State-space and non-state space in the crisis of neoliberalism: comparative perspectives

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Introduction

A key dimension of the current crisis in/of neoliberalism concerns the state. State austerity strategies, accompanying privatisation programmes, bank bailouts, quantitative easing policies, are all well known. Less discussed but also important is the impact of, and role in, the crisis of patterns of state space. How are the spatial dimensions of the state affecting, and being affected by, the crisis? It can be suggested that there are two aspects to this issue:

a) restructuring of patterns of state-space at different *spatial scales*, and
b) shifts in the relationship between *state space, privatised space* and what for want of a better term we will initially call *socialised space*.

This paper offers an initial exploration of these issues. This is undertaken on a comparative basis, drawing examples from both Western Europe and Latin America. This comparison adds important elements to the discussion. This is partly because of the very different positions in the global economy of the two regions and consequent differences in political economy (levels of development, social structures, political cultures). It is also though a result of the differential 'temporalities of crisis' in the two regions. Whereas in the EU the major crisis within/of neoliberalism has occurred in the past few years, in much of Latin America crisis impacted much earlier – in the late 1990s and early 2000s, while some Latin American countries have shown considerable resilience in the face of the 'global' crisis since 2008, some indeed exhibiting significant growth (Ugarteche 2012). The value of this comparison is twofold: it will indicate the *limits* to what might otherwise seem general trends in one or other region; and it will also indicate both *commonalities and differences* across the two regions (as well as within them).

 Table 1 presents a number of patterns and themes. Each of these are discussed with reference to specific examples. .

Table 1 State spaces and non-state spaces: Some contemporary trends

Space	Theme	Examples
Supranational state space	Tensions	European Union
	Construction	ALBA
National state	Refounding	Bolivia, Ecuador
	Defensive nationalism	UK
Regional state	Autonomist fragmentation tendencies	UK, Spain, Bolivia
Local state	Locus of radical change	Venezuela
	Hollowing out	UK
State/non-state	Privatisation – of space - of services	Honduras UK, EU
	'Counter-spaces'	Zapatistas, Chile Occupy, indignados

Supranational space

In the European Union, coercive elite-led austerity strategies, aiming to buttress and reinforce neoliberal hegemony, have been directed by EU institutions. While austerity programmes have been supported and indeed promoted to varying degrees by member states, especially by economically stronger states, the EU has led the drive to implement austerity programmes, and has attempted to strengthen EU supranational institutions in order to discipline and coerce member states where necessary. However this process in beset by tensions, as both weaker and stronger 'national' states seek to defend national and sectoral interests as the stakes are raised in the context of ongoing austerity, and popular forces, electoral and otherwise, prove difficult to manage and pose serious threats to the robustness and legitimacy of EU supranational institutions. The crisis-driven reshaping of the economic interrelationship between the EU and the wider world (Smith 2013), leads to re-scaling tendencies such as the notion of a Mediterranean region (Bialasciewicz 2013). Overall however, despite fissiparous tendencies, the principal contemporary trend is the defence of existing EU institutions, especially the Euro, the logical corollary of which is in fact a strengthening of the power of supranational institutions.

Latin American states also collaborate in supranational economic institutions which have traditionally operated according to 'market' logics, such as MERCOSUR and CAN (Communidad Andina de Naciones), now brought together in UNASUR, modelled initially on the EU neoliberal vision of supranationalism as integration towards a common market.   However, the more radical states in Latin America are also attempting to build new supranational state institutions which, unlike institutions such as the EU, the World Bank or the IMF, do not follow neoliberal recipes but are intended to shelter states from neoliberalisation by offering alternatives models of supranational collaboration.   The principal example of this tendency is ALBA, the grouping of more radical Latin American states, which includes among its aims the establishment of supranational financial institutions which can help to limit the dependence of member-states on neoliberal institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, and providing a framework for resource sharing between members of a very different nature to neoliberal competitiveness (Muhr 2010; Riddell 2011). An early example of this type of agreement was the exchange of Cuban medical personnel for Venezuelan oil. Today further examples include the provision of literacy training to peoples in other member countries, the creation of supranational enterprises for production of medicines and food, a continental TV broadcaster, Telesur, and the regional oil company Petrocaribe supplying fuel at far below world market prices. ALBA has also set up a bank providing low interest loans for agricultural and industrial development and is now establishing a currency, the Sucre, as a step towards a common currency.

