“Doing-Good” with the Support of the Brazilian Private Sector: Transnationalization and privatization of development cooperation

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Abstract
The fundraising crisis faced by Brazilian civil society organizations is not confined to Brazil alone, but is endemic to civil society organizations worldwide. In this environment, however, Northern development organizations that are faced with funding shortages have identified Brazil as a potential place for fundraising, particularly from the private sector. To ensure the program sustainability, these organizations deploy several strategies. One such strategy has been to identify and merge with Brazilian organizations, establishing a presence in an emergent economy. The recent partnership between Save the Children and ABRINQ Foundation - a Brazilian toy factory philanthropic organization - exemplifies this new trend. This paper aims to discuss how Northern development organizations are adapting to a new fundraising environment biased by the processes of privatization and transnationalization and the constraints those processes bring to the development agenda.

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1. Introduction

In the past decade, much of the talk among Brazilian civil society organizations (BCSOs) on the issue of international development cooperation was about how Northern development organizations (NDOs) were leaving the country or decreasing their amount of fund support to Brazil with a view that the country and some other emerging economies were not anymore an aid priority. Nevertheless, some facts have brought attention to a new - yet not often explicit - face of NDOs adaptation in a capitalist globalized world order. Some traditional and well-known organizations with a history of support to BCSOs have moved to a different status in terms of their approach towards Brazil as they realized that there is a promising fundraising environment on Brazilian private sector.

Therefore, it is necessary to look over both capitalist globalization and international development cooperation as parallel yet interconnected trajectories. I try to observe and analyze here the processes through which some Northern organizations that used to work with development cooperation getting finance resources in the North to distribute with counterparts in the South have adapted to a globalizing expansionist plan of action looking for new sources of fundraising in the course of a logic that imitates some elements of the transnationalization of corporations in neoliberal globalization.

It should be noted that this is a preliminary study of novel processes in course that still have not showed their complete picture. Thus, the purpose of this paper is most of all to provoke reflections and raises questions on how to better describe and analyze the new adaptations of international development cooperation as it seems to be changing to a profile of globalizing aid industry. Part of the content of this study is based on interviews with key actors in the process: Jorge Balbis, the Executive Secretary of ALOP - the Latin American Association of Promotion Organizations, and Chairperson of The Reality of Aid Network; Vera Masagão, Chief Director of ABONG, The Brazilian Association of Non-Governmental Organizations; Graciela Rodriguez, Coordinator of EQUIT Institute (Gender, Economy and Global Citizenship) and Global Coordinator of IGTN – International Gender and Trade Network; Pedro Cunca Bocayuva, Professor of International Relations at PUC-Rio and former Director of
FASE; Valéria Nepomuceno, Coordinator of CENDHEC - Dom Helder Câmara Center for Studies and Social Action; Fátima Melo, Director of FASE, Executive Secretary of REBRIP - Brazilian Network for People's Integration, and member of the Organizing Committee of the World Social Forum; and Gabriel Strautman, former Coordinator of the Brazilian Network on Multilateral Financial Institutions.

In this paper I endeavor to present a view on how international development cooperation has adapted to a globalizing profile similar to the path taken by corporations in the past decades. I have chosen to conceptualize the process as being marked by both a transnationalization and a privatization of cooperation which should not only be seen as part of a long term process affecting the international dynamics of solidarities among societies, but also as specific stages of change that bring to light the difficulties and challenges of development cooperation nowadays. Thus, even though there was always criticism of the systemic, capitalist, or either hegemonic character of NDOs (SOGGE, 2002; FONTES, 2010; ROY, 2004), I argue that new methods are in course quickly bringing together the arena of development cooperation to the corporate agenda of social responsibility.

1. From international solidarity to a globalizing aid industry?

The impetus of growing is justified as the corporations’ approach to survival in a period of globalization. However, corporate culture happens to impact other spheres of life and politics that are not explicitly linked to it. To analyze the impact of new global capitalist strategies in the world of development cooperation, it is essential to observe how some of the concepts and facts that are used to describe or give evidence of globalization apply to the changes on NDOs actions while they seem to reproduce some of the private sector behavior and therefore get by some means associated with it.

