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Section I Theoretical and Conceptual Issues

1

The Contradictions and Transformations of Neoliberalism in Latin America: From Structural Adjustment to “Empowering the Poor”

Marcus Taylor

Introduction

The editors of this volume have posed the challenging question of whether Latin America is moving into a “post-neoliberal” era. Without doubt, the rise of populist socialism in Venezuela and Bolivia, the uncertain politics of post-crisis Argentina, and the continentwide rise of anti-neoliberal social movements have thrown a stern rebuttal to the oft-repeated adage “there is no alternative” (Veltmeyer 2007). Simultaneously, during the 1990s and beyond, numerous changes were noted in the discourse and policy prescriptions associated with neoliberalism in countries as diverse as Brazil and Honduras. Although not formalized in the World Bank until the late 1990s, the contours of neoliberalism in Latin America have been consistently yet unevenly shifting in response to prolonged socio-economic dislocation since the mid-1980s. Mexican President Carlos Salinas, for example, preempted much of the rhetoric of contemporary neoliberalism when introducing his program of “social liberalism” or “neoliberalism with a human face” in the late 1980s (Soederberg 2002). Moreover, the evolution of neoliberalism gathered pace in the continent under the mantle of “second generation reforms” that looked to build more efficient institutions for a market society, coupled with a new social agenda that would transcend the notion of “safety nets for the poor” (Ffrench-Davis 2000; Pastor and Wise 1999).

In response to these changes, some authors have talked of a “Third Way for the Third World” as part of a shift to an “inclusive neoliberalism” (Craig and Porter 2005). The emphasis on macroeconomic fundamentals and “getting the prices right” that were staples of the original neoliberal prescription have been displaced by a new emphasis on the

institutional and social prerequisites for a successful market society. This shift incorporates a broad set of development objectives and offers new tools for achieving them, including proactive state intervention to tackle issues from market failure to poverty alleviation (World Bank 2001, 2002). Such trends appear quite distant from the original focus of liberalization, deregulation, privatization, and state retrenchment that characterized the early rhetoric and practice of neoliberal policy, and this raises the question as to whether Latin America stands at the edge of a brave new world of “post-neoliberalism.”

The answer to this question evidently depends on how we conceptualize neoliberalism. If we conceptualize it in the narrow sense of a set of macroeconomic reforms—the “ten commandments” of the Washington Consensus, for example—then it is indeed plausible to suggest that the era of neoliberalism has passed. Simply put, policymaking has become more pragmatic, addresses wider concerns, and incorporates procedural novelties such as “ownership” and “empowerment” that deviate widely from the original prescriptions and methods of neoliberal structural adjustment. Moreover, the rhetoric of retrenchment has been replaced with a vision of a proactive state that secures market efficiency and the framework for social development through the promotion of gender equity, empowerment, and environmental sustainability (World Bank 1997, 2002, and 2004). For authors such as Joseph Stiglitz, this shift is captured in the notion of the “post-Washington Consensus” that has superseded the ideological dogmatism of neoliberalism (Stiglitz 2000).

In this chapter, however, I suggest that we should be altogether more cautious in pronouncing the transcendence of neoliberalism or the arrival of a “post-neoliberal” era. Policy practices such as institution building, the new regulatory role of the state, and the empowerment of the poor do not mark a fundamental rupture with the central aims of the neoliberal project, nor have they solved its internal contradictions. To make this argument, I suggest that we need to conceptualize neoliberalism beyond the level of specific policies, as an ambitious project of social engineering. Emerging in a period of sustained political-economic crisis, neoliberalism was a program of institutional transformation that sought to embed market relationships as the predominant form of social organization through which societies reproduce themselves on a day-to-day level. Neoliberalism therefore involved a wide-reaching reconstruction of the institutional basis of society in an attempt to fashion a depoliticized, individualistic, and market-driven society that, according to the predictions of neoclassical theory, would be rational, harmonious, and ultimately ensure shared prosperity.

