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Introduction by Giles Scott-Smith

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Introduction by Giles Scott-Smith, University of Leiden

Transnational history has adopted many shapes and sizes over the years, but its central motive has always been to contest ‘methodological nationalism’: the approach that privileges the nation state as the prime unit of analysis.¹ Dating its emergence to the 1970s, Akira Iriye has commented elsewhere that “more and more historians were coming to view international relations not simply in diplomatic and political terms but also in the context of economic, social, and, of particular importance, cultural developments.”² What is interesting here is Iriye’s division between the diplomatic/political and the economic/social/cultural, whereby the former are presented as being more rooted in the nation-state paradigm and so relatively immune to the ‘transnational turn’ of history. Without getting into needless debates concerning how ‘the cultural is always political’ and related matters, it suffices to say here that subsequent research has closed this apparent gap.³

Both diplomacy and politics are equally valid terrain for exploring the resonance and relevance of the transnational dimension. On the one hand, the role of transnational social movements and pressure groups has opened up a vibrant field of activity that exposes the national unit as far more complex and fluid in terms of the flow of ideas, the influence of social contacts, and the persuasion of audiences. On the other hand, the decision-making primacy of the national unit has been heavily nuanced through greater attention to what Thomas Risse-Kappen termed “trans-governmental networks” and “transnational coalitions” that directly influenced policy-making outcomes.⁴ This line has been strengthened with research into informal sites of transnational exchange that through the twentieth century have taken on a variety of roles as think tanks, advisory boards, epistemic communities, and locations for elite socialization. Yet it is one thing to claim that states have become “disaggregated” through transnational coalitions of ministerial experts.⁵ It is quite another to point to sites outside of the state apparatus that may possess, because of their elite status, significant influence in the directions that (state) policies may take. The challenge for the historian is to assess to what extent and by what means those sites have indeed had such an influential role, and how we might conceive of the national and the transnational as being interwoven, often in the form of the notable individuals who move ceaselessly between them. The focus of these investigations is as much on process as it is on outcome: how are

¹ For a critique of methodological nationalism in the social sciences see Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, “Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences,” *Global Networks* 2:4 (2002): 301-334.

² Akira Iriye, *Global and Transnational History: The Past, Present, and Future* (Palgrave: Basingstoke, 2013), 8.

³ See for instance the work on transnational networks such as Ian Richardson, Andrew Kakabadse and Nadia Kakabadse, *Bilderberg People: Elite Power and Consensus in World Affairs* (London: Routledge, 2011); Stephanie Roulin, Giles Scott-Smith, and Luc van Dongen, eds., *Transnational Anti-Communism and the Cold War: Agents, Activities, and Networks* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014); Johannes Grossmann, *Die Internationale der Konservativen: Transnationale Elitenzirkel und private Aussenpolitik in Westeuropa seit 1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2014).

⁴ Thomas Risse-Kappen, *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In: Non-State Actors, Domestic Structures, and International Institutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4.

⁵ Anne-Marie Slaughter, *A New World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

transnational networks, be they built on formal or informal relations, part of the multi-layered fabric and decision-making structures of inter-state diplomacy?

This is the terrain covered by Dino Knudsen's *The Trilateral Commission and Global Governance*. While historians such as Valerie Aubourg, Hugh Wilford, Thomas Gijswijt and Ingeborg Philipsen have covered in some depth its closest transnational counterpart, the Bilderberg Group, the Commission has received less attention, largely due to a lack of sources.⁶ The Commission actually emerged out of Bilderberg as an early 1970s effort to incorporate Japanese elites into the changing apparatus of global governance, alongside more formal initiatives such as the G5. Bilderberg traditionalists rejected the move beyond the transatlantic region, leading Zbigniew Brzezinski and David Rockefeller to create a new form of informal governance with the formation of the Commission. Knudsen's access to the Commission's central archive has now overcome the source obstacle, leading to this detailed account of its first decade. Knudsen then goes further by developing the identity of 'informal governance actors' to understand what the Commission's representatives were doing, and how they should be conceived as participants in the global system. As a result, this is a very important book on a subject that has been waiting for a multinational archive-based study such as this.

The reviews are very complimentary towards the new information that this book brings to our understanding of how such transnational elite networks function. Thus Akira Iriye talks of "a new way of understanding recent world affairs" and praises the book for transcending the national paradigm in its approach. The reviewers also point out some omissions. Iriye comments on the continuing dominance of a state-focused approach despite the transnational intent. Laurent Cesari would have liked more of a comparative approach, both in terms of similarities with the methods of Jean Monnet and his Action Committee for a United States of Europe, and the fact that U.S. philanthropy has long supported the idea of a transnational elite being necessary to solve the world's problems away from the more parochial concerns of democratic systems anchored to national agendas. Stephen Gill, the author of the only full study of the Commission prior to Knudsen's,⁷ points to the lack of attention to race, class, and gender issues in assessing the make-up of the Commission's membership and the framing of their view on the world.

In fact, capitalism and class lie behind the principal comments of both Cesari and Gill, in the tradition of earlier critical works on the "transnational capitalist class."⁸ Cesari sees the Commission as an "agent of influence" for the "ideology of the export-oriented business classes" and regrets that little attention is given to

⁶ On Bilderberg see Valerie Aubourg, "Organizing Atlanticism: The Bilderberg Group and the Atlantic Institute, 1952-1963," *Intelligence and National Security* 18:2 (2003): 92-105; Hugh Wilford, "CIA Plot, Socialist Conspiracy, or New World Order? The Origins of the Bilderberg Group, 1952-55," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 14:3 (2003): 70-82; Ingeborg Philipsen, "For Better or for Worse? The Bilderberg Meetings and the Lockheed Affair," in Giles Scott-Smith and Valérie Aubourg, eds., *Atlantic, Euratlantic, or Europe-America: The Atlantic Community and the European Idea from Kennedy to Nixon* (Paris: Soleb, 2011): 362-391; Thomas Gijswijt, "The Bilderberg Group and the end of the Cold War: the Disengagement Debates of the 1950s," in Frédéric Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey, N. Piers Ludlow and Bernd Rother, eds., *Overcoming the Iron Curtain: Visions of the End of the Cold War in Europe, 1945-1990* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012): 30-43.

⁷ Stephen Gill, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1991).

⁸ Leslie Sklair, *The Transnational Capitalist Class* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001).

the Commission as a transnational lobby for free trade in goods and capital. Gill emphasizes the role of the “internationally oriented elements of the ruling classes,” and both Gill and Iriye point out how the reconfigurations of global capital and governance that took place in the 1970s could have been used by Knudsen to expand more on the context of the Commission’s formation and function.

Class, privilege, and status obviously permeate this book from start to finish, even if they are not placed in the foreground all the time. Knudsen chose instead to approach the subject through an expanded interpretation of diplomacy and diplomats, a perfectly valid option. These reviews therefore trigger significant questions: how far is it legitimate to historically analyse such elite transnational groups as the Trilateral Commission without directly addressing the issue of class as a decisive component? And if class is used to frame the investigation of the transnational elite, does that not limit the interpretation and explanation of these networks to a focus on economic interest alone?

Participants:

Dino Knudsen’s book on the Trilateral Commission is based on his 2013 Ph.D. dissertation from the University of Copenhagen, after which, he was a postdoctoral fellow at the same university focusing on diplomacy and Christian churches in the early Cold War. He has published several books in Danish and is presently doing research at the museum Mosede Fort-Denmark 1914-18 on state-private diplomacy and trade during World War I.