Most international cooperation for development has always mirrored the historical context of world economy and politics, even though it carried, if not a discourse of radical change, at least a view of what could be an improvement in people’s lives through several agendas: from democratization to sustainability, from gender to diversity, etc. The Marshall Plan (1947) is identified as one of the most ambitious aid
plans in world history. A great part of U.S. supremacy had to do with the role the Plan played as an ambitious financial support to European countries although with preferential clauses to rebuild their infra-structure and their economies after the end of World War II. The Plan soon became a reference to several debates on international cooperation. In 1961, the frustrated Alliance for the Progress was U.S. President Kennedy response to Latin American countries, even if it did not get close to the U.S.’s European package and received a lot of critics at the time.

Two decades after World War II, Europe had largely recovered from its situation after war times. Political parties, corporations and new social movements were ready to dispute U.S. hegemony worldwide through political and economic investment in a different profile of civil society. In Brazil, as in other countries in the region, the social movements and the first non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were influenced by this scenario. Thus, international cooperation from the United States and European countries in the decade of 1960 was a response to some world challenges such as decolonization, the Cuban Revolution, and numerous conflicts either East-West or North-South. In Latin America, NGOs had their influence in Brazilian civil society at that time bringing it from a Christian assistencialism model to a culture of associativism and cooperativism (Bocayuva, 2009).

In the 1970s and 1980s there was an expansion of agendas and an increase on the number of BCSOs - social movements and non-governmental organizations. Brazil was facing a dictatorship and the new social movements had a libertarian anti-oppression approach to several issues. Most of the NGOs were created by ex-exiled Brazilian men and women who had kept personal relationships and solidarity ties with organizations in Europe. Thus, until the mid-1980s, international development cooperation between European political parties and civil society organizations with BCSOs were based in solidarity, resistance, and large incentives to the construction of a diversity of movements (Bocayuva, 2009). In the late 1980s, development cooperation started to become more technical than political. Program and project based, cooperation agreements went through a phase of restructuring or reengineering. Planning, monitoring and evaluating methodologies were developed as NGOs had to professionalize their staff to work with several techniques. Some of those techniques were being developed by the private sector. Together with the winds of state
democratization, it also meant a relative level of distance between funded NGOs as political intermediaries and the social movements. In his critical work on foreign aid, Sogge analyzes the emergence of an aid strategic regime or industry at the period:

“In the 1980s Northern private aid agencies, their Southern branch offices and local NGOs gained prominence and status. (...) Agencies prefer to control chains right down to their presumed end points. They thus seek NGOs as go-betweens with local people. Where such segments are missing donors may simply create them.” (Sogge, 2002: 95).

In the 1990s, the end of Cold War and the growing influence of neoliberal policies in states and societies had their impact on development cooperation. Approaches to development started to move from a focus on inequality, economic exploitation and social oppression to policies of helping the poor and strengthening citizenship of “the excluded”. BCSoS, mostly the NGOs and most of all the ones that emerged in the 1990s, started to change from an engaged anti-systemic profile to a third sector one, becoming a private managerial space of public resources (Fontes, 2010: 273-278), even though some of the funds were coming indirectly (through NDOs) from Northern states.

During the dictatorship but mostly in the 1990s international cooperation both financially and politically made it possible for Brazilian NGOs to take part in a global public sphere represented most of all by UN’s cycle of great Conferences. Because of that, some major Brazilian NGOs could play a bigger global role. Yet, international cooperation has also played a role on adjusting BCSoS agendas in a indirect process of external conformations and artificial adaptations, although BCSoS’ leaders observe that they tend to somehow dispute the conditionality imposed by NDOs, what does not often happen in other countries (Melo, 2009).

In the late 1990s, international development cooperation had become more issue-oriented and professionalized, narrowing the lines of support and extending their control over the Southern counterparts. With a broader campaigning approach, some British expansionist organizations played a distinct role in achieving the diffusion of their agendas worldwide:
Several private aid agencies in Britain – OXFAM, Christian Aid and Action Aid – have shown what can be accomplished beyond the micro-project, in the battle of ideas. These agencies have paid attention to the large context of the world and developed conceptual handholds to grasp them. Among the results: global policy agendas from debt to farm pesticides to environment-poverty links have been permanently re-cast and concrete measures taken. Knowledge-based policy activists are building alliances with social movements, thus sitting the pace of policy debates in the South and the North” (Sogge, 2002: 160).