Deep flaws in both theory and practice, however, ensure that the neoliberal project is replete with contradictions. Latin America has faced escalating social polarization, profoundly uneven development, and repeated economic and social crises during the neoliberal era (see Petras et al. 1997; Saad-Filho 2005). Given that the basis of a new and harmonious society did not emerge spontaneously from neoliberal structural adjustment, the neoliberal project began to explore evermore expansive forms of institutional restructuring in an attempt to consolidate the original project. Without relinquishing its essential emphasis on the rationality of the market as the foremost organizing principal of social life, contemporary neoliberalism has dramatically broadened the scope of its social engineering in order to address its internal contradictions and attempt to mediate the ensuing social conflicts that have sharpened over the last 3 decades. Paradoxically, as I discuss in the final section, the cutting edge of neoliberal theory professes the need for collective action from below (“empowering the poor”) in order to secure its utopian vision of market individualism. Unsurprisingly, such developments do not resolve the underlying contradictions of neoliberalism but rather juxtapose them into new arenas of social practice and, in so doing, engender new contradictions and sites of struggle.

Neoliberalism as a response to crisis

Neoliberalism in Latin America was the child of the deep crisis that afflicted the continent in the 1970s and early 1980s. The remarkable rapidity by which it became embedded across Latin America derives not only from the coercive power of international financial institutions but also from the particular nature of the social, political, and economic malaise that Latin American countries encountered. In the era of “national-developmentalism” following the Second World War, the Latin American political economy was characterized by the expansion of state institutions intended to fortify economic development by promoting industrialization and to mediate social conflicts by regulating industrial relations and social reproduction (see Anglade and Fortin 1985 and 1990). In the economic sphere, these state institutions included protectionist tariff regimes, industrial credits, and currency regimes geared to aid technology imports as a spur to domestic industrialization. More widely, the expansion of the state incorporated the uneven development of a range of institutions that sought to mediate the social conflicts that wracked Latin American societies. These included corporatist arrangements between state, capital, and labor to dampen

industrial conflict (Carrière et al. 1989); price controls to cheapen food and other consumables for the urban working classes; various agrarian reform initiatives (De Janvry 1981); and the expansion of social provisioning for health, education, and social security as a response to the demands of increasingly mobilized occupational groups and social movements (Mesa-Lago 1989).

During the first two decades of national developmentalism, high prices for raw material exports buoyed the region's economies and provided revenue for ambitious import-substitution industrialization (ISI) strategies and the expansion of social programs. For the duration of these so-called golden years of relatively sustained economic growth, the expansion of the state seemed a necessary spur to capital accumulation because it stimulated industrial growth and appeared able to contain social tensions by distributing resources to social groups through corporative state institutions as a form of material and political compromise. When supportive global conditions came to a halt with the oil shock of 1973, however, the escalating contradictions of national developmentalism were thrown into sharp relief. On the one hand, import-substitution encountered serious difficulties, and the stagnation of the industrialization project manifested itself in pressure on profits and wages, which in turn exacerbated industrial conflicts (Saad-Filho 2005). On the other hand, propelled by the demands of popular movements for expanded social provision, the expansion of state expenditure became a mounting fiscal burden (Mesa-Lago 1989).

This crisis, however, was far from simply an economic crisis driven by internal inefficiencies and external shocks that required a correlated shift in economic policies. Inseparable from the economic manifestations of crisis was the growing politicization of Latin American societies. State institutions that had proliferated as part of national developmentalism—including welfare institutions, labor regulations, and agrarian reform processes—no longer appeared able to mediate social conflict but instead became conduits of social struggle driven by the contradictions of capitalist development. For example, the institutional frameworks intended to mediate industrial strife became points of contestation between national unions, employer associations, and state bodies, therein drawing the state further into industrial conflicts and wage setting (Carrière et al. 1989). Similarly, as the welfare institutions of the national-developmental state expanded, the state became deeply involved in regulating social reproduction and politicized the ways in which it intervened in distributional questions. Pressured by various social movements to expand its forms of provision, the

institutionalization of diverse welfare policies developed in a conflict-driven and profoundly uneven manner (Duhau 1997).

As a consequence, far from diffusing social conflict, the institutional forms of the state politicized the contradictions of capitalist development. With the expansion of state interventionism, the barriers between economics and politics appeared to be crumbling and many of the key institutions of capitalist societies, such as the sanctity of private property, appeared to be under strain. Sharp political divisions over how to respond to these challenges frequently led to political paralysis, and Latin American countries suffered repeated military interventions, with state coercion deployed to suppress wage and social demands from popular movements. Concurrently, public debt escalated as governments sought to borrow money to alleviate fiscal pressures. Following a sharp rise in international interest rates in the early 1980s, the dramatic increase in debt burdens culminated in the 1982 debt crisis (Körner 1986).

