within—traditional national boundaries, Atlantium offers an alternative to the discriminatory historic practice of assigning nationality to individuals on the basis of accidents of birth or circumstance." In other words, no more place-based conception of citizenship (Robson 2015).

For his part, Yasiin Bey—the U.S.-born rapper and actor formerly known as Mos Def—attempted to leave South Africa using a "world passport" (it did not work—he was arrested for overstaying his visa) (*BBC News* 2016b).

Meanwhile, opposition to the notion that borders are being made to resemble “nets” more than “walls”¹¹ seems to arise mostly—or at least, most loudly—from demagogic, right-wing populists, such as France’s Marine Le Pen, who equates globalization with “another kind of totalitarianism, the ideology of free business with no boundaries” (Chak 2015). Several-time U.S. presidential candidate and leading light of the “paleoconservative” political movement Pat Buchanan chimes in, optimistically: “nationalism and tribalism and faith—these are the driving forces now, and they are tearing apart transnational institutions all over the world” (Urban 2015). Per Donald Trump, then, it is high time to start building walls.

Returning to Marx, the workers of the world were supposed to be the ones uniting to create a new society in the shell of the old, but it seems like the capitalists are having a better go of it. Although some of the analyses and comments cited above are naturally based more on alarmism than sober appraisal, there is no doubt that these have been triumphant (if crisis-filled) years for the global capitalist system and its protagonists, a new Gilded Age on a nearly worldwide scale.

While most scholarship, as we will see, has responded to this era of global creative destruction by analyzing the *structural*, system-level dynamics of capitalist globalization, there has been a definitive lack of sociological analysis of the very *agents* who are at the commanding heights of this system. In that sense, the aim of the present work is to globalize Mills (1956) by transforming the study of “the power elite” into the

In a very different context, the so-called “Islamic State” also invokes a more limited understanding of globalism, based on its call for members of the *global* Muslim community—in Arabic, *ummah*—to leave their homes and take up residence within its self-declared caliphate.

¹¹ This formulation was put forth by Bill Clinton (Eggert 2015).

study of “the *global* power elite”—to engage in fine-grained empirical analysis of the life-worlds of today’s “masters of mankind,” and, specifically, begin to ascertain the extent to which they have developed a *global* capitalist class consciousness. In a world torn asunder by massive and ever-increasing wealth disparities, power inequalities, and class cleavages, it is my position that *any* light that can be shed on the inner worlds of those at the top represents effort well spent.

The Argument: On Rooted Globalism and the Stickiness of National Imaginaries in a Globalizing World

What leads me to the present research question, then, is a sense that we live in particularly interesting times, and that there is much—too much—that we do not know about the life-worlds, inner worlds, and interpretive frameworks of global capitalist elites. Per the above, this is a political and normative statement insofar as it is based on a particular conception of what matters in the world. Yet it is also academic and theoretical in that I am motivated by the lack of scholarly engagement—again, especially in my home disciplines of political science and IR—with the study of the “power elite” of our time (Stevens 2015, p. 725).

This statement in fact must be further unpacked, for while there is a general lack of scholarship that subjects to critical scrutiny the power and wealth wielded by global capitalist elites, the need for analysis of the ideational—as opposed to material—qualities of this class is particularly acute. While a smattering but growing number of studies, mostly from outside of political science, do analyze the “global capitalist class” as what Marx defined as a “class-in-itself”—that is, its objective existence in the global class structure (for example, through global chains of accumulation)—markedly fewer works seriously tackle the notion that it is also a “class-for-itself” (one whose members

have a subjective [and intersubjective] consciousness of this objective existence), even though such assertions are made frequently, including in many of the references cited above. Further, as we will also see, the brave few analyses of the latter question—the subject of the present study—also tend to suffer from serious methodological flaws, a malady that I of course seek to remedy here.

To put my cards on the table, I should note that I embarked on this study of the would-be global consciousness of capitalist elites without any particular axe to grind, beyond the desire to begin to address what clearly seemed to be a lacuna in this burgeoning literature. I have not been motivated by a desire to either confirm or refute the commonly made assertion that global capitalist elites have mentally divorced themselves from the state and other place-based logics. Rather—for the aforementioned, varied reasons—I simply wanted to *know*, and to begin to provide empirical evidence concerning a topic about which much is said but with apparently little factual basis. I must confess, then, that while I am intellectually prone to think in terms of a globally integrated and coherent elite that is highly cognizant of its status, privilege, and class position, I have been surprised to discover through my research that—at least among the present population of interest, the Latin American economic elites behind the region’s booming commercial relations with the Arab world—such reflexivity is the exception rather than the rule, and that in fact place-based attachments display a persistence—a *stickiness*—that contradicts many commonly held beliefs about global capitalist elites.

But before providing a fuller retelling of the main arguments, it is necessary to take a conceptual detour so that I may clarify how certain key words are understood in

this research area and in the context of the present study, which will in turn allow for a clearer explanation of *what* we are looking for and *why*. Most importantly, we must distinguish between:

- NATIONAL. An actor who is rooted in only one place-based imaginary (that is, a particular state, or perhaps ethnic, cultural, or people group). Trump, at least per his campaign rhetoric, is an obvious example. As we will see in Chapter 5, interviewees who boast of their country as “the future of the world,” and use “we” to refer to their own “*nación*” (nation), clearly fit in this category.
- TRANSNATIONAL. A place-based category, like the previous, but one in which *dual* (or potentially *multiple*) national imaginaries coexist. That is, such figures are also in a sense “national,” but differ from the above in that they are simultaneously embedded in two (or more) national communities. As has been said regarding transnational migrants and immigrants, “Their lives cut across national boundaries and bring two societies into a single social field” (Glick Schiller et al. 1992, p. 1). Per the below, when an interviewee interrupts my description of my research project to deliver a monologue about the exceptionalism and superiority of both Argentina *and* Lebanon vis-à-vis their regional peers, this is a clear example of a *transnational* interpretive framework.
- DENATIONAL. An interpretive framework in which national/place-based attachments have been displaced, and do not—or no longer—orient to any meaningful extent the activities of the actor(s) under consideration. In other words, what sets the “denational” crowd apart from its “national” or “transnational” peers is that it lacks *any* such national anchor or anchors. Interviewees who speak of pursuing “deals” and “opportunities” without any signs of sentimentality toward particular countries, ethnic groups, and so on, display a *denational* identity, that is, one with no (or relatively few) “national attachments or needs.”
- GLOBAL. A mental framework characterized by two components. First, an “identity in the global system above any local territories and polities”—that is, a positive identification with a nonterritorial peer group (in the present context, fellow capitalist elites from across the globe). Second, an ideological commitment to globalization that goes beyond the mere parochial concern with profits—that is, these are actors who “operate across state borders to further the interests of global capital” as opposed to those of a place-based capitalist system, national or otherwise. Thus, an interviewee who identifies with a borderless imagined community, and who views his/her economic activities as contributing to the viability, strengthening, and spread of a worldwide capitalist system, belongs to the *global capitalist class*.

Another word also merits our brief attention:

- GLOBALIZATION. The political economy of globalization, meaning the process by which the hegemonic model—the global capitalist system—spreads into the world’s every nook and cranny.

For the sake of further clarification, let me emphasize that a *denational* capitalist may be (but is not necessarily) a *global* one, and in the following pages we will indeed hear from actors for whom place-based identities have been decentered without any apparent, concomitant rise in a global set of attachments. This is a crucial distinction, and one that—as we will see—is ignored in much of the literature, leading to what I will argue is an overidentification of capitalist elites as “global.” Secondly, as is the case with any categorization scheme, these are ideal-type, overly neat definitions that are meant to facilitate the analyst’s task of generalizing from the particular. In regards to the present endeavor, it is of course the case that human identities are messy, multiple, intersecting, and more reminiscent of continuums than binaries. I will explore this complexity in greater detail in Chapter 7. But for now, let us leave disclaimers aside and proceed to a brief and broad overview of the overall argument, which features two principal components.

The first is that, based on careful analysis of the in-depth conversations I held with dozens of Latin American economic elites who are at the forefront of the region’s commercial relations with the Arab world, I find little evidence for the existence of a global capitalist “class-for-itself.” That is, contrary to much corporate propaganda, as well as the contention put forth in many lay and scholarly accounts (including those cited above), these actors think primarily in place-based (*national* or *transnational*) or *denational* terms. Respectively, one uncovers interpretive frameworks that are primarily state- and/or ethnicity-based (either singular or plural), or that exhibit few attachments of

any kind, except to profit. But, considering the totality of the interviews, there are only a few—and very nascent—*global* signs. These capitalist elites may or may not have congealed into a global capitalist “class-in-itself”—an issue that goes beyond the scope of the present research—but there is little indication, at least in these cases, of global identity formation. The notion of a global capitalist class-for-itself, as I argue, thus retains analytical utility as an “ideal type,” but does not appear to be an accurate representation of present reality.

This (unexpected) finding pits my research against—or at least on the more skeptical side of—most scholars who have sought evidence for the existence of such a class, including well cited sociologists such as Robinson and Sklair. Later, I will explore reasons for this discrepancy, including my focus on the *class-for-itself* instead of the *class-in-itself* argument, general methodological difficulties and what I would regard as recurring methodological problems in some of the aforementioned works, and even, perhaps, case selection.

On the other hand, I do hypothesize in later chapters that capitalist worldviews may indeed be moving in a global direction, and provide some preliminary evidence for this assessment. To borrow from the British historian E. P. Thompson (1966), in the not-so-distant future we may indeed bear witness to *the making of a global capitalist class*. I proceed from here to develop the category of “rooted globalism”—referring to the complicated amalgamations of national, transnational, global, and other identity axes that could be generated—to attempt to theorize how this process may unfold, and, hopefully, guide future efforts to wrestle with the effects of capitalist globalization on human consciousness. Thus, given my arguments that the would-be global capitalist

class does not appear to *currently* exist as a class-for-itself, and further that to the extent that one rises, its identities will still contain place-based “roots,” my overall conclusion is that much of the rhetoric concerning the global credentials of today’s power elite appears to be overblown.

Accordingly, the present results resonate with those who have adopted more nuanced conceptualizations of the would-be making of the global capitalist class. Most prominent among them is Saskia Sassen, undoubtedly one of the world’s leading globalization specialists, who has argued that “the imbrications of global, national, and denationalized will proliferate and begin to produce overall dynamics we have not yet seen,” even though, as of now, “the national continues to be probably the most significant and encompassing condition.” And to the extent that global identities emerge, they will be “partly structured inside” and “dressed in the clothing of the national” (Sassen 2011). The results of my study provide unequivocal support for her assertions, as well as for Adrian Budd’s (2013, p. 7) reasoned contention that what he refers to as “the transnationalization thesis” (which equates to this class’ would-be superseding of place-based categories) is both “over-stated and one-sided,” though still of some use for the analyst of global political economy.

The second principal element of my argument is a response to an empirical puzzle that emerges after digesting the above finding. At issue is how to reconcile my skeptical (but not dismissive) response to the notion of a global capitalist class-for-itself with the indisputable reality that corporate actors are so fond of flaunting their global credentials—for example, the aforementioned Emirates Airline ad, which baldly asserts that “tomorrow thinks borders are so yesterday.” Which is it? If place-based imaginaries

are so sticky, then what could explain such frequent proclamations of the opposite—that time and space are being compressed to such an extreme extent that all notions of geographic space have lost or are rapidly losing any and all meaning.

My response, to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable, is to suggest that we must interrogate the political uses of globalization discourses. For as it turns out, declarations of a new, borderless world order in which transnational corporations may roam unfettered, unhindered by our present scheme of mostly national regulations, is a capitalist utopia—precisely the ideal, flat, ungoverned and seemingly ungovernable milieu in which profit-seeking behavior, the structurally determined lifeblood of any capitalist, can find its highest, and most lucrative, expression. My analysis suggests that it is no happy coincidence that the very actors who would most benefit from such a globalized landscape are also its evangelists. Rather, they do the latter (spread the borderless, capitalist gospel) precisely because of the former (their own material drive for profit). Such apparent manifestations of global identities—media reports, corporate advertisements, carefully cultivated public images—are thus less an empirical reality and more of a political project to further their own, capitalist interests. It is, as Aihwa Ong (1999, p. 6) puts it, the strategic deployment of “a flexible notion of citizenship and sovereignty” for the purpose of “accumulat[ing] capital and power.”

Now, let me say a few words about the broader intellectual context for the present work. Chapter 2 will delve into the genealogy of the concept of a global capitalist class in some detail, and throughout this work I engage broadly with Marx’s own thought (both in a complimentary and dissenting fashion). However, there are other

theoretical influences and interlocutors—some lurking in the shadows, and not specifically named in the following pages—who are worthy of cursory mention here.

Insofar as this project focuses on the capitalist “superstructure”—the role of ideational attachments and interpretive frameworks—as opposed to the system’s material base, and is concerned with the extent to which the would-be global capitalist class has achieved *cultural hegemony*—the universalization of its ideology—vis-à-vis its place-based capitalist counterparts, much is owed to the Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci, who more than any other thinker pioneered the former analytical approach and developed the latter concept. In its (more limited) pretension to shed light on the life-worlds of global economic elites, my research also owes a debt of gratitude to the great sociologist C. Wright Mills, whose previously cited interrogation of the “power elite” of this time, though less focused on *capitalist* elites in particular, has served to inspire both the selection of this topic and my (sociological) mode of analyses. Finally, the Hungarian philosopher Georg Lukács (1972), who in the classic work *History and Class Consciousness* offers an appropriately nuanced reading of Marx and Marxist theory and suggests that class consciousness is not entirely reducible to material circumstances, provides both a theoretical framework for understanding class consciousness as well as a justification for why it—and not just the material base—is a worthy object of study in the first place.

Cumulatively, the above arguments and theoretical influences speak against overly strident arguments and instead to what the sociologist William K. Carroll (2012) refers to as “the need for nuance in theorizing global capitalism.” The next section of this introduction demonstrates how an interpretive methodological approach readily

lends itself to the study of such complex, context-based, and subtle phenomena, and reveals how it will be applied to a particular case of interest: Latin Americans' booming economic relations with the Arab world.

Methodology and Case Selection

Another astute observation by Carroll (2010, p. 19) captures the present dilemma, for it is undoubtedly the case that “to prove the existence [or not] of a transnational capitalist class is a far from easy task.” Let alone a truly *global* one. All the more so, one may note, when we are concerned not with this would-be class' *material* existence (as a class-in-itself) but its *ideational* qualities (as a class-for-itself), which leads us headfirst into the muddy waters of human consciousness. While I will save for Chapter 2 a more substantive discussion and critique of the methodological issues that afflict existing scholarship, and—in my view—cause it to perceive signs of global identities where they do not necessarily exist, here it is fitting to provide a brief overview of my own interpretive approach and explain why it is up to the task of shedding light on the potential existence of a global capitalist class-for-itself.

Interpretivism, and the current “interpretive turn” in the social sciences, emerges from a proud legacy of social theorizing, and draws inspiration most specifically from the argument—made by Max Weber and cited approvingly by Clifford Geertz—that “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun” (quoted in: Yanow 2006, p. 6). As such, studying human beings—living, breathing, sentient, and contemplative creatures—requires a fundamental concern with questions of *meaning*, and with how they—as well as *we*, as researchers—utilize language and other symbolic systems to construct their (and our) own, meaning-filled worlds. This, as the argument goes, sets the social sciences apart from their natural counterparts, and suggests that

the former should in turn follow its own, indigenous logic of inquiry. Or, to put it another way, and borrow from James Scott's (2007, p. 382) summary of an argument made by the political theorist John Dunn: "you can never create a satisfactory explanation of people's behavior without providing a phenomenological account of what they themselves think they are doing."

Thus, this project follows Sassen's (2007, p. 5) suggestion that in order to "decipher individual imaginaries about globality," we must conduct "in-depth interviews." As such, I engaged in deep, semi-structured, and context-sensitive conversations with Latin American economic elites who are at the forefront of the region's blossoming commercial relationship with the Arab world. This focus on meaning, context, and entering into the life-worlds of my interlocutors informs not only my methodology, but also the presentation of the "data," which I have chosen to recreate in Chapters 5 and 6 in the form of ethnographically inspired vignettes. Thus, as opposed to reproducing cherry-picked quotes in the service of an overly tidy argument, I allow the interviewees themselves to tell their stories, accompanied by my own thoughts, reactions, observations, and analysis as a reflexive researcher. Further, I reproduce all quotes in the language in which they were spoken—English, Spanish, or Portuguese—so that bi- or multilingual readers may make their own determinations concerning my translations. Indeed, as Frederic Schaffer (2016, p. 55) correctly observes, "words do not necessarily have stable or fixed sets of meaning across time and tongues."

Throughout, I ask probing, open-ended questions, and pay special attention to various forms of obvious and subtle evidence, including: how interviewees use and understand keywords such as "global" and "globalization"; what they *mean* and whom

they are referring to as part of their peer group when they speak of *we* and *us*; careful analysis of goals and motivations; references to, invocations of, and switching between national, transnational, and global symbols, ranging from soccer teams and languages to vacation destinations and family backgrounds; body language, tone of voice, and other observational cues; and even what books are sitting on the office shelf or what they post on *LinkedIn* and *Twitter*.

Finally, a word about the (somewhat unorthodox) case—social group—I have chosen for analysis: those Latin American business elites, predominantly merchant capitalists, who are responsible for the current surge in Arab-Latin American economic relations. Part of the purpose in choosing this particular case, as we will see in Chapter 3, is precisely to reverse the commonplace and pernicious practice of *exclusively* utilizing Global North cases to develop theories and concepts that are then applied to the South, without considering how the South itself may also be a source of theoretical and conceptual innovations that are of general relevance. However, there are also features specific to Arab-Latin American relations, and the actors involved therein, that make this particularly fertile ground for analysis of national, transnational, and global identities.

In brief, we may point to the fact that many, if far from all, of my interviewees are themselves Latin Americans of Arab descent,¹² which adds an intriguing ethnic angle to the equation and allows us to see how ethnicity interacts and intersects with other axes of identity; the longstanding association in Latin America and elsewhere of Lebanese

¹² Of those whom I profile below in vignettes, all but one reveal Arab ancestry. Among the others I cite more briefly, the group is more mixed in terms of national and ethnic backgrounds.

emigrants in particular and many others in the Arab diaspora more broadly with merchant capitalism, trading, and peddling, which makes this, at the level of popular imaginaries and stereotypes, a group that is expected to be perhaps *the* consummate capitalist class, and one whose members have few place-based attachments; and finally, the concentration of Arab-Latin Americans at the top of the regional socioeconomic pyramid, including Carlos Slim, a Mexican business magnate of Lebanese descent who ranks among the world's richest people, and the Brazilian Joseph Safra, of Lebanese-Jewish ancestry, considered to be "the world's richest banker" (Gelles and Horch 2015). A further motivating factor for the selection of this case is that, with notable exceptions to be discussed later, there is a dearth of English-language sources that profile the fortunes of the Arab-Latin American economic elite. My interviewees may not have amassed comparable levels of wealth to Slim and Safra, but they nonetheless comprise a capitalist elite both in terms of their business interests and their efforts to promote, grease the wheels of, and serve as midwives for increased Arab-Latin American exchange.

Here, it is natural to entertain the notion—or objection—that since I am analyzing the ideational qualities of actors who are engaged in *Arab-Latin American* commerce, many—but far from all—of whom are of *Arab-Latin American* descent, this is hardly an auspicious place to look for *global* identities. That is, if the *material* realities of these actors appear to largely be defined by place-based relations, and their particular region of economic interest happens to be precisely the land of their ancestors, then why expect their *ideational* realities to be global? Is this really a fair case for "testing" the notion of a global capitalist class-for itself?

I will leave a theoretical discussion of materialism and idealism for later chapters, in which I interrogate the relation of this project to Marx's thought, but suffice it to say for now that there is *of course* a link between material circumstances and ideational frameworks. And I will readily concede that I did not choose this particular case because it is where we are most likely to observe the phenomenon under investigation—which would mean that if we did not find global identities here, we should not expect them to exist *anywhere*.

However, while my analysis does produce some perhaps “obvious” results—for example, a Lebanese-Argentine man at the helm of a Lebanese-Argentine organization who evinces strong currents of both Lebanese and Argentine nationalism and, indeed, exceptionalism, along with a Chilean international trade specialist who reveals no Arab ancestry and displays stronger global tendencies than his Arab-Latin American counterparts—many of the other stories that emerge in the following chapters reveal material-ideational relationships that are much looser, if perceptible at all. For example, as we will see: a Syrian-Argentine financial capitalist whose commercial focus is the countries of the Gulf, who has no economic interest in Syria, and who is ultimately more interested in Asian markets than he is in the Arab world itself; and, the Syrian-Brazilian leader of the most important Arab-Brazilian commercial organization, who in fact displays no national or ethnic sympathies for the Arab world, and who in his private business focuses primarily on the U.S. and European markets. There is of course a fundamental association between the material and ideational, but the relationship is hardly so slavish. It must be *interrogated*, not *assumed*.

Finally, I expect that the choice of a “Southern” case study is likely to raise eyebrows in terms of its potential generalizability. If the broader interest here is in the global capitalist class, then why not look in London, New York, and Tokyo instead of São Paulo, Santiago, and Buenos Aires? As I note below, I agree with the suggestion that we could expect Northern capitalists—who are presumably closer to forming a global capitalist class-in-itself in that, one can imagine, they are better integrated into globe-spanning accumulation chains—to display a more *global* consciousness than their Southern counterparts. Yet in a world of rising Southern actors (Acharya 2014)—who happen to tend to go largely ignored in IR and political science—there is an intrinsic value to premising this study on a Global South case. As Javier Santiso (2013, p. 30) comments, South-South relations have grown at a “remarkable” pace in recent years, and Arab-Latin American ties “are another illustration of this global trend towards a more decentralized world.” And while the finding that place-based identities are stickier than commonly argued cannot be applied robotically to Northern or other cases, it at least provides us with a reason to be more skeptical of the argument that this class exists elsewhere to the extent that scholarly and lay sources suggest.

At any rate, when we are faced with questions of exporting knowledge that arises from one context to *another* context, we should *always* retain a healthy degree of skepticism—whether the original case was in the North *or* the South. Nevertheless, as I will also argue, the continued universalization of the global capitalist system at least provides grounds for considering that, at some fundamental level, the dynamics analyzed in this project do indeed retain a baseline of similarity across culture and space.

Chapter Outline

Having framed, in very broad strokes, the ideas and arguments that I will present in the following pages, it is time to tell the full story from the beginning. In Chapter 2, I review the idea of the global capitalist class, along with its intellectual history, what it does (and does not) mean, and how we can identify it when we see it. Here, I construct a broader argument about the need for “nuance” both in theoretical and methodological terms. Chapter 3 turns to our case of interest, Latin America’s booming relations with the Arab world. The aim is to historicize these relations (with a focus on migration and the development of political and economic ties), bring to an English-speaking audience the relatively vast Spanish- and Portuguese-language literature that has been produced on these topics, and contextualize the reader’s understanding of contemporary relations as well as their economic protagonists, to be profiled in subsequent chapters. In turn, Chapter 4 brings together Marx’s general arguments about class consciousness with an analysis of the specific role that other interpretive frameworks, ranging from race and ethnicity to religion and nationalism/transnationalism/globalism play, or may play, in the Latin American context.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I present my empirical material—long-form, ethnographic-inspired vignettes of selected and representative Latin American business elites—along with an analysis of what the life-worlds of the profiled actors reveal about the notion of a global capitalist class-for-itself. These chapters, respectively, are organized around figures with predominantly place-based (national or transnational) ties, and those with increasingly denationalized and/or incipiently global worldviews. After concluding that the balance lies with the former instead of the latter, Chapter 7 tackles two pending questions. First, it looks to the future of capitalist class identities, and argues that we are

witnessing the (slow) emergence of what I label “rooted globalism.” Second, it analyzes corporate discourses that suggest a global identity in the here and now, arguing that for elite economic actors, projecting such *globality* serves as a political-economic strategy for the further accumulation of wealth and power. Finally, in the conclusion, I provide a very brief summary, speculate on where this project and its findings leave us, and suggest avenues for future research.

CHAPTER 2 PROGRESS AND LACUNAE IN THE STUDY OF THE GLOBAL CAPITALIST CLASS

For those of us concerned with global political economy, we are cursed to live in interesting times. During the past few decades, capitalism—and, particularly, neoliberal capitalism—has continued and hastened its march across the globe, while compressing space and time through rapid technological and communications advances (Harvey 1990). Of course, debate rages over the implications of its spread. For example, as some argue, does capitalism’s expansion and entrenchment herald a benign new world order of free markets and free peoples—and indeed, the “end of history” and ideological conflict (Fukuyama 1992)? Or is it generating recurrent crises, soaring inequality, and a “planet of slums” and exploited masses who daily engage in acts of subtle and overt resistance (Davis 2006)?

My point is not to analyze the merits of these different positions per se. Rather, what is of immediate concern for present purposes is the shared and problematic one-sidedness that is common to works on the globalization of capitalism from across the ideological spectrum. People, scholars, and analysts of all persuasions often discuss capitalism as an impersonal force that exists beyond any and all human volition, contestation, regulation, and control. As Margaret Thatcher so elegantly put it, “there is no alternative” to the capitalist model and its global spread. Even if we do not willingly accede to Thomas Friedman’s (2005; 2012) “flat world,” the “electronic herd” of capitalist interests will make dissenting approaches nearly impossible—if not also unthinkable. He writes: “*No one is in charge...* I didn’t start globalization. I can’t stop it and neither can you—except at a huge cost to your society and its prospects for growth”

(Friedman 2012, p. 112). In the face of such historical inevitability and teleological certainty, one might as well join the winning team.

What these accounts describe is a world of all structure and no agency. It is capitalism without a working class or social movements to contest it. And in its description of a world defined in its totality by an amorphous, omnipresent, and omnipotent capitalist behemoth, it is even a capitalism without real living and breathing capitalists. Yet this hyper-structuralist notion of capitalism goes too far. History is not over, for—as Karl Marx (1852, p. 595) famously noted—“men make their own history,” even if they do not do so “just as they please” and “under circumstances chosen by themselves.” There is agency within the capitalist juggernaut.

Accordingly, this chapter focuses on the burgeoning literature of what has been termed the “global capitalism school,” which argues that there is indeed someone “in charge” and pulling the levers of our global economic system. It is the “global capitalist class.”¹ What distinguishes this class is that its members “operate across state borders to further the interests of global capital rather than of any real or imagined nation-state” (Sklair 2001, p. 295). Thus, as the argument goes, this class “ha[s] little need for national loyalty, view[s] national boundaries as obstacles that thankfully are vanishing, and see[s] national governments as residues from the past whose only useful function is to facilitate the elite's global operations” (Huntington 2004).

¹ As I explain later in this chapter, many thinkers in this tradition in fact refer instead to a “transnational capitalist class.” However, per the definitions reviewed in the introductory chapter, the phenomenon they are referring to is actually generally much closer to a *global* capitalist class, at least in regards to its ideational characteristics. Thus, I favor utilization of the latter term, though I also reproduce authors’ use of “transnational” where relevant.

This chapter proceeds as follows in its analysis of the scholarship on the would-be global capitalist class: First, I explore the origins of this concept, along with its broader intellectual context. This includes diverse influences ranging from Marx to Adam Smith and Samuel Huntington. Second, I review and analyze the key concept of “transnationalism,” and how it functions within the literature of the global capitalism school to make an original argument concerning our understanding of the political economy of globalization. Third, I make a substantive critique of this body of literature by interrogating the empirical basis for claims of the existence of such a class, particularly in regards to the idea that the global capitalist class has become a “class-for-itself” and developed a global capitalist consciousness. I also delineate and offer a critique of the different arguments within this school of thought concerning who is and is not considered a global capitalist.

Based on these critiques, I lay the groundwork for my own research in this area by making the case for interpretive research that focuses on questions of identity and analyzes the oft-ignored participation of Global South capitalists in these would-be transnational or global networks. I conclude by previewing my own empirically based argument that the rhetoric surrounding the growth of the global capitalist class is greatly exaggerated, particularly insofar as it fails to account for the stickiness of place-based imaginaries. Thus, as I will elaborate upon in later chapters, to the relatively limited extent that their mental frameworks are at all *global*, the class consciousness of these actors can be conceptualized as a form of “*rooted* globalism”: that is, they exhibit only a nascent globalism or cosmopolitanism, and one that is firmly rooted—and embedded—in a place-based framework. I also note the ideological implications of this conversation,

which tend to reinforce the notion that capitalism cannot be controlled. Indeed, as I argue, capitalist elites make hyperbolic statements concerning their global credentials precisely as a political strategy to evade regulation and oversight.

Overall, then, I seek to contribute to an active scholarly and popular debate concerning the global elites who are shaping our world. In pointing to the strengths and weaknesses of the literature of the global capitalism school, I hope to contribute to its development, particularly as it regards questions of global capitalist class consciousness. As of now, we understand too little about the worldviews of these powerful actors. It is important that we know more about them because it will add to academic and theoretical understandings of the global capitalist system, and show how the thought processes of these actors are linked to how they act in the world.

Additionally, this research has a strong normative bent. As I argue, the *idea* of a global capitalist class that has seceded from the state both materially and ideationally plays the ideological function of presenting elites as global, cosmopolitan, and thus, ungovernable. As I argue in later chapters, the global capitalist class is less of a concrete empirical reality—though it is slowly evolving in that direction—and more of a rhetorical strategy employed by these groups “to accumulate capital and power” (Ong 1999, p. 6).

Global and Transnational Capitalists: The Genesis of a Concept

For years, thinkers from across the political spectrum—ranging from the conservative political scientist Samuel Huntington to critical, Marxist-inspired political economists like the widely cited sociologist William I. Robinson—have argued that there is a global class of capitalists who do not identify with any particular country. To take perhaps the most famous and enduring formulation of this idea, Huntington coined the

pejorative term “Davos Man,” referring to elite attendees of the yearly meetings of the World Economic Forum, fittingly held in a heavily fortified ski resort in the Swiss Alps.

Seething with populist rage, Huntington (2004)—in a piece appropriately entitled “Dead Souls: The Denationalization of the American Elite,” and appropriately published by *The National Interest*—lambasts “Davos Men” and other perceived “transnationalists,” as they “have little need for national loyalty, view national boundaries as obstacles that thankfully are vanishing, and see national governments as residues from the past whose only useful function is to facilitate the elite's global operations.” These groups, he argues, are inimical to what the “overwhelming bulk of the American people” want: “a national alternative and...preserving and strengthening the American identity of centuries” (Huntington 2004).

Huntington’s formulation has been much quoted, particularly in the business press. Indeed, “Davos Man” has become a stock literary figure in mainstream discussions concerning the actions and identities of the global elite.² Other, similar incarnations abound. For example, the economist Lawrence Summers (2008; emphasis added)—the former president of Harvard University, and subsequent director of the National Economic Council—has warned that “growth in the global economy encourages the development of *stateless elites* whose allegiance is to global economic success and their own prosperity rather than the interests of the nation where they are headquartered.” Meanwhile, the far-right French gadfly and recent presidential candidate Marine Le Pen has boosted her populist credentials by railing against the

² To take one example, a recent article in the *Financial Times* poses the question, “what’s on the mind of Davos man?” (Rachman 2011). Answers, per the accompanying chart, include “China’s rise,” “sovereign debt,” and “parties.”

“globalised elites” who have sold out the country’s poor, tired, and hungry (Astier 2014). Positioning his thesis as an updated and globalized version of C. Wright Mills’ (1956) classic text *The Power Elite*, the foreign policy commentator and public thinker David Rothkopf (2008) has sounded the alarm bells over the existence and rise of a “superclass” of some 6000 individuals. As he notes, members of this “global power elite” wield “vastly more power than any other group on the planet”—and, crucially, are “transcend[ing]” the nation-state in their pursuit of “internationalist or supernationalist agendas” (Rothkopf 2008, pp. xiii, 14).

Scattered but recurrent news stories appear to speak to this trend. Common are depictions of the “globe-trotting” and “homeless” executive who “rarely spend[s] a week in one place” (as one such figure comments: “I have a flat in London, commute to Jamaica and also spend a lot of time in the US”) (Coomes 2015; Marston 2012). Some corporate executives, such as Facebook cofounder Eduardo Saverin, have even renounced their citizenship for business reasons—in his case, apparently, to avoid U.S. taxes (*BBC News* 2012). Similarly, a recent article on Burger King’s attempt to move its headquarters to Canada, where it will enjoy a lower tax rate, reads: “Burger King abdicates US citizenship” (Zurcher 2014). Indeed, citizenship and wealth are increasingly becoming linked. In fact, many countries—including the U.S.—offer “investor visas,” which allow the global rich to get on the “fast track to permanent residency” through making sufficiently large investments (as the *Wall Street Journal* notes, in recent years such U.S. visas have been “soaked up by Chinese”) (Jordan 2014).

Witness also the recurring proposals to create a “floating startup incubator” off of the coast of California, where U.S. law will not apply and “techies without green cards” will be able to ply their trade without encumbrance (Florida 2011). According to the vision of the “libertarian software engineer” Patri Friedman—Milton’s grandson—and his fellow-travelers, the idea of this “seasteading” is to create a brave new world of “libertarian utopia[s]” that are to be “run by Silicon Valley” instead of governments (E. Robinson 2014).³ Ours is indeed an increasingly “magical-realist” world where Latin American and other capitalist elites take advantage of fiscal paradises, change their ships’ flags (and thus nationalities) through registering them abroad (Justo 2014), and form “untraceable” shell companies (*The Economist* 2012)—all with the goal of avoiding taxes and state regulation.

Parallel to these lay invocations, recent decades have also borne witness to a growing and now-thriving scholarly conversation concerning the same fundamental idea. Referring to an ascendant global capitalist class, these scholars—mostly Marxist-inspired sociologists, with a smattering of political economists and contributors from other fields—have carved out a distinct research niche for studies of “global capitalism” and “global capitalists.”

³ Another media report elaborates:

Backed almost entirely by venture capitalist Peter Thiel, who cofounded PayPal, the team plans to seastead, colonize the sea beyond the reach of existing nations.

Friedman's mission is to open a political vacuum into which people can experiment with startup governments that are "consumer-oriented, constantly competing for citizens," he says.

"I envision tens of millions of people in an Apple or a Google country," where the high-tech giants would govern and residents would have no vote. "If people are allowed to opt in or out, you can have a successful dictatorship," the goateed Friedman says, wiggling his toes in pink Vibram slippers. (Bowles 2011)

That this now represents a bona fide research program is clear from its level of institutionalization and the publication record of associated scholars (Struna 2013). The Network for Critical Studies of Global Capitalism, founded in 2011, holds biennial conferences revolving around the themes of “global capitalism and transnational class formation.”⁴ Many key figures also participate and hold leadership positions in the Global Studies Association,⁵ and publish in its *Journal of Critical Globalisation Studies*. More broadly, and beyond in-house forums, there is a steady stream of books and articles within this research area—sometimes referred to as the “global capitalism school”—flowing onto the pages of both critical and mainstream publications. Along the way, foundational works in this research area have garnered significant attention and amassed substantial citation counts. Kees van der Pijl’s (1998) *Transnational Classes and International Relations* and William I. Robinson’s (2004) *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class and State in a Transnational World* have both garnered over 600 citations, while Leslie Sklair’s (2001) path-breaking *The Transnational Capitalist Class* has well over twice that number.⁶

Interestingly, this blooming scholarly literature makes little to no mention of Huntington’s ruminations on what is essentially the same topic. This curious omission can perhaps be explained by the fact that Huntington did not develop his ideas on

⁴ For background information about the organization, see: <http://netglobalcapitalism.wordpress.com/about/> (accessed February 1, 2016).

⁵ For example, Leslie Sklair is the president of the United Kingdom branch (I found this information on the organization’s website, available at: <http://globalstudiesassoc.wordpress.com/about/people/> [accessed February 1, 2016]), while virtually all of the main players have prominent roles in its North American counterpart (found at: <http://net4dem.org/mayglobal/contact.html> [accessed February 1, 2016]).

⁶ These figures are from the *Google Scholar* database. I conducted these searches on January 14, 2014.

“Davos Man” in any detail or publish them in academic journals. However, one may also suspect a desire for these “critical” scholars to avoid any appearance of commonality with a man who held notoriously noxious political views.⁷ That Huntington (2004) included “academic elites” among the aforementioned “dead souls,” echoing standard right-wing attacks on the professoriate, surely did little to facilitate such cross-pollination.

Adam Smith is a further unacknowledged influence. He is recognized as such and cited accordingly by Huntington, but not in most of the academic scholarship on global capitalism. As Smith argued in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, originally published in 1776, while “the proprietor of land is necessarily a citizen of the particular country in which his estate lies . . . the proprietor of stock is properly a citizen of the world, and is not necessarily attached to any particular country” (cited in: Huntington 2004). For Smith, financial capitalists are—or at least have the potential to become—the “Davos Men” that Huntington describes.⁸

In terms of historical influences, Karl Marx of course looms larger in this conversation. As noted, unlike popular depictions of “Davos Man” or a “superclass”—which are staples of the business press and mainstream, educated thought more generally—most of the academic work in this research area emerges from Marxist-inspired sociologists and political economists. Yet it is important to note that while this

⁷ On Huntington’s involvement with apartheid South Africa and other machinations, see: Oren (2003, pp. 1-5).

⁸ A quote commonly attributed to Napoleon frames the issue in much starker, but still familiar, terms: “money has no motherland; financiers are without patriotism and without decency; their sole object is gain.”

school of thought is steeped in the Marxist tradition, it also departs from it and seeks to push it in a new direction.

In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx memorably describes the bourgeoisie's role in making capitalism into a worldwide system. As he notes, in characteristic imitable prose: "The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere" (Marx 1888, p. 476). It is to Marx's credit that, over 100 years before "globalization" became an inescapable buzzword, he had already encapsulated the core of at least the economic aspects of this fuzzy concept.

Yet what is germane to the present conversation is not Marx's pioneering insights on international capitalism but rather his framing of the bourgeoisie. In the very next paragraph, Marx observes that:

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world-market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. [...] [I]t has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries...that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature. (Marx 1888, pp. 476-477)

What Marx describes here is precisely the globalization of capital by the bourgeoisie.

While perhaps hyperbolic—the idea that there is a "universal inter-dependence of

nations” remains controversial even today—the basic description is apt. As the bourgeoisie was “chase[d]...over the whole surface of the globe,” the production and consumption of both material and cultural goods—everything from food to literature—became, to a significant and unprecedented extent, international. This of course was not “new” in the strictest sense. Cross-border or cross-frontier exchanges have always been a part of human history, and indeed, commerce precedes the entire state system. The difference with the period that Marx describes is more of degree than kind. Such interactions undoubtedly reached new heights with capitalism’s conversion into a virtually worldwide economic system.

It is here that the contemporary literature on the global capitalist class enters the conversation, and that we see both Marx’s influences, as well as emerging disjunctures between Marx and contemporary theorists. As noted, Marx discussed capitalism as a system that encompassed “the whole surface of the globe.” Yet from the perspective of the global capitalism school, today’s capitalist system is “global” in a different—and more profound—respect. Further, the global capitalist class is not Marx’s bourgeoisie, though it is its modern-day personification. It embodies, according to the strongest statements of this position, the dominant “fraction” among the capitalist class. What separates the capitalism and capitalists of Marx from those of Robinson, Sklair, and fellow-travelers is precisely the concept of “transnationalism,” which, somewhat confusingly, marks the shift to a *global* economy.

Transnationalism: From a “World” Economy to a “Global” Economy

As a definitive marker of the *zeitgeist* of the past two decades, few terms have become more stubbornly lodged in contemporary discourse—both lay and scholarly—than “globalization.” Such has been the deluge that it is now customary for works on the

topic to be prefaced with apologies. As one scholar introduced his own contribution, capturing the prevailing mood: “Not another book on globalization! [...] Has this hype-propelled bandwagon not already slaughtered too many trees?” (Scholte 2005).

In turn, critics have pointed to a lack of conceptual clarity in the very term “globalization,” questioned whether it represents anything new, and challenged the often hyperbolic ideas espoused particularly in earlier works (for skeptical voices, see, *inter alia*: Hirst et al. 2009; Rosenberg 2000). This latter category has included Thomas Friedman’s (2005) argument that the spread of capitalism was ironing out global inequalities, Ronnie Lipschutz’s (2000, p. 5) declaration of something approaching “the ‘end’ of authority, sovereignty, and national security at the conclusion of the twentieth century,” and Arjun Appadurai’s (1996, pp. 21-22) contention that “the nation-state” is entering “a terminal crisis,” with “diasporic public spheres” serving as “the crucibles of a postnational political order.” In response to the overall tenor of this literature, the IR scholar Justin Rosenberg (2005; 2007) has gone so far as to forsake use of the term and perform a “post mortem” on “globalization theory.” On the other hand, even IR and IPE realists such as Robert Gilpin (2001, p. 362)—who are heavily invested in the notion of a state-centric world—have acknowledged that, “at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the nation-state is clearly under serious attack from both above and below.”⁹

⁹ In general, of course, Gilpin (1975, p. 220) and other IR realists have pushed back against those who see the state as becoming “an anachronism.” He writes, in somewhat nuanced fashion:

On the one hand, powerful economic and technological forces are creating a highly interdependent world economy, thus diminishing the traditional significance of national boundaries. On the other hand, the nation-state continues to command men’s loyalties and to be the basic unit of political decision-making. (Gilpin 1975, pp. 20-21).

The contours of this exchange need not detain us here. What is of concern in my study is not to wade into the muddy waters of the scattered literature on “globalization theory” in order to participate in the aforementioned debate. Rather, for present purposes, what is salient is to shed light on the intellectual context from which this particular idea of transnationalism and global capitalists arose.

For Robinson, Sklair, and others, globalization—understood in terms of political economy, and, specifically, the spread of capitalist relations—is both new and old. It is old in that capitalism, per Marx’s description, has for centuries been the impetus for ever-increasing economic exchange between far-flung peoples, states, and regions. And yet it is new in that, unlike the capitalism of Marx’s day, it is now fundamentally a *transnational* system.

Robinson (2008, pp. 2, 6) elaborates a “theory of global capitalism” based on the premise that we have entered a “qualitatively new stage in the history of world capitalism,” representing “the near-culmination of the 500-year process of the spread of the capitalist system around the world.” He points to two key features of this epoch: first, virtually everything has been (or is in the process of being) commodified, meaning that capitalist relations have significantly “deepened” their reach; and second, particularly after the incorporation in the early 1990s of the former Soviet bloc and “Third World revolutionary” states such as Vietnam, the capitalist system has been “enlarged” to the extent that no significant geographical space exists outside of its confines (Robinson

His overall argument is that “transnational actors”—such as “multinational corporations”—“have been able to play an important role in world affairs because it has been in the interest of the predominant or hegemonic powers for them to do so” (Gilpin 1975, p. 4). Gilpin’s liberal IR sparring partners, primarily Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (1977), developed the concept of “complex interdependence” to describe, in part, how world politics was indeed being transformed by the development of cross-border linkages of different kinds.

2008, pp. 6-7). The point is not that literally all economic relations in the world have been subjected to a capitalist logic. Rather, it is that “there is no longer anything external to the system...in that (1) there are no longer any countries or regions that remain outside of world capitalism or still to be incorporated through original accumulation and (2) there is no longer autonomous accumulation outside of the sphere of global capital” (Robinson 2008, p. 7). It is in this sense that capitalism, as the argument goes, has reached its “global moment” (Robinson 2008, p. 7).

The immediate origins of this new “global capitalism” date back to the 1970s, and the culmination of a crisis in that decade in the previous order of Keynesian (or “national corporate”) capitalism (Robinson 2008, p. 13). While this crisis was felt in terms of a global recession, rising unemployment, stagflation, and so on, previous decades had borne witness to another kind of crisis (Robinson 2008, p. 13). In short, this earlier era marked an *ideological* crisis for the capitalist class, as increasing mobilization by the working class and popular sectors had led to the achievement of concrete improvements in their socioeconomic conditions, while constraining capital’s ability to fulfill its structurally determined end of profit-seeking (Robinson 2008, p. 13). As Robinson (2008, p. 13) notes in this regard, during this earlier period, “organized labor, increased taxes on profits and income, state regulation, revolutions in the Third World, and the explosion of social movements and counter-hegemonic cultural practices everywhere constricted private capital’s real or perceived capacity for accumulation.” From the perspective of the capitalist class, these impediments could only be tolerated as long as structural constraints, and the “relative strength” of popular mobilization, prevented their undoing (Robinson 2008, p. 13).

The crisis in the Keynesian order provided just such an opportunity. As popularized by Naomi Klein (2008) in *The Shock Doctrine*, the logic of “crises” as “opportunities” is by now well known. The premise is clear. What cannot easily be achieved in “normal” times—such as neoliberal reforms in Latin America—is forced onto the agenda during times of crisis, when powerful interests are able to assert themselves in ways that previous constraints would not allow. So it was with the crisis in Keynesianism.

As Robinson (2008, pp. 9-15) argues, during this crisis the capitalist class sought to overturn the legal, social, ideological, and cultural barriers to continued capital accumulation by “go[ing] global”; this “allowed capital to shake off the constraints that nation-state capitalism had placed on accumulation and to break free of the class compromises and concessions that had been imposed by working and popular classes and by national governments in the preceding epoch.” For Robinson, then, capital has shed its *national* character for a *transnational* one. In so doing, it has managed to limit the ability of its “home” state to impose regulations or progressive social legislation (such as higher taxation to support social welfare programs), as it is now able to cross borders with relative ease and shift to locales where costs are lower, workers are more easily repressed, and regulatory frameworks are virtually nonexistent.

The policy vehicle for capitalism’s global push is neoliberalism, the aim of which is to impose structural adjustment on societies in order to remake them in the image of an extreme market fundamentalism (Robinson 2008, p. 17). According to this worldview, as then-British prime minister Margaret Thatcher once famously put it, “there is no society, only the individual”—and, more specifically, a particular kind of hyper-

rational, socially “detached” and “isolated” individual, whose chief aim in life is the pursuit of material gains (Robinson 2008, p. 17). And who is thus transformed from a *citizen* to a *consumer* (Moulián 2014). In Robinson’s (2008, p. 19) framing, the goal of the capitalist class in enacting neoliberal reforms is “to open up every country to its activities, to tear down all barriers to the movement of goods and capital, and to create a single unified field in which global capital can operate unhindered across all national borders.”