Giles Scott-Smith holds the Ernst van der Beugel Chair in Transatlantic Diplomatic History since WWII at the University of Leiden, and serves as the Academic Director of the Roosevelt Institute for American Studies in Middelburg, the Netherlands. He is the author of three monographs: *The Politics of Apolitical Culture* (London: Routledge, 2002), *Networks of Empire* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2008), and *Western Anti-Communism and the Interdoc Network* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012). In 2017, together with Ken Weisbrode, he founded *Diplomatica: A Journal of Diplomacy and Society* with Brill. He is currently researching the efforts of ‘private diplomats’ to promote mutual understanding between East and West during the late Cold War.

Laurent Cesari, Professor of Contemporary History at the Université d’Artois, Arras, France, specializes in U.S. foreign policy during the cold war. His publications include: “Que disait la Trilatérale?,” *Revue d’Histoire Diplomatique* (2000/1); his latest publications include, as editor, “Soixante-dizième anniversaire de l’Organisation des Nations-Unies,” special issue, *Revue d’Histoire Diplomatique* (2016/2); “Les effets des politiques américaines sur la France,” in *1984-1988: Les années du changement* (2017, forthcoming); “Les Etats-Unis et l’Asie,” in *Quel nouveau système international dans les années 1990?* (2018, forthcoming).

Stephen Gill is Distinguished Research Professor of Political Science at York University, Toronto, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and Senior Associate Member, St Antony’s College, Oxford. In 2004 he was elected and served as Vice-President of the International Studies Association (ISA) and in 2006, the ISA elected him as its Distinguished Senior Scholar in International Political Economy. His publications include: *The Global Political Economy: perspectives, problems and policies* (with David Law, Johns Hopkins University Press 1988); *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission* (Cambridge University Press, 1991); *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations* (Cambridge University Press 1993); *Power, Production and Social Reproduction: human insecurity in the global political economy* (with Isabella Bakker, Palgrave, 2003);

Power and Resistance in the New World Order (Palgrave, 2008); *Global Crises and the Crisis of Global Leadership* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) and *New Constitutionalism and World Order* (with Claire Cutler, Cambridge University Press, 2014). His most recent book is *Critical Perspectives on the Crisis of Global Governance: Reimagining the Future* (Palgrave, 2015).

Akira Iriye is Charles Warren Professor of American History, Emeritus, Harvard University. His publications include *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (John Hopkins University Press, 1997), *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (University of California Press, 2004), and *The Globalizing of America: American Foreign Relations, 1913-1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Review by Laurent Cesari, Université d'Artois, Arras, France

Dino Knudsen has produced the first book-length historical study of the Trilateral Commission (TriCom, to use the same acronym as the author) based on archival evidence. The records of the North American (United States and Canada) and West European sections of the Commission have been consulted, but not those of the Japanese section. Relevant material in other collections has also been used, such as National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski's papers at the Jimmy Carter Library, the David Rockefeller papers at the Rockefeller Archive Center, and the papers of the Ford Foundation, which subsidized the TriCom. Knudsen was not granted access to the Brzezinski and Henry Kissinger papers at the Library of Congress, but he uses the recent biography of Brzezinski by Justin Vaïsse which is based on the Library of Congress holdings.¹ Perhaps the *Kissinger Conversations* and *Kissinger Transcripts* published online by the Digital National Security Archive, which do not seem to have been used, might have yielded some relevant material. All in all, the archival information on the American and European sections is good, but one would like to know more on the inner workings of the Japanese section which, at least in this book, often looks like a mouthpiece of the Japanese Foreign Office.

The book is focused on the influence of the TriCom on state actors, with good reason, since the TriCom has often been viewed as a shadow world government. More importantly, the founders of the Commission (Brzezinski, David Rockefeller, and on the European side, the Dutch diplomat Max Kohnstamm, conceived it from the start as an agent of influence on legislators and governments, as opposed to a mere think tank. Knudsen is right to stress that even before the creation of the TriCom, David Rockefeller often performed unofficial diplomatic missions on behalf of the American government, some on State Department initiative, and some on his own. His positions at the Chase Manhattan Bank and the Council on Foreign Relations gave him access to public and private leaders worldwide. The parallel is obvious with Jean Monnet, the head of the Committee for the United States of Europe, whom French President Charles De Gaulle called 'the instigator.' This Committee provided a good number of the original European members of the TriCom; Kohnstamm was a former collaborator of Jean Monnet at the European Coal and Steel Community, and Monnet himself was consulted at the foundation of the Commission.

Knudsen confirms that the TriCom was definitely an American initiative, designed to preserve U.S. primacy over allies bruised by the 'Nixon shocks' of 1971-1972 (the end of the gold-convertibility of the dollar and the opening to China, without prior notice), by devising mutually acceptable policies between the U.S., Europe, and Japan. Finding such compromises was of course the essence of older Euro-American initiatives such as the annual Bilderberg Conferences founded in 1954 by Prince Bernhard of Netherlands, with subsidies from the Ford Foundation. Knudsen shows that including Japan in such conversations was the real originality of Brzezinski and Rockefeller. David Rockefeller, whose Chase Manhattan Bank was a regular partner of the Japanese Treasury, had first thought of opening the Bilderberg Conferences to Japan, but European members demurred for fear of diluting their influence on the United States. Hence the TriCom.

The working rules of the Commission are well described. Knudsen might have stressed how close they were to the methods of Monnet. Members of government were not allowed in the TriCom while in office, but were admitted as soon as they retired, and the Commission did all it could to have access to cabinets. The Committee for the United States of Europe did the same. And the reports program, which is one of the

¹ Justin Vaïsse, *Zbigniew Brzezinski, Stratège de l'empire* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2016).

essential means for the Commission to extend its network, recalls the habit Monnet had, when he was in charge of economic planning in France after the Second World War, to have civil servants, businessmen, and trade unionists write common reports on the economic situation before launching recovery plans. It would be interesting to know if Brzezinski, who was in charge of the reports program, knew about this practice of Monnet's.

Lastly, Knudsen is right to stress that the TriCom was more influential in terms of procedure than of substance. Governments always had the option to disregard the recommendations of the Commission, and the clash between Brzezinski and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance during the Carter administration shows that prominent Trilateralists could fundamentally disagree on basic policies. Concerning procedure, Brzezinski and David Rockefeller boasted that they gave to French president Giscard d'Estaing, who joined the TriCom after leaving office, the idea of the G7 summits. Indeed, the G7 looks very much like an official, public version of the TriCom. Yet things may be a little more complicated. What Giscard wanted was restricted meetings, with no official agenda, between the heads of government of France, Great Britain, the United States, and West Germany, the "Quad" of the Atlantic Alliance. He complained in 1977 to Carter and Vice President Walter Mondale that he had been pressured to add Japan, although Japanese ministers "never utter a word and just take notes," and that it then became impossible to deny admission to Canada and Italy, which according to him were not important enough to belong to such a setting.² Thus, Giscard, who was the very embodiment of Trilateralism in the eyes of the French public, resented the basic purpose of the Commission. It would be interesting to know where the unspecified pressures mentioned by Giscard came from.

All in all, then, this is a well-researched book, which will be required reading for future researchers on the TriCom. It confirms much information and adds new facts, such as the close relationship between the Commission and Robert McNamara during his mandate as president of the World Bank, or the fact that although it was created to counter the unilateralism of the Nixon administration, the TriCom kept the U.S. government informed of its purpose from the beginning, and had the agreement of Kissinger, who obviously conceived it as another way to influence Europe and Japan. I only regret that Knudsen, whose book is very detailed on the organization of the TriCom, did not devote more space to the ideas that it propagates, and has not engaged in some comparisons with other American foundations.