Criticism of the role played by funds on Southern societies is not just a particularity of Brazil or other Latin American countries. Commenting about the neoliberal assault on social rights in India, another emergent market, Arundhati Roy notes that

“as the state abdicated its traditional role, NGOs moved in to work in these very areas. The difference, of course, is that the funds available to them are a minuscule fraction of the actual cut in public spending. Most large well-funded NGOs are financed and patronized by aid and development agencies, which are in turn funded by Western governments, the World Bank, the UN, and some multinational corporations” (Roy, 2004: 42-43).

Currently, most of Northern Development Agencies demand explicitly some adaptations in order to fund a BCSO. Not often explicitly, there is the conditionality of starting to work with the private sector through an incentive to engage with the discourse of CSR.

In a greater lever, dispute among developed and emergent countries on the cost and effectiveness of development took place in the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, Korea (December, 2011). Facing fund shortages in times of economic crisis and public criticism on the results of aid to the developing countries, NDOs have set several strategies of survival. One of them is the expansionist plan of constituting a family of organizations (BOCAYUVA, 2009), so they would not have to be hostages of just one country’s political and economic context.

Brazilian civil society organizations analyze that the aid industry has two different perceptions of opportunities in Brazil. They see that most of the donors notice that
Brazil has become a middle income country and thus it is not anymore a priority for development agencies; however, there is also a perception that some NDOs have realized that Brazil could be a new land of fundraising opportunities (Strautman, 2011; Rodriguez, 2011; Masagão, 2011).

2. Getting Closer to the Private Sector (and asking Brazilian CSOs to do the same)

European development organizations have received a high level of pressure from their governments to apply measurable methods to the projects they give support and also to increase ties with the private sector. If BCSOs had to adjust to several procedures in order to keep being funded, now they see the need to flirt with a corporate social responsibility approach, since it became a central issue in the conversations with development agencies willing to “open” Brazilian civil society hearts and minds to overcome the prejudice of negotiating with the private sector. But what is to be expected? Should BCSOs adapt from tiresome hard bargains with NDOs to an emergent period of hard bargains with the private sector?

“That is the case today of some agencies that deal with corporations. So, for example, the agenda of connecting with corporations have produced several strains. In the case of the Dutch organizations, it is a (development) cooperation necessity of setting a dialogue in their own societies with private actors. However, that compromises too much our sphere of action here (…) The approach ends up being somehow imposed. So we used to say to them ‘here in Brazil it is too difficult to have a dialogue about social responsibility as you happen to do in Europe. Companies here are savages with a slavery culture’. Anyway, even though it is difficult to have a healthy environment for this kind of dialogue, the agenda keeps coming. It seems to be an inevitable process. The way in which OXFAM Brasil is trying to defend itself from OXFAM International pressure of a private sector approach is by trying to organize fragmented debates such as ‘interface with the private sector in the sphere of public policy councils’ or ‘land social movements’ interface with the private sector…” (Melo, 2009).

BCSOs know that most of their agendas will not get the support from private funds. This is the case of programs and projects on human rights, monitoring investment banks, foreign policy, etc (Rodriguez, 2011). For the most part, corporate private funds are not transparent and they also apply depoliticized and “assistencialist” criteria for
choosing the projects they give support to. Besides that, a big amount of aid coming from the private sector has to do with tax exemption meaning money that could go to state’s investment in public policies (Balbis, 2011).

Governments are giving more relevance to development cooperation through the private sector not only as a source of funds from corporations but taking them as an essential component of their development strategies. That is the case, for example, of “Business for Development”, the Swedish government development agency (SIDA) program with the private sector, which involves companies receiving public money to do development abroad, in the localities where Swedish corporations are placed. In other words, such partnerships seem to fulfill more the private sector’s interests than Southern communities’ necessities.

3. Case studies in Brazil: Transnationalization as part of the marketization of aid

NDOs expansionist approach did not simply mean to have a presence (as installing an office) in several parts of the world. It entails a subtle change marked by measures of looking for new markets, merging with national civil society organizations, competing for funds, depoliticizing cooperation through a philanthropy fundraising approach and setting a privatized environment of cooperation.