This process began in earnest with the coup against the democratically elected socialist president Salvador Allende of Chile in 1973. Under the subsequent Augusto Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990), the country served as a Petri dish for radical experimentation by Friedrich Hayek,¹⁰ Milton Friedman and the Chicago Boy economists, who sought to create a model neoliberal state (Robinson 2008, p. 21; Valdés 2008). From there, of course, neoliberalism would spread not only across the region but throughout the world, thus demonstrating, according to the geographer David Harvey (2005, p. 9), how a “brutal experiment...in the periphery” can become “a model for the formulation of policies in the centre.”

Robinson’s (2008, p. 25; italics in original) argument that this represents a new capitalist epoch relies upon the distinction “between a *world economy* (in which nation-states are linked to each other via trade and financial flows)... [and] a *global economy* (in which the production process itself becomes globally integrated).” Thinking in terms of “global capitalist relations” instead of “nation-state relations” requires the realization

¹⁰ On the Hayek-Pinochet connection, see Corey Robin’s “five-part series on Hayek in Chile,” available at: <http://coreyrobin.com/2012/07/18/when-hayek-met-pinochet/> (accessed February 1, 2016).

that: “when copper goes from Chile to China or oil from Venezuela to China it goes to feed not ‘Chinese’ capitalism but global capitalism in China, to fuel transnational accumulation taking place in Chinese territory” (Robinson 2008, p. 200). That is, whereas the previous “world economy” was characterized by interactions between distinct national economies (e.g., U.S. companies owned by U.S. investors producing for international markets), in the current “global economy,” service and production chains¹¹ are increasingly *transnational* in the sense that they embrace and bring together capitalists without regard to national boundaries (Robinson 2008, pp. 25, 27).¹²

In other words, this represents the end of the world as mainstream realist and liberal IR knows it, in which *the* unit of analysis is the sovereign state. Rothkopf (2008, p. 11) makes broadly the same point, noting that while elite connections across national borders used to take the form of “discrete alliances between sovereigns,” what is occurring now is that “a new community has been forming, at the same time that economies are spilling across borders, global entities are proliferating, and the world is, well, flattening.”

¹¹ The topic of “global value chains” has generated a significant amount of scholarship. For a recent example, see a 2014 special issue of the *Review of International Political Economy*, entitled “Global Value Chains and Global Production Networks in the Changing International Political Economy.” However, there appears to be relatively little collaboration between these scholars and the global capitalism school.

¹² Here one notices a certain resonance between the global capitalism school and the analysis of cross-border networks (Castells 2000). For example, William Carroll (2010) utilizes network analysis in his study of the “transnational capitalist class,” as do numerous others who are interested in determining whether such a class—transnational or global—exists in objective terms. Here, of course, my concern is with the extent to which *global identities* have arisen out of the existence of such networks. It bears noting, however, that while capitalist elites may be linked through different types of networks, a proper conceptualization of class dynamics of course requires a broader understanding of social relations that is not reducible to network analysis.

This is an important distinction, for it delineates what is purportedly “new” about today’s capitalist system.¹³ It also helps to clarify some of the conceptual confusion in discussions of global political economy. As Sklair (2001, p. 2) comments, “for many writers the terms international, transnational, and global are used interchangeably, but this can be confusing.” What distinguishes the “global” for Sklair (2001, p. 3) is that it refers to an ideal type of a perfectly globalized world—one characterized by “a borderless global economy, the complete denationalization of all corporate procedures and activities, and the eradication of nationalism” (Sklair 2001, p. 3).

For global capitalists, the primary agents, “the *global* is the goal, while the *transnational*, transcending nation-states in an international system in some respects but still having to cope with them in others, is the reality” (Sklair 2001, p. 3; italics in

¹³ The idea that the current era of “globalization” is fundamentally different from past eras—particularly in terms of pre-World War I exchange in the North Atlantic—has attracted significant criticism. Take, for example, a series of claims by Paul Hirst, Grahame Thompson, and Simon Bromley (2009), from the seminal text *Globalization in Question*. The authors attempt to dispute the “strong globalization thesis,” which “requires a new view of the international economy... [as] one that subsumes and subordinates national-level processes” (Hirst et al. 2009, p. 17). In arguing against this “ideal type” of a “globalized economy,” they note the following: that “the present highly internationalized economy is not unprecedented...In some respects, the current international economy has only recently become as open and integrated as the regime that prevailed from 1870 to 1914”; that “capital mobility has only recently begun shifting investment and employment from the advanced to the developing countries, and here it is just a very few of the emerging economies that are benefiting”; that “the world is far from being genuinely ‘global.’ Rather trade, investment and financial flows are concentrated in the Triad of Europe, Japan/East Asia and North America, and this dominance seems set to continue”; and finally, that (voluntary) global migration flows have in fact decreased over time (Hirst et al. 2009, pp. 3, 20, 31-32; Fulcher 2004).

From the perspective of analyzing the global capitalism school on its own terms, these critiques miss the point. What is new about global capitalism is not merely the *quantity* of international trade, financial flows, or migration waves, or whether the Global South will catch up with the Triad. Rather, it is a *qualitative* shift. At issue is not whether international economic exchange was greater in the 1870-1914 period. Rather, what is important is that while money and goods used to move between discrete, *national* economies, the very entities that produce and distribute them are now *transnational* or *global*. Likewise, whether or not migration has risen in absolute terms, the change that Robinson (2008, p. 203) sees is the dramatic increase in “migrant workers,” which is becoming “a general category of super-exploitable labor drawn from globally dispersed labor reserves into similarly globally dispersed nodes of intensive or specialized accumulation,” ranging from Buenos Aires to the southern coasts of China. Finally, this line of thinking does not of course foresee a quick flattening out of global inequalities between states, nor does it predict that the U.S., Europe, or East Asia are set to lose their position of economic “dominance.” However, it does suggest a refocusing of our level of analysis from *states* to *classes*.

original).¹⁴ Thus, it is “to the extent that private rather than national interests prevail across borders” that we may reasonably refer to the shift from a “world” to a “global” capitalist system (Sklair 2001, p. 3). To clarify, Sklair must mean here not a shift from national to private interests—private interests have of course been present all along—but from national to global ones (that is, from a world of national economies to one where production, service, and accumulation chains are organized globally). The argument of the global capitalism school is of course that this transformation has occurred or is at least in the process of occurring.

An “Imagined Community” of Transnational Capitalists

This understanding of global capitalism’s spread as referring to a process in which the economy is increasingly denationalized and remade along transnational lines provides the conceptual foundation for this school of thought, and thus, for my study. As noted, many scholars have theorized the class—or, more precisely, the fraction of the capitalist class—that has both pushed for the spread of global capitalism, and risen to prominence alongside of it, as the transnational or global capitalist class.

Direct references to this class go as far back as the early 1970s, when economists such as Stephen Hymer began to theorize an “international capitalist class” “whose interests lie in the world economy as a whole” (quoted in: Robinson 2004, p.

¹⁴ Confusingly, according to this usage, the position of Robinson and other thinkers in this tradition is again actually closer to the idea of a “global”—instead of “transnational”—capitalist class, even though they typically use the latter term instead of the former. For example, in the recently cited quote, it is not at all clear why Robinson simultaneously refers to (and appears to equate) “global capitalism in China” and “transnational accumulation taking place in Chinese territory.” These are *not*, and logically *cannot* be, one and the same.

Again, given the common assertion that its members share a positive identification with fellow capitalist elites from across the globe and an ideological commitment to globalization that goes beyond parochial concerns with profits, analytical precision suggests that we should follow Sassen’s lead—and Sklair’s own definition—and refer to this would-be group as a “global” instead of “transnational” capitalist class.

35). The idea developed with the passing of time and the further globalization of capitalism. In 1987, for example, the political economist Robert Cox referred to the existence of a “transnational managerial class” with a “distinctive class consciousness” (cited in: Budd 2013, p. 67), as well as a larger “emerging global class structure”¹⁵; his fellow Gramscian IR scholar Stephen Gill, writing in 1990, also invoked a “developing transnational capitalist class” (Sklair 2001, p. 16). The same basic idea—though not without variations—has been espoused by and gained currency among many critically minded scholars of global political economy from a variety of disciplines (in addition to those already cited, see, for example: Carroll 2010; Hardt and Negri 2000; Rupert and Solomon 2006). It has also spawned a small number of more empirical works related to this topic, such as van der Pijl’s (1984) *The Making of an Atlantic Ruling Class*, Aihwa Ong’s (1999) *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*,¹⁶ and Monica R. Biradavolu’s (2008) *Indian Entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley: The Making of a Transnational Techno-Capitalist Class*.

What, then, defines this purported global capitalist class? What makes it a global class and not the national bourgeoisie of Marx’s description? Let us consider perhaps the two most invoked definitions. For Sklair (2001, p. 295), what captures the essence of “transnational” capitalists is that “they operate across state borders to further the

¹⁵ On a perhaps related note, Cox later described how during his 25 years of work with the International Labour Organization, which took him across the globe, he had come to develop his own seemingly global mindset. He writes: “I had come to see myself as looking upon the world as a whole from a universal perspective, transcending any specifically national point of view.” As a result, and in hindsight, he “had, in effect, become a universal foreigner” (Cox 2013, pp. 300-301).

¹⁶ Though not specifically about the transnational or global capitalist class, Ong’s (1999, p. 243) references to “the dynamic construction of new kinds of transnational ethnicized subjectivity” clearly resonate here.

interests of global capital rather than of any real or imagined nation-state” (or, we might add, of their compatriot capitalists). In turn, Robinson (2004, pp. 47-48) argues that the transnational capitalist class—which he declares to be “the new ruling class worldwide”¹⁷—can be “distinguish[ed]...from national or local capitalists in that it is involved in globalized production and manages globalized circuits of accumulation, which gives it, spatially and politically, an objective class existence and identity in the global system above any local territories and polities.” There is little breathing room between these characterizations and Huntington’s (2004) aforementioned “Davos Men,” who again “have little need for national loyalty, view national boundaries as obstacles that thankfully are vanishing, and see national governments as residues from the past whose only useful function is to facilitate the elite's global operations.”

At the most basic level, two characteristics capture the essence of global capitalists. First, they are the protagonists in a globally organized capitalist system that supersedes and is rendering obsolete the demarcation of political-economic space based on state borders. They exist materially through spaces such as globally organized production and accumulation chains. This is the “objective class existence” to which Robinson refers. In this sense, to return to Marx, they exist as a “class-in-itself.”

¹⁷ For Robinson (2008, pp. 29-30), it is not the only bloc within the capitalist class, but it is increasingly the dominant one:

There are, of course, still local and national capitalists, and there will be for a long time to come. But they must de-localize and link to transnational capital if they are to survive. Territorially restricted capital cannot compete with its transnationally mobile counterpart. To paraphrase the academic slogan publish or perish, in the case of global capitalism, capitalists in any part of the world beyond the smallest of scale find that they must globalize or perish. As the global circuit of capital subsumes through numerous mechanisms and arrangements, these local circuits, that is, the local capitalists who manage these circuits, become swept up into the process of transnational class formation.

That is, they “objectively share a similar position in the economic structure of society independent of the degree to which they are aware of their collective condition or to which they consciously act on the basis of this condition” (Robinson 2004, p. 38).

Second, they do not identify with “any real or imagined nation-state” or feel “national loyalty.” Instead, they share an “identity in the global system” based on their common global class status. That is: they identify not with the state, but with their (global) class. On a subjective level, they *perceive themselves* as global capitalists. Per Marx, they are also then a “class-for-itself”—a class whose “members are conscious of constituting a particular group with shared interests and would be expected to act collectively in pursuit of those interests” (Robinson 2004, p. 38).¹⁸ In other words—to borrow from Benedict Anderson’s (2006, pp. 6-7) classic phrase—they form an “imagined community” of global capitalists: “imagined” in that most of its members will never meet, but nevertheless a “community” in that “a deep, horizontal comradeship” exists among them.¹⁹ While for Marx’s bourgeoisie “there is no implication that national affinities, identities and forms of capitalist organization fall away in the process” of

¹⁸ In turn, Robinson (2004, p. 43; italics in original) argues that the “transnational working class” is “increasingly a reality” as a class-in-itself, but “is not yet a *class-for-itself*.” Elsewhere, he notes that “subordinate classes” are also “transnationalizing” and that “capital and labor increasingly confront each other as global classes” (Robinson 2008, p. 29). For her part, Saskia Sassen (2007, p. 189) asserts that “the global class of low-wage workers is more global...than is usually assumed,” though it is not immediately clear if she is referring to objective or subjective factors. More broadly, she also refers to “an emergent [global] class of disadvantaged or resource-poor workers and activists, including key sectors of global civil society, diasporic networks, and transnational immigrant communities and households” (Sassen 2007, p. 169). Nevertheless, beyond references to “labor internationalism” and “transnational solidarity” of various kinds, few works explore the notion of a “global” or “transnational” working class in any detail (for exceptions, see: Chomsky 2008; Hürtgen 2014). Further study is clearly needed on this topic.

¹⁹ van der Pijl (1998) also utilizes the concept of the “imagined community” to theorize this class.

capitalism's spread, this is precisely the (novel) argument of the global capitalism school (Carroll 2010, p. 1).

To summarize this research program, global capitalists exist both materially and ideationally.²⁰ In order to demonstrate the veracity of the former assertion—that global capitalists have an “objective class existence” in tangible, material terms—scholars have proposed and analyzed a number of indicators that are to serve as proxies for the existence of a “transnational” (or global) capitalist economy. These include: the increasing percentages of “imported content” in finished goods, which suggest the transnationalization of production (Rupert and Solomon 2006, p. 43); the extent to which the ownership and management of a given corporation is composed of individuals from a variety of nationalities (Sklair 2001); and the existence of “overlapping elite affiliations of corporate directors,” which are said to create a transnational capitalist network (Carroll 2010, p. 7). For its part, the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) compiles a “Transnationality Index,” which measures the foreign-domestic ratios of the assets, sales, and employment of transnational corporations (TNCs) (Carroll 2010, p. 91). These studies have tended to confirm the hypothesis of a global capitalist class.

Yet the sum total of these works does not justify the bold claims of many of the aforementioned scholars. See, for example, Robinson's (2004, p. 48) strident assertion that “transnational” capitalists already represent “the new ruling class worldwide” and

²⁰ None of this suggests the end of intracapitalist competition. Rather, competition occurs on a different plane. Per this line of argument, global capitalists collaborate—and compete—based on their positions in globe-spanning accumulation chains. Less and less competition occurs on the basis of national boundaries.

that this class “is at the apex of the global economy, exercises authority over global institutions, and controls the levers of global policymaking.” Indeed, as acknowledged by the sociologist William K. Carroll (2010, p. 37), who is a supporter of a milder version of the “transnational” capitalist class hypothesis, “from all sides of the current debate [over the existence of this class] it is agreed that more direct evidence is needed.” And Carroll (2010, p. 19) is right to note that “to prove the existence of a transnational capitalist class is a far from easy task.”

Regrettably, as most of the work on this topic has been written by believers, these claims have not been subjected to sufficient scrutiny. Existing scholarship is limited by methodological choices and often advances arguments through anecdotes instead of systematic analysis. As Carroll (2010, p. 2) notes: “like Sklair’s, William Robinson’s prodigious writings on the ascendance of a transnational capitalist class rely primarily on aggregated statistical evidence, supplemented by citation of instances of transnational corporate mergers and quotation of corporate CEOs, rather than on sociological analysis of class organization.”

One of the few outsider perspectives comes from the globalization luminary Saskia Sassen (2007, p. 169), who argues that the would-be “global classes” in fact remain “embedded, in often unexpected ways, in thick localized environments.” She thus prefers to refer to these as “partially denationalized rather than global” classes, while acknowledging that this “incipient globality” is nevertheless salient and worthy of further investigation (Sassen 2007, pp. 169-170). However, she makes these arguments only in passing and does not undertake sustained analysis of this would-be class. Adrian Budd (2013, pp. 145-146) engages with this issue at much greater length,

finding that while “the evidence to support these arguments [for transnationalization] is, at least superficially, compelling,” it is ultimately “a one-sided account that glosses over the capitalist world system’s unevenness and contradictions,” and overlooks “the persistence of state power” in the global economy.

While a review of the available literature does suggest sympathy for the position of Sassen and Budd, my study is not concerned with the material existence of a global capitalist class. Instead, the aim is to interrogate its ideational and subjective basis—that is, the identity, self-perception, and consciousness of the purported global capitalists. This, as noted, is the second pillar of the would-be global capitalist class—that its members form a “class-for-itself” and have a *global capitalist class consciousness*. Robinson (2004, p. 48) is particularly clear on this point, arguing that these actors are “class conscious” and have “become conscious of [their] transnationality.”²¹

Yet the evidence that this class exists subjectively is even weaker than the case for its objective, material existence. In fact, Leslie Sklair appears to be the only thinker in this tradition to have engaged seriously with this question. As a result, as Alexander Anievas (2008, p. 198) argues, “the idea that [this class] is a globally hegemonic class-for-itself remains conceptually abstract, with little concrete empirical foundation.” Pointing specifically to Robinson’s work, Anievas (2008, p. 198) suggests that this conceptualization “not only ignores any possibility of a territorialising logic to capital accumulation,” thus ignoring the “emergent form of territorialization” embodied, for

²¹ Yet he dithers on this point. In the very next paragraph, Robinson (2004, p. 48) refers to “transnational” capitalists as being “increasingly a class-in-itself and a class-for-itself,” suggesting more of a process than a *fait accompli*.

example, by the rise of “global cities” (Carroll 2010, p. 4; Sassen 1991). It “also overlooks the fact that classes are mutually constituted through exploitation processes, often local or regional in scope, which fundamentally affect the global reproduction of class antagonisms” (Anievas 2008, p. 198).

It is thus reasonable to expect that Latin America’s capitalists—my focus here—may not go through the same process of consciousness-formation as their counterparts across the globe. Potentially relevant factors that may set them apart include: their concentration in certain industries (such as food or raw materials); their domestic and international environments (including the strength of working-class movements in and the foreign policies of their home countries); their Global South provenance (which means that they may be affected and conditioned by various colonial and imperial legacies and present-day practices); and, perhaps, the existence of a distinct “variety of capitalism” in the region (Schneider 2013). It may also be that race and other axes of oppression—which have been almost completely ignored in this literature²²—play a differentiating role. And indeed, as the prominent Brazilian economist, and former finance minister, Luiz Carlos Bresser-Pereira (2015, p. 12) has observed, “elites of developing countries, particularly those of Latin America, suffer to varying degrees from cultural and political alienation”—in ways, of course, that Global North elites do not.

Further, if the history and pedigree of global capitalism matter, then we should not be surprised if the fact that this system was “founded on US capitalism’s great economic strength and centered on the capacities of the American state” (Panitch and

²² One article examines the transnational capitalist class’ “use” of race to further its aims (Patterson 2013). However, there do not seem to be any existing works that examine issues of race *within* this class.

Gindin 2012, p. 331) means that it takes different forms around the globe. Capitalism in the U.S. does not look precisely the same as capitalism in Brazil. As Vivek Chibber (2013b, p. 285) argues, while capitalism is a “universalizing” force, it “is not only consistent with great heterogeneity and hierarchy, but systematically generates them.” Global capitalism is thus “perfectly compatible with a highly diverse set of political and cultural formations” (Chibber 2013b, p. 285). These include, I may add, elite identities.

As noted, Sassen (2007, p. 169) shares this skeptical reading of the “class-for-itself” argument, and refers to the “embedded[ness]” of these actors in “thick localized environments.” Though she acknowledges “the weakening of the exclusive objective and subjective authority of national states over people, their imaginaries, and their sense of where they belong,” Sassen (2007, pp. 170, 187) also notes that the would-be global classes “have a strong insertion into territorially bounded contexts—global cities and national governments.” This cuts against the argument that there are “free-floating cosmopolitan classes with no national attachments or needs” (Sassen 2007, p. 187). Nevertheless, she argues that there is a trend in the direction of global consciousness-formation, and that this “incipient globality does make a difference” (Sassen 2007, p. 170).

Among extant studies, again, Sklair (2001) takes us the furthest towards demonstrating the subjective existence of a “transnational” capitalist class. His approach is to conduct interviews with business leaders “to discover the use and meaning of the term globalization (if any) in companies’ corporate vocabularies and how these relate to corporate practices” (Sklair 2001, p. 47). Thus, he seeks to link class consciousness with material acts. Yet while he invokes and seeks to provide evidence

for “the material and ideological basis for transnational class formation,” his account—particularly of the latter—is unsatisfactory (Sklair 2001, p. 49).

Typical is the response he reports from a senior Hewlett-Packard executive, who declares the company to be “globally-minded” (Sklair 2001, p. 68). While Sklair takes this as unambiguous evidence in support of the global capitalism school, it is unclear: first, what this term even means; second, if its use here coincides with Sklair’s understanding and presentation of the same term; and third, whether the mere assertion that a corporation has a global mindset should lead us to accept his argument for this class’ existence. In sum, Sklair’s interviews end up telling us very little about whether a global capitalist class exists in ideational terms. As I will argue, more scholarship of an explicitly interpretivist bent is needed so that we may truly—to borrow from Sassen (2007, p. 5)—“decipher individual imaginaries about globality” among capitalist elites.

Two further maladies plague the arguments of the global capitalism school in relation to this topic. First, there is an underlying—and hidden—assumption that the material existence of a global capitalist class mechanically implies that it exists subjectively as well, and engages in purposive action on that basis. This perhaps explains the relative focus in these writings on the material instead of the subjective side of the argument, as these components are assumed to essentially be one and the same.²³ For example, Robinson’s strikingly cursory arguments on the “transnational” capitalist class as “a class group with subjective consciousness of itself and its

²³ An additional contributing factor may be that identifying a global capitalist class consciousness presents immediate and serious methodological difficulties. I will discuss and address these below.

interests,” and whose members “have developed a transnational class consciousness,” rise little above the level of anecdotes. He cites Rothkopf, who comments that:

Business leaders in Buenos Aires, Frankfurt, Hong Kong, Johannesburg, Istanbul, Los Angeles, Mexico City, Moscow, New Delhi, New York, Paris, Rome, Santiago, Seoul, Singapore, Tel Aviv, and Tokyo all read the same newspapers, wear the same suits, drive the same cars, eat the same food, fly the same airlines, stay in the same hotels, and listen to the same music.²⁴ (Robinson 2008, p. 31)

Despite his assertions to the contrary, it is not clear what this suggests about the notion of a shared global capitalist class consciousness. It may or may not be the case that capitalist elites the world over “read the same newspapers” and “fly the same airlines” (and indeed, he provides no evidence for these claims). Yet even if true, the *objectively* global nature of this class does not necessarily mean that its *subjective* outlook has stopped being national, transnational, regional, local, ethnic, or something else entirely.²⁵

As Benedict Anderson (2006, pp. 51-52) argues, newspapers help explain the rise of nationalism, and “why entities like Chile, Venezuela, and Mexico turned out to be emotionally plausible and politically viable.” But not everyone who reads the same newspaper develops the same consciousness and loyalties. Again, we cannot merely assume that objective structural forces will condition thought in predetermined ways.

Aida Hozic (2014, p. 237) frames the issue well, noting that the “circulation of goods

²⁴ Similarly, Sklair (2001, pp. 20-21) adds that among the “lifestyle” similarities within the “transnational” capitalist class are a convergence in educational patterns (especially in terms of particular business schools), favored vacation destinations, a primary residence in exclusive gated (and segregated) communities, and a global (as opposed to local) outlook on political, economic, and cultural issues.

²⁵ This is not to say that such sociological analysis of objective circumstances—ranging from educational and marriage patterns to the topography of business networks—is irrelevant to the present story. Far from it. However, due to the focus of the current project, it will have to be left for future research.

alone may not be sufficient to transform political horizons as long as the institutions and interpretative frameworks through which they are filtered remain the same.” Long ago, Marx recognized the difference between a “class-in-itself” and a “class-for-itself.” This link between the material and ideational existence of the would-be global capitalist class needs to be carefully analyzed, not assumed.

Second, there is a fundamental confusion in this literature concerning the purported global consciousness of this class. As noted, for a global capitalist class to exist in ideational terms, we should expect that its members will have a shared identity based around their global class status—that is, their “identity in the global system.” This is to supersede feelings of “national loyalty” and attachments to “any real or imagined nation-state” or nationally organized class.

Yet the (scant) arguments on this topic tend to conflate cosmopolitanism with profit-seeking. Sklair (2001, p. 49), for example, asserts that “the class interest of the [transnational capitalist class] is transnational in character, [and that] it is not necessarily connected with the specific sites where it does business and certainly not identical with the national interests of the states in which these sites are located.” However, this sets an exceedingly low bar for Sklair’s argument concerning a “transnational” capitalist class, as what he describes does not differ in any meaningful way from Marx’s or even Adam Smith’s bourgeoisie. Only a crudely deterministic theory of political economy could sustain that the interests of merchants and other capitalist groups have always been “identical with the national interests” of their home states.

Capitalists, after all, are interested in profits. This is their structurally determined *raison d’être*. It is what motivates them to “nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, [and]

establish connexions everywhere.” This does not mean that they do not have other interests or motivations. It is merely the behavior that the capitalist system produces. It is for this reason that Smith refers to “the proprietor of stock” as “properly a citizen of the world” who “is not necessarily attached to any particular country.” But having international, transnational, or global interests based on the desire for profit does not equate to a global consciousness. The latter requires a shared global identity, not merely a shared global drive for profit. If the latter is the standard for establishing the existence of a global capitalist class, then it does not take us far beyond Marx and Smith. This is a feature of *international* capital in general, and says little that is “new” about *global* capital. If the only standard is “the extent that private rather than national interests prevail across borders,” then Sklair (2001, p. 3) is really only testing whether these individuals are capitalists, not *global* capitalists.

Consider, for example, the “telling[]” quotation from the then-chairman of Dow Chemical that Sklair (2001, p. 50) cites:

I have long dreamed of buying an island owned by no nation and of establishing the World Headquarters of the Dow Chemical Company on the truly neutral ground of such an island, beholden to no nation or society. If we were located on such truly neutral ground we could then really operate in the United States as US citizens, in Japan as Japanese citizens and in Brazil as Brazilians rather than being governed in prime by the laws of the United States...

This is an eyebrow-raising statement, at least insofar as it demonstrates the extent to which globalizing capital seeks, and has been able, to remove any and all impediments to its circulation. It evokes the establishment of spaces in the global capitalist system that exist precisely to evade meaningful state regulation, ranging from tax havens and offshore banking centers to new financial hubs such as Dubai. As Sklair (2001, p. 49) suggests, it also demonstrates the rise of “transnational economic interests” vis-à-vis

“the interests of the states in which they were legally domiciled.” In other words, we are no longer in an era—to quote a famous misquote—in which “what's good for General Motors is good for the country.”²⁶

Yet the fact that capital and capitalists seek “neutral ground” and do not want to be “governed” tells us that corporate leaders prioritize profit-seeking above state interests. And, in turn, it suggests that they will attempt to influence state policies in accordance with their own interests. This is not new. It does not necessarily establish the existence of a coherent global capitalist class that transcends state borders, seeks “to further the interests of global capital,” and has a shared and cosmopolitan consciousness. As Sassen (2007, p. 169) argues, these may be “global classes that are not necessarily cosmopolitan”—that is, they are driven by the “single logic” of profit rather than a genuine globalism. To attempt to locate the Latin American-based global capitalist class, as my study seeks to do, it is apparent that we must both strive for greater conceptual clarity and go much deeper to interrogate the subjective dimensions of the argument that there is an imagined community of global capitalists.

Who's a Global Capitalist?

Toward the former end, it is important to delineate the boundaries of the global capitalist class. Notably, the main works in this research area often use differing criteria for “who's in” and “who's out,” and are generally less than forthcoming about the justifications for their choices. Here, I review these different positions before ultimately arguing for an in-between definition of global capitalists.

²⁶ On the origins of this axiom, see Hyde (2008).

On one end of the spectrum, Robinson (2004, p. 47) defines the “new transnational bourgeoisie” as encompassing “the owners of transnational capital, that is, the group that owns the leading worldwide means of production as embodied principally in the TNCs and private financial institutions.” The focus on corporate and financial capital represents a straightforwardly Marxist definition of capitalists, as suggested by Robinson’s mention of the owners of the “means of production.”

Yet this is only one position among many. For his part, Sklair (2001, p. 17) divides the “transnational capitalist class” into four principal fractions: corporate (comprised of “TNC executives and their local affiliates”); state (“globalizing bureaucrats and politicians”); technical (“globalizing professionals”); and, consumerist (“merchants and media”). These latter three groups are “supporting members” of this class (Sklair 2001, p. 17). As he rightfully notes, while “some Marxist scholars may object that only those who actually own the means of production can properly be called capitalists[,]” the reality is that “the globalization of capitalism can only be adequately understood when ownership of money capital is augmented with ownership and control of other types of capital, notably political, organizational, cultural, and knowledge capital” (Sklair 2001, p. 17). In other words, members of the corporate fraction “cannot achieve their ends alone”—rather, they “require help” from the other groups in order to pursue their economic agenda (Sklair 2001, p. 295). Further complicating efforts to focus solely on the owners of financial and industrial capital, it is also the case that while these groups are “analytically distinct,” there is significant overlap among them (Sklair 2001, p. 17).

In practice, however, Sklair (2001) focuses almost entirely on the corporate fraction. This, he notes, is the “dominant group” of “transnational” capitalists (Sklair

2001, p. 17). Indeed, as he argues, “the making of a transnational capitalist class depends on the emergence of transnational corporations that are demonstrably globalizing” (Sklair 2001, p. 49).

A more expansive view of the “transnational” or “global”—nomenclature that again varies by author—capitalist class is also taken up by others. Carroll’s (2010, p. 6) analysis centers on interwoven networks of corporate leaders. Yet as he notes, “corporate elites include not only functioning capitalists...but their *organic intellectuals*” (Carroll 2010, p. 6; italics in original). These consist of “lawyers, consultants, academics, retired politicians” and so on (Carroll 2010, p. 6). They are worthy of inclusion as “corporate elites” precisely because their efforts are “integral to corporate business today,” as “they often lead the way in representing corporate interests” (Carroll 2010, p. 6). However, like Sklair’s, Carroll’s research concerning a “transnational corporate community” is almost entirely focused on the “functioning capitalists.” Though acknowledging their relevance, they say little about the role of these other groups.

Adopting a similarly broad definition, Huntington’s (2004) “Davos Man” includes within its ranks “academics, international civil servants and executives in global companies, as well as successful high-technology entrepreneurs.” Unlike the aforementioned works, Huntington’s analysis takes seriously these other groups—those who do not fit the traditional definition of “capitalists”—as “transnational” elites. Nevertheless, given his contention that “the radical students of the 1960s have become tenured professors, particularly in elite institutions,” and his critiques of the supposed left-wing dominance of academia more generally, it is difficult to identify the supposed overlap between the worldviews of his imagined radical professoriate and those of the

global capitalist leaders who actually attend Davos (Huntington 2004). Huntington's (2004) answer is that what these groups share is that they are all "unpatriotic"—that is, they "are identifying more with the world as a whole and defining themselves as 'global citizens.'" He contrasts this "cosmopolitanism" to the "huge majorities of Americans [who] claim to be patriotic and express great pride in their country" and notes that "Americans as a whole are becoming more committed to their nation" (Huntington 2004). Whatever one makes of Huntington's argument concerning a shared lack of patriotism, it is only with great conceptual stretching that he is able to lump the supposed cosmopolitanism of the far-left (and presumably anticapitalist) academic elite of his imagination with that of the world's leading capitalists.

While recognizing the tendency of the global capitalism literature to focus on the existence of a class of "transnational professionals and executives," Sassen (2007, p. 168) also stakes a claim for considering other "partly...denationalized" and related classes. In particular, she refers to "the proliferation of transnational networks of government officials," many of which consist of "experts on a variety of issues critical to a global corporate economy" (Sassen 2007, p. 168). These include everyone from judges and immigration officials to trade and finance ministers (Sassen 2007, pp. 168, 179). While not "capitalists" in the proper sense, she argues that they are part of the infrastructure of the global capitalist system.

This literature is thus far from a consensus on how to define the "transnational" or "global" capitalist class. The benefit of Robinson's narrow framing—which refers exclusively to "the owners of transnational capital"—is that it allows for greater conceptual coherence and a relatively clear delineation between who is and is not a

“transnational” capitalist. Only industrial and financial capitalists need apply. This position is also the most faithful to Marx’s view of class.

However, at least for present purposes, it is too narrow. Most importantly, it largely overlooks the role of the merchant or trading class as capitalist actors, and in turn that commerce is a distinct sphere of capitalism that is worthy of analysis and inclusion (see, for example: Hozic 2006).²⁷ While merchants of course tend to be private actors, their activities in turn depend fundamentally on the state and certain other private actors who also do not fit the conventional definition of “capitalists.” These include (public) export-promotion agencies and (private) business organizations (such as chambers of commerce), which also constitute a type of merchant class. Even those who are not “owners” of capital play an essential role in the promotion of commerce. As such, they grease the wheels of global capitalism. Further, given that these actors are thus international by definition, they are a highly appropriate place to look for global capitalist identities.

To establish the importance of such a trading class, let us take the example of Brazil’s booming trade relations with the Arab world, which have increased several times over in the past decade.²⁸ This has been the result of a concerted effort by both public and private groups. In regards to the former, Apex-Brasil—the state-run Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency—was founded in 2003, and in that same year opened business support and distribution centers in Dubai to further its “mission and

²⁷ For his part, Sklair (2001) mentions, but does not dwell on, the role of merchant capitalists.

²⁸ For current trade figures, see: <http://www.ccab.org.br/infobiz-online/en/home.aspx> (accessed February 1, 2016).

vision” of “send[ing] Brazilian companies [to] the global market.”²⁹ The importance of Dubai is that it is seen as a “logistics hub” through which Brazilian and other exporters are able to “reach some 1.5 billion potential customers around the Arabian Gulf and surrounding nations” (*WAM* 2011). More generally, the Brazilian state—with its emphasis on South-South relations, particularly during the presidency of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2011)—has been instrumental in fomenting these relations. “Businessmen are very attentive to the signals conveyed by governments,” as noted by Celso Amorim (2011, p. 52), who served as Lula’s foreign affairs minister, and is the current Brazilian defense minister. “Often leaders wave the flag and businessmen follow suit.”³⁰

On the private side are actors such as the Arab-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce, which bills itself as “the quickest and safest way for [Brazilian capitalists] to find new markets and to do business with the Arab countries.”³¹ Among other activities, the Chamber “issues ‘certificates of origin’ for Brazilian exports to the Middle East, plans commercial missions for Brazilian state and business elites to the Arab world, represents Brazil in Arab-sponsored international fairs, and organizes seminars that train Brazilian elites in how to do business with Arab countries” (Karam 2007, pp. 36-37). A similar case is presented by the now-dormant Chilean-Arab Business Council,

²⁹ See Apex-Brasil’s website, available at: <http://www2.apexbrasil.com.br/en/about/who-we-are/scope-of-activities> (accessed September 1, 2014).

³⁰ This is in a sense the opposite of the standard Marxist argument concerning the state: “the executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie” (Marx 1888, p. 475). In Robinson’s (2004) updated iteration, the state has been refashioned to promote the interests of global capital.

³¹ See the Chamber’s website, available at: <http://www.ccab.org.br/arabe-brasil/en/about-us.fss> (accessed February 1, 2016).

which defined itself as “a group of visionary Chilean businesspeople of Arab descent, with the objective of bringing Chile and the Arab countries closer together in terms of commercial exchange and investment opportunities.” Fittingly, it referred to itself as the “natural bridge between Chile and the Arab countries.”³²

Neither of these sets of public and private groups is “capitalist” in the traditional sense. But they are precisely the on-the-ground enablers that make economic exchange happen. They are the midwives of the global capitalist system. Indeed, their role is so crucial that they cannot be excluded from consideration as part of the would-be global capitalist class.

Here, then, we may arrive at a suitable definition of “transnational” or “global” capitalists: they are “the owners of transnational capital” but also the “globalizing bureaucrats”³³ who allow capital to travel in the first place. This definition thus includes the leaders of corporations and financial companies—but also the merchants, government officials, and private business groupings that make global capitalism possible and foment its growth. Other groups play a role in this system, ranging from immigration officials to academics. However, at least for present purposes, their inclusion would sap the coherence of this concept. My focus here is on those who directly and materially enable, facilitate, and carry out the management and movement of capital, not those who provide the system’s intellectual or legal scaffolding.

³² I found this this description on the Council’s now-defunct website, previously available at: <http://www.chilearab.cl/index.html> (accessed September 1, 2014). Translations are my own.

³³ Sklair (2001, p. 17) uses this term to describe part of the “state” fraction of the “transnational” capitalist class. Yet, as argued above, there are many private actors—such as the aforementioned chambers of commerce—that also play this role.

Argument: The “Need for Nuance” and an Interpretive Approach

To build off of the literature of the global capitalism school, my study thus seeks to shed light on the life-worlds of the capitalist elites (according to the above definition) who run, dominate, and maintain the global economic system. I aim to analyze the identities of these actors in order to determine if there is indeed a class of global capitalists whose members have—at an ideational level—seceded from the state system and place-based imaginaries. In so doing, I seek to correct a number of the deficiencies in the literature of the global capitalism school, including: the weak empirical basis for asserting the existence of such a class; a near-exclusive focus on objective indicators for its existence and the presumption that a class’ objective existence necessarily implies its subjective existence; and a lack of conceptual clarity concerning the global capitalist class and what it would mean for it to have a “cosmopolitan” identity.

As I argue below, my study also seeks to make broader contributions to the discipline of IR, along with political science and the interdisciplinary field of global political economy more generally. Among these are: a demonstration of the validity and appropriateness of interpretive methods; an affirmation of the agency of Global South actors—who are generally ignored in the global capitalism literature—and the need to take them seriously as actors in global politics and economics; and an unprecedentedly comprehensive analysis of Latin America’s booming relations with the Arab world.

But why study global capitalist elites in the first place? The answer may (and should) seem self-evident. Yet there is a relative dearth of scholarship in this area. An outside observer may be tempted to think that global capitalists—given the tremendous power that they wield—would be the subject of endless dissertations, journal articles,

and books. This is simply not the case, particularly within political science (sociology, per the works cited above, fares somewhat better).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, critically minded scholars in the social sciences have often focused on who they believe to be the “good guys” in domestic and international politics, such as left-wing social movements and presidents. In the realm of Latin American politics, one can point to mounds of scholarship on groups such as the Zapatistas and on the governments of the “left turn” or “pink tide” (from Lula in Brazil to Hugo Chávez in Venezuela). Critical scholars often applaud these actors for their resistance (real or imagined) to neoliberal policies and, in some cases, to the global capitalist system more broadly. The focus on the subaltern subject is such that it has even inspired its own well-known joke. As one scholar begins a review essay about the favelas of Rio de Janeiro:

You've probably heard the one about Eskimo demography: how many Eskimos in the typical igloo? Five—a mother, father, two kids, and an anthropologist. The same joke might be made about Rio de Janeiro's favelas, but it would vastly undercount the anthropologists, to say nothing of the sociologists, political scientists, and assorted external agents of nongovernmental organizations. (McCann 2006, p. 149)

The question remains: why are corporate boardrooms and elite government offices not packed with similar numbers of Northern academics? If I may speculate, in addition to the understandable desire to highlight and draw attention to how the weak fight back against the onslaught of the powerful, disciplinary norms also play a role. Postmodern and particularly postcolonial approaches, with their frequent focus on subaltern agency, have displaced Marxist-inspired analysis as *the* standard-bearer for radical critique in the social sciences. Concurrently there has been a decrease in the analytical focus on class (Chibber 2013a), and thus, on capitalist elites.

One may also conjecture that within Latin American Studies—where the majority of scholars sympathize with the region and lament its subservient position in the oppressive global political and economic systems—there is reluctance to countenance how certain actors in the region in fact participate in the maintenance of those very systems. As is the case in the global capitalism literature, we are used to thinking of capitalist agents as a phenomenon of the North. This romantic view of the Latin American subject—as untainted by the system and lacking in agency—in fact bears a certain resemblance to the myth and trope of the “noble savage.”

Yet studying the rich and powerful of the North *or* the South, while perhaps less immediately satisfying, provides needed insight into their worldviews and activities. We know too little about either. Such studies also hold potential normative appeal: namely, the possibility of subjecting these actors to greater public scrutiny. Here, I am reminded of the words of the scholar-activist Susan George (2005, p. 8), who noted that: “although wealth and power are in a better position to hide their activities and are therefore more difficult to study, any knowledge about them will be valuable to the [global justice] movement.” So it is with the global capitalist class. Whether or not this is a fully global “class-in-itself” or “class-for-itself,” its members wield an extreme amount of power in global politics and economics. It is thus of the utmost importance that we understand their thoughts, actions, and means of influencing all of our lives.

As noted, the great lacuna within this literature is its general failure to examine the would-be global capitalist class as a “class-for-itself.” Analyzing the identity and consciousness of these actors, in turn, is the crux of my project. Certain epistemological and methodological choices follow from this focus. Namely, I seek to address these

questions by adopting an interpretive approach that is sensitive to context, the complexities of inferring class consciousness, and my own positionality as a researcher. In so doing, to borrow from James Scott (1985, p. xviii), I aim to construct a “‘meaning-centered’ account” of the global capitalist system based on an interpretive analysis of the actors who constitute that system. This represents an attempt to gain an actor-centric, micro-level perspective on the global capitalist system, as opposed to the structuralist approaches that have often predominated in this area (Ong 1999, p. 3).

At the moment of justifying an interpretive approach, it is justifiably commonplace to cite the anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s statement of creed: “believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take . . . the analysis of [those webs] to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (quoted in: Yanow 2006, p. 6). My study is precisely oriented in this direction: toward understanding the “webs of significance” of the would-be global capitalist class. Insofar as my focus here is on language, the reflexivity of actors, and “an overarching appreciation for the centrality of meaning in human life,” my study is firmly rooted in what has been called the “interpretive turn” in the social sciences (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006, p. xii). The overriding critique of this approach is that while mainstream social science overzealously emulates the logic of the natural sciences (for a famous example, see: King et al. 1994), the human and social realms are unique for the aforementioned reasons and must follow a distinct logic of inquiry (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006).

This is the approach that interrogating the class consciousness of “global” capitalists demands. Specifically, as Sassen (2007, p. 5) suggests in passing, this

requires conducting “in-depth interviews that decipher individual imaginaries about globality.” As noted earlier, Sklair (2001, p. 47) nods in this general direction by seeking “to discover the use and meaning of the term globalization (if any) in companies’ corporate vocabularies and how these relate to corporate practices.” However, he takes the responses of interviewees at face value and is insufficiently sensitive to the contexts and “webs of meaning” in which they operate, communicate, and exist. When he reports that respondents use variations of the term “global,” it is not at all clear that they mean what he suggests—or that this usage has anything to do with the arguments of the global capitalism school.

To really address the notion that global capitalists form a class-for-itself, we need a form of interviewing that is faithful to the goal of deciphering the richness of human consciousness. This, again, calls for an interpretive approach. Instead of proceeding formulaically with a standardized questionnaire, as conventional social science would have it, addressing this research question requires that we enter into fluid and dynamic conversations with interviewees. Proceeding in this manner does not imply that “anything goes” or that interviewers should not prepare questions or other materials. Interpretive research, properly executed, requires a great deal of preparation, and is equally as “valid” and “rigorous” in this sense as studies that follow the natural science model.³⁴ Rather, what this approach means is that one cannot merely make a tick mark in the “global consciousness” box every time an interviewee uses the word “global.”

³⁴ For example, Lisa Wedeen’s (2008) imitable, interpretive analysis of nationalism in Yemen was based on attending and participating in more than 270 khat chews. There is thus no basis for the claim that interpretive research “is only remotely empirical” and cannot contribute to both real-world and abstract, theoretical understandings of important political phenomena (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006, p. xii).

Gaining analytical leverage vis-à-vis the admittedly thorny question of how these actors perceive their identities requires a much greater sense of context and nuance than the natural science model allows. It means engaging in the art of interpretation based on open-ended conversations—not merely asking them about their identities and recording the responses.

Two particular frameworks from the interpretive tradition are of use for addressing this question. First, such interviews should be “in-depth” and “semistructured or unstructured” (Soss 2006, p. 135). This format “provide[s] freedom for probes and follow-up questions as opposed to the structured interviews one might find in a survey or some other study that prioritizes reliability-as-uniformity over flexible, detailed exploration” (Soss 2006, p. 135). Instead of coding keywords according to a one-size-fits-all template, this format allows the researcher to “pursue the meanings of specific statements by locating them within a broader web of narratives, explanations, telling omissions, and nonverbal cues,” and to take advantage of this open-endedness to “explore how individual comments fit together as parts of a more meaningful whole” (Soss 2006, pp. 128-129).

Second is Frederic Schaffer’s (2006, p. 154) conception of “ordinary language” interviews as examining “language in use” by “provid[ing] the person with occasions to use particular words of interest in ways that reveal their various meanings.” An interpretive approach suggests that we cannot merely *assume* the meanings of key terms, or that the interviewer and interviewee have the same meaning in mind when using them. Rather, when the interviewee says “global,” the interviewer must interpret the meaning of that word based on contextual factors. Mechanically identifying

keywords in interviews is not enough. Asking respondents for *their* conceptualizations of terms, and interpreting their responses and usages, will yield much richer data concerning individual beliefs and cognitive processes. This effort to grapple with “the broad range of ways in which actors themselves understand a concept” is precisely what Frederic Schaffer (2016, p. 22) refers to as “the elucidative practice of *grounding*,” which takes us beyond the “one-sidedness” of conventional, positivist approaches.