Concerning the worldview of the TriCom, it seems to me that commitment to free trade, or the Open Door, is the thread that runs through all its pronouncements. This commitment was consistent with the position of Rockefeller in international finance and with the interest of the big export-oriented companies which backed the TriCom. Its intellectual justification stemmed from the belief of Brzezinski—which was a commonplace since the administration of President Franklin Roosevelt—that the United States had an edge in high technology industries, and thus would be able in the future to beat competition from foreign economies. Knudsen does not neglect this Open Door proclivity but he might have insisted more on it. Few Commission reports are analyzed, and in the case of the one report which is discussed at length, *The Crisis of Democracy*, the link with the Open Door is missed. Knudsen is right to notice that this report asks governments to resist popular demands for increased social rights because they may cause inflation, but does not say where this abhorrence of inflation comes from. Yet Samuel Huntington, the American author of this report, was explicit: inflation may induce higher tariffs to protect the national economy from low-price competitors, and the

² Giscard-Carter-Mondale meeting, London, 29 January 1977, in Frédéric Heurtebize, *Le péril rouge : Washington face à l'eurocommunisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2014), 246.

‘overload’ of the state may lead to nationalist foreign policies. To quote: “The expansion of expenditure and the decrease in authority are also likely to encourage economic nationalism in democratic societies. Each country will have an interest in minimizing the export of some good in order to keep prices low in its own society. At the same time, other interests are likely to demand protection against the import of foreign goods. (...) A strong government will not necessarily follow more liberal and internationalist economic policies, but a weak government is almost certain to be incapable of doing so.”³

Likewise, a comparison with older American foundations might have helped to put in perspective the originality of the TriCom. The idea that human progress requires the action of a non-elected transnational elite which is able to think in global terms, because governments are subject to the demands of selfish national electorates, is a commonplace of American philanthropic foundations in the twentieth century. Raymond Fosdick of the Rockefeller Foundation said as much in the 1920s.⁴ Is it reductionist to call this the ideology of the export-oriented business classes of a superpower?

³ Michel Crozier, Samuel Huntington, Joji Watanaki, *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 105.

⁴ Ludovic Tournès, *Les Etats-Unis et la Société des Nations (1914-1946): Le système international face à l'émergence d'une superpuissance* (Bern, Peter Lang, 2016), chapter 2.

Review by Stephen Gill, York University, Toronto

I read this book with great interest, and I think it makes an important but also somewhat flawed contribution to our understanding of a particular period in recent history, diplomacy, and world affairs, coinciding with significant transformations in global power relations. The book concerns the question of American strategy as understood in the activities and networks of the private, relatively secretive Trilateral Commission (TriCom) a private international affairs Council founded by David Rockefeller that drew together political, corporate, and military leaders associated with mainstream, mainly Conservative Liberal and Social Democratic political forces on both sides of the Atlantic and their counterparts from Japan. Knudsen draws upon access to TriCom archives, and a network of related archives to analyse the emergence of new patterns in international relations in the period 1972-1982. The author analyses the TriCom as an elite set of links, initiatives, and concepts seeking to bind the dominant capitalist countries together under conditions when they were challenged by the actions of the Nixon Administration amid a series of crises. This situation coincided with the slowing of the long post-war capitalist boom (the crisis of Fordism), the rise of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its challenge to the U.S. and its allies, transformations in North-South relations, détente, and changes in East-West relations.

Dino Knudsen's interpretation of these changes and patterns of global governance is fairly conventional, and it operates under the questionable assumption of the relative decline of the United States. In this sense it adds relatively little to our understanding of the developments between 1972 and 1982. The strength of the book, however, is the way in which it shows in some detail how dominant capitalist elements, as well as leading political figures concerned with the extension and preservation of a more global framework for capitalist accumulation, came together to cooperate and try to reshape the principal relations between the key states and societies of North America, Western Europe, and (for the first time) Japan. This project was to allow Japan to join the 'West' and thus collectively to sit at the top table of international deliberations and alliance considerations. This process involved particular practices of consensus formation and crisis management, efforts to 'manage interdependence,' and in so doing to use crises as opportunities to foster a more economically liberal, elite-governed world order. In that sense Knudsen offers a contribution to our understanding of the mechanisms and networks of collective action and the forging of new projects of international relations and globalizing capitalism.

In this commentary I cannot cover all of the questions and issues that might be addressed in a much longer review. Instead I will focus on evaluation of the book critically in terms of its use of sources, methodology, place in the literature, use of evidence, and its principal strengths and weaknesses

Let me begin with its use of sources, how they are conceptualised, and the methods used to evaluate them. Knudsen relies principally on the TriCom's own written documents in what he calls a "multi-archival approach" which, he argues, "provides unique knowledge about the Commission and its relationship with the outside world, and about how informal policy making and diplomacy takes place" (19). His sources include full access to the TriCom archives in the U.S. and Europe as well as important associated archives such as the Rockefeller Archive Centre. The author's lack of knowledge of the Japanese language prevented him from being able to access archival material in Japan. This archival work—which also encompassed archives at the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), the U.S. State Department, and the U.S. National Archives, provides a rich backdrop of detail on the way in which private forces as well as those associated with predominant elements in state formations communicated and they document how the TriCom sought to develop conceptualisations and frameworks of action in a period of transformation in international relations.

Of course not all developments are contained in archives that are by definition selective and imbued with a particular perspective and ideology: archives are constructed with a particular generative grammar and purpose, so they must always be treated with caution and not as ‘truth.’

Indeed, as Knudsen acknowledges, the Trilateral Commission was not the only influential network or set of political and material forces that was at work developing the concept of Trilateralism with its ideology of inter-capitalist cooperation. The TriCom, which was created in 1973, initially consisted of about 300 extremely powerful and rich white and Japanese men. It built upon pre-existing networks that had been historically formed principally in the transatlantic regions, as well as methods used by and the networks involved in other secretive private international organisations such as the Bilderberg meetings.¹ In 1954 the latter began engaging political, corporate, and intellectual elites and ruling classes drawn principally from the North Atlantic nations to help cement the West in the Cold War. What was new about the TroCom was its engagement with Japan as an equal partner in the Trilateral project, its sponsorship and leadership by David Rockefeller and Zbigniew Brzezinski, and the fact that the leadership of the Carter Administration was principally drawn from the ranks of the TriCom. Only four women were members in its initial years, and only one member was an African American.²

Turning to conceptual innovation, Knudsen coins the phrase “Informal Governance Actor,” to capture the uniqueness of the Commission. Yet he provides consistent evidence throughout the work to make it clear that initiatives and projects such as those associated with the TriCom involved considerable amounts of material and political power, in both its public and private forms. Dominant, ruling class and elite forces operate within and across both political and civil society, or in state-civil society complexes. In the case of post-war governance, this has historically involved the conception and subsequent growth of an embryo of transnational frameworks of consciousness and action and an internationalisation of both states and civil societies in world capitalism, particularly as the world market has expanded. This pattern is reflected in and promoted by self-selecting and ostensibly private organisations that draw upon influential elements in the ranks of dominant corporate capital, politics, and the state. Thus the Trilateral Commission and its successors and contemporaries such as the World Economic Forum have overlapping and flexible national/international power networks that have become in a de facto sense rather like transnational political parties. They might be described as the new Internationals of Corporate Capitalism.