Within this environment of escalating economic and political crisis, the salience of neoliberalism was that it offered a program of reforms that, by breaking down and replacing the social institutions constructed in the postwar years of national developmentalism, promised not only to resolve the symptoms of crisis but also to eradicate their social and political roots. Neoliberal reformers envisaged a rapid end to both the economic woes of the continent and the spiral of politicization and crisis through a program of social engineering that sought to subordinate state and society alike to the abstract and seemingly neutral disciplines of market forces. Moreover, the project was promoted and sustained by the coercive power of finance and debt alleviation wielded by international institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank.

Neoliberalism as social engineering

To better understand neoliberalism's political project, it is useful to examine its theoretical roots in the neoclassical tradition of economics. As Arnsperger and Varoufakis (2006) have argued, while neoclassical economics has evolved in complex ways over the last 3 decades, it remains characterized by the foundational assumptions of methodological individualism, methodological instrumentalism, and methodological equilibration through which the dynamics of capitalist society are conceptualized as the outcome of interactions between rational individuals who act in an instrumental manner by exchanging goods to satisfy a relatively stable set of preferences. Rationality is designated

as the essential quality of the individual who is able to calculate and choose between different courses of action so as to best satisfy stable preferences, and the end result of these exchanges is to impose equilibrium upon the economic system whereby market forces marshal individual rationality into a socially optimal whole.

The theory is therefore rooted in what Milton Friedman termed the “elementary proposition” that both parties to an economic transaction benefit from it, provided the transaction is bilaterally voluntary and informed (Friedman 1962: 55). Exchange is therefore a rational occurrence that reconciles the scarcity of goods with the diverging tastes, desires, and wants of individuals. Concurrently, the market emerges as a spontaneous coordinating mechanism that aligns the atomized pursuit of self-interest (Friedman and Friedman 1980; Hayek 1973). Given its foundation in rational individual action, market exchange generates the optimal distribution of society’s resources as supply and demand equilibrate, while price signals ensure that individuals invest surplus capital in the areas of unmet demand and highest productivity that offer highest returns.

Three important further propositions were built on these initial assumptions and were enshrined in the political project of neoliberalism. First, given the finite provision of material goods (the condition of scarcity), the institution of private property is derived as the rational solution to restrict potential conflict and anarchy. The sanctity of private property not only sustains the system of exchange, and therefore facilitates social rationality, but also upholds the relationship between contribution and reward that promotes the entrepreneurship integral to a dynamic economy. The fundamental task of the state is therefore to ensure the exercise of property rights and the soundness of the contracting system that permits the exchange of property. Neoliberal political practice consequently seeks to retrench or remove state institutions that weaken the sanctity of private property and strengthen those that fortify it. This includes generalizing the commodity form into areas of social life that had previously been organized around collective provision.

Second, money—the instrument of exchange and account—is seen as the social oil that facilitates the rationality of the system. The stability of money itself is pivotal for the sound communication of information to and between market actors in the form of prices and must be protected above and beyond alternative political and economic motivations (Clarke 1990).

Third, if the market is presumed to be rational and to lead naturally to the optimal distribution of resources, the distortion of market

transactions by extra-market forces is deemed to infringe on overall efficiency by rupturing the formal rationality of the market imposed by the price mechanism. Based on the methodological individualism of the neoclassical tradition, collective subjects are seen as special interest groups that inhibit rational individual decisions based on utility maximization. The latter are conceived as artificial and illegitimate impediments upon a condition in which individual rationality and freedom is maximized to the benefit of the common good. In this respect, judging institutional configurations on the basis of neoclassical economics, “generally leads to the conclusion that the only institutions we should have are those—such as property rights and the rule of law—which enforce the roles of competition and exit, and hence limit the role of bonding or groups” (Storper 2005: 35).

Neoclassicism therefore provides the theoretical justification for governments to ensure a stable institutional framework for market transactions and to refrain from interventions that would alter market outcomes. Such actions distort natural market prices by interfering with the free and rational movement of capital, goods, and labor, leading to suboptimal investment decisions and a drop in overall economic output as capital. Moreover, state interventions break the nexus of effort to reward that the market is seen to promote and foster dependence on discretionary and politically motivated decisions rather than on the neutral, efficient, and harmonizing mechanism of the market.