ALBA has influenced established institutions such as MERCOSUR and UNASUR to shift towards a different Latin-Americanist vision of a community of nations with shared socio-historical values. It has promoted the foundation of BANCOSUR, the Bank of the South, and in 2011 the establishment of CELAC, a new alliance of Latin American and Caribbean states excluding the USA and Canada, set up as a direct challenge to the US-promoted OAS (Costoya 2011, Fidler 2013).

Whereas the EU reflects the contradictions of the neoliberal supranational state in the context of neoliberal crisis , ALBA and the complex of supranational institutional

innovation associated with it represent an attempt to build post-neoliberal supranational state institutions.

National space

ALBA is one dimension of a movement by several of the more radical Latin American regimes to 'refound' the nation state, rejecting neo-colonialist and neoliberal state forms. In many European countries, the neoliberalising project has been to *modernize* the (local) state and local governance. The rhetoric of modernization stresses the inefficiency of previous – by implication old-fashioned - state forms and practices, the need to change and the central role of 'change agents' and the association of the 'modern' with neoliberal forms and practices. In contrast, radical Latin American practice has sought to '*refound'* the state. In Bolivia for example, the 'refounding of the state' by the government of the MAS indigenous campesino party led by Evo Morales has been anchored in the form of a new constitution drafted by a specially-convened constituent assembly and ratified by a national referendum. The new constitution – in principle at any rate – entrenches a range of rights and guarantees, especially but not only for the indigenous majority, and starts to disembed the 500 year old colonial (neo)liberal state. Thus, for the Bolivian Vice-President (and Marxist intellectual) Alvaro Garcia Linera, the success of the Constituent Assembly was essential in order to 'build the new state, to anchor in enduring state institutions and relations of command the new correlation of forces reached by the indigenous popular movement in the 2000-2005 cycle of (popular) mobilisations (and to) solidify a series of irreversible points of support, conquests and controls historically achieved through a society's power struggles.' Without the successful installation of the new constitution, he argues, it would not have been possible to reach the 'point of bifurcation' - the moment when 'the crisis of the state, which began eight years earlier, would be resolved either through a restoration of the old state power or through the consolidation of the new bloc of popular power' , in which there is an alignment between the indigenous-popular social movements and other social sectors including middle classes and small and medium sized business interests (Garcia Linera 2009). The strength of this bloc was reflected in a presidential recall referendum in which Morales increased his vote from 54 to 67%, providing the democratic legitimacy for the reconstruction of the state and other elements of the MAS programme.

The new constitution redefines the concept of the state 'from a plurinational, multicultural and communitarian perspective[1]. The development of liberal rights, obligations and guarantees is combined with grassroots indigenous claims, which are thereby included in the new legal and institutional framework. Hence the notion of an interventionist, welfare state that protects natural resources takes shape, which incorporates the ways and principles of first peoples and nations into its institutional life'. The new constitution 'opens up multiple types of direct, universal and communitarian representation' and represents 'the deconstruction of the republican, colonial and liberal state'. Gender and gender rights cut across the whole constitution, as well as those of the indigenous majority (Prada Alcoreza 2009).

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[1] Note that the term communitarian does not have the associations in Bolivia which it does in the US and UK.

A new constitution has also been introduced in Ecuador, through a similar constituent assembly established by popular plebiscite. It has the effect of reducing the power of the traditional political parties associated with neoliberalism and strengthening the executive power of president Correa who pledged to use it to introduce 'socialism for the twenty first century' (Becker, 2007, 2008). Both the Bolivian and the Ecuadorean constitutions, and especially the latter, exhibit a tension between a more statist vision and one rooted in the social movements. Nonetheless, they both reflect a confidence in a revitalised, popular national state space. In contrast, the election in Paraguay of a radical presidential candidate has achieved no similar change, as the absence of strong social movements behind the electoral victory have meant that conservative forces have been able to negate the new president's agenda (Dangl 2010).

But while experiments such as this are under way in Latin America, in Europe the impetus of state modernisation has been profoundly affected by the economic crisis of the last five years. In the first place, the squeeze on state expenditure has brought to an end the more expansive dimensions of modernisation associated with rising public expenditure. Austerity reflects a thoroughgoing retrenchment of the national state. At the same time however, this retrenchment has sometimes been accompanied by the rise of a defensive nationalism, especially as the EU is associated with high and unaccountable state spending. In a number of countries (England, the Netherlands) chauvinist right wing nationalist currents are contributing to a reactionary reassertion of the national space and a rejection of supranationalism, allied to a political agenda rejecting elements of the modernising agenda such as diversity and multiculturalism.