In Brazil, it can be noticed mostly by the emergent profile of (originally) English development organizations such as OXFAM, Action Aid, Save the Children and Amnesty International and the latest adaptations they have maid in the country. Next, I analyze some of the recent strategies of two of those organizations, OXFAM and Save the Children, in Brazil.

3.1. OXFAM

Self-described as an “international confederation of 15 organizations working together in over 90 countries”, OXFAM is one of the most celebrated development organizations in the world. Lately, OXFAM has set a clear strategy of globalization
through a process of new independent affiliates being part of the “family” in what the organization describes in its website as going to “new markets”.

After a long period of coordination and adjustments among OXFAMs in Europe (OXFAM International, OXFAM Great Britain, NOVIB and Intermon) and also with OXFAM America (U.S.A.), the organization has started not only to spread their offices in strategic countries, but also to merge with national NGOs. Hence there are three consecutive phases in OXFAMs enrollment in a country which goes from a stage of international solidarity to one of effective transnationalization. First, the organization in the original territory (mainly Great Britain – GB - and The Netherlands, but also Spain and the U.S.A.) gives finance support (send money) for Southern NGOs’ programs and projects. Then, it happens to install an office structure in that country to better monitor the projects and also improve the relationship with that particular civil society. Finally, it changes its status playing a direct active role in that society and expanding its fundraising strategy (and point of view) to that country’s society.

In Latin America, the paradigmatic case is the one in Mexico where NOVIB (Dutch OXFAM) merged with the organization Rostros y Voces (RyV). Mexican civil society organizations got surprised since RyV had a kind of philanthropic and public campaigning profile which differentiates from the transformative and socially engaged profile of OXFAM’s usual counterparts in the country. RyV received a starting fund and all the other OXFAM family organizations operating in Mexico (OXFAM GB and OXFAM America) had to transfer their current projects to RyV, the new OXFAM Mexico. The problem is that some traditional OXFAM counterparts felt excluded in the process and do not have affinity with RyV-OXFAM Mexico meaning a threat to future fund support. With its independence, OXFAM Mexico assumes among other responsibilities the one of survival throughout fundraising in Mexico, essentially the private sector (BALBIS, 2011).

Although the process in Mexico was consolidated before any other case in other Latin American countries, the first OXFAM organization attempt to merge with a Brazilian organization trying to incorporate it into OXFAM family took place in Brazil a few years ago. NOVIB (again the Dutch OXFAM) has proposed to merge with IBASE, one of the most recognized BCSOs abroad. At the time, IBASE chose instead to have a
debate on the subject with other key BCSOs, forming what became known as the Black Stone Group (Coletivo Pedras Negras), named from the farm they first reunited (BALBIS, 2011; MASAGÃO, 2011). Facing serious budget impacts, BCSOs at the Group took advantage of the opportunity to debate challenges of their path beyond NOVIB’s proposal.

As a result of IBASE and other organizations refusal to act as the Brazilian OXFAM, the solution came through an agreement between OXFAM International (not NOVIB) and the Brazilian organization Vitae Civilis. As it happened in Mexico, an organization coming from a different field and also closer to the private sector is in process of becoming OXFAM Brazil.

In the background of this whole globalizing process, there is some level of dispute among OXFAM family organizations in terms of their understandings of each national civil society dynamics and the strategies of partnership they should pursue in each place as is the case of tensions between NOVIB and OXFAM International. Nevertheless, the recent rightist turn of Dutch approach to international cooperation linked to a British disciplinary strategic decision is part of the background scenario of a globalized OXFAM family. Family expansionist viewpoint gets transparent in OXFAM’s website through the description of a recently announced job position hiring a “Marketing and Fundraising Officer”. Among several other responsibilities, the profile describes the officer task of offering “marketing and fundraising consultancy support where appropriate to existing affiliates, and to prospective and emerging affiliates in new markets. Achieve consistent and continuous levels of input into supporting Oxfams with strategic marketing and tactical fundraising support either directly, or through bilateral affiliate agreements: Support to existing and growing Oxfams (for example, France, India, Mexico); Support to emerging Oxfams (for example, Brazil, Japan, Italy)” (My Bold) (In: http://www.oxfam.org/fr/getinvolved/jobs/marketing-and-fundraising-officer-110406)

Besides the general and original OXFAM International based in the UK, currently OXFAM publishes in its website the existence of 15 affiliates (U.S.A., Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hong Kong, India, Spain, Ireland,
Mexico, New Zealand, the Netherlands and Québec) and 2 observer members (Italy and Japan).