The story that emerges will doubtless be a complex one, as befits the human experience. Yet this does not mean that theoretical knowledge cannot emerge as a result. As the leading dependency theory scholar and subsequent president of Brazil Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1977, p. 21) rightly noted, when conducting research “it is necessary...to avoid the simplistic reductionism so common among the present-day butterfly collectors who abound in the social sciences and who stroll through history...with the blissful illusion that their findings can remove from history all its ambiguities, conjectures, and surprises.” One must instead proceed with “patience” and be prepared to be “astonishe[d]” by “unexpected revelations.” Cardoso’s is not a lambasting of theoretical knowledge. Rather, it is a call for theoretical knowledge that is empirically informed and disciplined by context. His own classic work, *Dependency and Development in Latin America*, coauthored with the Chilean sociologist Enzo Faletto (1979), is emblematic in this regard. Such is my aim.

The empirical referent for my study is the booming axis of relations between Latin America and the Arab world. In particular, I focus on Brazil, Argentina, and Chile—the three South American countries, in order, with the largest amount of trade and overall economic exchange with the Arab world. Brazil is by far the leader in this regard, with its

annual exports to and imports from Arab countries increasing from less than \$10 billion to over \$25 billion in the last decade.³⁵ Capturing the novelty and transformative nature of these relations, the Brazilian Defense Minister Celso Amorim has noted, with some exaggeration, that they are “creat[ing]...a new world economic geography,” which means that “to get from Brazil to Cairo, you won’t need to pass through Washington and Paris” (Karam 2007, p. 174). More broadly, recent years have borne witness to the establishment of political and economic forums (such as the Summits of South American-Arab Countries, which represent the first-ever institutionalized gathering between the regions), as well as the dramatic growth of diplomatic ties.

Several factors make this set of relations appropriate for analyzing the class consciousness of would-be global capitalists. The first has to do with their novelty. As I describe in later chapters, though it has attracted little attention from Global North scholars, there is a history of Arab-Latin American relations. This includes: the arrival of waves of Arab immigrants to Latin America, starting at the end of the 19th century; the flow of Arab petrodollars into the region in the 1970s; and finally, the broader history of relations between different areas of the then-“Third World,” through institutions such as the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and UNCTAD (including the associated idea of a New International Economic Order [NIEO]) (Prashad 2007). However, the breadth and scope of today’s relations are without historical antecedent. They are thus a worthy topic of study in their own right. The fact that these are “new” relations that are in the process of being

³⁵ These figures are from the website of the Arab-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce. See: <http://www.ccab.org.br/infobiz-online/en/home.aspx> (accessed February 1, 2016).

fomented is also enticing, as they provide an ideal vantage point from which to observe how global economic relations are made—and, in turn, conceived of—by actors on the ground in tangible, observable circumstances.

Second, as is well known, there is a dearth of IR scholarship on South-South relations. Even the “critical” literature of the global capitalism school theorizes the system’s protagonists as almost exclusively a Global North phenomenon. While this is particularly notable in regards to works such as van der Pijl’s (1984) *The Making of an Atlantic Ruling Class*, it is also a feature of broader-based and more contemporary writings. Carroll (2010, pp. 54, 84), for example, acknowledges “a growing if still modest segment of global corporate capital based in the South,” but justifies his own focus on Northern actors by noting that the “image of an Atlantic ruling class retained its cogency to the close of the twentieth century.” Sklair (2001, p. 100) also recognizes that the South has its own “local wings” of the “transnational” capitalist class; however, his analysis is almost entirely centered on the “triad” areas of North America, Europe, and Japan/Southeast Asia/Australia.³⁶

Given that we inhabit a world characterized more by “uneven development” than “flatness” (Harvey 2006), it is mostly true, per Carroll (2010, p. 92), that “the Top Dogs of global capitalism reside in the triad.” Nevertheless, this nearly exclusive focus on the North—however justified it may be in empirical terms—serves not only to obscure the

³⁶ Robinson’s (2008) *Latin America and Global Capitalism* provides a somewhat useful corrective in this regard, as he focuses on the existence of a Latin American “transnational” capitalist class. However, in his strident accounts of the global capitalist system, Robinson (2004; 2008) goes as far as to argue against the analytical utility of the very categories “North” and “South.” As I explain in the following chapter, his work is thus of limited appeal in this regard for postcolonial scholars and others—myself included—who think that colonial legacies and contemporary imperialist practices exist and matter. An additional recent volume—edited by Jeb Sprague (2016)—focuses on “transnational” class issues in Asia and Oceania.

extent to which there is a “growing” cadre of Southern capitalist actors who operate globally, but also to buttress the longstanding and pernicious premise that Global South actors lack agency. My study moves beyond critique of the Northern-centric status quo in IR to actually engaging in empirical work that foregrounds the experiences of the South in order to theorize the world from a Southern basis. In so doing, I hope to contribute to efforts to “think IR differently” by decolonizing it (Tickner and Blaney 2012b; Gruffydd Jones 2006).

To interrogate the idea of an imagined community of global capitalists, I conducted a series of in-depth, semistructured interviews with dozens of Brazilian, Argentine, and Chilean economic elites who are at the forefront of fostering relations between their respective countries and the Arab world. Interviewees include: financial capitalists; leaders and managers of private-sector business networks (such as the Gulf Latin America Leaders Council, the Chilean Federation of Industry [SOFOFA], and the Arab-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce); and, government bureaucrats employed in trade-promotion agencies (e.g. the office of ProChile, the country’s official Trade Commission, in Dubai).³⁷ For background, and to become more sensitive to local context, I also spoke with academic specialists from these countries.

For the notion of a “class-for-itself” of global capitalists to hold water, these interviews should reveal a cosmopolitan identity that supersedes local, regional, ethnic, religious, or state-based subjective moorings. It should be an identity that does not boil down to mere profit-seeking—the structurally determined hallmark of every capitalist—

³⁷ Crucially, lest this be a factor that needs to be controlled for, there is a mix of Arab-descendant and non-Arab-descendant Brazilians, Chileans, and Argentines among the interviewees.

but hints at belonging to an imagined community of global capitalists whose interests are in the functioning, maintenance, and spread of the global capitalist system, instead of those of their state of birth or residence. Not Marx's bourgeoisie, but one that eschews territorial-based accumulation in favor of that which is truly global. To borrow from the Greek philosopher Diogenes of Sinope, a global capitalist should be a "citizen of the [global capitalist] world."

To preview my argument from subsequent chapters, the interviews uncovered little evidence of this. In sum: much of the rhetoric surrounding "global" classes is overblown, as these actors think primarily (but not exclusively) in place-based terms.³⁸ Thus, while there are hints of a nascent global consciousness among some of these capitalist elites, most retain an identity that is largely based on their home country (or countries). They may comprise a "class-in-itself" but not a "class-for-itself"—in that they evince few signs of sharing an "identity in the global system."

This is important, for it suggests that while our world is becoming more global in terms of economic and political relations, elite identities—at least of the actors that I analyze here—continue to revolve mostly around a nation-state paradigm that is often argued to be increasingly obsolete (Sklair 2001). Nationalism is far stickier than those who see an all-encompassing capitalist globalization would allow—from liberal apologists such as Thomas Friedman to the Marxist-inspired global capitalism school (Budd 2013, p. 153). In regards to the latter, I find few reasons to disagree with the

³⁸ Yet there are also reasons to think that Global South capitalist elites may be different from their Global North counterparts, as noted above. While I still suspect that the "class-for-itself" argument is also exaggerated in regards to Global North capitalists, it may be the case that they have a stronger global identity. This is a matter for future research.

observation of Anderson (2006, p. 3; italics in original), who comments that “nationalism has proved an uncomfortable *anomaly* for Marxist theory and, precisely for that reason, has been largely elided, rather than confronted.”

However, this should not be taken to mean that the argument for a “class-for-itself” of global capitalists is completely without merit. First, though the process of global identity formation is not nearly as advanced as these scholars suggest, there still seems to be a nascent trend in this direction. In other words, while this class is far from being *global*, it is nevertheless apparently *globalizing*. My argument validates Sassen’s (2007, p. 164) suspicion that instead of speaking of the global capitalist class as a *fait accompli*, in reality what we have are “emergent” and “partially denationalized” global classes. In broad strokes, this is also suggestive of what Carroll (2012) refers to as “the need for nuance in theorizing global capitalism.” This also more or less coincides with Carroll’s (2010, p. 233) argument that, “as a class-for-itself, the transnational capitalist class is in the making [and perhaps only slowly, we might add], but not (yet) made.” This body of literature thus points to an important—if much-exaggerated—trend (Budd 2013, p. 146).

Second, instead of thinking of the global capitalist class as a current empirical reality, it is more valuable to conceive of this concept as what Max Weber referred to as an “ideal type.” That is, it can serve as a useful analytical tool for conceptualizing globalizing processes, but is ultimately a one-sided accentuation of a particular facet of reality and should not be confused with reality itself (Weber 2004). Indeed, we all have a complex mixture of identities, and it would be more fruitful for us to conceive of national-transnational-denational-global consciousness as a continuum rather than discrete

categories. The global capitalism school thus offers key insights into what a global capitalist economy, peopled by capitalist actors on the global end of the identity spectrum, would look like. But crucially, this is not an accurate description of the world that we currently inhabit.

By demystifying the identities of capitalist elites, my study serves a normative purpose. Robinson (2004, pp. 48-49) is right to criticize Thomas Friedman and other commentators for presenting globalization as an impersonal force that is “divorced from all agency”—a self-interested story told by “global elites [who] attempt to reify global capitalism as a reality external to their own agency and interests.” Robinson (2004, p. 49) highlights his own focus on the “transnational” capitalist class as a way to “spotlight[] the centrality of agency” in the global capitalist system. Having identified the actors who make the global capitalist world spin, Robinson (2004, p. 178) calls for “wrestling from transnational capital and its agents their control over the material and cultural resources of humanity and the enormous power that control brings.” He closes by declaring that “a global counter-hegemonic struggle *against* transnational capital has to become a global struggle *for* a democratic socialist alternative” (Robinson 2004, p. 178; italics in original).

I agree with these critiques and Robinson’s rejoinder. Yet it is worth noting that his own bold arguments—which Anievas (2008, p. 191) fittingly refers to as the “strong globalisation thesis”—fall into the same trap. By presenting the consolidation of the global capitalism system and the ascendancy of the “transnational” capitalist class as done deals instead of emerging processes, Robinson’s account disempowers the very resistance movements that he both encourages and praises. After all, if confronted by a fully mobile global capitalist class that operates materially and ideationally beyond the

state, and in fact controls the state, then what is an oppositional popular movement to do? Robinson's hegemonic capitalist class is so global that regulation seems impossible.

In this regard, he argues that "transnational social governance" may be the "hope of humanity" (Robinson 2004, p. 177). I do not wish to appear myopic or fall prey to presentism, but given our inability to foster more meaningful *national* social governance, the odds of a historic bloc rising to take on this task in the short term seem slim. Little actual hope seems to exist beyond waiting for the dialectic and teleology of the more deterministic forms and caricatures of Marxism to run their course. The *idea* of the global capitalist class thus has ideological implications that contradict the Marxist-inspired goals of these theorists.³⁹

What this analysis is missing is that it is in the material interests of global capitalists to present themselves in this way—as global, cosmopolitan, and hence, virtually ungovernable by the state. As Ong (1999, p. 6) astutely observes, "a flexible notion of citizenship and sovereignty" can serve "as strategies to accumulate capital and power." When capitalists boast of their global credentials, it may be—as Sklair and others would have it—evidence in favor of the arguments of the global capitalism

³⁹ In turn, arguments for the end of sovereignty and the state system in fact are a boon for neoliberalism, which posits that states should and must cede power to the market and abdicate social-welfare responsibilities in order to be competitive in the modern global capitalist economy.

Yet what neoliberalism really advocates for is not a weaker state but rather a reconfigured state: one dedicated to the promotion of capitalist interests. In many ways—such as social control, repressive apparatuses, and antiworker legislation—the neoliberal state is actually stronger. Hayek was only saying what others were thinking by arguing that: "at times it is necessary for a country to have, for a time, some form or other of dictatorial power." The high praise of he and other neoliberals for the Pinochet regime is a logical extension of this sentiment (Robin 2013). As one of the Chilean Chicago Boys put it, "a person's actual freedom can only be ensured through an authoritarian regime that exercises power by implementing equal rules for everyone" (Valdés 2008, p. 30).

school. Or, in contrast, it may be a strategy to demonstrate that they and their activities are beyond regulation and control. My argument here is the latter.⁴⁰ After all, a capitalist who is still materially and ideationally tied to the state—and indeed, has a “partial dependence” on the state (Sassen 2007, p. 177)—is a capitalist whose activities are much more susceptible to popular oversight. Thus, while capitalist rhetoric—per the aforementioned political strategy—is often global, the realities of their worldviews are much more territorial.

To summarize, as I will argue in later chapters, “global” capitalists are in fact far from being *global*. This appears to be true both materially and—especially—ideationally. Reports of the death of place-based imaginaries have been greatly exaggerated. The imagined community of the nation-state has proven to be a sticky concept despite the globalization of capital and the slow rise of globally organized classes. Reports of the state’s demise are both promoted by and play into the hands of those who seek the creation of a truly borderless world in which capital can roam unfettered.

In other words, Sassen (2011) is correct to note that “the national continues to be probably the most significant and encompassing condition,” even though it is also true that “the imbrications of global, national, and denationalized will proliferate and begin to produce overall dynamics we have not yet seen.” We are witnessing the ascent of the global or transnational, but it is important to recognize that these rising imaginaries are not painting on blank canvases. As these identities emerge, they are conditioned by the

⁴⁰ This of course suggests methodological difficulties in researching this topic, as interviewees thus have an incentive to lie and misrepresent their worldviews. There is no true escape from this pitfall. Nevertheless, the more holistic interpretive approach that I advocate for is more sensitive to such evasive tactics.

national imaginaries that predate them. As a result, they are “partly structured inside” and “dressed in the clothing of the national” (Sassen 2011). Theirs is a strongly “rooted globalism,” a concept that I will develop in later chapters.

The “capitalists of the world” have thus yet to accomplish what Marx long ago urged for the “workers of the world”: to unite in terms of a shared cosmopolitan consciousness. They are chased around the globe by a profit-seeking impulse, but not—or at least not yet—as a global capitalist “class-for-itself.” For that, we can be thankful. That capitalist elites have yet to mentally divorce themselves from the state and place-based imaginaries is both a cause for relief and a motive to consider how to contain their rise.

CHAPTER 3 HOW LATIN AMERICA MET THE ARAB WORLD

Within what Stanley Hoffman (1977) once famously referred to as the “American social science” of mainstream International Relations (IR),¹ to the extent the Global South is mentioned at all, it exists primarily as a site for the exercise of Northern power.² The idea that Southern actors not only have agency, but may interact among themselves in meaningful ways, is largely beyond the pale. This chapter attempts to expose and break mainstream IR’s usual silence concerning South-South relations by turning to a particular example that has been mostly overlooked by Northern scholars: Latin America’s booming relations with the Arab world.

Such has been the substantive increase in these relations that high-level officials claim that the two regions, perhaps with some exaggeration, are creating “a new world economic geography” (Karam 2007, p. 174). Yet this *current* rise is linked to what the former Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva refers to as a “reencounter” between two civilizations with a *history* of linkages (Karam 2007, p. 174). These include more than a century of Arab migration, the flow of Arab petrodollars to Latin America in the 1970s, and the oft-ignored broader history of South-South relations through institutions

¹ Though pinning down a concrete definition of “mainstream” IR goes far beyond the aim of this chapter (and could be the subject of an entire book in its own right), here I use this nebulous concept as a useful though not unproblematic label for scholarship in the field of IR—broadly defined—that is the most cited, most commonly read, most often assigned in IR classes (in the U.S. and indeed around the world), and most influential in affecting the field’s trajectory. In practice, of course, such works are produced almost entirely in English by Global North scholars based at Global North institutions, focusing on Global North topics.

² “North” and “South,” of course, are also contested terms whose usage often occludes more than it elucidates. Their appearance here is merely meant as shorthand for those regions characterized by: greater levels of poverty (at both the national and individual levels); colonial legacies; ongoing imperial practices; and a subservient position in the global economy (that is, based on raw-material exports). For further analysis of the North-South divide, see Funk (2015a).

such as the Non-Aligned Movement. This chapter follows Lula's lead by utilizing existing literature to recover this overlooked history of Arab-Latin American relations. Thus, in addition to providing a general framework for comprehending current issues in Arab-Latin American relations, this chapter also historicizes IR's more general marginalization of South-South relations. By analyzing the history and present status of these relations, I thus hope to contribute to the decolonization of IR and the establishment of a more globally inclusive field.

In addition to analyzing its marginalized position within the field's mainstream, this chapter seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on Arab-Latin American relations, which has been produced almost entirely by Southern scholars. While the sum of this scholarly production presents a useful overview of both the historical trajectory and contemporary status of these relations, it is largely unknown to Northern scholars. Further, this literature is not without shortcomings. Here, I identify four main gaps, the latter three of which I in turn address through my own work. Not all works succumb to these pitfalls; rather, these critiques apply to this literature as a whole.

First, this literature is insufficiently historical, at least in regards to interstate relations. There is a long history of "Third-Worldism" through which Latin American and Arab countries have interacted, including institutions such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the New International Economic Order (NIEO), and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) (Prashad 2007; 2013). Few works have seriously explored these linkages (for an exception focusing on Brazil, see: Karam 2012). Likewise, it largely overlooks past episodes of economic exchange, limited as they may have been, such as the injection of Arab petrodollars into Latin America in the

1970s (Howe 1974), or even remittance flows. There is thus a need here to *historicize* contemporary relations.

Second, the literature on Arab-Latin American relations is overly state-centric and devotes insufficient attention to how nonstate actors are also involved in promoting these ties (for an exception, see again: Karam 2007). As such, there is insufficient discussion of the fundamental contributions made by private actors (particularly economic ones) as well as emerging networks of private and public actors in “making” these relations. Here, we may point to the oft-overlooked role of merchant capitalist groups—including business federations (such as the Arab-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce), state economic bureaucracies (e.g. export-promotion agencies), and facilitators of investment flows (for example, the Gulf Latin America Leaders Council)—and how they, as globalizing elites, play a fundamental role as agents in enabling interregional economic exchange.

Third, there is a tendency for scholars in this area to focus excessively on what are presented as essentially “political” (instead of “economic”) questions, as if Arab-Latin American relations can be accurately grasped purely through foreign policy analysis. Accordingly, as I argue below, what is needed is for analysts of these relations to adopt a political-economy approach that is able to account for how political and economic factors interact and intersect to serve as the impetus for these relations.³ This analytical focus on foreign-policy issues takes us back to the aforementioned issue with this literature: its excessive state-centrism.

³ Scholarship in fields such as economics and business could potentially provide a useful corrective in these regards. However, very few works from these or similar fields focus on Arab-Latin American relations or the actors responsible for promoting them.

Finally, this literature is overwhelmingly empirical, as opposed to theoretical, in nature. That is: while it uncovers interesting dynamics concerning an axis of relations that is largely unknown in the Global North, it neglects to draw broader conclusions based on these realities, or even to situate them within a comparative context. For better or worse, this is symptomatic of a larger issue with Latin American IR: it is “subservien[t] to state cues” and thus focuses on practical instead of theoretical matters (Tickner 2008, p. 745).

Here, I do not intend to rehash the “area studies” debate (Bates 1997; Johnson 1997), nor to imply that local knowledge must serve some supposedly higher and more properly “scientific” purpose of informing “the disciplines” of IR, comparative politics, and so forth. Rather, my position is that Arab-Latin American relations present a fascinating case that could indeed help to shed light on broader dynamics, including how capital “goes global” through the efforts of the aforementioned networks, as well as how globalizing actors of a variety of ethnic, religious, and national backgrounds—the subject of this project—perceive their identities. Further, engaging in theoretical work based on Global South cases provides a useful corrective in the field of IR in particular, where there is an equally longstanding, dominant, and pernicious tendency to foreground and theorize on the basis of Global North histories, cases, and perspectives.

In very broad strokes, the existing literature on Arab-Latin American relations can be divided into two thematic categories. They are: first, immigration and diaspora, which focuses on the experiences of Arab immigrants and their descendants in Latin America, as well as the cultural history produced by interactions between these populations; and second, foreign policy and commercial relations, which deals mainly with Latin

America's current policies toward and trade with the Arab world, its posture concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the "terrorism" issue surrounding the Triple Frontier, where Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay meet. Two caveats are in order: this is of course a simplistic rendering and there is overlap among the categories (for example, the recent landmark volume *The Middle East and Brazil: Perspectives on the New Global South* treats both topics in fairly equal measure [Amar 2014]). Nonetheless, this categorization scheme provides a useful general sketch of the central topics of concern in this literature and gives an overall impression of what is (and is not) known about these relations based on existing scholarship.⁴

The Global North Discipline of IR and the Specter of South-South Relations

With few exceptions, mainstream Global North IR ignores or denies the reality or possibility of meaningful South-South relations, or Southern agency more generally. Given that Global South actors "are takers, instead of makers, of international policy"—as Robert Keohane (quoted in: Carranza 2006, p. 814) once noted about Latin America—there is little reason to pay attention to them.⁵ This marginalization is based, in part, on the perceived ontological threat that Southern agency poses to Northern domination of the global system (Krasner 1985). In other words, the South is ignored precisely because it threatens the idea of Northern hegemony. What makes South-

⁴ For a more detailed listing of sources on these and other topics, see the bibliographies maintained by RIMAAL, the *Red de Investigación Interdisciplinaria sobre el Mundo Árabe y América Latina* (Network for Interdisciplinary Research on the Arab World and Latin America): <http://rimaal.org/category/bibliographies/> (accessed February 1, 2016).

⁵ Even if Keohane is right, this does not necessarily mean we should ignore the South. For example, in disciplines such as anthropology it is entirely normal for scholars to lend their voices to those who lack power and agency.

South relations dangerous, in turn, is that they call into question the notion that the North is always central in questions of international politics and economics.

This is unfortunate, for the study of South-South relations could shed light on research topics that are of perennial interest even in mainstream IR. For example, scholars concerned with bread-and-butter issues such as the causes of war and peace (and how to prevent the former and promote the latter) should be intrigued by South America's "external-peace-and-internal-violence paradox": that is, that despite the region's extreme internal violence, it has seen fewer major interstate wars "than any other peripheral area in the world" (Martín 2009, p. 143). Thus, while the famed IR theorist Kenneth Waltz (1979, p. 72) once wrote that "it would be as ridiculous to construct a theory of international politics based on Malaysia and Costa Rica as it would be to construct an economic theory of oligopolistic competition based on the minor firms in a sector of an economy," one should more reasonably conclude the opposite: it would be ridiculous not to. Waltz's comment is particularly ironic given that one of the modern classics of political science—James Scott's (1985) *Weapons of the Weak*—is not only based on a Malaysian case study, but is esteemed for having made a major theoretical contribution to *general* conceptions concerning Gramscian hegemony and "subaltern" agency.

At the very least, the South demands our attention given that it is home to the vast majority of the world's population. The South and Southern people's lived experiences in international politics are thus essential for any attempts at global understanding. In turn, the idea that it is exclusively European history that is foundational to the field—and a sanitized version of it, which downplays the experiences

and legacies of imperialism, colonialism, racism, and slavery—occludes the many *histories* of international relations that exist around the globe.⁶ Even if we grant that “Europe set the pattern for the organization of and interaction among nation-states that persists to the present day,” per a recent textbook, it simply does not follow, as the authors argue, that “any examination of how world politics came to attain its present form must therefore begin in Europe” (Spiegel et al. 2012, p. 61). Rather than likening a focus on the South to studying oligopolies through the actions of “minor firms,” what Waltz’s position really amounts to, to take another political-economy example, is that we can somehow understand capitalism without theorizing from the perspective of the working class.

If the South is largely invisible in mainstream IR and associated disciplines, then the idea of South-South relations suffers from a double marginalization. To summarize the implicit argument: if the South lacks agency, as is commonly presumed, then Southern regions are incapable of interacting with one another in meaningful ways. Thus, while the South does appear with some regularity in mainstream scholarship as an agency-less site for the exercise of Northern power, the issue of South-South relations is ignored with virtual unanimity.⁷ Relations between Latin America and the Arab world are of course no exception to this trend.

There is by now in fact a relatively voluminous body of literature that focuses on—or at least makes substantive mention of—Arab-Latin American relations and how

⁶ Indeed, IR “traces its modern origins without embarrassment to a place and moment at the heart and height of imperialism” (Gruffydd Jones 2006, p. 2). As Brian Schmidt and others have documented, IR in fact was born as the would-be science of “colonial administration” (Long and Schmidt 2005).

⁷ An exception here is the case of China and particularly its relations with Africa and Latin America, topics that have caused much hand-wringing in the North.

these two seemingly disparate regions came to “meet” one another. However, virtually all of this scholarly production has taken place in Western academia’s periphery. This is true literally, as the vast majority of specialists in this area are Latin Americans who are based at Latin American universities. Beyond the level of individual scholars, several of the region’s universities also feature academic units dedicated, at least in part, to the study of the Arab world and its relations with Latin America. These include: Universidad de Chile (*Centro de Estudios Árabes*; Center for Arab Studies); Universidade de São Paulo (*Centro de Estudos Árabes*; Center for Arab Studies); Universidade Federal Fluminense in Rio de Janeiro (*Núcleo de Estudos do Oriente Médio*; Center for Middle East Studies); El Colegio de México (*Centro de Estudios de Asia y África*; Center for Asian and African Studies); and, Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica (CEMOAN—*Centro de Estudios de Medio Oriente y el Norte de África*; Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies).⁸ As a result of the resources, visibility, and community-building afforded by these academic units there is thus limited but significant institutional infrastructure in Latin America for the study of relations with the Arab world.

Other scholarly and lay organizations—again, predominantly within Latin America—also contribute to the production of knowledge on the intersections between the two regions. Most prominent among them are: BibliASPA, the *Biblioteca e Centro de Pesquisa América do Sul-Países Árabes* (Arab and South American Library and Research Center), located in São Paulo, which also administers its own publishing house, Edições BibliASPA; RIMAAL, the *Red de Investigación Interdisciplinaria sobre el*

⁸ There is at least one counterpart in the Arab world: the Latin American Studies and Cultures Center at The Holy Spirit University of Kaslik in Lebanon.

Mundo Árabe y América Latina (Network for Interdisciplinary Research on the Arab World and Latin America), an online community for Latin American and other scholars conducting research in this area; and the *Centro de Estudios del Medio Oriente Contemporáneo* (CEMOC; Center for Contemporary Middle Eastern Studies) in Córdoba, Argentina. Both CEMOAN and CEMOC publish academic journals on the Arab world and Arab-Latin American relations—entitled, respectively, *Revista Al-Kubri* and *ANMO: África del Norte y Medio Oriente*. The Arab-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce also publishes its own magazine and administers the online *Brazil-Arab News Agency*, both of which contribute substantially to the diffusion of news and analysis concerning these relations.

To summarize, Arab-Latin American relations have ceased to be an unknown phenomenon if one knows where to look. Yet virtually all of the knowledge-production concerning these relations has occurred within Latin America. Given that mainstream IR—as is by now well known—is so parochial and North-centric that it is largely unwilling or unable to see, assimilate, or valorize Southern scholarship, these Latin American and other efforts have almost all been for naught from a disciplinary perspective in that they have had little to no resonance in the field’s mainstream. This scholarship is thus peripheral not just *geographically*, but *intellectually*. As commented by the Colombia-based scholar Arlene Tickner (2003, p. 296), who as coeditor of Routledge’s *Worlding beyond the West* series and author of numerous articles on similar topics has been instrumental in attempting to bring Latin American and other “outside” perspectives into the field of IR: “the ‘who’ of IR studies continues to be a select number of academics hailing primarily from the countries of the core.”

That is, even though an enterprising group of mostly Latin American scholars has amassed a significant body of work on Arab-Latin American relations, with few exceptions it has not been debated or cited—or even, presumably, read—by their Northern counterparts. Hence the narrower question raised by Evelyn Hu-DeHart (2009): “where are the *turcos* [i.e. Arab-descendant Latin Americans]” in the U.S.-dominated field of Latin American Studies? This, again, is symptomatic of a larger malady affecting IR: the disjuncture between the *idea* of IR as a global discipline and its *reality* as an “American social science.” To extend the analysis of dependency theory into the realm of intellectual production, just as much of Latin America is stuck in the hamster wheel of commodity exports, so is its academic position cemented as a recipient of ideas from abroad rather than a producer of them (Dorfman and Mattelart 1991; Mignolo 2005).

The problem is less individual than structural. It is of course unreasonable to ask that each scholar—Northern or otherwise—be familiar with literally every potential topic of interest in international politics and economics (or be capable of reading articles in Spanish and Portuguese). Yet at a collective level, the fact that *so few Northern scholars* study these relations (or South-South relations more generally), or at least consider them relevant enough to mention in even a cursory manner, is highly problematic.

In addition to serving as yet another indication of the myopia of Western IR, this ignorance of Arab-Latin American relations is also troubling both intellectually and politically. In regards to the former, insofar as we desire to know more rather than less about the world, there must be some recognition of the fact that this is a growing axis of

relations that attracts a significant amount of attention from the involved actors. If the collectivity of IR scholars intends to progressively accumulate knowledge about the world, then surely someone among us should start listening. As is, it appears that many Latin Americans care about these relations, but mainstream IR does not.

As for the latter, the silence concerning Arab-Latin American relations has real political consequences. To demonstrate, let us take the slightly broader but related issue of Latin American-Middle Eastern relations (thus including Iran in the equation). These relations, for the first time ever, have risen from obscurity to become a major topic of concern for numerous political elites in Washington. Central here are accusations that Latin America—and particularly the “Triple Frontier” area where Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina meet—is a hive of activity for Middle-Eastern “terrorist” groups, which could use the region as a base from which to attack U.S. interests.

This idea has indeed become an article of faith in the hawkish wing of the U.S. foreign policy establishment, as the following examples demonstrate. During a 2011 Republican Party presidential primary debate on national security and foreign policy, Mitt Romney echoed the concerns of the other candidates in asserting that the would-be actions of Hezbollah and similar groups in the Triple Frontier and other parts of Latin America “pose[] a very significant and imminent threat to the United States” (*CNN* 2011). Addressing a question about “using the United States military,” Texas Governor Rick Perry called for “a 21st century Monroe Doctrine” to counter the supposed machinations of Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran in the region (*CNN* 2011). Not to be outdone, in response to the question, “what national security issue do you worry about that nobody is asking about[?],” former Senator Rick Santorum commented: “I’ve spent

a lot of time and concern [sic]... [thinking] about what's going on in Central and South America. I'm very concerned about the militant socialists and the radical Islamists joining together, bonding together" (*CNN* 2011).

To summarize, major U.S. political figures with significant bases of influence and aspirations for the country's highest offices are so concerned about this supposed facet of Latin American-Middle Eastern relations that they are apparently willing to countenance the (likely disastrous) use of military force. And yet neither the U.S. government nor anyone else has provided serious evidence to support the notion that the Triple Frontier is a significant staging ground for terrorist groups (Karam 2011). Instead, concerned reporters, analysts, and politicians constantly cite each other in a "closed loop of self-references," culminating in unconfirmed but oft-repeated allegations that Osama bin Laden spent time in the Triple Frontier and—as incorrectly speculated by *CNN*—that a picture of the nearby Iguazu Falls had been found in Afghanistan at an al-Qaeda training camp (Karam 2011, p. 263).

To be sure, the Triple Frontier has long been a haven for smuggling and unmonitored economic exchanges. It would to some extent be surprising if, at the very least, there were not some individuals in the region who contribute financially and perhaps in other ways to groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas (as may have occurred with the 1992 attack on the Israeli embassy and the 1994 bombing of the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association, both in Buenos Aires). Yet we know little about what actually occurs around the Triple Frontier. Instead, policy debates are being informed by wild speculation rather than honest, fact-based analysis. The collective ignorance in mainstream IR concerning Arab-Latin American relations (real or imagined) thus does

not exist in a vacuum. Rather, the lack of studies on this topic allows unsubstantiated claims to become authoritative knowledge, as there are virtually no Northern academics to debunk them. As noted in a recent article, in regards to the Triple Frontier: “the study of this purported crime-terror nexus provides a valuable opportunity for academic researchers to question the assumptions and assertions of policy-makers and pundits, push for transparency of information on the reality of the region and even help understand the problem better” (Costa and Schulmeister 2007). To repeat: there are political consequences, and potentially dangerous ones, for our lack of understanding of these relations.

Again, the issue is not precisely that there is no literature on Arab-Latin American relations. A significant number of sources exist, many of high quality. However, given that South-South relations are seen as unimportant, and that the scholars who engage with these topics are largely from IR’s marginalized periphery and often write in languages other than English, they are rarely cited by Northern scholars or practitioners. That is, these works are about *international relations* but are in effect excluded from the field of *International Relations*. IR is thus characterized by a spirit of “parochialism,” as U.S. concerns, U.S. graduate programs, and U.S.-based journals dominate the field (Tickner and Blaney 2012a, p. 5). As Arlene Tickner and David Blaney (2012a, p. 5) note: “the sheer muscle of the academic community in U.S. IR, as measured in numbers of scholars, Ph.D. programs, conferences and publications is palpable.”

Bridging the academic North-South divide is essential for “decolonizing” the field and making IR into a truly “global” discipline (Gruffydd Jones 2006).⁹ As follows, then, I attempt to provide a relatively comprehensive literature review concerning historical and contemporary interactions between Latin America and the Arab world. This survey is inclusive of literature that has been published in English, Spanish, and Portuguese (and predominantly in the latter two).¹⁰ The aim is not to delve into the intricacies of individual sources, but to provide a broad overview of what is—and is not—known based on existing literature, isolate recurring themes, identify areas in need of improvement, and provide a conceptual framework (based on a political-economy approach) for guiding future research in this area.

Immigration and Diaspora: The Making of a Political-Economic Elite

The first—and largest—group of literature tells the stories of the waves of Arab immigrants who have arrived to Latin America and analyzes how they and their descendants have navigated, shaped, and been shaped by Latin America’s political, economic, and cultural terrains. Arab-Latin Americans form a relatively small minority group throughout the region, though one of disproportionate political and economic significance. This makes it all the more surprising that Northern scholars have largely overlooked their role, leading Evelyn Hu-DeHart (2009) to pose the question: “where are the *turcos* [i.e. Arab-descendant Latin Americans]” in the Global North-dominated mainstream of Latin American Studies? In this sense, one may again lament that

⁹ The creation of “a Global IR” was in fact the organizing theme for the 2015 annual conference of the International Studies Association. See the conference website, available at: <http://www.isanet.org/Conferences/NewOrleans2015/Call.aspx> (accessed February 1, 2016).

¹⁰ For Arab sources on these relations, focusing on cultural issues, see ALECSO (2004).

scholars have done relatively little to draw larger theoretical implications based on the Arab-Latin American experience to inform our understanding of nationalism, transnationalism, globalization, ethnic politics, and similar issues.

Argentina, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador and Honduras have all had presidents of Arab ancestry, while Brazil's current vice president, Michel Temer, is of Lebanese descent. Numerous members of Latin America's economic, cultural, intellectual, and athletic elites can also trace their origins back to the Arab world, including: Carlos Slim, a Mexican business magnate of Lebanese descent and currently the world's second-richest person; the Mexican actress Salma Hayek, partially of Lebanese ancestry; the global pop star Shakira, whose paternal grandparents also hail from Lebanon; the famed Chilean director and novelist Miguel Littín, of Palestinian and Greek heritage, whose daring secret return to Chile from exile in 1984 to capture the brutal reality of life under the Pinochet regime was immortalized in the late Gabriel García Márquez's (1986) *La aventura de Miguel Littín clandestino en Chile (Clandestine in Chile: The Adventures of Miguel Littín)*; and the two-time Olympic gold medalist in tennis Nicolás Massú, also from Chile, whose father's side of the family is Palestinian and whose Jewish maternal grandparents were survivors of the Nazi Holocaust.

Arab-Latin Americans are also present in works of popular and high Latin American culture. Such representations include: the Arab merchants of García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad (One Hundred Years of Solitude)* (1967), or the subject, Santiago Nasar, of his *Crónica de una muerte anunciada (Chronicle of a Death Foretold)* (1981); the famed Brazilian novelist Jorge Amado's (2008) *A Descoberta da*

América pelos Turcos (*The Discovery of America by the Turks*), which narrates the romantic and economic exploits of two Arab immigrants upon their arrival in Brazil at the beginning of the twentieth century; the hit Brazilian soap opera *O Clone* (*The Clone*), which featured a Muslim Moroccan-Brazilian family; and the kindly elderly gentleman Farid Assad from the Chilean television drama *Los 80* (*The 80s*), who displayed a small Palestinian flag in his clothing store in downtown Santiago. Different facets of the Arab-Latin American experience have a constant presence in the region through recurring events such as the South American Festival of Arab Culture and the LatinArab Film Festival. Social institutions like the ritzy *Club Palestino* (Palestinian Club) of Santiago de Chile also have a hand in organizing cultural and other events.

The Latin American country with the largest Arab-descendant population is Brazil, where it is estimated, probably with some exaggeration, at up to 10 million (though it is not uncommon to hear even higher figures) (Karam 2007, p. 10). Not surprisingly, a relatively large number of sources focus on the Brazilian case (Amar 2014; Hilu da Rocha Pinto 2010; Karam 2007; Lesser 2013; Morrison 2005). Most of the Arab-Brazilian population is of Lebanese, and to a lesser extent Syrian, ancestry, with the bulk having arrived in the early twentieth century with passports from the Ottoman Empire—hence the enduring nickname, also used in Spanish-speaking countries, *turcos* (Turks) (Karam 2007, p. 10). As is frequently noted, Brazil is said to have “more citizens of Syrian origin than Damascus, and more inhabitants of Lebanese origin than all of Lebanon” (Luxner 2005).¹¹

¹¹ In Brazil and elsewhere, many millions of other Latin Americans also have an (often unknown) Arab background through the long Moorish presence in the Iberian Peninsula. In seeking to make the case that the Arab world and Latin America are currently experiencing a “reencounter,” Lula himself noted that the Arab world “first came to us by way of the Iberian heritage” (Karam 2007, p. 174). Interestingly, as Walter

Other Latin American countries with particularly sizable Arab-descendant populations include: Argentina (Brégain 2011; Civantos 2006; Hyland, Jr. 2011), Mexico (Alfaro-Velcamp 2007), Chile (Bray 1962; Elsey 2011),¹² Colombia (Vargas and Suaza 2007), and Honduras (Amaya Banegas 1997; González 1993; Gutiérrez Rivera 2014; Luxner 2001). For example, estimates range up to several million for the Arab-Argentine population, while there are said to be between 500,000-1 million Arab-Chileans (though in both cases, again, the real figures are probably somewhat lower). Syrian-Lebanese ancestry tends to predominate in most countries, including Argentina; however, in countries such as Chile and Honduras, Palestinians form the largest group (indeed, outside of the Middle East, Chile is home to the world's largest Palestinian diaspora population). Smaller populations also exist throughout the region.

In addition to the country-specific literature cited above, a number of works have sought to analyze Arab-Latin Americans—together, in some cases, with other Latin Americans of Middle Eastern and/or Jewish ancestry—in a multi-country or regional context (Alsultany and Shohat 2013; Karam 2013b; Klich and Lesser 1998; Raheb

Mignolo (2005, p. 157) comments, Latin America “was correlated in the nineteenth century with the inferior South of Europe, which was ‘tainted’ by Catholicism and the infusion of Moorish blood.” For the early-twentieth century Mexican thinker and racial theorist José Vasconcelos, best known for his essentialist celebration of *mestizaje* (racial mixture) as the foundation of a new “cosmic race,” this Arab heritage was to be, in its own curious and Orientalist way, a celebrated component of the new national identity. He writes: “Judaic striae hidden within the Castilian blood since the days of the cruel expulsion now reveal themselves, along with Arabian melancholy, as a remainder of the sickly Muslim sensuality. Who has not a little of all this, or does not wish to have all?” (Vasconcelos 1997, p. 22). The Moorish presence also explains the existence of very large numbers of Arabic loanwords in Spanish, Portuguese, and associated languages—so many, in fact, that Arabic is considered “the second most important ingredient of the Spanish lexicon” (Corriente 2008, p. viii).

¹² See also Miguel Littín's *Crónicas palestinas* (*Palestinian Chronicles*) and the 2008 Chilean documentary, *Palestina al Sur* (*Palestine in the South*).

2012).¹³ As I discuss below, common themes within this literature include identity, elite formation, and Latin American Orientalism vis-à-vis the Arab “Other.”

Though Arab-descendant Latin Americans as a group now occupy a relatively privileged location within their countries’ social, political, and economic hierarchies, the circumstances of the arrival of the first waves of immigrants were often less than glamorous. While the post-World War I fall of the Ottoman Empire and the continued colonial presence in the region would later send Arabs to Latin America in larger numbers, the first such immigrants arrived in preceding decades in a trickle, and, in many cases, unintentionally. In the words of a businessman belonging to Honduras’ large Palestinian-descendant community:

Many of our fathers and grandfathers in Palestine were saving their money to go to America...They bought third-class tickets, which were all they could afford. They weren't too smart geographically. The first stop was either the Caribbean or Central America. They didn't speak English, and they didn't speak Spanish. So they came without any papers, and without a penny in their pockets, and were admitted to a country that really opened its arms to them. (Luxner 2001)

Similarly, according to Helmi Nasr, then-director of the Universidade de São Paulo’s Center for Arab Studies: “Many of these immigrants came to Brazil without really wanting to...They had purchased steamship tickets to America, thinking they were heading for North America. After quickly recovering from the initial shock of discovering they had arrived in South America, they started to make the best of it” (*Washington Times* 2005). Most of these immigrants belonged to Christian families; in recent decades Muslims have comprised an increasing percentage of Arab immigration to

¹³ At least two special issues of journals have sought to analyze similar themes: “Together Yet Apart: Arabs and Jews in Latin America” in *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* (2011, volume 6, issue 2) and “Arab Women in Latin America” in the Lebanese journal *Al-Raida* (spring-summer 2011, issue 133-134).

Latin America, which has declined sharply but not ceased entirely.¹⁴ In one contemporary manifestation of continuing migratory flows, several thousand Syrians have recently arrived in Latin America—and particularly Brazil—as refugees, fleeing the violence, chaos, and instability of their home country (Brodzinsky 2014; Lissardy 2015). Smaller groups of Palestinian refugees have also been resettled in Latin America in recent years, mainly in Chile and Brazil (Henríquez 2008; Wellbaum 2007).

Arab immigrants in the region quickly established themselves as merchants, comprising, to give one example, an astonishing 90 percent of “peddlers” in the 1893 São Paulo city almanac, concentrated around the city’s *Rua 25 de Março* (Karam 2007, p. 25). Rio de Janeiro’s *Saara* district would form an additional locus of activity for Arab-Brazilian merchants (Luxner 2005). As Brazil industrialized under the protectionist policies of Getúlio Vargas during the early-mid twentieth century, Arab-Brazilians came to play a significant role in the country’s textile industry; subsequently facing intense competition from Asia, they diversified into other sectors, such as real estate and imports, while later generations in particular would increasingly join the ranks of the professional class (as doctors, lawyers, politicians, and so forth), and now run some of Brazil’s largest businesses (Karam 2007, pp. 27-33; Morrison 2005, pp. 432-434). The anthropologist John Tofik Karam (2007, p. 2) explains the current status of Arab-Brazilians in no uncertain terms:

Nearly a half-century after the last major waves of immigration, Middle Easterners have attained an unprecedented kind of privilege throughout Brazil. They oversee multimillion-dollar business ventures, constitute an estimated 10 percent of both the City Council in São Paulo and the federal congress in Brasília, own advertising and television enterprises, star in the

¹⁴ On Islam in Latin America, see the recent volume, *Crescent over Another Horizon: Islam in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latino USA* (Logroño Narbona et al. 2015).

top-rated soap opera *O Clone (The Clone)*, and run some of the most envied country clubs among national elites.

The history and evolution of other Arab-Latin American communities follows a broadly similar trajectory, with initial waves of immigrants engaged in commerce and light industry, in some cases also concentrated in specific neighborhoods, such as *Patronato* in Santiago de Chile (on the Chilean case, see: Bray 1962). In turn, subsequent generations have often branched out into positions of broader political and economic power in their respective societies.

As this literature suggests, Arab-Latin Americans have come to occupy a distinct space within the imaginaries of their respective countries. Based in part on this story of economic mobility, but also drawing from a longer history of Arab stereotypes, the general Latin American population has often associated *turco* ethnicity and identity with shrewdness, thriftiness, and a pathological propensity for commerce. In her account of the politics of soccer in modern Chile, which included the formation of Arab-Chilean immigrant sports clubs,¹⁵ the historian Brenda Elsey (2011, p. 156) notes that: “Sports magazines, newspapers, and comic strips depicted Arab Chileans as parasitic. They caricatured Arab business leaders as voracious social climbers who built empires by exploiting Chilean workers and consumers.”

These clubs were founded as a response to (and to counteract) discrimination, as well as to facilitate integration and “create a space for their community within popular culture” (Elsey 2011, pp. 149-164). They were also an avenue for political involvement,

¹⁵ Palestinian immigrants in Chile founded what is now a first-division soccer team, called *Club Deportivo Palestino*. The club still maintains ties to the Palestinian-Chilean population, for example through uniforms that use the colors of the Palestinian flag (green, red, black and white). In a recent controversy, the Chilean football authorities banned the team from wearing “anti-Israel” jerseys in which the number “1” had been replaced with the image of historic Palestine.

as the Arab-Chilean community recognized that it “continued to lack social prestige corresponding to its economic status” (Elsay 2011, p. 160). As opposed to other immigrant groups in Chile, such as the Spanish and Italians, Arab-Chileans were seen as “permanently foreign,” and were unable to fully incorporate themselves into the national imaginary of “Chilean mestizaje [that is, the dominant racial mixture]” (Elsay 2011, pp. 162-163).