The contrast between this conservative nationalism and Latin American radical popular nationalism is striking.

Regional state space

In some places however this defensive nationalism questions, rather than emphasises, contemporary nation state boundaries. This is the case for example with the Northern League in Lombardy. Alongside the Northern League though are a number of other regional-separatist movements which are seeking to detach relatively prosperous regional spaces from poorer parts of their current nation state – for example in Wallonia and Catalonia – as the economic crisis sharpens questions about 'who pays'. The Scottish National Party is proving able to use the conditions of crisis to reassert Scottish difference, though in this case with an emphasis on preserving more of the old social-democratic state against the inroads of English neoliberalism and austerity.

Regional fragmentation tendencies are also evident in Latin America. A notable case is Bolivia, where the relatively rich and white 'media luna' eastern region pushed – unsuccessfully to date – for separatism or much greater autonomy when the MAS government, with its roots in the poorer, primarily indigenous highlands, came to power in 2005. In general it would seem that both the sharpened politics of crisis and recession in Europe, and the challenge to neoliberalism in Latin America, have created the conditions for a revival of regional state space, although to date no regionalist movement has succeeded in exploiting these conditions to achieve national state status.

Local state space

Even two or three years ago, it may have been possible to argue along the lines that in the UK the coalition government did exhibit some ideological commitment to localism, even if that ideology was heavily constrained by the political expediency of budget cuts during an era of austerity (Lowndes and Pratchett 2011; Crowe 2011). Now however it is difficult to look beyond the way in which the local state has been positioned at the forefront of the wider rolling back of the state which deficit reduction and austerity are said to require, with expenditure cuts set to continue well beyond the next election. The institution of directly elected local police commissioners independent of local authorities has been a recent further step in the fragmentation of local institutions, while the extremely low levels of voter turnout for them served to underline the marginality of the local sphere. In this context, localism would appear to be little more than a highly convenient buck-passing rhetoric. The financial crisis of many Spanish municipalities (and regions) presents a second case of local government decimated in the bust following the construction boom of the earlier 2000s (Garcia 2010). The EU drive towards marketisation of public services ensures that the hollowing out of the local state is an EU-wide-phenomenon, however much it is nuanced in different countries (Bognetti and Overmann 2012).

In marked contrast, Latin America offers examples of the consolidation and resurgence of the local state. In the first place, the past two decades, covering both a period of neoliberal rule and then regimes contesting neoliberalism in countries such as Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia, have seen the extension of effective state administration over significant parts of the national territory for the first time in modern times. Prior to this, areas deemed to be of little economic value were effectively un-administered. This changed initially when neoliberal regimes, as in Bolivia (Kohl and Farthing 2006), created new local administrative institutions as an attempted means of shoring up neoliberal hegemony under threat from the poverty and inequality it was creating. A second more recent phase of consolidation is being undertaken now by the MAS government to extend service provision and bolster regime support (Garcia Linera 2012).

In Venezuela, the establishment of around 20,000 community councils (*consejos communales)* at neighbourhood level can be seen both as buttressing and challenging the existing local state, and a process of local institution building helping to create a 'new geometry of power' (Massey 2010) which can both empower local activists and enable new local leaders to emerge and promote the 'Bolivarian Revolution' (Marcano 2009; Motta 2009). The consejos help to compensate for the relative underdevelopment of social movements in Venezuela. These councils are described by the (now ex) Chavez regime as the embodiment of participatory democracy, handing over power locally to organised popular movements. A law of 2006 allowed local citizen groups in small areas (average 400 households) to form councils, to initiate policy for their local areas and oversee community development projects. Funding from central and local government as well as from locally-raised resources amounted to US$5bn in 2007, shortly after their formation (Gott 2008). However many commentators emphasise the tension between top-down and bottom up influences, with strong pressures from the national government to set up councils and the establishment of a national ministry to oversee their funding and operation, while the existing local government system complains about being undermined. Those councils which have been able to consolidate their position have been more

successful, but some have not, and the tensions between the existing municipalities and the new councils can contribute to what Ellner describes as problems of organisational solidification and institutionalisation which have faced the Chavez administrations (Ellner 2010). Fernandes puts this in different terms, describing the Bolivarian state as 'post-neoliberal' in the sense that neoliberalism is no longer the dominant guiding policy but continues to surface in a range of conflicting rationalities and policies that are brought into uneasy co-existence', with 'a collision between the urban social movements and the instrumental rationality of bureaucrats' (2010, 19 and 27). Nevertheless, despite such issues, it remains the case that in countries such as Bolivia and Venezuela, local state space is an expanding sphere of considerable importance to post-neoliberal projects.