Knudsen notes how these networks sought—with considerable success—to reshape and engage with the making of U.S. foreign policy during the Nixon and Ford Administrations, and in doing so caused the Richard Nixon-Gerald Ford foreign-policy architect and Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, to decry the TriCom

¹ On this see Stephen Gill, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 122-142.

² The Trilateral Commission’s memberships for 1 November 1973 and February-March 1974 have the following persons listed as women members, (from the United States): Doris Anderson, Editor, *Chatelaine* Magazine; Lucy Wilson Blumenthal, Chairman, Bendix Corp; Marina Von Neumann Whitman, Distinguished Public Service Professor of Economics, University of Pittsburgh; and (from Europe): Mary T.W. Robinson, Senator, Irish Republic. The African-American member was William T. Coleman Jr, Senior Partner, Dilworth, Paxson, Kalish, Levy & Coleman, <https://www.scribd.com/document/175391512/Trilateral-Commission-Membership-List-1973#>; http://trilateral.org/download/doc/February_March_1974_North_American_European_Japanese_Affairs.pdf (accessed 13 October 2017).

members as David Rockefeller's "eunuchs" (194, 201). Indeed, because so many of the members of the Trilateral Commission held significant public office in the departments of State, Defence, Treasury, as well as leadership of intelligence agencies, of powerful banks and corporations, with the Carter Administration being led by a large number of ex Trilateral Commissioners, it is hard to imagine that they were simply "informal" agents of power or castrati shorn of essential vitality. TriCom members represented key elements in the power structures of the world, more specifically, the more internationally oriented elements of the ruling classes of the TC's ever-widening circles in its growing numbers of member nations particularly during its twenty-first century expansion. Indeed since its early formation, these networks of the Trilateral Commission have gradually expanded to include virtually all the main loci of capital accumulation throughout the world. This development reflects and is part of the rapid expansion of the world market and global capitalism since the end of the Cold War and the corresponding deepening and extension of links between the major capitalist states and the emerging capitalisms of the global south and former east bloc. Although it is not always presented in a systematic way, much of the evidence provided by Knudsen confirms the way that the Trilateral Commission influenced some of the key conceptual frameworks, political agendas, and politics of governments across a range of areas in the period he addresses.

On the question of evidence, some of Knudsen's primary evidence is weak or inconsistent. For example, on finances and funding, Knudsen provides us with the sums and sources of U.S. contributions to the U.S. branch of the Trilateral Commission between 1973 and 1976, whereas he only lists the names of major financial donors to the Commission as a whole since 1973 and gives no detail on the amounts. It is not clear from the book exactly what amounts or patterns of funding have been obtained in Europe and Japan and from exactly where, with the exception of particular anecdotal evidence of provisions from powerful and wealthy individuals lobbied by David Rockefeller such as the Italian industrialist and head of Fiat, Gianni Agnelli or the wealthy French banker, Baron Edmond Adolphe de Rothschild. Other ad hoc sources referred to range from the Japanese Foreign Ministry channelled through the Japan Institute of Foreign Affairs to Royal Dutch Shell, the Ford Foundation, and of course the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. One would assume that the archives should or would have this information in detail and that the information could have been organized in one of the Appendices.

The limitations of the archival method are also reflected in Knudsen's discussion of the recruitment of new members and its links to transformations in the US foreign policy elite formations. Knudsen points out that "the circles, networks and organisations from which candidates were recruited are not systematically recorded in the Tri-Com source material" (88), although "Influence on financial contributions seems to have been key factors for deciding whom to recruit or maintain in the Tri-Com" (90). On the question of corporate representation he therefore draws on a secondary source, noting, "As [Stephen] Gill pointed out [in 1991], by the mid-1980s about two-thirds of the world's 100 largest public corporations were or had been affiliated with the Tri-Com via membership" (91).

With respect to its political patterns of representation, Knudsen also notes that "the critical intellectual tradition, from either the political left or right, [was] completely absent" from the TriCom ranks (90). He fails to link this omission with his later discussion of the TC's controversial *The Crisis of Democracy* (1975), which, amongst other things, called for a rollback of democratic demands and of left wing forces to allow

ruling elites to govern more effectively.³ *The Crisis of Democracy* castigated the so-called critical or “value-oriented” intellectuals, presumably referring to intellectuals sympathetic to radical democracy or communism, as a threat to political order and to the prestige of leadership in the Trilateral Countries. It further called for a liberal/conservative or Establishment counter-offensive to marginalise such intellectuals and prevent a shift to the left to deal with growing political crises and as a means to help restore “governability” (122).

A final point on representation concerns why or how women and African-Americans were virtually absent—as noted only four women were members in its first three years across the whole 300+-member Commission and only one African-American U.S. member. Knudsen observes (with apparently no sense of irony) that “There is no evidence of a confrontation within the commission on the issues of class, race, age or gender” (95). Nonetheless, earlier research on its annual plenary meetings revealed how “Commission staff organised a lavish ‘Ladies Programme’ which operates in parallel with the formal closed sessions. At the 1983 Rome Plenary this involved a Gucci fashion show, visits to several palaces, galleries, and restaurants and an audience with the Pope at the Vatican for members and spouses.”⁴ At the 1983 Rome meeting the Ladies Programme—for the spouses of Commissioners—also involved a shopping expedition to the exclusive Via Condotti.

Knudsen hypothesizes that the relative absence of considerations of gender and race may have been caused by the TC’s preoccupation with the need to be “free of the constraints that electorates and the public—the ‘nativist masses’ in Brzezinski’s words—placed on modern governments” (103). The TriCom went about its business of managing independence and alliance relations and developing new approaches to promote liberal economic globalization.

A more critical perspective might therefore have developed some questioning of the patterns of representation and the TC’s general ambivalence towards democracy, and its silences on class, gender, and racial equality. More could also have been done to critique the self-evidence of some of the elite thinking or the “imperial common sense” that he addresses.⁵ Knudsen’s sources and concepts could therefore be re-thought much more critically.

Instead of a simple restatement of his findings, his conclusion might also have provided reflections of the ontological transformations of international relations associated with the growing dominance of internationally mobile fractions of capital after the collapse of Soviet Communism and the integration of China into world capitalism after the end of Maoism—a development encouraged by an informal meeting of the Trilateral Commission in Beijing with Deng Xiaoping, Paramount Leader of the People’s Republic of China from 1978 until his retirement in 1989 and with other key members of the PRC leadership—Knudsen has an interesting account of that meeting.

³ Michel Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington, and Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy. Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission* (New York: New York University Press, 1975).

⁴ Gill. *American Hegemony*, 147.

⁵ Gill. “Towards a Radical Concept of Praxis: Imperial ‘Common Sense’ Versus the ‘Post-modern Prince,’” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*. 40:3 (2012) 502-521.

Knudsen notes that prior to his new work my book, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission*, which I cited above, “offered the most thorough investigation of the TriCom to date” (18) adding that my study was part of “an effort to develop an historical materialist theory of international relations (18).” However he suggests that my work lacked access to “primary, unpublished sources from the Commission.” He also asserts, “Gill makes no detailed analysis of the TriCom’s origins, its work, debates or development” (18). Here I would beg to differ, since my work does contain such a detailed account and analyses the TriCom at some considerable length.⁶ *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission* was partly based on over 100 in-depth interviews with members and staff of the Trilateral Commission, drawn from all its constituent countries, some of which lasted two to three hours, and typically between 45 minutes and one and a half hours (these were all negotiated, agreed to, and conducted under conditions of anonymity and informed consent). I also analysed all its publications and a host of other published and unpublished sources. I was provided with significant TriCom archival materials (not, however, full archival access); indeed my method was not dependent simply on archival research but on triangulation of several methods and a range of sources, e.g. speeches, memoranda, correspondence etc., provided by members of the Commission or its officers.