It is not difficult to see how such a political program could be heralded as the direct response to the various social, political, and economic manifestations of crisis facing Latin American countries in the late 1970s. Neoclassical economists argued virulently that the interventionist state had perverted the natural market order and thereby introduced rampant inefficiencies across developing-world economies, resulting in economic stagnation and ultimately deep crisis (Lal 1985). As such, and despite being contrary to 30 years of mainstream development thought, neoliberalism began to resonate in some circles within the political right in Latin America because it offered legitimacy to those on the looking to reform the interventionist state.

As a host of political economists have pointed out, however, the restrictive initial assumptions of neoclassical economics—including but not limited to the notion of the utility-maximizing individual, the tendencies toward equilibration, and assumptions regarding information and perfect competition—undermine its ability to explain actually existing capitalist society (see DeMartino 2000). The strength of neoclassical economics for policymakers in the 1980s, however, was not its

analytical precision or the uncertain benefits of its economic prescriptions, but its political implications. As Simon Clarke (1991) emphasizes, the original intention of establishing economics on foundations akin to the natural sciences was to offer an ideal type against which society could be judged according to scientifically grounded ideas of rationality and efficiency. This explicit normative dimension, wrapped in the trappings of a formalistic and “value-free” science, lies at the heart of neoclassicism and is directly incorporated into the core of the neoliberal project.

Far from being deterred by the gap between abstract models and social reality, neoliberal proponents use the divergence to justify reforms that are envisioned to make reality more closely approximate the ideal type. At its essential core, therefore, neoliberalism is an ambitious project of social engineering that seeks to coerce reality into the axioms of human interaction projected by neoclassical economics. Neoliberal reform involved state-led “creative destruction” through which existing social institutions that sanctioned nonmarket forms of social interaction could be destroyed and replaced with those that facilitate a society conforming to the methodological individualism of neoclassical theory. As the theory ran, society could be harmonized—and crisis tendencies extinguished—by forcibly restraining social aspirations within the seemingly objective limits of rational markets. So long as individuals submit to the play of market forces mediated through monetary relations, the optimal conditions for economic growth and individual satisfaction will predominate to the benefit of both individual and common good.

Figures on the political right began in Latin America began to rehearse neoliberal arguments in the 1970s, particularly where neoclassicism had a strong basis—such as in Chile where exchange agreements between the Universidad Católica and the economics department of the University of Chicago had established a strong clique of technocrats known as “the Chicago Boys” (Valdés 1995). For most civilian and military political leaders in Latin America, however, the radical projections of neoliberalism were greeted with much suspicion despite the evangelical pronouncements of economists such as Friedman and Hayek. On the one hand, neoliberal reforms threatened to alienate key constituencies—including sections of the industrial bourgeoisie—whose social reproduction was embedded in the functions of the interventionist state. On the other, neoliberalism appeared counterintuitive to policymakers schooled in an era of Keynesianism and development economics that emphasized the necessity of state intervention to overcome market failures. It also ran counter to the corporatist tendencies of the older social conservatism influenced by Catholicism.

Notwithstanding these reservations, the depth of the crises across Latin America in the early 1980s, combined with the coercive financial power of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, proved integral to the spread of neoliberalism across the continent. In practice the proliferation of neoliberal policymaking was uneven and took notably different forms across different national spaces. Chile, for example, was subjected to neoliberal restructuring from 1974 onwards when General Pinochet aborted ISI policies in favor of a neoliberal strategy that dovetailed with his wider goal of depoliticizing Chilean society (Taylor 2006). In contrast, neoliberalism came to Peru some 15 years later when Alberto Fujimori entered the presidency promising to overcome political deadlock and economic stagnation. Despite assurances to the contrary, the rapid introduction of a neoliberal reform program proved to be his solution to these quandaries (Ruiz Torres 2005). What we encounter in much of contemporary Latin America, therefore, is a plethora of “actually existing neoliberalisms,” each of which has evolved differently owing to the unique nature of the political environment, the particular character of the institutions that neoliberalism sought to reform, and the contingent outcomes of political and social conflict over restructuring.