State and non-state space

Alongside, and entangled with, these scalar shifts in state space are shifts between state and non-state space.

A key feature of neoliberalism has been the extension of privatised space and the erosion of public space and 'the commons'. For Harvey (2005), 'accumulation by dispossession', including the commodification of land and public (state) property, is a defining feature of neoliberalism. This is a process which has continued unabated since the crisis of the past five years, and indeed has been augmented by the sale of state assets of land (eg Greek islands) and other property in order to 'balance the books'. One implication of austerity strategies is the enhanced need for public infrastructure developments to be shored up economically by the provision of private profit opportunities. Examples include the London Olympics facilities, only accessible by passing through a huge shopping mall, and new stations on the proposed HS2 high speed rail line.

In the global South, major public infrastructure development has been transformed into an asset class from which private equity capital extracts above-average profits at low risk (Hildyard 2012). In Latin America the privatisation of large tracts of Amazonia, and the dispossession of their (often indigenous) inhabitants is a highly visible form of commoditisation. This process may be one of formal privatisation, by state sale of land, or informal but no less real, as for example in cases when hydrocarbon or mining companies are given rights of access to, and use of, tracts of land, including land in areas designated as excluded from development as ecological reserves or indigenous territory. However, opposition to such privatisation has in some places been both fierce and successful: in Bolivia the so-called water and gas wars successfully secured the re-nationalisation of water in Cochabamba and forced the neoliberal government to retreat on gas privatisation proposals, while the alliance of trade unions and social movements forged in these struggles was the basis for the election of the radical MAS government.

It may seem ironic therefore that both the Bolivian and Ecuadorian regimes are today accused of 'extractivist' policies which prioritise resource exploitation over indigenous rights and ecological sustainability (Becker 2013, Achtenberg 2012). The Bolivian government argues however that its commitment to natural resource use is no 'neo-extractivism', but part of an alternative development strategy which does indeed export more resources, but appropriates a high percentage of the wealth created and uses this for social and economic development programmes, while also

promoting local resource processing to retain added value. As Garcia Linera puts it: 'We try to prioritize wealth as use value over exchange value. In this regard, the state does not behave as a collective capitalist...but as a redistributor of wealth among the working classes' (Garcia Linera 2013). The debate over extractivism highlights however key tensions in and around the radical Latin American regimes which involve fundamental differences not only about resource exploitation versus ecological sustainability but also between those committed to the occupation of state space and fundamentally anti-statist currents.

A further form of privatisation of space is found in urban areas, most commonly through the construction of gated communities for the exclusive use of affluent residents, supported by privatised security apparatuses. In Honduras, the government has recently approved proposals for private 'model cities' along the Caribbean coast, enclaves free from Honduran law which would be planned and run by private entities and intended to stimulate foreign investment (Lydersen 2013). Projects such as this can be located in the broader context of the restructuring of space in southern Mexico and central America via the Plan Panama Puebla, a massive urbanisation and infrastructural development programme attempting to consolidate capitalist relations and state power in the region (Wilson 2013).

The drive to consolidate capitalist relations in this region is in part a response to challenges such as that posed by the Zapatistas and other indigenous communities. The Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico, erupted in 1994 and still continues today (Mentinis 2006). In the areas controlled by the Zapatistas, they have established their own autonomous institutions or "counter-spaces" (Hesketh 2012) alongside those of the Mexican state. The Zapatista autonomous structures of 'caracoles' (physical administrative areas) and 'good government juntas' each combining a number of autonomous municipalities, provide an umbrella for the autonomous infrastructure of schools, clinics, production workshops and shops which the Zapatistas have been building' since the early years of the rebellion. They are not only a response to the failure to get indigenous rights secured in the state constitution, but an attempt to put into practice alternative forms of organisation, such as the famous principle of 'leading by obeying', and rotation of leadership roles (Chatterton, 2009).

Also involved in the creation of 'counter-spaces' is *La Via Campesina,* a transnational peasant network of grassroots organisations and movements of small-scale producers from various places around the world, mostly from the South (www.viacampesina.org). In countries such as Brazil movements such as the *Via Campesina* reflect the failure of the neoliberal order to ensure sustainable agriculture, access to nutritious food and adequate living and working conditions for peasant communities, while the market-driven neoliberal restructuring of the state leaves less and less space for democratic practices. Social forces which participate in such institutions find themselves contributing to the reproduction of the neoliberal order. In contrast, organisations such as *Via Campesina* 'are repoliticising a public sphere of their own....contesting and redefining the politics of place and scale' (Massicotte 2010, 69-74), creating 'an infinity of small, self-managed islands' (Zibechi 2012).