Going further, my book assessed the origins of the Trilateral Commission in the context of a complex history of privately led initiatives—and private international relations councils—that have sought to help govern and reshape international relations and world capitalism. The lineage of these endeavours goes back at least to the period immediately following the Russian Revolution, and it took particular forms after the Second World War. This included the transatlantic sponsorship of the development of the European Community under a range of influential leading figures such as French banker and politician Jean Monnet and French Socialist, Jacques Delors. Indeed much of the initial intellectual and political impetus that resulted in the European community was partly funded by U.S. sources including the Ford Foundation, which also later gave considerable support to the TriCom.⁷ My account of the origins of the TriCom, and the significance of some of its key activities and publications, as well as the scope of its networks draws on this longer historical lineage and, in the period in question, is not in any significant empirical or documentary sense very different to that subsequently provided by Dr. Knudsen.

What is different about my book is its attempt to provide a new theorisation of the nature of capitalist strategies, methods, and techniques of contemporary international relations. In so doing it explored the connections between theory and praxis. I sought to explore collective intellectual-political projects such as those connected with the launch and development of the Trilateral Commission and to highlight the new collective form of the ‘organic intellectual’ associated with capitalist strategy, highlighted in the following statement from Max Kohnstamm, the first European Chairman of the Trilateral Commission:

“This, which must be done by absolutely first-rate intellectuals, will tend to become irrelevant unless it is done in constant checking with those who are in power or who have considerable influence on those in power... A Trilateral Commission without the intellectuals will become very soon a second-class negotiating forum. The intellectuals not being forced to test their ideas constantly with the establishment of our world will

⁶ Gill. *American Hegemony*, 4-6, 11-87, 122-202. The TriCom membership, activities, publications, and interviewees for the period up to 1986 are analyzed and listed in four appendices, 232-242.

⁷ Gill. *American Hegemony*, 122-142.

tend to become abstract and therefore useless... [It must be] the joint effort of our very best minds and a group of really influential citizens in our respective countries.”⁸

⁸ Gill, *American Hegemony*, 52; Knudsen, 57. The quotation is drawn from Max Kohnstamm, “The Trilateral Commission—a Proposal,” 19/8/72: 14.

Review by Akira Iriye, Emeritus Harvard University

This book offers an excellent example of the current vogue of ‘transnational history’ in the study of modern world history. For so long, modern history was conceptualized in the framework of independent nation states and their interrelationships. That is, the nation was assumed to be key, and everything else—religion, race, ethnicity, gender, etc.—was comprehended as ingredients within the national community. An aged female resident of the United States, for example, was considered first and foremost to be a member of the national community whose behavior and thoughts were understood to be inevitably ‘American.’

The nation-centric conception of history, however, has been amplified and often modified by a transnational perspective that would relate an American woman to women all over the world. A woman, in the new perspective, is considered to be a transnational, global being as well as a member of a national community. A female person in the United States is connected to women elsewhere because of her gender. Also, if she is a senior person, say over the age of seventy, she is understood as being one of millions of people of that age in the world. They share a great deal of conditions and concerns, and their separate national identities may sometimes mean less to their lives than what connects them to one another across national boundaries. Transnational connections, then, are a key phenomenon in modern history that is as crucial as national identities.

Connections, indeed, have emerged as a major theme in recent studies of history. If the trend continues, nation-centric histories may come to be seen as a temporary historiographic phenomenon. Their heyday coincided with the emergence and growth of ‘modern states’ all over the world, from the late eighteenth century to the late twentieth century. But during the last several decades, especially since the 1970s, as the phenomenon known as ‘globalization’ developed, the study of history, too, became more global. Today, it would appear that all historians at least pay lip service in their writing and teaching to the conception of modern history as having been global. In such a framework, connections among nations—traditionally called ‘international relations’—must be understood not simply as inter-governmental interactions but basically and primarily as people-to-people interconnections.

‘National interest,’ traditionally the key framework in which a country’s foreign affairs were comprehended, has also been challenged. The idea of ‘national interest’ was a powerful conceptual framework during the 1930s through the 1960s, when historians as well as political scientists were prone to see world and regional affairs as reflective of disparate national interests. Sometimes called ‘realism,’ such a conceptualization dominated the study of foreign policy and international affairs to such an extent that modern history came to be seen as virtually interchangeable as geopolitical vicissitudes. In such a framework, there was little room for comprehending phenomena like ‘cooperation’ and ‘understanding’ among nations other than as a temporary sharing of national interests, nor for examining cultural and social developments such as cross-national relationships among individuals and non-national entities.

The globalization of historical study since the 1970s has had the effect of reversing the trend and taking seriously international and transnational communities as major actors in modern, especially recent, history. Dino Knudsen’s *The Trilateral Commission and Global Governance: Informal Elite Diplomacy, 1972-82* is a good example to illustrate these historiographical trends. The first part of the title, “the Trilateral Commission and Global Governance,” suggests an interest in going beyond national entities and concerns. The second part presents “Global Governance” as a subject for serious historical inquiry. Third, the subtitle,

“Informal Elite Diplomacy” calls the reader’s attention to the roles played by non-state individuals and groups in shaping world affairs. All these amount to an excellent, fresh approach to modern history. The book succeeds on the whole in presenting a new way of understanding recent world affairs.

This does not mean that the book is flawless. First of all, despite its obvious success in arousing the reader’s interest in a fresh understanding of international relations, conventional statements still remain. For instance, conceptually the old-fashioned formula, the “international system,” is still adopted. (See 100 for an example.) Because the book succeeds to a great extent in presenting a fresh, transnational perspective, it will be confusing to the reader to encounter such a traditional phrase, sometimes even interchangeably with transnational interactions. Second, a reader anxious to know what new approaches to the study of international history the author offers will be rather disappointed, for the book essentially engages in examining the decision-making processes by various states in the same way as scholars have been doing for many decades. One would have hoped that a decision-making study would be supplemented, if not replaced, by a fresh conceptual framework. Third, to a historian it is disappointing that there is little sense of historical trends in the book. The author focuses on the Trilateral Commission’s role in international governance, but this is not framed in an overall scheme to reinterpret the history of the 1970s when the body was established. Unlike Daniel Sargent and others who have stressed that decade as having been a major turning point in recent history,¹ Knudsen refrains from offering a new chronology, with the result that the reader does not get the impression of having come to a new understanding of the recent past.

Despite such problems, the book offers an encouraging sign of where the study of history is heading, namely, the shift away from national history and international history toward human and global history. All history, in the final analysis, is human and global history, and so the value of a new book like this depends on the extent to which it contributes to our understanding of humanity and of globalization. This volume succeeds to a considerable extent in that regard but, in this reviewer’s view, not as much as it could have.