Neoliberalism in practice

In spite of such variation, it is useful to highlight certain key aspects of neoliberalism at a general level in order to shed light on its subsequent evolution. In contrast to the prevalent antistate bias of neoliberal rhetoric, the state stood as both the primary subject *and* object of neoliberal restructuring. Neoliberalism rests on systematic state interventions that seek to reshape social institutions while mediating the political and social tensions that arise from this restructuring. As Karl Polanyi (2001: 140), who examined an earlier period of market liberalism, observed long ago: “the road to the free market was opened and kept open by an enormous increase in continuous, centrally organized, and controlled interventionism.” From its inception, therefore, neoliberalism has been a project of institutional restructuring that involves not only “rolling back” the state but also transforming, strengthening, and creating new institutions. This point is key to understanding continuities within the subsequent evolution of neoliberal policymaking into its “neo-interventionist” forms.

Initially, the destructive aspects of this process were most prominent. In the name of the neutrality and rationality of the market, neoliberalism endorsed a state-led assault on institutions that were seen to distort

market outcomes or facilitate collective social action. This involved dismantling the institutions of the interventionist state through privatization, liberalization, retrenchment, and deregulation, with a particular focus upon the institutions that had formed around economic planning, labor relations, and social policy. Shock therapy was central to this project. By engineering a brutal recession that broke down productive structures and their underlying social relations, it obliterated existing institutional forms to create an environment in which market order could be inscribed. As I have argued elsewhere, this constituted a strategy of state-led “creative destruction” in which the destructive elements were pronounced and whose worst effects were born by urban working classes (Taylor 2006).

While collapsing the institutions of the interventionist state, however, neoliberal restructuring simultaneously created and strengthened institutions that are essential to the functioning of markets. Specifically, the legal system that upholds the sanctity of private property was fortified, often through constitutional amendments that ended a growing trend in Latin America of expropriating land and industries for redistribution or nationalization. Other institutions were remodeled, such as the redesign of taxation systems to promote entrepreneurship and a more regressive tax burden (Taylor 2006). Furthermore, many new institutions were created specifically to uphold markets—and the social discipline they entail—such as the formation of independent central banks that would control monetary policy to ensure that price stability would supersede all other social and political concerns. Indeed, the stability of money was a key moment in the project to subordinate the society to the limits of the market. Friedrich Hayek (1973) had emphasized how monetary stability was not simply a technical question of economic management but was the center point of a political struggle to assert the rationality of the market system over those who would seek to restrain it.

In this way, the crippling high interest rates that characterized the anti-inflationary measures of shock therapy programs represented a fundamental shift in power relations. As Andrew Gamble (2001: 131–2) elaborates:

Making sound money once again the cornerstone of policy meant being prepared to take on politically all the vested interests which had grown up through the extended state and helped perpetuate the policies which were restricting the rights of managers to manage and were tying capital down in increasingly ossified economic and organizational structures.

The overall goal of such neoliberal restructuring, therefore, is to create a strong state that, suitably disengaged from political pressures, is able in the name of the common good to discipline both society and its own institutional bodies to adhere to the process and outcomes of marketized social relations (World Bank 1997 and 2004). It also underscores the tendency toward the technocratization of neoliberal government in Latin America, a process under which politics was to be reconstituted as the depoliticized and technocratic exercise of governance—that is, responding to economic “facts” such as inflation rates, balance of payments, capital account fluctuations – in accordance with the dictates of “sound economics.”

Such institutional reform had a strong path-dependent quality owing to both the difficulties of undoing constitutionally embedded institutional changes and operating within the changed power structures they create (Brenner 2002). Where center-left governments came to power during the 1990s in Latin America, they often found their programs curtailed owing to the barriers provided by the institutions created through neoliberal restructuring and the correlate shift in the distribution of power. By tenaciously enforcing the social power of money across Latin American societies, neoliberal reform augmented exponentially the power of capital—both domestic and foreign—and strengthened the disciplinary role of finance. For example, the liberalization of capital markets has redefined the exercise of power in countries such as Brazil and Mexico, wherein the threat of capital flight and financial crisis currently serves as a notable moderating influence on governmental policy choices (Lemco and MacDonald 2001). In Chile, the reform of the state, implemented by Pinochet, placed important governance mechanisms outside of public control and concentrated vast resources—such as the control of collective pension savings—in the private sector (Taylor 2006). Neoliberalism attempted to constrain the political process in Latin America within strict limits as designated by the stable reproduction of the market order. These are precisely the limits, however, that the recent populist governments of Chávez and Morales and numerous popular struggles across the continent are challenging.