In other words, Latin American Orientalism is the lens through which “local” majority groups have often interpreted the exotic, foreign and conniving Arab “Other” (Camayd-Freixas 2013). Indeed, so extreme is the imagined association between Arab-Latin Americans and a cutthroat, blood-sucking entrepreneurial mentality that these groups have often been viewed as “pariahs” whose sense of belonging to the larger national community is in doubt (Karam 2007). Karam (2007, p. ix), himself of Lebanese-Brazilian descent, recounts being told that: “you don’t have the face of a Brazilian” and “you’re *turco!*” by an exasperated Brazilian vendor who had tired of his haggling, and who subsequently called him a “cheapskate.”

They are also seen as being prone to financial misconduct. Thus, the massive corruption scandal involving Paulo Maluf—the Lebanese-Brazilian former mayor of São Paulo—has often been portrayed through an ethnicized lens (Karam 2007). Going back to earlier times, “Arabs were...assumed to use their innate business acumen for personal enrichment at the expense of the agriculturally imagined Brazilian nation,” more interested in peddling their wares and accumulating wealth than contributing to the country’s economic prowess, then based on agriculture (Karam 2007, p. 26). As the

famed Brazilian anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro (2000, pp. 317-318) noted, in a passage worth quoting at length:

The Arabs have been the most successful immigrants, quickly becoming integrated into Brazilian life and attaining positions in the government. They have even forgotten where they came from and their miserable life in the countries of their origin. They are blind to the fact that their success can be explained to a large degree by the casual attitude they have in addressing and working with the local society: armed with prejudices and incapable of any solidarity, detached from any loyalty and family or social obligations. All of this allows them to concentrate their entire effort on getting rich.

The attitude of these immigrants is frequently one of disdain and incomprehension. Their tendency is to consider poor Brazilians responsible for their own poverty and to view the racial factor as what sinks the descendants of Indians and blacks into misery. They even state that the Catholic religion and the Portuguese language have contributed to Brazil's underdevelopment. They ignore the fact that they arrived here as a result of crises that rendered them superfluous, discarded from the workforce in their homelands, and that here they found a huge country already opened, with fixed frontiers, autonomously governing its destiny.

Of course, Arab-Brazilians are used here as a convenient foil for other Brazilian elites.

According to this highly misguided construct, Brazil's non-Arab elites have evinced greater levels of "solidarity" with and "loyalty" towards the general population, and never blamed the poor for their lot in life, or attributed the "misery" of "Indians and blacks" to "the racial factor." Thus, Ribeiro's narrative suggests that, Arab-Brazilians aside, there has indeed been something of a "racial democracy" in Brazil; however, it has been corroded by the rise of Arab-Brazilians, who, in his account, do not share the traditional non-Arab elite's supposedly enlightened views towards the country's dark-skinned masses. It is in this sense that Arab-Brazilians have been considered "pariahs," occupying a space in the Brazilian imaginary that is reminiscent of anti-Jewish stereotypes in Europe, the U.S., and elsewhere.

Yet, as Karam (2007) argues in one of the more theoretically minded works in this area, perceptions of Arab-Brazilian ethnic identity have shifted in recent years, coinciding with neoliberal economic reforms and the country's increasing insertion into the global economy. Once seen as *pariahs*, (some) Arab-Brazilians have now become *partners* of the Brazilian state and business community, as each seeks to expand its footprint in the Arab world (Karam 2007, p. 23). With the Brazilian government and economic elite searching for allies and export markets, they have turned to Brazil's own Arab-descendant population to serve as intermediaries; the presumption is that they (and only they) possess the necessary cultural capital to reach economic and political agreements with other Arabs, and that they are able "to negotiate and barter the way only Arabs do" (Karam 2007, p. 41). Thus, interested state and private-sector parties found their way to the doorsteps of existing and newfound groups who had already been promoting Arab-Brazilian relations on their own. The breadth and depth of the latter's activities would dramatically expand with the coalescence of this new public-private network, united behind the notion that Brazil and Brazilian companies needed to pay more attention to the Arab world.

While their supposed capitalist proclivities are still the target of suspicion in other contexts, when it comes to serving the imperatives of Brazil as "the export nation," Arab-Brazilians, and this particular understanding of Arab-Brazilian identity, are to be valorized, not disparaged. Whether for this or less cynical reasons, the Brazilian state has on occasion presented a more sanguine reading of the history of Arab immigration to Brazil. Accordingly, at the opening of the first Summit of South American and Arab Countries, held in Brasília in 2005, Lula noted that: "[T]here are few countries that have

the quantity of Arabs and Arab descendants who live in this country...[T]hese people helped to build this country” (Karam 2007, p. 174). Here, the literature on immigration and diaspora leads us to our second category: foreign policy and commercial relations.

Foreign Policy and Commercial Relations

As noted, Karam (2007) argues that Arab-Brazilian economic elites—including high-level groups such as the Arab-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce—have been able to insert themselves into the national imaginary by offering their ethnic and cultural capital to the Brazilian state as it seeks to reach out to the Arab and Muslim worlds. Among other activities, the Chamber “issues ‘certificates of origin’ for Brazilian exports to the Middle East, plans commercial missions for Brazilian state and business elites to the Arab world, represents Brazil in Arab-sponsored international fairs, and organizes seminars that train Brazilian elites in how to do business with Arab countries” (Karam 2007, pp. 36-37).

Thus, his account demonstrates how private actors participate in the construction of economic, political, and cultural ties between these two regions. Most of the literature in this area, however, focuses on state actors in Latin America, and especially how they have engaged with the Arab world in terms of foreign policy, often relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As noted, there is also a smaller body of literature concerning U.S. accusations of Middle Eastern “terrorist” groups operating in Latin America (Costa and Schulmeister 2007; Karam 2011). In both cases, the concerns of this research are largely empirical instead of theoretical.

The general foreign policy literature on Arab-Latin American relations is mostly a recent phenomenon. This reflects moves by numerous Latin American governments since the end of the Cold War to diversify their political and economic partners beyond

the typical cast of characters—primarily the U.S. and Europe—and reach out to Global South regions to which, with some exceptions, they had previously paid relatively little attention (Funk 2013). For some, this has been motivated by a deliberate strategy of fomenting a more multipolar world order in which Northern countries are no longer the central node through which all linkages must pass. As noted by Celso Amorim—who served as Lula’s foreign affairs minister, and is the current defense minister under president Dilma Rousseff—these actors are creating a world in which “to get from Brazil to Cairo, you won’t need to pass through Washington and Paris” (Karam 2007, p. 174).

One manifestation of the region’s turn toward the Arab world is the 2005 initiation of regular summits between the Arab League and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), a landmark in the institutionalization of these relations. As Amorim (2011, p. 52) commented, the Summits of South American and Arab Countries (ASPA, per the Spanish and Portuguese acronym) represent the “first time” that “these two parts of the developing world were brought together.” Such has been the substantive increase in these political ties that, as Amorim (2011, pp. 48-49) noted, the Middle East has come to occupy “the center of our diplomatic radar.” Lula himself became the first Brazilian head of state to make official visits to the Arab world, where he traveled to 10 different countries, shook countless hands, and opened several embassies (Amorim 2011, pp. 50-51).

Numerous works have contemplated this new era in Arab-Latin American relations. These tend to either focus on the foreign policies of the big, more internationally active Latin American states—such as Brazil (Amar 2014; Amorim 2011; Amorim 2015; Brun 2011; FUNAG 2001; Haffner and Holand 2012), Mexico (Tawil

2013), Chile (Baeza and Brun 2012), and Venezuela (Herrera Navarro 2008)—or analyze these relations from a broader or pan-Latin American perspective (Botta 2012; DeShazo and Mendelson Forman 2010; Moya Mena 2011; SELA 2012; Vélez 2015). There is broad agreement here that contemporary Arab-Latin American relations are of unprecedented breadth and scope (Moya Mena 2011), though Brazil stands head and shoulders above its neighbors by all accounts. Other countries, such as Chile, are only in the “initial stage” of building these ties (Baeza and Brun 2012, p. 63).¹⁶ We must add the further caveat that Rousseff is notoriously less interested in international affairs than her predecessor Lula, and has been distracted by a stalled economy and the preparations for the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics; at most, Brazil’s posture is now to consolidate Lula’s gains in building relations with the Arab world as opposed to making more dramatic advances.

Meanwhile, commercial exchange between the regions has soared, with South American-Arab trade more than tripling in the past several years (*Al Jazeera* 2009; *MercoPress* 2012).¹⁷ Indeed, the Arab world is now a larger export market than Western Europe for Brazilian agricultural products (dos Santos Guimarães 2012). Linking the worlds of immigration and commerce, Arab imports of South American *mate*—a caffeine-rich tea that is widely consumed throughout much of the Southern Cone—have also blossomed in recent years, having been introduced to Syria and Lebanon in particular by Arab immigrants to South America who subsequently returned to their

¹⁶ Translation is my own.

¹⁷ See, for example, the trade figures compiled on the pages of the Arab-Brazilian (<http://www.ccab.org.br/infobiz-online/en/home.aspx>) and Arab-Argentine Chambers of Commerce (<http://www.ccaa.com.ar/estadisticas.html>) (both accessed October 31, 2014).

homelands. Personifying the trend, Abu Wa'el Dhiab, a Syrian national and former detainee at the U.S.-run Guantánamo Bay detention camp who in December 2014 was released to Uruguay, noted through his lawyer that *mate* was “very popular” in Syria and that he used to drink it about three times a day (de los Reyes 2014).¹⁸

Further, there is an increasing trade in manufactured goods, typified by the Brazilian firm Embraer, whose model 170 jet is currently the second-most used aircraft in the Middle East (*MercoPress* 2011a). Recent years have also borne witness to the establishment of nonstop flights linking these regions.¹⁹ Summarizing the novelty and potentially transformative nature of these growing ties, Amorim declares that the two regions are ushering in “a new world economic geography” (Karam 2007, p. 174).

Predating the current boom in Arab-Latin American relations, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has long been—and continues to be—of particular interest for Latin American foreign policies (Sharif 1977). Indeed, Latin America has for years been a diplomatic battleground for Israeli and Palestinian influence (Glick 1959). As a Peruvian scholar observed several decades ago, “Latin America's interest in the Palestinian Question has grown considerably, up to the point of being one of the few issues invariably included in most conversations and studies about global affairs” (Abugattas 1982, p. 117). Just as generations of left-wing Latin American leaders and thinkers have

¹⁸ Translation is my own.

¹⁹ For example, the carrier Emirates launched daily flights between São Paulo and Dubai in 2007. Subsequently, Qatar Airways initiated flights from São Paulo to Doha in 2010, while direct service with Etihad Airways to Abu Dhabi began in 2013, followed by flights to Casablanca on Royal Air Maroc. Beyond São Paulo, Emirates has extended service to Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires, while Royal Air Maroc has added service to the former, and Qatar Airways to the latter. Emirates has also announced that it will add Panama City to its route network, in what would be the world's longest nonstop commercial flight. It is in turn set to be overtaken in duration by an announced Qatar Airways route between Doha and Santiago de Chile.

openly sympathized with the Palestinian cause, inspired by a shared anticolonial/imperial narrative, Latin American conservatives have often sided with Israel.

During the 1970s and 1980s, when much of Latin America was ruled by far-right military regimes, Israeli arms dealers were a frequent sight in the region (Bahbah 1986). Military-to-military ties continue to be tight, particularly between Israel and Colombia. In turn, Arab-descendant and Jewish populations in Latin America have to varying extents over time mobilized around and lobbied their governments about the conflict (Baeza 2014). Latin America would also be affected in other ways. For example: in the wake of the Six-Day War in 1967, which resulted in Israel's occupation of Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem, the Israeli government "consolidated" and to some extent carried out "a plan for promoting Arab emigration from the occupied territories to South America" (Karam 2013a, p. 756).

More recently, Latin American states—led by Lula's Brazil—have become increasingly active in critiquing U.S. ownership over diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict (Burton 2013). After Venezuela recognized Palestine as a state in 2009, Brazil's move to do so in December 2010 spurred nine other South American states—all except Colombia—to do the same in the following two months. Whatever the effect on Palestine's longstanding statehood bid, the symbolic message of these declarations was clearly to assert the ability to operate independently from the U.S.

Accordingly, Argentine Foreign Minister Héctor Timerman explained his country's decision as part of a foreign policy approach to the Middle East that is free of U.S. "hegemonic interferences" (Forero and Zacharia 2011). In leaked diplomatic cables, the

then-U.S. ambassador to Brazil is quoted as remarking that “Brazil does not understand Middle East affairs, it’s only joining the ‘anti-Israel’ choir”; Brazil later rejected U.S. calls to discuss its policies towards the region, with the then-foreign minister replying that “Brazil does not need US permission to conduct its foreign policy” (*MercoPress* 2011b). In Lula’s words, there is “a growing tendency in Latin American states to break out of the ghetto of U.S. diplomacy” (Gomez 2005).²⁰

The general tenor of this literature is highly normative, implying that as opposed to Washington’s gross favoritism toward Israel’s maximalist claims, Latin American states—particularly Brazil—could play a more productive role in addressing the conflict. Because of this and the aforementioned migratory ties between the regions, it should come as no surprise, as the *BBC* recently noted, that “Latin America is a region that is well known—and loved—by the Palestinians” (*BBC Mundo* 2014).²¹

Toward a Political Economy of Arab-Latin American Relations

There is, then, a substantial body of literature on Arab-Latin American relations. By quantity of production, one can happily observe that much has changed since the early 1980s, when, as one scholar noted, while “Arab-Latin American relations have grown in the last few years to an unprecedented level[,...][t]his expansion in political and economic exchange has not received adequate attention in academic institutions or research centers and remains largely unexplored” (Saddy 1983, p. xi). Yet to the extent that this literature has not permeated IR’s traditional bastions, this observation

²⁰ For a general assessment of contemporary U.S.-Latin American relations, see Funk (2015b).

²¹ Translation is my own (original Spanish: “*América Latina es una región bastante conocida-y querida-por los palestinos*”).

continues to resonate: for these relations have indeed been “explored,” though mostly not in the Northern-based “academic institutions or research centers” that matter.

Leaving this critique of Northern IR aside, what, then, can we say in general—and more theoretical—terms about Arab-Latin American relations and the motivations of these various Latin American actors for reaching out to and strengthening ties with the Arab world? As specified in the UNASUR Constitutive Treaty,²² is the goal to create a “multipolar” and “balanced” world order? Is Latin America adding to its stable of partners to lessen its traditional reliance on the North and assert itself as a “pole” in the context of a less U.S.- and Europe-dominated global scenario? To put the question more broadly, as well as to engage with common academic and lay arguments about Latin American foreign policy, are these countries pursuing relations with the Arab world for “pragmatic” or “ideological” reasons (Gardini 2011, p. 17)? That is, are Latin American states guided by “usefulness, workability, and practicality” or “principles and doctrinaire solutions” (Gardini 2011, p. 17)?

The question is itself ideological, or at the very least has strong ideological undertones. This is clear from the juxtaposition of an “ideological” foreign policy that is “doctrinaire” and “characterized by relatively short-term planning and a personalized vision of international relations,” with a “pragmatic” one that involves more rational, “medium-term” deliberation over “practical consequences” and is more focused on broader national interests (Gardini 2011, p. 17).

²² The text of the treaty is available at: <http://www.unasur.org/uploads/0c/c7/0cc721468628d65c3c510a577e54519d/Tratado-constitutivo-english-version.pdf> (accessed September 1, 2014).

For years it has indeed been commonplace—at least since Jorge Castañeda’s (2006) classic essay on Latin America’s “left turn”—to separate the region’s left-leaning governments into two camps: one that is “modern, open-minded, reformist, and internationalist” (read: good), and another, “born of the great tradition of Latin American populism,” that is “nationalist, strident, and close-minded” (read: bad). According to this Manichean worldview, the former—such as Chile (the perennial Latin American poster-state), Uruguay, and Brazil—are to be “support[ed],” while the usual suspects that comprise the latter—Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia—need to be “contain[ed]” (Castañeda 2006).²³ And just as we can effortlessly separate Latin America’s governments into “good” and “bad,” so it is with foreign policy. Here, Castañeda’s “modern” left equates to those with a “pragmatic” approach, while the “close-minded” states engage with the outside world based on ill-conceived and myopic “ideological” strategies.

Presumably it is mere coincidence that the great pragmatic-ideological divide neatly aligns with those countries that, respectively: A) are more closely aligned with Washington, wholeheartedly embrace neoliberal reforms, and do not actively seek to build political and economic relations with what the U.S. considers to be pariah states; or, B) find themselves on Washington’s official “enemies” list, are at least mildly critical (rhetorically, if not in practice) of neoliberalism and neoliberal globalization, and, for better or worse, openly engage with Washington’s geopolitical adversaries (Iran, Cuba, etc.). Yet in this latter regard, it is not immediately clear whether Venezuela, for

²³ There is a further ideological presumption here: that is, that the strategy pursued by the “good” Latin American states—which in general signals closer adherence to a neoliberal model, with fewer tariffs and trade barriers and less state regulation—is somehow less “ideological” than its more statist counterpart. Yet of course, notions such as “open markets,” “free trade,” and indeed “capitalism” as a whole are just as ideological as their opposites. Even these “pragmatic” economic relations are thus also “ideological” by definition.

example, is being “pragmatic” or “ideological”—or both—in seeking to diversify its pool of allies. I will leave this question to others.

What is of more immediate concern is another ideological assumption lurking underneath the dichotomy between a “pragmatic” and “ideological” foreign policy. This is the notion that in order to understand Arab-Latin American relations—or any other such axis—what is needed is merely to evaluate the “foreign policies” of the involved countries. Thus, “international relations” boils down to “foreign policy analysis,” meaning a primary focus on the state as *the* unit of analysis and the concomitant overlooking of the role of other actors in questions of international/global politics and economics.

Here, we return to my prior critique of the literature on Arab-Latin American relations: its excessive state-centrism. This focus is problematic for several reasons. First, as I argue above, framing Arab-Latin American relations merely in terms of state policies and interactions blinds us to the equally large if not larger role played by other actors, namely the aforementioned economic elites, many of whom hail from the private sector. A fuller account of these relations must explore how these different sets of public and private actors both work together and compete to promote their visions, goals, and interests vis-à-vis the Arab world.

Based on my own research, the most important actors in this regard include: government export agencies (such as Apex-Brasil, Argentina’s Chamber of Exporters and Fundación ExportAr, and ProChile) and economic ministries (for example, Chile’s General Directorate of International Economic Relations [DIRECON]); international business organizations (for example, the Gulf Latin America Leaders Council, based in Buenos Aires); and business networks, both sector-wide (such as Chile’s Federation of

Industry [SOFOFA]) and those based on particular country or regional relationships (most prominently, the Arab-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce and the Arab-Argentine Chamber of Commerce, but also many smaller organizations such as the Argentine-Lebanese Chamber of Commerce and the Brazilian-Iraqi Chamber of Commerce and Industry). As I have identified, this is precisely the web of public and private actors that enables commercial flows between the regions and is largely responsible for promoting Latin American commerce with the Arab world.

Second, by overlooking the role of private-sector business elites, this literature does not fully grasp how central economic factors are to explaining and understanding Arab-Latin American relations.²⁴ Instead, it implies a statist account in which politics is naturally privileged over economics. According to this reading of Arab-Latin American relations, the latter's interests have largely revolved around how to respond to and potentially play a role in resolving the geopolitical maladies affecting the former region, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, fallout from the Arab Spring, or, in the broader Middle Eastern context, the impasse surrounding Iran's nuclear program. These are real issues of concern for at least a number of Latin America's more internationally active states and there is no reason to doubt that foreign policy gurus in the region are sincere in their desire to "break out of the ghetto of U.S. diplomacy" or disrupt Washington's "hegemonic interferences" by pursuing more independent foreign policies.

However, this storyline fails to capture the *economic* interests of Latin American actors—again, both public and private—in pursuing closer ties with the Arab world or

²⁴ Though this project focuses specifically on the Latin American side of the equation, the same broad point presumably also applies to how Arab and Middle Eastern actors approach Latin America.

Middle East. In some cases, the above logic may apply to economic relations, insofar as certain Latin American commercial elites also seek to reduce their commercial dependency on the U.S. and other traditional powers. Yet the question of trade relations cannot be reduced to a national or regional interest in autonomy. The global capitalist system both produces and is peopled by actors with different interests and concerns, ranging from individualistic and parochial (that is, the profit motive) to transnational, global, and cosmopolitan.

Finally, parsing Latin American foreign policies without accompanying analysis of dominant economic interests, and how the two interact, smuggles in the highly problematic assumption that Latin American states are autonomous from domestic class forces. That is, by viewing Arab-Latin American relations through the prism of Latin American states, to which we attribute either a “pragmatic” or “ideological” foreign policy, we may ignore the question of whether the state is the proper unit of analysis in the first place. What if, in turn, the Chilean state’s increasing interest in the Arab world originates not from an autonomously generated state policy, but rather from the country’s globalizing economic elite, which through various forms of structural, political, and economic power has been able to turn its provincial class interests into those of the Chilean state? This is not an argument but rather a question that requires investigation. Focusing on foreign policy may lead us to hone in on the visible (state) “superstructure” while overlooking the submerged (private) “base.” My goal is not to promote a vulgar Marxist account in which states are mere empty vessels for capitalist elite interests—yet it would be just as problematic to assume that the state, and state foreign policy, are autonomous from these powerful groups.

As the above comments suggest, what we need is to understand the *political economy* of Arab-Latin American relations. In analyzing how “Argentina” or “the Argentine state” interacts with the Arab world, we must ask not just what kind of foreign policy or goals it is pursuing. We must go deeper and interrogate where those policies or goals come from in the first place, whose interests they serve, and how different sets of public and private elites—who may or may not be of Arab descent²⁵—cooperate, compete, and struggle to both define the government’s agenda as well as pursue their goals through nongovernmental means. The idea is not to argue for the primacy of either political and state-based interests, on one hand, or economic and private ones, on the other. Rather, it is to capture the dynamic interplay between them.

A political-economy approach is all the more salient given recent developments in Arab-Latin American relations. First, there has been a clear tendency for Latin American political and economic elites to feed off of each other’s efforts to reach out to the Arab world. In their visits to the region, it is customary for Latin American political leaders to travel with entourages of interested business elites. Further, the aforementioned ASPA gatherings are accompanied by parallel “CEO Summits,” the third of which—held in October 2012 in Lima—drew more than 500 attendees from both

²⁵ While a disproportionate number of these elites do claim Arab ancestry (vis-à-vis their representation in the overall population), many do not. For example, although many of the directors of the Arab-Argentine Chamber of Commerce are of Arab descent, none of the figures involved in the Chamber’s day-to-day administration share this ethnic background. Other such organizations, such as the Arab-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce, are almost entirely composed of individuals of Arab descent: in this case, Syrians and Lebanese. Within the realm of corporations and other economic institutions that engage with but do not focus exclusively on the Arab world, there is again an overrepresentation of Arab-Latin Americans, though many of the relevant actors are from non-Arab backgrounds. Building bridges between these different groups—elites of Arab and other ancestries—is often recognized as an important goal. The former leadership of the now-defunct Chilean-Arab Business Council, for example, has pointed to its own failure to expand its base beyond the Arab-Chilean community as one of the primary reasons that the organization did not gain more traction.

regions.²⁶ To further drive home the point, “businessmen are very attentive to the signals conveyed by governments,” as Amorim (2011, p. 52) notes. “Often leaders wave the flag and businessmen follow suit.” Yet the inverse is also true. As we have seen, private-sector groups are actively engaged in “training” local capital to go global, helping establish new axes of trade relations where the state is paying relatively little attention, and pressuring the state to adopt the very deregulatory policies that allow for increased trade and financial flows between the regions in the first place.

Given this protagonist role, we should not be surprised that while political ties between Latin America and the Arab world have stagnated or perhaps declined in recent years with the departure of more activist administrations such as Lula in Brazil and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, economic relations, though somewhat affected by the recent global crisis, are playing an increasingly prominent role in defining Arab-Latin American relations. Whether characterized by “ideology” or “pragmatism,” what we see in this regard is that both Latin America and the Arab world are becoming increasingly integrated into the web of global capitalist relations. Thus, this project aims to shed light on the mix of political and economic interests that will continue to propel these relations.

Beyond the brief summary and critical analysis presented here, I will leave it to others to more fully historicize our understanding of Arab-Latin American relations. Indeed, some of the above-cited works aim to perform this very task. In turn, my project

²⁶ There has also been a series of “Latin America Mid-East Investors Forums,” organized by LatinFinance, which bills itself as “the leading source of intelligence on the financial markets and economies of Latin America and the Caribbean” (see the organization’s website, available at: <http://www.latinfinance.com/About-Us.html> [accessed February 7, 2016]). For information on the third (and apparently latest) such forum, held in Abu Dhabi in 2011, see: http://www.latinfinance.com/EventDetails/0/4117/The-3rd-Latin-America-Mid-East-Investors-Forum.html#.VVePs_IViko (accessed February 7, 2016).

intends to address the other three critiques: that is, this literature's state-centrism, its privileging of politics over economics, and its neglect of theory.

To summarize, in seeking to construct a political economy of these relations, I reveal a network of both public and private economic actors who are instrumental in advancing these ties. The idea is not to marginalize the state's role, but rather to paint a more complete portrait of the merchant and other capitalist elites who occupy posts both in the private and public sectors and are the real midwives of these booming trade relations. Notably, this analytical focus also moves us beyond Arab-Latin American relations as being the exclusive domain of Arab-Latin Americans, for while perhaps a majority of these actors do indeed assert Arab ancestry, a significant number do not. In this sense, I seek to add to current understandings of what is at stake in Arab-Latin American relations, who the key actors are, what motivates their actions, and how and why this growing axis of relations may be significant and worthy of attention in the first place.

Additionally, I utilize the empirics of these relations—that is, my interview “data,” based on dozens of in-depth conversations with the aforementioned actors—to pursue a broad theoretical question in the field of global political economy. In other words: based on the Arab-Latin American case, to what extent is there evidence for a global capitalist class that exists as a class-for-itself, with a shared, global, and cosmopolitan class consciousness? It is to this topic that I now turn.

CHAPTER 4 BETWEEN GOD, COUNTRY, ETHNICITY, AND CLASS: THE COMPETING WORLDVIEWS OF LATIN AMERICA'S "GLOBAL" CAPITALISTS

Per the above political-economy account, the driving force behind the contemporary surge in Arab-Latin American relations is a small yet dynamic network of public and private economic elites. Their often hidden efforts toward encouraging, promoting, and making possible global commerce qualify them as the midwives of an increasingly globalized capitalist system. Accordingly, as defined above, many of them comprise a "merchant capitalist class."

The extent to which their actions are actually "global" according to the criteria of the global capitalism school is unknown. As I have argued, scholars are still struggling—with mixed and uneven success—to develop meaningful indicators that capture whether elite economic actors the world over participate in "globalized production and...globalized circuits of accumulation" (Robinson 2004, pp. 47-48). More work is clearly needed in this regard.

Developing clear and accepted indices of globality in this material sense is of course beyond the scope of my project and is necessarily a topic for future research. Regardless, what is clear is that these Latin American merchant and other capitalist groups are deeply embedded in the globalization of capital through the tasks they carry out in their daily lives. That is, they live and breathe global economic relations through their day-to-day, lived experiences. However "globalized" Latin America turns out to be in objective terms through these trade relations according to a given index, actors such as these are largely responsible for it.

My project aims to reveal, then, how these globalizing capitalist elites in Latin America view their own participation in globalization, understood again in political-

economic terms as the spread of capitalist relations and increased capitalist exchange.¹ What is the link between their objective realities—daily routines and entire lives dedicated to bringing down economic barriers, signing trade deals, building cross-border relationships, and training business elites, all with the end goal of more interregional trade, more interregional financial flows, and more interregional economic intertwining—and how they understand, process, and construct their own activities and worlds? Having figured out *what* they are doing, the question becomes: *why* are they doing it? In this sense, though my analytical focus is on ascertaining the extent to which these actors form a global capitalist *class-for-itself*, I seek to shed light not only on their class consciousness, but also on what it is that they actually do. Thus, through studying the ideational, the material also manifests itself.

Standard Marxist accounts provide a compelling if obvious answer to the question of how to explain capitalist behavior: through the establishment of competitive markets in which there are winners and losers, capitalism operates as a structural power to discipline and indeed determine human action. Capitalists are, and must necessarily be, interested in profit above all else, for this is the only way to prosper—or even survive—in a world that is defined by a cold, economic logic. In this sense, as Marx would have it, it is not only the worker who is alienated under capitalism. Capitalists themselves are also in need of “human emancipation” through the creation of a new “society which would abolish the preconditions and thus the very possibility of huckstering” (Marx 1843b, pp. 46, 48). To borrow from the anarchist thinker Emma

¹ One could also, of course, analyze the *Arab* elites who are at the forefront of their region’s relations with Latin America, though this topic goes beyond the scope of the present study.

Goldman (1917, p. 68), human nature under capitalism is “caged in a narrow space” and “whipped daily into submission” by the exigencies of the market. For these thinkers, freeing humanity from a dehumanized existence of utter servility to the profit motive thus requires transforming the structures that bring those behaviors into being in the first place.

While this standard Marxist-inspired structuralist story helpfully puts the spotlight on the economic structures that fundamentally condition human action, it of course does not—and indeed, at least in its more sophisticated variations, does not intend to—account for the gamut of human behavior or the complexity and diversity of the human experience. We are multifaceted creatures with complicated identities, goals, motivations, and thoughts, which themselves are the product of social interactions and are always, to some greater or lesser extent, in flux. The capitalist system certainly does demand that its elites participate in markets and engage in profit-seeking behavior, in the process turning them into a “caged” form of *homo economicus* or “economic man” (or woman). Yet this does not relieve us of the analytical burden of understanding the diverse “interpretive frameworks through which” the profit motive is “filtered.”

In other words: the idea is not to contradict Marx’s structural analysis, but rather to add to it by deciphering how structures manifest themselves in the worldviews and actions of real living and breathing capitalists. In turn, this leads to a demystification of the political uses of globalization discourses, which, as I will delineate later, often proffer a hyper-structural account of the global capitalist system as part of a self-serving rhetorical strategy to demonstrate the futility of any attempts to regulate or exercise control over that system or the activities of its agents. The capitalist system does indeed

create “one-dimensional” men and women (Marcuse 1964) for whom “huckstering” is their *raison d'être*, introduced to us by Marx as “our friend” (Mr.) Moneybags (1867, pp. 336, 343). As Marx (1867, pp. 362-363) describes in *Capital's* first volume:

As capitalist, he is only capital personified. His soul is the soul of capital. But capital has one single life impulse, the tendency to create value and surplus-value, to make its constant factor, the means of production, absorb the greatest possible amount of surplus-labor.

Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.

The capitalist may be many things—“a model citizen, perhaps a member of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty of Animals,” and so on (Marx 1867, pp. 363-364). Yet the capitalist “has no heart in its breast” (Marx 1867, p. 364). The logic of profit governs his/her behavior so thoroughly that “the dealer in minerals sees only the mercantile value but not the beauty and the unique nature of the mineral” (Marx 1844, p. 89). Indeed, “the need for money” is “the only need” that is “produced” by capitalism (Marx 1844, p. 93).

Marx’s account of the capitalist is hyperbolic and ideal-typical, but it is not fundamentally incorrect. “Absorb[ing] the greatest possible amount of surplus-labor” is precisely the behavior that the capitalist system demands and produces. The capitalist who eschews profit-seeking for sentimentalist concerns will—in all probability, but perhaps not universally—be outcompeted by cold, unfeeling, and alienated “economic (wo)man.” It is a system that engenders Adam Smith’s (2008, p. 264) “vile maxim of the masters of mankind”—“all for ourselves, and nothing for other people.”

Yet the plodding, subsuming structural juggernaut that is the capitalist system does not tell us all that we need to know about capitalist behavior. To return to the use of metaphor, at the level of the individual within the system there are sieves, filters, and

lenses through which capital's awesome structural power must pass before turning into actual human behavior. Indeed, as the Marxist sociologist Erik Olin Wright (2015) correctly observes, "It's never been true that class, by itself, explains consciousness. Consciousness is shaped by all sorts of other things besides the particular mechanisms subsumed under the concept of class." Even Marx—despite the caricatured prevailing versions of his thought—displayed a respectable sensitivity for his time concerning how class, race, and gender intersect within national societies (Anderson 2015).

What, then, *would* Marx himself make of such an analysis? By focusing on the would-be global capitalist class as a class-for-itself, does the present line of inquiry amount to what he denounced as "[e]mpty talk about consciousness" that overlooks the fact that "life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life" (Marx 1846, p. 155)? Are we falling into the trap of German idealism, "which descends from heaven to earth"—that is, from the ideational to the material—instead of more properly "ascend[ing] from earth to heaven" (Marx 1846, p. 154)? Why not confine ourselves to studying a given class as a class-in-itself? If the ideational is epiphenomenal, why not focus on the material? As Marx (1846, p. 154) forthrightly elaborates his position in *The German Ideology*:

we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, not from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises.

On the one hand, Marx (1846, p. 154) is correct to argue that, "the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life." And indeed, in the

ethnographic vignettes that follow, I aim precisely to link the ideational qualities of these capitalist elites with their material realities. Yet “directly interwoven” as they may be, he is too aggressive here in arguing that the former is merely the “direct efflux” of the latter (Marx 1846, p. 154). In other writings, Marx helpfully adopts a more properly nuanced posture concerning the relation between the material and the ideational.²

Indeed, part of the critique that I offer is of the notion—common to the literature on the global capitalist class, and to less sophisticated readings of Marx in general—that a seamless, one-to-one relationship exists between seemingly global practices and a global consciousness. To return to a previous example, the extent to which business elites the world over “read the same newspapers, wear the same suits, drive the same cars, eat the same food, fly the same airlines, stay in the same hotels, and listen to the same music” (Robinson 2008, p. 31) does not *necessarily* allow us to presume that they have become a global capitalist class-for-itself at a precisely corresponding level. The material and ideational are indeed “directly interwoven,” but the relationship is not so slavish.

² Overall, Marx is in fact somewhat ambiguous, and perhaps inconsistent, on the material-ideational link (and in general, is a much more nuanced thinker than contemporary [mis]readings of his works by political scientists and many others suggest). In short, he does not always present the relation between the material and ideational as being so automatic.

For example, although he writes in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* that “modern subjection to capital...has stripped” workers “of every trace of national character,” Marx (1888, pp. 482, 500) closes the same document by urging that “WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!” He is not stating here that the workers of the world have developed a global working-class consciousness, but rather attempting to spur it into existence with his revolutionary pamphleteering. In other words, workers the world over may have lost “every trace of national character,” but they are not necessarily cognizant of such. In this formulation, there is thus of course no one-to-one relationship between the material and ideational. That Marx was in fact not precisely the crude materialist of modern-day caricatures is a point made repeatedly by David Harvey in his well regarded lectures on *Capital*, that supposedly most materialist of texts (available at: <http://davidharvey.org/reading-capital/> [accessed February 7, 2016]).

My own extensive empirical analysis, presented below, provides no room for doubting the idea that the capitalist system produces class consciousness among the bourgeoisie, as Marx would have it. Yet for a more complete picture, Marx's eminently powerful structural analysis must be complemented by a deeper interrogation of other axes of identity, such as nationalism, transnationalism, and globality. The question, again, is how class consciousness is "filtered" through different "interpretive frameworks." How, where, and why capitalists seek profits indeed depends on numerous subjective factors—related, for example, to race, ethnicity, religion, and national belonging.

In regards to the latter category, I find few reasons to disagree with the observation of Benedict Anderson (2006, p. 3; italics in original), who comments that "nationalism has proved an uncomfortable *anomaly* for Marxist theory and, precisely for that reason, has been largely elided, rather than confronted." Exploring the stickiness of national identities in the face of Marxism's frequent stubborn insistence on the predominance of class-based identities of course served as the inspiration for Anderson's (2006, p. 10) iconic question in *Imagined Communities*: why is there no "Tomb of the Unknown Marxist"? In other words: profit-seeking, yes, but that is not all that defines human beings and their life-worlds. In turn, what is needed to understand capitalist behavior—not *if*, but *where* they choose to accumulate capital—is to go beyond viewing the profit motive in isolation by conducting fine-grained empirical analysis that allows us to capture how this particular goal is filtered through the other aforementioned prisms of identity (as well as others that are beyond the scope of my project).

It is here that our story begins. The following two chapters present ethnographic-inspired vignettes that delve into the life-worlds of Latin America's would-be global capitalist class. Based on dozens of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Latin American elites who have significant economic relationships with the Arab world, these chapters explore how these actors make sense of their own protagonism in the global capitalist system.

Are they the stateless, free-floating, and cosmopolitan "global capitalist class" of the global capitalism school? If not, what is the complex mix that defines their identities? Alongside the profit motive, what motivates them to rise every morning and toil away as the midwives of a global capitalist system that increasingly chases them "over the whole surface of the globe" and drives them to "nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, [and] establish connexions everywhere" (Marx 1888, p. 476)?

Before addressing these questions through an interpretive analysis of the stories of seven representative members of Latin America's would-be global capitalist class, we must pause to consider the potentially significant role played by other axes of identity, lest we construct a false narrative in which class and a stylized nationalism-transnationalism-globality divide crowd out all other mental frameworks. Based on a comprehensive analysis of these interviews, the two most relevant factors are ethnicity (and particularly, Arab ethnicity) and religion. Here, I discuss them in turn, followed by a review of the nationalism-transnationalism-globality debate. At this point, a most important caveat is in order: while different forms of identity may indeed compete for predominance in the minds of the respondents, we cannot claim that they represent a zero-sum game. That is, to take one example: a strong religious identity may supersede

a class-based one—or it may mingle with it, reinforce it, and combine with it in novel ways. The task of the analyst, again, is to attempt to make sense of these complex arrangements. Finally, to close the chapter, I present an overview of my overall argument.

***Turco* Race/Ethnicity (and Class) in Neoliberal Latin America**

Unlike many other formerly colonized areas, Latin America is a region of relatively strong national identities (and, in turn, relatively few ethnically based social or separatist movements). Accordingly, highly diverse “immigrant” groups—from the Japanese in Brazil to Jews in Argentina—have generally become recognized, if not always accepted, components of the national imaginaries of countries throughout the region. So it is with Arab-Latin Americans, who have integrated themselves into national life—and, in many cases, into their respective countries’ white-mestizo elites—while also retaining an Orientalist mystique as an exotic “Other.”

Here, race, ethnicity, and class intersect in myriad ways. Their extensive intertwining is indeed a feature of both the world in general and perhaps Latin America in particular, where skin color, ethnic traits, and socioeconomic status have been profoundly and inextricably linked since the colonial period (Mignolo 2005; Quijano 2000). In the case of Arab-Latin Americans, the nexus between popular understandings of *turco* ethnicity and class considerations is again revealed by Ribeiro’s (2000, pp. 317-318) aforementioned observations concerning Arab immigrants to Brazil—who, as he notes, are “armed with prejudices and incapable of any solidarity, [and] detached from any loyalty and family or social obligations.” This, in turn, “allows them to concentrate their entire effort on getting rich.” Indeed, as noted above, it has long been the case that certain groups—Arabs, Jews, etc.—have been perceived (or vilified) as cosmopolitans

based on crude stereotypes that stress their prioritization of “getting rich” over the proper, national-based concerns that are said to motivate the region’s traditional elites (such as the Portuguese in Brazil, Basque in Chile, etc.). Thus, the current analysis rejects any forced and false analytical separation of ethnic/racial- and class-based identities.

Rather, the point for the moment is to isolate artificially the racial/ethnic axes—in the spirit of an ideal type—in order to wrestle with their relative import vis-à-vis the “competing worldviews” under consideration here. But I seek to do this without losing sight of the fact, again, that separating ethnicity, race and class, at least in the Latin American context, is a fool’s errand.

As noted, a great many of the protagonists behind these trade relations are themselves, unsurprisingly, of Arab descent—mostly Syrian or Lebanese in the Brazilian and Argentine cases, and Palestinian in Chile. One may reasonably suspect, then, that *turco* ethnicity provides the subjective mooring that motivates these actors to serve as conduits for Arab-Latin American exchange. This ethnic angle, as noted at the outset, is one of the very factors that makes the Arab-Latin American case an intriguing one for analyzing capitalist identities.

In other words, it is tempting to surmise that the day-to-day economic activities of Arab-Latin American economic elites revolve around the Arab world precisely because their Arab background motivates them, consciously or not, to focus on trading with Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine—or, further afield, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco—instead of China, North America, or Europe. Such is the case with the following chapter’s opening vignette, which frames one particular figure’s *raison*

d'être in terms of an identity dominated by notions of both Argentine and Lebanese exceptionalism. This place-based worldview flies in the face of the hypothesis of a global capitalist class as a class-for-itself, which posits a global identity based on class lines and shared participation in particular global chains of accumulation. For its part, an Arab-Latin American identity could represent a transnational consciousness that is filtered by an ethnic lens. Perhaps, in turn, both axes—Arab identity and (global) class consciousness—may exist simultaneously, overlapping with and to a large extent reinforcing one another.

God before Class?

At the level of popular stereotypes, business and religion do not mix. The latter is a drag on the former as it introduces ethical reasoning and other extraneous considerations into the fundamentally amoral realm of buying and selling. As the nuclear-power magnate C. Montgomery Burns from *The Simpsons* once remarked while advising children from the local “Junior Achievers Club”: “Family. Religion. Friendship. These are the three demons you must slay if you wish to succeed in business. When opportunity knocks, you don’t want to be driving to a maternity hospital or sitting in some phony-baloney church. Or synagogue” (Ewalt 2005). Marx (1888, p. 475) is similarly forthright in asserting that the bourgeoisie “has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation.” In their place, “it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation” (Marx 1888, p. 475).

In reality, of course, many businesspeople are of course religious, and indeed many religious denominations and practices—such as prosperity gospel—provide convenient spiritual justifications for the accumulation of vast personal fortunes. In the

United States, we are highly accustomed to this marriage of faith and opulence, embodied by elegantly dressed “televangelists” who eschew traditional asceticism in favor of preaching wealth as a sign of God’s blessing.

In the Latin American context, while traditional elites have often participated in exclusive sects such as the ultraconservative Catholic order Opus Dei, recent years have borne witness to the explosion of U.S.-style charismatic Evangelical churches—for example, Brazil’s Neo-Pentecostal *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God). Appropriately for an organization that preaches prosperity gospel, the church’s founder is himself a billionaire and media mogul (Chesnut 2003). While the lower classes were in many cases the first to convert, Evangelical congregations now draw from a range of socioeconomic classes. Few works have seriously analyzed the religiosity of Arab-Latin Americans, beyond the general story—as noted earlier—that many of the Arab immigrants who arrived to Latin America adhered to Orthodox Christianity. In recent years Islam has predominated among the much smaller numbers of arrivals. As part of their general social-cultural integration, Catholicism—and, presumably, Evangelical Christianity—have taken root among many of the longer-standing populations.

Again, to the extent that religion is a dominant motivator and axis of identity among these groups, it is an argument against the global capitalism school, which asserts a primary identity based on belonging to a global capitalist class. However, one could also conceptualize religion as its own sort of global identity. This much is suggested by the Arabic term *ummah*, which refers to the supranational Muslim community. Though this is not necessarily the case, religion thus at least has the

potential to represent a distinct form of globality. As is the case with prosperity gospel, class and religion may also intermingle in profound ways.

On National, Transnational, and Global Class Identities

More than religion, my analysis indicates that what defines the worldviews of the Latin American capitalist groups under investigation here is the lived tension between place-based (national, ethnic, transnational) and place-less (global) class identities. In other words, religious affiliation (Orthodox Christian, Muslim, Catholic, etc.) and other axes that I have left unexplored (including gender, sexual orientation, and so on) of course *matter* in how Latin American capitalists define, construct, and understand their own identities. However, national/ethnic, transnational, and global concerns—and the frictions between them—weigh particularly heavily on the brains of these actors. It is to exploring the dynamic relationship between these mental frameworks, as well as evaluating their relative import for this segment of the Latin American capitalist class, that I now turn. In so doing, the concern is again the extent to which they qualify as a *global* capitalist class.

Making analytical sense of fluctuating and intersecting identities is of course no easy task. Indeed, the difficulty of studying this topic perhaps gives us a partial explanation as to why scholars laboring in this research area have mostly chosen to focus on *objective* instead of *subjective* aspects of globality. This task—my task—is rendered even more difficult by two additional complications.

First, these competing worldviews do not manifest themselves as merely an “either/or” phenomenon in which one can simply plot interviewees’ identities on a national-transnational-denational-global continuum. Rather, as Manfred Steger (2008, p. 247) astutely observes, “the global [imaginary]...erupts in fits and false starts, offering

observers confusing spectacles of social fragmentation and integration that cut across old geographical hierarchies in unpredictable patterns.” What we are left with is thus far from a static picture. Rather, it is a snapshot of a process that is very much in flux, and whose elements—nationalism, transnationalism, globality, etc.—come into contact in a dialectical process that creates new amalgamations of identity. To further extend the visual metaphor, if global identities are on the rise, they are obviously not being painted onto blank canvases, as if the human mind were a *tabula rasa*, a veritable Etch A Sketch whose lines fade away with a few shakes—or, in this case, with the development of an increasingly interconnected global capitalist system. To the extent that it is a “real” phenomenon, globality emerges inside of, and is conditioned by, the national imaginaries that predate it. It is the analyst’s burden, of course, to make sense of this dynamic and complicated process.

The second complicating factor has to do with one of my core contentions: that capitalist elites utilize discourses about globalization, and presentations of their own “global” identities, to mold public opinion and serve their own material interests. Specifically, as I argue, these groups spread the notion that they are globe-trotting, cosmopolitan actors who are at the helm of a system to which, per Margaret Thatcher, “there is no alternative.” The point is to demonstrate that the global capitalist juggernaut is a structural force that cannot be stopped and that its protagonists cannot be regulated by (territorially based) states. The self-serving nature of these arguments and “presentations of self” should be readily apparent. This, in turn, suggests the need for skepticism regarding the veracity of claims regarding global capitalist identities.