An element that does not get a clear picture in the process is whether the new OXFAMs or the Action Aid “branches” are to enter or not in the national NGOs associations. In other terms, there is a debate on whether the organization profile is more related to a Fund or to an NGO/CSO one (MASAGÃO, 2011), although in Great Britain, OXFAM definitely belongs to BOND - British Overseas NGOs for Development⁴, where it is even part of the Board.

3.2. Save the Children

Save the children is a post-World War I organization aimed to give support to projects investing in the improvement of children conditions. In 2010, after 20 years in Brazil, Save the Children merged with ABRINQ Foundation, the 20-year old philanthropic organization of Brazilian toy factories. Both had in common the focus on children rights. As a result of the merger and in order to consolidate and modernize its structure for improving fundraising and multiplying children assistance in Brazil, the organization, now presented as ABRINQ Foundation-Save the Children, was to receive five million dollars and more than double the annual investment from US 4.5 million to 11 million (MANZIONE, 2010).

The merger, however, became a reason of suspicion for some NGOs that used to obtain support and keep a dialogue with Save the Children. The Dom Helder Camera Center - CENDHEC, based in Pernambuco, Brazil, like other Brazilian Save the Children counterparts got totally surprised with the merger and did not know how they were supposed to act in this new conjuncture. The organization did not know, for example,

⁴ “Bond is the UK membership body for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in international development. Established in 1993 on the initiative of 61 NGOs working in international development, (it has) 358 members (at 31 March 2011) ranging from large bodies with a world-wide presence to smaller, specialist organisations working in certain regions or with specific groups of people.” (In: http://www.bond.org.uk/pages/about-us.html)
what was going to happen with the two projects it had presented to European Union cooperation together with Save the Children. Nepomuceno says CENDHEC notices contradictions between the two organizations since Save the Children was perceived as a humanitarian association and ABRINQ Foundation is essentially a business fund. After years of intense and productive dialogue with Save the Children, all as sudden CENDHEC had to redefine their relationship with the “new Brazilian” Save the Children tied to the private sector (Nepomuceno, 2009).

Nevertheless, a quick look at Save the Children’s website is enough to realize that the partnership with the private sector is by far the great source of funds for the organization, with some corporations such as Pepsi, Boston Consulting Group, Microsoft, Google, Toys “R” Us, Procter & Gamble among others donating more than a million dollars annually, besides several other well-known corporations with other considerable donations. Save the Children has a very pragmatic and depoliticized approach towards such partnerships:

“Our partnerships with the corporate sector are largely in the form of philanthropic grants and cause-related marketing campaigns for specific projects that are designed to meet the private sector partner’s philanthropic and marketing needs and to improve Save the Children’s resource capacity to address the pressing needs of children. Corporations provide Save the Children with financial support, marketing and communications assets, volunteer expertise, technical knowledge, and donated goods and services. Save the Children has a robust and vigorous partnership assessment procedure and policies to ensure we partner with companies committed to social responsibility and the values and goals of our organization. No matter the partner or the form of partnership, the needs of children — whether it’s clean water, access to health care and education or relief after an emergency or natural disaster — are the number one priority”.(http://www.savethechildren.org/site/c.8rKLIxMGIpI4E/b.6148397/k.C77B/Corporate_Partners.htm)

ABRINQ Foundation’s president Synésio Costa explicitly conceptualizes the agreement with Save the Children as similar to the sphere of capitalist globalization:
“This action of bringing together two big corporations know-how and strengths with the goal of improving the life of Brazilian people is something original in the country and can be compared to recent mega mergers of other sectors in Brazil and the world” (COSTA, Synésio APUD MANZIONE, 2010)

4. Some facets of resemblance to corporate globalization

As previously mentioned in this paper, there was always a critic of development cooperation seen as a part of a systemic center-periphery model of domination or as part of imperialistic or hegemonic actions taken by Northern states and societies to maintain control and economic exploitation of Southern states and societies. Craig Murphy observes the role development plays in a North-South Gramscian historic bloc viewpoint:

“The typical self-interested Northern justification of the development system converges with the typical, self-interested Southern justification, if we consider the system a non-coercive superstructure, a part of the North-South bloc that helps cement the alliance between the subordinate Third World organizational bourgeoisie and a dominant ruling class in the North” (MURPHY, 2005: 124).