The contradictory evolution of neoliberalism

The failure of political opposition and social conflict to disappear under the auspices of the presumed rationality of neoliberal restructuring is not surprising. Despite its ascendance across Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s, neoliberalism is predicated upon a number of contradictions that have undermined its political project and shaped its subsequent

evolution. Guided by the empty abstractions of neoclassical economics that reduce capitalist social relations to the sum of individually rational market exchanges, neoliberal reformers are frequently blinded to the substantive and conflict-inducing irrationalities of capitalist development, as manifested in the subordination of social need to profit, the conflicts generated across production and distribution, the pervasiveness of human resistance to processes of commodification and exploitation, and the continual crisis tendencies of social relations that stubbornly refuse to conform to general equilibrium models. Accordingly, neoliberal reform has proved unable to achieve the economic and social goals its proponents heralded. Structural adjustment tended to exacerbate social crisis across the continent, driving a new degree of polarization and impoverishment during the “lost decade” of the 1980s and which proved largely intractable during the 1990s (SAPRIN 2004a). Concurrently, social conflict did not melt away under the auspices of a radically depoliticized new society but was transposed into alternative arenas and sites of struggle (Petras et al. 1997; Veltmeyer 2007).

The result has been a transformation of neoliberalism—both in theory and in practice – driven by the unanticipated outcomes of existing policies and shaped by the contours of ongoing social and political struggles. Indeed, international organizations such as the World Bank have been caught between the need, first, to extend restructuring across evermore social realms in order to fortify the neoliberal project and, second, to respond to the conflicts that restructuring has unleashed. Unsurprisingly, the evolution of neoliberalism has been profoundly uneven, and new theories have often been a *posteriori* rationalizations of policy changes.

In Latin America the political response to the ongoing disruption of structural adjustment quickly arose in the dual strategies to engage in second-generation reforms and to give neoliberalism a “human face” (Pastor and Wise 1999). At an international level, the World Bank’s policy prescriptions have undergone constant reinvention yet remain unable to shed the underlying contradictions of neoliberalism. These remain manifested in its fragmented policy prescriptions and practices that have emerged in a reactive mediation to the struggle-driven and crisis-torn course of uneven capitalist development in the present era (Taylor 2004b; Taylor 2005; and Ruckert in this volume).

The expansion of institutional restructuring, including an emphasis on the political structures (“good governance”) and the requisite forms of economic regulation (“sound investment climate”) to catalyze a market society, has been ongoing since the initiation of structural

adjustment. Within the current discourse, the familiar end of a market society is to be pursued by new, and often contradictory, means. First, neoliberal theory and practice has drawn heavily on the theoretical lineage of information-theoretic economics and the “new institutional economics,” popularized by Joe Stiglitz and Douglas North respectively, in order to rethink the role of the state. While not duplicating the functions of markets, the newly interventionist state must go beyond its original forms of restructuring to construct a sound regulatory environment that can align the expectations of actors within a framework of market rationality and mitigate informational imperfections that might undermine the efficiency of markets outcomes. In this manner, as the World Bank (2002: 22) stresses:

The efficiency of markets, which are themselves institutions, depends on the strength of supporting institutions that help align the expectations of agents regarding the procedures that govern their transactions.

Nonetheless despite these revisions, the primary assumptions of neoclassical economics remain, and the ultimate goal of reform is to solidify—not modify—the underlying thrust of neoliberal structural adjustment. As Ben Fine (2001) has demonstrated, methodological individualism remains the assumption of this “post-Washington Consensus” formulation. The new framework retains the basis of a perfectly competitive market composed of rational self-maximizing individuals, yet it charts how information imperfections or imperfect institutional configurations produce deviations from this state. Such imperfections are considered to be prevalent and therefore necessitate a much fuller role of the state in establishing institutions that impartially enforce the rules of the game and that channel information about market conditions, goods, and participants than the initial restructuring models suggested (World Bank 2002: 8). Revisions of this nature provided both a convenient rationale for prior failures and a program of new reforms, yet they did not mark a break with the underlying market ontology of neoliberalism.

More interesting transformations have arisen through struggles over poverty alleviation. Within the neoliberal cannon, it became expedient to develop new theories to explain why poverty rates were not falling and to direct policy practice. Remaining wedded to the notion that market activities are mutually beneficial and will therefore help raise the poor out of poverty, neoliberal theory since the 1990s has developed

the hypothesis that numerous social and institutional factors obstruct poor people from effectively exchanging assets in markets and thereby perpetuate their poverty (see World Bank 2000, 2002, and 2004).