The reality, however, is even more convoluted: for capitalist elites have incentives to present their identities as both “national” and “global.” I have already discussed the latter. If ours is a world of fully *global* capitalist elites and yet *nation-based* governance, then capitalists and capital are largely free to roam unfettered. This assertion of a global identity thus becomes a means “to accumulate capital and power,” to borrow again from the anthropologist Aihwa Ong (1999, p. 6). This becomes clear, as I will show in the following chapters, through the recurrent (and often hyperbolic) concerns expressed by interviewees concerning the regulation of business activities by the state.

In regards to the former, there are also material benefits to the presentation of a national identity. The point is obvious from a U.S. perspective, where the slogans “Buy American” and “Made in America” tap into deep-rooted patriotic sentiments. In much of the world, capitalists reside and operate within national contexts where the masses are becoming increasingly restive and suspicious of elite behavior. Indeed, in many places, capitalism as a system—or at least its financialization—is coming under fire for being the cause of periodic economic crises, inequality—and the language of “the one percent”—is becoming a common talking point on the national political agenda, and rising social movements are pushing back against decades of neoliberal reforms and general attacks on the welfare state and material wellbeing of the working class. It might be too much to speak of a crisis of ruling-class hegemony, as some Gramsci-inspired thinkers would have it (see, for example: W. Robinson [2014]). Yet cracks and new fault lines are clearly emerging, as they perpetually do. In this context, draping themselves in the language of the state, nation, and patriotism is a means—as it has always been—for

capitalist elites to escape proper scrutiny by asserting that they are “one of us” and that we are all “playing on the same team.”

Navigating between these two perspectives, in which there are structural incentives for these actors to present themselves as both *national* and *global*, comprises a further methodological and empirical challenge for this project. While inescapable, recognition of this difficulty provides further justification for my aforementioned methodological choices: the pursuit of an interpretive approach with an ethnographic sensibility, which—as opposed to much contemporary political-science research—is highly attuned to context and well suited for the task of allowing us to enter into the constructed life-worlds of these human agents.

Summary of Argument

Naturally, the interviewees present complex identities in which ethnicity, religion, and numerous other factors are clearly present. However, overall, and based on the present analysis, *class* is the ubiquitous and inescapable invisible hand that serves as the primary, first-order motivator of their behavior. In other words, at least in the present context, class proves to be intersectionality’s “binding agent” (Wallis 2015).

This, however, does not answer the guiding question of this study: is there such a thing as a (Latin American) global capitalist class? To phrase the query more usefully: what, again, are the interpretive frameworks through which this overriding class identity is filtered? Is the “imagined community” of the capitalist elites who are behind Latin America’s economic relations with the Arab world national, transnational, denational, global, some mixture thereof, or something else entirely?

To put the argument that emerges into its most stripped down form: the death of the nationalist imaginary has been greatly exaggerated. Place-based capitalist mental

frameworks (*national* and *transnational*) continue to predominate; scattered hints of *global* belonging emerge, but are only nascent and inchoate; and even these continue to be dressed in national clothing. Based on the interviews, I speculate about the slow rise of a global capitalist class identity, though in the absence of longitudinal research, this is little more than a preliminary hypothesis. While I will not engage in reckless generalizations based on these case-specific findings, this study provides ample reason to at least be skeptical of a weighty and diverse body of theoretical work—ranging from Huntington’s “Davos Men” to the global capitalism school’s “transnational capitalist class”—that suggests that capitalist elites have unilaterally filed for divorce from the state.

The last part of my argument confronts a remaining puzzle. If global capitalist identities are less real than the conventional story—told by conservatives, Marxists, and others in between—suggests, then why do capitalist elites brag about their global credentials, and why has the idea of a stateless, free-floating, cosmopolitan capitalist class permeated both lay and scholarly discourse? What in the *material* world explains the recurring appearance of this *ideational* construct, even when there is so little in the way of evidence to support it?

To borrow from the celebrated economist and *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman, certain ideas may “flourish because they are in the interest of powerful groups” (cited in: Chomsky 1996). As I will argue, global elites promote the *idea* of the global capitalist class precisely because of its ideological content: it posits an ungovernable world in which capitalist elites have no material or ideational attachments to the state. Thus, it lays the ideological groundwork for a capitalist fantasyland in which

regulation is both unthinkable and impossible. I do not mean to suggest, naturally, that Marxist scholars of global political economy also intend to encourage such defeatism. Yet through its at-times overly aggressive assertions concerning the rise to hegemony of a seemingly omnipotent global capitalist class, the global capitalism school has precisely the effect of disempowering those who seek to regulate the activities of capitalist elites or indeed imagine a different, alternative form of globalization. Before arriving at this endpoint, in the next two chapters I tell the stories of seven representative figures from Latin America's would-be global capitalist class.

CHAPTER 5 THE TRADITION OF DEAD GENERATIONS: ON THE PERSISTENCE OF NATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL LONGINGS

My skeptical arguments concerning the existence of a global capitalist class are based on a careful analysis of the worldviews and actions of the Latin American capitalists who are responsible for the region's booming relations with the Arab world. In this and the subsequent chapter, I tell several of their stories. Given the interpretive philosophy and approach that undergird this project, I present them in the following pages as ethnographic vignettes that are rich in context, sensory details, and meaning.

This format allows me to foreground the complexities of the conversations as well as provide my own analysis and reactions—not as if I had a “view from nowhere,” but as a living, breathing, and situated human being (and interviewer, researcher, and conversation partner) who is engaging in a fluid and dynamic exchange of words and ideas. At least for present purposes, in which questions of meaning are paramount, this format is superior to the traditional political-science approach toward interviewing, which involves: A) speaking *for* interviewees instead of allowing their own voices and lived experiences to shine through; B) reproducing selected quotations without the surrounding context; and C) presenting an overly linear argument buttressed by univocal evidence from interlocutors while foregoing the complexity of the real world.

In regards to this last point, Fernando Henrique Cardoso's methodological advice again comes to mind. As he argues: when conducting research, “it is necessary...to avoid the simplistic reductionism so common among the present-day butterfly collectors who abound in the social sciences and who stroll through history...with the blissful illusion that their findings can remove from history all its ambiguities, conjectures, and surprises” (Cardoso 1977, p. 21). What the researcher needs instead is “patience”

(Cardoso 1977, p. 21). The “interpretivist lens” that I don here rejects the notion that such complexity is a nuisance “to be cleaned up” and instead seeks out “situated, intersubjective understandings that shed light on how people construct, navigate, and challenge their social worlds” (Schaffer 2016, p. 16).

The two following chapters both contain three ethnographically informed vignettes, one from each of the principal countries—Argentina, Brazil, and Chile—under consideration. Most focus on particular individuals while another presents the stories of multiple figures within the same organization. In all instances, the actors under analysis are precisely the merchant and other capitalist elites who are responsible for the recent boom in Arab-Latin American economic exchange. I have chosen to portray these specific figures for two reasons. First, they are representative of the much larger body of interviews and conversations. And second, they bring to the foreground particular emblematic moments that will help draw our attention to important overall features of the subjective existence of the would-be Latin American global capitalist class.

In this first chapter, I present the stories of three such individuals and organizations. The first is Dr. Antonio Aramouni, an economist by training who founded and for decades has served as director of the *Cámara de Comercio Argentino Libanesa* (Argentine-Lebanese Chamber of Commerce). Next are Nawfal Assa Mossa Alssabak and Jalal Jamel Dawood Chaya—respectively, the president and administrative vice president of the *Câmara de Comércio e Indústria Brasil Iraque* (Brazil-Iraq Chamber of Commerce and Industry). The final interlocutor is Jorge Daccarett, former executive director of the Chilean government’s International Cooperation Agency and founding executive director of the private-sector *Consejo Empresarial Chileno-Árabe* (Chilean-

Arab Business Council), who is currently a corporate consultant, international business professor, and advisor for Latin America with the Bank of Palestine.

Together, these vignettes represent those whose mental frameworks display a strong place-based (national and/or transnational) consciousness, a subgroup that, as I argue, comprises a narrow majority within the larger population of the Latin American capitalist elite. It is important to note that even here there are hints of denationalizing—and, to a lesser extent, globalizing—trends. Yet the class consciousness evinced by these actors is clearly filtered through an interpretive framework that is predominantly national or transnational. In turn, the next chapter analyzes three sets of actors whose class consciousness is less national or transnational than denationalized or global. It is again fitting to note that identities are composed of complex mixtures of diverse, competing, and intermingling ideas. The national-transnational-denational-global distinction thus cannot be reduced to discrete categories. For the sake of analysis, it is much more akin to a continuum, in which one expects to find different levels of all such phenomena coexisting within the mind of the same individual. At the conclusion of the empirical chapters, I proceed to analyze these cases as a whole and develop my overall argument that this evidence does not suggest the existence of a *global* capitalist class.

To return to the present task, the focus is on how the very same place-based longings that a diverse group of thinkers—ranging from Samuel Huntington to leading lights of the global capitalism school, and indeed including many globalization theorists in general—argue are rapidly becoming obsolete are in fact a sticky and persistent feature of the contemporary world. It is for this reason that the title of this chapter invokes Marx's (1852, p. 595) observation that "the tradition of all the dead generations

weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.” This statement emphasizes the extent to which inherited structures constrain and condition human agency in the present. In Marx’s (1852, p. 595) own (famous) words: “men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past.” Similarly, national and even transnational longings may appear passé in today’s seemingly hyper-globalized world of free trade, cross-border interconnectivity, and time-space compression (Harvey 1990). Yet the “old” place-based interpretive framework, far from melting into air, continues to filter the profit-seeking activities of many of today’s international capitalists.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. To find out whether they form a truly “global” capitalist class, I asked interviewees both directly and indirectly about the goals and motivations that lay behind their economic activities. I also sought out subtle verbal and nonverbal cues. What follows are illustrative vignettes from the aforementioned interviewees, presented again with an ethnographic and interpretive sensibility. Together, they begin to tell the story of how this group of Latin American economic elites understands its globalizing activities and shed light on the complex amalgamations of diverse interpretive frameworks through which these activities are filtered.

Vignette #1: Antonio Aramouni

Of the nearly \$7 billion in annual Argentine exports to the Arab world—representing more than a fourfold increase from a decade prior—a relatively small but

not insignificant amount of mostly agricultural and other food products (including *mate*¹), valued at just over \$100 million, is destined for Lebanon.² Since its founding in 1977, on the thirty-fourth anniversary of Lebanon's independence day, the *Cámara de Comercio Argentino Libanesa* (Argentine-Lebanese Chamber of Commerce) has labored to build these commercial—and also social and cultural—ties, within “*el complejo y exigente contexto de la globalización*” (the complex and demanding context of globalization).³

To that end, the *Cámara* performs consulting work for businesses, connects sellers and buyers, issues certificates of origin for Argentine exports, and—when practical, which, for reasons to be enunciated later, it is often not—collaborates with the Argentine government. The *Cámara* itself was born during and because of Lebanon's messy “civil” war (1975-1990), as a breakaway organization from a now-defunct Syrian-Lebanese chamber of commerce.⁴ Syria, as I am later informed, has always wanted to “swallow” Lebanon.

Since its inception, the *Cámara* has been led by Dr. Antonio Aramouni, an economist by training who is the proud descendant of “*la primera ola de inmigrantes*” (the first wave of immigrants) to arrive in Argentina from Lebanon. Indeed, among the

¹ This refers to a caffeinated drink, nearly ubiquitous in Argentina, Uruguay, and some other parts of the Southern Cone, which is made from the dried leaves of the *yerba mate* plant.

² These figures are available at: <http://ccaa.com.ar/estadisticas.html> (accessed February 1, 2016). By comparison, Argentina imports less than \$3 million in Lebanese goods annually.

³ These quotes are drawn from different sections of the *Cámara*'s website. See: <http://camaralibanesa.com.ar/nuestros-servicios/> and <http://camaralibanesa.com.ar/la-camara/nuestro-emblema/> (both accessed February 1, 2016).

⁴ During its 29-year occupation of Lebanon, from 1976-2005, Syria “gained almost exclusive control of Lebanon's politics and economy.” It also maintained a military presence, which, at its high point, consisted of 30,000 soldiers. Lebanese reactions to the Syrian presence were mixed—from those who celebrated Syria's role as “brothers in arms in the face of the Israeli enemy,” to others, such as my interviewee, who decried Syrian involvement in Lebanon on national (as well as, at least implicitly, religious) grounds. For additional background, see Fattah (2005).

up to several million Argentines who claim Arab descent, Lebanon, along with Syria, are by far the most common countries of origin. As we chat over tea, a dark wooden mural occupying nearly the entirety of the rear wall stares back at me. It features an etching of the famous Lebanese cedar tree, accompanied by images of Phoenician merchants and their trading ship. Lest the symbolism be lost on us, the *Cámara*'s website helpfully notes:

The typical merchant vessel of the Phoenicians was used by these traders par excellence to crisscross all the seas of the Old World, exchanging goods, art, and culture.

The cedar—an ancient tree, almost eternal, praised time and again in the Bible—is the national symbol of glorious LEBANON.⁵

We may assume that this capitalization of the country name was not accidental.

Likewise, the *Cámara*'s emblem features the image of the cedar tree, surrounded by its product, again a Phoenician trading vessel. With the words “Chamber of Commerce” wrapped around the outside in English, Spanish, and Arabic, the evocation of the Lebanese people as preternaturally gifted merchants is clear.⁶ The traditional Argentine sun—which occupies the center of the national flag—radiates outward from the ship.

⁵ Translation is my own. Original text: “*La típica nave mercante de los fenicios es la que estos comerciantes por excelencia utilizaron para surcar todos los mares del antiguo mundo, intercambiando bienes, arte y cultura. El cedro, árbol milenario, casi eterno, alabado una y otra vez en la Biblia, es el símbolo nacional del glorioso LEBANO.*” It is available at: <http://camaralibanesa.com.ar/la-camara/nuestro-emblema/> (accessed February 1, 2016).

⁶ Indeed, a propensity for commerce is often held—by Lebanese and non-Lebanese alike—to be firmly implanted in the Lebanese people’s DNA. This national imaginary is based in part on references to the exploits of the Phoenicians in sailing and commerce, and has its contemporary equivalent in parts of the Lebanese diaspora, such as in West Africa. As the *BBC* notes, the Lebanese-West African population is estimated at anywhere from 80,000 to 250,000, and has “thrived” in “one of the most difficult and dangerous places to do business,” propelled by “the Lebanese tenacity, aptitude for business and drive to succeed.” Of particular relevance for present purposes is the Latin American link within the “apocryphal” story of the arrival of the Lebanese in West Africa. As legend has it:

Sometime toward the end of the 19 Century, a ship-load of Lebanese immigrants was heading to Brazil, seeking profit from the booming new world. The first stop after several weeks sailing was

The office building that hosts the *Cámara*, like much of the teeming *microcentro* (downtown) of Buenos Aires, appears tired and faded. Yet it maintains a stately, old European air—this is, after all, the “Paris of the South”—that evokes the Argentina of 100 years prior, when the country was among the top-10 global economies. With the fastest economic growth rates *of any country* during the pre-World War I period, according to *The Economist* (2014), Argentina “could claim to be the world’s true land of opportunity.” It has since gone through a “century of decline”—or, more precisely, endless cycles of booms and busts, as well as democracy and dictatorship.

Surely one legacy of the country’s heady past is reflected in the attitudes of—and stereotypes concerning—its people, none more than the (in)famously brash inhabitants of Buenos Aires, known as *porteños* (literally, port-dwellers). As *The New York Times* once noted, “Argentines have long taken pride in their arrogance,” one manifestation of which is the tendency to “flaunt their European ancestry and culture to their Latin American peers.” Thus, as any viewer of an intraregional *fútbol* (soccer) match can attest to, “Argentines are without a doubt the most disdained group in Latin America” (Sims 1998). If nationalist sentiment should abound anywhere in Latin America, Argentina is a prime candidate.

My interlocutor does not disappoint. After our initial exchange of pleasantries, I begin to answer his question about the topic of my research—only to be promptly interrupted upon my mention of Arab-Latin American relations. He interjects: Lebanon is no mere “Arab” country; nor does Argentina qualify as “Latin American.” I am made to

Senegal and - the story goes - the somewhat unworldly Lebanese passengers got off believing they had arrived in South America. (Walker 2010)

feel that forcing these singular countries into such broad, plebeian regional categories is clearly a sign of sloppy thinking. As I learn, to “*igualar*” (make equal) the relationship between Lebanon and its would-be “Arab” neighbors, or those between Argentina and the more indigenous countries to its north, would be to “*bajar*” (lower—and thus demean) them. As he sits behind his massive wooden desk, concluding his speech on Lebanese and Argentine exceptionalism while opening a recently arrived letter from Lebanon itself, he casually refers to “*cristianos como él*” (Christians like him). He and his fellow Lebanese Catholics, he later tells me, are not like (read: are superior to) other religious minorities in Argentina, as they intermarry with other groups—thus achieving a deeper sociocultural integration with the local society.

I take advantage of a brief pause, while he struggles to print me a copy of the *Cámara*’s aforementioned emblem—of which he is clearly quite proud—to peruse the office. As I glance at the well-ordered bookshelves that surround the outside window, I am greeted with titles such as *Crimes against Business* and *You Can Negotiate Anything*. On cue, he erupts with a litany of accusations against the populist and statist Argentine government of then-president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner: “*hace todo lo posible por no exportar*” (they do everything in their power *not* to export); “*mejores corruptos no hay*” (you won’t find more corrupt people anywhere); the president is “*absolutamente*” (absolutely) crazy—physically, mentally, and even genetically, down to the level of her cells; they spend everyone’s precious tax money on “*estupideces*” (stupid things). For him, Argentina is a country of “taxes” and “red tape.”

As I discover later, what Argentina should be doing is following the example of Chile, the perennial Latin American neoliberal poster-country. “*Chile es mejor*” (Chile is

better), he comments baldly, referring specifically to the country's "*clima social*" (social climate). Based on this narrative of reverence for what he understands to be the uber-capitalist "Chilean model,"⁷ in one of our conversation's more curious moments, he even praises me for having a Chilean wife. "*Elegiste bien*" (you chose well), he quips.

Indeed, so common are fawning, hagiographic invocations of the Chilean model by Latin American elites as being a source of inspiration for all matters economic that I have come to refer to this as the "idea of Chile." He makes no mention, of course, of the country's rampant inequality (among the worst in Latin America, and thus, the world), the profound authoritarian legacies left behind by the Pinochet regime (including the country's constitution, which was imposed under authoritarian rule but is still in use, or impunity for perpetrators of massive human rights abuses), or the fact that for the hundreds of thousands of students who have mobilized in recent years "*por una educación gratuita y de calidad*" (for free and high-quality education), Chile is less a model to be followed than an ominous forewarning of how neoliberal reforms punish everyone from the poor to the middle class and have produced what has been called "the most expensive higher education [system] in the world" (Loofbourow 2013).

But why work so hard to promote business in a country that in his view—unlike the Chilean foil—throws up endless obstacles to his success (and, apparently, his

⁷ Though subjected to an extreme market fundamentalism during the Pinochet regime (1973-1990) by the crusading revolutionary neoliberal economists referred to as the "Chicago Boys" (Valdés 2008), the Chilean economy continues to feature several anomalies that complicate the narrative of Chile as a neoliberal Eden on earth. These include national ownership of a significant portion of the highly lucrative copper industry and a publicly funded national healthcare plan (*Fondo Nacional de Salud*; National Health Fund). Despite its faults, the latter amounts to "nearly universal health coverage" (*World Bank* 2013), the likes of which would provoke fire-and-brimstone warnings of a communist takeover if attempted in the U.S.

happiness)? Why do “*todo lo que se puede*” (everything that can be done) to promote trade relations between Lebanon and Argentina?

He may earn his living as a management consultant, he remarks. But what he *lives* for is his other business card: the one that reads “*presidente*” (president) of the *Cámara*. There is no ambiguity in what drives his life’s ambitions, and why he labors without remuneration. It is “*por amor a la tierra de mis padres*” (for love of the land of my parents). It is “*una cuestión patriótica*” (a matter of patriotism) that draws on a deep reservoir of feelings and nostalgia concerning his family and ancestors—who happen to hail from Lebanon, “*el país más importante del mundo árabe*” (the most important country in the Arab world). At no other point in our conversation does he refer to Lebanon or the Lebanese people as belonging to a larger Arab collective. Such is his love of Lebanon that he is even willing to partially overcome his deep-seated aversion to Islam and Islamism—the two being synonymous in his mind—to express muted appreciation to Hezbollah for what he perceives to be its role in helping to defend Lebanon from Israel.

The Lebanon that exists in his mind is an “outstanding country” (he says this in English), “*absolutamente*” (absolutely), where—unlike in Saudi Arabia, hated Syria, or elsewhere among the country’s supposed Arab brethren—“*todos son trilingües*” (everyone is trilingual). As the entire population of Lebanon is not really trilingual, of course, “*todos*” does not—cannot—actually mean “everyone” in this case. It instead apparently refers to whom he later calls “*la gente bien*”—a largely anachronistic term that means “affluent” or “well-to-do” people, but that in fact evokes images of old-money aristocrats who belong to the traditional nobility and view themselves as models of

moral rectitude. Tellingly, few Latin Americans beyond those who actually belong to such groups—that is, people like my interviewee—use this highly classist expression in public without at least a tinge of irony.

Argentina—and more specifically, the Argentine government—may be “*un impedimento*” (an impediment) to the realization of his life’s ambition to reconnect with Lebanon, yet it is still a place that he claims as his own. Are you patriotic, I ask? He answers with an immediate “*por supuesto*” (of course), which we then repeats four times in quick succession. Throughout our conversation, he asserts a strong Argentine identity—the kind one expects to find among *porteños*. He refers to “*nuestra*” (our) Argentine flag, casually notes that Argentina has the world’s best polo horses, and even boasts of the quality of the country’s livestock. Pope Francis, he warmly remarks, is *our* Argentine pope, and a personal friend (indeed, he offers to send me a picture of them together). Nevertheless, one doubts that he sympathizes with the Pope’s condemnation of trickle-down economics as a “new tyranny” that is based on “a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power,” or agrees with his clarion call for humanity “to say ‘thou shalt not’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality,” in which “the powerful feed upon the powerless” (Downie 2013). National identity apparently trumps political ideology.

Overall, he claims a shared nationalism (and exceptionalism) between the Lebanon of his ancestors and the Argentina that he calls home. In fact, the first nationalism reinforces the latter, as evidenced by his interest in highlighting the contributions of Lebanese immigrants and their descendants to all facets of Argentine society, ranging from music to government. As he notes, the *argentinos libaneses*

(Lebanese-Argentines) are in “*todo el país*” (the whole country). He sees it as his—indeed, as “*nuestro*” (our)—duty as a member of this group to build relations between these two countries, so that he may “*servir patrióticamente*” (patriotically serve) both of them. In other words, he is like the local Maronite church that he frequents: as he puts it, a piece of Lebanon in Buenos Aires (he willingly recounts that the church was designed by Lebanese architects, the stones were imported from Lebanon, and even the bricklayers were Lebanese). Argentina, he notes, “*no es nada fácil*” (is not at all easy). But it is where his cedar tree has put down its roots.

Vignette #2: Nawfal Assa Mossa Alssabak and Jalal Jamel Dawood Chaya

I had become convinced that the *Câmara de Comércio e Indústria Brasil Iraque* (Brazil-Iraq Chamber of Commerce and Industry) either did not exist, or at best amounted to little more than a shell organization. My several attempts during 2013 to contact the *Câmara* elicited no response. Further, with an exclusive focus on Brazil’s relations with Iraq, the organization’s scope seemed too limited to warrant anything beyond the most skeletal of operations—perhaps a businessman’s hobby with a legal name, website, and little else. After all, given the seemingly hegemonic presence of the Arab-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce—which I discuss in the next chapter—in the gamut of matters linking Brazil with the Arab world, what room could there be for a chamber with a partially overlapping, and much narrower, purview?

The following year, after another attempt at contact, I received a prompt response from the *Câmara*’s leadership and an offer to devise a comprehensive itinerary for my visit. To my surprise, they took me under their wing for more than a week of interviews, guided visits to related organizations (including the nearby Arab-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce and the further afield Arab and South American

Library and Research Center [BibliASPA]), shared trays of *baklava*, and invited buffet lunches at the *Al Maza* Arab restaurant on the corner. Such was my level of access that I found myself sharing birthday cake with the *Câmara*'s dozen employees and student interns while Portuguese and Arabic office banter filtered over the cubicle walls. In addition to its robustly staffed Brazil office—which is home to more than twice as many employees as the much older and more broadly based Arab-Argentine Chamber of Commerce—the *Câmara* maintains an Iraq-based representative.

The São Paulo headquarters occupies what appears to be the better part of a floor of the suggestively titled “Diamond Tower” building. Resting upon rows of dark columns, the high-rise's exterior is composed almost entirely of flat, shiny, and reflective plate glass. It is the sort of generic skyscraper that would not be out of place in any business district within a global megacity, and this is exactly where we are. From *Al Maza*, a quick right leads to the bustling *Avenida Paulista* (Paulista Avenue), São Paulo's most emblematic street and traditional economic hub, and one of Latin America's most expensive real-estate markets. Once I pass through the Tower's revolving doors, a security team demands my passport and fingerprints and makes a quick phone call to verify that the *Câmara* has indeed solicited my presence.

At the *Câmara*'s helm are Nawfal Assa Mossa Alssabak and Jalal Jamel Dawood Chaya, both Iraqi-born middle-aged men who have called Brazil home for over three decades—the latter having arrived in 1978 to avoid military service, and the former in 1982 because of a “*mulher*” (woman). The gregarious, chatty, and smooth-talking Alssabak, my primary interlocutor over the course of the visit, is a busy man, and frequently keeps me waiting as he fields phone calls, prances from office to office, and

alternates between dictating orders to and telling jokes with his staff. Along with directing the Brazil-Iraq Chamber, he presides over the *Câmara de Comércio e Indústria Islâmica Brasileira* (Islamic-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce and Industry), is a successful entrepreneur, and is pursuing graduate studies in business administration—with a focus on Brazil’s halal exports to the Middle East—at the city’s *Universidade Paulista* (Paulista University). Together, Alssabak and Chaya lead an organization whose stated ambition is to “increase the list of exports and the volumes of Brazilian products sold to the Iraqi market.”⁸ And with what Alssabak describes as an increase from \$42 million in Brazilian exports to Iraq at the *Câmara*’s founding in 2003 to \$1.5 billion today, business is booming.

It is no coincidence that the *Câmara* opened its doors the same year as the U.S. invasion of Iraq. The “shock and awe” that hundreds of thousands of troops from the “coalition of the willing” visited upon the country culminated not only in the toppling of the 24-year Saddam Hussein dictatorship, but also heralded the end of a strict U.S.-led and United Nations-imposed sanctions regime that had prevented any significant growth in Brazilian-Iraqi commercial flows.

Yet economic obstacles to Brazil-Iraq ties were not exclusively external. Chaya refers to the fact that the Ba’athist regime—based on an ideological mixture of socialism and pan-Arabism—controlled some 95 percent of Iraq’s economy. It would take the Coalition Provisional Authority’s Order 39, as decreed by U.S. diplomat and then-de

⁸ Original Portuguese: “a *Câmara Brasil Iraque amplia a pauta de exportações e os volumes de produtos brasileiros vendidos ao mercado iraquiano.*” The translation is my own. See the original “message” from the Chamber’s website, available at: <http://www.brasiliraq.com.br/index.php/conteudos/92> (accessed February 1, 2016).

facto ruler of Iraq Paul Bremer, to—paraphrasing Marx (1888, pp. 476-477)—“batter[] down all [Iraqi] walls” and allow the bourgeoisie to “nestle,” “settle,” and “establish connexions” in the country. As Naomi Klein put it, “the now infamous Order 39...announced that 200 Iraqi state companies would be privatised; decreed that foreign firms can retain 100% ownership of Iraqi banks, mines and factories; and allowed these firms to move 100% of their profits out of Iraq. The Economist declared the new rules a ‘capitalist dream’” (Klein 2003).

Now, according to Chaya’s estimates, close to 95 percent of what Iraqis consume is imported.⁹ Despite the country’s “*instabilidade*” (instability), he notes, Iraq “*igual tem 32 milhões de consumidores que têm que consumir*” (still has 32 million consumers who have to consume). In steps Brazil as “the export nation” (Karam 2007) and budding halal superpower. It is a perfect match: he describes Iraq as the world’s fifth-largest importer of chicken. Brazil, in turn, is “the world’s largest chicken exporter” (Gomes 2014). For both men, and the *Câmara* as a whole, the “*privatização*” (privatization) of nearly everything in Iraq—from industry to “*serviços públicos*” (public services)—has presented a tremendous opportunity to “*divulgar produtos brasileiros*” (promote Brazilian products) in the land of their birth, everything from food and construction materials to cars and health and safety services.¹⁰

⁹ This quote is provided on the Chamber’s website, available at: <http://www.brasiliraq.com.br/index.php/noticias/124> (accessed February 1, 2016).

¹⁰ For an overview of economic relations between Brazil and Iraq, including a guide for “doing business” between the two countries, see the following report from the Chamber’s website: http://www.brasiliraq.com.br/images/arquivos/doing_business_brazil_and_iraq_eng.pdf (accessed February 1, 2016).

Yet theirs are not precisely the politics of exiles-waiting-in-the-wings who attached themselves Ahmed Chalabi-style¹¹ to an invading force with the hope and expectation of future spoils. Neither speaks with any elation about the U.S. invasion nor lets their apparent distaste for the Hussein regime color their overall opinions of the Iraq that they left behind. As we sit across from each another at one end of a long conference-room table, Chaya remarks that Iraq under Hussein “*era um país muito industrializado*” (was a very industrialized country), and that during the 1970s—under Hussein’s Ba’athist predecessors—Iraqi citizens were more educated than Brazilians. The government, he notes approvingly, paid for the country’s best students to study in the world’s premier universities.

Alssabak’s recollections are more personal but equally telling. In 2008, he returned to Baghdad—the city of his birth—for the first time in decades, accompanying Eduardo Suplicy, a senator from the left-leaning Workers’ Party who represents São Paulo.¹² Suplicy recounts that Alssabak grew “*desapontado*” (disappointed), for he could no longer recognize the Baghdad of his youth, which he regarded as the most beautiful city in the world. Instead, he saw the Green Zone’s concrete walls, “*um sinal da divisão que hoje marca o Iraque*” (a sign of the division that marks Iraq today) (*O Estado* 2008). Nothing better captures his complicated emotional bond with Iraq than the famously difficult-to-translate Portuguese word and Lusophone cultural marker

¹¹ A recurring figure in Iraqi politics until his recent death, Chalabi rose to fame (and notoriety) in the U.S. as a darling of the neoconservative movement. He helped to sell the 2003 invasion to both the U.S. government and general public through the provision of false intelligence concerning the Hussein regime’s would-be terrorist links and weapons of mass destruction program.

¹² See the aforementioned report, available at: http://www.brasiliraq.com.br/images/arquivos/doing_business_brazil_and_iraq_eng.pdf (accessed February 1, 2016).

saudade, which refers literally to a “yearning” or “longing,” but in more holistic terms can reflect “a melancholy nostalgia for something that perhaps has not even happened.” Further, “it often carries an assurance that this thing you feel nostalgic for will never happen again” (Garsd 2015). Accordingly, Alssabak may have physically returned to Iraq, but to borrow from the eponymous Thomas Wolfe novel, on a spiritual level he truly *can’t go home again* to an Iraq that perhaps only partially ever was and that more certainly now no longer is.

What he and they *can* do instead is “*fomentar o comércio*” (promote commerce) between the two countries they have called home and “[*contribuir*] para o *estabelecimento de um canal direto entre empresários brasileiros e iraquianos*” ([contribute] to the establishment of a direct channel between Brazilian and Iraqi businesspeople).¹³ In practice, this entails everything from conducting and publicizing market research, to shaking the important hands of political and economic elites from visiting delegations, and making regular business trips (some 7 times a year, in Chaya’s case), particularly to Iraq’s relatively stable north. This is precisely the sort of “detailed work” that the larger but less nimble Arab-Brazilian Chamber is reportedly unwilling and/or unable to do. And it is here, by charging interested businesses for services rendered, and being the only entity with the authority to issue “certificates of origin” for Iraq-bound Brazilian goods, that Alssabak and Chaya have found their apparently profitable niche (though the *Câmara* itself is not a profit-seeking entity).¹⁴

¹³ See the “*Quem Somos*” (Who We Are) section of the Chamber’s website, available at: <http://brasiliraq.com.br/index.php/conteudos/54> (accessed February 1, 2016).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

This dialectical interplay between two seemingly opposing (but ultimately intertwined) forces—the nostalgia-inducing Iraq that percolates through childhood memories and the cold, economic logic of the business world—plays itself out repeatedly during our conversations. Here, responses to my iterations of the “why” question—that is, *why* do you do what you do?—yield illustrative, if complicated, responses.

Let us take, for example, the genealogy that Chaya presents of his own involvement with the *Câmara*. The first round of questioning reveals a compelling and coherent story: he does what he does because he 1) is Iraqi, 2) wants to “*ajudar a população*” (help the population), 3) perceives a “*necessidade*” (need) for this kind of help, and 4) wants to “*reconstruir o país*” (rebuild the country). Given my social-science training, I wonder, how does Chaya operationalize and measure the success of his altruistic endeavors? How does he know if he, and the *Câmara*, are succeeding?

He succinctly reports the following “*resultados*” (results): a positive “*balança comercial*” (balance of trade), which means an increase in Brazil’s exports to Iraq vis-à-vis its imports. He makes no mention of *rebuilding*, *reconstruction*, *helping*, or other sentimental keywords that had previously passed through his lips. When it is Alssabak’s turn, he responds only by citing the aforementioned increase from \$42 million to \$1.5 billion in annual Brazilian exports. Whether the *Câmara*’s success in promoting this astronomical growth in *Brazilian trade* with Iraq, or creating an export surplus *for Brazil*, actually has any salutary effects for Iraq (let alone the general population of Brazil) is beside the point. What is relevant here is the underlying assumption that it is so obvious that this *must* be the case that one need not present any supporting evidence. In this

sense, Alssabak and Chaya are the living embodiment of Adam Smith’s “invisible hand,” as they believe that their individual actions will automatically bring social benefits to their (suffering) Iraqi compatriots.¹⁵

From here, the waters continue to muddy. Their espousal of a “[Brazilian] trade equals [Iraqi] reconstruction” ideological framework, absent the provision of an explanation of this would-be causal link, even when I ask, appears self-serving. This is, after all, the Brazil-Iraq *Chamber of Commerce and Industry*, not a beneficence society. And yet the *Câmara*’s claim that it “*tem desenvolvido e facilitado atividades culturais e sociais que reforçaram a cooperação entre o Brasil e o Iraque em muitas áreas*”¹⁶ (has developed and facilitated cultural and social activities that strengthened cooperation between Brazil and Iraq in many areas) should not fall on totally deaf ears—as exemplified by references to having provided aid to an Iraqi hospital or its role in organizing the first-ever soccer match between the two countries, an international friendly held in Sweden in October 2012. Such was the symbolic importance of the latter that Itamaraty, the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, lists the occurrence—though without referencing the results, a 6-0 Brazilian thrashing of the Iraqi side—in its

¹⁵ The same ideological framework rears its head to a perhaps even greater extent on the *Câmara*’s website. Consider the slippage between the following understandings of “*desenvolvimento*” (development). First, it is stated that “*a Câmara Brasil Iraque promove o desenvolvimento através da aproximação comercial entre Brasil e Iraque*” (the Brazil-Iraq Chamber promotes development through closer commercial ties between Brazil and Iraq). To clarify, a few lines later, we learn that the *Câmara* “*promove continuamente o comércio entre o Brasil e o Iraque como forma de levar o desenvolvimento aos mercados e empresas dos dois países*” (continuously promotes trade between Brazil and Iraq as a way of bringing development *to the markets and business* of both countries; emphasis added). See the “*Mensagem do Presidente*” (Message from the President) page of the Chamber’s website, available at: <http://www.brasiliraq.com.br/index.php/conteudos/92> (accessed February 1, 2016).

¹⁶ See, again: <http://brasiliraq.com.br/index.php/conteudos/54> (accessed February 1, 2016).

“chronology of bilateral relations.”¹⁷ It is precisely on the terrain of having a *social*, and not just *commercial*, mission that this *Câmara* carves out an identity for itself that differs from that of its much larger Arab-Brazilian counterpart.¹⁸

Indeed, the *Câmara*'s leaders are genuinely interested in all types of “*transferências*” (transfers) that may bring Brazil and Iraq together, as Chaya frames it, even when the profit motive is not involved. Yet the fact that they are unable to explain the link between the economic activities from which they *do* profit, and the social ones from which they *do not*, does not make them hypocrites (though it does, perhaps, suggest a certain lack of reflexivity concerning their everyday activities and place in the world). Rather, it is a well-timed reminder for us to recognize that the profit motive is translated into real-world action only after passing through a series of interpretive frameworks, the sum of which may lack a degree of internal coherence to the outside observer.

That is to say, people's identities are muddy waters indeed. Perhaps we should not be surprised then that Alssabak could salivate over the business opportunities presented by Iraq's hasty privatization scheme while simultaneously suggesting that the Brazilian government's world-famous *Bolsa Família* (Family Allowance) program, which

¹⁷ See: http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11107:republic-of-iraq&catid=155&lang=en&Itemid=478 (accessed February 1, 2016).

¹⁸ Though Alssabak later organizes and whisks me away to a cordial meeting with the Arab-Brazilian Chamber's director, there is clearly bad blood between the two groups. According to Alssabak's official history of all matters related to Arab-Brazilian commerce, which I have not been able to verify independently, the Arab-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce is the product of a fusion that occurred several decades ago between predecessor Iraqi and Syrian chambers. Per this account, the agreement was to rotate the presidency in three-year terms between leaders from the two communities; however, the Syrians, all of whom he claims hail from the western city of Homs, “never gave it up.” Later, as I am being called to enter the office of the Arab-Brazilian Chamber's CEO, I am told that the accompanying intern from the Brazil-Iraq Chamber, who had been helping to facilitate the logistics surrounding my visit, had to wait outside.

establishes a system of conditional cash transfers to low-income households, could be a model for alleviating Iraq's social maladies. Or that Chaya could shift effortlessly from extolling the private sector's—that is, to a large extent, his and Alssabak's own—initiative in promoting Iraqi-Brazilian ties, to declaring that the *Câmara* needs, and gets, the Brazilian government's help with all manner of entrepreneurial activities, ranging from the staging of trade fairs, workshops, and commercial missions to organizing meetings and signing relevant accords.

Unsurprisingly, then, Alssabak is full of praise for Brazil's receptivity toward immigrants like himself, providing as evidence the assertion that the country “*ajuda com os negócios*” (helps with business). While my Argentine interviewees in particular stressed the ideological and personal conflicts that define their relationship with the government, here the *Câmara* has made common cause with the left-leaning president Dilma Rousseff, a portrait-style photo of whom—along with one of her Iraqi counterpart—is displayed prominently in the office waiting room.

From ideology to identity, theirs is a mixed, fluid, dynamic, and hybrid world. There are laments about Iraq's sectarian divisions and deteriorating security situation, but when I ask Alssabak if he “*tem medo*” (is afraid) to operate in this environment, he asserts that money is money for businesspeople. There are invocations of reconstruction, aid for an Iraqi hospital, and building goodwill through staging a *futebol* (soccer) match, all in support of the notion that *this Câmara* has a particularly *social* mission. But what really seems to excite Alssabak is when he talks about his “*loja*” (store), his “*comércio*” (trade), and his role as an “*agricultor*” (farmer), as it is business that he has “*no sangue*” (in his blood). And then there is the Alssabak who leaves me

waiting in a nearby cubicle as he lays out his prayer rug, closes the office blinds, and begins his ritual act of worship, but who also, as both a Muslim and president of the Islamic-Brazilian Chamber, is keenly aware—per a recent academic paper that he jointly authored—of “the rapid growth of Muslim-directed food markets and the emergence of a global Halal food industry” (Carneiro-da-Cunha et al. 2013, p. 282), of which he is naturally a part.

How, then, to classify their worldviews? What are the interpretive filters through which *their* profit motive passes? How do they navigate between the Iraqi and Brazilian flags and presidential photos that adorn the walls of the office waiting room? Searching for a more tangible heuristic, I ask for the *Câmara*’s genealogy. Alssabak responds: the “*Câmara “é brasileira”* (is Brazilian), though its “*origem*” (origin) is “*iraquiana*” (Iraqi). He makes a quick correction: “*alguns dos fundadores são brasileiros também*” (some of the founders are also Brazilian). Such is the intricate latticework of intersecting—and at times competing—Iraqi and Brazilian ties that largely defines not only the *Câmara*’s founding, but also the capitalist worldviews of its entrepreneurial leaders. And while I have been at pains to disentangle them, the more telling point for present purposes is that either way, it is one or another set of *place-based* (national and transnational) allegiances—and the interactions between them—that largely defines their life-worlds and guides the trajectory of their capitalist behavior.

Vignette #3: Jorge Daccarett

As a freshly minted PhD Candidate with grant funds in my pocket, a fast-approaching departure date for a one-way ticket to Santiago de Chile, and stacks of English-, Spanish-, and Portuguese-language Institutional Review Board-stamped consent forms awaiting the opportunity to be read and signed by eager would-be

interviewees, I had made all of the logistical preparations—but none of the actual contacts—for my initial, multi-country research sojourn.

Hoping and *needing* to break into the seemingly esoteric world of Arab-Latin American business connections, the multi-hatted Jorge Daccarett—political appointee, university professor, business consultant, and charity administrator—became my lifeline. As I would soon learn, the *Consejo Empresarial Chileno-Árabe* (Chilean Arab Business Council; frequently referred to as “ChileArab”) of which the Palestinian-Chilean Daccarett was the founding executive director had recently gone into hibernation, thus providing a retroactive explanation for my unanswered phone calls (and the concerns over the viability of my project that accompanied them). Yet once a Google search led me to his government email account, only seven minutes separated my initial, introductory message and his amiable response. It included both his personal cell phone number and an assurance that he was “*encantado de apoyar[me] en el tema*” (delighted to support me with this topic). In June 2013, a few days after I stepped off the plane in Santiago, he would become the first of my several-dozen interviewees among the Latin American business elite; two years later, when I was back in Chile for a variety of personal and professional reasons, he would also become the last.

Then serving as the executive director of the governmental *Agencia de Cooperación Internacional de Chile* (AGCI; Chilean International Cooperation Agency),¹⁹ a position to which he was appointed by the right-wing government of Sebastián Piñera in 2011, Daccarett invited me for our first encounter to his eighth-floor

¹⁹ It has since been rechristened as the *Agencia Chilena de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo* (AGCID; Chilean Agency for International Cooperation for Development).

office within the greying but stately Ministry of Foreign Affairs in downtown Santiago. So regular would become my presence in the *Ministerio* (Ministry) due to a steady stream of meetings with leaders from the Chilean state's international trade bureaucracies that I was soon on a first-name basis with the morning security guard, who began to grant me single-use, building-access cards without the requisite inspection of my passport.

Founded in 1990, the year of Chile's democratic transition, the Agency's stated mission is to "coordinate the cooperation that Chile delivers to countries of equal or lesser development and articulate opportunities for cooperation in favor of Chile to overcome areas defined as pressing and deficient for national development."²⁰ Accordingly, the Agency's activities have the dual function—or at least goal—of simultaneously promoting both *national* and *international* development. As he explains, this position has nothing to do with the Arab world, save for a few small projects with Palestine, as well as his additional efforts to attract "Arab donors" to Central America.

As helpfully delineated in his English-language LinkedIn profile,²¹ Daccarett's other roles have included a stint as executive director of *Belén 2000—Fundación Palestina* (Bethlehem 2000—Palestinian Foundation), a Santiago-based charity that seeks to harness the resources of Palestinian-descendant and other Chileans to "improve the quality of life of the Palestinian people,"²² and an ongoing part-time

²⁰ This quote is from the Agency's official website, available at: <http://www.agci.cl/index.php/acerca-de-agci/quienes-somos> (accessed February 1, 2016). Translation is my own. Original Spanish: "Coordina[r] la cooperación que entrega Chile a países de igual o menor desarrollo y articula oportunidades de cooperación en favor de Chile para superar áreas definidas como prioritarias y deficitarias del desarrollo nacional."

²¹ See: <https://cl.linkedin.com/in/jorgedaccarett> (accessed December 1, 2015).

²² See the organization's website, available at: <http://www.fundacionbelen2000.cl/la-fundacion/mision-y-vision/> (accessed December 1, 2015). Translation is my own. Original Spanish: "trabajamos por mejorar

professorship in international business at the exclusive, Opus Dei-affiliated *Universidad de los Andes* (University of the Andes). There, on a privileged, 52-hectare campus in the foothills of the world's longest mountain range, located within the posh, east-side municipality of Las Condes—the same high-powered neighborhood that is home to the city's "*Sanhattan*" financial district—Daccarett teaches a course entitled "Investing in Latin America," which takes students to South American business hubs such as Lima and Bogotá so that they may appreciate "the opportunities and challenges for Chilean companies on [sic] their international operations" and "meet with both public and private actors."²³

However, Daccarett's true pet project was—and to an extent still is—the Chilean Arab Business Council, which he helped to found in 2007 in order to "bridge the gap between Chile and the Arab World in terms of trade, business and investment." Returning to the same metaphor, the *Consejo* was to become "the natural bridge between both markets" through "developing the Chilean market to be a premium supplier for value added goods and services to the Arab World...and a hub for investment opportunities in the Latin American region."²⁴ "*Lamentablemente*" (Regrettably), numerous factors led Daccarett to more or less pull the plug on the *Consejo* in 2011, including his own assumption of public office, as well as a perceived lack of substantive interest among the *Consejo*'s Arab-Chilean membership base. Yet

la calidad de vida del pueblo palestino, a través de ayuda solidaria orientada a las familias de más escasos recursos."