¹ Daniel Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) and Daniel Sargent, Niall Ferguson, Charles Maier, Erez Manela, eds., *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s In Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

Author's Response by Dino Knudsen, Postdoctoral Researcher, The Museum Mosede Fort-Denmark 1914-18

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to Thomas Maddux for convening and editing this roundtable and to Giles Scott-Smith for introducing the discussion. I am pleased to know that my work has been critiqued by such exemplary researchers as Laurent Cesari, Stephen Gill, and Akira Iriye whom I thank too. I will use this response to restate my central arguments, address concerns and suggestions, rectify misrepresentations, and discuss some fundamental methodological differences compared to those used by Gill.

For far too long, as Akira Iriye notes, a “nation-centric conception” prevailed in history. Connections, links and interdependencies, and exchanges and circulations between nations and societies were to a large degree overlooked. My book, which is based on a Ph.D. thesis that I defended at the University of Copenhagen in 2013, attempts to surpass such limitations and present a transnational history. Equally important, it has been my ambition to incorporate informal aspects of governance and diplomacy in my analysis. It is common practice that researchers focus narrowly on decision-making at the highest levels of government or in prominent international organizations, but neglect how policy-formation and decision-making processes come about in a broader sense; involving consultations, discussions, and input from a wide arena of actors inside and outside of formal government and diplomatic structures. I am not claiming symmetry with respect to the importance of formal and informal levels, but I argue that we need to abandon the idea that they constitute separate, distinct, and absolute levels, and that we should focus on how they are connected and interact.

The Trilateral Commission was a perfect study object for this endeavor, because from 1973 onwards it brought hundreds of elite people from North America, Europe, and Japan—mainly from the financial, business, political, and academic sectors—together at regular meetings in a private organization, with the aim of impacting public opinion, governments, and international collaboration. In doing so, the Commission reflected on the one hand the world of national interests, as when it was utilized as an alternative platform to negotiate these interests through private or semi-private representatives, and on the other hand an elite integration over and beyond the Atlantic. Moreover, in my book I argue that elite policy groups in general and the Commission in particular merged formal and informal levels across national borders, and formed part of a circulation of information, ideas, agendas, and policy proposals. In this view, the Commission and various governments and international organizations constituted overlapping networks through which problems and solutions were formulated, interests negotiated, policy developed, leadership promoted, and decisions executed.

Therefore, while I was pleased that Iriye found that my book on the whole succeeded “in presenting a new way of understanding recent world affairs,” I disagree with his statement that my book “essentially engages in examining the decision-making processes by various states in the same way as scholars have been doing for many decades.” Quite the contrary, integrating transnational informal actors such as the Commission in the historical analysis of how policy formation and decision-making processes took place in Western societies, constitutes if not a completely novel, then at least an alternative and fresh approach to mainstream historiography. One of its merits is that it reveals how transnational phenomena spill over to national contexts and *vice versa*. Also, it elucidates how formal and informal levels of governance and diplomacy are mutually interdependent.

Iriye calls for “a fresh conceptual framework.” I agree. This is why I have developed a new concept, “Informal Governance Actor” to signify entities, such as the Trilateral Commission, that are private or semi-private in nature, but engage in governance and diplomacy in various ways. Likewise, I have contributed to the development of already established concepts related to diplomacy, notably ‘informal diplomacy.’ At the same time, I critique dominant concepts such as ‘non-state’ and ‘non-governmental’ actors, which in the best case have become nearly meaningless and in the worst case distort our perception of how the formal and informal are connected, how the state and the private go hand in hand.¹ With that said, I admit that terms in my study such as ‘international system’ do reflect my ambivalence towards how far we should consider transnational history as something that *obliterates* or *supplements* prevailing concepts, including those belonging to the realist tradition of international relations study.

Iriye states that my book does not offer a new chronology, but I think that in this area, my work complements the work of others, including his own.² For example, much in line with the overall analysis developed in I.M. Destler, Leslie H. Gelb, and Anthony Lake’s *Our Own Worst Enemy, The Unmaking of American Foreign Policy*, I see the Trilateral Commission as reflecting a transition in the U.S. foreign policy elite in the 1970s from the old Establishment to a new, more fragmented, professionalized, and, in time, politicized elite, which was less centered on the East Coast and related to the rise of new economic centers in the west, south, and middle of the U.S.³ Here, I argue, perhaps with more novelty, that the Trilateral Commission served to integrate different elite segments and formulate a new foreign policy consensus. In this process, the Commission became a refuge of elite segments that—on the background of the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and the Watergate Scandal—had to abandon an aristocratic foreign policy approach and was searching for a new space, free of the constraints of modern mass democracy, to develop and promote policy. However, the Commission’s bid for a foreign policy consensus, which gained prominence in the mid-1970s, ultimately failed at gaining hegemony and was replaced by neo-conservative visions.⁴

Perhaps my contribution to a new chronology and a new understanding of our recent history lies within my emphasis on how politics changed some of its traditional forms during the 1970s. However, as I note in my book, the history of many of the private Atlanticist foreign policy initiatives and organizations from the 1950s and 1960s that could be seen as the Commission’s predecessors is yet to be written. Therefore, it remains to be established whether, to what extent, how, and under what circumstances these initiatives and organizations

¹ See the introductory chapter in my book.

² See Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); for example, in line with Daniel Sargent’s work, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), I demonstrate that ideas of interdependencies and trilateral collaboration already entered the U.S. State Department vocabulary and analysis in the early 1970s during Henry Kissinger’s watch, and not only after former Commissioners such as Jimmy Carter, Brzezinski, and Cyrus Vance took office in 1977.

³ I.M. Destler, Leslie H. Gelb, and Anthony Lake, *Our Own Worst Enemy, The Unmaking of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984); see chapter four in my book.

⁴ See especially chapter four, six, and eight in my book.

served as transnational alternate spaces for policy-making, diplomacy, or political consensus building among elites, and how to position the Trilateral Commission among them.⁵ Because it is too early to determine exactly how innovative and unique the Commission was, I am cautious about making too-general judgments. Nevertheless, I am willing to make one such claim, namely that the 1970s, with the entry of Japanese representatives into the Commission, marked the end of an era in world history in which Europeans and North Americans were the only ones present in the private or informal engine room of world politics.

I am delighted that Laurent Cesari appreciates this aspect of my book and I agree with his observation that the forming of the G5/G7, in which the Japanese participated, drew on many sources, not only inspiration from the Trilateral Commission. That the French President Giscard d'Estaing only reluctantly included the Japanese in international policy coordination is very much in line with the skepticism towards the Japanese expressed in the Bilderberg Conferences prior to the formation of the Commission and later in the Commission itself. Giscard's frustration that the Japanese "never utter a word and just take notes," was an experience shared in the Commission. Especially throughout the Commission's first triennium, but in fact during its first ten years of existence, there was a recurrent critique by Commissioners that the Japanese were too passive and non-engaging. However, the prevailing view was that it was necessary to show patience towards the Japanese. To some degree this view was rewarded when the Japanese in 1976 began raising more funds for the Commission and in the early 1980s committed themselves more fully to the Commission's purposes.⁶ However, I am as curious as Cesari is to where the unspecified pressures on Giscard came from. My best guess is from the U.S., from formal or informal circles, or a combination of the two.