Further examples of such local 'counter-spaces' include urban neighbourhoods in Chile where groups of the poor have seized parcels of peripheral urban land, such as the area of La Victoria on the outskirts of Santiago, withstood attempts at eviction

and within two years had built a settlement of 18,000 inhabitants and more than 3000 dwellings, with self-built and managed social facilities. Zibechi argues that La Victoria and other places like it represent a radical break with capitalist legality and property rights, with legitimacy and use value replacing bourgeois law. In Bolivia, oppositional groups took control of new local institutions set up by the neoliberal government in the early 2000s and converted them into nuclei of opposition.

Zibechi refers to such – predominantly local - 'counter-spaces' as 'territories in resistance', arguing that 'the crisis of the old territoriality of the factory and the farm and (neoliberal) capital's reformulation of old modes of domination' (14) has led to the 'territorialisation' and 'territorial rootedness' of contemporary anti-neoliberal and anti-capitalist movements in Latin America. By this he emphasises the roots of contemporary movements in local spaces secured through long periods of struggle, spaces of autonomy from not only the state but from traditional political parties and trade unions oriented towards the state. Thus for today's radical social movements in Latin America, he suggests, the taking and holding of local spaces is the key to strategy, replacing the strike or electoral or clientilist politics: 'territory is the space in which to build a new social organisation collectively, where new subjects take shape and materially and symbolically appropriate their space (19). Concepts of horizontalism (Sitrin 2006) provide an attempted theorisation of a (spatial) politics which does not subordinate the local to 'higher' spatial scales.

Echoes of these Latin American 'territories in resistance' are evident in the *Occupy* and *Indignados* movements in Europe, most notably in Spain (Taibo 2012; Charnock, Purcell and Ribera-Fumaz 2011) and Greece (Douzinas 2012), where the social impact of the crisis and austerity measures has been greatest. To date however such movements, lacking the rootedness and capacity of those in Latin America, constitute primarily symbolic rather than material 'territories of resistance'.

Reasserting and contesting neoliberalism: changing spaces

The financial crisis and consequent austerity policies of the last five years in Western Europe have had important spatial dimensions, while during the same period (though in a different temporal relationship to neoliberal crisis) both the reassertion of, and resistance to neoliberalism has taken distinctive spatial forms in Latin America.

These changes are complex and any attempt to summarise is difficult. Several observations may nevertheless be made. Table 2 regroups the trends which have been discussed into those associated with the reassertion of neoliberalism and those associated with its contestation.

Table 2 Restructuring state and non-state spaces: Reasserting and contesting neoliberalisation

Reasserting neoliberalisation	Contesting neoliberalisation
Tensions of supranational state space	Construction of new supranational state space
Defensive nationalism	Refounding the nation state
Autonomist regional fragmentation tendencies	Autonomist regional fragmentation tendencies
Hollowing out of local state	Local state a locus of radical change
Privatisation of space	'Counter-spaces'

Where neoliberalism is resurgent, not surprisingly the privatisation of space tends to be very visible. The other side of this coin is of course a tendential reduction of state space. This is especially true at the local level, but also at other levels: regional fragmentation tendencies; the increased prominence of defensive nationalism and a retreat from national state modernisation strategies under the pressure of austerity; and tensions around supranational state space.

Where neoliberalism is contested, this may take two spatial forms, which are in tension. One of these is a strengthening of the state – 'refounded' national states, construction of new supranational state institutions, the local state as a focus and locus of radical change. Counterposed to this statist form however are the localised 'counter-spaces' or territories of resistance, a form opposed at least as much to the state as to capital and its neoliberal forms.

Both resurgent and contested neoliberalism can produce tendencies towards the regional fragmentation of state space.

The forms of restructuring of state and non-state space linked to resurgent neoliberalism are dominant in Western Europe but are also present in Latin America. But those forms associated with contestation of neoliberalism are almost exclusively found in Latin America (of the two global regions examined here), and thus without the comparative dimension of analysis would have been hardly noticeable, potentially permitting European trends to appear as the norm.

In relation to the focus of this panel on the local state, this paper suggests a positive contemporary association between the contestation of neoliberalism and local space (including though not only local state space but local anti-state counter-spaces) while the reassertion of neoliberalism is associated with the hollowing out of the local state (Geddes and Sullivan 2011).

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