²³ See, again: <https://cl.linkedin.com/in/jorgedaccarett> (accessed December 1, 2015).

²⁴ See the Council's *LinkedIn* page, available at: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/chilean-arab-business-council> (accessed December 1, 2015).

Daccarett's belief in the viability of increased Arab-Latin American economic exchange lives on through wistful references to one day relaunching the organization as a proper "chamber of commerce," as well as the new role that he took on just months before our second meeting as "advisor for Latin America" with the Bank of Palestine.

Eager to avoid a late arrival to my first meeting, I allowed well over an hour for the late-morning commute—by bus and then subway—to the city's traditional downtown core from my cousin-in-law's cozy though earthquake-scarred apartment in the mixed-class, southeastern Santiago municipality of Macul. My abundance of caution afforded me a few minutes in the mid-winter cold to admire *La Moneda*, the same presidential palace that only four decades prior had been subjected to intense bombing by the country's own air force, culminating in a military coup and a seventeen-year "anthology of horror"²⁵ and savage repression at the hands of the Augusto Pinochet regime (1973-1990).

During the short walk from the seat of government to the Ministry, I pass a monument to the deposed socialist president Salvador Allende. Its base bears an etching from his final speech, delivered as bombs fell and fires raged: "*Tengo fe en Chile y su destino*" (I have faith in Chile and its destiny). Only minutes but worlds away in Daccarett's office, after crossing the appropriately titled *Plaza de la Constitución* (Constitution Square), I find myself seeking to build rapport by accepting a cup of tea and making banal conversation about crowded conditions on Line 1 of the Santiago Metro, South America's longest underground rail network and one of the busiest in the

²⁵ This phrase—"antología del horror" in the original Spanish—is attributed to the celebrated Argentine writer Ernesto Sábato, referring to his country's own bloody experience with authoritarian rule during the same period (de Ramón 2010, p. 239).

hemisphere. He shrugs off my attempt to establish common ground, commenting that an unspecified number of *years* have passed since his last ride.

Allende's hopes aside, perhaps no factor has done more to define Chile's *destiny* since the pacted and fragmentary 1990 transition to democracy than an unwavering commitment to the free movement of goods and capital. The details of the Milton Friedman- and Chicago Boy-led authoritarian imposition of neoliberalism in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as its subsequent universalization across mainstream Chilean politics in the post-Pinochet democratic order, need not detain us here (Funk 2012; Harvey 2005; Haughney 2006; Valdés 2008). Rather, what is germane for present purposes is that postdictatorship, neoliberal Chile is said to have more free trade agreements than any other country *in the entire world* (*AméricaEconomía* 2013). As Daccarett later notes approvingly, the economies represented by Chile's trade deals together comprise a staggering 92 percent of global GDP.²⁶ His subsequent declaration that "*Chile tiene un interés en tener una apertura comercial con la mayor cantidad de países del mundo*" (Chile has an interest in having open trade with the largest number of countries around the world) thus requires no further elaboration. In the admiring, jealous words of the right-wing Argentine intellectual Mariano Grondona (2003), "*Chile no se casa con nadie. Carece de 'relaciones carnales'...su estrategia permanente es vender adonde pueda*" (Chile doesn't marry anyone. It lacks 'physical [i.e. intimate] relations'...its strategy is to sell wherever it can).

²⁶ As cited in the following chapter, the Chilean government's own number is somewhat more modest, at 86.3 percent. See the website of DIRECON (or *Dirección General de Relaciones Económicas Internacionales*, the government's General Directorate of International Economic Relations), available at: <http://www.direcon.gob.cl/> (accessed December 1, 2015).

Daccarett's ambition boils down to marrying Chile's promiscuous international commercial policy with an Arab world, and particularly Gulf region, that is thirsting for: 1) reliable suppliers of agricultural goods—thus improving “food security” in a region that depends heavily on imports to satisfy domestic consumption—and; 2) attractive investment destinations that can absorb the seemingly endless stream of petrodollars (along with, particularly in Dubai's case, earnings derived from tourism, services, shipping, and so on) spewing from the overflowing coffers of its sovereign wealth funds.²⁷ Chile, with its bountiful harvests of agricultural products ranging from apples, grapes, pears, almonds, and avocados to wine and farm-raised salmon, and its reputation as an economically successful country that is “*abierto, serio y confiable*” (open, serious, and trustworthy)—adjectives that are repeated ad nauseam by the country's political class (*La Nación* 2015)²⁸—thus seems to fit the bill nicely. In other words, as Daccarett notes at the very beginning of our conversation, he quickly realized that “*aquí hay una oportunidad interesante que hay que explotar*” (there is an interesting opportunity here that needs to be taken advantage of).²⁹

Indeed, he would repeat the keywords “interesting” and “opportunities” time and again during our visits. And the 2008 founding of the *Consejo* under the auspices of the powerful *Sociedad de Fomento Fabril*, or SOFOFA (the Chilean Federation of Industry, according to the official translation, but whose name more precisely equates to the

²⁷ For more information on such funds and their arrival to Latin American markets, see Santiso (2013).

²⁸ In this case, the speaker was the current president Michelle Bachelet, though one does not need to search long nor hard to encounter virtually identical utterances of Chilean exceptionalism from other members of the country's political and economic elite.

²⁹ He was not alone. Before leaving for a trade fair in Brazil, my cousin-in-law handed me a sampler of *frutos secos* (dried fruit and nuts) to present to Daccarett during our meeting. I politely demurred.

Society for Manufacturing or Industrial Promotion), the stated mission of which is to “represent[] the views and interests of Chilean industry,”³⁰ marked a definite step forward in the efforts of the Chilean business class to attempt to seize them.

The *Consejo* could certainly claim a blue-blooded pedigree. First, it was born within SOFOFA’s rarefied confines, after a series of back-and-forth exchanges with the sector-leading, “benchmark” organization, the Arab-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce. Second, its founding came on the heels of Daccarett’s presence at a meeting in New York alongside Bill Clinton, Jordan’s King Abdullah II, the Crown Prince of Bahrain, and 100 CEOs from both the U.S. and the Arab world, as well as his organization of a business forum that included such luminaries as president Michelle Bachelet and the Lebanese-Mexican business magnate Carlos Slim, one of the world’s richest people (Daccarett excitedly recounts that the two ate breakfast together—in response to my question, he confirms that Slim paid). In sum, the stars seemed to align for a dramatic surge in Arab-Chilean trade.

Initial signs were indeed auspicious. Adopting the model of the Arab-Brazilian Chamber, which had presented then-president Lula with a well-received plan to “*fomentar el comercio*” (promote trade) with the Arab world and developed a close working relationship with his administration, the *Consejo* entered into dialogue with Bachelet and the various arms of the state international trade bureaucracy. The aim was to show that “*hay oportunidades*” (there are opportunities) and encourage her participation, along with a(n) “*delegación empresarial importante*” (important business

³⁰ See the SOFOFA website, available at: <http://www.sofofa.cl/english/sofofa2004.htm> (accessed February 1, 2016).

delegation), in the second ASPA summit (held in Doha in 2009). Daccarett et al. placed particular emphasis on (successfully) using a government grant to obtain halal certification, which involved working with a local mosque, conducting seminars and workshops, and helping the Chilean business community to understand “*de qué se trata el halal*” (what halal is about). He quickly adds that halal certification brings access to markets beyond the Arab world, as there are also many halal consumers in Malaysia, Indonesia, China, and India (and indeed, in Europe, North America, and so on). “*Yo no soy musulmán*” (I’m not Muslim), he specifies. “*Pero es un mercado interesante*” (But it’s an interesting market).

Though Arab-Chilean trade, as noted, has indeed experienced a significant increase in recent years, Daccarett continues to describe these relations as “*muy incipiente[s]*” (very incipient). Several impediments presented themselves along the road to realizing his ambition of replicating the Brazilian success story. First, while Brazil “*tomó una política de apertura hacia el mundo árabe muy intensa*” (pursued a very intense policy of openness toward the Arab world), the Chilean state’s commitment was never more than lukewarm, its gaze firmly directed toward more geographically immediate Asian-Pacific growth markets. “*Chile no tiene interés*” (Chile isn’t interested), he declares.

By way of supporting evidence, he points to a string of missed opportunities and bungled interactions—such as the two occasions on which the Emir of Qatar had announced visits to Chile. “*¿Sabes la respuesta de Chile?*” (Do you know what Chile’s response was?), Daccarett asks me rhetorically. With a mocking, incredulous tone, he recounts the message that the government transmitted to the Qataris: that they could

not receive him because it was summer and everyone was on vacation. Instead, the Emir went to Venezuela, Uruguay, Brazil, and—he reports with a special brand of paused consternation reserved for one of Chile’s chief historical, economic, and geopolitical rivals—even *Peru*. Thus, when he comments that “*hay mucho por hacer*” (there’s much to do) and that “*Chile está very behind*” (Chile is very behind), he is expressing concern not only with missed opportunities for Arab-Chilean trade, but that Chile is starting to lag vis-à-vis its peers. Prospectors from the Gulf are circling the globe searching for investment gold, and it is much to Daccarett’s dismay that the Peruvian port of Callao has received hundreds of millions of dollars in investments from DP World—a Dubai-based corporation that operates “more than 65 marine terminals across six continents”³¹—while Chile appears as empty space on the company map.³²

Another rhetorical question follows, this time reflecting his tendency to sprinkle his native Spanish with key business terms in English: “¿*Sabes cuántos investments están recibiendo esos países?*” (Do you know how many investments those countries are receiving?). To stop the economic bleeding, he suggests choosing diplomats—perhaps, I wonder, like himself—who are linked to the business sector and actually understand the Arab world.³³

³¹ I found this information on the DP World website, available at: <http://web.dpworld.com/about-dp-world/> (accessed December 1, 2015).

³² See: <http://web.dpworld.com/our-business/marine-terminals/> (accessed December 1, 2015).

³³ As he recounts, one such figure “*estaba newly assigned al mundo árabe, y tenía un mapa del mundo árabe que incluía Afganistán y Paquistán, y yo dije no, no, no, no, no, esos no son árabes*” (was newly assigned to the Arab world, and had a map of the Arab world that included Afghanistan and Pakistan, and I said no, no, no, no, no, those aren’t Arab [countries]). “*Hay mucho desconocimiento*” (There’s a lot of ignorance), he suggests. They think an Arab is a “*señor con turbante que habla raro*” (man with a turban who talks weird).

The unexpected second issue was precisely the Arab-Chilean composition of the Arab-Chilean *Consejo*. While its membership base essentially consisted of “*empresarios de muy buenos nombres, todos de origen árabe*” (businesspeople with “very good names,” all of Arab origin), he discovered that few of them had “*un link comercial*” (a commercial link) with the region, or even a particular interest in developing one. Lesson learned: ethnic Arab-Chilean capital will not carry the day.

“*Entonces*” (So), he concludes, “*obviamente que no importa si el empresario es o no es árabe, lo que importa es que el empresario tenga un interés comercial en la región*” (obviously it doesn’t matter if the businessperson is or isn’t Arab, what matters is if the businessperson has a commercial interest in the region). As he later explains, contemplating my future meetings: “*si tú vas a ver a algún empresario árabe, cualquiera...te va a decir puras cosas lindas, que los árabes son tan buenos...pero, what are you really doing [to promote relations with the Arab world]? Nada*” (if you go to see an Arab businessman [in Chile], whichever one...he’s going to say a bunch of beautiful things to you, that Arabs are so good...but, what are you really doing [to promote relations with the Arab world]? Nothing).

All of the preceding translated both into difficulties with funding the *Consejo*’s operations and its conversion into a one-man operation. By the end, he sighs that “*el Consejo era yo*” (*I was the Council*). Next time—and one imagines that there will indeed be a next time—he will try to establish a proper *Cámara*. “*Me encantaría*” (I would love to), he gushes. For now, “*allí está el tema como dormido*” (the issue is there, like, asleep), and yet the “*oportunidad interesante de negocios*” (interesting business opportunity) remains. How about a halal lamb slaughterhouse in the Chilean outpost of

Punta Arenas, one of the world's southernmost cities? For reasons (geographic or otherwise) that he does not explain, that "*puede ser un tremendo negocio*" (could be a huge business). And what about importing Qatari gas to curry favor so that the Emir will send some investments Chile's way? Plus, someone needs to bring Islamic banking to Chile. I think that he thinks that he can make it all happen.

But, he cautions, "*necesito funding*" (I need funding). And, he says mockingly, for the Chilean business class—which obsesses over Orientalist images of halal certification, in which a curious figure from the mosque arrives to your farm and "*pon[e] un CD [y]...di[ce] cosas raras*" (plays a CD [and]...says weird things)—to overcome its mental block against "*exportándoles a estos musulmanes*" (exporting to these Muslims), and realize that the Arab world represents, once again, "*una oportunidad interesante de negocios*" (an interesting business opportunity). This is not to say that his efforts—including preparing reports for high-level officials, receiving visiting delegations of political and economic leaders, organizing business forums, participating in international trade fairs, literally taking Chilean businesspeople to Dubai, and training a new generation of trade-promoters in cultural awareness and sensitivity—were for naught. And indeed, he points to certain successes, such as Chile's presence at Dubai-based Gulfood, which describes itself as "the world's biggest annual food & hospitality show," and the place "where international flavours find world-class business."³⁴ While the Chilean stand used to be "*horrible*," now his protégés "*se tomaron en serio el tema—de*

³⁴ This information is from the "about" section of Gulfood's website, available at: http://www.gulfood.com/page.cfm/link=130/t=m/gosection=1_105 (accessed December 1, 2015).

verdad” (took the matter seriously—really), and recently won an award for their exhibition. But there is an *opportunity* to do much, much more.

At this point, I wonder why he is such a stickler for cultural knowledge—or what he calls “*el tema árabe*” (the Arab issue). Or why, beyond profit, he does any of this in the first place. What does he make of himself as a Chilean of Palestinian descent who speaks Arabic, has a local cell phone in Dubai, and displays a healthy obsession with promoting Arab-Chilean economic exchange? And when I comment that very little is known in the U.S. about Arab-Latin American relations, why does he stress that this is “*obvio*” (obvious), since my people know essentially nothing about either Latin America or the Arab world, before breaking into a derisive laugh? What meaning does he attach to the fact that Latin America “*está lleno, lleno, lleno de personas de origen árabe cristiano*” (is full, full, full of people of Arab Christian descent)? That Arab-Latin Americans are a prominent if not dominant business class in countries throughout the region (he observes, perhaps with a touch of exaggeration: “*los grandes empresarios de Centroamérica...son todos árabes*” [the big businesspeople of Central America...are all Arabs])? That he is part of this diaspora? And that his business dealings in the Arab world are facilitated by a cultural relationship that is “*muy fácil*” (very easy) to navigate as a result of the common bond and shared values produced by the long Moorish presence in southern Spain?

Admittedly, my initial forays did not yield any epiphanic moments. Though he at times adopted the “Arab” label, when pressed he insisted that it did not apply. He explained that “*no somos árabes, somos chilenos*” (we’re not Arabs, we’re Chileans) or “*chilenos de origen árabe*” (Chileans of Arab origin), as “*los abuelos llegaron hace 100*

años” (their grandparents arrived 100 years ago). They speak Spanish, eat Chilean food, and are fully integrated into mainstream Chilean society—their community “*no es un gueto*” (is not a ghetto), he remarks. When I inquire about the maintenance of the Arabic language in his family, he contrasts “*la cultura cristiana Levantine*” (the Levantine, Christian culture) of his ancestors with that of the Gulf countries where he pursues interesting opportunities. On business trips to the region, they may ask him if he is Lebanese due to his accent and dress, but he professes not to feel the connection. “*Es otra cultura, es otra gente*” (It’s another culture, it’s another people), he declares.

I make a mild amount of progress by annoyingly interrupting him mid-sentence. Do they see you as Chilean? “*No, una mezcla*” (No, a mix), he casually responds. The fact that when he sits down for dinner at a Dubai restaurant he knows both *how to order* and *how to eat* undoubtedly unsettles the stable categorization schemes of his interlocutors. And, on three separate occasions, Arab CEOs have pulled him aside—by the arm—after meetings involving non-Arab figures in order to ask him, since he “*es de los nuestros*” (is one of us), if the others are “*confiables*” (trustworthy). But he soon returns to discussing *interesting opportunities*, a topic that dominates much of the rest of our encounter. Even after direct questioning about his motives, I am able to glean little beyond the fact that he is inspired by some mixture of A) a *business* recognition that “*hay una oportunidad*” (there is an opportunity) to follow Brazil’s successful lead, B) a *personal* genuflection toward his “*orígenes*” (origins) and the fact that “*me gusta la región*” (he likes the region), and C) a preoccupation with Chile’s economic wellbeing. But where does the balance lay?

Fortunately, two years later, by the time our second and final meeting rolls around, I have become much more adept at staying on message and subtly eliciting the revelation by near-strangers of potentially sensitive personal information. After a flurry of last-minute, early-morning *Twitter* messages, during which we made several time and venue changes in order to accommodate his cramped and ever-morphing schedule, I grabbed my messenger bag and speed-walked from my central plaza-adjacent residence in the coastal city of Viña del Mar, some 120 kilometers to the capital's northwest, to the nearby bus terminal. Two hours later, I emerged from a subway escalator immediately east of downtown Santiago and found myself sitting across a Starbucks table from Daccarett in the plate glass-filled business district abutting the green, urban oasis of *Cerro Santa Lucía* (Santa Lucía Hill).

This is his third consecutive meeting in this very café, and with his legs already shaking from two previous coffees, we refrain from joining the long line of suit-clad patrons clamoring to order (occupying a table without consuming must be a violation of corporate policy, I muse, though I decide it is unlikely for such rules to be applied in these classier surroundings). Across the street is a branch of the “Wall Street English” language institute, and though we are half a dozen subway stops from *Sanhattan's* edge and Latin America's tallest building, the clusters of clean-cut, black-suited patrons who people the café's every nook evoke the same regimented, manicured, and homogenous presentation of self into which the power elite has apparently been socialized into adopting the world over. Sporting frizzy, curly blond hair and a goatee, and lacking a proper suit jacket, I feel both undergroomed and underdressed.

Over the steady din of the early-afternoon coffee crowd, and with a fluidity and frankness that suggests a regular gathering with an acquaintance—or, dare I say, friend—the conversation immediately turns to our topic of mutual interest: Chile’s economic relations with the Arab world and his role in promoting them. If Daccarett was not exactly restrained during our previous encounter in his assessment of the government’s missteps, the distance afforded by his replacement as the executive director of the aforementioned Chilean Agency for International Cooperation for Development upon the left-leaning Michelle Bachelet’s assumption of the presidency in 2014 has only furthered the tendency. And it would later allow him to stray as far afield as engaging in conversations concerning the reasoning behind suit purchases and family vacation destinations, both of which, perhaps unexpectedly, proved to be fertile vantage points from which to observe national, transnational, and global longings.

I am quickly brought up to speed. The framework of the ASPA summits is “*una estupidez*” (stupid) and “*no sirve para nada*” (useless), since the participating countries do not really care. Those members of Chile’s Arab-world diplomatic corps who are not based at one of the *relevant* embassies—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates—are apparently neither given nor can devise on their own anything to do, and “*se aburren*” (they get bored).³⁵ The government, along with the country’s formidable business class, maintains its Asia-Pacific focus. At ProChile, the official state Trade Commission, the highly praised halal expert—and fellow two-time interviewee—Diego

³⁵ By process of comparing lists, the would-be “irrelevant” Arab embassies in Chile’s relatively robust diplomatic network would thus include Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, and Syria. This information is based on the Chilean government’s official embassy list, available at: <http://chileabroad.gov.cl/embajadas/> (accessed December 1, 2015).

Osses has been transferred from Santiago to Bangkok, where he is now the country's trade commissioner to Thailand and Vietnam, leaving "*nadie para halal en ProChile*" (nobody for halal in ProChile). In general, the continually constipated nature of Arab-Chilean trade represents "*más de lo mismo*" (more of the same), and as of now "*no hay ninguna presión de parte del sector privado*" (there is no pressure from the private sector) to break the logjam and allow this axis of ties to surge forward. As such, plans for a *Cámara*, which still figure prominently on his crowded to-do list, are "*en standby*" (on standby).

Yet Daccarett has not exactly been sitting on his hands, staring wistfully out the window as unattainable "*oportunidad interesante*" (interesting opportunity) after "*oportunidad interesante*" speeds by. This familiar phrase still peppers his speech (according to a comment I scrawled in my fieldwork notebook at the halfway point of our second conversation, he had already repeated it "5+" times by this point). And he continues to discuss Arab-Chilean exchange—trade promotion, deals through which "*nosotros*" (we—Chile) can "*captar inversión*" (attract investment) from the Gulf, and so on—with the unbridled optimism of a motivational speaker. But, having recently returned from Palestine, he also has a new job—and a new business card, in Arabic on one side and English on the other—with what he refers to as a(n) "*catalizador interesante entre las regiones*" (interesting agent of change between the regions).

As there appears not to be a single Arab bank in all of Latin America's 20 independent states, I initially have a hard time imagining why out of all the former region's banks the Bank of *Palestine* would become the first, or why it would choose Chile's relatively small market as the site of its representation office. Why a Palestinian

bank in Santiago instead of an Emirati bank in São Paulo? Yet the Bank's president, Hashim Shawa, has noted that "*ha sido un sueño tener una presencia en terreno aquí en Chile*" (it has been a dream to have a presence on the ground here in Chile)—both because "*cuando venimos aquí y vemos a nuestra gente teniendo éxito en un hermoso país como Chile, nos hace sentir nostalgia por la Palestina con la que deseáramos soñar, que deseáramos tener*" (when we come here and see our people having success in a beautiful country like Chile, it makes us feel nostalgia for the Palestine that we would wish to dream about, that we would wish to have), as well as the fact that "*hay mercados muy grandes aquí para que los exportadores y las compañías de Medio Oriente hagan negocios*" (there are very big markets here so that Middle Eastern exporters and companies may do business) (Morales 2015).

According to Shawa, then, the idea is not merely to connect Chile and Palestine, but to establish this axis as a bridge by which (to) "*fortalecer las relaciones de negocios entre Latinoamérica y el Golfo Árabe*" (to strengthen business relations between Latin America and the Persian Gulf) and "*apoyar las inversiones entre Medio Oriente y América Latina*" (support investments between the Middle East and Latin America) (*El Mercurio* 2015). Given his previous experience with *bridging*, what is entirely unsurprising is that the Bank has appointed Daccarett as its consultant and advisor for Latin America, precisely to traverse this now-familiar gap between "*nostalgia*" and "*mercados*" (markets).

Out of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and back into the perhaps friendlier environs of the private sector (and Starbucks), the freewheeling Daccarett is now in a contemplative, almost philosophical mood. I learn more about him that afternoon than

what I have garnered from many long-term acquaintances. About his childhood ambitions: “*niños sueñan con ser astronautas, bomberos*” (kids dream about being astronauts, firefighters)—but he wanted to be like Michel Alaby, secretary general and CEO of the *marvelous* Arab-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce (and the subject of a vignette in the following chapter), who has dedicated his life to promoting economic relations between Brazil and the Middle East. About what gets him out of bed in the morning: “*lo que me motiva no es el comercio en sí, sino la relación entre las regiones*” (what motivates me is not trade in and of itself, but rather the relation between the regions)—not just economic and political, but also cultural and personal. About his own transnationalism: “*cuando se te empiezan a borrar las fronteras, no es normal*” (when borders start to get erased for you, it’s not normal), he observes, almost worriedly. It is thus with palpable unease instead of triumphalism that he notes that, at a certain point, “*te sientes local en cualquier lugar del mundo*” (you feel at home anywhere in the world).

And about the very nature...of life. “*¿Para qué es el trabajo?*” (What is work for?). He has friends who have struck it rich(er), but . . . why? Granted, at least if the gated quasi-mansion that appears in *Google Maps* when I type in his address—located far to the northeast of downtown, in subway-less Lo Barnechea, one of the city’s, and country’s, most exclusive neighborhoods—is any indication, his is not precisely an ascetic lifestyle, nor is he spearheading a “back-to-the-land” movement. Yet there is an authentic reflexivity in his discourse. He leans in. “*Centroamérica me encanta*” (I love Central America), he enthuses. Family trips could be spent in Miami or Milan, or Doha or Dubai, but he prefers to take his kids on three-week jaunts to rural Costa Rica, where

the goal is to avoid the beach tourism of nearby Tamarindo while meeting everyday people and shopping at the everyday corner stores where they shop. “*La gente es más cálida*” (people are warmer) there, he coolly observes. “*Mientras más pobre el país, mejor me siento*” (the poorer the country, the better he feels), and the more genuine and unassuming its inhabitants. Any critiques about this implicit glorification of poverty or adherence to the ideal of the “noble savage” notwithstanding, these are curious words for a class-conscious protagonist of Chile’s status-obsessed internationalizing business elite.

His subsequent recollection of seeing a child sleeping on the streets of Phnom Penh, surrounded by dogs, while an unspecified international development official immediately on the other side of the fence sports a Rolex, is also ideological. Indeed, I would be shocked if Daccarett does not also own a nice watch, and part of what motivates this animated retelling is his belief that “*el sector privado*” (the private [business] sector—not governments, NGOs, or aid workers by themselves) is necessary because “*genera desarrollo*” (it generates development). But we must not be so cynical as to entirely dismiss the humanistic streak that both reveals itself in our conversation and propels, to some extent, his economic activities. When he says, “*creo en Palestina, creo en [sic] Middle East*” (I believe in Palestine, I believe in [the] Middle East), it is something more than a concocted self-justification for seeking profit.

To summarize, national—and transnational—ties loom large in Daccarett’s interpretive frameworks. His economic and personal activities are filtered through a range of constructs that include both Chilean and Palestinian nationalism, a vague sense of allegiance to a larger Middle East, and even personal commitments to

idealized Central American *campesinos* (rural dwellers), the global poor, and an ill-defined “Southern perspective.”

When I ask about his time in the Chilean government, the bitterness over opportunities lost melts away, and he reflects that, “*se pasa bien porque uno está trabajando por su país*” (you have a good time because you’re working for your country). When I make small talk about the Chilean national *fútbol* (soccer) team’s lackluster 3-3 tie with Mexico in the previous night’s first-round match of the *Copa América* (America Cup) regional tournament, he begins to make animated hand and arm gestures, and shrieks as he recalls Chile’s devastating second-round departure from the 2014 World Cup. And when I ask what he makes of the Bank of Palestine-branded cards that he has been promoting in Chile, he responds that even if this were not his own initiative, he would still be interested, “*para sentir que mis hijos tengan un nexo*” (to feel that his children have a link).

After he posted a picture of one of the bank cards on Facebook, people went crazy. Within the Palestinian-Chilean community, “*a los ricos se les olvidaron sus raíces*” (the rich forgot their roots)—“*pero no a la clase media, en Patronato*” (but not the middle class, in Patronato [Santiago’s traditional Arab neighborhood]). The “*simbolismo*” (symbolism) of the card is important, as is the fact that the Bank invests in and donates to relevant charitable ventures in both countries. These range from dedicating 5 percent of annual profits “to support community projects in the Palestinian society”³⁶ to spending millions of dollars to sponsor—and place the Bank’s name on the

³⁶ This information is from the “corporate social responsibility” section of the Bank’s website, available at: <http://www.bankofpalestine.com/en/csr> (accessed December 1, 2015).

jerseys of—the Santiago-based, first-division *fútbol* (soccer) team, *Club Deportivo Palestino* (Palestinian Sports Club), founded by Palestinian immigrants in 1920.³⁷

He has not forgotten about the profitable “*oportunidades interesantes*” (interesting opportunities) for Arab-Latin American trade, still finds it “*curioso*” (curious) that there is no Arab-Chilean Chamber of Commerce, and has recently developed a new idea—to link the Pacific Alliance³⁸ with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).³⁹ And he readily admits that his “*ego*” is part of what drives him to succeed in his efforts to bring Chile and the Arab world together. But as he intimates that in life you must do what “*te haga sentido*” (makes sense to you), that he seeks to “*a la vez ayudar*” (help at the same time), and that one’s actions must be “*coherente en valores*” (coherent with values), it becomes clear that his mission is not trade for the sake of trade itself, or to further the efforts of fellow internationalizing entrepreneurial elites the world over.

On the other hand, it is perhaps ironic that his very actions to further open Chile to the world—“*Chile tiene que crecer hacia afuera, no hacia adentro*” (Chile has to grow toward the outside, not toward the inside)—appear to be reifying the same global

³⁷ For additional background on the deal, see *Emol* (2014), as well as, from the bank’s website: <http://www.bankofpalestine.com/en/media-center/newsroom/details/270> (accessed December 1, 2015). On the club itself, see its official history, available at: <http://www.palestino.cl/es/elclub/historia/> (accessed December 1, 2015).

³⁸ Established in 2011 by Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru, the Pacific Alliance is a mostly economic mechanism for increasing integration between these free market-oriented member states, as well as serving as a platform for their “projection to the world, with emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region” (see the Alliance’s official website, available at: <https://alianzapacifico.net/en/que-es-la-alianza/#what-is-the-pacific-alliance> [accessed December 1, 2015]). Costa Rica is also in the process of joining. In ideological terms, the Pacific Alliance is seen as the foil for the more statist regional bloc Mercosur, comprised of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Bolivia is currently being incorporated as Mercosur’s sixth member.

³⁹ The GCC is a Persian Gulf-based regional organization focusing on political and economic coordination. Its member states—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates—enjoy relatively strong economies and together comprise an important market for imports and source of investments, and include several major international trade hubs.

capitalist order whose onward march is said to be undermining those local cultures—Chilean, Palestinian, Middle Eastern, and even Central American—where he feels most at home. Yet here again we must be careful to separate the material (globalizing) nature of his activities from the (mostly, but far from exclusively, place-based) ideational constructs that undergird them.

Toward the end of our encounter, he describes a conversation with his “*señora*” (wife) over the purchase of a new suit. Should he buy Chilean? Or perhaps one that is locally made during an upcoming trip to Miami or Buenos Aires? The anguish that goes into the decision—he does not reveal the outcome—gives lie to his concluding facile assertion that he has a global mindset. As does the fact that while he views it as part of his pedagogical and capitalist mission to globalize Chilean business students by taking them to Peru and Colombia—“*países del futuro*” (countries of the future), as he labels them—the motivating factor behind the mission is that this is the mentality that *Chilean* companies need.

Analysis and Conclusions

This chapter’s contention is that the preceding vignettes tell the stories of four capitalist elites whose interpretive filters can most fittingly be labelled as “national” or “transnational” in orientation. To be sure, any act of classification obfuscates certain characteristics for the purpose of allowing the analyst to construct (hopefully) useful images of reality; thus, we must strive to studiously avoid the worst practices of the aforementioned “butterfly collectors,” for whom the complexity of the real world—and real human agents—is a scourge to be shorn away for the sake of parsimony and would-be analytical clarity rather than an ontological reality to be embraced (and explained). And there are undoubtedly less-than-national/transnational moments in the

above narratives—the desire to hew to “the complex and demanding context of globalization” in Argentina, the contradiction between professed support for state involvement in the economy/Brazilian-style social programs in Iraq and salivation over the windfalls to be reaped as a result of U.S.-imposed privatization and austerity schemes, and the dilemmas raised by suit purchases or how to keep Chile growing “toward the outside.”

However, taken as a whole, these vignettes reveal mental frameworks that are significantly more *national* and *transnational* than *denational* or *global*. As is constitutive of capitalists, theirs is profit-seeking behavior. But the point is that it is mostly filtered through place-based lenses—Argentina and Lebanese, Brazilian and Iraqi, and Chilean, Palestinian, Arab, and Middle Eastern. Relatively little evidence points to the decentering of the national imaginary and even less to its replacement with a new set of global attachments. These processes may indeed be under way, and in fact, Daccarett’s unease about his own (apparently burgeoning) global credentials provide a tentative indication of such. Yet in the present cases these hints are the exception rather than the rule. Before providing further substantiation from other interviewees, let us strip down the preceding vignettes to their bare, national essence:

- ANTONIO ARAMOUNI. A thoroughgoing embodiment of the national/transnational imaginary. Ideological references to the superiority of the Chilean model aside, paeans to Argentine and Lebanese exceptionalism permeate every nook and cranny of our conversation. So uncomplicated and unadulterated is his place-based discourse vis-à-vis those of any of my dozens of interviewees that one suspects that, if his type was ever commonplace, it is now a dying breed. Lacking the mores of modern political correctness, his is the old-school and brazen class consciousness of the *latifundista* (landed gentry) or nineteenth-century factory owner, and he inhabits a world where *everyone*—“*la gente bien*” (the people who matter)—talks about polo, speaks multiple languages, and similarly idealizes Chile. Yet so utterly nationalist is his thought that the fact that Pope Francis is

Argentine matters more to him than the would-be communist demagoguery for which he has been lambasted by U.S. elites.

- NAWFAL ASSA MOSSA ALSSABAK AND JALAL JAMEL DAWOOD CHAYA. Navigators of the choppy waters that separate profit-seeking and (transnational) altruism. Both on their website and in speech, they premise their economic activities on the notion that Iraq and the Iraqi people *need* them and their Brazilian wares, that linking import-dependent Iraqi consumers with producers from Brazil, the export nation and budding halal superpower, will cause the tide to rise, thus lifting all boats. Yet they are strangely incapable of explaining why or how. Nonetheless, nostalgia for the homeland looms large in their mindsets, reflected in part in a desire to build cultural linkages. That they have stumbled upon a “capitalist dream” in their native Iraq is almost beside the point, for while contradictory statements concerning neoliberal reforms in Iraq reveal a perhaps inchoate, denationalized commitment to profit, for purposes of categorization they are most similar to (a less extreme version of) Aramouni’s transnational mindset.
- JORGE DACCARETT. An atypically reflexive thinker who is keenly aware of the global directions in which his economic activities and lifestyle are pulling him, and who appears bent on resisting them. According to the present analysis, he is winning, at least for now. A sampling of posts from his busy *Twitter* account⁴⁰ provides a useful window into his soul: after the Paris attacks, “Terrorists kill innocent people. Media kills (sic) Islam.” (November 14, 2015); “my forefather's palestinian passport” (November 6, 2015; images included); “pure pleasure” (October 13, 2015; image also included, this time of the top of a bottle of Glenfiddich Scotch in the foreground, and a large flat-screen television showing the World Cup qualifying match between Chile and Peru in the background); “my grandma used to say: you're a different person for every language you speak; does that make me schizophrenic (sic)?” (September 9, 2015); and, on the same date, “What if the Palestinian Cabinet, or even the PM [prime minister], would come from the Diaspora? Aren't they Palestinians as well([sic],” and “palestinians, syrians and lebanese lived happy in their land since ever, 'till foreigners came and messed things up; now they are refugees” (September 3, 2015). His desire to build a *Cámara* that is filled “*no con árabes, sino con chilenos que se interesan en los mercados*” (not with Arabs, but with Chileans who are interested in the markets), his strategic focus on Dubai as a “*hub*” from which to sell to “*otros lugares*” (other places), and his angst over his identity may suggest otherwise, but for now, the many “*oportunidades interesantes*” (interesting opportunities) that he identifies are, without coincidence, located in a region that he holds dear. And it is precisely *because* he holds this region dear that he has identified these opportunities in the first place. That is, much like the previous interlocutors, his mental frameworks are also predominantly place-based: Chilean, Palestinian, Middle Eastern, Arab, and even Central American.

⁴⁰ His account can be found at: https://twitter.com/j_daccarett (accessed December 1, 2015).

Again, I have chosen these figures to explore in depth precisely because they best illustrate the stubbornly sticky nature of place-based imaginaries within a globalizing world. In their own ways and to varying extents, the above interlocutors all see the world through primarily place-based lenses, and their profit motives and class-based interests—which, unsurprisingly, are constant among the entire body of interviewees—are mostly filtered through national, transnational, and regional interpretations. In other words: they are of course chased around the globe by profit, but *where* precisely they choose to make money depends largely on a series of national, transnational, ethnic, and family ties. It is thus through these actors, and many others like them, that the “tradition of dead generations” lives on.

Though my original intention was to classify *all* of my Latin American capitalist interviewees in a similarly, and relatively, unequivocal fashion, my honest engagement with the unexpectedly frequent “ambiguities, conjectures, and surprises” that arose through my research restrains me from committing any such acts of “simplistic reductionism.” To put it another way, many of the butterflies defy easy classification.

Nevertheless, in the interest of further categorization, I can report that over half of interviewees—equating to more than a dozen people—exhibited “interpretive filters” that were more *national* or *transnational* than either *denational* or *global*. As this analysis suggests, there is overlap between the various groups, even with the more “ideal-typical” figures I have chosen to portray in the above vignettes. And indeed, some of those whom I will cite in the following paragraphs to provide evidence of nationalism’s persistence will also appear in the next chapter to support the opposite assertion. Such is the complexity of human life—a richness that again is to be embraced and accounted

for rather than simplified away. What follows, then, are further examples of place-based longings:

- DIEGO OSSES (the aforementioned halal expert with ProChile, now based at the Thailand office and responsible for trade-promotion in Southeast Asian markets). “*Somos el futuro del mundo*” (we are the future of the world), he casually observes, with the “we” referring naturally to the economic rise of Chile and the Chilean people. “*Chile quiere ser un país elite*” (Chile wants to be an elite country) and does not see itself as part of the “*sur*” (South). Nonetheless, given Chile’s position “*en la vanguardia*” (at the vanguard) of a free-market, free-trade-based economic model, “*nos sentimos referentes en América Latina*” (we—the Chilean people—feel like a model in Latin America).
- ANDREA SAPAG (at the time of our interview, the head of ProChile’s Asia, Oceania, and Middle East department, and since October 2015 its New York-based trade manager). The most gratifying part of “*ser funcionaria pública*” (being a civil servant) is that she is “*apoyando al país*” (supporting the country). She recalls almost crying when a business deal was signed—not because of “*interés personal*” (self-interest) or monetary gain, but rather out of the conviction that by walking “*con la mano del sector privado*” (with the hand of the private sector), she can assist small and medium-sized businesses, work to address Chile’s (astronomical) inequality, and help to develop the country’s oft-neglected peripheral regions.
- PABLO FODARO (manager of the *Cámara de Comercio Argentino Árabe*, or Arab-Argentine Chamber of Commerce, which as of 2015 is celebrating its eighty-sixth anniversary⁴¹). Globalization “*nos ayuda y nos perjudica*” (helps and hurts us)—referring to “*nosotros en Argentina*” (we in Argentina) and “*la nación argentina*” (the Argentine nation). But Argentina’s flourishing trade relations with the Arab world apparently represent more *good* than *harm*, given that—as he recounts concerning their surplus-heavy economic relationship—some 99 percent of total Arab-Argentine trade consists of the latter’s exports to the former. This (im)balance is thus overwhelmingly “*a favor de Argentina*” (in favor of Argentina).

Accordingly, if the sentiments expressed in this chapter are any indication, the death of place-based imaginaries among capitalist elites has been greatly exaggerated. To be sure, the above are all “good” capitalists who—happily in some cases,

⁴¹ The Chamber’s official website can be found at: <http://www.ccaa.com.ar/index.html> (accessed December 1, 2015).

unreflexively in others—are performing their structurally determined role as profit-seekers within a market economy. All have earned the right to the moniker, as Marx (1867, pp. 336, 343) would have it, of “our friend,” “Mr. Moneybags.” All share “the tendency to create value and surplus-value, to make its constant factor, the means of production, absorb the greatest possible amount of surplus-labor” (Marx 1867, p. 362). And all are “chase[d]” to different countries and regions by “the need of a constantly expanding market” (Marx 1888, p. 476). Yet this crystal-clear class position only turns into real-world action once it passes through a series of interpretive filters. For the figures portrayed in the above vignettes, those lenses have a distinctly place-based tint.

Together, based on simplified coding, these “national” or “transnational” capitalists form the largest group among my interviewees. Yet it may be a mistake to assume their continued (or even perhaps current) hegemony, for—as the next chapter demonstrates—there is a notable *denationalizing* streak among many Latin American capitalist elites. Whether such a group is indeed “growing” is impossible to determine based on the present analysis. Knowing for sure would of course require a longitudinal study. Nonetheless, at the level of broad speculation, one does perceive a *trend* toward denationalizing, based both on what we know about the growing protagonism of Latin American actors in the global economy, as well as the globalizing thoughts that are invading the life-worlds of Daccarett and fellow-travelers—provoking torment in some, and either passing imperceptibly or stirring up feelings of globalist pride in others—precisely as a result of such participation.

The next chapter seeks out and analyzes evidence for a *denationalized* and/or *global* mindset among my interviewees, uncovering significant signs of the former but

relatively few of the latter. Based on these findings, the arguments made by a motley crew of thinkers—ranging from the Marxist-inspired global capitalism school to Samuel Huntington and those associated with the “strong globalization” thesis—for a global capitalist “class-for-itself” are indeed overstated. As we will see, place-based imaginaries thus persist to an unexpected extent, but not without qualification.

CHAPTER 6
“THEY DO NOT...HAVE A PATRIA [HOMELAND], THEY ONLY HAVE BANK
ACCOUNTS”: ON DENATIONALIZATION AND GLOBALITY

The aim of this chapter is to provide and evaluate available evidence for the argument that there exist, among my interviewees, figures whose interpretive frameworks are predominantly *denational* or *global*. Let us pause to parse this crucial distinction. As we saw in the previous chapter, if a *national* or *transnational* capitalist is one whose profit-seeking activities follow a place-based logic, meaning that her/his economic activities are directed toward at least one particular and delimited geographic space—such as a country or region—because the actor in question is drawn there through a personal and/or collective linkage, then a *denational* capitalist is in a sense its opposite. To be denational, denationalized, or denationalizing refers to the decentering of the national imaginary. That is, national and other place-based subjective moorings no longer influence such a capitalist’s profit-seeking activities, or at least only do so to a reduced extent.

What one would thus expect from a denational, denationalizing, or denationalized capitalist is profit-seeking behavior that passes through little to no filtering of a geographic, affective nature. Returning to the example suggested by Marx (1867, pp. 336, 343), the object for “our friend,” “Mr. Moneybags,” is to pursue profit across space and time with decreasing or no regard for territorial sentimentality. S/he is “chase[d]...over the whole surface of the globe” in search of increasing returns, and will—or indeed “must”—“nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, [and] establish connexions everywhere” (Marx 1888, p. 476), so long as the price is right. To be clear, the *national*, *transnational*, and *denational* capitalist are all species within the same genus, and are driven by a structurally determined “need for money” (Marx 1844, p. 93)

to accumulate for accumulation's sake. Yet whereas the *national* or *transnational* capitalist—the subject of the last chapter's vignettes—will concentrate profit-seeking endeavors within a particular space (or spaces) of personal or collective relevance, the *denational* capitalist has shed any such territorial logic, and will go more or less wherever the going is good. His or her economic cartography is indeed a “flat world” (Friedman 2005). It is this idea that provides the title for the current chapter, which refers to the fact that certain elites (that is, for present purposes, *denational* capitalists) “do not...have a Patria [homeland], they only have bank accounts” (Zapatista 2005, p. 293).¹

If we imagine—accurately or inaccurately—capitalist identities as existing in logical, and chronological, order, then the final group under consideration here is the *global* capitalist class. Locating such a class is of course the primary motivator behind this project. Continuing with the thought experiment, if Mr. Moneybags' profit motive is largely defined by a single national/place-based set of attachments, then he can be labeled a *national* capitalist. If plural, then a *transnational* capitalist. In turn, if this place-based subjective mooring were to be decentered for Mr. Moneybags, we would call him a *denational* capitalist. A *global* Mr. Moneybags represents the next leap. Not only have place-based imaginaries lost much if not all of their subjective pull for him, but this void

¹ These words are drawn from a much longer communiqué issued by the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*, or EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation), a largely indigenous autonomist movement based in the Chiapas region of southern Mexico. The EZLN's uprising on January 1, 1994—planned to coincide with the start date of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)—shook the foundations of the Mexican state and, to a perhaps even greater extent, the confidence of international investors. The phrase cited here refers to the “neoliberals,” foreign and domestic, who they view as plundering their country.

has also been filled by global attachments: first, to a set of global capitalist peers; and second, to a globally organized economy.

We may thus conceive of a *global* capitalist as a *denational* capitalist who has subsequently developed a new class consciousness based on belonging to an “imagined community” of capitalist peers the world over. Both may seek profits anywhere and everywhere, but only the global capitalist has an “identity in the global system” that is based on belonging to a group that exists “above any local territories and polities” (Robinson 2004, p. 47) and knowingly works in concert with peers “to further the interests of global capital rather than of any real or imagined nation-state” (or, we might again add, of their compatriot capitalists) (Sklair 2001, p. 295).

If an interviewee were to display profit-seeking behavior that has no territorial logic, positively identify with a global cohort of globally oriented capitalist elites (for example, through use of the word “we” to refer to such a peer group), and work jointly for the establishment of an ever flatter capitalist world, then s/he would have the profile of an actor who belongs to a global capitalist “class-for-itself.” To again return to this chapter’s title, not only do such elites “not...have a *Patria* [homeland]” in the traditional, territorial sense, as is also the case with *denational* capitalists. What sets them apart is that they do have a *patria*, but one that takes the form of a shared identity with other globally organized class peers, forming a nationless nation whose political project is to inaugurate a borderless world in which capital and capitalists may roam free.

Let us now search for evidence of either mentality—*denational* or *global*—among our interlocutors. Replicating the format of the last chapter, here we will delve into the life-worlds of a series of carefully chosen actors through the presentation of

ethnographically inspired vignettes. They are: 1) the Argentine Daniel Melhem, cofounder and president of the Buenos Aires-based Gulf Latin America Leaders Council; 2) Michel Alaby, secretary general and CEO of the São Paulo-based Arab-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce; and, 3) the less typical case of José Sepúlveda Torres, an adviser in the Europe, Africa, and Middle East Department of DIRECON, or *Dirección General de Relaciones Económicas Internacionales* (the Chilean government's General Directorate of International Economic Relations).