It is not, therefore, the substantive irrationalities of marketized social relations that are causally related to the creation and reproduction of poverty, but rather the failure of poor people to adequately access and participate in markets owing to institutional and social impediments, such as lack of information, corruption, discrimination, and political voicelessness. Poverty is therefore conceptualized as the result of cumulative human, social, and political failures external to capitalist social relations and that can be remedied by correcting institutional forms. Whereas the initial neoliberal reformers promoted sound macroeconomic policy, market liberalization, and expanded commodification that helped to expand economic opportunities, they underestimated the range of social institutions that needed reform before market activities could improve the lot of the poor. In the words of the World Bank (2002: 61): "Societies have to help poor people overcome the obstacles that prevent them from freely and fairly participating in markets."

Hence, poverty alleviation is reconceptualized as a process of dismantling social and political institutions that prevent poor people from reproducing themselves via the medium of the market. In practice, this has resulted in an emphasis on greater resource provision to facilitate improvements in the social and institutional infrastructure of poor communities. Most dramatically, poor people are to be "empowered" to manage such interventions themselves. In the neoliberal usage, "empowerment" refers to the need for poor people to act collectively to apply political pressure to guarantee the quality of state services and peer monitoring of their delivery, thereby mitigating the possibilities of development resource capture by elites. In an apparent reversal of power relations, for example, the World Bank lauds the empowerment of poor people to "monitor and discipline service providers" (World Bank 2004).

Collective action beyond ensuring accountability and a superior quality of service delivery, however, is not welcome. Political movements that might threaten the status quo as enshrined by property rights and the primacy of free markets are symptomatic of poor people who do not recognize their own best interests. Unionization, for example, is antithetical to true empowerment because it forms a barrier to the flexibility of labor markets and prohibits the formation of a market-clearing price for labor that will ensure optimal levels of employment and productivity (World Bank 1995). Empowerment, therefore, is the

harnessing of the poor to help remove barriers to their participation in market relations. In short, and with no small degree of irony, poor people should act collectively to enforce free markets and good governance and therein create the conditions in which market individualism can reign supreme.

Within the Latin American context, social funds—such as the *Fondo de Solidaridad e Inversión Social* (FOSIS) in Chile and *Oportunidades* in Mexico—have become the primary vehicle of antipoverty policy. Despite their increasing sophistication, they remain intrinsically neoliberal in formulation. They do not offer a form of decommodification in the manner suggested by social policy theorists such as Gøsta Esping-Andersen: namely, a mediation between individual and market that reduces the dependence of the former on the latter (see Esping-Andersen 1990, and Ruckert in this volume). Rather, their aim is to provide the physical and human infrastructure to promote market participation as the means to socioeconomic development. Rather, they attempt to provide the means through which marginalized communities can reintegrate with capitalist social relations which primarily means reinserting themselves into labor markets that have been suitably “flexibilized” (see Taylor 2004a; World Bank 1995). The contradictory dimension of this process is that, in the name of empowerment, individuals are inserted into impersonal globalized market relations over which they have no control, in which they face profoundly uneven power relations, and which repeatedly enter into frequent crisis periods that marginalize significant portions of the population. Moreover, such programs deliberately obfuscate alternative antipoverty strategies—such as strong redistributive measures—that have been used with success elsewhere (Øyen 2001).

Conclusion: Toward post-neoliberalism?

The above sections have argued that many of the innovations associated with contemporary policymaking in Latin America—such as a more active role for the state and new models of social policy delivery and antipoverty programs—do not mark a rupture from the political project of neoliberalism. These trends, particularly evident in post-Pinochet Chile, Lula’s Brazil, and Fox’s Mexico, are a testament to the path-dependent qualities of neoliberal restructuring. By recasting institutional structures and the distribution of resources, neoliberalism reshaped power relations across the continent in an enduring manner that has frustrated the aims and strategies of many political movements

that sought to break with the market ontology of neoliberalism. When we think of post-neoliberal futures, therefore, attention is necessarily drawn to contemporary transformations in Venezuela and Bolivia. Debates will rightly continue over the aims and methods of these movements toward "Twenty-first century socialism." Nonetheless both cases serve as important examples of political processes that counter the notion of the market being the only efficient form of social organization and that seek to halt the relentless commodification of all aspects of social life. In so doing, careful and critical analysis of these ongoing transformations can help construct pathways toward a post-neoliberal future across Latin America.

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