Such analysis does not take into account the new globalizing potential of NDOs in emergent Southern countries. The emergent model of a transnationalized development cooperation resembles the description of the internationalization (Cox) or transnationalization (Robinson) of production developed by Neo-Gramscian thinkers in International Relations, or particularly in what has been recently called as Critical Globalization Studies.

Robinson illustrates capitalist globalization in two complimentary processes of extensive and intensive enlargement. Capitalist extensive enlargement represents its tendency to enter territories that “were outside the system of commodity production” (Robinson, 2004: 06). By intensive enlargement, he points the processes of privatization of public services or common goods: “the penetration by commodity
relations of spheres of social life that were formally outside the logic of profit making” (Robinson, 2004: 07). I find that changes on development cooperation are related to these two globalizing capitalist forces. Development cooperation is also becoming an aid industry through extensive and intensive enlargement. The description I present of OXFAM and Save the Children mergers with Brazilian organizations and their strategy of disputing fundraising in Brazilian society is a process of extensive enlargement. The privatization of development cooperation with government incentive to private sector’s engagement with projects that show corporate social responsibility is the face of intensive enlargement.

Some other features such as a new market of consultants and evaluators working for CSOs show similitude to a corporate globalization “subcontracting and outsourcing” “flexible-production model” (Robinson, 2004). In this way, Balbis narrates that a large part of cooperation resources are going to a chain of intermediary personnel, consultants subcontracted outside the structure of NDOs, a vast majority of them European ones. In the case the European consultants do not have the capacities to produce (monitoring/evaluating) on a specific country, they subcontract again consultants in the Southern country, consolidating a typical private sector neoliberal culture of a flexible work environment (Balbis, 2011).

Arundhati Roy observes the risk of a “NGO-ization of resistance” (ROY, 2004: 41) and analyzes that “the capital available to NGOs plays the same role in alternative politics as the speculative capital that flows in and out of the economies of poor countries. It begins to dictate the agenda” (ROY, 2004: 43). And if the national context is not anymore one favorable to the interests of Northern development organizations families, they can prioritize investment (installing offices, merging with organizations, etc.) in other countries.

To sum up, facing funding shortages from states, NDOs have mainstreamed a new fundraising model that brings themselves and some BCSOs closer to the private sector agenda. In such a difficult finance and political scenario, Brazilian CSOs keep facing debates internally and together with other CSOs on the limits of the acceptable (MASAGÃO, 2011; MELO, 2009). Hard bargains with development cooperation start to happen in issues that challenge NGOs principles. For example, the Dutch
cooperation through NOVIB (the Dutch OXFAM) have asked a Brazilian NGO that historically fought against the soy monoculture in Mato Grosso to give support in the certification of soy bought by Dutch companies that are planted in the same space the Brazilian organization was confronting. For that historical organization, it was possible to say no, but the evidence is that pressure from Northern states and corporations to NDOs tend to be replicated in the cooperation between NDOs and BCSOs.

5. Conclusion: New constraints to the development agenda

Three combined and parallel factors distinguish current changes on development cooperation to Brazil: NDOs have tried to convince their Brazilian counterparts to start working with the private sector; NDOs faced fundraising shortages in their countries of origin due to finance crisis and public critic of aid effectiveness; Brazil and other “emergent” countries are seen as an opportunity of private fundraising for NDOs.

However, transnationalization and privatization of development cooperation should not be just perceived as changes on the political economy of development, but also as part of a larger capitalist cultural dimension in all societies it takes place. Therefore, the strategies used to NDOs in Brazil also communicate with strategies of survival of BCSOs being both part of the recent imperatives of neoliberal globalization. That is how the struggle for survival of both NDOs and BCSOs point to strategies of resistance from a globalizing development industrial model.

Much debate and empirical analysis are necessary to produce a view of those processes. This paper provides a humble starting point to further research on the subject. Resistance to neoliberal globalization should not be seen as something external to the transnational networks of solidarity, but it is also associated to the limits local and global civil society may impose to the ways they are funded.
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