Cesari wonders if the American political scientist and diplomat Zbigniew Brzezinski, later when he designed the Commission's report program, knew about the French economist and diplomat Jean Monnet's practices in this area. Brzezinski did. The Trilateral Report Program was mainly modeled after *The Tripartite Studies*, a series of studies at Brookings Institution in collaboration with the Kiel Institute for World Economics and the Japan Economic Research Center on North America, Japan, and Western Europe. Monnet's Action Committee for the United States of Europe was explicitly mentioned as a second influence and an early draft on the Commission read that one of its objectives was to "gain acceptance of Commission recommendations in the three regions, in somewhat the same way that Monnet's Political Action Committee has done in Europe."⁷ However, during the preparation for the Commission and later, references to Monnet's work was mostly made by the Dutch historian and diplomat Max Kohnstamm, who had been the Vice President of the Action Committee itself, and not Brzezinski. Most likely, it was also Kohnstamm who consulted Monnet prior to the establishment of the Trilateral Commission and got his endorsement for it.

⁵ See page 19 in my book, as well as chapter two.

⁶ For an example of the latter attitude, see Hisashi Owada, "Trilateralism: A Japanese Perspective." *International Security* 5:3 (Winter 1980-1981): 14-24.

⁷ See Folder Trilateral Commission #1, Box 52, Record Group 33, Rockefeller Family and Associates General Files, Rockefeller Archive Center; annex to George S. Franklin to Gerard C. Smith, 12 February 1973, Folder 4094, Box 308m, The Trilateral Commission (North America), The TriCom (North America) Records, Rockefeller Archive Center.

I agree with Cesari that a more comprehensive comparison between the Trilateral Commission and the American foundations that funded it would have been beneficial for my book. I was surprised how little research had been conducted into the ideas, programs, and activities of the Ford Foundation in the 1970s, compared to previous decades. The Foundation was the Commission's main financial backer. The Rockefeller Brothers Fund, another important source of Commission funds, seems to also lack scholarly attention. This is likely related to limited archival access. This would not be a problem if I had only aimed at confirming the conclusion that Cesari himself draws (with a rhetorical question: "Is it reductionist to call this the ideology of the export-oriented business classes of a superpower"). I do not disagree with this conclusion, but I wanted to go a step further and see how these ideas were concretely articulated, reformulated, and transformed under the new circumstances in the 1970s. However, the lack of existing academic work hindered my research and I had to rely mostly on sources that I myself found in the Ford Foundation Archives (now in the Rockefeller Archive Center). These sources show that the Commission had a close alliance with the Ford Foundation, which contributed to shape the Commission, including its basic objectives, organization, membership, and programs. I argue that this alliance possibly reflected a broader reorientation in the thinking about US foreign policy at the time, including the analysis of the actors themselves that the U.S. was experiencing "a decline of hegemony" and had to strengthen its ties with Japan.⁸

Cesari makes a good point about how the notorious Commission report *The Crisis of Democracy* was linked with what he calls an "Open Door proclivity" in the Commission, and that I could have placed more emphasis on this.⁹ I agree. On one hand, I have made efforts to have the Commission's commitment to internationalism and free trade run as a red thread throughout my book, but on the other hand I question claims that the Commission was unified in promoting a harsh neo-liberal vision of the economy, especially in the domestic U.S. setting.¹⁰

During my research for the book, I was not aware of the *Kissinger Conversations* and *Kissinger Transcripts* published online by the Digital National Security Archive, which Cesari notes. I have now taken time to look at them carefully. The relatively few items related to the Trilateral Commission do not add substantially to nor alter any arguments in my book, but instead support my findings and contributes with some details. For example, Henry Kissinger, then Nixon's National Security Advisor, endorsed the Commission, saying that it was "terribly needed", explaining that, "in the government it's extremely hard to get the middle range view and long range view that you need" and concluding that the Commission's action would have "some very open hearted reception" at the State Department.¹¹ In another instance, The Commission asked Kissinger to persuade Ford Foundation President McGeorge Bundy, who initially showed some reluctance to fund the

⁸ See chapter three in my book.

⁹ Michel Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington, and Jōji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission*. The Triangle Papers (New York: New York University Press, 1975).

¹⁰ For more on this, see chapter four in my book.

¹¹ "Trilateral Commission", 3 October 1972, *The Kissinger Telephone Conversations: A Verbatim Record of U.S. Diplomacy, 1969-1977* (accessed 15 December 2017).

Commission, which Kissinger agreed to do.¹² Finally, when the Commission met with Kissinger in Washington, May 1976—he was now Secretary of State—the meeting was not of a ceremonial character, but included substantial discussion of U.S. foreign policy.¹³

I am very pleased that Stephen Gill, the author of *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission*, the first significant study of the Trilateral Commission, notes that my book is a “contribution to our understanding of the mechanisms and networks of collective action and the forging of new projects of international relations and globalizing capitalism.” This was my intention for the book.

Related to Gill’s criticism, I think one of our main differences is with respect to methodology. Gill makes the observation that “not all developments are contained in archives,” that these by definition are “selective and imbued with a particular perspective and ideology,” and concludes that therefore they must not be confused with “truth’.” I agree, which is why I quoted Pierre Bourdieu that “data have been left by people who had an interest in letting them trail behind them.”¹⁴ Archives and access to them, but also the lack of archival material from people, especially those “without a voice,” reflects power interests and relationships.

However, having been the first researcher to gain access to the central archival collections of the Trilateral Commission, I have to stress the advantages that such material provides, when handled with proper critical care. First, access to this rich collection of sources provides a good opportunity to establish basic facts. For example, Gill is not correct in his review when he writes that the Commission initially consisted of 300 members: it was 180, and only in the following ten years did the number rise to 310. Gill also writes that the Commission “drew together political, corporate and military leaders,” but contrary to participants in, for example, the Bilderberg Conferences, military leaders were totally absent from the Commission.¹⁵

Second, access presents an opportunity for developing an accurate analysis and a better interpretation of facts, including determining questions of causality. This allows us to go behind the curtains of official stories and public documents. For example, in order to avoid watering down reports to the lowest common denominator in the Commission, it was decided to have reports made *for*, not *by* the Commission. This also shielded the Commission from criticism. So when the report *The Crisis of Democracy* was issued by the Commission in 1975, Charles Heck (who served as an assistant to the Commission’s founding Director, Brzezinski) was

¹² “Request for Ford Foundation Funding”, 23 February 1973, *The Kissinger Telephone Conversations: A Verbatim Record of U.S. Diplomacy, 1969-1977* (accessed 15 December 2017).

¹³ “Secretary Kissinger’s Meeting with the Trilateral Commission, Wednesday Afternoon, May 12, 1976”, *The Kissinger Transcripts: A Verbatim Record of U.S. Diplomacy, 1969-1977* (accessed 15 December 2017).

¹⁴ Quoted in my book, page 27; for the original quote, see Pierre Bourdieu, “Thinking about Limits,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 9:1 (1992): 37-49, 44.

¹⁵ In the period studied, a few former NATO-diplomats—André de Staercke, former Belgian Representative to NATO, Henrik N. Boon, former Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the NATO Council, and Sir Frank Roberts, former British Ambassador to NATO—served as Commissioners. Also, the intelligence community was extremely weakly represented; only Robert R. Bowie, former Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and George Bush, former Director of Central Intelligence, served as Commissioners.

technically not wrong in making it “terribly clear” to the press, “that the report was the work of its authors and did not necessarily express the views of the Commission.” However, the source material reveals that it was no one but Heck’s own boss, Brzezinski, who pushed for the report and its sharp edge, the conclusion that the Western world suffered from a surplus of democracy. On the other hand, the sources also showed that many Commissioners disagreed with this conclusion, which is why it is not fair to paint the Commission as a nest of anti-democrats.