As we shall see, while the first two figures are most solidly in the *denational* camp, the last interviewee—rare among my interlocutors—displays a budding *global* identity. However, and with the aforementioned caveat that separating these figures thusly is decidedly less straightforward than developing a taxonomy of butterflies, the overall argument remains: such *denational* and especially *global* moments are less frequent than their *national* or *transnational* counterparts. But for now, let us stand aside and allow these denational and global stories to be told. At their conclusion, I will pursue a broader analysis of their contents and return to the larger argument.

Vignette #1: Daniel Melhem

A brisk half-an-hour walk to the northwest of the office of the aforementioned Argentine-Lebanese Chamber of Commerce, and overlooking the sprawling *Retiro* bus and train complex (presumably Argentina's busiest travel hub), lies the upmarket business district that soars upward from the city's *Avenida del Libertador* (Liberator Avenue). I have come to visit the offices of the English-titled Gulf Latin America Leaders Council (GLLC). Here, we have traded the fading continental European architecture and steady din—"cambio, cambio" (exchange, exchange)—of the *microcentro's* (downtown's) proliferating street moneychangers for the glass-covered skyscrapers and

well-manicured lunch-goers of the rarified, tony neighborhood of *Recoleta*. These are the traditional stomping grounds of Buenos Aires' urban elite, many of whose aristocratic forbearers are resting in elaborate mausoleums in the nearby *Cementerio de la Recoleta* (La Recoleta Cemetery). A few doors down from the high-rise tower that houses the Council's operations sits *Patio Bullrich Shopping*, which lures consumers with gourmet cuisine, “*refinamiento cultural argentino*” (Argentine cultural refinement), and “*una auténtica experiencia de lujo*” (an authentic experience of luxury).

The building itself is staffed by a uniformed security team; it is only after showing my passport and informing them of my destination that I am afforded a single-use keycard that allows me to proceed to the elevators. Waiting for me in the GLLC's privileged eleventh-floor office suite, flanked by views of the staid waters of the *Río de la Plata* (River Plate), is cofounder and president Daniel Melhem.² With his gently graying hair and an expensive-looking suit, he gives every appearance of his past roles at Morgan Stanley and Lehman Brothers. As he starts explaining, Latin America and the Gulf countries—as well as the broader Middle East—had traditionally been linked mostly through European and North American institutions. He helped establish the GLLC in 2009 to capitalize on growing opportunities for interregional investment flows, thus “bridg[ing] the gap” between the distant regions.³ He fires off several examples of increased Gulf-Latin American exchange: the Brazilian mining giant Vale's \$1 billion investment in an iron ore plant in Oman; the establishment of direct flights linking the

² If *LinkedIn* is to be believed, Daccarett serves as a “senior advisor” to the same organization. His account is found at: <https://cl.linkedin.com/in/jorgedaccarett> (accessed December 1, 2015).

³ This quote and information, along with much of what is cited below, are from the GLLC's website, available at: http://www.gllc.org/english/?page_id=25 (accessed January 9, 2016). As he notes, while the *Cámaras* focus on trade, the GLLC exists to court and encourage investment.

regions; and repeated trips to Latin America by representatives of the Gulf's overflowing sovereign wealth funds.⁴

As quickly becomes clear, the GLLC is no mere neighborhood financial broker. Indeed, "membership is highly selective and by invitation only." The website goes on to explain: "all members must be highly regarded, not only in their own countries but also internationally, for their entrepreneurial skills, personal integrity, and broad interests."⁵ Only "top-tier leaders and decision-makers from both the private and the public sector" need apply.⁶ Doors open for those who pass muster. Perks include "direct access to key leaders, potential partners, and broad opportunities," as well as the possibility of "off-the-record, private meetings with government officials, heads of business and cultural leaders."⁷ As if to reinforce my preexisting impression of the elitist waters in which I am swimming, our conversation is soon interrupted by a hurried phone call in which vast sums of money are being discussed. At this point, I dutifully comply with the request to turn off my digital recorder.

The U.S.-educated Melhem is affable and fast-talking. Though I approach him using Spanish, he replies in fluent English, which becomes the sole language of our interactions. For business reasons, it is also the default language of the GLLC. He effortlessly punctuates his frank, salesman-like overview of Gulf-Latin American

⁴ For additional information, see again: http://www.gllc.org/english/?page_id=25 (accessed January 9, 2016).

⁵ This characterization is from the "members" section of the GLLC website, available at: http://www.gllc.org/english/?page_id=36 (accessed January 9, 2016).

⁶ The source of this quote is the website's "about" section, available at: http://www.gllc.org/english/?page_id=2 (accessed January 9, 2016).

⁷ See: http://www.gllc.org/english/?page_id=40 (accessed January 9, 2016).

economic exchange with disarming references to his alma mater (Babson College—he is the president of the Argentine alumni club), recent in-flight movies, and even my (relatively long) hair—which prompts him to suggest that I must be a member of the Democratic Party. Looking out over the *río* (river) toward the Uruguayan coast, he muses—jokingly, I hope—about how easy it would be for Argentina to invade and conquer such a small country, recalling an earlier time in which what is now independent Uruguay was ruled from Buenos Aires.

As becomes especially clear in a subsequent phone conversation, he shares Aramouni’s not-so-gentle assessment of the then-current Argentine government. He refers to it as a “regime,” “criminal organization,” and worse. The real problem, in his view, is its handling of the economy. Taxes—which the state uses as part of a “Machiavellian” plan to “control everyone”—are too high. Companies are going bankrupt. There is no “respect” for trade agreements. Indeed, the government actively discourages imports, thus turning Mercosur—composed of Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, and Venezuela—into one of the “worst” trade blocs in the world. With partial nationalizations of property belonging to foreign companies (such as the Spanish energy giant Repsol YPF, in 2012), as well as drawn-out international legal battles with hedge-fund creditors, Argentina is “fighting against the world.” The result: more inflation and less foreign investment.

It is no surprise then that he had been “waiting for this regime to end.” With presidential elections then scheduled for October 2015,⁸ as of July 2014 he had already

⁸ Indeed, Melhem’s side—the right-wing opposition—would indeed triumph in these elections, bringing Mauricio Macri to power as the new president.

met with several potential opposition candidates who, if elected, would undo the damage from Kirchner's "fundamentalist" approach to the economy. Argentina "needs change" and to get "back on its feet" as a "full member of the global economy." And if not? "We'll have another crisis"—a "tremendous recession." And Argentina will continue "alienating" the world, joined by a cast of "inferior allies"—Cuba, Russia, China, Angola—while poisoning relations with the U.S. and Europe. It is a replay, in his mind, of the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas War—which notably resulted in Argentina's humiliating surrender to Great Britain and contributed to the downfall of the country's ruling military junta (1976-1983).

In other words: stop picking fights, whether over islands, foreign debt, or the activities of multinational corporations. And start "to reestablish trust" with the global "financial community." Argentina should be opening itself up to the world instead of trying to force a return to the preglobalization era, in which "every country wanted to do everything." He is thus offering not only a critique of Argentina's maladies, but a solution: foreign investment and global markets. These of course can be accessed—for a price—by people like him. "The private sector will lead," he declares. "People like us. Not the government."

According to his analysis, the state appears to have two roles. First: help businesses succeed. Here, he cites the example of U.S.-based Boeing—which, as he notes, "wouldn't survive" without unspecified forms of government assistance. Second: get out of the way. He illustrates with a folksy simile: "the economy is like a wedding cake...the more you touch the cake, the worse the wedding." While I will not claim to understand the purported causal mechanism by which low cake consumption correlates

with an enjoyable celebration of marriage vows, the message is nevertheless clear: keep your hands off the economy. There is an obvious contradiction between these roles. Indeed, the European Union has spent the last decade pursuing the U.S. government through the World Trade Organization—with some amount of success—for allegedly providing Boeing with billions of dollars in “improper subsidies” and, more recently, “illegal tax breaks” (Drew and Clark 2012; Miles 2014). Of course, he is not the first, and will not be the last, to place profit above ideological or logical consistency.

The GLLC is just one of Melhem’s several hats. In fact, the GLLC resides within the offices of Knightsbridge Partners, a “diversified financial services firm” and “merchant bank” of which he is also a cofounder and senior partner.⁹ Among his current projects, according to news reports, is a plan “to raise \$150 million for a hedge fund focused on Argentinian securities” by attracting investments from “10 to 20 wealthy Latin American, Middle Eastern and European families” (*FINalternatives* 2014).

Yet it is still not clear to me what makes him tick. Inviting a patriotic response, I ask: Might these efforts help to return Argentina to its glory days of a century prior? Perhaps such investments can be wielded to repair the country’s infrastructure, which he argues has been “completely destroyed” by the sitting administration? In contrast to earlier, there is an unnatural pause before his response. When it comes, it sounds as though he is reciting one of the business-first platitudes that pepper the website, and I learn little beyond the fact that, “the Arab Gulf States and Latin America are vibrant

⁹ Information about Knightsbridge is from the following sections of the firm’s website, available at: <http://www.knightsbridgepartners.co/our-team/1> and <http://www.knightsbridgepartners.co/who-we-are/> (both accessed January 9, 2016).

growing regions with substantial economies and natural synergies . . .”¹⁰ Soon, he is back on home turf, where life revolves around “making deals,” with the goal of “creating links in a chain” of Gulf-Latin American economic relations. In no time, he has again mounted his favorite hobbyhorse, declaring to me that the Argentine government “does everything it can to destroy the productivity of companies.”

I try once more, but with a reconsidered approach and a more direct question. Why the “deal-by-deal” drive to build Latin America’s relations with the Gulf, as opposed to Europe, China, the U.S., or anywhere else?

His own past starts to emerge. Melhem was born in Mexico to a Syrian-Argentine family. Despite the fact that he is quick to point out that his Syrian ancestry “may not mean anything,” and that he does not speak Arabic, it clearly *does* mean something to him. “I always felt that I was Middle Eastern in many ways,” he reflects. Having attended a school in which everyone else was “European,” he liked being “different.” He recalls: “I thought it was cool to be Arab.”

Later in life, he had the chance to travel to the region and “meet high-profile people,” whom he describes as “intelligent, global players.” Since there was already “enough going on” between Argentina and the U.S., he saw an “opportunity” in the Gulf as he was the “first Latin American there.” He is “not interested” in Syria, the country of his ancestors, because of civil strife and a lack of business opportunities and contacts. But it is precisely because of his Syrian past that he has been able to become a conduit for exchange between Latin America and the Gulf, as he is recognized throughout the region “as Middle Eastern.”

¹⁰ See, again: http://www.gllc.org/english/?page_id=25 (accessed January 9, 2016).

But he is also Argentine. And when he says that “we’re large food exporters,” or “we consume,” he is referring to his Argentine compatriots. He then tells the story of a trip to Egypt, taken at the request of the “richest man” in Kuwait. Soaking in the sights, sounds and brutal repression of the 2011 revolution from its epicenter in Cairo’s Tahrir Square, he manages to emerge unscathed. How? Because “nobody messes with an Argentine.” As I ponder what this means, he throws in obligatory references to footballing legends Messi and Maradona for good measure.

The Gulf countries serve two (strategic) functions in Melhem’s world. First, they are a “tremendous source of capital,” and he is firm in his conviction that a significant portion of those funds should be invested in Latin America—naturally, under his tutelage. Second, look at a map. As he observes, the Gulf countries are located “in the center” of the world, about “halfway to China.” There is thus a historic opportunity for Latin American capital to “use this region’s advantages as a springboard to other countries beyond the Middle East.”¹¹ After all, supplying Gulf markets is small potatoes compared to the Asian behemoths that lay beyond, where billions of consumers beckon—a pot further sweetened by abundant and cheap labor, open tracts of land, and low taxes. The GLLC may be a “bridge” between Latin America and the Gulf, but the Gulf itself is also a bridge between the GLLC and China, India, and other rising economies.

Thus, while his own familial past and personal interest have led him to the Gulf, the Arab world in general is epiphenomenal vis-à-vis his larger ambition of making “deals” wherever “opportunities exist.” If he had been “smart”—and he quickly indicates

¹¹ Ibid.

that he is “not”—he would have been the one to create the BRICS grouping, thus earning himself a privileged position as a mediator of exchange between the key “emerging markets” of our time. In this alternative storyline, both Latin America and the Arab world lose their starring roles.

Vignette #2: Michel Alaby

As a diminutive and hunchbacked elderly man with a receding white hairline and seemingly permanent dour facial expression, Michel Alaby does not immediately evoke the image of a young boy’s superhero. And yet when Jorge Daccarett—founding executive director of the *Consejo Empresarial Chileno-Árabe* (Chilean Arab Business Council) and the subject of one of the previous chapter’s vignettes—was himself coming of age, he forewent the tried-and-true childhood fantasies of becoming an astronaut or firefighter, and instead fixed his sights on the secretary general and CEO of the Arab-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce as his North Star. As Daccarett explains all too excitedly, Brazil has been exporting approximately \$10 billion worth of goods to the Arab world per year,¹² and since the Chamber earns a 0.1 percent commission on these exports for providing the mandated certificates of origin, there has been a steady flow of funds as of late into its revenue stream. He explains that “*0,1 por ciento de comisión son 10 millones de dólares, de ingresos para la Cámara*” (0.1 percent in commission is \$10 million in income for the Chamber). “That is business”—and precisely the model he yearns to replicate one day in Chile.

¹² In fact, he underreports Brazil’s success in boosting exports to the Arab world. From a base of around \$5 billion only a few years prior, by 2011 Brazil’s annual exports had reached around \$15 billion. Given more recent challenges such as the subsequent downturn in the Brazilian (and global) economy and president Rousseff’s notorious lack of interest in international relations, the curve has begun turning downward once again, if only gently. These figures are from the Chamber’s website, available at: <http://www.ccab.org.br/infobiz-online/en/home.aspx> (accessed January 9, 2016).

On second thought, as far as Arab-Latin American business leaders go, Alaby—and the Chamber that he leads—are not such bad role models for the budding international trader. Unlike the relative penury of Daccarett’s essentially one-man and now-dormant *Consejo*, the well-resourced Chamber—which “has been acting for sixty years with the objective of boosting economic, cultural and tourist exchange between Arabs and Brazilians”¹³—employs a robust staff of 75, spread over four sprawling floors of one of the countless generic, slightly drab high-rises that fill the horizon for as far as the eye can see in both directions along *Avenida Paulista* (Paulista Avenue), São Paulo’s most famous—and business-friendly—thoroughfare. Downstairs is the office of the honorary consulate of Jordan, headed by the Chamber’s director, Mustapha Abdouni (a fellow interviewee who, curiously enough, is of Lebanese descent). The Chamber’s São Paulo headquarters is complemented by branch offices in the prosperous Brazilian cities of Belo Horizonte and Curitiba.

Business-minded media consumers may avail themselves of the Chamber’s very own bilingual magazine (printed in Portuguese and Arabic),¹⁴ online news agency (Portuguese and English),¹⁵ digital “TV” channel (featuring, as of December 2015, 1,347 videos),¹⁶ and a well-stocked if somewhat disheveled on-site library whose several rows of bookshelves include all manner of materials, ranging from writings on Arab, Latin

¹³ This description is from the “about us” section of the Chamber’s website, available at: <http://www.ccab.org.br/arabe-brasil/en/about-us.fss> (accessed January 9, 2016).

¹⁴ Background information about the magazine is available at: <http://www.ccab.org.br/arabe-brasil/en/home/arab-brazilian-chamber-magazine.fss> (accessed January 9, 2016).

¹⁵ Its portal is located at: <http://www.anba.com.br/> (accessed January 9, 2016).

¹⁶ The channel’s content can be viewed at: <http://www.ccab.org.br/arabe-brasil/en/home/arab-brazilian-chamber-tv.fss> and <https://vimeo.com/arabbrzchambertv> (both accessed January 9, 2016).

American, and Arab-Latin American politics, economics, and culture, to travel guides, dictionaries, and country-specific file holders. With cover images of former president Lula's face staring back at me from a stack of Arabic-language texts, and flanked by copies of the Chamber's *Relatório de atividades (Activities Report)*, I find myself agreeing with the website's bolded claim that "the Arab-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce is the quickest and safest way for you to find new markets and to do business with the Arab countries."¹⁷

These very same activities—the Chamber's and Alaby's—exude further power, influence, and success. To interest the government in making "changes in Brazilian foreign policy" that would favor increased Arab-Brazilian exchange, the Chamber had presented then-president Lula with a report "on the potential growth of trade with the Middle East and North Africa" if his administration were to take specified "trade promotion actions." It did, and the result was a "sixfold" increase in trade from 1989 to 2012 (Carrieri 2013). To draw the attention of Arab business leaders to the economic opportunities that were waiting to be seized in the Brazilian promised land, as recounted by former Chamber market intelligence manager Rafael Abdulmassih, the Chamber brought representatives from 10 Arab companies, all expenses paid, to witness Brazil's successful title run during the 2013 FIFA Confederations Cup.

To teach Brazilian business elites "how to negotiate with Arabs" (Rocha 2015),¹⁸ coincidentally at the very time and on the very day that I am sitting down to write this,

¹⁷ See, again, the Chamber's "about us" page: <http://www.ccab.org.br/arabe-brasil/en/about-us.fss> (accessed January 9, 2016).

¹⁸ He offers me one such tip for free: to do business in the Arab world, "*a presença duma autoridade*" (the presence of an authority figure) is fundamental, which goes part of the way toward explaining the Chamber's emphasis on cultivating a relationship with Lula and the Brazilian state in general.

the Chamber is offering an “*exclusivo*” (exclusive) workshop—Chamber members only—“*para que sua empresa possa iniciar ou expandir seus negócios nestes mercados*” (so that your company can initiate or expand its business in these markets).¹⁹ After Alaby “covers the details in an educational, humorous way,” and explains “the three pillars of negotiation: patience, perseverance and persistence,” attendees at the Renaissance São Paulo Hotel will be treated to a networking breakfast (Rocha 2015). For companies seeking to diversify their stable of partners, the Chamber’s offices also play host to “matchmaking sessions” between Brazilian exporters and Arab importers (Santos 2015a).

And to push for Latin America as a region [to] “*ter mais negócios com o mundo árabe*” (have more dealings with the Arab world), Alaby has also become secretary of the newly created *Federação das Câmaras de Comercio Árabes-Sul Americanas* (Federation of Arab-South American Chambers of Commerce), the aim of which is not only to promote collaboration among existing chambers but to foment the founding of additional ones in countries such as Uruguay, Peru, and yes, Daccarett’s Chile.

As Alaby recounts at the beginning of our conversation, the Chamber’s “*enfoque*” (focus) during its 60-plus years has been on cajoling “*governos e empresários*” (governments and businesspeople) to put the Arab world on their respective radars. To that end, over its lifespan the Chamber has organized an estimated 400 delegations and participated in approximately 170 trade fairs, both of which make for impressive annual rates.

¹⁹ Event information is available at: <http://www.ccab.org.br/emailmkt/CadastroEventos/AspectosCulturais/Insc1.asp> (accessed January 9, 2016).

Having joined the “*diretoria*” (front office) in 1984, Alaby has been near or at the Chamber’s helm for literally half of its existence, happening to coincide with its most productive—and successful—years. His gives all the appearances of having been a lifetime of holding closed-door business meetings with political and economic elites, showing Brazilian capitalists how to navigate Arab markets and then literally organizing their way there (including inviting them to accompany Lula on official visits), and pushing for the Brazilian state “to strengthen trade ties” with the region by “reducing tax, signing free trade agreements, expanding trade delegations, creating bilateral companies and promoting reciprocal investment” (Carrieri 2013; Carrieri 2014; Daniel 2009). It is for all of the preceding that he is to be honored on “Arab Day”—the very day after his hotel workshop—by the sponsoring Council of Arab Ambassadors during an invitation-only dinner celebration in the capital, Brasilia (Santos 2015b). Beyond overall increases in trade and financial flows—along with many apparent “matchmaking” successes—recent advances in Arab-Brazilian economic relations include the signing of free trade agreements with Egypt (2010) and Palestine (2011) (Baldissarelli 2014).²⁰

²⁰ A database of trade agreements is available at: http://www.mre.gov.py/tratados/public_web/ConsultaMercosur.aspx (accessed January 9, 2016). However, at least the former agreement has apparently not yet entered into effect (Santos 2016).

Percentage-wise, Brazil is not a hugely significant country of origin for Palestine’s imports (comprising \$36.5 million, or nearly 0.9 percent of the annual total, according to 2013 figures), though given Israel’s control of Palestine’s borders and domination of the Palestinian economy (accounting for 68 percent of imports), this number is still good enough for eleventh place overall (just behind France and ahead of major European economic players such as the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and Spain). Brazil’s imports from Palestine are numerically insignificant in relative terms.

In terms of Egypt’s imports, Brazil occupies tenth place (at 3.3 percent, equating to approximately \$2.29 billion annually), just behind Kuwait, and ahead of countries such as France, the Netherlands, Japan, and South Korea. Again, Egypt is not a significant source of Brazilian imports.

These figures are drawn from the highly useful website of the Observatory of Economic Complexity, available at: <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/> (accessed February 6, 2016).

At this point, in the last and climatic interview of my second fieldwork tour of South America's great bourgeois capitals, my subtly prodding "why" questions—not *what* are you doing, but *why* are you doing it?—have become as regular as São Paulo's Friday-evening traffic jams.²¹ And I have reason to suspect that this part of my conversation with Alaby will be a relatively smooth ride. With a lifetime of experiences in his briefcase, he must have a lifetime of experiences to share—his own ethnographic vignettes about sending Brazilian businesses to the Arab world and bringing Arab businesses to Brazil, frontline tales of capitalist intrigue, folksy anecdotes about deals that have either succeeded or gone sour, and behind-the-scenes disclosures about lobbying the government for fewer and lower taxes, more free trade agreements, and increased attention to be paid to the Arab world. And I expect his comments to be punctuated throughout by revealing, Daccarett-esque reflections in which he bares his soul and provides a compelling and coherent account, from the privileged perch of a childhood superhero who is now looking down from the apex of a mountain that he has climbed for decades, of *why* he has spent so long seeking to internationalize Brazil's business class that he is now to be honored for this very dedication.

With these as my expectations, our conversation leaves me disappointed, a feeling that returns as I page through my interview notes. One-word responses. A lack of deep engagement with my questions. No epiphanies, no moments in which I feel that he is "losing himself," and no grand revelations about who or what led him to be sitting

²¹ According to the *BBC*, at the aforementioned day and time, "all the tailbacks in and out of the city extend for a total of 180km (112 miles), on average, according to local traffic engineers, and as long as 295km (183 miles) on a really bad day" (Cabral 2012).

across from me in a central, glassy CEO's office within the Chamber's expansive, four-floor headquarters.

Does his life's work trace back to the fact that he is of "*ascendência síria*" (Syrian descent)? "*Não*" (No). And in fact in his own company—about which he shares no other information—they export much more to the U.S. and Europe.

Is it all about profit? Does cash rule everything around him? The Chamber "*não tem fins de lucro*" (is nonprofit).

Why is any of this important? I interrupt his soliloquy about "*investimentos*" (investments) from the Arab world to sharpen my question. Why is any of this important "*para o Brasil*" (for Brazil)? As I was confronted with during my aforementioned stay in the *Câmara de Comércio e Indústria Brasil Iraque* (Brazil-Iraq Chamber of Commerce and Industry) on the opposite side of *Avenida Paulista* (Paulista Avenue), I earn a spirited and number-laden lecture about how "*exportações estão crescendo*" (exports are growing). I want depth but am only being met with platitudes, spoken with a gravelly yet soporific inflection.

Similarly, when I ask about his and the Chamber's goals for the future, I learn only of their ambition to again double trade within the next six years, and—in a mixture of Spanish and Portuguese²² that he attributes to the fact that he used to live in Venezuela—that he is planning to "*aposentar pronto*" (retire soon).

Does he feel that his life's work has been a success? "*Sim, lógico*" (Yes, of course). *Seguinte tópico*. Next topic. As far as loquaciousness is concerned, he is

²² This amalgamation is often referred to as *portuñol* (in Spanish) or *portunhol* (in Portuguese), a combination of the words for Portuguese and Spanish in each respective language.

certainly no Aramouni, Alssabak, Chaya, Daccarett, or Melhem. In a sense, he offers essentially nothing beyond the previous year's interview with Abdulmassih. And I start to wonder whether my dogged email and in-person efforts to reach the top of the Chamber's hierarchy—culminating in a virtual tongue-lashing by Abdulmassih for bothering too many of his coworkers with my messages²³—were in the end worth so many of my valuable fieldwork-hours.

Having by this point reviewed, processed, and analyzed field notes, recordings, and personal recollections from and about my many interviews, I am struck by a revelation of my own. After months of international travel, dozens of interviews, and careful refinement of my subtly probing questions, confidence-building techniques, and presentation of self, I arrive at the conclusion that Alaby disappoints me because I *assume* that he has a “real” and “deeper” essence that he is unwilling or unable to share. Quick and somewhat superficial readings of Marx had taught me to expect that an award-winning international trade specialist who has dedicated his adult life to the deepening of capitalist relations both at home in Brazil—again, by “reducing tax, signing free trade agreements, expanding trade delegations, creating bilateral companies and promoting reciprocal investment”—and abroad would have naturally developed a corresponding self-awareness. After all, “consciousness” is determined “by life,” and “the phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their

²³ To quote from his unfavorable response, “*Vamos tentar focar o seu contato em apenas uma pessoa? Você envolveu nossa assessoria de imprensa, que tem interlocução apenas com veículos de mídia. Consideramos que esta não é a melhor prática.*” (Let's try to focus your contact on just one person? You involved our press officer, who only dialogues with media outlets. We do not consider this to be the best practice). He closes by inquiring as to whether I still wish to hold a “*breve*” (brief) meeting with him, which confounds my expectations by turning out to be both fairly lengthy and cordial.

material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises” (Marx 1846, pp. 154-155).

What is initially disorienting about Alaby, then, is the seemingly insignificant extent to which his capitalist, globalizing material circumstances have ascended from earth to heaven—his waking, thinking, and conscious being. He is a capitalist, to be sure, and has a class-based worldview. But the depth of his reflexivity concerning this longstanding, material reality is so shallow as to be nearly imperceptible to the naked eye of the observer.

But what if Alaby is more of an *unthinking* than a *thinking* capitalist? What if there is little *there* to be discovered by the eager analyst? What if Alaby wakes up, puts his pants on one leg at a time, grabs his figurative lunch pail from the refrigerator, and goes to work just like “normal,” nonrich people, so absorbed in his daily, capitalist grind that he muddles through without subjecting his own work, goals, and activities to meaningful scrutiny? What if he is the proverbial dog that did not bark, neglecting to engage in Daccarett-esque analysis of his own “positionality” not because he is a shy and guarded public figure, but rather because he is not thinking such reflexive thoughts in the first place? What if not all capitalists are supermen and superwomen of reflexivity?

Fieldwork is indeed “the cure for bullshit” (Bates 2007, p. 511).

Such is Michel Alaby, the childhood superhero. As I wrote at the conclusion of my field notes, “it’s really all [about] economics w/ him.” It goes on: “[H]e’s not very reflective on his role. That’s interesting.” And, to summarize: “[I] don’t know why he cares.” Yet I was wrong in my initial assessment of Alaby as an especially tough nut to crack, for it turns out that his terse responses speak volumes. When he denies the

relevance of his Syrian heritage, he means it. When nearly the entirety of his discourse centers on “*investimentos*” (investments), “*exportações*” (exports), and the reciting of trade figures, he is not concealing deeply held Brazilian, Syrian, or pan-Arab attachments. And when, after provocatively (and presumably unknowingly) mimicking Robinson’s likening of “global capitalism” to “*inserção nas cadeias [globais] de produção e serviço*” (insertion into [global] production and service chains), he fails to mention any actual global affiliations, it is because he neither has nor feels them. Though he may indeed *desire* them.

Rather, he is loudly and clearly focusing on what matters most to him: trade for trade’s sake, and taking the actions (holding export seminars, drafting government briefs) and pushing for the policies (trade agreements, lower taxes, pro-business state intervention in the economy) that will (supposedly) help to bring it about. As Karam (2007) argues concerning contemporary, “neoliberal” Brazil, “Syrian-Lebanese” ethnicity among Arab-descendant business elites has recently coalesced among many such figures into a more general form of pan-Arab cultural capital, for reasons including the demands of the Brazilian state for the requisite knowledge that will allow for increased exports to the overall *Arab* world (as opposed to specific countries such as Syria and Lebanon). Alaby is virtually a paragon in this regard: whatever may be the personal import of his Syrian heritage, he declares that it is unrelated to his business activities. But an instrumental invocation of that same ethnic background has allowed him to rise through the ranks of the *Arab*-Brazilian Chamber, as well as to be a sought-after authority on “how to negotiate with Arabs.”

He is an Arab-Brazilian man engaged in Arab-Brazilian trade, but this is an epiphenomenal link, for his true desire is to follow the money. The Chamber's website may refer to "sixty years...of boosting economic, cultural and tourist exchange between Arabs and Brazilians," but he speaks only of the former, with no reference to the Chamber's stated "objective" of "bring[ing] Brazilians and Arabs together" on planes beyond the economic.²⁴ Such is the life-world of this capitalist antihero, and the formidable, sector-leading, "benchmark" organization that he leads.

Despite occasional hints of all three, his goals are thus neither national, transnational, nor global to any significant degree. Rather, they center on a denationalized quest for capitalist exchange. He may be a reluctant and taciturn man with a weathered, tired voice. But in a way, I wish that all of my interviewees had been so clear and forthcoming about their worldviews and ambitions.

Vignette #3: José Sepúlveda Torres

Twice I excitedly scheduled an interview-meeting with Carla Henríquez, who has served since September 2012 as head of the Europe, Africa, and Middle East Department of the *Dirección General de Relaciones Económicas Internacionales*, or DIRECON (the Chilean government's General Directorate of International Economic Relations). Twice she failed to show: in 2013, due to a trip, and the following year, as I learned from the Department's secretary less than a week prior to our second meeting that was not to be, because "*se tomará esa semana*" (she will be taking that week off). When I reached out again in 2015, I received no response.

²⁴ See, again: <http://www.ccab.org.br/arabe-brasil/en/about-us.fss> (accessed January 9, 2016).

In what turned out to be an act of fieldwork serendipity, on each occasion she sent in her stead José Sepúlveda Torres, an adviser from the same Department who turned out to be the great anti-Alaby: loquacious, gregarious, and seemingly happy to be exploring his sentimental state while speaking into the digital recorder of a stranger. Such was his level of engagement with our conversation that at the end of the second round, he thanked *me*—the opposite of every other interviewee—for my time and for giving him the chance to take a step back and reflect about his day-to-day activities.

Imagine my surprise upon hearing that “*le gustó la chance de salir de lo cotidiano*” (he liked the opportunity to get out of the daily routine) through this probing interview and that normally, and unfortunately, “*nadie los critica*” (nobody criticizes them [Chile’s international trade protagonists specifically and global economic elites more broadly]). It was—and remains—a sublime moment of fieldwork glory in which rather than struggling to pull teeth, I was able to elicit revealing personal reflections even through asking the long-ago discarded, pedantic, paragraph-length questions that I lovingly crafted to seek research approval through the University of Florida’s Institutional Review Board.

As a veterinarian by training, Sepúlveda may be an odd subject of analysis for a work that is explicitly concerned with the life-worlds of *capitalist* elites. Yet given the “*vasta experiencia en negociaciones comerciales internacionales*” (vast experience in international trade negotiations) that he has gained during his nearly 15 years in this advisory role, which has included participating in talks leading to and helping to manage over a dozen free-trade agreements (including with the U.S. and European Union, as

well as, currently, the Trans-Pacific Partnership²⁵), along with what he claims on his *LinkedIn* profile as his “*permanente visión global del comercio internacional*” (permanent global vision about international trade), and his willing, sunny disposition, Sepúlveda makes for an intriguing, if slightly unconventional, interviewee.²⁶ And a highly fitting subject to be profiled in this work’s last ethnographic vignette.

Created by the Pinochet dictatorship in 1979, as dissident and other inconvenient bodies continued to be exiled, tortured, disappeared, and piled up, and in the same year as the implementation of a controversial labor law that codified the neutering of the country’s badly repressed union movement (Kremerman 2013), DIRECON’s legal mandate from the beginning has been to “*ejecutar la política que formule el Presidente de la República en materia de relaciones económicas con el exterior*” (execute the policy that the President of the Republic formulates in regards to international economic relations). Through the postdictatorship period, this commercial policy has displayed a remarkable and perhaps disquieting continuity with that of the military regime, reflecting the fact that an unwavering commitment to “free trade” and “open markets” appears to be stamped into the DNA of Chilean parties from across the mainstream political spectrum. This degree of unanimity and singularity of voice in a society with deep

²⁵ As the culmination of a decade-long negotiation process, the agreement to create the Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP, was reached in October 2015. Composed of twelve countries that together account for 40 percent of global trade, the TPP makes for “one of the most ambitious free trade agreements ever signed.” Beyond the usual concerns raised by labor unions, environmentalists, and other advocacy groups, the TPP has also drawn criticism due to its secrecy-shrouded negotiation process. The agreement is currently awaiting ratification by participating governments, which are comprised of: Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the U.S., and Vietnam. See: *BBC News* (2015b).

²⁶ See: <https://cl.linkedin.com/in/jos%C3%A9-sep%C3%BAveda-torres-0a32b697> (accessed January 9, 2016).

social, economic, racial, and ideological divisions indeed makes one question the vibrancy of Chile's supposedly consolidated and enviable democracy.

What is undisputable is that the results of this nonconsensual consensus have been nothing less than spectacular. As cited in the previous chapter, Chile has perhaps more free-trade agreements than any country in *the entire world*—25 in total, per DIRECON's website. Together, they cover an impressive “64 mercados, que representan el 64,1% de la población mundial y el 86,3% del PIB global” (64 markets, which represent 64.1 percent of the world's population and 86.3 percent of global GDP),²⁷ as well as over 92 percent of Chile's foreign trade.²⁸ If the Chilean state and its economic arms are married to anyone or anything, it is definitively the free-market ideal. Sepúlveda's role in putting it into practice as a veterinarian-cum-negotiator of major international trade deals may seem low-key, or even inconsequential. Yet, he is precisely the type of merchant capitalist actor whose behind-the-scenes efforts—launched from deep within the DIRECON headquarters, on the twelfth floor of the same Ministry of Foreign Affairs building in downtown Santiago where my presence was so frequent that I was on a first-name basis with the security staff—are essential for the functioning and propagation of the global capitalist system.

He divides his work duties into three parts: “*mucha negociación*” (a lot of negotiation), “*administración*” (management), and interacting with relevant embassies. With noticeable contentedness, he comments that the current administration of Michelle Bachelet “*está más cerca del mundo árabe*” (is closer to the Arab world) than its right-

²⁷ These figures are provided on the DIRECON website, available at: <http://www.direcon.gob.cl/> (accessed January 9, 2016).

²⁸ See: <http://www.direcon.gob.cl/mapa-de-acuerdos/> (accessed January 9, 2016).

wing predecessor. In particular, he cites a[n] “*acercamiento político*” (political rapprochement) with the region based on Chile’s large and influential Palestinian-descendant population, increased interest on Chile’s behalf in pursuing free-trade agreements with Middle Eastern countries, and a more activist foreign policy vis-à-vis Israeli human rights abuses against the Palestinians, itself the product of the government’s critical posture toward Chile’s authoritarian past (indeed, Bachelet’s own father, an air force general who was loyal to the Allende government, died in military custody after months of torture at the hands of the Pinochet regime, and Bachelet herself was subsequently detained, tortured, and exiled). In fact, during the same fieldwork trip, while I descended the red-carpet stairs that lead to the Ministry’s lobby, I was met with a seemingly impromptu, standing press conference held by several legislators to denounce Israel’s bombardment of the Gaza Strip during the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict.

Yet ultimately, of course, I am much less concerned with *what* Sepúlveda does—about which I can learn a sufficient amount from his previously cited *LinkedIn* profile—than with *why* he does it. And unlike the tiring psychoanalytic gymnastics required to inspire Alaby to begin to openly consider his place in the world, Sepúlveda was more than happy to oblige from the very beginning as I peppered him with unconventional questions about place-based imaginaries and his own globalizing role.

Indeed, the dialectical interplay between these two seemingly opposing forces—national/transnational longings and global consciousness—became clearer through my exchanges with Sepúlveda than it was with perhaps any other interview. As I jotted down in my postinterview notes, he “switches back [and] forth between [the] national

and global,” is “navigating [the] global [and] local,” and “denies [any] contradiction” between them. Let us explore where the balance lies.

There is in fact a recurring nationalist tick in his speech that surfaces in the forms of both the now-familiar “we-means-the-homeland” framework that I explained earlier as well as even balder pronouncements of Chilean interests and/or exceptionalism. Thus, in regards to the former, Sepúlveda refers to “*un nuevo acercamiento que estamos tratando de hacer*” (a new rapprochement that we [Chileans] are trying to make; emphasis added) with the Arab world. As he comments similarly near the beginning of our first encounter, “*queremos ser una potencia agro*” (we want to be an agro power). Again, by “we,” he means “Chile,” and by “agro,” he is alluding to the budding halal industry, “*una mina de oro*” (a goldmine) that the country is sitting on top of, even if its agricultural producers have only started to take notice.

He goes on, evincing a seemingly left-of-center ideology that is at odds with my other interviewees: “*nosotros vamos a seguir en subdesarrollo sin educación de calidad*” (we’re going to continue in underdevelopment without quality education), invoking the sustained, mass student movement that for years has mobilized against the political class for its collective failure to improve overall standards and address chasmic inequalities within the country’s ailing public educational system. “*Nos está condenando*” (It’s condemning us), he deadpans, as if to a premature death.

Time and again, he repeats: *nos* (us), *nosotros* (we), *este país* (this country)—Chileans, the Chilean people, Chile, and its “*selección*” (national soccer team). And just as he laments—apropos of Keohane’s aforementioned observation that Latin American countries “are takers, instead of makers, of international policy” (quoted in: Carranza

2006, p. 814) —that for now “*Chile es un tomador de regulación*” (Chile is a taker of regulation), he looks forward to a future world in which Chile “*pone en jaque a un país desarrollado*” (puts a developed country in check) in regards to a matter of international political or economic import. As he extols Chile’s virtues as “*un país serio [y] estable*” (a serious [and] stable country) that has “*tranquilidad*” (peace), is “*seguro*” (safe), and suffers from “*menos problemas sociales*” (fewer social problems) than its neighbors, it is almost enough to expect that he will in any moment break into a stirring rendition of the national anthem, which compares the countryside to a “*copia feliz del Edén*” (happy copy of Eden) and twice promises “*futuro esplendor*” (future splendor) for Chile.

Fortunately, our second and much more revealing conversation, which unlike the first did not include the participation of other DIRECON interlocutors, quickly turns to the topic of globalization and what it means both for him and for the Chilean state that contracts his labor to promote international trade. While he had previously defined our globalized world as one in which “*las ideas viajan rápidamente*” (ideas travel quickly), citing the examples of world-spanning protest movements and the global repercussions of Middle Eastern conflicts, he now hones in on the *economic* angle of the globalization of ideas and mindsets that motivates my research and presence in his office.

Chile may be geographically isolated “*al fin del mundo*” (at the end of the world), but through the aforementioned (and expansive) “*red de acuerdos*” (network of [free-trade] agreements), it is beginning to “*linear*”—to draw, sketch, and outline—the contours of a globally inserted economy. What about Sepúlveda the veterinarian and merchant capitalist? Does he consider himself a global actor? “*Sí, sin duda*” (Yes, without a doubt). Through his international trade-promotion activities, he has

constructed a “*red de contactos en todo el mundo*” (network of contacts throughout the world). As he observes, they see each other three times a year at international meetings, much more often than he crosses paths with fellow public-sector employees in Chile who happen to work in the relatively nearby *Ministerio de Salud* (Ministry of Health). Based on his (material) *global* meeting schedule and *global* assemblage of merchant capitalist peers, he has developed a(n) (ideational) *global* consciousness to boot. Yet he acknowledges that this *globalization* is an uneven process, for not all similarly placed trade officials either in Chile or around the world participate in these globe-spanning networks.

This globalization process is also lumpy in a further sense that he does not openly acknowledge during either of our conversations. Though he asserts that “*no hay conflicto*” (there is no conflict) between the national and global, at the level of his own mindset there is at least a hint of tension that it behooves us to interrogate in the following paragraphs. Indeed, it is precisely by exploring these seemingly contradictory yet in reality intertwining axes of identity that we may start to establish where precisely his own sympathies lie, as well as begin to approach the much larger question of how *place-based* and *global* allegiances rise, fall, and interact in capitalist elites the world over.

Sepúlveda may initially refer to “his” people as the Chilean nation, and to being motivated as a college student by the desire to “*trabajar por, [y] levantar el país*” (work for, [and] raise/build/lift up the country). But as his material circumstances changed upon joining Chile’s international trade bureaucracy, his goal morphed into something far greater: “*quería alimentar el mundo*” (I wanted to feed the world), he declares. Even

while quickly jotting down his exact words during our interview, I took the time to underline “*mundo*” (world) in my notes. He immediately clarifies that his concern with “*seguridad alimentaria*” (food security) also translates into wanting to feed the “world” in his own country, and ensure that his country’s own poor—those whose current lack of educational opportunities also concern him—have reliable access to a healthy food supply. One can thus deduce that he does not subscribe to a facile local/global binary. Rather, he consistently and deliberately asserts the peaceful coexistence of *both* identity axes in his own mindset.

Sepúlveda is paid by the Chilean state to promote the “*producto chileno*” (Chilean product), improve Chile’s “*imagen país*” (national image), and “*defender a Chile*” (defend Chile) in international forums, and he seems to perform these tasks with great passion and aplomb. Yet when he subsequently reflects that his labor is directed toward benefitting *everyone*, he means not only “*mi país*” (my country), but “*el mundo*” (the world). Just as he describes Chile’s international political and economic relations as being composed of interlocking networks, stretching from regional to global, so are Sepúlveda’s identity frameworks stacked on top of one another like layers on a cake, simultaneously identifiable as distinct and yet coherent parts of the same mass.

As he closes by asserting that in today’s globalizing world, of which he is an important if somewhat unconventional protagonist, “*todo está conectado*” (everything is connected), and that “*todo lo que hacen tiene repercusión global*” (everything that they do has a global repercussion), I cannot help but think that the same is true of Sepúlveda and his identity. His nearly 15 years of participation in international trade negotiations have clearly internationalized his own worldview as well and led to his incorporation into

global networks that have elevated his interpretive framework beyond the Chilean nation-state container that used to more or less exclusively filter his reality. It would be too much to speculate that, these initial moves aside, he is moving in the direction of a full-fledged global identity. Rather, at least for the time being, he is perfectly content to allow the local and global to coexist within himself, a further indication, if any were needed by this point, that human identities in general and class consciousness in particular are lumpier, less linear, and more convoluted than the “butterfly collectors” (Cardoso 1977, p. 21) would have us believe.

Analysis and Conclusions

At the previously stated risk of oversimplifying for the sake of categorization, this chapter argues that the three figures profiled above can be most accurately conceptualized as *denational* or *global* capitalists. To be sure, there is great diversity among them, with a particularly noticeable gap separating Melhem and Alaby’s profit-first mindsets and Sepúlveda’s budding global sense of solidarity. But what unites them is that in one or another form, the place-based interpretive filter has been decentered to a significant extent. Whereas the last chapter analyzed interlocutors for whom national or transnational concerns were paramount, in the present cases, there is a noticeable supersession of parochial national and/or ethnic concerns in favor of either a (partially) denationalized quest for profit or a (partially) global set of identifications and attachments. National moments that are not dissimilar to those uncovered in the last chapter again rear their heads here, but they are now in the minority.

Overall, then, this chapter interrogates cases that provide at least partial validation of the global capitalist class hypothesis. That is, one finds some evidence here for the existence of a capitalist elite that features an “identity in the global system

above any local territories and polities” (Robinson 2004, pp. 47-48), or at least for whom place-based imaginaries have to a significant degree been decentered. As I have argued, this is in fact a *minority* position, for the national or transnational imaginary is far stickier among my interviewees than suggested by proponents of the global capitalism school. But before evaluating the overall balance of evidence concerning the notion of a global capitalist “class-for-itself,” let us first briefly recapitulate the story as told to us by the above interviewees.

- DANIEL MELHEM. A dead ringer if any exist among my interviewees for the “Mr. Moneybags” of Marx’s (1867, p. 362) description, whose “life impulse” is profit, whose “soul is the soul of capital,” and who is chased around the globe by the desire—the *need*—“to create value and surplus-value.” Teary-eyed sentimental longings for particular homelands or compatriots surface occasionally vis-à-vis his “cool” immigrant past and the almost comically nationalist tendencies that are so often attributed to Argentines in general and residents of Buenos Aires in particular. Yet ultimately what has led him to the Arab world is not a Daccarett-, Aramouni-, Alssabak-, or Chaya-style quest to reconnect with the hallowed lands of ancestors and coethnics, nor a deep-seated desire to promote Argentine’s economic development or address what he identifies as the country’s many, many maladies. Rather, it is a denationalized quest for profit, and the fact that it is in the Arab world that he is able to turn his *cultural capital*—his Syrian family background and ascribed, corresponding ability to harness business opportunities in the larger Arab world—into *capital* itself. At least, that is, until Asian or other markets prove more attractive. According to his supremely class-conscious, elitist worldview, the “imagined community” that appears as the most salient is in fact the “private sector,” and more specifically financial capitalists. As he labels them, “people like *us*” (emphasis added). Though inchoate, there are indications that he understands that this imagined community exists beyond Argentina’s borders.
- MICHEL ALABY. From childhood superhero to unthinking capitalist. In terms of reflexivity (or, in his case, the lack thereof), he is no less than the anti-Daccarett. As it turns out, the motives driving the actions of this award-winning, seasoned, and weathered interviewee—ultimately responsible, perhaps more than any other individual, for Brazil’s remarkable “sixfold” increase in trade with the Arab world—were not buried deep below the interpretive surface. Rather, one sees what one gets with Alaby: a straightforward, largely denationalized capitalist desire to change Brazilian foreign policy, internationalize Brazil’s economic elites through exclusive workshops, spread the Arab-Brazilian Chamber model throughout the region, and pursue a general, business-friendly agenda of pushing for lower

taxes and more free-trade agreements. At the level of demeanors, his soporific sobriety is the polar opposite of Melhem's free-flowing brashness and charm. Yet if a mutual conversation were to turn to the strategic use of cultural capital in support of a largely denationalized quest for profits, the two would have much to discuss.

- JOSÉ SEPÚLVEDA TORRES. An endearingly reflective, obliging, and perhaps unlikely negotiator for a country that pursues international trade deals with dogged and unmatched enthusiasm. And who embodies both the local *and* the global, as well as how the latter may arise alongside of—and not precisely to replace—the former. Indeed, he is nearly equally at home among *nosotros* (us)—we, an atypical class-inclusive rendering of the Chilean people—and a global, epistemic network of trade contacts. Sepúlveda wants to simultaneously feed the world and ensure that Chileans of all socioeconomic statuses have access to quality education. Indeed, as he puts it, “*todo está conectado*” (everything is connected) in both his world and his interpretive frameworks.

As has become clear from the preceding, I have chosen to portray the three above figures in this chapter precisely because of how their interpretive frameworks differ from those depicted previously. Whereas the last chapter showed us how heavily the “tradition of dead generations” weighs on the brains of many of today's living capitalists, through the corresponding place-based attachments—to nations, states, cultures, and homelands of various kinds—in the present chapter we witness a distinct, if not entirely contradictory, trend. That is, these are the capitalist elites who most closely resemble Huntington's Davos Man and the global capitalist class-for-itself of the global capitalism school's analysis. Among these interviewees, “place” either lacks the ability to determine much of the direction of capitalist flows (Melhem, Alaby) or exists as only one part of a larger, mixed, and intertwined local-global framework (Sepúlveda).

Here, the usual caveats are once again in order. It is not that national or ethnic ties are irrelevant in these cases, for even among Melhem and Alaby they are still part of the general background of cultural capital that has led them to the particular—and successful—niche of Arab-Latin American relations. Also, decidedly *unglobal* moments

continue to make appearances, particularly in the form of Melhem's slow-to-come-but-nevertheless-meaningful references to his family's immigrant past, as well as Sepúlveda's tried-and-true Chilean nationalist tendencies. Further, if one accepts the ontological starting point that identities are not binaries but rather take the form of continuums and pieces of latticework, then the entire categorization process itself becomes inherently thorny. The present work, after all, is concerned with complex cognitive processes among living, breathing, and reflexive human agents, not the labeling of butterfly specimens.

Taking into account the nuances that characterize human life, the present analysis suggests that the three figures under consideration display significant *denationalizing* (Melhem, Alaby) or *globalizing* (Sepúlveda) trends. Particularly in regards to the former, they are not alone, as demonstrated by the following and brief examples from other interviewees.

- ANDREA SAPAG (as cited in the last chapter: at the time of our interview, the head of ProChile's Asia, Oceania, and Middle East department, and since October 2015 its New York-based trade manager). To my inquiry about her global credentials, responds with noticeable surprise that "*nunca lo había pensado así*" (I had never thought about it that way [before]). Yet she is quick to note that the experiences of promoting international trade, traversing the globe, and finding her bearings when arriving in foreign airports have caused her to realize that we live in an era of "*conectividad mundial total*" (total worldwide connectivity) and to develop a corresponding "*apertura mental*" (mental opening). Further, it has become her life's work to "*transmitir*" (transmit) that mental opening "*al sector privado*" (to the private sector).
- MARÍA DEL ROSARIO SOLARI (director of international and technical relations for the private-sector *Cámara de Exportadores de la República Argentina* [Argentine Chamber of Exporters]). Displays precisely the denational streak that one would expect from a merchant capitalist without a particular national or regional focus, along with a Melhem-esque—though less incendiary—appraisal of then-president Kirchner. They at the *Cámara* are interested in exporting "*donde sea*" (wherever), she observes, and will go wherever the going is good, including—but of course not limited to—the Arab world. "*Estamos inmersos*" (We're immersed)

in globalization. Invoking the folksy and previously cited *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, Solari comments that “*no es elegible la globalización*” (globalization isn’t “choosable” [it is not a choice]). Rather, it is the “*motor*” of our time, “*para todo el mundo*” (for the whole world). In this predetermined context, her role is to export whenever, however, and to whomever.

Denational and to a lesser extent *global* capitalists—that is, those for whom the place-based imaginary has largely been decentered (to return to this chapter’s title, leaving them without a *patria* [homeland], only bank accounts), and those with a positive set of global attachments, respectively—are thus real. Further, as I have speculated earlier, among capitalist elite identities there appears to be a (perhaps nascent) trend away from nationalism/transnationalism and in both of these directions. Thus, the arguments of the global capitalism school are not without merit and bear consideration as we contemplate the contours of our present, and especially future, world.

However, after carefully coding my interviewees, it is clear that these are still minority positions, with only a handful of my interlocutors beyond those profiled in the preceding pages fitting most comfortably into the *denational* or *global* categories. In fact, among the entire universe of my interviewees, Sepúlveda is the *only* one whose interpretive frameworks can be said to be *global* to a significant degree. Indeed, place-based filters for profit-seeking activity continue to resonate to an extent that calls into question many of today’s common scholarly and lay understandings of global processes, ranging from the arguments of the global capitalism school to proponents of the “strong globalization” thesis. In other words: based at least on the present case, a global capitalist class-for-itself has yet to supersede its place-based counterparts. Instead, as Adrian Budd (2013, p. 171) concludes more broadly, “The contradictory

inter-penetration of the national and global that has characterized its entire history continues to shape the capitalist world system.”

This chapter thus brings to a close my empirical engagement with the fundamental question of the extent to which we can speak of and identify a global capitalist class-for-itself among Latin American business elites, and, perhaps by extension, in the world more broadly. Going forward, there is indeed much room for methodologically sophisticated and regionally diverse works that continue to move the ball forward and add to our collective understanding of this important but mostly neglected topic.

However, I find my own conclusion—a skeptical but not dismissive response to the ideational half of the global capitalist class hypothesis—to be strangely unsatisfying. For both before and especially during the completion of this project, I had and have become accustomed to being confronted by cases of elites asserting global identities, the very phenomenon on whose existence I have ended up throwing some amount of cold water through this study. The last substantive chapter, before the moment arrives to present my concluding remarks, thus tackles this seeming paradox: if such global capitalist identities are much less “real” than commonly thought, then why are we bombarded with tales of their existence? As I discuss below, squaring this circle requires that we analyze the *material* benefits that may accrue to capitalist elites through their *ideational* assertions of global identities.

CHAPTER 7 ROOTED GLOBALISM, FUTURE HORIZONS, AND THE SPECTER OF THE GLOBAL CAPITALIST CLASS

The two previous chapters delved deeply into the ideational qualities of the Latin American merchant, financial, and other capitalist elites who are most responsible for the marked growth in this region's commercial relations with the Arab world. The principal finding, as noted, is that while *denational* and very occasionally *global* interpretive frameworks do indeed manifest themselves among the above interlocutors, *national* and *transnational* imaginaries continue to filter the profit-seeking activities of the majority of interviewees to an unexpectedly significant extent. Thus, if we are to take these cases as any indication, this stickiness of place-based attachments leads to a skeptical, but not entirely dismissive, response to those who advance arguments for the existence of a global capitalist class-for-itself. In turn, the present chapter seeks to tie up two theoretical loose ends that arise out of this analysis.

First, in the interest of converting critique of mainstream IR into action, I will invert (and subvert) the longstanding practice of building theory *only* on the basis of Global North realities by instead utilizing the present Latin American and South-South case to attempt to make a broader theoretical contribution to the field of global political economy. As such, the aim is to explore what the study of the would-be global identities of *Latin American* capitalist elites can potentially contribute to our understanding of this same phenomenon *the world over*. The idea, naturally, is not to blindly export these Latin America-based findings around the globe, but rather to engage in a nuanced, context-sensitive theory-building exercise in order to free my analysis from its regional cage and see what it does or does not seem to suggest about the broader phenomenon under investigation. As I explore below, the conceptual framework that arises out of the

preceding empirical chapters is “rooted globalism,” a nuanced category that intends to account for how the *global* and *local* interact and intersect in diverse geographical contexts.

Second, I take up the challenge of addressing the puzzle that surfaces at the end of the last chapter: if my findings suggest a skeptical (but again, not dismissive) response to the strong globalization thesis, at least as it concerns elite identities, then why do I so often find myself being bombarded with media and visual references to global capitalist entities that seemingly have “no national attachments or needs” (Sassen 2007, p. 187)? What could explain the apparent contradiction between my own research and the prevalence of newspaper quotes and corporate advertisements—printed in magazines and posted in the jet bridges of major international airports—that assert in unequivocal terms that such elite global entities exist and have cut the national umbilical cord?

As I will argue, there is in fact no contradiction between these empirical realities. For while it is indeed the case that elite identities at the global level appear to be less *global* than is commonly thought, these same elites stand to gain materially from global “presentations of self.” That is, in a world in which capitalist elites are materially and ideationally *global*, but most forms of meaningful “governance” are in fact *national*, these actors would be able to sidestep such place-based regulatory mechanisms with relative ease. Thus, while global capitalist elites may not in fact form a highly developed global capitalist class-for-itself, many such figures and entities indeed present themselves as *global*. For them, *globality* is both an aspiration and a political project

meant to demonstrate the futility of efforts to regulate both their activities and the broader global capitalist system of which they are a part.

“Rooted Globalism”: A Latin American Category

To again summarize my empirical findings, while place-based imaginaries are the dominant interpretive filters among this group of Latin American globalizing capitalist elites, there are important ideational forces—denational and, to a lesser extent, global—pushing in contradictory, or at least, differing directions. As I have suggested, identities are *complicated*, and the results that emerge from the present anthropological and sociological analysis suggest that seemingly opposite filters often operate simultaneously within the same individual. To invoke the logic of continuums, at the end of the day we may all have at least a little bit of everything.

Within this lumpy framework, as I have speculated, we may indeed be witnessing early signs of a *trend* toward the denationalization of identities, and even more speculatively their potential subsequent globalization. Corroborating evidence appears in the form of witnessing how globalizing material circumstances are transforming the mental frameworks of actors/thinkers as diverse as Daccarett and Sepúlveda, albeit in distinct ways.

What is the analyst, motivated by the desire to impose a category onto the hodgepodge, to make of the apparent coexistence and intermingling of the place-based (national, transnational, ethnic, etc.) and the place-less (denational or global)? It is here that I am reminded of Sassen’s casual ponderings concerning the convoluted rise of global classes. Though hers are abstract, philosophical ruminations that do not ostensibly enjoy the firsthand empirical backing that the present work has attempted to provide, it is nevertheless apparent that her general and nuanced contributions to this

debate are essentially correct and closely approximate the reality that has emerged from my own painstaking research into this topic. Let us consider a sample of previously cited observations:

- While “the national continues to be probably the most significant and encompassing condition,” it is also the case that “the imbrications of global, national, and denationalized will proliferate and begin to produce overall dynamics we have not yet seen.” Global identities, as they emerge, are “partly structured inside” and “dressed in the clothing of the national” (Sassen 2011).
- Would-be “global classes” in fact remain “embedded, in often unexpected ways, in thick localized environments.” They are thus “partially denationalized rather than global” classes, though the phenomenon of “incipient globality” is still important and merits further study (Sassen 2007, pp. 169-170).
- While we are witnessing “the weakening of the exclusive objective and subjective authority of national states over people, their imaginaries, and their sense of where they belong,” these same would-be global classes also “have a strong insertion into territorially bounded contexts—global cities and national governments.” These are not “free-floating cosmopolitan classes with no national attachments or needs.” However, there is indeed a trend toward global consciousness-formation (Sassen 2007, pp. 170, 187).

How prescient. Though at the beginning of this project I had no particular predilection for Sassen’s position nor desire to provide it with empirical support, in the end the outcome has been precisely to buttress both her nuanced conceptualizations of identity-transformation processes and her overall argument about where the balance lies. Both the local and global are real, can and do coexist, and are seemingly undergoing transformation. It is thus worth our time, energy, and attention to watch the process unfold.

To aid our efforts to identify what we see—and, perhaps more importantly, likely *will* see in the future—when we stare out at the vast expanse of global capitalist

identities, I have arrived at the concept and label of “rooted globalism.”¹ It is relevant here to speak of “globalism” because of the aforementioned hints that this is the direction in which elite (and perhaps other) identities are headed, and indeed the *denationalization* of national capitalist identities, observed in some of the above cases, is logically a first step. There is no ironclad *telos* or implied suggestion in the preceding that such a *denationalization* process is guaranteed to eventually occur, nor that if (not when) it does, it will inevitably lead to the development of *globalism*. Rather, I offer these arguments in the spirit of empirically informed conjectures concerning the path and paths that future capitalist elite identities seem likely to take.

¹ Per a *Google* search that I conducted after elaborating this concept, the term “rooted globalism” has not been used previously to any significant extent.

In turn, “rooted transnationalism” has been invoked with some, but not extreme, frequency to explore how diaspora populations do and do not adapt to their host societies (see, for example, a recent conference held in Australia: <http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/mai/international-conference-asian-migration-and-rooted-transnationalism/> [accessed January 17, 2016]). I developed the concept independently of such considerations but nonetheless am happy to extend the conversation into the present area of interest, concerning the sociology of global capitalist elites. However, as a caveat, we may note that “rooted transnationalism” is a redundant expression, for all “transnationalism” is of course “rooted” by definition. I thank Philip Williams for making this point.

My searches also subsequently led me to the somewhat further removed notion of “rooted cosmopolitanism,” which has become a serious topic of conversation in the field of liberal political theory. It refers to the attempt by scholars to reconcile global, universal ethics with local ties and attachments without giving up on either. See, for example, Kwame Anthony Appiah’s (2005) blockbuster *The Ethics of Identity* (for a brief review focusing on rooted cosmopolitanism, see Freedman [2005]), as well as Will Kymlicka and Kathryn Walker’s (2013) *Rooted Cosmopolitanism: Canada and the World*. For the origins of this term, and another instance of its use, see Sidney Tarrow’s *The New Transnational Activism* (2005, pp. 42-43). He writes: “Transnational activists are a subgroup of rooted cosmopolitans, whom I define as *people and groups who are rooted in specific national contexts, but who engage in contentious political activities that involve them in transnational networks of contacts and conflicts*” (Tarrow 2005, p. 29; italics in original).

Both of these terms wrestle with a similar, macro dynamic—the intermingling of the local and the global/transnational/cosmopolitan/universal—and thus bear at least a surface resemblance to my use of “rooted globalism.” What I add to this broader area of inquiry, aside from the focus on the identities and class consciousness of capitalist elites, is a specific empirical hypothesis, as articulated above, concerning their apparent future evolution, as well as an ontological argument about how “new” interpretive frameworks tend to arise only gradually, and within the shell of the “old.”

And yet it is also relevant to specify “rooted,” because, as and if it occurs, such globalism will grow within the shell of the national and/or transnational. It will write over it, but also write alongside of it, producing not just a fundamentally and ahistorically new global identity, but one in which the local and global cohabit within the same mental space, in spite of any ontological tensions that may exist between them.

Accordingly, to spell out this category’s definition in the clearest possible terms, rooted globalism refers to an identity formation in which, to significant and observable extents: 1) place-based filters have in some sense been denationalized; 2) global attachments and longings have developed; but, 3) local, national, transnational, ethnic and/or other such axes continue to resonate, thus 4) producing complicated, convoluted, and braided “new” identity amalgamations. The first and third characteristics appear contradictory, and indeed are—but as we have seen, so are human identities.

In these regards, Sepúlveda emerges as the closest we have to a real-life personification of this category, for it is through his person that we are able to witness: 1) how the desire to “*trabajar por, [y] levantar el país*” (work for, [and] raise/build/lift up the country) 2) transformed into the ambition to “*alimentar el mundo*” (feed the world), accompanied by a “*permanente visión global del comercio internacional*” (permanent global vision about international trade), and the development of a “*red de contactos en todo el mundo*” (network of contacts throughout the world), while simultaneously 3) he continues to speak in terms of *nos* (us), *nosotros* (we), *este país* (this country), and *la selección* to mean Chileans, Chile, and its national soccer team. The product, as we have seen, is 4) a figure who “switches back [and] forth between [the] national and global,” is “navigating [the] global [and] local,” and in general asserts that “*no hay*

conflicto” (there is no conflict) between them. Returning to Sassen, it is in these ways that capitalist elites with “incipient globality” may still be “dressed in the clothing of the national,” thus producing “imbrications of global, national, and denationalized...[that] we have not yet seen.”

Notably, this is not—or would not be—precisely the global capitalist class-for-itself of the global capitalism school’s description, which features a less nuanced “identity in the global system above any local territories and polities” (Robinson 2004, pp. 47-48). In this conjectural vein, at least for the foreseeable future, my argument is that global identities can be expected to exist *alongside* their place-based counterparts, not *above* them. Just as global capitalist elites indeed remain “embedded” in local environments—their material circumstances—a good Marxist account should infer that, to some greater or lesser extent, their identities will also in turn be “dressed in the clothing of the national,” the ethnic, and so on. “New” axes of identity do not paint on *tabulae rasae*, but rather on already colored slates, in the process creating what are indeed novel identity formations but only in the context of the “old.”

As described in earlier pages, perhaps the greatest contribution of the global capitalism school, or Huntington, in putting forth a strident rendering of a global capitalist class is that very stridency. By shearing away the surrounding context, nuance, and shades of grey, they have proffered an image of global elites that they hold to be true but that the above analysis suggests is not. Nonetheless, such a formulation again holds value as an “ideal type,” as it is the very act of presenting an exaggerated vision of a flat world peopled by global actors with fully global mindsets that aids our efforts to engage in analytical exercises concerning potential future trajectories of the

world system that surrounds us. That is, by accentuating certain (global) features at the expense of others (place-based), just as Weber had intended, we may engage in useful thought exercises relating to both our current world and its future possibilities.

However, and in the spirit of fidelity to Weber's own framing of ideal types as an analytical tool, we are not to lose sight of the fact that *ideal* types are not accurate depictions of "reality." They are deliberate, thoughtfully made distortions intended to clarify certain features through the bracketing of others. Though the desires of Robinson et al. were not, as far as one can tell, to devise such an analytical construct, but rather—presumably—to capture empirical reality, my own argument is that they have done the former instead of the latter. In turn, the present study's purpose has been to capture with the greatest possible precision the empirical contours of global elite identities, culminating not in the elaboration of its own ideal type, but rather an empirically based category that hews as closely to possible to the stories and realities that I have explored in the preceding pages. It is in this sense that I hope that "rooted globalism" turns out to be useful for categorizing and conceptualizing current and future identity amalgamations in all of their nuanced, tangled, and convoluted glory.

It is, as I have noted, a Latin American category, generated through deep, interpretive, and context-sensitive engagement with the region and its history, politics, and cultures. Thus, as also explained earlier, all the usual caveats about generalizability, and the reservations about blindly applying concepts derived from the experiences of one place to another, certainly apply here as well. And yet, to reverse the typical flow pattern of Western academia, which—presumably since its very beginning—has been developing ideas based on its own geographic surroundings and

applying them with perhaps no better than mixed results to other places, peoples, and contexts, my desire in the preceding is to have utilized these Latin American and Global South experiences in order to contribute ideas that may be of broader use to both “the discipline” as well as in other regions. Including the Global North.

Catch Me if You Can: On the Political Uses of Global Discourses

As briefly reviewed above, and as the below examples will further demonstrate, contemporary media—ranging from news stories to corporate ads—surround us with tales of globalism, of nomadic, globetrotting capitalist elites, of wealthy investors who trade cash for citizenship, of businesspeople who and businesses themselves that shed flags and host countries with nary a second thought, and even seasteaders—right-wing libertarians on steroids—who are seeking to create an anarcho-capitalist paradise in international waters. The fevered pitch is enough for many to inspire conversion to Huntington’s (2004) vision of an army of “dead souls”—economic elites, of course, but accompanied by converts among the professional classes and (wait for it) academics—who are undermining our “national identity” in favor of their flat-world economics (and, at least in the latter cases, their universal values). All that is left is for we, the people, to stand up to the rootless cosmopolitans by maintaining our steadfast commitment “to a national alternative and to preserving and strengthening the American identity of centuries.” The logical next step, to make a reference that will hopefully date the present work, is to vote for Donald Trump so that he can—or because he *will*—“Make America Great Again.”

To formulate an unlikely phrase in the present context, Huntington actually has a point—at least insofar as he offers a sort of challenge to the aggressive globalizing discourses of capitalist (and other, seemingly unrelated) elites, instead of accepting

them as a *fait accompli*, per the theoretical framework of the global capitalism school. Whatever the other (and many) faults of his position on this and other matters, Huntington at least thus understands the political salience of global discourses, even if he does relatively little to tell us about where they come from, let alone why, and how they can be used strategically.

But before we go down this path, let us first establish the precise nature of the aforementioned empirical puzzle that now confronts us. At issue is how to reconcile A) the stickiness of national and place-based imaginaries that I have identified through the present research with B) the prevalence of discourses by and about elite capitalist actors, boldly asserting their global identities. Surely, there appears to be a fundamental contradiction between these positions, insofar as they point in opposite directions concerning the great national-transnational-denational-global debate that I have sought to address in the preceding pages.

But perhaps there is in fact no such contradiction, as instead I have merely erred in one of my premises. Here, at least three possibilities arise. First, it could be that my empirical conclusions are simply *wrong*, and that Latin America's capitalist elites are much closer to forming a global capitalist class-for-itself than the above analysis suggests. Second, my case selection could be leading me to an idiosyncratic conclusion that does not "travel." Maybe Latin America's capitalist elites are simply that much less "global" than their Global North counterparts, or there is something peculiar going on with Arab-Latin American relations and the protagonists I have profiled above. And finally, it could be that I have too aggressively stated the claim that assertions of global

capitalist identities are indeed all around us, and the reality is instead that such examples are relatively few and far between.

In brief, and after careful consideration, I am not swayed by such objections. My meticulous and thorough empirical analysis of representative cases from within the chosen population does indeed point in the direction of sticky place-based imaginaries and only (very) nascent global ones. While, as noted, we may speculate with some basis that Global North capitalist elites could indeed have more “global” identities than their Southern colleagues, if for no other than the simple, Marx-derived reason that to the extent that a globally organized economy exists, they are more likely to be more deeply plugged into it (that is, their material circumstances), these Northern and Southern elites are nonetheless all protagonists in the same universal story of capitalist globalization (Chibber 2013b).

It is doubtlessly true that “postcolonial elites are increasingly entangled in the transnational class formation produced by global reconfigurations” (Dirlik 2000, p. 7), and to the extent that we recognize that global capitalism is indeed a *universalizing* force, but not a *homogenizing* one (Funk 2015a), we have every reason to expect that the life-worlds of Northern and Southern capitalists are of course different but intrinsically connected at the same time as they coexist within a larger, shared, global capitalist structure. As such, though we should naturally expect some diversity of thought among them, we should also presume that there is a fundamental relation—and similarity—in their interpretive frameworks.

Likewise, while Arab-Latin American relations—which feature a disproportionate presence of actors with *ethnic* and *national/transnational* ties to the region of their

ostensible commercial interest—may constitute a particularly challenging case for attempting to locate a *global* capitalist class, further examination demonstrates that in fact these attachments do not play such an overbearing role, or perhaps not precisely the one we may expect. To return to the vignettes, Daccarett may love all things Palestinian, but he also speaks glowingly of the broader Middle East, and even Central America; the Syria of his ancestors, in business terms, is irrelevant to Melhem; in Alaby's company, most exports are in fact destined for the U.S. and Europe; for his part, Sepúlveda reveals no familial ties whatsoever with the Arab world. Thus, the very ethnic and national/transnational linkages that make Arab-Latin American relations a particularly compelling case for analysis in the present circumstances do not, at least in general, drown out the profit motive of these actors. Thus, while we may again expect place-based sentimentality to be stronger here than would presumably be the case with a de-ethnicized, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant capitalist elite actor in the U.S. who heads a multinational corporation that has truly global business interests, we must not lose sight of the fact that *all* of these figures are fundamentally related as part of the internationalizing sectors of their respective countries' economic elites. They are distinct but connected manifestations of capitalist globalization. Accordingly, as is the case with the first would-be objection, while the issue of generalizability is—always—a legitimate concern, it should not derail us here from discussing the potential extension of the present analysis to a broader set of cases, at least for the sake of argument.

The final putative objection is the easiest to address. Beyond the above-cited examples of media stories that conjure images of a border-hopping, and indeed borderless, global economic elite, we may go straight to the horse's mouth—to the

business community itself—for even more dramatic presentations of transnational selves. Specifically, business propaganda—commercials, promotional posters, and text from websites—proves to be fertile ground for identifying cases of elite economic entities asserting global identities, both for themselves and potential clients. The point is not to interrogate the veracity of these media and corporate discourses, or of course to suggest that anarcho-capitalist seastealers do not exist and that there are no such cases of economic elites who change their citizenship for business reasons. All of the above are indeed “real” phenomena.

Rather, the present aim is to understand why corporations feel the need to sell us—the general population—on their own would-be “globality” in the first place, to discover what motivates the desire to emit such a public image, and to interrogate the political calculations behind—and ramifications of—these decisions. As I have noted, my contention is that global capitalist elites are driven to display, and indeed exaggerate, their global credentials—in both *material* and *ideational* terms—for the very simple reason that doing so is in their self-interest. In other words, the practices of adopting and promoting their own “flexible citizenship” function “as strategies to accumulate capital and power” (Ong 1999, p. 6) in the sense that the actions of “free-floating cosmopolitan classes with no national attachments or needs” would by definition be significantly harder to regulate than those of their nationally oriented counterparts. Not because teary-eyed patriotic appeals have lost their resonance with the former, but due to the fact that actors with fewer national ties of any kind will be better able to dodge efforts at regulation of their economic activities, centered as these regulatory efforts are on *national* laws and *national* means of enforcement.

Further, these global discourses feed into the public image—also beneficial for such elites—that we live in a capitalist fantasyland in which meaningful global regulation appears both unthinkable and impossible, and thus is not worth even attempting. Naturally, even social movements with an interest in fighting for alternative, politically progressive forms of globalization are more likely to feel disempowered rather than energized by the implicit message that capitalist elites cannot be tamed by the state apparatus. Solving the aforementioned empirical puzzle thus requires that we understand the material incentives that motivate such a global presentation of self.

Let us pause to consider two cases of corporate actors that have invested heavily in the cultivation of a global image. The Dubai-based Emirates Airline, which only thirty years after its founding has joined the ranks of the world's largest international carriers, is a particularly media-conscious entity, and as I peruse its website I am greeted by the trustworthy face of former *Friends* actress Jennifer Aniston (notably, the commercial in which she was paid a reported \$5 million to star centers around Aniston's horror upon discovering that not all airlines match the amenities offered by Emirates' aircraft, which include showers and a cocktail bar²).

Emirates is also a prolific producer of poster advertisements, the most telling of which for present purposes features the slogan, "tomorrow thinks borders are so yesterday."³ Leaving aside a visual analysis of the background image, which displays adolescent skateboarders—including a hijab-wearing girl—careening their way down a

² The video is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kwYr4LAIUjk> (accessed January 17, 2016).

³ This advertisement can be viewed at: <https://www.pinterest.com/flywithemirates/hello-tomorrow/> (accessed January 17, 2016).

mostly barren street, what explains this rather forthright statement of borderless creed? What does it mean, and why is Emirates paying to disseminate this meaning?

Our main clue lies in the fact that Emirates, like all other airlines, is of course forced to navigate a world order in which nationally produced pieces of paper—in the form of passports and visas—determine who can and cannot enter a given country, or, in turn, fly on one of their planes. A borderless world is thus an appealing utopia for a business that profits from increasing global connectivity. Yet in the more mundane real world of today, borders are not actually of course a relic of yesteryear, and one's possession of a given national document is still an ironclad determinant of whether you can purchase a given Emirates ticket or enjoy the apparently glamorous, inflight "Emirates Experience." Nevertheless, at least at the level of aviation policy, the *aspiration* to create a borderless world remains, an ideal that Emirates seeks to start concretizing through aggressive campaigning for "true international competition and open skies"⁴—the latter of which, perhaps not so coincidentally, happens to also be the name of Emirates' inflight magazine.⁵ It is a global ethos that even filters down to hiring practices, with the "Cultural Diversity" section of Emirates' website observing that "our employee diversity of over 160 nationalities is our unique strength as a global organization."⁶

⁴ Information on this campaign is drawn from the "international and government affairs" section of Emirates' website, available at: <http://www.emirates.com/english/about/int-and-gov-affairs/international-and-government-affairs-new.aspx> (accessed January 17, 2016).

⁵ See the magazine's website, available at: <http://www.emirates.com/ro/english/open-skies/issue/2866682/january-2016> (January 17, 2016).

⁶ See: http://www.emiratesgroupcareers.com/english/about/cultural_diversity.aspx (accessed January 17, 2016).

The immediate ambition, as stated in fine print at the bottom of the aforementioned poster ad, is to encourage potential customers to “Fly Emirates to 6 Continents.” But the larger political project is to tear down state-based legal obstacles to the freer circulation of people, goods, capital, and indeed airlines, a position that would further buttress fast-growing Emirates’ efforts to cement Dubai’s status as a global “aviation hub.”⁷ It is in this—rhetorical and of course self-interested—sense that, to borrow from another Emirates ad, “Dubai re-imagines the world.”⁸

Second, let us take the case of the Hong Kong-born and London-based HSBC, one of the world’s largest financial institutions, which “was established in 1865 to finance trade between Europe and Asia.”⁹ Per a website heading, “we are different,” since from the beginning, “we brought together different countries and cultures, as we still do today.”¹⁰ According to the website’s “strategy” section, “Our aim is to be acknowledged as the world’s leading international bank.” As such, it maintains “an international network of around 6,100 offices in 72 countries and territories,”¹¹ with shareholders hailing from 131 “countries and territories.”¹² Having until recently anointed itself through a global marketing campaign as “the world’s local bank,” financial

⁷ See: http://www.emirates.com/english/about/the_emirates_story.aspx (accessed January 17, 2016).

⁸ See: http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/emirates_burj?size=original (accessed January 17, 2016).

⁹ HSBC’s official “company history” is available at: <http://www.hsbc.com/about-hsbc/company-history> (accessed January 17, 2016).

¹⁰ See: <http://www.hsbc.com/citizenship/diversity-and-inclusion> (accessed January 17, 2016).

¹¹ See: <http://www.hsbc.com/about-hsbc> (accessed January 17, 2016).

¹² See: http://www.hsbc.com/about-hsbc/our-purpose?WT.ac=HG HQ_Ah_h1.2_On (accessed January 17, 2016).

pressures have since caused HSBC to scale back such retail operations and focus instead on “global banking and markets and commercial banking” (Farrell 2011).

In recent years, dating at least as far back as the “world’s local bank” days, HSBC has sought to “bring our global network to life and demonstrate the power of international connections” by placing its poster advertisements “on jetbridges at airports around the world.” The altruistically framed purpose, as stated on the website of the current “global brand campaign,” is “to encourage people to think about where they are going in life and, by doing so, demonstrate our support to help them along their way.”¹³

Typical are those ads with trivia-style yet politically suggestive statistics and observations—“Only 4% of U.S. films are made by women, compared to 25% in Iran”; “Five times more people are learning English in China, than there are people in England”; “Holland makes more exporting soy sauce than Japan”¹⁴—followed by a call for weary travelers to “find” or “see” the world’s potential.

Other slogans bear even less resemblance to the head-scratching “real facts” from Snapple bottle caps and instead evince clearer normative assumptions about the evolving world order, with prodding implications about how we can all get in on the (profitable) action. We read: “In the future, South-South trade will be norm not novelty” (accompanied by the message: “There’s a new world emerging”); “In the future, new trade routes will reshape the world economy” (accompanied by the slightly expanded and balder message: “There’s a new world emerging. Be part of it.”); “In the future, even the smallest business will be multinational” (featuring the same accompanying

¹³ See: <http://www.hsbc.com/about-hsbc/advertising> (accessed January 17, 2016).

¹⁴ These and other such slogans are available at: <http://blog.rev.com/articles/culture/hsbc-airport-ads-share-remarkable-insight-to-our-world/> (accessed January 17, 2016).

message); and, finally, “In the future, there will be no markets left waiting to emerge” (accompanying message: “Tomorrow is full of opportunity”).¹⁵

In other words: Corporate globalization is real. It is inevitable. Everyone is involved (or at least should be). And it is creating a flat world. For those passengers who are willing to pause and reflect on HSBC’s aphoristic marketing slogans as they make their way through the jet bridge, and absorb in corresponding fashion the aforementioned ideological implications of these pithy statements, rewards include precisely the heightened global awareness that will be necessary to stay ahead of the business curve in “tomorrow’s” evolving and increasingly borderless capitalist landscape. According to this utopian vision, every geographical space in the world will be fully integrated into the global capitalist system, and even the neighborhood lemonade stand—as pictured in the “smallest business” ad, with prices in three different currencies—will have globalized accordingly.

As one blogger titles her reactions to the ads, “Globalisation Promoted at Airports.”¹⁶ Indeed, business opportunities know no boundaries. And given that—as another ad puts it—“Over 138 million people work outside their country of birth,”¹⁷ and you as a viewer of these ads are on your way to or from an airplane at a global aviation hub, neither should *you*. It is almost as if we are back in Buenos Aires, listening to Daniel Melhem—profiled in the previous chapter—delivering an impassioned

¹⁵ The advertisements can be viewed at: <http://mustardpost.com/hsbc-airport-ads/> (accessed January 17, 2016).

¹⁶ The blog post is available at: <https://watchfineartslondon.wordpress.com/2012/07/21/globalisation-promoted-at-airports/> (accessed January 17, 2016).

¹⁷ See, again: <http://blog.rev.com/articles/culture/hsbc-airport-ads-share-remarkable-insight-to-our-world/> (accessed January 17, 2016).

motivational speech about “making deals” wherever “opportunities exist.” There is, after all, a big capitalist world out there, and those passengers who adopt a proper global mindset and break free of their antiquated and parochial place-based concerns will be well situated to reap substantial material rewards.¹⁸

The argument, again, is that Emirates, HSBC, and other global actors invest in the diffusion of such global presentations of self—and their customers—for reasons that have less to do with any sort of “real,” felt globality (which may or may not be a part of their interpretive frameworks) and are more related to the material benefits (that is, profits) to be reaped by assuming a global identity. As Ong (1999, p. 6; emphasis added) again puts it, “in their quest to accumulate capital and social prestige in the global arena, subjects *emphasize*, and are regulated by, practices favoring flexibility, mobility, and repositioning in relation to markets, governments, and cultural regimes.” After all, per the observation of the Argentine thinker Néstor García Canclini (2014, 42), “in regard to globalization, those who propagate it would not be very persuasive” if they did not also simultaneously promote an accompanying “imaginary.” In this context, to again borrow from Krugman, globalism—the utopian vision of a borderless and flat world—becomes an idea that spreads precisely because it is “in the interest of powerful groups.”

Thus, these media efforts serve as a forum through which global elites not only challenge regulatory efforts and the general public to “catch them if they can.” They also

¹⁸ Playing more of the middle ground—between the local (or, in this case, regional) and global—is the São Paulo-based Itaú, which refers to itself as a “Global Latin American bank” (see bank’s official website: <http://www.itaubank.com/> [accessed January 17, 2016]). Reflecting the same spirit, it has developed its own advertising campaign featuring the slogan, “I Am a Global Latin American” (Robertson 2015, p. 13). I would like to thank Jany Méndez for bringing this and some of the other above examples to my attention.

take the further step of suggesting that they *cannot* be caught, or regulated, or contained. As the economist Dani Rodrik puts it, business elites (and economists themselves) have sought to advance a “hyper-globalization agenda” that asserts corporate rights over states’ abilities to promote the welfare of their populations (Pearlstein 2011). Taking this analysis one step further, the present argument is that one way in which this business-friendly agenda is advanced is precisely through corporate propaganda that stresses the global credentials of their own institutions as well as of capitalist elites more generally.

“Proving” the link between private interests and public images would of course require insider knowledge and evidence of a kind that, at least to my knowledge, is not currently available, and whose collection is beyond the scope of the current project. Further, it may be the case that, at least for some, this is not an entirely conscious process, in the same way that we have discovered that global capitalist elites do not always display the robust levels of reflexivity that one may expect from actors who are situated thusly. Yet just as the detective seeks to establish a motive as part of the attempt to solve a crime, we may work backward from the empirical anomaly—largely place-based identities coupled with very public assertions of global identities—and surmise that there are material interests at play that must go some amount of distance toward squaring the circle. It will be up to future research to provide a fuller explanation of the present puzzle and uncover evidence directly implicating the material interests of global elites in their decisions about how to project themselves into the public eye.

Conclusions

To conclude the present study, this chapter seeks to tie together two theoretical loose ends relating to issues raised by the above analysis of the global credentials (in

ideational terms) of Latin American capitalist elites. While both cursory and speculative, these theoretical threads speak to highly salient issues for consideration of, respectively, the transformative (yet nuanced) processes that I suggest have begun and will continue to morph the interpretive frameworks of globally oriented capitalist actors, and how we are to reconcile the continued prevalence of largely place-based identities alongside firm and frequent assertions by globalizing institutions of the reality and desirability of our increasingly borderless world.

As a brief summary, I first utilize this Latin American empirical material to derive the concept of “rooted globalism,” which encapsulates the contradictory, halting, and nascent trend toward the denationalization and subsequent globalization of capitalist elite identities, but which still occurs—as I argue, agreeing with Sassen—within the shells of sticky national and transnational imaginaries. My dual hopes, again, are to work toward the establishment of a precedent through which Global South realities are better integrated into theoretical understandings of our evolving global political-economic order, as well as to accurately capture a developing phenomenon through suggesting a conceptual label that should facilitate efforts to figure out, *what are the effects of globalization (the material) on elite identities (the ideational)?*

In regards to the second, I have made the suggestion that certain corporations publicize the *idea* of the global capitalist class precisely because of its ideological content: it posits an ungovernable world in which capitalist elites have no material or ideational attachments to the state. Thus, it lays the ideological groundwork for a capitalist fantasyland in which regulation is both unthinkable and impossible. I do not mean to suggest, naturally, that Marxist scholars of global political economy promote

such an idea. Yet through its at-times overly aggressive assertions concerning the rise to hegemony of a seemingly omnipotent global capitalist class, the global capitalism school has precisely the effect of disempowering those who seek to regulate the activities of global capitalist elites or indeed imagine a different, alternative form of globalization.

To put these two threads into dialogue, the “capitalists of the world” have thus yet to accomplish what Marx long ago urged for the “workers of the world”: to unite in terms of a shared cosmopolitan consciousness. Indeed, global capitalist elites are increasingly chased around the globe by a profit-seeking impulse, but not—or at least not yet—as a global capitalist “class-for-itself.” For that, we can be thankful. That capitalist elites have yet to mentally divorce themselves from the state and construct a global imagined community is both a cause for relief and a motive to consider how to contain their rise.

But we may very well be heading in such a direction, from place-based interpretive frameworks to rooted globalism, and then, perhaps, beyond. And indeed, based on the above analysis, at least certain global elites already seem to recognize the material benefits that may accrue to the “global one percent” as it increasingly sheds its territorial baggage. It is a haunting specter, and serious efforts—from combative social movements to new forms of global governance—will be needed to confront it.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

To quote three prominent disciplinary voices, “it is striking how little political scientists actually know about the political attitudes and behavior of wealthy citizens” (Stevens 2015, p. 725)—or, indeed, about their beliefs and actions in general. Yet such an oversight is not apparently limited to either political science or U.S. academia. As the Brazilian sociologist Antonio David Cattani comments, despite the fact that his is one of the world’s most unequal countries, and that “the rich and superrich help to influence processes that determine the structure of society,” nearly *99 percent* of research in the social sciences focuses on the poor and working and middle classes. “Few study the rich” (Costas 2014).¹

Through analyzing (and exploring the histories and contexts surrounding) the agents behind Latin America’s booming economic relations with the Arab world, this project has sought to begin to fill this gap and contribute toward our understanding of the life-worlds and interpretive frameworks of internationally oriented economic elites both in the region and the world over. Indeed, while various studies attempt to measure the extent to which globalization as an objective, material economic phenomenon is spreading around the planet (for example: Figge and Martens 2014), we know much less about the ideational qualities of this system’s protagonists.

To briefly recapitulate, I have argued—to borrow from Latha Varadarajan (2014, p. 377)—that “while the expansion of capitalism on a global scale is real, so is persistence of the territorial nation-state system.” And indeed, in regards to capitalist

¹ The original quotations are in Portuguese. Translations are my own.

class consciousness, the pull of the latter is stronger than that of the former, at least at present. In other words, and in contradiction to many lay and scholarly accounts, *place-based* motivating imaginaries continue to reverberate among the predominantly merchant capitalist elites analyzed in this study to a more frequent extent than their *place-less* counterparts. Accordingly, the argument for the existence of a fully formed imagined community of global capitalists retains analytical utility as an ideal type, and perhaps as a representation of a class that has yet to coalesce but one day will. However, it does not appear to be an accurate description of living and breathing capitalist elites as they exist today.

Further, I have argued that corporate discourses promoting *globality*, along with “tomorrow’s” borderless utopia, may in fact often be a political performance by capitalist entities to promote their own material, profit-seeking interests. Thus, the idea of a global capitalist class-for-itself is less an empirical reality than the (rhetorical) “heavy artillery with which” such agents attempt to “batter[] down all . . . walls” (Marx 1888, p. 477)—regulatory, ideational, and otherwise—that prevent further capital accumulation. And finally, I have developed a conceptual framework—based on the notion of “rooted globalism”—with the aim of aiding our collective understanding of ongoing and likely future changes in global capitalist identities. Given the apparent trends toward denationalization and, much more nascently, globalization, that my analysis reveals, my hope is that the idea of rooted globalism will serve as a useful reference point for others who wish to shed additional light on ongoing changes in the interpretive frameworks and life-worlds of global capitalist elites.

While we may raise the (reasonable) objection that *what* these actors are doing (the material) is of much greater relevance than *why* they think they are doing it (the ideational), my contention has been that there are real, political consequences to the above story. Two are particularly worthy of mentioning here. First, though it was not my aim to make such an argument at the outset, to the extent that I have demonstrated the mythology behind the aforementioned borderless utopias and the stickiness of place-based imaginaries, there are stronger grounds for considering how to engage in more meaningful forms of global governance. A class that still has some level of “national attachments” and “needs” (Sassen 2007, p. 187) will be easier to regulate. And second, by constructing actor-centered accounts of the capitalist system, instead of overly structural ones that appear deterministic and teleological, we counter the arguments of those who see the current power and economic inequalities that have risen alongside global capitalism as *fait accompli*.

From here, many ideas and future projects beckon. Indeed, my interest has been piqued by multiple topics throughout this process of study, learning, and analysis, including: the spread of new global infrastructure, such as Bitcoins, that could one day lay the basis for a truly globally integrated economy (and perhaps a corresponding shift in capitalist identities); the rise of “global cities” in Latin America, from Santiago to São Paulo, as hubs for economic exchange; the potential formation of South-South linkages to the extent that, as cited earlier, “to get from Brazil to Cairo, you won’t need to pass through Washington and Paris” (Karam 2007, p. 174); and the need for critically minded, policy-focused research concerning “global governance,” as well as consideration of how the global power elite can be not just *conceptualized*, as my

project has sought to accomplish, but also *regulated*. Further, I would of course welcome efforts by others to conduct serious studies of global class consciousness in their regions of expertise. Any limitations of this study aside, my aspiration is that the present methodological approach, the notion of rooted globalism, and the conceptual clarity that I have sought to provide, will all be of some utility in such endeavors. Also, it would hearten me to witness an avalanche—or even a steady trickle—of political science research studying the “attitudes and behavior of wealthy citizens” and other elites.

Embedded within the *current* project, just like any other, is a series of critiques, normative assumptions, and political aspirations. To give voice to some of them here:

- Facing the IR tide of foregrounding Global North cases, experiences, and realities, I decided to swim in the opposite direction. Thus, I chose to tackle what I regard to be an important and *general* theoretical question with a *Latin American, Global South* case study.
- Standard, positivist methodologies, at least by themselves, are inadequate for addressing questions that involve meaning and identity. This is perhaps especially true for studies involving class, a notoriously “complex” phenomenon to observe and analyze (Emerson et al. 1995, p. 138). Based on its context-sensitivity, ethnographic sensibility, and more realistic and fluid view of human thought and action, interpretivism is much better suited as a general methodological framework to inform the “social” sciences. It is not my position that interpretivism is the only methodological game in town, or that all scholarship should adopt such an approach, but rather that our methodological choices should match our research questions and ontologies (Hall 2003). To the extent, then, that we are interested in human cognition and consciousness, and that we recognize that “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun,” an interpretive approach is a natural fit.
- Following Karen Ho’s (2009) example from *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*, we have much to learn by closely observing the agents who labor within, and whose actions help to create, global capitalism’s seemingly faceless, anonymous structures. Further, focusing too much on structure as opposed to agency can reinforce the (undesirable) status quo by strengthening the presentist bias and making change seem impossible. Global capitalism and neoliberalism, like much else, have “political origins,” and in order for a serious movement to

arise to challenge them, people must come to internalize “their ability to be politically reversed” (Schwartz 2014, p. 519).

As implied above, an intellectual project of this kind is also an act of hope—for a more inclusive IR, a more methodologically pluralistic political science, and a more equal and democratic world. My aim with this work has been not only to *interpret* the less-than-desirable status quo in these and other regards, but to *change* it, if only in small and hardly perceptible—but nevertheless meaningful—ways. This is undoubtedly a tall order for even one’s entire academic career, let alone a solitary dissertation. Yet here, we can perhaps do no better than to follow Antonio Gramsci’s deservedly well-known adage of “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.”

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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