Another example is that in several studies, including Gill’s own work, it is said that the American banker David Rockefeller, the co-founder of the Commission, controlled the recruitment of each Commissioner.¹⁶ Although David Rockefeller and other U.S. organizers had a big impact on the recruitment to the European and Japanese sections of the Commission—also more than they claimed to have—it was ultimately in the hands of local organizers from these regions. Even in the U.S. itself, it was not David Rockefeller, but former Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who recommended then Governor Jimmy Carter for Commission membership. Furthermore, it was mostly local business circles in Atlanta who were consulted in the recruitment process and who decided about approaching Carter.¹⁷ This certainly does not rule out that David Rockefeller was consulted in the process, as he was with respect to many important questions, but it abandons more simplistic ideas about how the Commission came about, how it was organized, and how it was led.

In summary, access to unpublished primary source materials provides a broader, more accurate, and more nuanced insight into the study object. This in no way dismisses Gill’s book on the Commission. The more than hundred interviews he made during his study are not only very impressive, they were necessary to conduct his investigation, given the lack of access to greater quantity of unpublished primary sources at the time. And most importantly, this provided a good study, a foundation that I have relied on myself. However, I wanted to move beyond the information provided by the Commission and the narratives told by Commissioners’ themselves with a firm empirical and historical analysis on how an elite organization such as the Commission functioned in practice, including how it was organized and led, how it related to formal government and international collaboration, what it achieved, etc. To ensure this, I did not rely only on archival sources from the Commission itself, but also from state archives, donors, collaborators, and international organizations. Using non-Commission sources, gave me the opportunity, for example, to better test Commission claims of impact (every organization will, by nature, tend to overstate its own impact). I hope that this, despite the difficulties of presenting a full picture, has added substantially to the work done by others in this and related fields.

I agree with Gill when he highlights that some of my primary evidence is weak, but I do not agree that it is inconsistent. Weaknesses can be detected with respect to documenting the funding and finances of the Commission; here I had trouble finding systematic information and time constraints meant that I had to be

¹⁶ Stephen Gill, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 140; a point reiterated in Nick Paretsky, *Policy-Planning Organizations and Capitalist Support for Industrial Policy, 1970-1984* (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri-Columbia, 2003), 171.

¹⁷ See page 135 in my book for the point about Carter and chapter one, three and four for how the Commission was organized, led, Commissioners recruited, etc.

selective and place a higher emphasis on certain topics. Therefore, in my book, I present what I found, and even though it may not be exhaustive, it gives a good impression of patterns of funding and finances from which I have been able to deduce several conclusions, including that the Commission mainly was funded from North America, but also that it had financial support from governments, etc.

When I wrote that “the circles, networks and organizations from which candidates were recruited are not systematically recorded in the TriCom source material,” I meant that one does not find explicit references in the Commission sources to specific organizations or networks identified for potential recruitment. It does not mean, however, that I have not myself inspected from where members were selected and who or what they represented, including how, in a U.S. elite setting, this reflected broader shifts.¹⁸

When it comes to the question of representation in the Commission, Gill’s comments suggest that there is a misunderstanding of my analysis, perhaps because of a difference in style. In the sources, there are a few indications that class, race, age or the gender composition of the Trilateral Commission were discussed in the Commission, but despite the very disproportionate demographic representation (almost all white men—with the exception of Japanese—from the very top of specific sectors in society) there were no open conflicts on this issue, except with donors. However, this observation does not mean that I am uncritical about it. In my book, I emphasize that the Commission, despite early proclamations of a broader representativeness, ended up being very exclusive, and that the Commission deliberately was modeled to reflect the power centers in the trilateral societies. I demonstrate how this was sometimes expressed implicitly in the sheer neglect to include others and at times was expressed explicitly, as when Brzezinski stated that he wanted no quotas on minorities in the Commission (chapter 4, esp. 95-95).

Because there is very little reference to these issues in archival sources—most likely as a result of an unspoken consensus within the Commission—my approach was to extract conclusions from norms and practices. For example, on the basis of seemingly inoffensive material about the Commission’s Women’s Program and the organizing of a Commission office, I illustrate the condescending attitudes towards woman existed in the Commission leadership. I argue that this, as well as the lack of women holding power in society at the time, contributed to keeping women out of the Commission. To this is added a critique of the unspoken norms and practices in the Commission, including my discussion on the role of language, habits, and education. I conclude that the Commission was not an aggregation of the “best brains in the world” (David Rockefeller’s stated ambition early on), but that most likely, “habits that had been passed on or nurtured in their family environments, private schools, prestigious universities, membership of elite alumni associations, particular professions and career pathways, and exclusive social clubs,” played a decisive role, thus the elite character of the undertaking. In conclusion, it was insufficient to be innovative or talented to become a member, because wealth, connections, elite habitus, and power were more essential (94-96). Moreover, I relate this to a disdain for the broad masses, which I traced in the Commission, including in the report *The Crisis of Democracy*, demonstrating that my work does not lack a critical sting.

¹⁸ In chapter four of my book, I note that many U.S. members were drawn from the Council on Foreign Relations and Brookings Institution, and that in Europe, many had had an affiliation with Monnet’s Action Committee, the Bilderberg Conferences or the European Commission. In both regions, there was also an emphasis on including directors of prominent foreign policy institutes or think tanks.

Whether Commissioners were powerful or not is another misunderstanding. Gill writes that because Commissioners commanded significant leadership positions in important organizations, it “is hard to imagine that they were simply ‘informal’ agents of power or castrati shorn of essential vitality.” Quite the contrary, I emphasize that although Commissioners could not simultaneously hold a government office, they used the Commission to stay up-to-date, be part of crucial debates, keep or create important connections, and promote themselves to new power positions. In fact, most Commissioners, while they were in the Commission and outside of formal government structures, kept positions in which they still yielded power or influence, whether as business executives, directors of significant research institutions, heads of international organizations, or parliamentarians, etc. The Commission served as a continuing infrastructure for these people. The example of the coordinated action that the Commission and former Under Secretary of State George Ball took concerning the handling of the oil crisis in 1973-1974, in which they were able to push the U.S. government in their direction, perfectly illustrates this (194-195). The point of my study is to demonstrate how the formal and informal sectors are closely connected and that power or influence is not a phenomenon contained in the former.

When it comes to how to understand the Trilateral Commission and similar organizations, Gill writes that they can be compared to “transnational political parties” or “new Internationals of Corporate Capitalism.” Here I am inclined to disagree. Commission meetings are reduced to a few times a year for most members, not producing formal decisions or common statements. Members do not have strict obligations and are not obliged to follow some kind of majority rule. Moreover, to describe them as new Internationals would need a qualification. For example, the Communist International, 1919-1943, was a highly centralized world party, whose directives were mandatory for the parties belonging to it, which were seen as mere sections of the same body and whose members operated under so-called democratic centralism. Of course, present day internationals, for example The Socialist International, are much less strictly organized and do not command the same discipline, but members still adhere to the same fundamental ideology, whether by tradition or in practice.

Only in the small leadership and secretariats of organizations such as the Trilateral Commission will one find something slightly resembling party cohesiveness. Therefore, I propose to understand the Commission and similar initiatives as new forms of organizing transnationally in which informality is institutionalized, fundamental consensuses built, connections created, leadership promoted and ideas and policy proposals circulated and enriched, with the aim of legitimizing and realizing them in one or the other form. These organizations or initiatives do not have an ideological, political, or organizational cohesiveness equal to a political party or international, since the very idea behind them is to create consensus that transcends party lines, within an elite framework of interests. Therein lies their uniqueness.